

TRANSLATIONS

Introduction

The following is a translation of the last four pages of a twenty-page article dealing with the problems and history of legend research. Because of limitations in space and because the historiography of legend research can be obtained in other English language sources, the major portion of Azbelev's article has not been translated.

A significant portion of the article is devoted to an evaluation of the different classificatory systems that have been devised for the legend genre. Noting the basic shortcomings of the various systems, the author proposes an alternative system which he feels will overcome the deficiencies of other classifications. It is my opinion that the system proposed by Azbelev has great potential, especially if one were to use it in conjunction with computer technology.

Besides offering a system of classification which is both simple and inclusive, Azbelev's system has the added bonus of helping to classify legends in a manner which would make structural investigations of the rather elusive legend much easier.

Azbelev is the author of numerous articles dealing with narrative genres and he has co-authored a number of books. We hope that this translation will serve to stir the imagination of English-speaking scholars and at the same time introduce to them a relatively young but potentially significant Soviet scholar.

Nikolai Burlakoff
General Editor

A Proposal for the International Systematization of Saints' Legends and Sagen. By S. N. Azbelev.

This translation is an excerpt from "Problemy mezhdunarodnoj sistemativacii predanij i legend" [Problems of the International Systematization of Saints' Legends and Sagen], Russkij fol'klor [Russian Folklore] (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1960), 10, pp. 176-195.

Translated by Ronald J. Meyer

All the existing systems of indexes have one general feature in common, which might be conventionally termed as synthetic. The synthetic catalog reduces each of the cataloged texts to one "symbol," which may be brief (one word) or extensive (a more or less detailed statement of the plot). Regardless whether the cataloging is done by types of plots, principal motifs, principal characters, themes, or some other factor, each concrete variant in the catalog is characterized by that factor on which the catalog is based. The dilemma is unavoidable even under an ideally consistent and logical system of cataloging--a dilemma that not one of the existing indexes has solved. If the headings under which the variants are given are very general, the number of these headings then is correspondingly small and it is comparatively easy to find the necessary heading. In this case, however, a great number of variants which greatly differ from one another fall under the same heading. If the headings are made more specific, the number of these headings becomes so large that it is sometimes difficult to find the necessary one. This is the case in the national catalogs.

In the compilation of an international or even a European catalog, the difficulties of this sort will increase as the variety of material included in the catalog increases.

It should be noted in connection with this that the newest and best of the existing national indexes, which have the most elaborate system (Christiansen and Simonsuuri),¹ by no means include all the material from their countries. All material unrelated to the area of folk superstitions is excluded from Simonsuuri's index and almost none of this material is included in Christiansen's index. It is just this material--that of the historical legends--which is the most difficult to reduce to a more or less limited number of types.

The Aarne-Thompson international index of folktale types, so indispensable for every researcher of tales, may serve as a model for researchers of legends (Sagen) and saints' legends. The variety of types of tales, however, can in no way be compared to the variety of saints' legends and Sagen. The compilation of the saints' legends and Sagen for an international index of the synthetic type, i.e., similar to the Aarne-Thompson index, is possible in principle, although the compilers will have to overcome enormous difficulties and the index will either turn out to be so general that it will be of little value for practical work, or it will be so unwieldy that its use will be a highly labor-consuming affair.

Putting aside the argument on the practicality of compiling an international index of such a type, permit me to propose a principally different system (we shall call it analytical), which would, it seems to me, be free of those difficulties that were just discussed.

If one examines any one of the various symbols which designate types, motifs, and themes in contemporary indexes, it is possible to note that the substance of each symbol is described by a combination of a maximum of four basic elements: the designation of the character performing the action, the object of the action, the action itself (or the conditions present), and an indication to the circumstances under which the action is accomplished. It is often the case that only one of these elements figures in the symbols (usually the character performing the action, less often the action itself), as it is also the case that several similar elements represented in these symbols (for example, two or more characters, etc.). Sometimes the symbol denotes several episodes in succession. The representation, then, of each of these episodes is broken down to the stated elements. One way or another, every symbol may be reduced to such elements in the classifications of the index if this symbol represents the essence of the concrete contents of the texts and not their summarized characteristics (such as "historical legends," "aetiological legends," etc.).

We believe that it would be more advisable to designate each type by a component number where each component is the designation of only one element, rather than by a single number which already designates one or another combination of these elements.

The variety of types of plots of the saints' legends and Sagen is almost limitless. The types of characters and subjects who function or appear as the object of the action are much fewer in number. These types could be singled out and reduced, if one wished, to a comparatively small number; the resulting number would depend on the degree of generalization adopted. (A list of the headings in the indexes of Simonsuuri, Sinninghe,² and a few others could serve as models for a small number of general types of characters.) It would be possible to discern in a similar manner the types of actions performed by characters and the conditions under which they are found. It would then be possible to reduce to a limited number the

types of action and the circumstances by which the action is accomplished. As a result we would have three lists of types: 1) types of characters (animate and inanimate); 2) the types of their actions and the conditions of their actions; 3) the types of circumstances under which the action is performed. If each of these lists is numbered and arranged in the same order that we place the numbers of the corresponding elements in the designations of the concrete plot, then any type of plot could be schematically represented by four numbers.

We believe that it would be most advantageous to first designate the character (by the corresponding number from the first list), then the action (by the number from the second list), then the object of the action (again from the first list), and finally the circumstances of the action (from the third list.³ Then, for example, the representation of the type "the city vanishes under the face of the earth as a consequence of damnation" would be represented as 0.451.707.361--if "city" is listed in the first list under No. 707, "vanishing under the earth" in the second list under No. 451, and "damnation as a reason for the action" in the third list under No. 361. Since there is no character in the example given, a zero is placed in that position. Otherwise the numerical representation of the action would be taken for the representation of the character. It goes without saying that there is no need whatsoever to place a zero at the end if the designation of the type does not require an indication of the circumstances or if it is composed of only the representation of the character and his actions. In such cases the numerical representation will be made up of only two or three numbers separated by periods.

If we agree that each number may have up to four component parts, this will then accommodate up to 9,999 entries in each of the three lists of the index. Such a quantity will no doubt be sufficient for us to be able to give a schematic representation of any folklore plot. At first the lists may not be very large, but they will increase as the amount of new materials increases.

It seems to us, however, that a "stepped" decimal system would be more efficient. All characters would from the very beginning be reduced to more general types, which must not be more than nine altogether. Each of these nine types could then be divided into more concrete classes (also not more than nine). These in turn could be divided into even more concrete classes. Let us assume that in the "first nine" the following things would be included: a man, an animal, a dwelling, designated by the corresponding numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. In the second position of the heading "man" we will have the subheadings: man in relation to his family, man in relation to his work, a man connected with supernatural forces, represented again by the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. The first of these subheadings might have the subdivisions: father, mother, son, numbered in the same manner. "Son," therefore, will be numerically represented as 113 (the more general type, "relative," would be 11). It is possible to be even more specific: let's assume the eldest son would be represented as 1131, the middle son as 1132, and the youngest son as 1133. Such concrete designations composed of four elements may often be far from necessary for the schematic representation of the type of plot.

In cases where it is necessary to list similar elements of the same component, the different elements may be set off by a *comma*. The fact that there is more than one element to a component can be indicated by a *semicolon*. For example: "brother and sister unknowingly violate the interdiction" could be represented as 115, 116; 79.0.106 (where 115=brother, 116=sister, 79=the violation of the interdiction, and 106=committing the action unknowingly).

In spite of the large quantities of numbers in these representations, the decoding of the components in the stepped-decimal system is very simple. To determine from the numerical representation the most general contours of the plot it would not even be necessary to look in the index, since any researcher could easily remember the nine meanings of the first place in each of the positions of the listings. The location of the meanings of each of the following numbers requires first-hand examination of not more than nine of the following numbers, which would follow one after the other in the same places in the index. The size of the index itself would not be very large; in the three-place system it would amount to three thousand lines, i.e., approximately 50-60 pages of printed text. The four-place system would require 500-600 pages, which is not very much if one considers the size of Thompson's motif index.

The proposed system would permit one to easily make the necessary inquiries without a complete deciphering. If, for example, it is necessary to find in which of the coded variants the character or object is a supernatural being, it would be enough to examine only the first place of each group of numbers.

This system could be applied not only to saints' legends and Sagen, but also to the majority of other folklore texts. In connection with this it would be advisable to compile an index that would take into consideration not only Sagen and saints' legends. For those cases where the numerical representation of the variant must also indicate the genre; it would be possible to work out a system for the designation of genres. In order to prevent confusion with the system of the identification of the types, the genre could be indicated by letters from the Latin alphabet. If we consider the possible combinations of two letters, we will have 656 designations--a quantity that is probably more than sufficient if we do not overly splinter the concept of genre. Here it is possible to choose a two-place system: the first letter will designate the general category, the second will designate the specific genre.⁴ If a person should have difficulty in the determination of the genre, he could, having coded the text, assign just the first letter. It would be clear to the person who is decoding that only the general category is indicated and not the genre.

It would be possible to arrange it so that in the coding of a text the broadest representation would always be given first, after which a more detailed coding by episodes would follow if necessary. It may be given in more or less detail or be absent altogether. Seeing the coded representation BC 147.38.401.263; 147.30.401; 70.10.0.105;30.708, the researcher will know that the first group of numbers up to the semicolon is the general type of the entire text. The following three groups of numbers are the codes for its three main episodes. The coding and decoding of any text may be done with a great degree of exactness. For example:

- 1) 7.8.1.3
- 2) 71.88.19.36
- 3) 715.886.191.367
- 4) 7155.8862.1914.3679

Each successive step is a more concrete representation of the same text. Having encountered a code taken to the fourth step, the researcher is not obliged to look up the meanings of all the numbers. He may limit himself to the decoding of only four--the first figure of each number--and then decide if he needs to continue decoding.

It should be understood that the proposed system does not exclude incorporation with the synthetic system. The application of Simonsuuri's index, for example, which may serve ethnographers as a model for the systematization of folk beliefs (and which, incidentally, fully deserves to be published in Russian translation),

could easily be used in conjunction with the analytical coding of the folklore sources for an ethnographic study. The cataloging of strictly folklore material within a national framework could be carried out, for example, in combination with the analytic codes indicating the bibliography of variants in conformity with Christiansen's system.

An international synthetic index can only be made on the basis of study of all the material that is to be included and will require years of work for many people. An international analytic index can be based upon already available material and could be made quickly and with a comparatively small staff. Immediately upon its completion it could be used for comparative studies of texts of most folklore genres and for the comparison of materials from any people or nationality.

Notes

1. Reidar T. Christiansen, The Migratory Legends, Folklore Fellows Communications, no. 175 (Helsinki, 1958) and Lauri Simonsuuri, Typen- und Motivverzeichnis der finnischen mythischen Sagen, Folklore Fellows Communications, no. 182 (Helsinki, 1961)--Ed.
2. J.R.W. Sinninghe, Katalog der niederlandischen marchen-, ursprungssagen-, sagen-, und legendenvarianten, Folklore Fellows Communications, 132 (Helsinki, 1943)--Ed.
3. V. Ja. Propp proposed that the representation of the function of folktale characters be made in an order similar to the alphabetical indices to collections of folktales (see V. Propp, O. sostavelnii alfavitnykh ukazatelej k sobranijam skazok [Concerning the Compilation of an Alphabetical Index to Tale Collections] in the collection Skazochnaja komissija v 1927 g. Obzor rabot pod red. S.F. Ol'denberga (Leningrad, 1928), p. 71.
4. Tillhagen made a similar proposal: to designate folktales by tradition and as a token of respect for the work of Aarne and Thompson as AT, Sagen (by analogy) as BT, songs and ballads as CT, etc. (C. -H. Tillhagen, Der Internationale Sagenkatalog, 39 (Antwerp, 1963).