

OBITUARY

**Professor Lauri Honko  
(1932–2002)  
In Memoriam**



PROFESSOR LAURI HONKO passed away on July 15, 2002. He gained scholarly renown internationally as an innovative establisher of scientific institutions, an inspiring theoretician, and a tireless organizer of international conferences, seminars, and training schools. In a tragic coincidence, he died the very day the Sixth International Folklore Fellows' Summer School was about to commence. The teachers and participants knew him as both the founder of the training school and as the Chief Editor of *FF Communications* and *FF Network*.

In addition to folkloristics, Lauri Honko's fields of academic interest included comparative religion, folk medicine, and cultural anthropology. His doctoral dissertation, *Krankheitsprojekte*, a comparative study of folk medicine and folk belief, was published in 1959. His second monograph, entitled *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland*, appeared in 1962. This work was a methodologically ambitious study of folk belief tradition in Ingria, an area inhabited by Finnic groups along the southern and eastern shores of the Gulf of Finland near St. Petersburg. The high quality of his research ensured the young scholar a firm position in the field of folklore studies and comparative religion. Lauri Honko was appointed Professor of Folkloristics and Comparative Religion at the University of Turku in 1963. During his academic career Honko also served as the Director of the Nordic Institute of Folklore (1972–1990), and he was twice nominated as Academy Professor at the Academy of Finland (1975–1978, 1991–1996).

Lauri Honko was the president of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research from 1974 to 1989. In Finland Professor Honko played a leading role in a number of professional societies: the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters (member of the board 1987–2002, chairman 1989–1990), the Finnish Literature Society (President 1978–1988), and the Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion (Chairman 1969–1990).

Honko's research interests covered a vast area, both theoretically and methodologically. The following are just a few examples: he elaborated methods in the tradition-ecological perspective, applied sociological role

theory to folklore research, guided the debate on theories of genre, fostered research on cultural identity, and, last but not least, developed methods of folkloristic fieldwork. Honko made it his life's work to understand traditional genres, such as belief legends, memorates, and laments; towards the end of his life, he turned his scholarly attention to the epic. He took extended field trips among the Saami people in Northern Finland and Russian Karelia, and also to other continents, including Tanzania, China, and India.

Lauri Honko devoted the last fifteen years of his life to the research of epics, concentrating mainly on the *Siri* epic of the Tulu people of southern Karnataka, India. In December 1990, together with his Finnish-Indian team, he recorded on video and audiotape a total of 15,683 lines of the epic performed by the singer and possession priest Gopala Naika. In 1998 this epic, only five lines shorter than the *Iliad*, was published in Tulu and English in two volumes of the Folklore Fellows' Communications (*The Siri Epic as performed by Gopala Naika I–II*). A third volume, *Textualizing the Siri Epics*, is an introduction to the methodology of the textualization process of oral epics. Lauri Honko saw the advent of a new paradigm in epic research with an emphasis on multiple documentation: video, audio, and still-camera. Honko saw in multiple documentation the potential "to satisfy the interest in (1) the verbal text of the epic, (2) the details of its performance, and (3) the integration of the epic singing into a wider ritual process.... The performance paradigm will one day give way to another paradigm, probably emergent in present-day research. Judging by the weaknesses of the performance approach and by the general pattern of paradigm shifts, it should be possible to cast a prediction. Just as 'performance' relativised 'text,' the next paradigm may relativise 'performance' (Honko 1998, 50–51).

What will be the leading paradigm of culture research during the twenty-first century? Lauri Honko was one of those scholars who sought to show us the way; now we must continue our journey without him. Honko was a man of dauntless vision and formidable energy. Those of us who had the pleasure of knowing Lauri still mourn his loss. Yet the force of his ideas will keep him in our discussions.

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