

# MORDVINIAN MYTHOLOGY

TATYANA DEVYATKINA





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**STUDIA MYTHOLOGICA SLAVICA**

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**SUPPLEMENTA**

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# MORDVINIAN MYTHOLOGY

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## THE AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

**M**ythology is the foundation of the culture of every civilization. Therefore it is no coincidence that the interest in mythologies of different peoples of the world has recently risen. This is a positive tendency, for it provides impetus to numerous research projects in various branches of science and to the reconstruction of traditional ethnic culture in particular. In our opinion, mythology can be compared to a computer hard drive that stores files with confidential information and every decoded file (myth) is a discovery in the world of science and culture.

In this book the mythology of one of the Finno-Ugric ethnoses - the Mordvinians - is presented. This nation lives throughout the territory of the Russian Federation.

Mordvinian Mythology is the first summarized publication on this topic of an encyclopaedic nature. Originally it was published in Russian (The Mordovian Republic, Russia, 1998) and then in Mokshan-Mordvinian (Tartu University, Estonia, 2002). The work contains different aspects: the concept of the world model, the system of the traditional worldview, etc. It was compiled by means of a reconstruction of the ancient cosmologic views of this ethnos.

The book is divided into two parts: theoretical (the introduction) and encyclopaedic (the articles). The former introduces the Mordvinians as an ethnos i.e. demographic state, the settlement sites, pieces of tangible and intangible culture, as well as a presentation of the literature on Mordvinian mythology. In this part the cosmologic views of the Mordvinians as reflected in their myths, rituals and language are reconstructed. Time, inoethnic cultures (mainly Russian and the Tatar), religion (Slavic paganism, later changed by Islam and Christianity) influenced the development of Mordvinian mythological concepts. During the conversion to Christianity (approximately between the 17th-19th centuries) a religious and mythological duality arose: ancient Mordvinian paganism on the one hand and Orthodoxy on the other hand. In connection to this, two ideas of the world, the universe and the first origin of man can be traced. They are evolution (the Earth and the first man were born of an egg from the Great Bird) and creation (God created everything either with the help of a *deuce* or in struggle against him).

The main part of the book consists of the encyclopaedic articles that deal with the interpretation of images and the most important signs, objects of traditional intangible culture, as well as rituals, heathen and contemporary holidays, ceremonies connected with the animal world and natural phenomenon. The articles also touch upon such notions as time and space, life and death, numbers, ancestor cultism, magical ceremonies, charms and spells, sacrifices, taboos, protective symbols, dream interpretation, etc., which were formed in different epochs due to the changes in the mythological worldview of the Mordvinians. There are also 40 heathen Gods and deities-patrons, their origin, appearance and functions are presented. As a rule, the deities are born of an egg or of some alliance with the Gods. Some of them were created by

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the God. Some Gods used to marry mortal girls. The majority of the deities are female. Usually they patronize different objects on earth (water, woods, houses, etc.). The articles correspond to the encyclopaedic style, and are as such laconic and precise.

My professional interest has always been focused mostly on rites and mythology. This book summarizes more than seventy of my published works: monographs, books, papers for international and Russian national congresses, conferences and symposiums, as well as the materials of numerous fieldwork projects which were carried out at the sites of Mordvinian settlements (Russia). It also includes information on mythology gained from my mother, a connoisseur of traditional Mordvinian culture. In addition, I would like to emphasize the importance of all preceding works by Russian, Finnish and Mordvinian scholars. Their data have been taken into consideration and used, but in most cases expanded.

I would like to thank the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the sponsors, my daughter Sima Devyatkina and everyone who helped me publish this book. Every one of the above-mentioned contributed to this affair. My special thanks go to Dr. Monika Kropej (Slovenia) for her kind help in arranging the publication.

The book will be interesting for general readers as well as for specialists. It contains unique data about Mordvinian culture, which is an inseparable part of the culture of the world.

## THE MORDVINIAN PEOPLE: HISTORY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

**T**he Mordvinians or the Mordvins (the Moksha, the Erzia) are one of the Finno-Ugrian peoples inhabiting Russia. They are the third largest people among the Finno-Ugrians after the Hungarians and the Finns. According to the 2002 census, in Russia there are 844,500 Mordvinians, 283,861 living in the Mordvinian Republic, otherwise called the Republic of Mordovia or simply Mordovia. The rest live in forty republics, regions and districts of the former USSR.

The Erzians are basically concentrated in the eastern part of the Mordvinian Republic, the Mokshans – in its western part. The ethnogeny of the Mordvinians took place between the Volga and the Oka rivers on the base of the tribes belonging to the Gorodets archeological culture. In 1000 A.D. the settling area of ancient Mordvinians embraced the valleys of the Oka, the Volga (its Middle Region), the Tsna, the Moksha and the Sura rivers (Vihlyayev, 1974: 27–28). The division of the ancient Mordvinian tribes into the Moksha and the Erzia is supposed to have taken place in the middle of the first millennium A.D. (Stepanov, 1968: 263; 1970: 31, 43, 55). Among the factors that provoked this division are usually mentioned the huge expanse of territory occupied by the ancient Mordvinians and, in consequence, the impediments to their communication (Mokshin, 1977: 43). At the same time the influence exerted by neighbouring tribes on the Mordvinians caused peculiarities to emerge in their language, anthropological appearance, mode of life and culture.

Migrations of peoples at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, the settling of the Bulgars in the Middle-Volga Region (at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium) and the emerging of the new Volga-Bulgarian State are also considered to be conducive to the division. Later the Tatar-Mongol invasion played a not so minor role in stimulating the process.

Approximately in the 8–9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. the Mordvinian language community began to disintegrate. The Mordvinian parent language split into dialects and the common Mordvinian language system ceased to exist. Newly-formed language units acquired their specific peculiarities due to diverse language contacts (Tzygankin, 1991: 94). The Moksha- and Erzia-Mordvinian languages refer to the Volga group of the Finno-Ugrian branch of the Uralic language family. The Mordvinian languages differ from each other in phonetics, grammar and vocabulary. The languages have dialects with a quite definite locality: the Erzian dialects are subdivided into 5 types and the Mokshan ones – into 3. The modern Erzian literary language has developed on the base of the Kozlov-Ardatov dialects, while the Mokshan literary language is based on the Krasnoslobodsk-Temnikov dialects.

The written Mordvinian languages were developed from the very beginning using the Cyrillic alphabet. The first Mordvinian manuscripts date as far back as the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Feoktistov, 1976: 161-162). The rise and development of the written languages are closely connected to the dissemination of Christianity among the Mordvinians. It was at that moment that people began translating the New Testament and other missionary literature into the Mordvinian languages. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century more than 300 Mordvinian written sources had been created and nearly half of them had been published. At the same time nearly 50 dictionaries had been compiled and works of folklore were in print.

The anthropological structure of the Mordvinians was formed as a result of the intermixing of different types within the European race (the White-Sea, the Pontic and the East-Baltic types). The Mordvinians have less Mongoloid admixture than other East-Finnic peoples. The anthropological resemblance of the Russians and the Mordvinians can be accounted for by the common character of their anthropological types, the process of their intermixing and further development. Among the Erzian people there dominate fair-pigmented types, among the Mokshans - dark-pigmented ones (Mark, 1960: 33-35). The traditional concept of the Mordvinian nation, as a single whole (ethnos) consisting of the two ethnical communities (the Moksha and the Erzia) which possess their own peculiarities in the anthropological appearance, language, mode of life and culture has lately been debated (Tsygankin, 1991: 92-112; Nadkin, 1992: 3-8). Some scholars confine themselves to the opinion that Moksha- and Erzia-Mordvinians are two self-independent peoples (the newspaper "Erzian' mastor"). According to S. G. Guryanov's investigation, nowadays the Mordvinians represent a metaethnic community, which consists of two ethnoses (Guryanov, 1993: 24).

Apart from the Mokshans and Erzians two more ethnographical groups of Mordvinians have been preserved: the Shoksha (15,000) inhabiting the Tengushevo and Torbeyevo regions and the Karatays, who live in the Kama-Estuary region of the Tatar Republic. These groups possess specific peculiarities in their languages, rites and dress. Moreover, the Shoksha-Mordvinians reveal traces of Moksha and Erzia influence, while the Karatays show Tatar impact. According to the traditional version, the Karatay-Mordvinians fled to those parts during the Tatar-Mongol invasion. The name "karatay" means "a black foal" in Tatar and it evidently came into being due to the sacrificing of a black foal. The Karatays call themselves Muksha (UPTMN, 1983: 229).

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century another ethnographical group of Mordvinians was registered - the Teryukhans, who dwelt in the Teryushevo volost of the Nizhni Novgorod district (nowadays - the Dalnekonstantinivo district of the Nizhni Novgorod region). The Russian ethnologist W. Mainof considered them to be Erzians. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Teryukhans considered themselves Mordvinians though they spoke Russian. Today they have lost their sense of national awareness and consider themselves Russians.

The ethnonim "Mordvinians" is practically non-existent among the Moksha and Erzia people (they usually call themselves Moksha and Erzia). This ethnonim was first mentioned in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. by the Gothic historian Jordan in "De origine actibus que Getarum" ("About the origin and deeds of the Geths"). It was a people that dwelt in Eastern Europe - Mordens. Another source containing the ethnonim with the root "mord" is a work of the 10<sup>th</sup> century by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII (Konstantinas Porphyrogenetos) "De administrando imperio" ("About governing the empire"). He mentioned the country "Mordia" which was situated within 10 days' walking distance of the country of the Pechenegs (Harva, 1952: 4).

In Russian Chronicles, the name "Mordva" occurs in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in "Povest' vremennykh let" ("A Tale of Temporal Years"). In official documents, the expression "the Mordvinian people" ("the Mordvinian nation") came into use after 1921.

One of the earliest written sources containing the ethnonim "Erzia" (arisa) dated 986 A.D.

is the letter of the Khazarian kagan Ioseph to the Hebrew dignitary Khasday (Kokovtsev, 1986: 98-99). Later in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Arabic scholar Ibn-Haukal mentioned the tribe "arsaya" in his "Book of Ways".

The first written facts devoted to the ethnicon "Moksha" (moxel) are to be found in Guillaume Ruysbriek's notes. He was a Flemish traveller who went together with Ludwig the Holy's embassy in 1253 through Southern Russia to Asia. The Venetian Iosafat Barbaro (Barbaro, 1971: 133-134, 159) mentioned "Moksha" in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. As for the etymology of the words "Moksha" and "Erzia", it is hitherto obscure.

The union between Mordvinians and Russia played a considerable role in their life. This process of rapprochement began very early when Russia itself had not yet been consolidated, and finished only at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when a united Russian state was formed (Mokshin, 1989: 46). Alongside the unification of Mordvinians and Russia another process began - the conversion of the Mordvinians to Christianity, which was completed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The heathen Mordvinians became Orthodox.

In ancient times Mordvinians got their food by hunting, fishing and gathering honey. Later arable farming and cattle-breeding began to play the leading role in their economy. At a very early stage of their economic activity Mordvinians already knew such animals as pigs (tuvo, E., tuva, M.), sheep (reve, E., ucha, M.), oxen (buka, E., M.), goats (seya, E., syava, M.), cows (skal, E., traks, M.), horses (alasha, M., E.).

Long since, the Mordvinians knew metallurgy and metal-work. They produced iron from marshland and turf ores, which were widely spread on their territory (Peterburgsky, 1995: 120). Squirrel skins were used as money equivalents (urt, ur M., E.) - a squirrel (Yozhef, 1968: 25). Metal coins came into usage as late as the 10<sup>th</sup> century (yarmakt M., E. - metal coins, money). "Yarmakt" is a Turkic loan-word which meant originally "chopped, hacked, slashed" or "a piece of metal separated in this way" that could serve as change. At this time the Mordvinians carried on a great deal of trade with the Arabs. These contacts were intensified by the rise of the Volga Bulgaria state because a considerable part of Mordvinians lived in this state (Mokshin, 1989: 38). The main part of a money system had appeared in the Volga region long before the Mongols began minting coins under the Juchid dynasty.

One may conclude from Russian chronicles that Mordvinians built villages, winter huts for cattle at the back of their houses (in Russian called "zimnitses", from "zima" - winter) and strongholds. The first three types had no fortifications; as for strongholds they were erected in forests as fortress-towns where Mordvinians could seek shelter in case of danger (Vavilin, 1995: 148-166). Mordvinians began building towns at the end of the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries on the Moksha River. Most towns were founded in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries as fortress-towns to defend Russian frontiers against invasions from the South (nomadic steppe peoples, the Crimean Tatars, Bashkirs, Kazakhs). The Russian government built these towns on abatis attracting to their building various peoples from the Volga region, including Mordvinians. In this way the following towns grew up on the territory of the modern Republic of Mordovia: Temnikov (1536), Krasnoslobodsk (1627), Saransk (1641), Insar (1648) and others.

A most characteristic type of houses built by Mordvinians was the type widely spread in the Russian Midlands. In this house, a stove was situated in one of the corners near the door, with its mouth turned to the windows of the front wall. The chief corner (the so-called red corner) was situated opposite the door and diagonally to the stove. The interior of the Mordvinian house differed very little from a Russian peasant's "izba" (hut).

Before conversion to Christianity polygamy was commonly practised among the Mordvinians. People from ruling classes ("murzas", princes) had several wives. A Mordvinian man was allowed

to have as many wives as he could support. Nevertheless, due to economic reasons, none of the peasants could have more than three wives (Lepyokhin, 1771: 173). In the 17–18<sup>th</sup> centuries monogamy and very seldom bigamy became legal forms of marriage among the Mordvinians.

It is a peculiar fact that small boys (3–10 years of age) were known to marry up to twenty/thirty-year-old girls and women (Evseyev, 1966: 321). The idea of such marriages was purely economic and entailed the acquisition of free labour.

The Mordvinian women's folk-dress is very original and distinctive. There are two main types (the Moksha and Erzia) of clothes, which include in their turn rather many variants. The folk-dress of a Mordvinian woman of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with its complicated decorations was described in detail by P. S. Pallas. It goes back to the 1<sup>st</sup> – early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium A.D. Women's festive clothes were very complicated and consisted of many articles with abundant ornaments and adornments as well as with different ways of draping a figure (Balashov, 1995: 176). The ceremony of the festive clothing sometimes took up several hours because women, as a rule, could not dress themselves without help.

A Mokshan women's shirt differed in cut and decoration from those of the Erzia type. The colouring of the Mordvinian embroidery combines the black colour tinted blue and dark-red as basic colours and also the yellow and green colours for making the tracery vivid and bright. In Mordvinian ornamentation there occur most often "ushtor lopat", M. – maple leaves, "kuyen' pryat", M. – snakes' heads, "sarazon' pil'gonyat", M. – hen's feet. A shirt was girdled with a woollen belt (karks, M., E.) woven on wooden planks or completed with a decorated loin-cloth (pulay, E.). These articles played the role of symbols of perfection; they indicated their owner's wealth and the territory he/she lived in (Balashov, 1995: 183). The Mokshan shirt (panar) was supplemented with trousers (ponkst), which nearly reached the ankles.

In the Iron Age, Mordvinian women wore silver and golden rings on their temples and bronze pendants (Tallgren, 1928: 7). In addition to that, they wore a breast adornment – "syulgam", M., E., i.e. brooch (and at the same time a grip) in the shape of an oval hoop with a moving needle in the Erzia variant, and in the shape of a ring placed on a trapezium buckle in the Moksha modification. This object was used to pin up the collar of a shirt. The chest and the neck were also adorned with beads (krgan'ya, M.) or a breast adornment made of glass beads (tsifks, M.; krgan' pir'f, M.). On their arms and hands women wore bracelets and rings made of copper, silver and gold.

Erzian women's head-dresses (pango, soroka and shlygan) were made on a hard base and had the form of a cylinder, half-cylinder and a cone. The frame was made of bast or birch bark. The back part of such a head-dress continued down as a specific detail covering a woman's back. Moksha-Mordvinian women's head-dresses called "panga" had a trapezium form and consisted of two or three parts. Women also wore kerchiefs of canvas and linen and often in a turban-like way. In some districts, a married woman's hairstyle resembled horns (kodavks). After a wedding a girl's head-dress was replaced by a woman's one.

Mokshan women wore small round objects covered with glass-beads ("pilepryat") in their ears; Erzian women wore balls made of goose-down or ear-rings with a pendant – a silver coin.

Traditional Mordvinian footwear consisted of bast shoes ("lapti"). Later women began to wear leather booties decorated with red morocco. Even nowadays Mokshan women wear specific objects on their knees (called "nakolenniki" in Russian) which are usually striped or have a geometrical pattern, knitted of wool. At present, in several regions of Mordovia, Mokshan women still wear a traditional everyday and festive folk-dress. Erzian women wear it only on special occasions, for instance, if they go to a wedding party. Old women keep national clothes to be buried in. Nowadays several elements of the Moksha- and Erzia-Mordvinian women's folk-dress are

being preserved and developed in the creative work of Mordvinian modellers and embroideresses.

There was hardly any difference between the Erzians and the Mokshans in preparing food and the food products they ate. Traditional Mordvinian cuisine depended on farm produce and was conditioned by the Mordvinians' main occupations: arable farming, cattle-breeding, bee-keeping. Fishing, hunting, and gathering mushrooms, berries and nuts were also a great supplement to their diets.

Millet, oats, barley, buckwheat, peas, rye, wheat, lentils and sunflower seeds were the oldest crops cultivated by the Mordvinians. As for vegetables, in different periods of their history Mordvinians grew cabbage, cucumbers, onions, garlic, turnips, radishes, beet-roots, squash and carrots. When making a store of food Mordvinians used to prepare pickled products. As a rule, they preferred turned milk and were very fond of sauces made of sour milk, sour cream or hemp oil.

Since very old times rye bread ("kshi", M., E.) has been a staple. Up to now in some villages it is baked of sour dough and put in a hot stove on cabbage leaves. Nowadays bread continues to play a very important role in all kinds of ceremonies: weddings, funerals, family-parties and fortune-telling.

One of the oldest Mordvinian dishes was "shongaryam", M., "vetsayam", E. - a kind of soup made of millet and very few potatoes. Pan-cakes (pachat, M. pachalkset', E.) have always been very popular; they were made mostly of millet or wheat flour. Even nowadays they are baked very thick and are eaten with milk, sour cream and butter. Mordvinians used to pickle mushrooms in tubs, make sauerkraut and pickled apples. Even today they pickle and smoke pork fat over



*Woman breast adornments. End of 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

a stove in their bath-houses.

Especially esteemed in Mordvinian cuisine were ritual dishes, closely connected with special events in the agricultural cycle as well as with family and religious festive occasions. For instance, “numolon’ pyaryakat”, M., “pryakat”, E. (pies with hare flesh) and “yam”, M. (millet porridge) were not only ritual dishes at public prayers, weddings, christening parties and funeral feasts. The last, in particular, was closely connected with the special ritual – “Baban’ kasha”, M., E., i.e. “old women’s porridge”.

In the Erzian wedding, the last day of the bride’s staying at her parents’ home was called “kashado yartsamo chi”, E. (the day to eat porridge). This was the first day of the wedding. Traditionally, when the main beam was laid in a newly built house, the master went round it with a pot of millet porridge in his hands. The porridge symbolized in this case longevity.

Several types of ritual rolls and buns were assimilated by Mordvinians after their conversion to Christianity. Thus, in March they baked buns in the shape of birds, called “skylarks” and on Wednesday in the fourth week of Lent – the so-called “crosses” into which they put coins, small crosses, little pieces of coal and seeds.

Since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century potatoes (“modamar”) have occupied a considerable place among the food products eaten by the Mordvinians (Balashov, 1995: 194). They also made different kinds of “kissel” (i.e. a kind of starchy jelly) of oats, peas and rye. An important role has also been played by milk (“loftsa”, M., “lovtso”, E.) consumed sour or fresh from the cow.

The oldest Mordvinian drink was “pure”, M., E. – mead. Pure was a ritual drink and was included in the number of obligatory sacrificial food products consumed at magical ritual ceremonies. The sacred “pure” was made of a mixture of honey, hops, and barley which was prepared like usual beer. Among ritual products there was also a drink called “poza”, M., “braga”, E. i.e. traditional non-alcoholic beverage. Even today, in the village of Alkino of the Kovytkino region of the Mordvinian Republic the Mokshan people celebrate the holiday “avan’ poza” a week after Easter. One of the most popular non-alcoholic drinks to this day is “kvass”, made of rye bread.



*Mokshan clothes of young woman. Photo by T. Deviatkina, 2003.*

The Mordvinians never practised separate meals for men and women.

Archeological finds of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia show that the Mordvinians possessed a gift for the artistic vision of the world and this can be clearly seen in many works of applied art. When decorating their tools, clothes, utensils ancient Mordvinians depicted cult animals, symbols of heavenly bodies. A real prototype acquired a conventionally stylized form subordinate to the laws of decorative plastic arts.

For the last three centuries the chief place in the artistic and creative activity of Mordvinians has been occupied by such arts as embroidery, glass-bead work, making ornaments and adornments of beads, kauri-shells and buttons. Mordvinians have always been good masters of appliqué work, weaving, patterned weaving and knitting.



*Clothes of a Mokshan bride. The 20<sup>th</sup> century. Photo by T. Deviatkina, 1992.*

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Traditionally, men were good at decorative woodcarving, they made ornaments on the pediments of houses, wedding chests called “par”, platbands, looms, spinning-wheels and other utensils. National traditions of woodcarving and the artistic perception of reality are reflected in the creative work of the Mordvinian sculptor S. D. Nefyodov (Erzia, 1876–1959) who made a valuable contribution to the development of national and world sculpture. The art of woodcarving is still living today. There is a school of artistic woodcarving in the village of Podlesnaya Tavla in the Kochkurovo region of the Mordvinian Republic.

The first facts concerning musical practice among Mordvinians (their songs and musical instruments) refer to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Composing and singing songs are maintained by collective and individual traditions. Collective traditions are to be found in non-ritual songs, i.e. epic, lyrical, wedding songs as well as in singing and dancing in a ring. Individual traditions can be seen in lullabies and in wedding songs as well as in the so-called match-maker’s songs.

Non-ritual songs, which are sung freely, are wide-spread even nowadays in rural districts, and they are more characteristic of the Mokshans. There, one can find some of the traditional ritual songs: wedding songs “paryaftnemat”, M., “paryavtnemat”, E., i.e. songs of reproach, ritual songs proper, laments for the deceased or for some other occasion.

Several kinds of songs and instrumentals connected in the past with the cult of sacred



*Mordvinian with a national musical instrument – puwama. Photo taken at the beginning of 20th century.*

trees, worshipping wild and domestic animals and birds have at present lost any tie with heathen notions and are preserved in the new function of non-ritual songs and in melodies (Boyarkina, 1995: 438).

A most popular instrument was “nyudey”, E., nyudi, M. (reed) – a doubled clarinet made of two hollow reed pipes of the same or different size and approximately 17–20 cm long. In the past it was used for playing everyday and dancing tunes (melodies), “vanytsyan’morot”, E. – shepherd songs. Another musical instrument of no less popularity “fam”, “ufam”, M., “puvama”, E., was made from a bladder of an ox, a cow or a pig, sometimes one that belonged to sacrificial animals. It was a bagpipe of two kinds, which differed from each other in the material they were made of and in the number of pipes. The air reservoir of the first type was made of a calf skin, that of the second type – of an ox-, cow-, or pig- bladder.

Both of these types of “nyudi” used to be the main types of musical instruments for playing ritual melodies and accompanying ritual songs of the Christmas House holiday, wedding and ancient agricultural holidays. The nyudi timbres were thought to possess a peculiar quality to guard people from harm at a wedding-party. They were considered to be able to propitiate god patrons. In this function tunes were played mostly at magical ritual ceremonies (Boyarkina, 1995: 461–463).

At present, Mordvinians use the Russian accordion, more seldom a violin to accompany dancing and singing “chastooshkas” (two-line or four-line folk verse, usually humorous and topical; in a lively manner). The latter were sung in three languages – Mokshan, Erzian and Russian. Mokshans and Erzians speak Russian as fluently as their native languages. For Moksha- and Erzia-Mordvinians the Russian language acts as a mediator in their mutual “communication” and in the communication with other nations of Russia. It also serves as a means of access to other cultures. But this highly-developed bilingual ability is characteristic only of Mordvinians. It should be stated that this sort of practice places the further development of the Moksha- and Erzia-Mordvinian languages in jeopardy.

The number of Mordvinians who consider the Erzian and Mokshan languages as the vernacular is constantly reducing. According to the 1979 census, only 91% called Mordvinian their native language and according to the 1989 census – only 85,5% of Mordvinians. There are several reasons for such development. The Mordvinian languages are not used in kindergartens; they are not learnt in schools. In the 1970s in all Mordvinian schools Russian was introduced as the language of instruction. At present, in towns, secondary schools include the Mordvinian language in their curriculum only as an optional subject. Mordvinian children who live outside the Mordvinian Republic have no opportunity to learn their native languages in schools. In the regions of Mordovia with the prevailing Mordvinian population 21 newspapers are printed, but none is published in either of the Mordvinian languages. In spite of the fact that the Moksha- and Erzia-Mordvinian languages have lately acquired the status of official languages, they are not accepted in clerical work, business correspondence or public speeches in towns. The local radio and TV devote less than 15% of airtime for broadcasting in national languages. Like other peoples of Russia, the Mokshan and Erzian people have begun work on the resurgence of their languages, culture, history and, in particular, mythology that has not yet been studied profoundly to this day.

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## A CONCISE HISTORY OF COLLECTING AND STUDYING MORDVINIAN MYTHOLOGY

**T**he first works on Mordvinian mythology can be traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In most of them the earliest Mordvinian religion was defined as paganism (Julian, P. Karpini, G. Ruybriek). Some travelling missionaries mentioned even idolatry (I. Barbaro in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Barberini in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, F. d'Avril in the 17<sup>th</sup> century). More detailed information concerning Mordvinian religion and mythology is to be found in "Mordvinian religious beliefs and mode of life at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century" by the land-surveyor K. Milkovitch (1905). The book was the first to name (though with some terminological misrepresentations) the main god-patrons of the Mordvinian people and also sacrifices and holidays in honour of these gods. The book also mentioned the places of heathen magical ceremonies ("keremet"), which, according to their functions, can be subdivided into major and minor ones. Further information concerned priests of heathen magical ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, obsequial rites and Mordvinians' ideas of the other world, the beyond.

Different materials on heathen magical ceremonies (ozks), magic effects, various actions to guard oneself at funerals, funeral feasts, remembrance parties and weddings are to be found in the articles by M. Popov (1834), K. Fux (1839), A. F. Leopoldov (1844), A. Primerov (1870), A. Martynov (1865), A. Ternovsky (1867), N. P. Orlov (1867), A. Yurtov (1877) and others.

In the Saratov region A. F. Leopoldov gathered information about "the contacts" of the living people with the beyond, e.g. sending regards to the dead, delivering food parcels to them through a hole dug in a grave, scraping a coin, which symbolized sending money to the dead. It should be stated, however, that some facts in Leopoldov's book cannot be confirmed by other sources.

This refers, for instance, to the description of public magical ceremony held in August and called "keremed" – a sweet holiday. The name is evidently derived from "kere", "keroms", M., – to cut, hack, chop, to draw; and "med" – honey, i.e. a holiday in honour of honey. It can be assumed that, by analogy with a fenced apiary, the place for magical ceremony was later called "keremet".

"The Moksha-Mordvinians" – an article by N. P. Orlov, contains specific materials devoted to cult myths. K. Mitropolsky in "The Mordvinians" (1876) described a mythological perception characteristic of the Mordvinians in the Tambov region, viz. worshipping the Sun, the Moon, the dawn, believing in evil spirits and ghosts which are killed, according to a Mordvinian belief, mostly by lightning-bolts and which are extremely fair and just. The last fact is absolutely contrary to what Orthodox religion says about spirits and ghosts.

The chief evil ghost is a black serpent vomiting flame.

A considerable contribution to studying Mordvinian mythology was made by P. I. Melnikov-Petchersky with his books "Mordvinians' religious beliefs, customs and home in the Nizni-Novgorod region" (1887) and "Mordvinian essays" (1909). The scholar tried to reconstruct a

complicated system of the Mordvinians' Pre-Christian views that had been formed and developed for centuries. He disproves the opinion that Mordvinians were idolaters and at the same time assumes the similarity of Russian and Mordvinian Pre-Christian beliefs and rituals.

Some scholars (I. Smirnov, M. E. Evseyev, U. Harva) believe that the whole system of Mordvinian mythology, as it was represented in P. I. Melnikov's book (including the goddess "Ange Patyay", discovered in the Nizni-Novgorod region), is contrived and therefore fictitious. Nonetheless, materials taken from other sources show that Melnikov's conclusions are true. As for "Ange Patyay", she is still preserved in the memory of Erzia-Mordvinians and the Moksha-Mordvinians of the Kovylkino region (The Republic of Mordovia) as the goddess of fertility, the patroness of women in childbirth and children.

Of all books devoted to Mordvinian mythology, "Les restes de la mythologie Mordovine" by W. Mainof (1889) is worth mentioning. The author summarized numerous facts from books that had been issued before and made his own observations of great value and interest.

He wrote about Mordvinian religious and magic rituals and beliefs, the influence that Mordvinian mythology exerted on Russian mythology – facts of great significance for comparative mythology.

The collected articles "Picturesque Album: Peoples of Russia" (1880) contain very interesting information about Mordvinian religious beliefs and rituals: marriage, funeral ceremonies and ceremonies devoted to childbirth. An unknown author points out the religious dualism of the Mordvinians, the recognition of two opposite bases: Good and Evil. He thinks that due to this fact all gods are divided into two camps of invisible spirits. Another unknown author speaks in the same book about the Mordvinians' perception of solar eclipses (as the evil ghost's deeds), falling stars, and magic ways of healing diseases, spells, charms, superstitions, popular beliefs and rituals.

The essay "The Mordvinians" by I. N. Smirnov (1895) can be regarded as an intermediate stage from descriptive to theoretical analysis, a peculiar generalization of observations on the Pre-Christian beliefs among the Mordvinians. Based on his own field work materials, he stated that spirit patrons are divided into two groups: domestic ones that fuse with the souls of the dead and those which personify natural phenomena. The scholar also pointed out the diversity of word-formation elements in the Mordvinian languages with the prevalence of "awa" (mother, woman), "atya" (old man, man), "azorawa" (proprietress) in the Moksha language and "Paz" (god) in the Erzia language. In addition to this, he characterised the forms of cult rituals and their essential points.

The author thoroughly investigated the peculiar features of Mordvinian religious views in the process of their development and emphasized that from the simplest animistic world outlook Mordvinians moved up to more definite mythological images and notions of gods.

In religious magical ceremonies, which were also holidays, I. N. Smirnov singled out four characteristic elements: the object of worshipping; the role of intermediaries between gods and people; a certain place of serving gods; a definite ritual. He gave a detailed description and interpretation of each element, stated common features in the evolution of the Mordvinians' and the Maris' religious views. In his opinion, Mordvinians were influenced by their Iranian and Scythian neighbours, which can, in particular, be traced in the etymology of the words "azoro" E., "azor", M. (host, master), which presumably originates from the Zend "ahura" and the Persian "aura" (owner, proprietor).

Great services to science have been rendered by the Finnish scholar H. Paasonen, who gathered rich mythological materials during his expeditions to Mordvinian villages (1890–1899, 1898–1901) and also from Mordvinian informants.

The greater part of collected information was published in a serial book "Mordwinische Volksdichtung", which included various folklore genres: songs, fairy-stories, spells and charms, laments, etc. In mythological songs there were reflected the deeds of the Supreme god-patrons and patrons and their functions. In his article "Mythologisches, etymologisches" (1914), H. Paasonen analysed the etymology of their names. Markelov's articles, published in "Religious beliefs of the peoples of the USSR" (1931), are devoted to the investigation of the ancestors' cult, obsequial rites and the rituals of funeral repasts and remembrance parties. In addition to this, the articles deal with the early forms of religion, such as sorcery, witchcraft, typical not only of Mordvinians, but also of other Finno-Ugrian peoples.

Pagan rituals, magical ceremonies and sacrifices that were made in 1910 in the Narovtchat Godishche, Krasnoloslobodsk and Insar districts of the Penza province were described in detail by M. E. Evseyev in his book "Public prayings and other religious rituals of the Mordvinians in the Penza province" (1914). He was the first to describe at great length the Mordvinian wedding (1893) and a number of its rituals that go back to myths.

The connection of folklore and myths is traced distinctly in A. I. Maskayev's "Mordvinian folk fairy-tale". Following V. Ya. Propp and adhering to methods of structural folklore studies the author compares numerous characteristic elements and motives of fairy-tales and myths.

Mythological origin should be assumed for the theme of a totem-bear and a Mordvinian woman's marriage, which resulted in the birth of creatures that were at the same time half-people and half-bears and possessed the habits and strength of wild beasts. The fantastic fairy-tale is characterized by the author as containing miraculous personages, speaking and acting objects, mythological images and various magic events, as for instance, the arising of a mountain out of a thrown wooden bar or the destruction of towns and buildings with the help of verbal magic, gestures and objects.

A. I. Maskayev enumerates popular plots of "Viryawa" (the deity of the woods) and of the children who were at the mercy of the mythical Baba-Yaga (Yaga-Baba, M., E.) and escaped owing to their quick wit, or young valiants born by miracles who fought with a serpent, etc. According to the scholar, the ending in fairy-stories is always happy and the trials the hero undergoes are comparable with the trials included in marriage or initiation ceremonies of an archaic society as they are reflected in myths.

Of no less significance for studying Mordvinian mythology there is yet another book by A. I. Maskayev - "Mordvinian epic folk song" (1964), in which he defines its specific character, i.e. archaic forms preserved as a developed system of mythological views on nature and society. The author is very consistent in analysing folk songs, which have many features in common with fantastic fairy-stories, old myths of people's struggle with monsters and totems, i.e. myths of a hunter, fisher and a horse.

Mythical motifs come to light in songs of the struggle with death (a common Finnic plot), children of miracles, the abduction of an earthly woman by a heavenly bride-groom, a singing tree that has grown on the grave of a murdered man, marriage trials. A. I. Maskayev considers that in songs devoted to the struggle with death there were incarnated the notions of the ancient society, when a family had not yet been opposed to kindred, and no discrimination was made between the notions of the ancestors' cult and mythological images.

The Finnish scholar U. Harva was the first to make an attempt at rationally reinterpreting Mordvinian mythology in his book "Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen" (1952). Systematizing the sources of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries and Mordvinian informants' manuscripts the scholar constructed a harmonious hierarchy of Mordvinian gods, revealed the system of their intercourse and formulated his own concept of Mordvinian mythology. Sharing H. Paasonen's opinion he

emphasized that the idea of creation is alien to the Mordvinians. This deduction meant that myths containing creative elements could not be ancient. Thus, he came to the conclusion that such myths were of recent origin. He considered the duality principle of Mordvinian gods (i.e. their subdivision into male and female deities) to be a basic one in Mordvinian mythology. He assigns great significance to earthly gods and thinks that in some cases they forced out the Supreme gods. This fact, in his opinion, indicates their later origin. In the book much attention is paid to the description of funeral ceremonies, holidays, funeral feasts and remembrance parties. The facts concerning heathen god patrons gathered by N. F. Mokshin during his visit to Mordvinian villages are published in his "Mordvinian religious beliefs" (1968). The author replenished the fundamental works by U. Harva and M. E. Evseyev with new information.

"Mordvinian ritual poetry" (1980) by K. T. Samorodov deals with establishing mythological motives in the genres of ritual poetry. The book reveals people's archaic views on nature, their wish to influence it with the help of magic, their beliefs in various mythical gods. The author states that Mordvinian ritual poetry (and particularly songs) remained in its essence heathen with insignificant elements of Christian culture, though there was no complete confusion of Christian and pagan holidays. Thus, there arose a specific Mordvinian double religion. According to K. T. Samorodov's observations, only the names were borrowed from the Christian church calendar rituals. Under the influence of these names the sequence of Pre-Christian agricultural rituals was changed.

The materials from the collection of the Mordvinian folklore "Oral poetry of the Mordvinian people" are of great importance for the reconstruction of Mordvinian mythological views. Since 1963, 11 volumes and 17 books containing nearly all genres, i.e. legends, songs, spells and charms, etc. have been published; some of them originating from Mordvinian mythology.

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Bd. VII, 1980; Bd. VIII, 1981. Paasonen H. Mythologisches, etymologisches // Memoir de la Société Finno-Ougrienne XXXV. No 11. Helsinki, 1914.

## THE MORDVINIAN TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW

**T**he traditional system of mythological notions of the world model, through which people express their views on world organization, is one of the main systems in mythology. It is a kind of base on which religious views, understanding the past and the future of the world, ways of its development and man's status in it are obtained. The mythological model (picture) of the world is reflected not only in cosmogonic myths, but also in various rituals (connected with weddings, funerals and childbirth) as well as with public prayings, sacrifices, popular beliefs, superstitions, omens and language, viz. names of objects and natural phenomena, idioms (Napolskikh, 1991: 16).

The sources of Mordvinian mythology (both of Moksha and Erzia mythology) go back to the epoch of the Finno-Ugrian community (approximately the second and third millennia B.C.). The materials on folklore and ethnography that serve as the basis for reconstructing Mordvinian mythology are very brief and sometimes fragmentary or even contradictory in their plots. This situation can be accounted for, on the one hand, by their archaic character and even loss and, on the other hand, by the formation of the two ethnical groups of Mordvinians and the influence of alien mythologies, i.e. Iranian, Turkic, Slavic, Baltic and at the final stage - by Islamic and Christian mythologies (Petrukhin, Khelimsky, 1994: 563). During the period of adopting Christianity, the religious and magic integrity of paganism was beginning to transform, because Mordvinian mythological traditions fell under the influence of two religious-and-mythological systems, i.e. Orthodoxy and Old Mordvinian paganism.

The Mordvinian notions of the world and the universe are very similar to those of most Indo-European and Siberian peoples. Despite the resemblance of mythological plots, on the whole, there is no common Mordvinian unity in Mokshan and Erzian mythology (Maskayev, 1964: 131). The peculiar features of their cultures and languages can account for this fact. A number of local variants is to be found in myths of the Mordvinian ethnographical groups: the Shoksha, the Teryukhans and the Karatays, which differ considerably from each other in their languages, rituals, folk-dresses and other specific peculiarities. For instance, the Supreme God-demiurge in traditional Erzian myths is "Chipaz" (the God of the Sun), the Mokshans have "Shkay", "Shkabavaz" (the God of Time and the Sun); later in the Erzia myths the role of demiurge was played by "Nishkepaz", "Chipaz's" son - a cultural personage who bequeathed labour to people. In mythological songs, "Nishkepaz" is represented as a god sitting in an oak-tree and distributing happiness and people's fates. The Teryukhans' Mother of the Gods was "Ange Patyay", called by I. N. Smirnov a questionable goddess, an imitation of a classical one (Smirnov, 1895: 268). Nevertheless, "Ange Patyay" has even recently been recorded among the Mokshans in the Koyilkino region of the Mordvinian Republic.

Myths about cosmogony, i.e. about the origin of the world and universe are very few in number, probably because the idea of world creation was not originally developed (Harva, 1952:

144). Mordvinians believed that the world was created by the world itself. According to K. Mitropolsky (Mitropolsky, 1876: 18), in the Erzian myths an ocean with three fish swimming over it plays the role of the fundamental principle that bears the embryo of the world ("Ineved", E., "Poksh ved", E. - Great Water). The origin of the universe was usually associated with the origin of the Earth ("Mastor", M., E.), as a creative act of some definite order. Under the influence of Christianity the notion of demiurge begins to take shape. The Mordvinian worldview model has an apocryphal character, according to which the creators of the world were not only "Shkay", M., "Chipaz", E., but also the evil ghost "Shyaytan", M., "Idemevs", E. The most archaic tale of the creation of the universe as compared to other Volga-Finnic plots which do not go back to the popular Christian traditions of the Bogomils (the heretical doctrine of the 10-14<sup>th</sup> centuries) is a myth of the demiurge's diving to the bottom of an ocean. Having changed into a duck, he dived to bring up a lump of earth that he later spat out and created land in this way. The deuce, imitating his actions, created mountains (YUPTMN, 1983: 188).

Quite evident traces of popular Christian influence (keeping back the lump of earth) can be clearly seen in a variant of the Mokshan myth of "Vyarde Shkay" (the Supreme God) who, sailing in a boat, told the deuce to change into a golden-eye-duck and dive in order to bring up some sand from the bottom of an ocean. But he did not want to obey "Vyarde Shkay" and brought up the sand only after diving for the third time. The creation of the world takes place in the struggle with the deuce at several points in time: the deuce first retrieved "the constructing material" from the bottom, soaked it in his mouth, spat and thus made a plain; then he created the roughness of the country, i.e. pits, ravines and mountains.

In the Erzian variant of the myth, "Chipaz", the Supreme God, sailing on a stone over an ocean, created the deuce with a spit and the stroke of a rod; later "Chipaz" made him dive to fetch some sand from the bottom. The sand that "Chipaz" had scattered everywhere expanded and turned into land (Melnikov, 1981: 45-47). In another myth (no indication to the Moksha or Erzia origin) God makes the evil ghost (who had the appearance of a duck swimming over the water) retrieve some earth from the bottom (Mitropolsky, 1876: 19).

These myths as well as legends and songs in which the demiurge orders the deuce (who having assumed the aspect of a bird swims over the primary ocean) to bring up some earth from the bottom, most of all resemble the Finno-Ugrian motives of world-creation.

The role of a waterfowl in the Mordvinian view of the world, just as is the case in that of all Finno-Ugrians, has been evident since ancient times. This is confirmed by archeological finds (bronze pendants in the form of a duck, webbed pendants and utensils in the form of birds, etc.).

Of less prevalence is the myth of "Ine Narmon", M., "Ine Narmun", E. ("The Great Bird", "The World Bird", who created the world). She lays the world egg ("Ine al", - M., E., "Otsyu al", M.) and the world is made of this egg: the round Earth - out of the egg's embryo, while the heavenly and the earthly solidity - out of the egg-shell. In the myths of world creation there occurs the image of the Life Tree, under which (and later in which), the Erzian demiurge "Chipaz" sleeps twice for 30 years. While he is sleeping, the tree grows very high blotting out the sun and extracting subterranean water with its roots. The water fills the ravines, created on the flat surface by the deuce. On the place, where he had slept, remained a deep depression, which later became the Sura river-bed (Mainof, 1889: 109-110). The world in Mordvinian mythology, just as in the mythology of other Finno-Ugrian peoples, is divided into 3 main spheres: the upper one - "menel", M., E. (sky), the middle one - "moda", M., E. (Earth, surrounded by ocean waters), and the lower - the subterranean one - the world of cold and darkness. "Kelu" (birch) personifies the correlation of these three spheres. In some villages, Erzians imagined the world organization as hives with four sections: the upper section, the lower one and two

central sections, one of which is inhabited by people and the other – by all possible creatures. God, who like the Queen Bee, reigns in the hive, protecting each hive. The heavenly chief of the hive is “Ineshkipaz” (or “Nishkepaz”) who creates stars that are, according to Erzians, happy people’s souls living in bright houses lit up by sunrays. The Mordvinians imagined this God as a man who keeps bees and round whom bee-souls whirl. This God’s dwelling is the Great Bear (Ursa Major) or the constellation Vesta (probably Libra – T. D.) (Mainof, 1889: 109).

According to the Mordvinian world picture, all living beings inhabiting the Earth (land, water and air) grew up together with the Earth. The idea that the Earth was small in size is archaic (Harva, 1952: 140). According to several versions, the Earth is flat, in the shape of a scoop or a bowl, concave at the edges. It may also have the form of a geometrical figure. According to other versions, the Earth is round, washed by the waters of the World Ocean (“Ine Ved”, M., E.) or even quadrangular. In each corner there stand silver poles. Mordvinians thought that in each of the corners there were barrels, in which by turns the deity of the wind “Varmawa” (M., E.) was sitting. The direction in which the wind blows depends on which barrel is opened at the moment (Harva, 1952: 141).

In Erzian mythological songs, the Earth is situated on a white fish (beluga) or on three fish: a *sevruga* (a kind of sturgeon), a sturgeon and a beluga, protected by the deity of the Rava river (the Volga). They are placed between the sea and the Rava and protect people (Evseyev, 1963: 209–210). These fish swim to three starts, three abysses with the aim to hold up the Earth with their backs: the eldest fish swims eastward, the middle one – in the direction of the midday sun (and probably to the centre of the Earth), the youngest – westward to the sunset (UPTMN, 1963: 26).

In fairy formulas and spells, three whales that separate it from the water and underground expanses hold up the Earth. Moving in different directions they produce and preserve the harmony and equilibrium of the world. The “holders” jerky movements cause floods and earthquakes. In later myths, all these catastrophes are explained as God’s punishing people for their sins and violation of laws established by ancestors. The fact that the fish holding up the Earth are under the protection of “Vedyava”, M., E. (the deity of water) provides every reason to see in the image of a fish a certain totem, a kind of a kindred animal, forbidden to be fished at a definite period of time (Maskayev, 1964: 237).

The idea of four corners of the Earth is presumably connected with the four cardinal points: the West, the East, the South and the North though it lacks distinct and clear expression. Orientation was determined by the sun (the East is before “shin’ styama shire”, M., “chi lisema en”, E. literally: where the sun rises); the West is behind “shin’ madoma shire”, M., “chin’ madoma en”, E. (literally: where the sun sets). The characterization of Gods is also usually connected with the East from where they may come. The chief orientation for the Earth was consequently eastern. It is here that the sun rises, the day begins and “Shkay” and “Nishkepaz” live. It is due to this fact that Mordvinians prayed kneeling with their faces to the East. In ancient times, the doors of their houses also faced the East.

In the songs of wedding rituals, the Earth also has four corners; in its middle there are silver chairs (a symbol of heavenly gods) and yellow tables (a symbol of fertility).

A square as a mythoepic symbol was reflected in rituals performed when a house was being built: a square was drawn and in the middle of it a table was placed with bread and salt on it, then a new tree was planted which usually was an oak – a symbol of the origin and development of life. The roof symbolized the sky, the framework the Earth, the cellar (under the floor) the nether world.

After the creation of the Earth, “Shkay” created the sky. He made stars from the stones

collected on the Earth (solar and lunar myths do not exist). Originally the celestial sphere was imagined as a part of the world, the whereabouts of heavenly bodies. The Mordvinians thought that the demiurges "Chipaz" and "Shkay" lived on the Sun. In several myths, "Shkay's" dwelling is thought to be on the moon. But such myths are without question of later origin because the Christian figure of Precursor is mentioned together with "Shkay". The sky is considered to be the vault over the Earth, the centre of the universe (from here "Menel' pet'kol", M., (menel' - sky; pet'kol' - pestle) - the North Star). The Mokshans singled out "menel' teksh", "menel' ezha" (the centre of the firmament, the highest place) (Harva, 1952: 140). The eternal light was thrown onto the Earth through the hole in the celestial dome. In spells, charms, songs and funeral rituals, the firmament is thought to be golden, silvery, sometimes crystal, radiating light and warmth. According to myths, a man's soul after his death flies away from him to the light sky, to "Nishkepaz", the son of the Supreme God, where he finds a place for it, while the body is left for the deuce. As myths of later origin relate, in the sky there live the souls of those who died prematurely and also children's and righteous people's souls.

According to Mordvinian mythological notions, the heavenly world consists of several layers, one being made of iron, the other - of stone. When the Erzian God of Thunder "Pur'ginepaz" is riding his fiery-coated horses harnessed to chariots, sparks dash from the wheels and hooves (Yurtov, 1883: 129). In case somebody breaks his bans, "Pur'ginepaz" could punish and kill this person with stone-arrows called "pur'gine kev", E., "atyam kev", M. (the stone of thunder).

According to Mokshan belief, the sky in ancient times was much lower and nearer to the Earth, clouds brushing against the roofs of houses. For this reason, an Erzian woman moved it away with a poker, a Mokshan woman with a frying-pan. In other myths, the sky is so near that a man can touch it with his hand (Harva, 1952: 140). According to the Teryukhans' views, "Ange Patyay", the mother of the gods, poured life from the sky onto the Earth and life came down with dew, rain, snow and summer lightning (Melnikov, 1981: 81).

The origin of the Sun and the Moon is unknown though Mordvinians thought that they appeared after the creation of the sky. Besides the Moon and the Sun, Mordvinians singled out the Milky Way (Kargon' Ki, M., E. - Cranes' Way), Libra (Kursyakst - kursya, E. - yoke, arc), Pleiades (Ozyasket', E.). Their names reflected the old traditions of the Mordvinian poetical world outlook. As the process of personifying Nature went on, the Upper World became the abode of the Supreme gods: "Shkay", M., "Chipaz", E., "Nishkepaz", E., "Pur'ginepaz", E.

People sacrificed to the Sun, the Moon and the stars, they performed special magic acts, observed certain taboos. The cult of the Sun was reflected in many rituals, wedding and calendar holidays, mode of life, adornments. The Sun and the Moon were personified in Mordvinian folklore. It was considered that "Shis' - stir'", "Kovs' - tsera", M., E. (the Sun is a lass; The Moon is a lad). The Sun is given epithets "mazy" M. (red), "lyambe", M. (warm), etc.

The first man is made after the creation of the Earth, the sky and visible Nature. The Mokshan and Erzian anthropogenic myths (myths of man's origin) are different. The Mokshan "Shkay" made the world from the stump of a thirty-year-old tree (by means of will, glance and desire); the Erzian "Chipaz" modelled it of clay (Melnikov, 1981: 53), in another variant (no indication of the Moksha or Erzian origin) - of earth (Mitropolsky, 1876: 19). In the Teryukhans' myths of the Nizhni Novgorod and Simbirsk provinces, the deuce began modelling a man of clay, sand and earth taken from 77 different places on the Earth, but it was "Chipaz" who finished making the man and inspired life into him (Melnikov, 1981: 54).

According to Mokshans, "Chipaz" first made people as tall as giants having given them the height of 99 archins (or 231 feet) and the longevity of 700-800 years but they all perished during the Deluge. Those who remained after that became shorter in due course.

It is shown in the Erzian mythological songs that, after the creation of the Earth first the Sun appeared, then the Moon and, thirdly, man and the Erzia people (Erzian morot, 1928: 3), who after 70 years settled in 77 villages and inhabited the Earth (Harva, 1952: 137-138). According to other legends from the three eggs of "Ine Narmun" (the Great Bird) the original parents of the three peoples: the Erzians, the Russians and the Chuvash were born.

Customs, rules, divinities are created by the Supreme Erzian God "Nishkepaz" together with the God of thunder - "Pur'ginepaz", E., M. and "Nikulapaz", E. (the Christian Saint Nicholas) (M. V., 1977: 2). As the founder of the cultural tradition "Ine Narmun" appears. In the myths devoted to her, she is represented as sitting in a nest in "Ine chuvto", E. (the World Tree, usually an oak or a birch) or in the field (UPTMN, 1981: 104) hatching three birds out of three eggs: a lark, a nightingale and a cuckoo. She endows them with quite definite functions: the lark is responsible for arable land (it is also a symbol of childhood and youth), the nightingale is in charge of housekeeping (the symbol of youth), the cuckoo looks after woods and forests (the symbol of sorrow and grief).

Theogenic myths have been preserved only fragmentarily and not of all gods. According to Mordvinian views, earthly gods and some supreme gods were born or emerged from an egg: the Erzian mother of the gods was born from an egg cracked by "Chipaz", the Supreme God. In a myth, the three sisters: the deity of fertility - "Norovava", E., the deity of the wind - "Varmava", M., E., the deity of the woods - "Viryava", M., E., were hatched out of three eggs laid by "Ine Narmun" (the Great Bird) in a nest in a big birch (Harva, 1952: 141). The Erzian God "Nishkepaz" is begotten by "Chipaz"; the Supreme God gave birth to "Mastoron' kirdi", M., E. (the God of the Earth); "Varmapaz", the deity of the wind is the son of "Viryawa", the deity of the woods; "Mastorpaz", E., the God of the subterranean kingdom, was born in the marriage of "Chipaz" and the Erzian deity of harvest "Norovava"; "Ange Patyay's" daughter "Nishkende teitert" gave birth to "Pur'ginepaz", the God of Thunder. The demiurge engenders himself and others. His acts are not limited in time or space.

The specificity of Mordvinian mythology lies in the predominance of female deities. The deity of the Earth was "Mastorawa", M., E.; her helper was "Modawa", M., E. On the Earth there lived deities - patronesses of agriculture, animals, crafts, nature, the elements (water, wood, fire, wind, etc.). The Mordvinians thought that they had husbands and children (Smirnov, 1895: 209-210), but the last mentioned did not play any independent role and were only the deities' helpers and fulfilled their wishes.

The patriarchal theogony is evidently of late origin. Before converting Mordvinians to Christianity it had not yet taken the shape of a harmonious system and did not supplant the matriarchal Olympus. In A. Maskayev's opinion, there hardly existed any independent male deities in the secular period of matriarchy and matriarchal ideology. They could acquire the status of gods only as husbands and sons of deities. On the other hand, deities themselves began regenerating into male deities (Maskayev, 1964: 144).

Despite the fact that in our time the words "Shkay", M., "Paz", E., are translated as "god", reminding one of the male Christian God, the Mordvinians perceived them as deities of an indefinite sex. Only "Keren' Shochkon'paz", E., the deity of building and bast, is understood as a deity of both sexes. Nevertheless, the words "Paz", E., and "Shkay", M. suggest no idea of gender and that is supported by the absence of the category of gender in the Mordvinian languages.

Gods appear to be supernatural only owing to their knowledge. They can assume the shape of a man or an animal, most often that of a bird, a vegetable or a hybrid (half-human, half-animal) one. Some of them propagate themselves like people (Smirnov, 1895: 23-204) and marry earthly women. There exist song-legends of the sacred marriage of "Pur'ginepaz" and the earthly maiden

Litova (Lituva, Syrzhya, etc.) (Yakov, 1848: 59-60). The liaison is usually initiated by Pur'ginepaz, but there are legends telling that a girl herself asks him to take her to Heaven. To all appearances, "Pur'ginepaz" is a common Finnic deity (Kuusi, 1963: 144).

The Mordvinians believed that in the world there reigned superior and interior deities that personified the Sun, Warmth, Fire and other categories. Each one patronized and governed a definite object, territory or natural phenomenon. For instance, "Viryava", the deity of the woods governed everything that lies in the forest, "Vedyava", the deity of water, controlled water and all creatures living in it. Each deity was subordinate to another. For instance, oaks obeyed the deity-patron of the Oak "Tumopaz", E., "Tumashkay", M., who was dependent on "Viryava", the deity of the woods, and the last, in her turn, - on "Shkay", M., "Chipaz", E. (the Demiurge).

According to Mordvinian Pre-Christian views, deities take care of kin interests, they are representatives of the beyond, the other world, who are closest to people. Such deities were very numerous, though the leading role was played by spirits patronizing the home - kud, M., E. or kin - yurht, E. (Smirnov, 1895: 200): "Kudava", M., E. (the deity of home), "Yurkhtava", M., "Yurtava", E. (the deity of the kin), "Pyanakudava", M., "Kashtom", E. (the deity of the hearth), "Kardazava", M., "Karda Syarko", E. (the deity of the cattle-yard), etc. The spirits of the environment (water, woods) were also respected and worshipped.

The polytheism of Mordvinian mythology tended to transform into monotheism, viz. to the elevation of "Nishkepaz", E. (the son of the Supreme God Chipaz), "Shkay", M. This tendency, however, was not completed as it was influenced by a number of factors connected with wars and raids made by neighbouring peoples. In different regions, among the Erzians, both "Chipaz" and his son "Nishkepaz" were regarded as the supreme god; among the Mokshans it was "Shkay".

After the creation of the world and primitive man, people began propagating themselves. The Erzian "Chipaz" divided them into nations and gave each their own language and religion.

It was considered that there were 77 religions on Earth and as many languages (Melnikov, 1981: 56). To keep order in the world of people "Chipaz" appointed rulers and judges.

"Shyaytan", M. (deuce), on the contrary, created demonic forces which were hostile to people. He gave people hops and taught them to brew "pure" (beer, mead) out of them. People became drunkards; they began quarrelling with each other.

The deuce made people kill "Nishkepaz", who like Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven (Melnikov, 1981: 55-56). Thus, The Fall of Man was imagined in this way and this version has very much in common with the Christian beliefs in Our Saviour's death.

The people were punished for their evil deed: the sun began shining 7 times less than it used to shine, winter became 7 times colder than it had been before, the fields required more intensive work, the crops became poorer.

"Lokseyt'" (swans) were considered to be intermediaries between the gods and people. It is supposed that these beliefs were echoed in the Mordvinian ritual of meeting birds at Shrovetide when people imitated swan's voices with the help of special musical instruments (Boyarkin, 1986: 43-44).

In order to propitiate deities Mordvinians made a sacrifice, of which gods allegedly reminded forgetful people by sending them natural calamities. Under these circumstances there appeared various religious and magic ceremonies, rituals and prayers (ozks, M., E.), spells and charms (orozheyamot, E., vorozhiyamot, M.). In the process of their development and complication there were singled out in due course various chosen people who acted as priests (ozaty, E., vozaty, M., pokshaty, E). There appeared "sodytsyat", E., "soday lomatt", M. (healers, witches, magicians, wizards) who could allegedly know the will of the gods, appease them, and calm their anger (Samorodov, 1980: 33).

Originally public prayings and spells were inseparably linked to each other, because they

both were aimed at exerting influence on gods and spirits by means of magic actions (words and deeds). The purpose of this influence was to procure wealth (crops, yields of cattle) or health.

The magic acts of impact began to differentiate when Mordvinians started dividing all spirits into good and evil ones (Samorodov, 1980: 34). They began to exert influence on good spirits by means of praying and sacrificing in order to win their favour. They influenced evil spirits with incantations trying to subdue them. The Mordvinians qualified everything created by the deuce as evil spirits.

Traditional magical ceremonies, which included sacrifice, were performed at a definite time and were devoted to definite deities- patrons. The texts of mythological songs, legends and epics devoted to the constructions of towns, mills, churches, etc. (Maskayev, 1964: 83-84) enable us to conclude that in ancient times quite real sacrifices were made and not symbolic ones. Those who made a sacrifice connected with the stone-laying ceremony, cut sacrificial animals and things into four pieces and put them in the four corners of the future building. According to the sacrificers' directions, a young girl chosen by "Modava", M., E., the deity of the Earth, and determined for the role of sacrifice by the local village gathering, was bricked up in a crypt (Evseyev, 1961: 90-93). Mordvinians considered the election for the sacrificial death to be a factor of inevitability and an honourable duty towards society.

According to Mordvinian views, the lower zone was the world of the dead and later the place for sinners' souls. The notion of the other world, i.e. the beyond, was at first rather obscure. Mordvinians did not differentiate between hell and paradise; these notions were adopted later after converting to Christianity. They believed in one indivisible world beyond the grave where ancestors lived. This world could lie either in Heaven or beneath the surface of the Earth or somewhere very far away. The ruler of the subterranean world is "Mastorpaz", E., "Mastoratya", M. (the God of the subterranean kingdom). He is also the patron of the dead and he is usually asked to pass food to dead relatives.

The Mordvinians thought that some god patrons are close relatives to their ancestors (Smirnov, 1895: 294) and can communicate with them. "Varmava", the deity of the wind, was considered an intermediary between the dead and the living. The subterranean world is quite like the earthly one: woods grow there, rivers flow, villages sprawl, there is "eri ved'" M. (living water) in this world. The subterranean world is reflected in fairy-stories of a step-mother and a step-daughter. The girl found herself in the kingdom of the dead where she takes some "living water" (Maskayev, 1964: 60-61).

According to Mordvinian beliefs, dead people live in the next world just as they do on Earth. Due to this fact, various utensils, tools, adornments, etc. are put in graves.

In Mordvinian mythology, much attention is paid to the ancestor cult. As has been stated above, ancestors were considered to be the care-takers of their posterity's interests. They believed that ancestors helped the living people, guarded their kinsmen against all misfortunes and disasters (Maskayev, 1947: 53).

With the decay of the matriarchal society and the tribal system the family became the bearer of the ancestor cult. One of the elements specific to this cult is the belief in the next world and life in it, in the dead man's soul and in the idea of the family patron. Without it there would be no notions of ancestors and their power both favouring and punishing. The cult of ancestors is particularly evident in marriage and (especially) in funeral rituals. Nevertheless, people's relation to the dead is to this day dual. On the one hand, they fear the dead and try to get rid of them as soon as possible (for this reason various magic and protective acts were performed and, on the other hand - they honour and esteem them. In their honour special family and tribal remembrance days (Kalmalagon' shi, M., Kalmolagon' chi, E.) were organized,

which occupied a very important place in the system of religious and mythological notions. The ancestors' names were mentioned on holidays, people addressed their ancestors during family and public prayers, invited them to their home at Easter. After the holiday Mordvinians saw them off. Before the funerals they strictly adhered to the established taboo, viz. going barefooted, cradling a child, etc. were banned. The Mordvinians believed that the living could be given aid by the dead ("af es' kulomasost", M., those who died a premature or a violent death), e.g. drowned people, suicides, etc. They could render aid, for instance, when asking gods for rain in the drought or when treating people for certain illnesses.

In ancient times, Mordvinians did nothing in their everyday life (weddings, purchases) without having asked their ancestors' advice. Mordvinians were sure that besides good the dead could also do living people a lot of harm. If they got angry with the living they could send disease, misfortune, a poor harvest, etc. Mordvinians also believed that, if they propitiated the dead, they would become very kind and friendly. Because of this, Mordvinians sacrificed (a horse, a sheep or a calf) to them, first at the cemetery, then in the yards of their houses.

According to Mordvinian views, the world existed in twofold oppositions, the struggle of good and evil. The creation of the world originates from this struggle (Shkay, M., Chipaz, E., - God and Idemevs', E., Shyaytan, M., - the deuce), so does the creation of man. The life granted by the Supreme God is opposed to death whose symbol is a bony old man or an old woman.

In marriage and funeral rituals the odd-and-even opposition is particularly evident. In everyday life the belief in favourable and unfavourable days, lucky and unlucky numbers, particularly in magic acts including fortune-telling was extremely strong.

In mythology, a distinct opposition of the left-right notions can be traced. The right side was associated with life, the left side - with death, the right-hand road was considered a lucky one, a people's road, the left-hand road was thought to be the road of non-people. In her lamentations, a bride addresses "Kardo syarko", E., the patroness of the yard, and asks her to distribute good-natured people on the right side and ill-natured - on the left side.

According to a superstition, an angel sits on man's right shoulder, the deuce on the left shoulder, seeing the moon from the left is unlucky, from the right - a sign of joy, etc. This opposition is reflected in marriage rituals. In the heathen wedding ceremony, a woman stood to the left of a man (UPTMN, 1972: 268). In mythology, the right side is usually associated with the masculine origin, the left side - with the feminine origin. The feminine origin is also very strong in magic and witchcraft (sorcery). Female deities dominate in the pantheon as well. The twofold nature is typical of superstitions, omens, fortune-telling (a good-bad sign, omen, a sign of joy, sorrow, etc.). The opposition "fire vs. water" is reflected in the antagonism of "Tolava", the deity of fire, and "Vedyava", the deity of water (Harva, 1952: 184). Heaven, on the one hand, Earth and the underworld Kingdom, on the other, are connected with the deities' predestination to Heaven and man's predestination to Earth and the underworld Kingdom.

A number of heathen peculiarities have been preserved up to the present day in several cults: the cults of water, fire and the cult of a tree. Several purificatory rituals are connected with water: bathings at Epiphany ("Kl'khchyanysta", M.) and on Maundy Thursday; throwing water on each other among young people at Midsummer Day; (by tradition, people take "holy water" at Epiphany which is kept up to the next holiday); pouring water on the graves of those who died a violent death in order to provoke rain, etc. There also exists the cult of springs ("lis'maprya", M.) and draw-wells. The water in some of them is considered salubrious. On the second day of the wedding Mordvinians take a bride to a spring or to a draw-well.

Ritual bonfires, which are made not only at Christmas or on New Year's Day but also at several public prayings and rituals, are connected with the cult of fire. A very old ritual is "od

tol", M. – kindling a new fire, which is kept at home until the next year. The so-called "living" fire was used to protect oneself against all possible evil as well as to treat people and cattle for certain illnesses.

Mordvinians worshipped several trees (lime, oak, birch), which were considered sacred. They thought that these trees possessed a wonderful quality to appease the gods' anger and to protect people from harm as well as to increase fertility. Several trees played a symbolic role in marriage and everyday rituals (umarina, E., marlyu, M., – apple-tree; kiley, E., kelu, M., – birch; tuma, M., tumo, E., – oak).

In folklore (fairy-stories and songs), images containing the elements of ancient totemism have been preserved. These are: the image of a shake – the patroness of the hearth and agriculture; the image of the three fish holding up the Earth, the image of a bear as a totem – forefather. In marriage and Christmas ritual ceremonies, the bear and the bear's ritual dancing occupied an important place. In songs devoted to marriages of people and bears, a bears' land where a bear takes an abducted girl, his future wife is mentioned. A fairy-story of a noble bear that gave a woman a present for her treatment of him is also very popular (M.n.s., 1985: 24). In the myth of a hunter and a duck, people's attitude to their kinsmen and ancestors is reflected. The duck appears as the kin totem to which the hunter belongs. The duck is shown first as a human being, then as a bird forbidden to be hunted. The man who killed it infringes on the kin's taboo and thus commits a grave crime (Maskayev, 1964: 227). In the image of a duck sitting on its eggs, one can trace the relics of old Uralic mythology. The development of agriculture diminished the role of totem trees, birds, animals, and fish, but attached significance to grain and bread.

To this day, several family and kin cults have been preserved, for instance, joining a new tribe or kin (with Mokshans – giving a daughter-in-law a new name in the bride-groom's house), and setting kin-marks (on the first row of logs, on a grave cross).

Mordvinian mythological views are clearly represented in religious, magic calendar and non-calendar prayings and rituals. Having adopted the Christian faith, the Mordvinians began performing rituals devoted to both Christian and local deities and saints. Thus, approximately in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries there appeared a specific form of dual faith, which continued developing further. For instance, Mordvinians reinterpreted Our Lady (the Virgin) as "Vedyava", M., E. – their own deity of water and child-bearing, and the prophet Elijah – as their god of thunder "Atyamshkay", M., "Pur'ginepaz", E. (Samorodov, 1981: 50), etc.

Like other Finno-Ugrian peoples the Mordvinians linked their most significant holidays and rituals to the most important dates of the agricultural year: the beginning of field work, the first driving of the cattle to pasture, the beginning and end of the harvest, etc. Their cycle began with the winter solstice and New Year's Day. As a whole, the people's calendar was synchronised to the Christian church calendar (at least in outward appearance). The Mordvinians honoured mostly those Christian saints who patronized agriculture and cattle-breeding, e.g. Nikolai, the Thaumaturge (Mikula, E., Nikola, M.) – the patron of agriculture, Basil the Great (Tausyay, Tuvon'paz, E.) – the patron of swine, the Holy Basil – the patron of cattle on the whole, the saints Flor and Lavr – the patrons of horses, etc. The contents and essence of the agricultural religion is usually the cult of the deity-patrons of Earth, fertility and verdure, and first of all, "Norovawa", E., – the deity of the harvest, "Paksyawa", M., – the deity of the field, "Serawa", M. – the deity of corn and also the cult of dead ancestors. The majority of the rituals had an invoking effect, i.e. they were aimed at providing a bumper crop, a yield of cattle, health, wealth, etc. Their form was a syncretism of various arts: songs accompanying the rituals, play, and fortune-telling.

Of all religious holidays up to now the Mordvinians observe Easter (Ochizhi, M., Inechi, E.), Whitsunday (Troitsya M., Trovitsya, E.), Midsummer Day (Kupalnya, M., Valnoma chi, E.),

Nikola (Mikola, M., Nikola, E.).

The paganism in many rituals was embodied by the cyclic character of natural phenomena: the revival, rebirth (spring rituals, connected with preparations for a sowing campaign and the sowing campaign itself), blossoming (expecting crops), nature's falling asleep (autumn and winter rituals).

In addition to regular rituals, the Mordvinians performed occasional ones (when having droughts, fires, etc.). The rituals belonging to the harvest cycle included the rituals of the last sheaf, the remembrance patch of unreaped corn in honour of a dead person. After the harvest, Mokshans left an unreaped patch called "paksyan' sakal", M. (the beard of the field) in the field for feeding "paksyan' kaza" (the she-goat of the field).

When gathering crops, in the last row 10 ears were left, which were bound in the shape of a cross so that "Paksyava", the deity-patroness of the field, could guard the field. These rituals clearly demonstrate the cult of grain and bread. The magic role of grain and bread should also be stated in other calendar and family holidays. The ritual "kopshat", M. (loaves of bread), pies (among the Erzians), pancakes (among the Mokshans) represent an inseparable attribute of weddings and funeral repasts to this very day.

Theatrical performances, masquerade scenes (dressing-up) and bonfires represent the ritual and magic part of those holidays. The majority of all rituals were performed at Christmas, Easter and Midsummer Day. Various acts and fortune-telling practices connected with the magic of the first day (which most often falls on New Year's Day and Easter Sunday are of Pre-Christian origin. The heathen essence of some rituals appears in various protections aimed at guarding people against diseases, witches and the evil eye. These are, in general outline, the characteristic features of the Mordvinian worldview, the main peculiarities of its perception and some of the religious beliefs.

Lit.: Boyarkin N. I. Mordovskaya instrumentalnaya signalnaya muzyka // Muzyka v obryadah i trudovoi deyatel'nosti finno-ugrov. Tallinn, 1986; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. Tr. T. 1-2. Narodnye pesni mordvy. Saransk, 1961, 1963; Yakov. O mordvah, nahodyashchihsya v Nizhegorodskom uezde Nizhegorodskoi gubernii. SPb., 1848; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya skazka. Saransk, 1947; Melnikov P. I. Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; Mitropolsky K. Mordva. Religioznye vozzreniya, ih nravy i obychai // Tambov. eparh. ved., 1876; Mordovskie narodnye pesni (M.n.p.). M., 1957; Mordovskie narodnye skazki (M.n.s.). Saransk, 1985; Napolskikh V. V. Narodny uralskoi yazykovoi semyi. M., 1991; Petrukhin V. Ya., Khelimsky E. A. Finno-ugorskaya mifologiya // Mify narodov mira. Entsikl. T. 2. M., 1994; Samorodov K. T. Mordovskaya obryadovaya poeziya. Saransk, 1980; Smirnov I. N. Mordva. Kazan, 1895; Ustno-poeticheskoe tvorchestvo mordovskogo naroda (UPTMN). T. 1. Epicheskie i liro-epicheskie pesni. Saransk, 1963; T. 7., ch. 1. Erzianskie prichitaniya-plachi. Saransk, 1972; T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983; Erzian morot. Saransk, 1928; Yurtov A. Obraztsy mordovskoi narodnoi slovesnosti. Vyp. 2. Kazan, 1883; Harva U. Die religiosen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952; Kuusi W. Suomen kirjallisuus I. Kirjoittamaton, kirjallisuus. Helsinki, 1963; Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä 1889; Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 5. Helsinki, 1977.



*A map of the Republic of Mordovia.*





## MORDVINIAN MYTHOLOGY: ENCYCLOPAEDICAL ARTICLES

# A

**Angel** (áŋgol', M., áŋgel, E.) In religious mythology, it is a supernatural creature, God's messenger patronizing people. Angel is represented as an infant with wings and dressed in white. Mokshans and Erzians assimilated this image after their conversion to Christianity (the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries). The main function of this creature is to protect man's life. According to popular beliefs, every person has his/her own angel that resembles him/her. This person lives until angel is sitting on his/her right shoulder.

People asked angel for health, wealth, and success in business and when starting on a journey. The fear of losing angel caused many omens, popular beliefs and taboos. It was forbidden to spit over the right shoulder. If one spat through the window, one could hit angel in his eye and angel could leave. It was also forbidden to defecate on a road – angel wouldn't be able to cross it and would leave. Neither must one urinate there (if one did it, it was done into angel's eyes, and angel could also leave). It was believed that before leaving home you should invite angel to accompany you so that it could follow and protect you.

The mythological image of angel was quite definitely manifested in the "right-left" opposition. The right side of a human body was associated with life, something positive and kind; the left one – with death, something negative and evil. In this connection people concluded: the right hand itched – a sign of profit; the right eye – a sign of joy, the right brow – a sign of meeting again; if there was a ringing in one's right ear – it was a sign of good news. Nevertheless, it was not allowed to lie on one's right side – it meant: the angel is crying, he has no place to sleep on. According to Mordvinian beliefs, the right side provided luck, the left side – failure. It was customary to get up on one's right foot; one should also begin with the right foot when putting on shoes; when entering the house one should first tread with the right foot – then the way for angel will be free. Washing the right hand in the morning – "áŋgol'tse shtatanza" – was strictly observed (the angel is washing you and blessing you in addition, he protects your life throughout the whole day). The accidental washing of the left hand was considered to be a token of mischief, bad luck. Witches and sorcerers used, as a rule, the back of their left hand.

**Apple-tree** (márlyu, M., umarína, E.). According to Mordvinian views, it is a symbol of femininity, beauty, harmony between Heaven and Earth. In Mordvinian mythology, apple-tree symbolizes the world's balance. It spreads its branches in all directions and grows in the middle of a dark forest covering the sky with its branches and the ground with its roots. The apples on the tree are of two colours: they are red when the Sun rises and white on the other side. This also symbolizes the day (warmth, light) and the night (cold). In mythical plots, an unusual apple-tree grows in the restricted place protected by the Erzian God "Nishkepaz". Apple-tree is invisible, nobody is able to see or find it, except a golden-headed, golden-winged queen-bee which gathers nectar from it. In one of the songs, a heartless tyrant "pine boyar" (a dog-boyard) decides to cut down an extraordinarily beautiful and an immensely big apple-tree, which looks like an oak. Apple-tree speaks to him like a human being, cries for mercy. She warns him that if he cuts her down, he will fall through a wooden bridge and his horses will be killed (and that really happened later).

## Mordvinian Mythology

In wedding rituals and songs, a young girl is identified with an apple-tree growing near the road.

An apple-tree plays the role of a prophetess. People believed that a withered or again blossomed in autumn apple-tree in a garden betokened misfortune, the master's death or the death of some other member of the family. There was a ban on cutting down an apple-tree (it may cause a misfortune). The person who had buried a child was banned from eating apples till the church holiday called Apple Spass (August 19) (otherwise there will be no apples for the child in the next world).

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 2. Liricheskie pesni. Saransk, 1965.

**Asp** (póyu, M. póy, E.). It is a tree used for protective purposes and at the same time it is thought of as a cursed tree. The idea of its being cursed can be accounted for by the fact that this tree was considered to be very timid. According to Christian mythology, "shkayen' shavis", M., "pazon' chavis", E. (God's murderer – Judas) hanged himself on an asp.

That was evidently the reason why this tree was not used as construction material. The Mordvinians believed that "shyayattne kshnikht' alonza", M. (deuces dance round it). It was also prohibited to hide under this tree during a thunder-storm (you can be killed by lightning). In the ritual and magic practice, there was registered the driving of an aspen pole into the grave of an "evil" person or a "roaming" dead man (in order to block his way). With the help of this pole a placenta was also drowned in a marsh in order to have no other delivery. A popular means of healing sick children was drawing them through a split asp or through trees growing very close to each other.

# B

**Baths** (bánya, M., E. [the term is borrowed from the Russian people]), an inseparable part of Mordvinian mythological culture, it is connected in particular with deities-patrons of baths “Banyava” and “Banyatya” as well as with the place of the ritual and magic practices. It is also the focus of the notions “clean-unclean”. According to some scholars, it was a prototype of “izba” (hut); baths as a house for permanent residence is mentioned in Mordvinian folklore. The same fact is confirmed by the very appearance of the house, its terminology and functional value in Mordvinian religious and family rites. Baths was often used as a place for childbirth where, according to Mordvinian views, women could easily protect themselves against strangers’ looks and the evil spirit, because at this very moment the mother and the child were thought to be easily bewitched with the evil eye. As a protection against sorcerers and witches, an axe and a knife were taken to baths. It was believed that after childbirth the mother and the baby were at the mercy of evil spirits. Mordvinians thought in this connection that a child could die unless after its birth a fire was made three times in baths. According to Mordvinian tradition, a woman recently confined must be washed three times (for purificatory purposes). Before her leaving baths there was organized praying in honour of “Banyawa”, the patroness of childbirth.

Mythological motives are reflected in ritual baths among the Erzians of the village of Kardafley in the Gorodishche region. It was customary with them to steam three times during Holy Week. The first baths was called “kiknay” (a fire was made there on Holy Wednesday). Its peculiarity consisted in the fact that everyone tried to undress as quickly as possible, then run to the cold water with the words “ki-ki” a (hence the name “kiknay) and pour water on him-/herself. In the second baths fire was made on Holy Friday. When steaming, everyone called the ghosts of dead people for whom water and a sauna whisk had also been prepared. In the third baths (“teiteren’ banya”), when all people steamed, young girls made a fire on Holy Saturday. On Holy Thursday both Mokshans and Erzians organized special praying in honour of the female deity of baths who was asked to grant health.

Wedding rituals are also connected with baths. In some villages, a bride before her wedding lived several days in baths. Here she mourned her girlhood, took leave of her girl-friends and her native house. Her relatives treated her to ritual porridge. The ritual washing of the bride in baths was a part of the Mokshan and Erzian wedding ritual. By tradition, the bride visited her maiden baths for the last time without a head-dress and with numerous girl-friends. In baths fortune-telling was also practised (if steam is hissing, the future husband is hot-tempered). In many Mokshan villages, the ritual of substituting a girl’s headdress for a married woman’s one after getting married in church also took place in baths. By tradition, after a wedding there was made a fire in “r’vyanyan’ baths.” (the bride’s baths), where the young wife was to steam her mother-in-law and close kinswomen.

Traditionally, there was left some water in baths for “Banyawa”, the deity of baths, and her children. Mordvinians thought that this deity also steamed and washed herself. They also believed

that in case this custom was not observed, “Banyawa” could do a family a lot of harm.

For purificatory and protective purposes, a fire was made in baths for those who dug a grave. When remembering the dead, a pot of porridge was taken to baths and placed in the corner. Baths was used (and is used nowadays) for fortune-telling (s. Fortune-telling), love and sexual magic. The main practices were: to bewitch a young fellow, to treat for impotence, childlessness, etc. with the help of verbal magic (spells, charms, incantations, invocations). According to a popular belief, a sick person is sure to recover if he is steamed in baths three times with the water from three springs and the sauna whisk made of branches from three birch-trees and on the stones from three baths.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Bear** (ófta, M., óvto, E.). The Mordvinians believed that a bear was one of their forefathers, a totem animal. According to a legend, a bear is a cursed man and therefore he has human legs and feet. A bear is a symbol of wealth, health, kindness, and fertility. The Erzian God “Nishkepaz” is imagined as a bear.

The ancient cult of the bear as a forefather, a totem animal is reflected in folklore. The Erzians have a song of a young girl who married a beast and gave birth to children who looked like people or beasts and were extraordinarily strong. In songs of conjugal unions between people and bears sometimes a reference is to be found to a bear’s land that lies somewhere in a forest which is never visited by people and where a bear takes an abducted girl, his future wife.

In Mokshan fairy-stories, a bear cohabits with a woman who was delivered of “Ofton’ tsera’, M., a bear’s son, who grows very fast.

He speaks with a human voice, sings songs, asks people for help. He, in particular, asks a woman to draw a splinter out of his paw and brings her some honey as a token of gratitude. Killing a bear was considered a grave crime that was followed by a severe punishment: a mother, father, wife and a child could die. Nevertheless, in later fairy-tales, a bear is not treated as a totem. His son born by a woman kills him. In songs, a girl’s beloved fellow is represented as an angry bear. In Mokshan fairy-stories there occurs a motive of eating people (an old man and an old woman) by a bear.

In marriage rituals, the bear’s role was usually played by a woman in a fur-coat turned inside out. She also came out to meet a newly-married couple. The bear symbolized progeneritiveness of the future married couple and wealth. A bride and bridegroom were seated on a bear’s skin or fur-coat. The bride stepped on a fur-coat after a marriage ceremony in church when entering the bride-groom’s house. The newly-married couple’s bed was also covered with a fur-coat. At Christmas-tide, people used to dress up as a bear. This custom was connected with fertility.

A bear was thought to have protective functions. At Erzian weddings, a match-maker dressed up as a bear whipped all people entering the house with a sauna whisk. According to people’s views, the evil spirit and witches are afraid of a bear and therefore Mordvinians kept the bear’s skulls in stables and cattle-sheds lest evil spirits should penetrate there and do the cattle harm. Those who had no skulls practiced inviting people with real, living bears (when they appeared in the village) to enter these buildings and stay there for some time. The bear’s fat was used for treating pneumonia; “ofton’ bokon”, M. (brier; literally: a bear’s navel); it was also hung as protective means in a cattle-shed, broth made of bear’s fat was taken for chill.

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Besom/sauna whisk** (tyál’me, M., ténst’, E.). In Mordvinian folk tradition, it fulfils a protective

function, being at the same time an object which is used to pass witchcraft on to someone else; a “clean-unclean” object. The protective properties of a besom helped to resist witches, protecting against the evil eye. For this purpose, a besom used for sweeping the floor was placed in the corner upside down near the threshold. After an ill-natured person left, the floor was swept with a besom in order to sweep away his footprints. Such an incantation was usually said: “Es pryatz nezhetse”, M. (Let all this fall on your head).

Numerous bans and warnings are connected with a besom: it was not allowed to step on an old besom (one would be exhausted by an illness), one could not use it for whipping children (they would stop growing), or cattle (they would be covered with worms). When moving to a new house people used to take an old besom in order to take “Kudava”, the deity of the home, and “Yurkhtava”, the deity of the kindred, with them, put a besom stealthily on somebody’s threshold or in a cattle-shed, if they wanted to cause damage. Up to the present day, it is common to store birch and oak sauna whisks from Whitsunday till the prophet Elijah’s Day (August 2). The sauna whisk made on the second day after Whitsunday is considered to be the most magic and favourable. Old besoms and sauna whisks were thrown out on “shuksha pryа”, M. (a place for rubbish) or with the left hand on a crossroads.

Sauna whisk was used in medical magic. Folk healers and sorcerers touched sore spots with it, whipped a sick person, said spells. A sick person was usually steamed with it not more than three times, he was made to step over it, sprinkled with water and put three times on a stone stove (the illness and damage were thus burnt). After ordinary baths it was customary to leave a sauna whisk for “Banyava”, the deity-patroness of the baths, so that she could steam herself and her children. When it was hailing, in some villages people used to throw out a besom with a frying-pan through an open window or a door.

A sorcerer or witch, whose magic was impeded (he/she was somehow “confused”), was revealed by the fact that he/she felt sick. In this case it was necessary for him/her to find a besom or a sauna whisk so that he/she could vomit on it. Before death they sometimes used a besom to pass their witchcraft on to someone else. The person who took it was able to become a witch or sorcerer. In order to protect a family against another case of death, a besom was thrown out on “shuksha pryа” (a place for rubbish) after carrying the deceased out of the house. A sauna whisk was put under the head of the deceased; the leaves of birch sauna whisks were spread on the bottom of a coffin.

The Erzian marriage ceremony included a special ritual of going to the bride-groom’s house to take a besom. Up to now, in several Erzian villages of the Penza region, it is common to meet the newly-weds after a church marriage with a “bear” holding a sauna whisk (a woman in a fur-coat). When the guests were entering the bridegroom’s house, “the bear” whipped the newly-married man and woman on their backs with a sauna whisk. Afterwards “the bear” whipped the rest in order to protect the newly-married couple and ensure their fertility. At Christmas, domestic animals were given water to drink where besoms or sauna whisks had been steamed; girls visited houses and sang carols with birch besoms in their hands (s. Christmas).

Lit.: Devyatkina T. P. Mokshanskie svadebnye obryady i pesni. Saransk, 1992.

**Birch-tree** (kélú, M., kiléy, E.). It is a traditional object of worship among Mordvinians, personification of fertility and femininity. According to an Erzian legend, this tree grew for the first time on the grave of a beautiful and brave girl, “Kilya” by name, who fought with nomadic steppe people. It is in her honour that this unknown tree was called. The role of the birch-tree is reflected in mythological poetry and songs. In this poetical form Mordvinian philosophical concepts concerning the origin of the world were embodied. In the image of the sacred tree one

can see the traces of the “world-tree” which has correlations in the poetry of many Finno-Ugrian peoples. Among Mokshans, the birch-tree personifies the interdependence of the three worlds: its roots go down to the Nether world which is identified in peoples’ beliefs with the world of the dead, the ancestors’ world; its crown is in the world of mythical patrons; the trunk is situated in the earthly world, it combines the worlds of the ancestors and the patrons. Birch-tree reveals itself as a mighty old tree, around which heavenly bodies rotate and stars twinkle on its branches.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the God of “Kelu” – “Kelupaz” was registered among the Erzians. In his honour people organized public magical ceremonies with praying where they asked for mares’ fertility. The second ceremony was on St Peter’s day (a sheep was sacrificed to him, and in a leap year – a white stallion). Birch-tree was honoured like “Shkay”, the God of the Sun. It was a favourite tree of Mother of the Gods because of its fertility.

In the ritual wedding folklore, the birch-tree reveals itself as a symbol of the bride’s beauty, tenderness and shapeliness.

The miraculous properties of are clearly seen in some laments and songs. A singing, prophetic birch-tree grows on the grave of a killed girl. A hunter, when passing by, cuts it down and makes a violin, which sings about the girl’s fate to all people, including her parents. In this fairy and mythic plot, the whole system of symbols is codified. Changing a girl into a birch-tree signifies first and foremost a magical trial, which a young fellow undergoes. The rite of planting a birch-tree on a dead person’s grave represents a symbolic link with the other world.

In the folk tradition, a birch-tree (its buds and sauna whisks made of it) is used as a protection against evil spirits. Going to the sacred birch-tree with the entreaty of health was practised as an ancient method of medical magic. To be even more beautiful, young girls washed their faces with birch sap. Sick boys were drawn through a split birch-tree or two birch-trees growing very close to each other with the deep belief in the magic treatment by means of it birch-tree. Whipping the guests entering the bride-groom’s house on their backs with a birch sauna whisk (a rite performed by “ovto” – a bear, whose role was played by a woman in a fur-coat turned inside out) and a decorated birch-tree for a marriage procession were thought of in popular magic as a reliable protection. To protect themselves against “Pur’ginepaz”, the God of Thunder, and evil spirits, people stuck birch sauna whisks behind the windows platbands on Whitsunday. Birch logs were used by young girls in the fortune-telling rite (s. Fortune-telling). Cutting down a birch-tree in a dream meant that a wife or a daughter would die. Erzians believed that the cattle would breed well in case one dug a small birch-tree in a forest (in the place with much cobweb) and planted it in a cattle-shed.

Lit.: Mainhof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsinki, 1889; Pamyatniki mordovskogo narodnogo muzykalnogo iskusstva. T. 2. Saransk, 1984.

**Birth** (sháchema, M., cháchoma, E.) is accompanied in the folk tradition with numerous magic and ritual acts. In several rituals connected with pregnancy, childbirth and a child’s life during the first months, some mythological motives are preserved. A large number of protections, spells and specific acts were designed for a particular purpose to guard a mother and a child. In Mordvinian folklore and, in particular, in the songs of mythic hero “Tuyshtya”, to this day archaic views on the miraculous birth of a child can be traced. Conception was never thought of as the result of the sexual act only. Mokshans and Erzians believed that the interference of good and evil forces was also necessary. In the Mokshan song “Vasalgya”, the parents prayed to gods for the only daughter who later became a daughter-in-law of the Supreme God and a wife of the God of Thunder. Various rites were performed by women in order to get pregnant. For instance, a sorceress made a doll of dough and at midnight together with a sterile woman

went to a river-bank. The woman with loose hair, and wearing no cross and belt, fell prone. The sorceress whispered a prayer, blew and said, "Take it for you and give us yours. We ask for yours and give you ours." The principle that underlies Mokshan and Erzian beliefs and omens, connected with pregnancy, implies that similarity always provokes similarity and its result. There existed various taboos for a pregnant woman: she could not look at a house that was on fire (a child's face could be burnt), at the deceased and cripples (lest the child should die or be born a cripple); she was not allowed to visit a cemetery, to whip a pig (otherwise a child would be covered with bristles), to step over a yoke, a shaft or a shaft-bow (so that the child in his mother's womb could lie in the right position), to eat hare flesh (lest the child should be born harelipped) etc. Offending a pregnant woman was considered a great sin, because Mordvinians thought that an unborn child was under the protection of "Kudava", the deity-patroness of the home s. It was inadmissible that a pregnant woman should be refused some desired food, because it could allegedly influence the unborn child who later would constantly lack this food. Sometimes this belief was combined with fear of a pregnant woman as a "dangerous" creature.

Referring to various omens which were also based on the principle of similarity, Mordvinians tried to determine the future child's sex: a round belly betokened a girl, a pointed one promised a boy; a button found by a pregnant woman meant a girl; if the last boy in the family had a lock of hair on his neck, his mother was expected to have a baby-girl. Mokshans thought that a pregnant woman would have a girl if she, when showing her hands, turned them with the palms up, and a boy, if she turned her palms down.

On the second day of the Erzian wedding party, a piece of bread was tossed up on purpose. If it fell with the crust up – a boy was expected and a girl if the crust was underneath.

Following this same principle of similarity, a pregnant woman was to get rid of a belt and buckles when in childbirth. Mordvinians like other peoples believed in the magic power of knots and their particular role in the most crucial points. Thus, all knots were undone both on the woman's clothes and in the house. Women who were in childbirth for the first time and those who had a difficult delivery, let their hair down; a candle that had been used in a church marriage ceremony was moved round them; people fired guns, opened the church gate, rang bells; Erzians addressed "Ange Patyay", the patroness of women in childbirth, the care-taker of the mother and child's health.

All available materials show that the Mokshans and Erzians did their best to conceal approaching delivery and delivery proper, which usually took place in a bath-house, a cattle-shed or behind a stove. The Erzians did not even tell the mother of the woman in childbirth the date of her delivery because they believed that it would assist her in having a happy result. It was also considered that a woman and a baby were mostly open to the evil eye and damage at this period of time. Thus, at the time of delivery people closed the chimney and windows everywhere lest a witch should come and spoil the baby. To protect the woman in childbirth against the evil eye, people put a loaf of bread beside her.

By custom, after the woman was confined, her husband was given to drink some wormwood infusion with salt and pepper. People used to say at this moment, "It was an ordeal for your wife, so have it, too".

"Iden'baba", M. (a midwife) helped the woman in childbirth, protected the baby against evil forces. A baby-girl was wrapped in a man's shirt (love magic) to ensure her future happy life. When washing the baby, the midwife put silver coins in the water (thus, wishing wealth in future), some salt and oak leaves (so that the baby could grow strong and healthy and live a long life). When washing a baby-girl, she added birch leaves so that the girl could grow beautiful. For the same purpose, the baby was covered with blue or green cloth (the colour of the sky

and verdure). When doing so she used to say, "Just as grass grows on Earth, just as verdure is beautiful, so you grow in the same way, grow and rise! Just as the sky is clear and light, so may your life be clear and happy". If the placenta did not happen to go out at once, the woman in childbirth was given to drink some "kvass" (a bread beverage) or "braga" lees (braga – an alcoholic beverage). It was customary to bury the placenta and the navel-string in the cellar under the floor because people believed that childless women could steal them in order to harm the mother and the baby. In order to have another son the placenta was buried under the sacred corner of the house; if another girl was desired, it was buried in somebody's field. If a woman did not want to have babies for 3, 4, 5 and more years, the placenta was buried respectively on the third, fourth and fifth, etc. day. If she did not want to have any children at all, the placenta was put in an old, shabby "lapot" (a bast shoe) and driven with an aspen pole into a marsh. It was believed that a woman would not have babies for a year or two if she ate one of the sprouts from the root of the herb "kyad" (a hand), called so because its root had five sprouts.

For magic purposes, the following methods were also practised: a navel-string was woven together with the mother's hair so that a child could be attached to his/her mother and take care of her; to make a girl become a good weaver in future, people cut off a part of the placenta and drove it into a spinning-wheel or a loom. People watched and concluded: if the child's first tooth is preserved until his/her full age, he/she will never leave the parents. A child that was born prematurely was wrapped in a piece of cloth and on a spade put into a warm stove after loaves of bread had been taken out. At this moment the woman in childbirth was to ask what was being baked there. She was given the reply, "I am baking it to live long." For the same purpose another delivery was sometimes imitated. The mother lay on the same spot where the delivery took place with the child in her bosom. Afterwards a midwife drew it out of her.

Purificatory rituals dealing with the rite of washing in a bath-house were obligatory, because Mordvinians considered that a mother and a child after the delivery were at the mercy of evil spirits. Thus, a woman was washed at least in three bath-houses. Nevertheless, she had been considered "unclean" for 40 days and was not allowed to go to church, to the cemetery or visit a house where the deceased was lying at the moment, etc. After the delivery, a pair of lapti tied with a bast string was hung on the ridge of a roof. It was believed that somebody was expected to die soon if the string got rotten or broke.

Before the father and guests came to the bath-house, the midwife took the baby and put it on a small column near the stove in order to introduce to "Yurkhtava", the deity of kindred s. On the first day after the delivery, a ritual "kshi ozondoma", M. (a magical ceremony devoted to bread) was organized, to which all relatives and acquaintances were invited. When praying, the midwife said a prayer asking the deities – patrons for luck, happiness and wealth. Nobody was allowed to see the woman recently confined until she herself prepared thick porridge and pan-cakes. After the baby was born people used to cover a window-sill with ashes, cross the windows and move a birch broom round the baby. They asked the sacred tree (a birch-tree) to guard the baby against an ill-natured person, the evil eye. The baby was taken care of in this way for 60 days. According to Erzian myths, a new-born child's fate was determined by "Nishkende-teiter" – the eldest daughter of "Ange Pataya mother of gods and the God of the Sun.

Since the very moment of the child's birth, people tried to find out its future fate. Children with a big crown were considered happy, as well as with long hair, "tyashte markhta", M. (tyashte – a star), i.e. with birth-marks and moles, "panarsa", M., i.e. (born in a caul, which was dried and taken later on the most important occasions). Children who were born "pil'ge langsa", M. (with the feet forward) with small pieces of the placenta were also thought to be happy as well as girls resembling the father and boys resembling the mother. Children's character was

determined by their hair: red-haired children are vivid, black-haired ones with a fair lock are sorcerers. Children born with one tooth or several teeth also referred to them. Great attention was paid to determining the child's vitality: big-heeled feet and big ears indicated it. If a child raised its head when being turned with its legs upward, this meant that it was also of great vitality.

Of little vitality were thought to be children born prematurely (prenatal period of 8 months) if they did not cry at the moment of their birth or if no expression was seen at the corners of their eyes, if the navel healed slowly, if deep hollows were in the armpits, etc.

Among Erzians, it was customary to put a three-day-old baby in a cradle which was fastened to the ceiling in the middle of a room and covered, as a rule, with the canvas that had covered the bride's cart. On this day, people made pies, hung the cradle and crossed it three times with a knife or a scythe, put a pie and scissors under the child's pillow. Having pushed the cradle the grandmother used to say: "Pilge pelev lyukshtyatyān - pilge viev stuvtan, pryā peli lyukshtyatyān - pryā melyam suvavtan", E. (When I swing in the direction of your legs - may your legs be strong, when I swing in the direction of your head, may you be clever). Then she stood with her back to the cradle and having pushed it, she began speaking about the child wishing him/her to sleep more and never weep. Mordvinians put men's things in the cradle if they wanted another child to be a son.

In the first year of the child's life, great attention was paid to protections against evil forces and particularly witches, who were thought to be able to substitute one child for another. For protective purposes, people sometimes scraped an old coin with a knife over the place of delivery. According to Mordvinian views, it was considered dangerous to hang swaddling clothes because the deuce or a witch could play with them at that moment and child could be taken ill, or at least, have a bad sleep. To exorcize the evil spirit that could penetrate into a child, Mordvinians practiced spells and charms.

If the child often wept, it was brought after sunset to the gate; people bowed to the door hinges and asked for a good sleep for the child at night and in the daytime. To stop the weeping, people also washed the child's face with morning dew in a threshing-floor. In order to save the child from skin diseases after, they poured the water after washing in some clean place.

Various customs and taboos were observed in order to provide the child with health. The child was taken out under the first spring rain and thunder (lest it should ever fall ill); it was washed in spring water during Holy Week on Wednesday (in early spring); it was forbidden to swing an empty cradle (one will have no more children or the child will have a bad sleep). It was prohibited to take the child to the mirror lest it should be frightened. The child must not have its hair cut until it is one year old and this will stimulate its growth and vitality. It was forbidden to swear while giving the breast to a child (the child will be damaged). Water-lilies and nettle were put in its bosom to protect it from the evil eye. A lock was hung on sick children's neck lest the disease should pass to others. For their treatment children were drawn through splintered trees or between two trees standing close to each other (an oak, a birch - for a boy, an asp - for a girl). A child, who could not learn to walk for a long time, was laid near the threshold under a wooden trough. A sorceress "hacked" his/her disease with an axe and said, "I am hacking the disease, I am hacking the scoundrel, I allow (the child's name) to walk and give strength to his/her legs". It was not common to take a cradle from a family, in which children used to die. In a family where children did not live, they were "sold" through the window to a beggar or the first comer. The child was given to them together with a piece of bread and afterwards the mother went to the gate and bought her own child. It was believed that the evil spirit was puzzled in this way and thus it failed to harm the baby. Sometimes a midwife wrapped the child in dirty rags used to plug up a ventilation opening in a bath-house and gave it to

another woman through the window. It was called “stealing children” from “Vedyava”, the deity of water. If a child could not learn to speak for a long period of time, it was brought to hear the first sound of the church bell during the morning service on the first day of Easter. In order to cure a sick child, the mother went together with a sorceress to the bath-house at midnight and prepared there a dish called “solyanka”. Afterwards they went out and left the door open. The woman undressed, went down on her hands and knees and moving backwards crept into the bath-house stepping over the frying pan. Then she began eating as if she were a dog. At that time the sorceress invited all mythic spirits and patrons for the meal and asked them for help.

It was forbidden for a mother to curse her baby: he/she could die, become a stammerer or the evil spirit's victim. It was also considered that cursed children could not live long. To intimidate disobedient children, people mentioned mythic creatures. With the Erzians, it was “Ruts'k-Pets'k”, which used to come at night and frighten children. With the Mokshans, children were intimidated by “Bobo”, a wolf and a bear.

Lit.: Belyaeva N. F. Rodilnye obryady mordvy-mokshi Atyuryevskogo raiona Mordovskoi ASSR (konets XIX-XX nachalo vv.) // Etnokulturnye protsessy v Mordovii. Saransk, 1982. s. 51-63; Kuzebai Gerd. Etnographica. Helsinki, 1993; Devyatkina T. P. Narodnye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

**Bread** (kshi, M., E.), was of great religious and magic significance for the Mordvinian folk tradition. It is also one of the most widespread kinds of ritual food, a symbol of the Sun and health. Baking bread was a woman's duty, cutting it into pieces – a man's one. Before baking, the flour was crossed first, then the loaf. Among Mordvinians up to the present day, it is customary to keep a loaf of bread on the table in the “red corner” (the front corner), which symbolizes wealth, hospitality. It was also considered obligatory to put a loaf on the table before a wedding ceremony; it was taken by match-makers, when they went on a visit. Bread was used as a magic means to guarantee children for a newly-married couple and to sanctify the events (meeting the newly-weds at home from church, their blessing, etc.). When a daughter-in-law was given a new name in her husband's house, a loaf of bread was being held over her head. For this purpose, a ritual round loaf (kopsha, M.) was baked with observing numerous customary rules. Among Shoksha-Mordvinians there was a practice of poking the daughter-in-law in the ribs so that she could have many children.

A loaf of bread was put on the table before a long journey (a good omen); it was taken for a journey as a protection. When a new house was being built or when a new dweller moved into a house, a loaf of bread was put on the table, after the third row of logs had been laid, and the table was placed in the yard, so that the deity of the house could help the owners become rich and protect them.

In funeral and remembrance rites, a loaf of bread was put on the table and another was taken to the cemetery. As a protection against the evil spirit, people practised going round the house three times before Easter with bread, salt and an icon in their hands. In order to stop hail, a dough stirrer was thrown out of the house.

When eating bread, numerous taboos were observed which were thought to possess magic significance. In the evening it was forbidden to cut the whole loaf of bread into two parts, otherwise the deity-patroness of the grain would weep. One should not eat some other person's piece of bread (you can take his strength). One could not leave a piece of bread uneaten or move it away from oneself with a hand (the strength will be gone). There was a ban on collecting and eating small pieces of bread (a sign of poverty) or picking up a fallen piece of bread at dinner (it was left for the dead).

According to popular beliefs, after sunset it was forbidden to lend bread (you yourself will

run out of bread forever). If you call on somebody with a piece of bread, the pigs will eat your crop in the kitchen garden and mice will eat your cabbage. It was considered that hens would die, if you brought your bread back home from the field; if you nibble at two pieces of bread at a time, some of your close relatives will die or he/she will be simply hungry.

A husband must not eat much bread while his wife is pregnant, otherwise she can have a humpbacked son. A loaf of bread that fell on the floor late in the evening betokened unexpected news or a fright, at midday – a dead relative asks for remembrance; two pieces of bread taken at dinner promised two husbands.

Bread was used in the practice of fortune-telling. The loaf that had been held over a daughter-in-law's head when giving her a new name was sometimes thrown out behind the shed. People tried to guess judging by its flight whether she would have a baby-girl or a baby-boy. At Shoksha-Mordvinian wedding parties, a loaf was tossed up by the newly-married. The person who tossed higher would be the head of the family. When building a house, a loaf was hung on the beam and afterwards the rope was cut. If the loaf fell on its side, it was a bad omen.

Bread was also used in folk medicine. Chewed rye bread wrapped in cloth in the shape of a baby's dummy was given to three/four-week-old infants to protect them from rupture. To save a child from screaming at night, people went round him/her three times holding a loaf of bread and some salt and then threw them out. Children's bristle was also treated with rye bread. To be cured of different diseases, people went to a crossroads taking with them some bread called "proshchengas", M. (to be forgiven or absolved). Children were given "vetraskya" (bread made of the rest of the dough) to prevent them from enuresis. In mythic songs, "vetraskya" is taken to Heaven for "Atyamshkay", M. – the God of Thunder by his earthly wife "Vasalgya" and this symbolizes close relations between people and deities.

**Buzzard** (pánzey, E.). Mordvinians considered that God had cursed this bird. According to a legend, after the creation of the world God ordered all birds to dig an individual well for each of them to wash there. Everyone obeyed, but the buzzard, which was absent at the moment. When buzzard came flying, it decided to use cunning and suggested to a crow that it should go and wash itself of silt so that it could appear before God clean. But the buzzard only soiled itself with silt and when it flew to God before the crow it said that it had also dug a well for itself and pointed to the crow's well. God cursed buzzard for its deception and forbade it to drink water from rivers, lakes and wells. Since that time the bird is able to slake its thirst only with rainwater and dew. When it does not rain for long, buzzard begins weeping and asks God for water.

On the basis of the legend, many proverbs and sayings appeared: Moksha-Mordvinians say of those who like to make use of other people's work: "Panzit' kondyaks vadend'sy pryants i myar'gi: "eshit' mon shuvine"" ("Like a buzzard soils its head and says, I have dug a well").

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

# C

**Candle** (shtatól, M., E.). In traditional Mordvinian beliefs, it was an object of worship endowed with a particular mythical significance. Approximately up to the 1920s a candle symbolized fertility, the continuation of life and family line.

Every community, i.e. kindred members occupying 10–30 houses, had two (later one) wax, home-made candles belonging to the whole kindred. They had the shape of a truncated sugar head (nearly half a metre long and weighing a kilogram). By tradition, they were tied in their middle with a white towel. According to M. E. Evseyev's data, the origin of candles (the place and the time) is unknown. They were prevented from waning with the help of small pieces of wax added to them after a praying, which lasted 20–30 minutes. In former times, more popular was the so-called "keremed' shtatol", M. (literally: the candle of keremet', i.e. the candle of the "molyan"). Among the Erzians there occurred "Atyan' shtatol" (the candle of ancestors), kindled on Easter Sunday. Young girls, recently married, covered it with a white kerchief (i.e. granted a kerchief to it).

The candle was kept in a barn during a year in each house of the community in a special basket made of elm bark and was brought into the house only before praying. The sacred candles were kindled only once a year on the day appointed for a magical ceremony. On other days it was forbidden to look at them and to touch them. According to Mordvinian views, the breach of the candle's peace out of time could provoke its anger not only towards the perpetrators of crime but also towards the whole community.

The magical ceremony devoted to the candles was performed on the second day of Whitsuntide, on the first Sunday after Eastertide in the house where they had been kept. One candle was kindled by the mistress of the house on the shelf intended for icons, the other was placed near the eye of the tub filled with "braga" (an alcoholic home-made beverage) and put in the middle of the "izba" (the house). Before the praying, people bowed three times to the candles, on behalf of the community an elderly woman addressed the candles asking them to grant health, a good harvest, the fertility of cattle, as well as to protect the house from fire and other misfortunes. She also stated that a holiday was devoted to the candles. After the praying having been performed, all its participants bowed again and kissed the candles. Perhaps, for purificatory purposes and for protection, people singed their hair with the flame of the candles: on the forehead (men) and on the temples (women). For propitiatory purposes, money and canvas lengths were passed to the leader of the praying. She wound the candles several times with each canvas (contagious magic) and adjured them on behalf of each participant to grant happiness.

After the ceremony having been over, people extinguished the candles by pouring "braga" on them and sat at the ritual table. Before sunset, the candles were taken to the house next in turn to keep them there.

In some villages, only women could participate in this rite. When carrying the candles to the next house, they went astride sticks, which imitated horses and were decorated specially for this purpose. The other sticks that had been used for the invitation to the rite (people knocked on windows with them) were thrown into a river or a pond. The sticks that went to the bottom meant a bad omen.

Church candles were used in marriage and obsequial rites. The end of the ritual candle that was kindled at the cemetery (later it was carried all over the village) was used to cure

toothache. For protective purposes, on the night of Easter people went round the house with a candle, an icon and a loaf of bread.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5, Saransk, 1966.

**Cemetery** (kálmolánga, M., kálmokúcha, M., kálmomár, M., kálmolángo, E. [kalma, M., kalmo, E. - grave; langa, M., lango, E. - top, place; mar, M., E. - heap]). Ancient burial places were called "mar". Heathen cemeteries were a common place for a large district inhabited by ancient Mordvinians and they were situated in thickets, where people came from a distance of 70–100 miles.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century cemeteries were situated on high spots. Every kin had an individual site in the common cemetery. The first man who had been buried there was called "kalmon' kirdi", M. (kirdi - is holding), "kalmon' pryavt", E. (pryavt - head), "kalmon' poksh", E. (poksh - big), "kalmon' ushedy", M. (ushedom - to begin).

Mordvinians preserved the notion of the deities: "Kalmazorava", who was the patroness and keeper of the cemetery (azor - host, ava - woman, mother) and "Kalmazoratya", M. (atya - old man). It was believed that their place was at the gate of the cemetery.

A cemetery was considered to be a sacred place and therefore numerous bans were observed, e.g. to make hay, to gather berries. It was also forbidden to cut down trees at the cemetery and to bury suicides and those who died of hard drinking. People thought it to be an unforgivable sin. They were buried far from the village because suicides were supposed to go out of their graves when it was dark, frighten people with their shouts and cause other troubles.

People came to the cemetery and prayed there in the drought and in case they were ill; these troubles being thought of as a result of the dead man's hostility. At the beginning of their praying, they begged his pardon and then asked the deity of cemetery ("Kalmazorava") and the first man who was buried at the cemetery for help. Sometimes a sick child was left there alone for the whole night.

Sorcerers and witches used the earth taken from the cemetery to cause diseases.

At Christmas and Easter, young girls and women came to the cemetery, where they were engaged in fortune-telling. Judging by the sound they tried to guess what kind of harvest, weather and family life they were expected to have (s. Fortune-telling).

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 1. Erziánskie prichitaniya-plachi. Saransk, 1972; T. 7, ch. 2. Mokshánskie prichitaniya. Saransk, 1979; Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Christmas** (Róshtuva, M., Róshtova, E.) - one of the chief Christian holidays established in honour of Jesus Christ's birth (observed on January 7).

It was included in the Mordvinian tradition after Christianity had been adopted and was observed alongside heathen rituals. For the holiday of Christmas young women brewed honey beer ("pure") and did not allow old men to do it. The Erzians of the Nizhni-Novgorod region did not add hops to their "pure", because they thought that Mother of the Gods ("Ange Patyay") disliked this plant given to people by the deuce. A pig was "prepared" with the strict observance of many ritual and magic procedures: the pig had been fed intensively for 2–3 weeks, admitted to the house for three days where it lived under a stove, people tied a towel round its neck, under which they stuck several rods from a steamed sauna whisk and gave it water to drink in which they had steamed the sauna whisk. The pig was slaughtered with the towel and rods on, the blood was poured under the stone of "kardo syarko" (the patroness of the cattle-shed) and there the pig was also singed with the help of birch splinters kindled from the sacred candle (s. Candle). In the yard people organized praying addressed to "Yurkhtava", the deity of house, and "Nishkepaz", the son of the God, who were invited to the party and asked to protect the

house from the evil spirit and ill-natured people. Mordvinians also thanked them for good deeds. The towel was burnt and the rods stained with the blood were taken by the mistress so that she could wake children in the morning with their help whipping them for magic purposes: to beg the Goddess-mother of the Gods for health.

Before Christmas, the Erzians of the Nizhny-Novgorod region spread straw on the floor and in the front corner they put a birch sauna whisk turned upside down and before it they placed a candle, which was not kindled. By tradition, in all villages Mordvinians boiled a pig's head. On the dish under the head they spread a wisp of red and orange thread in the shape of a beard ("a golden beard") and in the pig's mouth they put a steamed twig with leaves and a coloured egg.

On the eve of Christmas, Mordvinians went about the village and sang Christmas carols: girls had steamed birch sauna whisks decorated with towels and kerchiefs. Boys carried sticks, bells, cymbals and oven-doors on which they knocked when singing carols. Young people organized Christmas games in somebody's house (s. Christmas house). In several regions, Mordvinians made a doll of straw that later was burnt. Sometimes young people whipped each other with burning wisps of straw.

Of particular significance for Christmas parties was the dressing-up. Men and young fellows put on sheep fur coats turned inside out, made masks of bears, spread soot on their faces and frightened people visiting their houses. Sometimes a frame was made in the shape of a horse, where seven fellows found room (among Mordvinians worshipping a horse was reflected in marriage ceremonies and wedding rituals, because it was a characteristic feature of their ancient religion).

At Christmas, Mordvinians practised fortune-telling trying to find out something about their future life (if a cookie that had been left for a night on a platband turned out to be pricked all over, the owner of the cookie was expected to die within a year), about a marriage (if something hairy and shaggy touched a young girl's hand, which she pushed through a smoke window of the baths, it meant that her future husband would be a rich man), about the coming year (whether a good or a poor harvest should be expected). One of the variants of foretelling a future harvest was leaving out of doors for a night several rye- or wheat-sheaves fastened on poles. In the morning conclusions were made judging by the amount of hail on the sheaves. People also went to eavesdrop outside their neighbours' windows. They tried to define by a conversation (a good or bad one) a good or bad event expected in the nearest future.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7. ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovaya poeziya i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; Imaikina V. L. Obryadovy kalendar zimnego sezona mordvy // Uchen. Zap. Mord. gos. univ. Yazyk i literatura. Vyp. 64, Saransk, 1968.

**Christmas house** (Kshtiman' kud, M., Kíshtiman' kudo, E. [kshtims, M., kishtems, E. -to dance; kud, M., kudo, E. - house] - a dancing house, later - Roshtuvan' kud, M., Roshtovan' kudo, E. [roshtuvan', M., roshtovan', E. - referring to Christmas]) - Christmas house, where a holiday devoted to spirits - patrons of domestic cattle was observed. This holiday had no bearing on Christmas as a Christian holiday. Moreover, many songs that were sung there were a biting and virulent satire on the orthodox clergy and this was a natural reaction to the struggle of the church against ancient Mordvinian rites. The beginning of the holiday was the last night before the winter solstice. In the past, it was one of the most important calendar agricultural holidays of fertility and abundance, a specific school with ancient roots for assimilating spiritual traditions by young people. According to a popular belief, the more people gathered in the Christmas house, the more effective became their good wishes. Thus, people who allowed their house for the holiday party, considered this fact to be a good omen and honour. Magic significance was attached also to festive clothes. Coming to the party carelessly dressed was a bad omen.

When entering the Christmas house, old men and shepherds threw a handful of grains into the corner absolutely secretly. The party began with singing in chorus songs devoted to good wishes that were intended for the patron. These songs also contained the request to grant a bumper harvest, more children and a yield of cattle. The singing either accompanied a collective ritual meal of the old men and shepherds or preceded it. Pork was an obligatory ritual dish. A boiled pig's head was served. To the pig was devoted a ritual dance accompanied with the melody "Tuva" (pig) played on one of the ancient popular instruments: "fam", M., E. (bagpipe), "nyudi" (a kind of doubled clarinet), "garze", M., E. (a kind of violin). The image of a pig was associated with a ritual animal that personified the fertility of Earth and domestic animals.

At supper time, young people solved puzzles devoted to fertility. After the ritual meal and singing songs, dances began in which only young people participated. Obligatory were the dances with uplifted hands that were at the same time bent at the elbows (a symbol of addressing the Sun). Of great significance was a game-dance of a bear ("often' kshtima", M.), which was accompanied by specific tunes and melodies played on "fam", "nyudi", "garze". This game-dance exists up to the present day, but have no longer any link with the holiday though it is still called "Ofra-tya", M. (an old man-bear), "Ofra", M. (bear), "Ofra atyan' tsera", M. (the son of an old man-bear). In the Saratov province, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the dances of a bear were accompanied with the singing of erotic songs. Singing such songs at the Christmas house party is confirmed by the fact that these songs still exist between the Moksha and the Insar rivers.

Dancing at night during Christmas-tide was the chief part of the holiday, its acme. Original games that included erotic elements were also organized. Some of these games are as follows: "Driving sucking-pigs out" (one of the fellows put on a long coat and acted as if he were a sow with many sucking-pigs whose roles were played by boys and who the fellow drove out with a whip), "Flaying a ram" (people tried to take off the fellow's trousers and shirt), "A bee-hive" (a fellow was made to stand in a corner and was smothered with straw which was set on fire), "Putting a shoe on a horse" (young lads and girls were sitting on a bench while another lad got under it and cut their bast shoes laces), etc. At this party young girls also practised fortune-telling.

The custom of renting a house for the Christmas house existed in Mokshan villages nearly everywhere up to the 1950s and in some places it still exists (Levzha, Suzgarye, Perkhlyay of the Ruzayevka region of the Mordovian Republic). This holiday is observed now in villages also in the form of amateur performances.

Lit.: Pamyatniki mordovskogo narodnogo muzykalnogo iskusstva. T. 1. Saransk, 1981.

**Clothes/adornments and footwear** (shchápt-káryapt, M., orshavt-káresevt', E.) reflecting a part of Mordvinian culture, their connection with mythology.

Both everyday and traditional "panarkht", M. (shirts), "sermat", M. (embroideries), "karks", M. (belt), "naryzhamat", M. (adornments), "pryan's shchamat", M. (head-dresses) played a certain magic role and personified links between human beings and Nature. In songs, a national shirt is compared to a poppy, its petals, a maple and maple leaves.

The leading role was played in clothes by the white background and linen clothes, which possessed a ritual character (being closely connected with family life and family rites). The colour of ornaments, patterns and embroideries is red and dark red as well as brown, blue, orange, green, and black. Every colour had its own significance and symbol. Thus, colour combinations are extremely important. The black colour symbolized earth and fertility (the main strips on shirts were embroidered with black thread; the red colour symbolized the sun, warmth, protection). In folklore, the white colour is used in the descriptions of the garments of mythic deity patron of water ("Vedyava", M., E.), woods ("Viryava", M., E.), "Nishkepaz", E. (the Supreme God), etc.

According to Mordvinian customs, among the Nizhni Novgorod Erzians, “Ange Patyay”, Mother of the Gods, embroiders for her son “Nishkepaz” the hem and shoulder-edges of his shirt with thread dyed in the heavenly azure, in the red sun, in the yellow moon and in the scarlet dawn. The mythic hero “Tyushtya” is also dressed in a white shirt embroidered with many-coloured patterns.

The embroidery in clothes reflects the Mordvinian world outlook: a man is a hunter, an aggressor, a conqueror and, at the same time, he is so closely connected to Nature that he can be imagined as a man-bird, a man-tree, etc. It is not a mere chance that patterns on shirts (as well as separate elements of Mordvinian embroidery) were embroidered and called in the shape of a pigeon’s feet (gul’kan’ pil’gekit, M.), a wolf’s paws (vr’gazon’ kit, M.), a hare’s paws (numolon’ pil’gekit, M.).

Many popular beliefs were connected with clothes. Clothes dressed inside out betokened evil (a topsy-turvy day); in some marriage rites of Mokshans, “panarht” (shirts) were fumigated with smoke for protective purposes.

A belt as an article of clothing that can acquire the shape of a circle was also used for protective purposes. Taking off a belt meant joining the evil spirit (during fortune-telling) as well as ritual and magic freedom – it was the symbol of the road, the path that one must follow to get through mythic obstacles (in childbirth). When driving the cattle to pasture for the first time in spring, it was customary to spread the belt in the gate (so that the cattle could always return home). Newly-bought cattle were led homeward through a belt (their joining a new home, a new cattle-shed).

The wedding “seks”, M., (consisting of silver coins, shells and bells hanging on pieces of red thread) were fastened to the belt. The bells were supposed to protect people with their ringing from witchcraft and fortune-telling.

Deep symbolics underlie the clothes of women and young girls. Especially distinctive of them are the following adornments: “ten’ki” or “kuen’pryat”, M. – metal round objects, reminding one of money, or a big fish’s scales (they were made of different metals: copper, silver, gold, which personified light, good), “ket’kst”, M. (bracelets), “pil’kst”, M., (ear-rings), “syulgam” (brooches).

They produced a deep impression by their radiance and reflexion. Metal, taken as such, symbolizes a masculine origin (weapons and armour were made of it). Thus, clothes embodied at the same time femininity and masculinity. Young girls and women wearing clothes were ranked as deities by their outward qualities (the brilliance of gold, silver and copper has always been mentioned in the descriptions of deity patrons). They were likened (in folklore) to the sun, the fire, the moon and the stars. This created the atmosphere of singularity, uncommonness round them.

Several taboos connected with clothes were strictly observed: it was not allowed to twirl a cap or a kerchief round in one’s hand (one is sure to have a headache), to put a cap on the table (this will cause quarrels and misfortunes), to put on someone’s cap or kerchief (you will have his/her headache). A head-dress was also used in love magic (a girl put on her fellow’s cap, so that he could think only of her).

The traditional manner of covering the head with a kerchief differentiates between a young girl and a married woman. The former usually wore a head-dress made of wood and copper in the shape of a crown. Such a head-dress resembled a pipe, the inner space of which was filled with hair; bronze spirals being above it. The plait was covered with a kerchief and bronze adornments, hanging from it (a constant attribute of Mordvinian girls and women).

A most distinctive mark of a married woman was the “panga”, M., “pango”, E. (a high

head-dress in the shape of a mushroom), young girls wore a fillet decorated with embroidery, gallons and a fringe. The hair was gripped with a “syur’khtsem”, M. (a comb made of wood or bone), which is mentioned in mythological plots as well (“Chipaz”, the God of the Sun is combing his hair with such a comb).

Shoes and, in particular, “lapti” (shoes of bast) also fulfilled a ritual function. They were hung on a pole of the fence for protection against evil spirits and witches. To ensure a successful match-making, an old “lapot” (a bast shoe) was thrown to follow the bashkuda (the person arranging marriage matters with a bride’s parents; he was the first to enter a bride’s house). A lapot’ was also used to put a placenta in (s. Birth), the deceased was buried with lapti on his/her feet (s. deceased).

Lit.: Tallgren A. M. Les provinces culturelles finnoises de la lague recent de fer dans la Russie du nord. Eurasia. Septentrionalis antigwa. III. S. 3–24. Helsinki, 1928; Devyatkina T. P. Mokshanskije svadebnye obyady i pesni. Saransk, 1992; Balashov V. A., Luzgin A. S., Prokina T. P. Odezhdza // Mordva. Istoriko-kulturnyje ocherki. Saransk, 1995.

**Coffin** (lazks, M., kandoláz, E. [laz – board; kandoms – to carry]) is of recent origin in the Mordvinian funeral ceremony; it is connected with numerous magic rituals and beliefs. According to the materials dated as far back as 1783, the dead were buried without a coffin and were only wrapped in birch bark. Later people began making coffins by means of hollowing a tree (one part of it served as a coffin, the other as its cover). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mordvinians made oblong coffins in the shape of a box nearly everywhere. By tradition, in the Petrovo district of the Saratov province, the person who was the first to start making a coffin was presented with a towel. Chips and shavings that remained after making a coffin were thrown near the cemetery at a dump. In the Samara province this place was called “shchepka lango”, E. (lango – place, shchepka – chip) and considered dangerous for man’s health (s. illness).

Before a dead person was put in a coffin, it was fumigated and spread with leaves of birch sauna whisk on the bottom. As soon as the deceased was placed in the coffin, an old woman standing at its head and scraping a copper coin asked the dead person to forgive those who washed and dressed him/her; then she also asked to preserve their crop, cattle, reason, hair, ears, eyes, teeth, tongue, heart, arms, legs. In the coffin were put pieces of nails that had been pared beforehand (s. Soul), coins so that the deceased could pay off in the next world. On the walls of the coffin, two or four windows were drawn with a piece of coal at eye level (two windows on the one side and two on the other) in order to provide the dead person with light when he/she began “working”. The Mokshans of the Penza region made both a window and a door through which the deceased could look and go out. Sometimes people made even paned windows. This custom was connected with the idea of interpreting a coffin as a dwelling place for the deceased in the next world.

By tradition, a close relative was obliged to lament when the coffin was being made. After the coffin was carried out of the house, one of the old women asked all the dead people, who were allegedly present at the funeral ceremony, to go out of the house together with the other people. Mordvinians touched door-posts three times in order to prevent another death in the house. It was believed that suicides were fated to live the rest of their lives in the coffin and to die their natural death as they were destined to.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 1. Erzianskije prichitaniya-plachi. Saransk, 1972; T. 7, ch. 2. Mokshanskije prichitaniya. Saransk, 1979; Zelenin D. K. Vozzreniya na zalozhnyh pokoinikov u drugih narodov // Ocherki russkoi mifologii. Izbr. tr. M., 1995.



*Mokshan contemporary festive woman clothes. Photo: T. Devyatkina, 2003.*



*Mokshan women and girls are making embroidery. Village S. Terizmorga. Photo: T. Devyatkina, 2003.*

**Cuckoo** (kúku, M., kúko, E.). According to Mordvinian views, it is a prophetic bird. Its mythological origin is reflected in calendar and ritual folklore (Christmas carols, Shrove carols) in a different way. According to several plots, cuckoo hatched out of "Ine Narmun's" egg (E., the Great Bird) or out of the egg of "Poksh ved'" narmun's bird (E., the Great Aquatic Bird), who built its nest out of a young girl's hair, laid three eggs, hatched the younglings: a nightingale, a cuckoo and a skylark (cuckoo usually hatches out of the first or second egg). Judging by other plots, cuckoo is hatched by a heath-cock (or an unknown bird) who built its nest in the first grove, in the first tree, on the first branch and laid three eggs out of which three nestlings hatched: a cuckoo, a nightingale and a birdie. Cuckoo is cuckooing in the first tree, on the first twig, bud, leaf. In the morning its cuckooing was associated with the beginning of a working day. Cuckoo's appearance is mythical. In Shrove carols, it is speckled with red booties on, its beak gilded, its crest silky.

In mythological plots cuckoo was destined to become a domestic bird. However, at first she promised and then refused to fulfil the wish of the goddess-mother of the Gods, "Ange Patyay", to lay eggs each day. In view of this she was ousted from the human dwelling-place into the forest. In addition the goddess did not allow cuckoo to build a nest and ordered it to lay its eggs in the nests of other birds. As a token of the unrealizable promise she made cuckoo and its eggs speckled. Since then it is cuckooing sadly in the forests and missing a human dwelling-place.

It was believed that cuckoos were unborn children. There existed a ban to kill a cuckoo (a baby will be killed). Children who died unchristened also became cuckoos. In folklore, the deity-patroness of wood "Viryava" is represented as cuckoo. In fortune-telling, cuckooing serves as a means of determining the period of one's own life. In this case, people ask this bird, "Cuckoo, cuckoo, how long am I to live?" Sometimes young girls asked it, "How many years are there left before I marry?"

There exist numerous omens, beliefs connected with the first cuckooing. It was considered that cuckooing heard from the right side meant wealth all year round till the next cuckooing in spring; from the left side it betokened hunger. Cuckooing heard from the East was a good omen, from the West - a bad one. Cuckooing in autumn meant a long and a warm spring. Cuckooing heard from the East promised a bumper harvest, from the South - the birth of male-babies, from the West - a young girl's death. A frequent cuckooing promised no good (or, on the contrary, sunny weather). If cuckoo was cuckooing in a dry tree, cold weather was expected. Cuckooing during a harvest was considered to have a magic meaning. If someone happened to hear it at that time, he/she was to turn in order to face the place from where cuckooing was heard. It was believed that in this case one would not have a sore throat till the next harvest. St Peter's Day (July 12) was associated with the end of the period of cuckooing. If it was heard after this day, it meant a bad omen.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

# D

**Death** (kulomá, M., E.) – the end of life of a person or animal. According to Mordvinian views, it is man's transition from the world of living beings to "tona shi", M. (the next world), opposition to the notion of life. Death and man's existence after it were one of the basic ideas of heathen worldview. It was believed that an angel and death always accompanied a living person.

In spite of the fact that people are unaware of the time and circumstances of their death (it always comes unexpectedly) they have always tried to find out the day of their death with the help of numerous omens and ways of fortune-telling. People practised fortune-telling before Christmas and New Year' Day; for this purpose they used pieces of bread and hair, which were put on platbands (whose piece or hair disappears, this person will die). Death was thought to be connected with birds' and cattle's unusual behaviour. As a sign of death there was interpreted the following: any bird flying through an open window, a black crow sitting and croaking on the roof of a house, porridge that ran over the edge of a pot and from under the lid, a wedding ring that fell on the floor during the wedding ceremony, etc. An unusual behaviour of hens (a hen flying through a smoke-window, a crowing hen), a dog's prolonged howl and its cold nose, a cat with its outstretched legs and tail to the doorway; the second flowering of apple and cherry-trees was also associated with death. "Kuftsema", M. (a groan) of the deity-patroness of the home "Kudazorava" was a sign of death as well.

It was also thought of as an omen of death to dream about teeth that came out (a front tooth meant a child's death, a tooth with some blood on it betokened death of a close relative). Digging of a cellar, construction of a house, planting of potatoes, a white hare, an ox, a lightning bolt, killing a cock, the new moon were of ill omen and meant death.

People believed that it was possible to delay death by means of various magic practices or cunning, e.g. to kill a crowing hen, to draw its throat, burn it and scatter the ashes over a field; after a dream that betokened death people used to put the fourth finger in the hole between the panes of a window and say, "Let it leave me". In fairy-stories, a man deceives death and prolongs his life. According to informants, in ancient times some elderly people felt their death approach and made preparations: bought or made clothes, "soborendaftolez' pryason", M. (administered extreme unctions, confessed their sins). Sometimes they saw that dead relatives come to their place and invite them to go with them (usually a mother or some other close relative). Before dying, people said the last good-bye to their relatives. In order to make it easier for a soul to leave a body, people used to pour some water, kindle a candle; they stood near the dying person in silence.

In folklore, death has numerous images: a stern woman or an old man in white clothes who takes a soul with his fingers out of a man through the mouth. In other cases there is no concrete image of death: it is simply ugly, terrible, black, armed with a scythe, sword, cuts sinews in people's legs and the whole body. In Erzian laments, death comes in the image of three rays (green, black and white) and deprives a person of his/her power of legs and arms. Instead of death, God can lower a cradle on ropes from Heaven and send three saints: the first deprives a person of his/her memory, the second deprives him/her of the power of legs, the third takes his/her soul, wraps it in a white kerchief, puts it in a copper cradle, covers it with a silken towel and carries it to a river bank to wash. After that he raises the soul to the God "Nishke" and the latter decides where he should place it. In addition to this, according to Mordvinian views, the soul of a dead person could get to Heaven and space through a lock of hair, if he/she was righteous when living on Earth.

It is considered that righteous people's death is easier, but sinners' death is very difficult

(particularly witches' and sorcerers'). They could die only after they had passed on their witchcraft. To make their death easier some magic act was performed: people undid their clothes, opened a window or a door, raised a beam, so that their soul could go out; kept silence so as not to frighten it. It was believed that at the moment of someone's death a star fell or faded. The Erzians spread honey on a dying person's lips, because they thought that he/she felt bitter in his/her mouth at that moment. It was very important to cover the dying person's face with a kerchief, because another person on whom he/she cast the last glance was thought to die in the current year. By tradition, after somebody died, a hen was beheaded and its head was thrown on a road with the words, "Here is a hen for you in the next world". To prevent death from returning back to the house various acts were performed (s. deceased).

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 1. Erzijskie prichitaniya-plachi. Saransk, 1972; T. 7, ch. 2. Mokshanskiye prichitaniya. Saransk, 1979; Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Deceased** (lóvazha, M., kúlytsya, E.), in whose honour numerous rituals and magic rites were performed as it is reflected in the structure of the traditional Mordvinian culture. These rites embodied mythical relations between the living and the dead, this world and the next world. Thus, the deceased was an intermediary between the God and people. Among the Erzians, "Mastorpaz" was the patron of the deceased.

For protective purposes, even nowadays, straight after death people close the dead man's eyes, cover all mirrors with cloth as well as all other objects, which possess the property of reflection (TV sets, photos under a piece of glass). According to the popular belief, the dead man's soul can see everything that takes place in the house, because it leaves for the next world only later. But the deceased must not see his/her reflection – he/she may get frightened and visit the house ("arams sashendyks" – to come home) afterwards. The dead people come home late at night through the chimney looking like a fiery snake or knock at the window and ask to open the door. The deceased was usually seen as a living person. His/her visits exhausted living people, they wept constantly pending his/her return and felt depressed. Sometimes they even experienced nervous disorder. In such cases, the deceased was driven off. The Erzia-Mordvinians, for instance, placed branches of a rowan-tree on either side of the door and crossed them three times. They thought that this prevented the dead man from entering the house.

The rite of washing, dressing, mourning (and afterwards burying) the deceased depended on the cause of death (if it was natural, due to his/her age, illness or an accident, a suicide, drinking alcoholic beverages, etc.) as well as on sex and age. These rites ensured the soul's transition to the next world and protected the living people from any contacts with the deceased and death.

It was customary to wash a dead person's head with eggs, as it was indecent to appear before "Verepaz", M. (the Supreme God) smelling of soap. By tradition, each article of clothes was scraped with a knife, so that the dead man's soul could easily go out. When dressing the deceased, some rituals were performed: people scraped a copper coin with a knife, put a piece of cloth in the dead person's belt, allegedly for another world, told him/her not to give his/her clothes to anyone, as many dead people had no clothes on. At this time "Nishkepaz", E. (the Supreme God) was being prayed to for a good place. It was believed that in case a woman came to wash the dead body a little later than she was expected to and attended to her duties carelessly, the deceased could cause the disease called "kuly'n' saf", M., E. (literally: sent by the deceased). Thus, she might fall ill, become fruitless or her children might be taken ill with a deadly disease. After the dead person was dressed, all people, by tradition, knelt and touched the floor with their foreheads. Some article of the dead person's clothes was hung on the wall, where it continued hanging for 6 weeks after his/her death.

It was forbidden to come to the dead person's house empty-handed. As a rule, the deceased was asked to pass some food to those who had died before. The God of the Nether World, "Mastorpaz", and "Varmava", the deity of the wind, were asked to be intermediaries in this request. In some villages, all food gathered for the deceased in this way was shown to "Varmava". Sometimes even a horse "was passed" to the dead person, lest he/she should walk there on foot. It was believed that this horse was fated to die soon. If some rites were violated, negative consequences were to be expected: the dead person could take offence, cause losses or "take" someone from the family with him/her, i.e. do living people harm if he/she "af parol' myalezonza", M. (felt inconvenient or bad).

The Erzian funeral rituals that were performed when a young girl died, very much resembled wedding rituals with a slight difference in their succession. On the day of her death, as was customary on the wedding day, everybody brought a pot of porridge, cookies and a candle. A prayer was said and all the pots were put in the stove. A daughter-in-law or any other woman, a close relative, was lamenting, though not weeping. The dead girl's clothes were hung on the walls as it was done on her wedding day. Only young girls were to carry the dead girl's body out of the house on long strips of canvas. The clothes were spread out and carried afterwards in the coffin (after the funeral ceremony they were hung on the cross).

When the dead person was still in the house, it was forbidden to take off clothes or shoes. People even went to bed with their clothes on. It was not allowed to make a fire in the stove either, as it was believed that the dead person's soul could burn. Among the Mokshans and Erzians of the Gorodishche district of the Tambov province, it was common for women to go out at midnight and ask their ancestors to accept the deceased.

It was believed that in the next world dead people lived the same life as they used to live on Earth. Due to this fact, they were provided with needles, adornments as well as with hair clipped beforehand and pieces of cut nails. As for the last, they were supposed to be necessary to climb the smooth firmament, the Heaven's dome, or to build a ladder to get to Heaven. Some money was also put in the coffin for the dead person to pay off in the next world. It was believed that if the deceased had no Mordvinian bast-shoes (lapti) on, he/she would not be accepted by his/her kinsmen in the next world.

There were performed acts opposite to those that were performed while the deceased was living: shoes were put on his/her feet beginning with the left foot, during the funeral service he/she was carried round the church counter clockwise.

It was thought of as a good omen if the dead person's face was "joyful" at home and when carrying him/her out. If he/she "wept" (immediately after his/her death tears were flowing), it meant that he/she died a violent death. If the dead person's eyes were slightly open, people feared that it betokened another death in the family. There was a number of bans referring to the deceased. It was forbidden to mourn a dead person, if the burial day fell on Easter Day (it was considered a sin), to look at the funeral procession through the window and to cross the road before it. By contrast, meeting a funeral procession on one's way was thought to be a good omen. It was believed that the soul of a person who died on a holiday (Christmas, Easter), was sure to be in Paradise.

Before and after carrying a dead body out of the house, various protective measures were taken: people drew a circle round the dead body with a knife, moved the knife over its legs, chest and neck in order to cut off the death's head. The knife that was driven into the place where the deceased had lain was taken out after returning from the cemetery. Having drawn a cross on the door with this knife the master of the house threw it with all his might to the ceiling. If the knife jumped away, his family was to expect another misfortune. For protective

purposes, an axe was put under a bench or on it (sometimes it was a small piece of coal). The axe could also be placed on the table, where the deceased had lain, lest death should step over it. Near the door people placed a knife in order to get over the fear of the deceased. After carrying out the dead body, the room was sprinkled with water, and the place where the coffin had been placed was powdered with ash. People washed the table, the bench, the window-sill and the floor in the direction of the door. For the next 6 weeks it was forbidden to use a besom, as it was thought that the ancestors' souls might stay in the house. Due to this fact, it was not allowed to swing children in the cradle so as not to run against them.

If the weather was good on the burial day, it meant that the dead person had done a lot of good in this world. If birds did not peck grains on the dead person's grave, it was a sign that he/she was dishonest. To make the carrying of the dead body easier (it was always very heavy because deuces fought for its soul) on either side of the coffin people put birch logs and went round it three times with a loaf of bread and an icon.

In honour of a dead woman a small patch of hemp was left unrequited in the field; in honour of a dead man – a patch of barley. On a man's grave, his image was carved on a pine-tree or an oak, on a woman's grave, her image was carved on a birch-tree. It was believed that the person who had died of alcohol could cause the drought by sucking moisture out of the soil. Thus, if he was buried in the common cemetery or in the churchyard, he was dug out on the same night, thrown into some reservoir and pierced with an aspen picket, lest he should come out to the surface. In the drought the graves of drunkards buried in the forest were watered.

Great importance was attached to dreams while the dead person was still at home. It was considered that the deceased wished to express his/her state of mind and desire through them. Dreaming about a dead person towards morning in winter meant snow, in summer – rain.

To make birth-marks ("shachema vast", M.) come out, people moved the hands of three dead persons over them. People used to take the dead person's hand so that he/she could wish them good and protect them against misfortunes.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 1. Erziänskie prichitanija-plachi, Saransk, 1972.

**Deceased's deputy** (Vastózay, M., Vástozava, M., Ézem ozy, E., Tárka ozy, E. [vasta, M., tarka, E. – place; ozams, M., E. – to sit; ezem, M., E. – bench; ava – woman, mother]) – person who played ritual and magic role of the deceased at the remembrance party. For this purpose there was usually elected a person who was a close relative of the deceased resembling him/her and of the same age. Sometimes such a person was elected by the deceased while he/she was still alive.

The deceased's deputy put on the dead person's clothes and sat in his/her usual place. All members of the family took care of him/her, as if he/she were the dead person. He/she was addressed with respect. This elected person was afterwards present at wedding and christening parties.

In the Saratov province, at the remembrance party of the third and the ninth day each woman wept in front of the deceased's deputy, who was sitting at the very edge of the table. At this party, the deceased's deputy gave all the people present advice about the way of life, asked "Kudava", the deity of the home, to bless the dead person's family and provide them with a good harvest and a yield of cattle. The participants of the remembrance party revelled away the time till the very morning. The deceased's deputy spoke about the life in the next world and the fun he/she had had there with relatives.

Only his/her clothes sometimes presented the deceased. In the village of Orkino of the Saratov region, the dead person's clothes were rolled in the form of a doll and placed in the

corner; people bowed to it, and treated it to ritual food. While everybody was at the cemetery, the doll stayed at home. After the remembrance party, the clothes were given to beggars.

The deceased's deputy was seen off in the evening or after sunrise. In some villages, he/she was carried to the cemetery on a horse, in other villages, in a cart. This person was carried to the grave and placed there on a pillow; at his/her feet people put some food and invited all people who had died before. Sometimes he/she was seen only to the gate. When seeing him/her off, a new fire was made and all the participants of the ritual jumped over it. One of the organizers of the ceremony made a speech addressing the deceased's deputy and asked him/her to go to the next world, so as not to disturb the living people and not to refuse them his/her patronage.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 2. Mokshanskiye prichitaniya. Saransk, 1979.

**Deity-patroness of the apiary and bee-hives** (Néshkeáva, M., E. [neshke - hive, bee; ava - woman, mother]). Mordvinians thought that every apiary had its own deity who lived in the biggest hive. Among the Erzians, "Nishkepaz", the son of the God, is also considered to be the patron of bee-families. When honey was being taken from hives, Erzians placed a small cup of honey beverage (mead) before each hive and invited the deity of the apiary to help herself. According to a legend, a young man who did not believe in her, tried to rob a hive, but the hive began bleeding and all the bees flew away.

In honour of the deity-patroness of the apiary there were organized great holidays and prayings accompanied with sacrifices. People usually sacrificed honey, mead drinks and other food, which they threw on the threshold of a lodge. While doing so, people asked her to increase the number of bee-families and grant more honey. In the Gorodishche district of the Nizhni Novgorod region, Mokshans organized a holiday in honour of the deity on the prophet Elijah's Day (August 2). All deities of the forest, the forest itself and everything that can be found in the forest, were invited to the party. A white goose was sacrificed. While praying to the deity of the apiary, people asked her to increase the number of hives, to protect them from witches, evil-wishers and damage. After a ritual meal all those present performed another praying; the hostess touched the ritual porridge and asked the deity for protection and the fertility of bees. After the meal, the eldest member of the family poured a ladle of mead into the nearest brook, allegedly, as a donation to the forest deities - "Viryava" and "Mokoryava", M. (mokor' - stump; ava - woman, mother), the female deity of the stump.

In the Narovchat district of the Penza province, a holiday devoted to the apiary was observed a fortnight before Pokrov Day (Feast of the covering of Veil of Our Lady, October 14). The deity of the apiary was prayed to if people were ill and the illness was thought to have been caused by the apiary, bees, honey and honey "pure" (mead, honey beer). In this case, prayers were performed at the apiary. It was considered that a bee would never bite a good-natured person (the deity would not allow). It was supposed that one couldn't enter a bee-keeper's house bareheaded or barefaced, otherwise the bees would die. It was not customary to lend honey on the day of the praying (honey will disappear and the apiary will perish).

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendar-no-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-patroness of the barn** (Awin Awa, M., E. (avin - barn for storing crops; ava - woman, mother)). Mordvinians imagined that every barn had its own deity. The pit used for heating the barn was considered to be a place for the deity of the barn to live in and to be made a sacri-

fice to. The barn's rafters could also serve this purpose. Every year at one and the same time an "ozks" (a magical ceremony with praying) was organized in honour of the deity. A red cock, which was sacrificed to her, accentuated its close kinship with fire. By tradition at the end of every such rite emptied beer mugs were tossed up and rolled on the floor. In that way people expressed their wish for the wheat and rye ear to grow big in the current and coming years. The deity of the barn could inflict punishment, if she or somebody from the people were insulted. According to myths, a woman, who did not comply with her parents' request, was strangled to death by the deity in the barn. When Erzians were sick, they would go to the barn at midnight and ask the deity-patroness for recovery.

Lit.: Smirnov I. N. Mordva. Kazan, 1895; Shakhmatov A. A. Mordovsky etnografichesky sbornik. SPb., 1910.

**Deity-patroness of baths** (Banyáva, M., E., Banyazorava [banya + azor – hostess, host; ava – woman, mother])—a female deity, the patroness of baths, health, childbirth. According to Mordvinian views, she lives under a sweating shelf of the bath-house together with her children. As a rule, the deity is invisible, but sometimes she appears (which is both a good and a bad omen) in a bath-house as a small and young naked woman sitting on a shelf and combing her fair hair. The deity has a husband, "Banyatya" by name, M., E. (atya – husband, old man), who is also young in appearance and undersized. Besides good, the deity of baths can do people harm, if she gets angry. She does not like those who come to the bath-house late at night, after many people had already steamed. In this case she can frighten a person by entering the bath-house with a loud noise, oversteam him and close the smoke-window. By tradition, people prayed before they made a fire in a bath-house. When entering it, one was obliged to cross oneself in order to protect oneself against its deity's anger and prevent her children from disturbing and interfering with the procedure of steaming. It was believed that the deity of baths washed after everyone had already washed, so one should leave for her some water, soap and a sauna whisk. Otherwise she could scatter people's things in a bath-house, make the air full of fumes next time.

It is considered that the deity of baths helped women in childbirth. In her honour, ritual porridge was prepared after each delivery. In order to propitiate her, people brought some porridge for her from a funeral repast and pancakes from festive parties and placed them in the corner of the bath-house.

Before the bride's ritual washing in a bath-house, the bride addressed the deity of baths with the request to dye her with smoke, to cover her with ash, because she was giving her girlhood to her. With Mokshans on the second day of the wedding, a young wife made a sacrifice of money, canvas, bread and salt, which she put under a sweating shelf of the bath-house and intended for the deity.

The deity of baths participated in fortune-telling ceremonies (at Christmas, "old" New Year). At midnight young girls came to a bath-house and thrust their hands into a smoke-window. If the deity touched them with a gloved hand, their future bride-grooms were expected to be rich, if she did it with a bare hand – the bride-grooms were thought to be poor.

In villages, it is customary up to now to thank the deity of baths for her help in steaming and ask her for health.

**Deity-patroness of all bees** (Méshava, M., Mékshava, E. [mesh, M., meksh, E. – bee; ava – woman, mother, i.e. queen bee]). She symbolizes beauty, thrift, efficiency, and wisdom. On account of this, a match-maker at a wedding party behaves as if she were the deity. A bride is compared to the golden-winged queen bee and this fact enables one to suppose a very old tie with mythical forces in this comparison. According to myths, the deity does not allow bees to

sting people. She very seldom punishes people and if she does, she punishes only those, whose soul is “poor” and who did other people harm. In folklore, nomadic steppe peoples – Nogaites and match-makers are depicted as a swarm.

Erzians supposed that “Ange Patyay”, Mother of the Gods, patronized the deity of all bees. The Goddess liked her for her diligence and fertility. She gave “Ange Patyay” her consent to give birth to children every day and due to it she was in her good graces. “Ange Patyay” ordered sacred candles (shtatol, M., E.) to be made only of her wax and sacrificial “pure” (an alcoholic beverage) to be brewed only of her honey.

The deity of all bees, just as “Velyava”, is the patroness of the village; she protects people from evil spirits. It was considered that in case she disappeared, the village would disappear as well. For protective purposes, several taboos were used, e.g. it was forbidden to enter the house of the apiary’s owner bareheaded (otherwise the deity and all bees would disappear); to lend money gained after selling the first gathering of honey; to lend money on the day of the praying devoted to the patroness of bees. On the whole, the deity of all bees or queen bee is a rather stable ancient symbol with a broad meaning. It is the universe, wealth, and fertility. Bees were considered to be intermediaries between Heaven and Earth.

**Deity-patroness of the cattle-shed** (Kárdazáva, M., E., Káldazáva, M., Kárdazon’ kirdi, M., Kárdaz Syárko, E., Kárdaz Syárkhka, M. [kardaz, M., E. – yard, cattle-shed; ava, M. E. – woman, mother; kirdi, M., E. – is holding, keeping; syarka, E., syarkhka, M. – nit]). It may appear both as a male and a female and sometimes can be seen by people. In several regions (among the Mokshans of the Temnikovo region of the Mordovian Republic, and the Erzians of the village of Sabayevo of the Kochkurovo region of the Mordovian Republic), this deity is identified with the deity of house “Yurkhtava”; in the village of Bolshoye Permiyevo of the Penza region the deity is called “Giger’ pryá guy”, E. “grass-snake”.

The deity is rather a self-willed creature. If she takes a dislike to cattle (usually because of their colour), she is sure to tire them out. She can ride a cow, horse or sheep the whole night. She is fond of plaiting a horse’s mane. According to a popular belief, one must not unplait it, because the deity of cattle-shed may get angry and kill the animal. The deity’s dwelling-place is under a stone, which covers the pit in the middle of the yard. The blood of sacrificial animals was poured there. In honour of the deity were performed magical ceremonies. The rites conducted at the end of field work and after Epiphany were considered to be obligatory. Before the beginning of the ritual, the floor in a cattle-shed was covered with straw and some food was brought. Having turned to one of the corners, the mistress of the house asked to increase the cattle population, to protect them against diseases and loss, to help them to spend the winter. Then a small part of each dish was taken and all this was put on a millet cookie and then placed on a board for the deity of cattle-shed. After this ceremony, the food was taken back to the house and people began eating the ritual food. Only women and children used to participate in this rite.

In the village of Sabayevo of the Karsun district, in order to celebrate the “Kardaz ozks” (a magical rite in the yard) people baked four ritual loaves of bread, roasted a pig (the blood was usually poured under a stone in the yard). The ceremony was usually performed in the middle of the yard during which people stood with their faces to the East.

In addition to special rites, people also performed ones to the deity of cattle-shed in case of loss of cattle. In the Temnikovo region, in honour of “Yurkhtava”, the deity of house, “ven’ ozks”, M., E. (praying at night) was usually organized. For this purpose a pie was baked with 40 candles placed on it and “boza” (nonalcoholic beverage) was also made. People asked the deity

of house not to harass the cattle and to help cure them.

If the cattle died, in case they had been bewitched with the evil eye, a rowan-tree was brought from a forest and planted in the right-hand corner of the cattle-shed. It was allegedly of some help to the deity of cattle-shed. It was customary to ride horses on the first and second days of Epiphany so that the deity could not tickle them (which made them very lean).

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendar-no-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-patroness of the field** (Paksyáva, M., Páksya syárko, E., Páksya Pátyay, E. [paksya, M., E. – field; ava, M., E. – woman, mother; syarko – nit; patya, E. – elder sister, aunt]). Among the Erzians this function is fulfilled by “Norovava”, s. deity-patroness of harvest and farming. In the calendar and ritual poetry, the deity is depicted as a grouse or a woman with long drooping hair.

The cult of the deity of field is closely connected with sacrifices, which are made before and after harvesting (laying-in). By tradition, in honour of the deity the Mokshans left an un-reaped patch of corn called “paksyan’ kaza” (a field she-goat), “paksyan’ sakal” (the beard of the field). At the end of reaping, in order to ensure a bumper harvest in future and to propitiate the deity, people left a little straw for her in the place of the former shock and several rye ears in the last row. It was believed that the deity does not allow anyone to take stones home from the field – hens would cease laying eggs; it was also forbidden to take back the bread – the hens would perish.

When rye is blooming, at midnight, the deity of field is said to produce sounds. People listened to them very carefully and concluded: if the sounds resembled whistling, it promised a good harvest, if they were like weeping, it betokened a poor harvest. The Mordvinians considered that at the time it was forbidden to make noise – the deity could get angry. It was advisable that one should stay at home with windows closed, because she likes silence and quiet.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendar-no-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity of fire** (Toláva, M., E. [(tol – fire; ava – woman, mother])). She was imagined as a woman of indeterminate face, silky-haired, dressed in blue (a kerchief, ear-rings, with a stick in her hands). In folk poetry, she is regarded as a personified creature, she fears “Vedyava”, s. the deity of water.

In a myth of a child’s birth, the deity of fire invited the deity of water and her husband; having treated them to honey “pure” (a national alcoholic beverage, “braga”), she got into an argument with her guest (each of them praised herself and abused the other). In the end, the deity of fire hissed and got inflamed, and the deity of water began splashing with water. Being frightened, the former hid behind the stove. The later told her not to burn poor people’s houses, not to drive beggars to tears. While the deity of water is away, the deity of fire may sing and dance.

The deity of fire was addressed in spells to cure burns (pitsevte ozolmat, E., pidefta ozondo-ma, M.). Some of the skin diseases (scab, fungous diseases) were treated in front of the “living fire” burning in a stove or in a bath-house. It was believed that the deity of fire could help “pidems urmat’”, M. (to boil the disease).

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7., ch. 3. Kalendar-no-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk. 1981.

**Deity-patroness of the grain** (Seráva, M. [sera – grain; ava – woman, mother])). Among the Erzians, this role was played by “Norovava” s. deity-patroness of harvest and farming. The deity

of grain was depicted as a skylark, and a hare. In myths, she is beautiful, dressed in gold and silver with a copper hat on her head. She can sing, dance, weep like a human being. She has children. In honour of the deity, various ritual and magic acts were performed, bans were imposed and protective measures were also taken. In order to increase the fertility of the soil, on the first day of the sowing campaign boiled eggs were thrown into it together with the seeds. By tradition, the first handful of seeds was thrown by a boy. On this day it was prohibited to lend anything from the house, or to come back in order to take something. It was forbidden to make a fire from Easter until the beginning of the sowing campaign to guarantee a good crop. It was considered that one would starve, if he supported a sack with his teeth when pouring grain into it. When seeing a hail cloud, old women threw a frying-pan or a dough-stirrer into the yard, lest corn shoots should be destroyed by hail. Seeing intertwined ears was unlucky. It was believed that in the evening a whole loaf of bread must not be cut in two: the deity of grain would weep.

The Erzians performed a praying in honour of “Norovava”, the female deity, the patroness of corn and grain. Two big stones were brought to the sacrificing place and under them pits were dug. Under one of the stones people poured the blood of the sacrificial animal, put its bones under the other and said a prayer, in which they asked the deity of corn and grain to help them grow a bumper crop, to protect the field against those who tied knots on ears (and thus deprived the corn of its power), as well as against hail and strong wind.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7., ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk. 1981.

**Deity-patroness of grass** (Naráwa, M., E. [nar - low, creeping grass that grows on trampled places, viz. in the street, along roads; ava - woman, mother]), which served as food for poultry and domestic animals (pigs, calves). This deity was made sacrifices to and prayed to, when hens and pigs were ill and when children fell onto the grassy ground.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiosen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Deity-patroness of harvest and farming** (Nórowáwa, E. [norov - bread; ava - woman, mother]) - female deity, the second daughter of the gods' mother “Angle Patyay”, “Mastopaz” mother. In myths, among all deities she is particularly respected by “Shkay”, the Mokshan Supreme God. For great services done to “Shkay”, she was allowed to distribute everyday bread among the people. In folklore, she is depicted as a beautiful woman dressed in splendid silvery clothes.

The deity is assisted by her husband, “Norovatya”, “Norov paz” (atya - husband, old man; Paz - God), the God of Harvest. Every field is considered to have its own deity, who lives in the field or on its boundaries. On the boundary, magical ceremonies were organized (s. Praying on a boundary strip of neighbouring villages) aimed at preserving the so-called “sporina” (rapid growth, profit, benefit), preventing it from going to the neighbouring field. It was believed that in case of ignoring these ceremonies the deity of harvest could curse people and bring them a poor crop. In the Erzian song “Pazon' simemat” (The Feast of the Gods), the deity reveals her capriciousness. She does not accept the son's of the God invitation to the Gods' feast because of people who are to begin a sowing campaign in the field and she is to meet and bless them.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissa, 1889; UPTMN. T. 1. Epicheskie i liro-epicheskie pesni. Saransk, 1963.

**Deity-patroness of the home** (Kudáwa, M. E., Kudazoráwa, M., E. [kud - house, azor - host, hostess; ava - woman, mother]) - female deity of the home, household and family. Every house

has its own deity-patroness. Mokshans and Erzians imagined her as a young woman of small stature with long fair hair. She has a husband ("Kudaty", M., E; kud - house, atya - husband) and children, who live in the cellar under the floor. In ancient times, she was seen very often (she was sitting at a table, eating, drinking and talking to herself). Sometimes she resembles the mistress of the house. Before people she usually appears very neat, dressed in folk clothes.

She can do people both good and harm. Fearing to annoy her people never unplaited their hair plaited by her. She could kill those who broke this taboo. Some informants said that they felt their hair being plaited with the deity's cold hands.

By tradition, in a new house "od kudon' poza" (the beer of the new house) was brewed for the deity of home, bread and pancakes were also baked. In case this custom was not observed, the deity remained hungry and thirsty with no food to eat or anything to drink. Then she used to reproach the owners of the house, until it became rotten. When moving to a new house, people used to invite the deity to go with them, otherwise she could come without an invitation and cause troubles.

A new deity (every house before people moved to it had already had its own deity) was forced to leave. If both were left, troubles and quarrels began, because the two could not live together in one and the same house. It was believed that in case the deity was moaning ("kuftsy", M.), it meant misfortune and death. Seeing her was also considered a bad omen. If the cattle (particularly horses and cows) were ill and poor, the situation was accounted for by the deity's hostility towards the owners or by the fact that she did not like the colour of the animal.

**Deity – patroness of hops** (Komlyáwa, M., Komolyawa, E. [komlya, M., E. - hops; ava - mother, woman]) - a female deity, the patroness of wild verdure, hops, the mistress of the Mordvinian ritual drink - pure. She symbolizes uncontrolled forces of nature, indomitable strength, abundance of energy, fun, songs and dances, carnal pleasures, will, struggle. She is compared to a strong wind bringing all people down; she possesses a giant's power. There exists a large cycle of songs devoted to her. The deity is often glorified in Mordvinian songs which are sung at wedding parties. The image of hops is always personified. Mother of the Gods, did not like hops, because they had grown out of a small branch given to people by the deuce.

A single combat between two opposite notions underlies various works devoted to the deity: struggle between violence (it is personified by the deity of hops) and order, culture (represented by "Norovava", the deity of harvest). This single combat, a collision, symbolizes the world's striving for balance and harmony. Corn and hops signify the change of the seasons of the year (one state of heroes is substituted for another and alongside spring, summer, autumn and winter follow each other). In songs devoted to the deity, the place where hops grow is usually indicated: it is dark and damp, i.e. Earth. In this way its reference to the feminine origin is emphasized. Then the hop twines round the trunk and branches of a tree and reaches the top. Its small yellow cones have the divine colour, the colour of the Sun, i.e. that of the masculine origin. In more ancient songs, the hop is imagined as a woman, mother, and the patroness of the woods. According to ancient Mordvinian beliefs, priests and chiefs played the role of intermediaries between the two opposing parties. The clothes of the deity of hops (headgear and dress) are usually imagined as golden-silvery, like other mythical heroes' garment.

**Deity-patroness of the kindred and family** (Yurkhtáwa, M., E. [yur - M., E.] - root, base, foundation; yurkht, M. - yard, place), including household and all buildings in the yard. According to Mordvinian religious beliefs, she was sent to the Earth by Nishkepaz, the Erzian deity to take care of the kindred, family and a dwelling-place. Among the Mokshans she is the

daughter of “Mastoron’ Kirdi”, the deity of the whole Earth. People believed that she lived in the corner, under or behind the stove. She has a husband, “Yurkhtatya”, M., “Yurtatya”, E., by name. The deity of the kindred rules over “Kudava”, a female deity, the patroness of the home, and “Kardazava”, a female deity, the patroness of the yard and cattle-shed. Later in several villages, she was identified with “Kudava”. In myths, her appearance, possibly due to this fact, sometimes resembles “Kudava’s”.

A week before moving to a new house an “ozks” (a magical ceremony) was performed in honour of the deity of kindred. Festive food was prepared and placed in front of an opening, which led under the stove. People prayed and invited her to move to a new house. By tradition, a special magical ceremony in her honour was performed in autumn after field work was over. A sacrifice was made to her of a cock or a black sheep, which was stuck in the cellar under the floor. People also prepared porridge and “braga” (a home-made alcoholic beverage). At supper they ate the sheep’s head and legs and at the same time said a prayer. They asked the deity of kindred for health, the fertility of cattle and protection against evil, ill-natured people. In several villages, after the rite was over, the mistress took a piece of each dish, gathered all this on a crust of bread and then put on the icon shelf for “Shkay” (the Supreme God). Then the mistress together with two or three members of the family took from the larder new portions of food and went with it to the cellar under the floor. There they fastened a candle to “zavalinka” (a small mound of earth along the walls of a peasant’s house), arranged dishes and repeated the praying. After they returned from the cellar, the family sat at the table and ate. It was considered that the deity could kill the cattle in case she disliked them. So people asked her to accept a new animal and never offend it. A cow that had been bought was led into the yard over a fur-coat spread on the ground, so that she could calve well and be accepted by the deity.

In case people and cattle were often taken ill, in the honour of the deity, a ritual and magic ceremony called “Ven’ ozks”, M., E. (s. Praying at night) was organized at night. It was believed that seeing the deity of kindred is unlucky.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Deity-patroness of the meadow** (Lugáwa, M., E. [lug - meadow, awa - woman, mother]). She has a husband “Lugatya” (atya, M., E. - old man). People prayed and made sacrifices to her when cattle were driven to pasture for the first time in spring. They asked her to protect horses from illnesses and horse-stealers. Before hay was stored for winter every reaper threw several pieces of bread as a sacrifice to the deity of meadow and asked her to be gracious, to protect them during their work against all possible evil. If no praying was performed before making hay or in case somebody fell on the meadow and swore, cakes were made in the deity’s honour. At night people also brought bread and salt to the meadow, begged her to forgive them and asked for health. In a legend recorded in the Krasnoslobodsk district of the Penza province, a young girl gave birth to a son and gave him to the deity of meadow to bring up; later he became her helper.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952.

**Deity-patroness of the pussy-willow** (Vermáwa, M., E. [verma - pussy-willow; awa - woman, mother]) - a female deity, the patroness of the pussy-willow, health, rapid growth, vital power, fertility. By tradition, in honour of the deity of willow on the night of the “Verma holiday”, M., “Er’ba”, E. (Palm Sunday) young people organized a special magical public ceremony called “verban’ salmat”, M. (literally: Palm Sunday klotskas - “kind of dumpling”). The day before, the young girls used to prepare ritual food (klotskas, porridge, pelmens with minced fish, i.e. Sibe-

rian dumplings). About midnight, the tables were laid and candles were kindled before icons. An old woman invited beforehand said the prayer “pazmoro”, E. (“Paz” – god; “moro” – song), and asked the deity to grant the girls health, to protect them from ill fame, to ensure a good harvest, a yield of cattle. Only married people were invited as guests to the party, but after the supper they were driven between two rows of people: young girls and lads whipped them with pussy-willow branches, so that the deity could grant them health and a good harvest.

Before dawn young people with pussy-willow branches in their hands visited homes of those who participated in the party, whipped sleeping people with branches, sang ritual songs wishing them health and a good harvest. After that, they whipped the cattle in the sheds and said spells wishing the cow to have two calves every winter and more milk, wishing the horse to have strong legs and to work much.

Mordvinians believed that pussy-willow branches personified magic power, which could be given to others by striking them with branches. After conversion to Christianity, pussy-willow branches were sanctified in churches. Young pussy-willow branches sanctified on Palm Sunday were kept until the next holiday in the “red corner” near the icons. It was considered that these branches protected against various natural calamities (lightning, hurricanes).

By tradition, the owners whipped the cattle with the sanctified branches on the first day of driving the cattle to pasture in spring. This was done for protective purposes and also to provide a good yield of cattle. These branches were considered to be a good healing remedy and were used for whipping sick children, calves and foals. If children grew slowly, pussy-willow branches were put under their pillows. Under them pieces of thread used for binding warts were also thrown. The latter were thought to disappear after the thread became rotten.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. M., 1966.

**Deity-patroness of some definite place on Earth** (Módawa, M. E. [moda – Earth; awa – woman, mother]) as well as in the next world, the patroness’s of the whole earth (“Mastorava”) helper. Her functions are limited. She was usually addressed in laments and more rarely, in witches’ spells. It is known from folklore sources that she was made sacrifices to when building a town or a church: people cut sacrificial objects (thread, needles) and animals (a horse, a cow, a hen, etc.) into four parts and put them in the four corners of a building. In addition to this, a young girl elected by a village gathering was bricked up in a wall or a tomb. She was allegedly demanded by the deity.

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1966.

**Deity-patroness of the stove** (Pyánakudáwa, Pyátzagodáwa, M., Kástomáva, Ushtomán’ Kirdi, E. [pyanakud, M., kashtom, E. – stove; kud, M. – house; awa, M., E. – woman, mother; ushtoms, M., E. – to heat; kirdi, M., E. – kirdems – to hold]). She is invisible, her dwelling-place is not fixed, it is supposed to be somewhere in the stove. On holidays, in order to gain her favour, Erzians threw the first piece of food into the stove. At Easter a sacrificial drink was poured on the stove and pieces of bread and meat were thrown on red-hot coals. While they were burning, the mistress of the house thanked the deity. Sacrificial grants in honour of the deity of the stove were put in the left corner of the floor of the stove where the temperature was usually higher.

Childless women addressed her as well as those who were injured when doing everyday work near the stove or when they prepared fire-wood for it, brought water, cooked food for remembrance parties. She was also addressed, when a child fell onto the floor or ground. It was considered that in case a child, when falling, hit some of the deity-keepers, he/she was fated to be taken ill. On this occasion, a sorceress performed several magic acts: she went to the cellar

with a bundle of sacrificial grants (hops, millet, a coin), stood in the front corner and moved the bundle three times round the child's head, said a prayer to the deity of the house and then to the deity of the stove.

The deity was conjured in wedding songs of mythological character, which were sung by women before baking ritual loaves of bread and pies so that they could be baked brown and crisp. It was very important for the further ritual acts.

When a young wife moved to her husband's house she was taken to the stove and "introduced" to its deity.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 6. ch. 2. Mokshanskaya svadebnaya poeziya. Saransk, 1975.

**Deity-patroness of the village** (Velyáwa, M., E. [vele - village; awa - woman, mother]). She is thought to be like "Yurkhtawa", deity-patroness of kindred. No other facts concerning her appearance are available; her location is uncertain and vague (somewhere in the village). The deity is on close terms with the dead founders of the village. "Velen' ozks", M., E. (a village magical ceremony) was devoted specially to her. A soft-woollen sheep or an ox was sacrificed to her. While praying to the deity of the village, people asked her to grant health and to protect the village against epidemics, ill-natured people, fire. She was addressed at other magical public ceremonies (s. Holiday of old women's porridge). People believed that when in anger, the deity can take revenge upon people. She has a husband "Velen' otsyunya", M. (otsyunya - big). In one of the mythical songs, villagers were looking for him. Dressed in canvas clothes, he went to a slope of a big ravine and sent curses to the village to ensure there should be no crops or yields of cattle.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-holder of water on the whole Earth** (Véden' kirdi, M., E. [wed' - water; kirdi - is holding], Vedyazorawa, M. [azor, M., E. - host, hostess; awa, M., E. - woman, mother], Ved'mastorava, M., E. [mastor - Earth]) - female deity, keeper of water and rain on the Earth, patroness of all aquatic plants and fish. She is the daughter of "Mastoron' kirdi", the God of the whole Earth. She lives in a faraway land ("Ineved'sa", E. "Otsyuded'sa", M.) - in great water (i.e. sea, ocean). In epic songs, she is an anthropomorphic creature.

According to Nizhni Novgorod Erzian myths, "Paksya Patya", the patroness of fields (the third daughter of Mother of the Gods) gave birth to "Wed'mastorpaz", the deity's husband who helps her govern seas, rivers, lakes, springs, wells and draw-wells. In Mokshan myths, the deity of water is the wife of "Shkay", the God of Time and the Sun. Erzians imagined her as a stout woman in silver clothes with a crucian's tail. She knows the language of fish (and best of all the language of the white roach) as well as roads under the Earth. She announces her arrival to numerous "Wedyáwas", deities of water with bell's ringing. People also can hear it.

When it was raining, Mokshans said, "Véden' kirdi sera putnyay" (the deity's of water semen is falling in drops). That is the reason why young women in rainy weather came out, so that the deity could help them to get pregnant sooner and more easily to give birth to a child. People addressed her not as often as "Wedyawa", the deity of water. But if "Wedyawa" failed to help them, they prayed to the deity of all water asking mostly to cure them of the diseases of the eye. For the same purpose, they went to a spring, said spells, took some water and washed their eyes. To propitiate the deity, they laid the table near the water. Before the ritual meal they performed a praying in which they not only asked for help but also said that they sent a part of the food to her, through the Volga to the sea, where she was already expected and

everybody was singing and dancing.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889.

**Deity of bast and logs** (Keren'-Shochkon'paz, E. [kerno - bast, bark; shochko - log; paz - god], Atayon' Ker'ze, E. [atya - old man]). In folklore the independent existence is not recorded. As a rule, he was addressed during the construction after the deity-patroness of the home, and "Yurtawa", the patroness of the kindred and of the yard with all its outbuildings. When the foundations of a new house were laid, a stone was set in each of its four corners. Some millet, salt, a piece of wax, coals (against a sorcerer, fire) wrapped in a kerchief were placed on the first row of logs in the red corner and a praying in honour of "Yurtawa" and the deity was performed (asking for health, increase of cattle). In their honour after the end of field work a cock was slaughtered (its blood was poured under the sacrificial stone in the yard) and a praying was performed in which a plentiful life was requested. The deity of bast and logs was addressed in Erzian wedding songs and charms.

Lit.: UPTMH. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno - obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity of Fire** (Tólpáz, E.). In myths, he is imagined wearing a red shirt and trousers, dancing, playing when it is not windy. He is strong, does people good, but may also do harm in case he gets angry. He is afraid of nobody and nothing except water. In a praying devoted to him, it is said that he was born from running water.

People made a sacrifice of a red cock to him.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiosen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Deity of frost, old man-frost** (Kél'me átya, M., Átyapáz, E. [atya, M., E. - old man, husband; kel'me, M., E. - cold, frost; paz, E. - God]). According to popular beliefs, he can be both good-natured and cruel. He lives in a house made of ice; his favourite place is behind the chimney. In fairy-stories, he tries to repay people with good because once he did them harm, i.e. he froze their crops.

He is worshipped on the Thursday before Easter. In order to win his favour, people offered him flour "kissel", which was placed on a window-sill in every house. At the same time people asked him to preserve crops and prevent a human person from dying of cold.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889; UPTMN. T. 3, ch. 1. Mokshanskíe skazki. Saransk, 1966

**Deity of heaviness** (Stákapáz, Kézheypáz, E. [staka - heavy; kezhey - wicked, malicious]). His main function is to hold heavy objects and to bear earthly burdens, to provide people with everything good and light in their life. He was most often prayed to during the epidemics of catching diseases. By tradition, before sowing early crops in honour of the deity a praying was performed. The leader of the rite, "Staka atya", M., E. (atya - old man) was elected for seven years. He remained for the next term in case there were good harvests and no epidemics while he was on duty. "Staka atya" said a prayer asking for a good crop. He also asked to remove the burden from the village and grant relief. As a sacrifice a black hen or a white ox was killed. In some villages there were no sacrifices.

Lit.: p 257 Harva U. Die religiosen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 7., ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-patron of pigs** (Túvon' paz, E. (tuvo – pig; Paz – God). In the structure of traditional Mordvinian culture, he was associated with the ritual animals that personified the fertility of Earth and domestic animals. In honour of the patron, as a rule, on New Year' Day the Erzians performed a special praying with the observance of all directions and magic rituals (people spread straw on the floor of the cattle-shed and at home; a pig chosen for a sacrifice was fed with special food and kept at home for a certain period of time, etc.).

When praying, Mordvinians asked the deity to protect pigs against wolves and losses, to grant an increase of cattle. The master of the house together with his children went in the yard around a ritual stone, the cattle-shed and the pigsty with a pig's head in his hands. A child with a pig's tail in his mouth went in advance and threw grains in front of his father. After a family meal, the mistress buried the pig's ears and the tip of the snout in the front corner of the house, the pig's head being put under the threshold of the door.

On New Year's Day and at Christmas, it was common among Mokshans to serve a boiled pig's head and boiled legs, which symbolized fertility and wealth. The Christmas house holiday (s. Christmas house) included several rites devoted to a pig, i.e. a ritual dance that was accompanied with the dancing tune "Tuva", M. (a pig) and the game "driving sucking-pigs out of the house".  
Lit.: Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-patron of the sacred place where magical ceremonies were performed** (Keremet' paz, E. [Keremet' – proper noun, paz – God]). In the Bugulma region (the village of Bokla), people made a sacrifice to him on the last Sunday before Whitsunday. They gathered for magical ceremonies on a glade near a spring and killed a sacrificial ox and four sheep. An old man said a prayer. The deity was asked for a blessing that would provide people with good reason, health and a bumper harvest. People also asked to protect them against premature death and their village against the evil spirit, wind, hail, etc. In their prayer they glorified his abilities. Like other deities, he can do people both good and harm. He can fly, walk, he is able to drive people mad and deprive them of strength in their legs.

Lit.: UPTMH. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendaro-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-patron of Water on the whole Earth** (Véd'mástorpáz, E. [ved' – water; mastor – Earth, Paz – god]). By tradition, in honour of him a magical ceremony was organized (usually on September 15 or the next Friday after this date). A sacrifice of a goose was made whose head was thrown into the water. The head was to be torn off, but not cut off. The rest of the bird was eaten by the family.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889.

**Deity-patron of the whole Earth** (Mástoron' kirdi, M., E. (mastor – land, country; kirdi, M., E. – is holding). He is created by the Supreme God and he is his helper. The deity is eternally young, he constantly struggles against evil; reigns in the world and governs it. In several sources, the deity-patroness of earth is considered to be his wife, in others – "Azorawa" (the goddess of fertility and life). He has many daughters: deities of baths, forest, water, kindred, home, etc. He is sometimes called "Kanay", "Kiday" or "Soltan". He was asked for help in Erzian spells used as a remedy for injuries.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889; Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952.

**Deity of wind and air** (Vármápáz, E. [varma, M., E. – wind, Paz, E. – God]), the son of “Wiryava”, deity of woods. He opened a new road with his breath, which was hitherto unknown. His birth was conditioned by “Chipaz’s” (the God of the Sun) only glance.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889.

**Deity-patroness of water, marriage and childbirth** (Wedyáwa, M., E. [wed’ – water; awa – mother, woman]). The Mordvinians thought that every river, lake or spring has its own deity.

There exists a legend of the deity’s origin. The deuces decided to make a throne for themselves in Heaven. The angel sent by God failed to push them down. Only the archangel Michail succeeded in it: with his sword’s end, on which there was a cross, he pushed them down from Heaven. Those who fell into the water, turned into the deities; those who fell on a dry ground – remained deuces.

Mokshans and Erzians imagined her as a young, tall woman with fair hair reaching to her knees. Her image is dual: she is endowed both with positive and negative features. She has a husband – “Wedyatya”, M., E. (atya – old man, husband) with a long silver-grey beard. His functions are limited. As a rule, they are not seen together. People see her naked at night or late in the evening; more seldom – with a bucket in her hand or with a Mordvinian folk-shirt on, called “panar”, M.; she usually splashes with water or combs her hair.

According to a popular belief, the deity and her husband live in deep waters, where they draw people who are destined to drown. At this moment, she is cross and angry. If a person happened to succeed in saving his/her own life, he/she was obliged to thank the deity, to bow to her and throw money and some millet into the water. After that it was necessary to go to a crossroad with a sorceress (to get forgiveness, absolution). If it was an expectant mother, the violation of this rite could cause the child’s death during childbirth or the child could become dumb in the future.

After bathing in a river, its deity could cause an aquatic disease – “narfott”, E. In order to propitiate her, people organized magical ceremonies in her honour and gave her various presents (canvas, linen, kerchiefs) and sacrificed a hen. Early in the morning a sick man went to a spring together with a sorceress and asked the deity to forgive him, then the sorceress said a spell pleading to take his illness from him and grant him health. At last they left a packet of salt, bread and millet at the river and left without turning their heads.

In order to accustom a young wife to a river or a spring and to introduce her to the deity, on the second day of the wedding a daughter-in-law was taken to a river where a praying was organized in the deity’s honour. By tradition, the daughter-in-law was to throw a ring into the water, and elderly people – a cookie. In addition to this, the newly-weds prayed to her for children. Afterwards they went secretly to a river, sacrificed bread, salt, beef, canvas to her; they also ate a part of the food when they were sitting on the river bank putting their arms round each other and calling the deity.

A praying to the deity of water was performed on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after Easter (a big burning sheaf and eggs were thrown into the water). Young lads, who were going to get married in the current year and women dreaming of children dipped into the water. Mordvinians supposed that rains also depended on the deity. That was the reason why in the drought they performed a special praying. Villagers went to a spring, “woke” her and asked her for rain. Then they splashed with water and threw water at each other. They ate the ritual food that they had taken with them and invited the deity. Sometimes they put eggs into the river for her.

People addressed the patronesses of water in spells aimed at bewitching a beloved person: so

that a husband could love a wife and a wife could love a husband; a lad could love a lass and a lass could love a lad. She was prayed to for health before high water on the river, people sacrificed a hen and sang songs of supplication (oznomat, E.), asking her not to be angry with them.

In folklore, the deity of water reveals herself as the patroness of fish, a man's tutoress who urges him to give up fishing and take up farming. In mythological songs, she is inclined to anthropophagi, she is insidious and crafty and she demands a sacrifice of a human being or at least his/her things. As a ransom for a hero's life, she demands his daughter or son. In addition, she wanted people to make sacrifices when they built a mill on a river. Young girls sometimes happened to drown at the construction site; in this case a diver was hired to negotiate with the deity.

Lit.: Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendar-no-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Deity-patroness of the whole Earth** (Mastoráwa, M., E. [mastor - land, country; awa - woman, mother]) - deity-patroness of Earth, land, country. In Mordvinian pre-patriarchal mythology, she is a polyfunctional and, in many respects, an amorphous image, but at the same time a humane one. The deity holds the whole Earth's burden, possesses a fruitful power that produces all necessary things for people, for everything living and lifeless. She is invisible; she goes over the ground and under it. Sometimes she is interpreted as a masculine origin. "Mastoron' Kirdi" is considered to be her husband. In a mythical song, she is ugly with a black face, long nose and thick lips. In honour of the deity various magical ceremonies were performed. A black hen was usually sacrificed to her. In the rites before a sowing campaign people asked her for a heavy crop, health; in autumn people thanked her for a good harvest. In addition to this, the deity of earth was addressed with the request to cure a disease that was caused by Earth: injuries, chill, etc. It was believed that she could make one suffer from a disease. In this case people went to a crossroads ("ki rashka", M. "ki rashkov", E.), where a sorceress said a prayer and a spell, so that the deity could forgive sick persons and cure their diseases. People kissed the soil three times, threw a small packet of millet and hops over their left shoulder and returned home without turning back.

The patroness of earth can demand obedience, punish and even take man's life. During the period of forcible conversion to Christianity, people's attitude towards her changed. Several myths were reinterpreted, e.g. myths of the world's origin, of the Deluge, three gigantic fish holding the Earth, etc. In songs, the deity of earth and other heathen deities show their anger to people that proved to be false and betrayed them. At the deity's of earth request the Erzian son of the God "Nishkepaz" informs people through a hawk, his messenger, that deities will either flood or burn the Earth in order to kill the ungrateful people and populate the Earth with a new people. She asks the gods to bring down their wrath on people for their apostasy and at the same time she weeps for people, for their happiness, which they lost because with their new faith they have no longer rich crops and yields of cattle.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1966; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981.

**Deity-patroness of wind** (Warmava, M., E. [warmá - wind; awa - woman, mother]). Mordvinians thought that the deity was endowed with destroying or, on the contrary, a salutary and beneficial power. She has no arms, legs, wings, she is speechless, but when she calls somebody, her whistling is heard a long way off. According to myths, she was considered to be a sister of the deities of harvest ("Norowawa", E.) and woods ("Wiryawa", M., E.). She sleeps in calm

weather and gets up in bad weather. There exist different versions concerning her place of residence: in Heaven, in four tubs placed at the corners of the world, on the other side of the sea. The deity keeps the wind under lock and key but from time to time lets it out. She has several sons who live in tubs. Should she only cast a glance, her son-wind flies out of his tub. People thought that when the deity called her children, the wind blew with a whistle, when her children played, it was blowing a gale, when she covered them with blankets there was ground wind. One of the myths tells us about men who were making hay on a meadow and met her children who looked like cold creatures. The men put them in a cart and wanted to take them to the village. But suddenly wind rose and became so violent that the men could not go further.

The patroness of wind was prayed to on many holidays and at various sacrificial ceremonies. In addition to this, a special magical ceremony was devoted to her, in which she was asked not to allow the wind to blow the ripening fields. A speckled hen was sacrificed to her. In order to propitiate her, people addressed her kneeling with their hands raised, they promised to glorify her, if the wind went down. Gardeners also prayed to her and besides she was prayed to when many houses were on fire. People tried to stop the wind by throwing an addled egg or an apple that was picked on Transfiguration Day.

It was considered that the deity of wind could cause a disease. Sometimes sorcerers let their evil winds out. Where the wind was blowing, it meant that people could be harmed there. It was considered that skin, nervous and other diseases (pinen'kcha, M., - a sty; lifkssa, M. - smallpox; akshesa, M. - leukaemia, etc.) were connected with "varman' saf syaryademasta", M. (an illness caused by the wind). In this case, a sick man was taken to a crossroads "proshchengas", M. (to be forgiven, absolved).

It was considered that linen gone with the wind (and particularly "shary davol", M. - with the whirlwind) received a magic impact. One could "shary ili trnay pryaks arams", M. (literally: fall ill with fever or giddiness). Such things were spoilt or buried. The whirlwind was considered to be a sorcerer's game. One should throw a knife at the whirlwind in order to stop it - thus people stabbed the sorcerer or they said three times: "Tsyur, tsyur, tsimbirkas' syavonzot", M. (Fains, fains, may the Siberian ulcer take you). A sudden blast of wind at the window was associated with bad news (usually connected with somebody's death). In omens, strong wind meant changing weather; a warm wind on Annunciation Day - warm summer; from what side it was blowing on that day - it will blow the whole summer from there, if Eudokia's Day (March 14) is windy, the coming spring will be cold.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen, Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Deity-patroness of woods** (Wirjawa M., E. [vir' - wood, forest; awa - woman, mother]). In Erzian mythology, she is the fourth daughter of the Goddess-mother of the Gods "Ange Patyay". Mordvinians thought that every forest had its own patroness. She is seldom seen by people, usually at noon or before sunset. Descriptions of her appearance vary. When seen in a forest, she seems to be of large stature, nearly the height of a tree. When crossing a field, she is only as tall as the stubble, very slim, with long dark hair falling beneath her waist and very big breasts drooping beneath her knees or even swung onto her back. She is sometimes imagined as lying prone over a river with her arms on the one bank and her legs on the other. She is also thought to have only one leg but in spite of this fact, she is not lame. The number of the deities constantly increases at the expense of cursed children and suicides.

According to myths, the deity's skin is considered to be like fish scales (mostly a beluga's or white sturgeon's scales). She has one eye on the top of her head; her mouth resembles a

man's mouth though with very big teeth which are rather like the teeth of a harrow. She can also change into a hare. Sometimes she is seen in a white shirt or a Mordvinian folk-dress (both Mokshan and Erzian).

According to myths, her son was nearly killed by the deuce. She is very strong, she fells several trees at one blow. If she happens to sit in a cart, the horse cannot move. The deity goes through a forest with great noise; she laughs so boisterously that leaves fall. She also shouts and whistles so loud that trees bow before her. Mordvinians believe that seeing the patroness of woods is a bad omen. In the forest also lives "Wiryatyá" (atya - old man, husband) - the deity's husband. When Mordvinians prayed to her they raised hands over their heads 30 times (in honour of her 30 sisters).

She is considered to be a good deity, she keeps order in the forest. If someone gets lost, she can help to find the way though she remains invisible at that moment. However, she can confuse a man in a forest and make him lose his way. In this case, he must pray to her and ask her to help him find the way. People also ask the deity to show them where berries and mushrooms grow. She is prayed to for health as well (if someone fell ill in a forest) or for help to find stray cattle or a missing man, etc. As a rule, she is a good helper in these cases.

According to Mordvinian views, the deity of woods protects animals from hunters. She is also thought to be a great lover of tales and stories. She may delight in listening to them and forget about her concern for animals and birds. Sometimes she even falls asleep. Thus, hunters used to profit by this weak point of hers. One of them usually narrated stories near the fire while the others were hunting.

Besides good, the deity can do people harm: to lull a person to sleep or to cause a disease. When meeting people she may ask: "Kot' ili pot'?" (kot', M. - kot'koftoms, M - to tickle; pot', M. - potyaftoms, M. - to give a baby [or someone else] the breast). She could tickle a person to death. She could also change into fire. One should go from her backwards with one's face to the place where her laughter is heard or she herself appears. In this case, she will tread in a man's tracks but will fail to find him. The deity is afraid of cats, dogs and a knout (a whip). One should guard oneself against her with the smoke of birch bark.

In fairy-stories her mythological image is transformed. She is defeated by a young hero who managed to outwit her. He squeezed her hands in the chinks of a stump and asked for her daughter's hand.

According to informants, nowadays the deity is afraid of people and seldom appears before them.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983. Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya skazka. Saransk, 1947.

**Deuce** (Shyáytan, M., Sháytan, E., Shishma, E., Idemevs', E.) - in Mordvinian mythology, he is a hater and bitter enemy of the good, the antipode of the Supreme God "Shkabavaz", M. (Shkay), the creator of evil spirits, the deuce who originates (according to Mokshans and Erzians) from different sources. The mythological plots of the Erzians of the Samara province, run that he was born by "Chipaz's", the God of the Sun, spit produced in vexation, and his stroke of the rod. Deuce agreed to help the God of the Sun to create the world out of the sand that he had brought up (after changing into a duck) from the bottom of the sea. Because of his pride he did not follow exactly the God's directions and the latter cursed him and sent him to hell under the bottom of the sea so that he might stay there forever and feel unhappy.

According to the Mordvinians of the Simbirsk and Penza provinces, deuce suggested that the God of Sun should rest for a while and he, being young and energetic, would rule the world

that they had created. The God cursed him in response to this suggestion and drove him into an abyss. Deuce got angry with him and remained a bitter enemy of the good forever. According to the Mokshan version, the Supreme God, "Shkabavaz", created deuce as his own helper but the latter rose in opposition to his creator and was driven out of the Upper abode to the Earth, where watermills, smithies, marshlands, crossroads, etc. became his dwelling-place.

Deuce is an ancient mythic image, appearing before people as an eagle-owl, owl, wild-boar, stone, bat and later as the deuce and the ruler of the dead. He is imagined in the black and the dark-red which reveals his demonic, uncontrolled temper. According to the myths of Teryukhans and some of the Erzians of the Nizhni Novgorod and Simbirsk provinces, he participated in creating primitive man together with the God of the Sun (s. man).

Mordvinians thought that because of his malice deuce did his best in order to spoil every creation of the Supreme God. While the latter was away, he came to the gate of Paradise and, having deceived the dog, penetrated there and covered the human body with spittle all over, except the tips of his fingers and toes. The human skin was originally horny and the Supreme God failed to clean it out of the spittle, so he had to turn it inside out.

Deuce constantly gives people pains and troubles: induces them to commit sins, makes drunkards lose their way, frightens them when he appears suddenly before them (hairy, horned and tailed) near neglected smithies or in places where people were once killed. According to a popular belief, black clouds in the sky, winds, storms, and severe frosts are also his deeds. It is common to believe that a whirlwind is his game and humours. He creates evil ghosts which cause people and cattle illnesses, he sends worms, locusts and bad weather to fields, teaches people to do wicked deeds, etc. It is considered that human evil originates from deuce.

According to a popular belief, if one casts a net for the first time without having prayed, deuce will come out to the river bank looking like a human being and will wait. Should one throw him several fish - he will leave, if not - he will clap his hands, whistle and scare the fish away.

In some fairy-tales, he begins to live in a human soul and in this case the body is taken ill and there is no possibility for a person to recover until he leaves the body of his own free will.

Deuce is equal to Mother of the Gods and therefore is always opposed to her, because she carries on the unending struggle with evil. In myths, the Goddess and deuce strike fire out of two flints that they found on Earth. Nonetheless, the former took a steel rod (for kindling fire) from her father, the God of the Sun, and the flint - from her son "Nishkepaz". Thus, from the fire struck by them both good and evil spirits increase in number, just as people, animals and plants propagate themselves.

Deuce has 13 daughters (12 fevers and one chicken pox), the number of his sons is unknown. His daughters give people no rest.

In several plots of legends, he made a man plant hops, taught him to brew beer, to make mead and wine and this caused hard drinking. People incited by him killed the Erzian "Nishkepaz", the son of the God.

Deuce strives to take possession of human souls. It is customary to believe that witches sell their souls to deuce, who helps them in witchcraft. Suicides are thought to be guided by him. In folklore materials, which originate from Mordvinian mythology, he, having got into a hollow tree, and having assumed the aspect of a serpent, indulged in mimicking "Pur'ginepaz", E. (the God of Thunder) and the latter killed him for that. If someone managed to kill deuce his blood was thought to take fire, and the place, where he had hidden caught fire. Thus, it was not allowed to say the name of deuce aloud during a thunderstorm (people used to say "tonat", "nonat" [those, others] because they were afraid to be struck by lightning). He is particularly dangerous at the period of time from midnight until the first cock's crow and at noon. At this

time people refrained from starting a journey. In order to protect a house from deuce, on the night of Easter people went round it three times with a candle and a loaf of bread in their hands; on Epiphany Day they drew crosses on the doors and windows with a piece of coal. It was believed that to sledge on Epiphany Day meant to break his legs, to make bonfires in the evening meant to singe his legs.

To this day deuce's name is mentioned in spells, fortune-telling and curses. If someone happened to prick a finger with a needle, he/she used to say "Shyayatan sedis pezolet", M. (may this stick into the deuce's heart).

Lit.: Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964; UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Dream** (on, M., E.) – images experienced when being asleep. The Mordvins considered dreams to be a fantastic reflection of the past, present and future of a human being, a link between the earthly world and the other world. It was believed that a person's soul, when the individual is asleep, wanders all over the world and God shows that person his/her life. The Mordvins attached great significance to the interpretation of dreams. It is possibly connected with their extraordinary inclination for superstitions. Many villages had "soday lomatt", M. (competent people), i.e. readers of dreams, who knew everything that took place in the other world. They were identified with magicians and witches. This polyfunctional ability of theirs originates from myths. The readers of dreams were considered to be intermediaries between the sacral sphere and the profane one.

Up to the present day, dreams are divided into prophetic, partly prophetic and vain. Their trustworthiness was thought to depend on the days of the week. Dreams that people had on the night of Monday, Thursday and Friday were considered true. A dream on the night of Sunday can come true only in the morning. Dreams that people had before main religious holidays and on the night of the 13-14<sup>th</sup> of January (New Year's Day according to the old style) can come true during a year.

Great significance in reading and interpreting dreams was attached to human names endowed with a certain symbolism (in the structure of the Mordvinian traditional culture a human name was supposed to deal with a person's fate and was even identified with its bearer). Up to now, a person's health is defined by a dream. In general outline, reading dreams ranges between two notions "lucky" and "unlucky" (diseases, death, marriage, news, guests, journey, poverty, wealth).

Reading dreams often occurs in songs and seems to be aimed at introducing a listener into mythological time and space. A young fellow has a prophetic dream before a change of his fate, e.g. before joining the army, and a girl before her marriage. The protagonist addresses his mother, daughter-in-law, sister telling them about what he had experienced when he had a dream. In songs, a prophetic dream usually betokens death, marriage or imposes a ban on some of the protagonist's actions that might cause misfortune.

To protect oneself from a misfortune predicted by a dream, the Mokshans and Erzians resorted to verbal spells and charms or some protective mythical acts: they put the third finger between two window panes and said to themselves, "Let the dream go away through the window" or "Let the dream follow the night". So people even nowadays try to keep their dreams to themselves. In this case they are said not to come true.

Lit.: Devyatkina T. P. Tainy snov. Saransk, 1995.

**Duck** (yáksyarga, M., yáksyargo, E.) – a totem bird. In myths, it is connected with water, earth, the nether world (it dives to bring up a lump of silt, s. the Supreme God), air, the sky. The

mythoepic image of duck brooding eggs in its nest is not only a Mordvinian, but also a common Finnic one.

She is notable for her unusual beauty. Her description is brimming with mythological symbols: she has gilded legs, on her wings there is something like a coin with patterns, the wings having golden edges, her feathering resembles coins, on her back there are tsar's signets, the head is of silver; the beak and feet are made of copper, her wings crescent-shaped. She radiates unusual light, it is majestic and sublime. Duck is related to people (she is a bewitched woman). She is sometimes ranked as a bird of "Verepaz", E. (the Supreme God) or of "Viryawa", the deity of the forest.

Duck is imagined as a human being (a young girl), who assumed the aspect of a bird, forbidden for hunting. The man, who killed it and thus violated the ban of his kin, commits a grave crime. Duck is an adopted or an unloved daughter cursed by her step-mother. She has to assume the aspect of a bird until she gets married. In songs devoted to the bird, people's relation to their kindred totems is reflected.

Duck's murder is condemned; the perpetrators of the crime are punished (morally and physically). In some mythic songs, a young hunter at her request does not kill her (but marries her); in others, a hunter (a married man) kills her without paying attention to her request. He does it in spite of the fact that she warns him of many misfortunes (his family will perish with her, he will lose his crops) because she is not a duck but a messenger of the Erzian Supreme God ("Verepaz").

In myths, duck is a donor of life in the first place and a bird in the second. When a hunter kills such a duck, he is struck by her moaning, the quantity of blood and feather of this bird. Lit.: UPTMN. T. 1. Epicheskie i liro-epicheskie pesni. Saransk, 1963; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964.

# E

**Egg** (al, M., E.) according to people's beliefs, it expresses the vital origin and possesses a magic power of fertility and protection. An egg was an obligatory ritual food at magical ceremonies. According to a custom of the Mordvinians, the first egg, laid by a hen, was taken with a mitten and rolled in a sieve. The first laid eggs were also weighed and fixed in loops on a stick, which afterwards was fixed half way along a knife's edge. People watched and made conclusions: if the first egg was heavier, they began their spring sowing in the first term, if the second egg was heavier - in the second term, if the third - in the third term. When sowing, people threw boiled eggs into the furrow, so that grains would be as big as eggs. When cattle were first driven to pasture, the shepherd was handed an egg, so that the cattle could breed well and always return home from pasture. For magic and propitiatory purposes people used coloured eggs.

The eggs, which were laid on the day of the goddess-mother of the Gods (syomik), were coloured in onion-skins and called "golden". They were kept safe and in case of a fire people threw them into the fire, for the flame to become smaller and for the wind to change direction. They were put in forest trees for bees to swarm better. After they were crumbled with prayers in the goddess-mother of the Gods honour, they were fed to young chicks so that they could lay many eggs when grown up. Women who could not give birth to a child or whose children died in the crib ate golden eggs. In the periods of losses and diseases of cattle (particularly sheep) crumbled eggs were put in sheds, while the cattle were being fumigated with the smoke of eggshells and onion-skins. When relieving somebody of harm, healers also used eggs. The water, in which people steamed birch sauna whisks on Christmas Eve and where they put several eggs, was later used to wash children's cradles and sprinkle women in childbirth. An egg was handed to children through the window when they were singing Christmas carols. An egg was also put into the mouth of a pig's boiled head.

At Eastertide coloured eggs were put on the window-sills for gods as well as behind the icon for protecting each member of the family. People kept an eye on them and concluded: if the egg became rotten before the next Easter, someone would fall ill or die. Coloured eggs, and also those which were used during the village magical ceremony (Holiday, magical ceremony of the village s.), were thrown into fires in order to put them out when the house happened to catch fire.

The eggshells, after the chicks had hatched, were strung on a splinter for protective purposes. It was forbidden to hand an egg to a person standing on the other side of a path, because after that, hens were thought to be lost. The first egg, laid by a hen, was never put under a brood-hen again, as it was considered hollow. It was forbidden to crack eggs against a table before eating (a bad omen). Nevertheless, by tradition (as a wish of good health) sometimes an egg was cracked against a child's forehead.

An egg was given to a young couple in response to an invitation to an Erzian wedding-party to symbolize the starting of a new family. The eggs were put in front of them on the second day of the traditional wedding. For the same purpose, on the upper (the twelfth) layer of the major ritual wedding pie ("Luvon' kshi") there were placed four hen's eggs - the fact symbolizing four cardinal points of the world. Eggs were used in funeral ceremonies and in funeral repasts; they were brought to the dead man's house and to the cemetery as a symbol of rebirth and resurrection.

Stale and hollow eggs were used for magic and witchcraft purposes, they were thrown into cowsheds and under the porch in order to cause harm to the household and cattle.

Lit.: Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; Shakhmatov A. A. Mordovskiy etnograficheskiy sbornik. SPb., 1910.

**Earth** (móda, M., E). Mordvinians imagined it as the main power giving birth to everything, all living and dead people's abode. Due to this fact, earth was addressed with respect and caution. According to some myths, it is round, according to others – quadrangular; in each corner tubs are buried, where “Warmawa”, the deity of the wind, lives. Possibly, the idea of four earthly corners is motivated by four cardinal points: the West, the East, the South, and the North.

According to myths, an unusual birch-tree was growing in the center of earth. Three branches of the birch-tree formed its crown and three radicles – its roots. The birch-tree was found by a big bird (God's messenger) who built a nest in its crown, laid three eggs and hatched three sisters-deities: of crops – “Norowawa”, of wind – “Warmawa”, and of woods “Wiryawa”. According to some mythical plots, the Supreme God “Shkay” created earth of sea-silt, according to others – the God of the Sun made it with the deuce's help. The God (“Shkay” or “Chipaz”), looking like a duck, when swimming in the ocean, dived to the bottom (at first there was water everywhere), took a lump of earth in his beak, spat it out and the latter began to grow and increase. Earth has three origins, three abysses. Along its edge, there swim three fish which hold three heavy objects; the eldest fish, a prophetess, is in the East, the middle one is in the center, the youngest fish is in the West, where the sun sets. Earth is considered to have favourable and unfavourable (rotten) places on its surface, which influence kindred, family, domestic cattle, harvest. According to sorcerers' advice, people performed prayings in the unfavourable places and made sacrifices (of pigs, hens) or even left them forever.

On the day of the wedding it was forbidden to pack the bride's things in a house with some earth on the ceiling (it betokened an unhappy life, because people were between two earths: on the ceiling and under the floor). In the bride's laments, earth symbolized death and misfortune. Seeing it in a dream was considered a bad omen. Earth was also used for magic purposes: to cause people harm, illness, etc. In those practices, two footprints left by a person's feet were buried in the grave. It was believed that this magic practice is deadly dangerous. For the same reason earth brought from a cemetery was also used.

It was believed that a man who often stumbled and fell did a lot of evil when living on Earth and therefore “modas' af kirdi esonza”, (earth refuses to hold him up). By Christian tradition, the dead person's body is committed to the Earth.

It is considered till now that the Earth refuses to accept a sorcerer's remains during three years and all this time his soul wanders in sadness all over the world and knows no rest. To work in the garden or field on the Spirits' Day (the Monday after Whitsunday) was seen as a great sin. A special magical ceremony was performed to earth at any time of the year. A black hen was usually sacrificed to it and afterwards people asked it for various comforts (a bumper harvest, health). If someone fell on earth, he was to spit on this spot three times and say, “Etaza – potaza tokafs'”, M. (let the injury wear off).

Lit.: Harva U. Die religioesen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952; UPTMN. T. 1. Epicheskie i liro-epicheskie pesni. Saransk, 1963; T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Enchantress (old woman)** (Yága-bába, M., E.) – popular personage of numerous, mostly Erzian, fairy and fantastic tales based on Mordvinian mythology. She is supposed to be of late origin and is possibly borrowed from Russian fairy-tales.

She is depicted as an ugly old woman with big teeth and long arms and legs, enormous breasts and heavy step. Her approaching is accompanied with sounds and interjections “Kuldor-Kaldor, Kaltsk”, M., E., reminding one of an old cart moving over hummocks and tussocks, pits and bumps. Her horse is a trough, her knout is a pestle, and her reins are a cat's intestines. She has dozens of daughters whom she marries to young valiants born by miracles.

Old enchantress lives far from other people, in the middle of the forest in a dilapidated hut surrounded with tall weeds. Her hut is steady, and thus differs from the Russian one's hut that turns on hen's legs. As a rule, she sits in the front corner of her hut, lies on her bed or stove; her legs are behind the stove and her head is in the front corner, her breasts are thrown over a pole. There is a different description of her: she is as tall as a house, her head is as big as a shed, one foot is on a stove, the other is in front of it. When meeting old enchantress one should call her “Granny” and greet her saying “Syuk” (a bow), otherwise she could tear and swallow you. She makes her captive girls work.

According to some tales, old enchantress leaves her hut very seldom and mainly because of her victim that she has to pursue; in others, she comes home only at night and in the morning goes to the forest again. Her constant dweller is a weasel. The tree that grows near her hut serves as an obstacle for a person pursued by her. She beats a running person, blocks her/his way.

When this personage is depicted in fairy-tales as an evil creature, a man-eater, she is usually slow-witted. A girl puts an aspen log instead of herself near her and the latter eats it thinking that she is eating the girl. She wants to seat a boy and a girl on a spade and put them in the stove to roast and eat them. The children turn out to be more cunning and seat old enchantress in the stove.

Her body and things have magic qualities, a miraculous power preserved even after her death. For instance, her fat can change people (in case they taste it) into a kid or a ram; things can be turned into a kid, cow, ox and other animals. A person can resume his/her former aspect only under some conditions (e.g. after slaughtering a cow one should preserve its horns).

Old enchantress is not constantly depicted as a negative personage, a man-eater. She might also act as a helper, protector, adviser and a prophetess; she helps young fellows fated to die; orphans. She gives a boy a magic clew, guiding thread, which shows him the right way to achieve his object; she repays good for good. In such stories, she is depicted as a less terrible creature; she is only a bony, decrepit old woman in a forest hut, tender and sweet to people.

At present the name of old enchantress is used when scolding ill-natured old women.

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. *Mordovskaya narodnaya skazka*. Saransk, 1974.

**Eastertide** (Óchizhi, M. [otzyu - big; shi - day], Ínechi, E. [ine - great, big; chi - day]) - a Christian holyday (between April 4 and May 8) observed as a remembrance day of Christ's suffering and connected with the myth of his resurrection. Among the Mordvinians, it has been celebrated approximately since the 18<sup>th</sup> century alongside observing heathen rituals.

Easter was personified as a concrete image of a man who rode to people astride a white steed. Nowadays, it is a Mordvinian agricultural holiday devoted to the beginning of field work. This fact is confirmed by the contents of ancient magical ceremony performed on the day (so that the environment could be fertile, men could sow, women - reap and ploughman - be healthy). Traditionally during the Holy Week the mistress of the house or a newly-married couple were honoured.

Preparations for the holiday began a week before it. By tradition, people cleaned the house, did the washing, made a fire in a bath-house; in several villages they did it three times on Holy Wednesday (common baths), on Friday (ancestors' baths), on Saturday (young girls' baths).

Holy Thursday was considered a day of purification. On this day, people bathed in rivers and brooks (Mordvinians thought that spring waters have the quality of purifying external (outward) diseases). After the young girls' bath people used to bake pan-cakes, brew "pure" ("kvass" made of hops); they also coloured eggs in onion-skins, invited forefathers to the house leaving the door slightly open, made the bed on the front bench and served pan-cakes and a boiled pig's head. In the evening, children usually shouted, "Ochizhis' sai ftalga, suvai kutsemalga, ozai ezembryati, kundai tuvon' pryati", M. (Easter Day will come through the back door, climb the staircase and sit in the red (front) corner and will begin eating the pig's head). Going round the house three times in the evening with a candle, icon, and a loaf of bread was considered obligatory (as a protection against the evil spirit or a fire).

On the night of Easter, people did not walk in the streets (because the dead and deuces are walking there at that time), did not ask gods for health (Jews are praying kneeling at that time). People watched and concluded: if the night of Easter is calm and the dogs do not bark, the current year will be lucky: where the dogs bark, the houses will be on fire there; if the dogs bark until midnight, in the first half of the year houses on fire are expected; after midnight - they should be expected in the second half. A moonlit night was thought to betoken a poor harvest, a thunderstorm on the first day of Eastertide - a good harvest, rain - again a poor harvest. According to a popular belief, on the night of Easter horses "speak". On that night, people went to the cemetery to practise fortune-telling: if they heard some noise, it betokened houses on fire. A dream which somebody had on the night of Easter was considered prophetic.

On the first day of Easter, in several villages a magical ceremony was performed in the house where the ritual candle of ancestors was kept and kindled (s. Candle). Near the candle people put "atyan's shapka", M., E. (the ancestor's cap) to gather money and eggs. They prayed first to Easter, and then to the ancestors (thanked them for coming, asked for a bumper harvest and blessing). They also recounted festive ritual dishes (ritual porridge was considered obligatory). The ancestors were asked for protection against all possible evils, for a bumper harvest and yields of cattle. With the candle of the ancestors people went round each house. By custom, a young girl who had got married not long ago, covered the candle with a white kerchief.

Before sunset, people used to see the dead people to the outskirts of the village or to the threshing-floor; they brought a bed for them, a cap with eggs and money, the candle of the ancestors. They treated them to food for the last time, scraped a coin with a knife (it was thought that the dead would have to pay the fare or their lodging for the night) and asked them to go to their places. Following the dead, people fired guns to clear their roads from deuces that, in the Mordvinians' opinion, were afraid of the noise of shooting. They rolled eggs in the direction of the cemetery (for dead children to play in the next world).

By tradition, the festive breakfast consisted of traditional millet pancakes, pies, coloured eggs. Coloured eggs were put near the icons (for health), on the window-sill (for the dead). People used to go about the village and gather eggs (young fellows at sunrise, children in the morning).

People tried to notice and conclude: if a boy enters the house first to glorify Christ, this year will be lucky for the master of the house; if a girl - not quite lucky. In this case a girl was seated on hen's eggs so that the master could have brood-hens enough. It was customary to hand a pancake to the first beggar; he was thought to be Christ himself, who came to glorify. Coloured eggs were thought to have magic properties (s. Egg).

On the day of Easter numerous taboos were observed. It was forbidden to work (it is a sin), to start new affairs, to clip hair, to mourn a dead person who was buried the day. On the contrary, everybody was to have fun, because the deceased was in Paradise. It was not allowed for women to go barefooted (the dead would not be able to enter the house), to remember

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the dead at the cemetery (they come home themselves), to throw something through an open window from Easter until Ascension (one may hit God and be punished by him), to kindle a fire from Easter until the end of the sowing campaign in order to ensure a good harvest.

At Eastertide people used to play with coloured eggs, to swing on the swings, to visit close relatives. In the Erzian village of Kardaflay, the second day of Easter is called “Kuchemlyan’ yakaftoma chi”, E. (the day of treating people to soup; kuchemlya yam – pork soup). A magical ceremony preceded the meal.

When Easter was seen out, people prayed and invited it to sit at the table and share their meal. The ritual of seeing Easter out varies in different places. During the meal at Kardafley, people performed a number of ritual acts: they took a small piece of all dishes, went to the door and asked Easter to leave the house. All the villagers saw it out (people usually went to the outskirts of the village). In several villages, people threw eggs that followed the leaving Easter, fired guns, played, danced, and sang. The loaf of white bread that had been baked specially for the occasion was fed to horses.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

# F

**Fire/flame** (tol, M., E.). The symbolics of fire was dual: on the one hand, it represented the image of a formidable flame, destroyer, death and, on the other hand, the image of light, warmth and the fire purifying various diseases. The “living” fire was practised as a protection for people and animals against the evil spirit and illnesses. By tradition, when burying the deceased, Mordvinians kindled the so-called “od tol”, M. (a new fire), over which all the participants of the funeral procession jumped. After the towels were used in the funeral ceremony, they were shaken over it as well (s. Remembrance party). On New Year’s Day, people also jumped over a fire. When making preparations for a marriage ceremony, Mordvinians moved burning splinters round the tubs before dough was kneaded in them. The same was done with wedding pies lest “dushman” (the evil spirit) should spoil them. The bride’s clothes were held over the fire and in several regions – the wedding wine before serving it.

Magic power was attached to the fire, which was used in the magical ceremony performed in July when the new moon was appearing. In this case, it was looked upon as a means of preserving horses’ health. As a sacrifice, a he-goat was stuck, and horses were driven along the platform placed over a ditch, in which a fire was made by rubbing two wooden bars against each other. This fire was considered sacred and it had been worshipped for a very long time even after Christianity was adopted.

When a magical public ceremony was appointed in honour of kindling a new fire, all villagers were told to extinguish their fire at home with water and take the new fire from the ceremony’s site. This fire was supported all year round. Something similar to the archaic worship of fire can be seen in the ritual of meeting the newly-weds in the bride-groom’s house after marrying in church. People threw under their feet a frying pan with burning coals. It was thought of as a good remedy for protecting the newly-married couple against damage.

Later the symbol of the sacred fire transformed and occurred only as “atyan’shtatol”, M. (the ancestors’ candle) with the help of which people burnt hair on the forehead (men) and on the temples (women) in order to get purified.

As an ancient mythological notion among the Mordvinians there should be regarded the image of a fiery serpent into which the soul of the deceased reincarnated. It penetrated into the house through a chimney and had a sexual connection with his widow.

The blustering fire was pacified with special spells, Easter eggs (s. Egg) and the icon “The burning bush”. A fire caused by lightning was extinguished with the milk of a black cow. The sounds produced by fire made Mordvinians think that there existed the language of fire, allegedly understood by people who are endowed with a particular gift. They can govern it and put it out with the power of their word.

Numerous bans connected with fire were imposed. It was prohibited: for pregnant women to look at it (otherwise pimples might appear or the child’s face would be burnt; he might also be born red-skinned), to do the washing on Friday before Easter lest the fire should get angry, otherwise a fire might break out; from Easter Sunday till the beginning of the sowing campaign it was forbidden to kindle a fire, otherwise the crops would be poor, etc.

Fire was addressed in love magic spells. Dreaming about fire meant quarrels and poverty.

Lit.: Mozharovsky A. Istoriya obrazovaniya prihoda sela Selishch Sergachskogo uezda Nizhegorodskoi eparhii // Nizhegorod. eparh. ved., <sup>1</sup> 20, 1890; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966;

UPTMN. T. 7., ch. 3. Kalendarsno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk. 1981.

**Fortune-telling** (gadádondama, M., gadáyamo, E., orozháyamo, E.) – practices of fortune-telling, a ritual aimed at learning future events by using magic methods and addressing the forces of the other world. Fortune-telling is mentioned in the sources and songs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in obsequial and remembrance rites as well as in heathen rites. Fortune-tellings were mainly individual and more seldom – collective ones. Rather young girls than women practiced them but, as for collective ones (usually concerning the harvest), young lads and men performed them as well.

There existed special and everyday fortune-tellings, sometimes even occasional ones. Special fortune-tellings were performed during heathen ritual and magic ceremonies, later they were timed to chief Christian holidays (“old” New Year, Christmas, Epiphany and sometimes St Peter’s Day – July 12) and to family rituals (weddings, remembrance parties, birthdays, moving to a new house). They were considered to be most precise, revealing people’s fate. It was believed that by using special objects and choosing the right place and time people could establish a specific informational source with the help of their dead ancestors’ ghosts and evil spirits, the connection of our world with the other one and thus receive “signs” of their fate. Because of the mediation of the other world, necessary for learning future events, people estimated special fortune-telling as a fearful practice, concealing a certain sacrament.

The establishment of a very close relationship between the people’s world and the other worlds was a potential danger to cosmic order and earthly harmony. Thus, it was no mere chance that some precautions-protections were taken: a circle was drawn on the ground (Mordvinians thought that it prevented the interference of evil spirits) and people lay inside it for performing fortune-telling. Every action was completed very quickly so that the evil spirit could not strangle the performer (a prolonged contact was therefore forbidden). Thus, it was a reason for a looking glass to be broken after seeing a promised husband in it. At the same time special fortune-tellings were regarded as an ordinary and traditional practice and not a sinful one.

When performing special fortune-telling aimed at discovering contacts with supernatural forces, special magic methods were used: the performers loosened their hair and belts, took off adornments (after the conversion to Christianity, also a body cross so that the evil spirit could help). It was performed in silence, the place of it was approached secretly so that none could see, because coming across a stranger betokened a failure. The last fact had no bearing on special cases that had been planned beforehand (e.g. fortune-telling aimed at finding out a future husband’s name with the participation of a stranger). As a rule, dark, “unclean” places were chosen for fortune-tellings (a bath-house, a cow-shed) and also border spaces (gates, draw-wells, crossroads; the last were deeply symbolic). Late evening and midnight were thought to be the most favourable period of time for it. Early morning (before sunset) was used more seldom and particularly for summer fortune-tellings. The greater part of fortune-tellings was performed at Christmas. The most typical ones were connected with marriages, life and death, wealth and poverty, a good and bad harvest. Various methods of forecasting were used: with the help of ashes (the person is sure to die, if his/her ash-hill is scattered), melted tin and lead (if a circle appears, a young girl will get married; if a cross appears, it means death). Some other objects were also used: cookies, crumbs, bread (the person, whose cookie was pierced, was fated to die in the current year), hair (if the hair disappears from the platband, it is a sign of death), a mirror (a young girl could see a promised husband), etc.

When fortune-tellings were connected with marriages, young girls tried to find out their future husbands’ financial position (if something hairy and shaggy touched the girl’s hand which she thrust through the smoke-window of a bath-house, it meant a rich husband), the colour

of hair (if in a shed a girl tore a flock of white wool from a sheep, it betokened a fair-haired husband; a black flock meant a dark-haired husband).

The future place of residence after marriage was found out judging by knocking (people knocked at the gates with a spoon); dog's barking (a girl will marry a fellow from the side where dogs are barking at the moment), rubbish thrown over gates. The number of future children was defined by the number of knots in a log taken from stacks of fire-wood. Dead relatives' ghosts were also invited to participate in fortune-telling: a book tied up with a ribbon was held suspended and at the same time questions were asked; if the answer was "yes", the book turned.

Several types of fortune-telling were connected with throwing things over one's head (people defined the place of residence after marriage by a sauna whisk, thrown after it had been steamed with). People used to define luck and happiness by the imprint of a body left on snow (if someone stepped on it, there would be no luck).

Methods of forecasting the future harvest were very numerous: judging by a stalk (young fellows and men stood with their backs to a stack and took a stalk with their mouths; the number of grains on it meant the number of measures of corn for each member of the family), by hail (women left sheaves of different kinds of corn outside for a night; the sheaf covered with hail more than the others indicated the kind of corn that would provide a good harvest the next year), by the sound heard from a distance (people lay inside a circle drawn on the ground with the help of a birch sauna whisk, broom or a spade in order to protect themselves against evil spirits and listened: if they heard the sound of a cart loaded with a lot of sheaves, it meant a good harvest); by eggs (s. Egg). People used to define weather by doves that they let out on Epiphany Day (where they fly, from there it will rain), etc.

A fortune-telling called "kulkhtsontsdoma", M. (performed by ear) were widespread: a dog's bark, noise from a cemetery betokened a house on fire, the sound of an axe meant death, the squeak of a cart – a journey, singing – a wedding, weeping – misfortune. In addition to this, people often went to listen to the sounds under the windows of neighbouring houses; sometimes they even entered the houses, but did not speak to anyone, only listened. They interpreted what they heard according to the subject: good news meant happiness, bad news – misfortune. Fortune-tellings connected with dreams were traditional. Under their pillows, young girls put various magic objects (a key, a lock, a looking-glass, a comb) that could ensure a prophetic dream. If they wanted to see a promised husband, they locked a draw-well and put the key under the pillow. For the same purpose oats were poured in one's bosom or a lock was put under a pillow; afterwards such spells were said: "Katk vasyaze-polaze onz shovori", M. (let me dream about my promised husband).

Some facts of fortune-tellings taking place during wedding ceremonies are also known; some of them are connected with omens. In a bathhouse, young girls used various magic methods trying to define their future husband's temper: if the steam hisses loud on the stones, the husband will be hot-tempered, if not – a girl was marrying a man of gentle disposition. The husband's character was also defined by cakes which were placed in front of the Erzian bride during the wedding ceremony: if she took a cake filled with hops, her husband would be a drunkard, with wool – a rich man, with salt – her life would be sad. In church, people tried to notice whose candle was burning faster: this person was fated to die sooner. Some methods were used to define the birth of a future child; people tossed up a loaf of bread that had already been used in the ritual of giving a new name to the bride, if it fell on the ground with the side where it was cut, a girl was expected to be the first child. The bride and the bride-groom's temper was defined by natural phenomena: thunder and wind (if the wind blows hard on their wedding day, they are hot-tempered, if it thunders – they are angry).

There exist many fortune-tellings which are connected with funeral ceremonies (s. death), the birth of a future child (s. birth), house-warming parties. They were widely spread in house-keeping (e.g. when planting cabbage young girls sometimes planted together three cabbage plants on purpose, giving them the names of their bride-grooms; the girl was supposed to marry the fellow whose plant grew better; when going to the forest to gather strawberries people tossed up a mug, if it fell upside down, it would remain empty, if it fell on the bottom, it would be filled to the brim. There occur also occasional fortune-tellings (if one is sitting between two persons having the same name one's desire is sure to come true).

Lit.: Shakhmatov A. A. Mordovsky etnografichesky sbornik. SPb., 1910; Devyatkina T. Ī. Narodnye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

**Funeral repast, remembrance party** (pomínkat, M., E.). It is a kind of feast organized in honour of dead people and aimed at their immortalization. It is also a form of worshipping dead ancestors. The party reveals the Mordvinian belief in the other (the next) world, in the earthly character of dead people's vital requirements, in the mythic link between the dead and the living. According to heathen rituals, it was celebrated six times in succession on Saturdays. After the introduction of Christianity, remembrance days were celebrated according to the customs of the Russian Orthodox Church (the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup>, and the 40<sup>th</sup> days after the person's death). Nonetheless, in several regions of residence of Mordvinians (Mokshans, Erzians) the influence of paganism still remains. Thus, in the Tambov province, the 5<sup>th</sup> day was also observed in addition to the traditional remembrance days. In the Saratov province, it was customary to keep awake all night before P. In many villages food for the dead was prepared laid on a window-sill on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.

The most prominent was the remembrance party of the 40<sup>th</sup> day called by the Erzians "kulyñ' pora" (the time of the dead). It was considered that the soul of a dead person stayed at home during 40 days, it ate and drank with all the relatives and only after this spell of time did it pass on to the next world. It is said in laments that one of God's angels comes to take the dead man's soul to Heaven, where a special place is given to it. Numerous bans were observed up to the 40<sup>th</sup> day: it was prohibited to sweep the floor so as not to hit the dead person's feet, to cover a child's cradle with something so as not to hit the dead person with the coverlet when swinging the cradle. In the Gorodishche district, a cup and a spoon were preserved on the table for the deceased up to this day. The whole procedure of the 40<sup>th</sup> day was the same as on other days; only in the end the deceased was seen off from the house. Various rituals were performed in this connection; they had local variants and peculiarities among the Mokshans and the Erzians.

On the eve of the party, the Mokshans of the Tambov province rode a dead man's horse to the forest in order to cut down a tree in front of which the horse stopped. At home "vastomaza mokor" (a stump to sit on) was separated from it so that a man playing the dead man's role could be seated on it (s. Deceased deputy). In the Saratov province, before the party people rode a horse to the cemetery to invite the dead man and the ancestors home. For the dead man a bed was prepared and afterwards a person playing the dead man's role was seated on it. Sometimes before it a fire was made in the bath-house and the dead as well as the ancestors were invited to wash there (for this purpose Mordvinians scraped a coin and called each by name). This procedure was aimed at washing off death, gaining the ancestors' favour after they had been asked to receive the deceased.

By tradition, on the 40<sup>th</sup> day a sacrificial animal was killed: in honour of a dead man there was made a sacrifice of a ram or an ox, in honour of a woman – a cow or a sheep; it was thought of as a measure needed to help them keep house in the next world. Sometimes a

horse was sacrificed, but it was not always the case because the horse was needed to meet and see off the deceased. In the Insar district of the Penza region, as well as in many other places the person, playing the role of the deceased, rode his horse up to the grave, cut off a wisp of hair from its tail and threw it on the grave saying, "Here is a horse for you, make use of it and give it to nobody".

Before sacrificing, several magic rituals were performed: after giving the animal plenty of food the Erzians wound its body with a towel (the Mokshan tied the horns with it) and begging its pardon and promising a lot of hay and flour in the next world they mourned the animal, kissed it and told it to ask its dead master for health for the living.

The animal's blood was collected in an individual cup so that it could be poured in each ritual dish. The head and legs were put in the grave when burying the deceased; the skin was hung on a tree. During the ritual meal speaking was prohibited. Having scraped the dead person's cup and spoon as well as his clothes Mordvinians collected all odds and ends and threw them into a rubbish pit. The next day all these acts were repeated.

When burying the dead person, people used fire produced by rubbing wooden bars: they made a fire using firewood of the same tree as the stump for the man who played the role of the deceased. This fire was called "od tol", M., E. (with a new fire) or "proshchama tol" (the fire of absolution). The people who participated in the remembrance party jumped over this fire with burning candles in their hands, laughing and singing ritual songs. They moved the candles round each others' heads and pulled several hairs out of the head and beard which the deceased would need to build a bridge, if there happened to be "a sea" on his way. Elderly women sometimes participated in this ceremony and came there with picked bones in their hands. Having turned to the cemetery, they said good-bye, threw the bones and returned running to the party. It was believed that the person, who lagged behind, was fated to die sooner than the others. According to the 1876 materials, in addition to throwing bones and running, the Mokshan rite also included the wrestling of two women (if a woman was remembered) or two men (if a man was remembered). The person who lost the game was thought to die sooner.

In the Krasnoslobodsk district, in the evening of the 40<sup>th</sup> day, Mordvinians visited the houses of the dead person's relatives to remember him/her; after the funeral ceremony they sang ancient songs and asked the deceased (through the person playing his/her role) not to appear any more among living people.

The remembrance parties celebrated after six months and a year differed little from the party devoted to the 40<sup>th</sup> day. In honour of the dead master of the house Mordvinians left in the first year an unreaped patch of corn (usually near the road), in honour of the dead mistress – a patch of hemp or flax. For the remembrance party at which "harvesting the dead man's corn" was planned, an ox was sacrificed whose eyes had been covered in advance with a white kerchief. The people participating in the ritual went to the field and reaped the patch, tied sheaves (not more than 5) and left them there together with a reaping hook. Mordvinians believed that those who touched them could die. In several places, a belt was made out of straw and the widow wore it during a day. When reaping the patch of the deceased, the Erzians held the reaping hook by the edge and threw the reaped ears over their heads backward. During the work, in which all relatives participated, they ate ritual food twice. In the Saratov province, it was customary to leave an unreaped patch of all crops cultivated there. Dead people were also remembered at big family parties (weddings, christening parties).

Lit.: Primerov A. Religioznye obyady i suevernye obychai mordvy Krasnoslobodskogo uyezda // Penz. eparh. ved., <sup>1</sup> 16, 1870; Orlov N. P. Mordva-moksha // Penz. gubern. ved., <sup>1</sup> 107-108, 1876; Milkovitch. Byt i verovaniya mordvy v kontse XVIII stoletiya // Tamb. eparh. ved. <sup>1</sup> 18, 1905.

# G

**Ghost of the deceased/spectre** (Shópacha, M., Chópacha, E.); also it is a deuce, picture, photograph. According to Paasonen's dictionary, it is a bird that flies in the twilight and reminds one of a cuckoo in appearance and size.

If the ghost is not sacrificed to, it becomes a wandering one. It is believed that it comes in people's dreams and on remembrance days. In legends, it is a spectral creature that assumes the human aspect. Such creatures had a good time with girls but never showed their backs to anyone (there were no backs and therefore all internal organs were seen). They could also change into pigs, sauna whisks and besoms. They are fond of merry-making, weddings; they are good dancers.

In the Buguruslan district, it was understood both as a ghost of a living person and a dead one. When one of the spouses is away for a long time and the other feels miserable, the ghost appears before him/her. It appears near someone's bed, knocks on the walls, grasps a sleeping person by the legs, pulling him/her downward onto the floor. In order to exorcize the ghost, on the neck of the pursued person there was hung a small piece of a dog's or a pig's liver as well as a piece of charcoal used to singe a pig. At the same time a witch said a spell, which ran that S. was afraid of nobody and nobody could kill the ghost. Only a wise old man living in an icy house at the bottom of the great water was able to drive it out and into the rotten hollow of a tree.



*Mordvinian village gates. Photo: T. Devyatkina, 1996.*

According to tales, in order to prevent a child from returning as a ghost to this world, mothers sometimes put a comb at the head of their dead children's bed and said, "On the one side is a sea, on the other are reeds".

In several villages, in order not to leave the ghost of the deceased at home when carrying the deceased in the coffin out of the house, people knocked on the place where it had lain, first with an axe, then with a knife. For this same purpose, in the Simbirsk province, the place where the deceased had lain was strewn with ash and then a knife was stuck in.

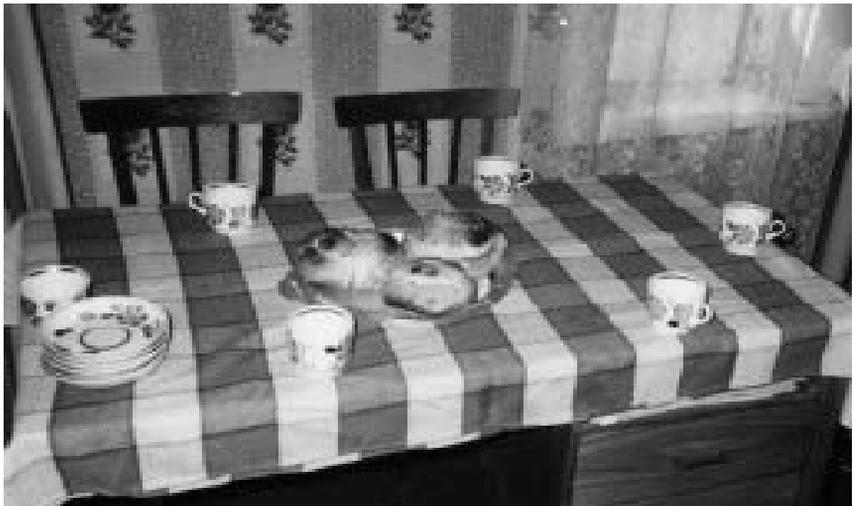
The ghost of the deceased can change into fire, to rise as fire from the coffin in order to suck living people's blood and kill them. A killed person can allegedly rise from the dead, if his body is covered with drawings made with the help of a black calf's blood. It was believed that one could easily get rid of the angry S. by driving into his body a spoke of a wheel that had been used in the same cart for seven years.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Goddess of the Moon** (Kowáwa, M., E. [kow - Moon; awa - woman, mother]). She has a husband - God of the Moon (Kowatya, M., Kowpaz, E.). The Mordvinians thought that the goddess controlled time and saw everything that happened on Earth. People's health depended on her to some extent. Thus, magical ceremonies were organized in honour of the goddess and she was asked for health. In folklore, she usually acts together with the Sun, but she is worshipped to a smaller extent in comparison with the Sun. This is reflected in numerous bans connected with the Moon (s. Moon).

**Goddess – Mother of the gods, patroness of love and marriage** (Ánge Pátay, M., E.;

*Kurgonjat – small cakes with cottage cheese.  
Photo: T. Devyatkina, 1995.*



Ange - deity's name, patyay, E., elder sister; aunt) - among the Nizhni Novgorod Erzians she is considered to be Mother of the Gods, the deity-patroness of love and marriage, a good helper at childbirth, a care-taker of women in childbirth and of infants' health. With the Mokshans in the Kovytkino region of the Mordovian Republic she is recorded as goddess of fertility and health. According to the myths of the Nizhni Novgorod Erzians, mother of all gods ("Ange Patyay") is the only deity created by the God of the Sun ("Chipaz") out of a cracked egg. In her turn, she herself produced all other gods and goddesses. Mother of all gods was imagined

as eternally young, full of strength and beauty, supporting life all over the world. She was also considered to be a pure maiden, the patroness of virgins and chastity. Mother of the Gods had 8 children by the God of the Sun (4 gods and 4 goddesses), but remained a virgin. According to the Erzians of the Nizhni Novgorod region, she dwells on Earth and in Heaven. Over the clouds she has a house, which is filled with various plants' seeds, versatile animals' embryos (wild and domestic ones') and souls of people who have not yet been born. From her house, she pours and scatters life onto the Earth, which comes down with the dew, rain, snow and summer lightning. The last was considered her most fruitful and beloved granddaughter and helper.

When the goddess descended to Earth, she changed from a young woman into a fantastically strong old woman. Under her feet the ground caved in and footprints remained on stones. Sometimes she comes to Earth looking like a big bird with a long golden tail, and at that moment grains are falling onto fields out of her golden beak.

The Goddess could also assume the aspect of a snow-white dove and from above she threw flowers for bees to gather honey and bread-crumbs for hens. When she visited cornfields people could only see her shadow.

Of all plants she particularly patronizes millet and flax for their rich productivity of seeds and also onions and garlic. The last ones were put under infants' pillows when fumigating them with the smoke of onion-skins. Mother of the Gods is also considered to be the patroness of spinners and she is a spinner herself. She spun linen thread with a golden spindle on a silver hackle for her divine children. The Nizhni Novgorod Erzians think that cobweb flying on bright autumn days is the thread belonging to her.

The Goddess sends her maid-servants with animal's embryos and people's souls to Earth. She is present at childbirth but remains invisible. She often comes to children in their dreams.

Of domestic living beings she prefers hens. According to a legend, when the world was being created, she ordered all animals and women to bear fruit every day. Everybody refused to do it, as it was very exhausting. Only a hen agreed to fulfill the goddess's wish and in consequence she became her favourite. Mother of the Gods also likes pigs and sheep for their fruitfulness and fertility. That is why people sacrificed hens and eggs to her, in summer – a white sheep, in winter – a pig. She plucked wool from white sheep, dyed it in the heavenly azure, in the red sun, in the yellow moon and in the scarlet dawn and then embroidered the gods' shirts, the hem and shoulder edges. The rainbow is the hem of "Nishkepaz's", the son of the God, shirt embroidered by Mother of the Gods.

Her favourite tree is the birch because it grows fast. No holiday in the Goddess's honour is celebrated without a birch-tree. In winter in festive ceremonies people used steamed birch sauna whisks. Some sorcerers and healers practised birch besoms and branches to eliminate harm. The Goddess aided healers, patronized midwives. In some villages she was called the Goddess of midwives.

It was considered that the universe would have been ruined long ago, but for Mother of the Gods who could restrain storms, thunder and lightning. When it rained, she sprinkled milk from her heavenly house, drops fell on cows and increased yields of milk.

In honour of Mother of the Gods there were two holidays. One of them is a magical ceremony devoted to her, as the patroness of a birch-tree ("kiley ozks"), which was observed on Thursday on the Russian syomik's Day, first by girls (in a village and later near a river), then by widows. Another one, observed in winter on Christmas Eve (kolyadki), was celebrated in houses first by children, her favourites, then by married women and midwives. In addition to this, she was honoured on other holidays: girls' magical ceremony (teiter' ozks) – on Thursday, on the other day of syomik, widows' magical ceremony (baban' ozks) – on the Thursday after

Whitsunday; home magical ceremony devoted to mother of the gods and her son “Nishkepaz” (ozks) – on Christmas Day with the invitation of all gods to the holiday; on the second day of Christmas a public magical ceremony (vele’ ozks), performed by married women and a midwife; on New Year’s Eve – children’s holiday in her honour and on New Year’s Day – magical ceremony at home to her with the request to grant fertility.

Lit.: Paasonen H. *Mythologisches, etymologisches // Memoires de la Société Finno Ougrienne*. XXXV. Helsinki, 1914; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). *Ocherki mordvy*. Saransk, 1981.

**God-patron of the Erzians** (Nishkepaz, Īneshkepaz, E. [neshke – bee-hive or bee; ine – great; paz – god]) similar to Chipaz, the Supreme God of the Sun, the creator of the world and Earth. He was “Chipaz’s” favourite son and therefore he gave him nearly all his power. In some variants of the myth, he is the eldest son of Mother of Gods “Ange Patyay”. He was also considered to be the God of fire and love, the God of Heaven, the Lord of family life and the patron of bees and hives. Mordvinians also imagined him as a God, whose occupation was bee-keeping and round whom bees’ souls fly. The Teryukhans and the Erzians of the Nizhni Novgorod province called him also “Inechipaz” (ine – big, great; Inechi – Easter), a god’s son. In prayers, he is the seventh God, dominating the six subordinate Gods. He creates stars, which are happy peoples’ souls.

In the myths of the world creation, the God is depicted as a tall man with long, thick drooping hair and a white beard reaching to the ground. While he is sleeping under a tree, his beard grows moving apart Earth and Heaven, ravines are being filled with water, springs are appearing in hollows, grasses, beasts, birds are appearing on the surface. In mythical songs, he distributes peoples’ happiness while sitting on a branch of an oak-tree.

The God can change into a dove, swan, eagle, swallow, wolf, ox, horse, hare, and bear. His favourite bird is the swan, the messenger of Heaven, and the regulator of heavenly and human relations. One of his heavenly daughters is “Kastargo”. His dwelling place is indicated by “Kargon’ Ki”, M., E. (the Milky Way) and the constellation of Vesta (probably, Libra – T. D.). The God has a golden cradle, which he lowers from Heaven on golden chains and silver wire in order to take miserable young girls, who failed to find worthy bride-grooms.

The God was said to go about the village eavesdropping outside windows in order to know peoples’ dreams, desires and requests. To get rid of diseases, one should give some article of a dead or sick person’s clothes to a beggar through an open window and say, “God Nishke, take it and pass it on to my son in the next world.”

The Mokshans-Erzians of the Simbirsk and Penza provinces considered that the God had a great number of houses where good peoples’ souls lived. Good peoples’ souls hover near him like bees, which are hovering round their queen-bee. He gives his mother “Ange Patyay” a flint to strike good spirits from it.

Special magical ceremonies were devoted to the God: village prayings (e.g. those after St Peter’s Day – “Baban’ Kasha”, old women’s porridge), family prayings and occasional ones (diseases, droughts, misfortunes). Sacrifices of sheep and hens were made, people asked him for assistance in some affair, a bumper harvest, rain, protection from hail, wind, etc. Prayings to the God were performed when christening a new-born child, which was accompanied with numerous spells and charms providing him with health, protection against the evil eye or a witch. He was also addressed in various spells and charms aimed at bewitching a beloved person or protecting one against burns, injuries or snakebites.

According to the myths, spread among the Teryukhans and Erzians of the Nizhni Novgorod and Samara provinces, the God was allegedly sent to people by the Supreme God, “Chipaz”. He

## Mordvinian Mythology

lived as a human being on Earth and helped people (averted evil, taught them to good deeds, cured, etc.) One cannot but see a certain identity of these myths with the Christian version of Christ's death. People instigated by the deuce killed the son of the Supreme God, "Nishkepaz" who ascended into Heaven. Nevertheless, he punished people: the Sun's light and warmth became seven times less than before, winter became seven times as cold as it used to be, harvests became poorer as well as yields of cattle.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissa, 1889; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964.

**God Nikolay (Nicholas)** (Mikúlapaz, E., Mikíla, E., Mikóla, M.) -- the most honoured saint of all other Christian saints among Mordvinians. He is considered to be a thaumaturge, a favourer. In myths, he was invited by "Nishkepaz", the son of the Supreme God, to take part in creating new rites and customs. Two holidays were celebrated in his honour (on May 28 and on December 19), which combined both Christian and heathen rituals and included special sacrifices. Mordvinians identified him: in spring with "Mastorpaz", E. (the God of the nether world), who gave the Earth the power of blooming, and in winter - with "Nazarpoz", E. (the deity-patron of winter and night). When praying to the God, people asked him for a bumper harvest, health, etc. On St Peter' Day a magic ceremony devoted to the saint was performed and an ox's head was placed in front of an icon.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889; Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947.

**God-patron of the nether world** (Mastorátya, M., Mastorpáz, E. [mastor - land, country; atya - husband, old man]). He is also called "Stakapaz" (staka - heavy) - the God of Heaviness. According to Nizhni Novgorod Erzian Pre-Christian mythology, he was born in the marriage of the God of the Sun ("Chipaz") and the deity of harvest ("Norovava"). The God of the nether world sits in the soil and gives strength to all plants and particularly to corn and vegetables. Mordvinians imagined him as a taciturn, heavy and severe man (hence, his second name is "Stakapaz"). He is the patron of dead people and, due to this fact, he is considered dangerous (a sorcerer could curse a man with his name). People addressed the God with the request to pass on some food to dead relatives to the next world.

Very popular is the opinion that all the injuries that a man had when he fell onto Earth can be cured, if the God is asked to do it. In fairy formulas used when addressing him, he is called silver-bearded. As a rule, a black ox was sacrificed to him. The God was begged for pardon at the cemetery (usually on Friday or at a crossroads).

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981.

**God-patron of thunder** (Átyamshkáy, M., atyama - thunder, atya - husband, old man; shkay - god), Pur'ginepaz, E. (pur'gine - thunder, paz - god), Meltsey, Mel'sedey, E. (mel' - memory, thought, desire). The Nizhni Novgorod Erzians believed that the God ("Purginepaz") had been born by "Ange Patyay's" (mother of the Gods) daughter "Nishkende teiter'" (nishke, E., neshke, M. - bee, bee-hive; teiter' - young girl). It was considered that he had been born bow-legged; his parents (the Supreme God of Erzians and his wife "Ange Patayay") therefore threw him down onto Earth where he lived until it was time for him to get married. In the image of the God of Thunder there were reflected Mordvinian ancient mythological ideas of the ties between

the world of people and the world of patrons. Mythological legends and songs tell us about the god's love for a young earthly girl "Alduna" by name, his desire to marry her. But the Goddess of Lightning kills her because of jealousy. In myths, we see the God first as a young handsome fellow, then, quite the reverse, as a black man with eyes burning like fire. The plots of mythological songs deal with his marriage to the young earthly girl "Vasal'ga" (in the Mokshan version) or "Syrzha" (in the Erzian one). As legends tell us, during the marriage feast the God danced on cups, goblets and spoons, shouting very loud. When it was time to take the young wife to his room, he shouted as loud as thunder, lightning flashed from his eyes and consequently the house ("izba") caught fire. The God and his wife ascended into Heaven. Since that moment it has been customary to believe that during a thunderstorm the God of Thunder dances on cups like he did at his wedding party. At that moment Teryukhan-Mordvinians went outside, threw up their arms and shouted, "Hush! Hush, God, you're ours, aren't you?" It is said that during a thunderstorm he rides two or three fiery horses striking fire from the wheels, holding thunder in his left hand and rain in his right hand.

According to folklore, the God's wife visited her native home descending to Earth on iron chains. People believed that children born by the Gods and Mordvinian women were Mordvinians' rulers up to their death and after death they returned to Heaven, to their parents. P. I. Melnikov-Pechersky supposed that the Mordvinian ruler Purgas (the 13<sup>th</sup> century) was considered to be the God's son by Mordvinians. After conversion to Christianity, the God of Thunder was identified with the prophet Elijah, the Christian patron of thunder and rain. This fact influenced village prayings: on Elijah's Day and in the drought, Mordvinians went to springs and asked the God and the prophet Elijah for rain as well as to save crops from hail. Mordvinians usually sacrificed hens to the God.

The God of Thunder is endowed with the power of punishment; he killed and burned deuce ("Idemevs", "Shaytan"), monsters, giants. Droughts, hailed fields were imputed to his evil will. Fearing his anger Mordvinians observed various taboos during thunderstorms: it was forbidden to work, to eat, to talk loud, to shout (otherwise you could court the God's disaster), to go barefooted and bareheaded (the God could kill). When building a house one could not use a tree fallen during a thunder-storm (you will have bad luck afterwards). If someone broke the ban, the God of Thunder could kill people and cattle with stones (pur'gine kev, E.; atyam kev, M. – a stone of thunder). In order to protect themselves against his anger during thunderstorms people shut the stove's chimneys, and covered their food.

At the sound of the first thunder people used to shake out their clothes in the street, lest they should have any fleas all year round. They also poured some water into their bosoms in order not to be afraid of thunderstorms. It was considered that people who were killed during thunderstorms went straight to Paradise, because the God purified everybody of sins. Thus, elderly people went outside seeking death and purification.

Up to now, people forecast weather judging by thunder. The first thunder from the East or South betokens good weather for the whole summer. Early thunder in spring is indicative of an early summer; late thunder in autumn suggests that the autumn will last long that year. Prolonged thunder is an omen of hail; thunder after rain betokens warm weather. Dreaming about a thunderstorm meant for Erzians quarrels, for Mokshans – poverty. A thunderstorm on someone's wedding day promised an unhappy life. Thunder was mentioned in curses ("shtoba atyamas' shavolente", M. – may thunder kill you). A rainbow is considered to be the God's road (Atyaman' ki, M.).

Lit.: Yakov. O mordvah, nahodyashchihysya v Nizhegorodskom uезде Nizhegorodskoi gubernii. SPb., 1848; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya

skazka. Saransk, 1947.

**God of the Sun, Time, the Supreme God** (Shkáy, Shkábavaz, Shipáz, Ótsyu Shkáy, Vyáre Shkáy, M., Chipáz, Shkipáz, Verepáz, E. [from shi, M., chi, E. – the Sun, day; shka, E. – time; bavaz, pavaz, M. – happiness; otsy, M. – big; vyare, M., vere, E. – upper]). Among the Erzians, “Nishkepaz” (his son) is regarded as his equivalent.

Mordvinians imagined the God “Shkay” as a man with big eyes, who sees everything that takes place on Earth. His look possesses the power of fertilization. The God is of an indefinite sex; he is at the head of the world, creator, patron, ruler of the visible and invisible world, of everyone and everything living. He reigns with the help of the deities, who are subordinate to him.

In myths, he chose women as his helpers, because they are thought to hear what they cannot see, and feel what they cannot hear. They were to report to him everything that took place on Earth.

“Norowawa”, E. (the patroness of corn, bread and harvest) was appointed distributor of the God’s everyday bread. This post was given to her by him because he liked her behaviour: on Friday she was late with her report to the God Shkay because she was busy distributing bread among the hungry people. Thus, he ordered everybody not to work on Friday.

According to a legend, a woman, who broke the God’s ban on work and kneaded dough, was raised by him straight to the Sun and was fated to die (she was saved only because at her last moment she thought of her children – orphans). The God felt sorry for her and let her go on condition that she would tell everybody about this ban. As a token of her stay at the God’s dwelling place, he set his mark on her forehead – a crimson-blue spot. It is said that this woman did not knead dough any longer on “Norowawa’s” (the deity-patroness of corn) Day.

The God’s abode is in the Sun; he sleeps there on a round bed. He is invisible for people, he does them only good, but if he is annoyed with people’s evil deeds, he may punish them. In Mokshan folklore, he can assume the aspect of a hare, pig and thistle. People believed that at night the God went about the village to eavesdrop outside windows in order to know what people talk about or what they dream of, what they are not pleased with, what they ask for or what they lack. In mythology, he married an earthly girl. According to legends, the God created Earth and man; he ordered deuce to create evil spirits and settled them in marshes and pools lest people should forget themselves.

After creating Earth, The God “Chipaz” slept 30 years under a tree and 30 years in the tree. He woke due to a sharp pain in his right leg because when sleeping he happened to crack an egg with his leg hanging from the tree. A beautiful girl came out of the egg. In accordance with his desire she became his wife. The Erzians call her “Ange Patyay”, Goddess-mother of the Gods s.

According to Mordvinian views, if someone did a wicked deed, the God punished him through the mediation of evil spirits. Nevertheless, if he was requested to save a person from evil, he stopped the evil spirit and told it to stay in the water. It was considered that the God in anger could not be propitiated by a single, private prayer; absolutely necessary were public and family prayings to deities subordinate to him (the deities of the home, yard, etc.). The God was therefore addressed at the beginning of every praying, whatever deity the prayer might be devoted to. He personally was seldom asked for any good things of life.

The cult of the God was very strong. Mordvinians never stepped over sun rays falling through the windows because they were afraid to tread on his foot. Nor did they attempt to swim or sail in a boat over the sun’s reflexion in the water lest they should strike the God on his beard with an oar. As stated above, his abode was in the Sun, and this was the reason why the sun was referred to in Mordvinian religious and magic ceremonies both as the God and his symbol.

When having domestic magical ceremonies (*ozkses*), people usually sacrificed to him a foal, small cattle, poultry, pies, and beer. The ceremony took place twice a year, at the beginning of spring when corn was being sowed, and in autumn when people asked for a good, happy winter. At the time of summer field work the God was asked for a blessing to labour, he was thanked for the possibility for people to work all day long for their health. After Christianity was adopted, the mythological image of the God was transferred to the Christian God.

The God's name is often mentioned even nowadays in oaths, protective phrases, admonitions, e.g. "shkays' vyare, sel'monza alot", M. (God is above, his eyes are below). It was considered that he lowered a rope from Heaven with three saints to take the soul of the deceased.

Lit.: Mainof W. *Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine* // *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*. Helsingissä, 1889; Milkovitch K. S. *Byt i verovaniya mordvy kontsa 18 stoletiya* // *Tamb. Eparh. ved. Chast neofits.*, No. 18, 1905; Melnikov P. I. (Andrei Petchersky). *Ocherki mordvy*. Saransk, 1981; UPTMN. T. 10. *Legendy, predaniya, bylichki*. Saransk, 1983.

**Grave, "eternal house" after death** (*kálma*, M., *kálmo*, E.). By tradition, it was customary to dig a grave in the direction from the East to the West. According to folklore materials, in ancient times a coffin was placed at the fork of three roads on poles or in a highway in any tree except a birch; in winter it was left in a forest, in spring buried under a tree. Later there appeared a practice of burying dead people wrapped in birch bark. Together with the deceased, several objects were placed in the grave (which had been scraped with a knife and which were necessary for his/her life in the next world): some bread, knives, tools, pieces of canvas, needles and thread, money, sometime even a dog, so that the deceased could need nothing. In some villages, money was intended for the cemetery-keepers who were the first people buried there.

First the deceased was mourned and then on long, white "koti" (a cloth as large as a towel) the coffin was sunk into the grave and raised again three times. It was placed so that the dead person's head could be directed westwards. Then everybody asked the dead person for pardon and told him/her to get used to a new home and not to be afraid of it. Lest the deceased be frightened, each of those present threw a handful of earth on the coffin saying that they wanted the earth to be soft for him/her.

People thought that some other relative was expected to die if the coffin was of a larger size than necessary. The same conclusion was made if the shoes became untied near the grave or in case its edges crumbled.

If a person died with his/her head on a pillow, when burying him/her, people threw three feathers from it and asked God and the ancestors not to make the deceased count more than three feathers in the next world. Originally this rite was aimed at protecting the bedding from a contact with death.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Teryukhan-Mordvinians placed a pole or a shaft on graves which had the shape of burial-mounds; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Mokshans of the Krasnoslobodsk district made low and small grave-houses. On these houses, as well as on the poles, kin marks were fastened. The graves rose above the surface (at the height of five logs and were covered with boards). Teryuhans also had such constructions. In addition to this, they buried dead people on the slopes of river-banks. Shoksha-Mordvinians place big crosses nearly three metres high on graves up to now. In several districts, on the slope of graves a hole was left for a dead man to survey this world and for his soul to go out through it. Before leaving the burial place, Mordvinians scraped a coin with a knife. At the end of the ritual only close relatives remained at the grave to have a funeral repast. The rest of the food intended for ancestors was put on the grave. In several villages of the Saratov province, small pieces of the remembrance food were

## Mordvinian Mythology

put in small holes dug in the grave. In ancient times, in honour of the dead man, a foal was sacrificed and in honour of a dead woman - a cow. A part of the sacrificial meat was eaten at the cemetery and another part was taken home. The skin was usually hung on a pole driven into the grave or on a branch of a tree that grew nearby; in the Simbirsk province - on a forked pole. Especially distinctive was the rite practised in the Penza province. After the participants of the funeral ceremony had left, a black ram was brought to the grave. His horns were wound with a red kerchief. Before the ram was sacrificed, people led him on his back legs round the grave three times.

By tradition, an aspen pole was driven into witches' graves to prevent them from going out. On the graves of those who died of alcohol, much water was poured during a period of drought, as it was considered that they could provoke droughts by sucking moisture out of the soil.

Lit.: Smirnov I. N. Mordva. Kazan, 1895; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 1. Erzijskije prichitanija-plachi. Saransk, 1972.

# H

**Hair** (shyáyar'kht', M., chert', E.). Mordvinians considered hair to be the focus of human vital power. Special symbolics was connected with hair in customs and rites. In Mordvinian culture, cutting hair was a special symbolic ritual. The facts of Mordvinian folk poetry testify to the close connection between the ritual of cutting hair and marriage. In songs, the rite of cutting off a lock of hair is called "tyasht'ks", M. (a mark). Later these marks were to help recognize a bride who was either hiding or had changed. Cutting off or tearing out a young girl's lock of hair meant depriving her of her personal freedom, conquering her heart.

Cutting off hair was regarded in several cases as a token of the estrangement of a hero from his kindred and his attachment to some other kindred. In her laments, a bride asks him to give her a blessing for a new life, to grasp at her plait and wind it round her bridegroom so that the fellow could take her to his house as his own wife. At her wedding party, when saying good-bye to her native house, a bride tore out several hairs and threw them in the direction of her home. It was considered that the bride's hair is exposed to bewitching during the wedding party and it was therefore taken great care of (if a witch succeeded in cutting off a lock of her hair, it was all over with her). According to the materials of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in several villages young girls wore their hair short.

A lock of hair was cut off when christening, consecrating a priest, a monk and a nun, etc.

Some songs run that after the bride came to her bride-groom's house, her hair was plaited together with a long tail of bast (ker' pulo, E.), which likened the girl to a fertile lime-tree. Dressed like that, the bride and the bride-groom accompanied by musicians playing the violin or the clarion, called on her relatives and acquaintances. Plaiting her hair together with the hairs from a horse's mane symbolized her intertwining with the world of animals.

Numerous customs and rites are connected with hair. It was believed that girls sacrificed their hair to specific mythical creatures called "Ust sud" or "Ust ve sud", E. (ust - brain, intellect, strength, wisdom; sud - to judge, solve). H. Paasonen supposed that the creatures "ust sud" personified meteorites, which were considered by the Erzians as fiery serpents or evil spirits hiding the sun and light.

In the Ardatovo district of the Simbirsk province, people threw into the fire the hair cut from the temples. They also moved burning candles round each other's heads, tore out several hairs which were thought to be necessary for the deceased to build a bridge over a stream. Hair was also burnt over the ancestors' candle, during a magical ceremony (s. Candle). The magic power of hair was accounted for by the ancient principle of substituting the whole for its parts. Thus, a separate lock of hair that had been cut off a person's hair was thought to possess all properties of the person from whom it was taken.

By custom, young girls and particularly brides were to go bareheaded on holidays, even if they fell on winter frosty days. One of a young girl's merits is a thick plait reaching her heels. After their marriage women were obliged to cover their hair.

A central parting was used to serve as an outward mark of a married woman; hair was covered with a kerchief or a specific high head-dress called "pango", E. Thus, hair could express not only mythological but also social information. It informed people of a girl's or woman's status, making it clear at first sight whether the girl is chaste, or if she is a bride, or if the woman is married.

Long hair possessed a ritual significance revealing the connection of hairstyles with marriage ceremonies, i.e. with the ancient magic of fertility.

Mythic personages – heathen deities (“Wedyawa”, the female deity of water; “Wiryawa”, the female deity of woods; “Komlyawa”, the female deity of hops, “Nishkepaz”, the Supreme God, E.) were always depicted as having long hair that reached to the ground. It was considered that long hair endowed the consecrated people with a specific power. The left side of the head symbolized unluck; the right side – luck, victory. It was customary to plait hair beginning from the right, unplait – from the left.

Mordvinians thought that hair was connected with the forces of the beyond and dead ancestors. It was believed that hair was to help the deceased in the next world to transfer in time and space. Hair is a crossing, a bridge over a fiery stream (sea, river). Some of the magic acts were performed with the help of hair (witchcraft, fortune-telling): a lock of hair was cut off, wrapped in a kerchief and hidden under a tree (it was considered that a fellow was crazy about a certain girl at that time); if a childless woman picked up some hairs fallen on the floor, it was considered that she took the fertility from the owner of the hair.

By tradition, a girl who came of age or who was going to marry, was obliged to have her hair cut. When a woman died, her plait as a symbol of her girlhood was placed in her coffin. This was thought to help her rise again in the next world, get married, and have children. Hair, which serves as a symbol of rebirth, feminine origin, also occurs in men’s burial-places. The custom of cutting a lock of hair from the deceased signified the shift from one world to another, joining the realm of the dead, their kindred.

The relatives of the deceased cut off locks of their own hair as a token of mourning, showing that they were kindred. At a wedding party almost an identical event took place, when the future husband cut his bride’s hair as if setting a kindred mark on her.

When baby-girls were one year of age, it was customary to draw a lock of their hair through a ring and then cut it; this was thought to ensure their health and happiness. Curly hair was identified with rings; it was supposed to possess a particular power in the initiation ceremonies of the young (a transference to a new social state). The loss of hair was identical to the loss of strength. In order to make a girl get married, one was to cut off a lock of her hair. Cutting off hair symbolized death and dying.

Up to the present day, there occur several directions and bans connected with hair. Cutting hair was regulated by a number of factors: a person’s age and the time of the procedure (days of the week, phases of the moon). It was forbidden to cut hair (and to have it cut) on holidays (and particularly in the evening), when the moon was waning, on “hard” days (Monday, Friday) and on Sunday as well (a bad omen, it will not grow again). When a woman was pregnant, she could not have her hair cut either (she was expected to have a hard delivery, and the child would feel bad).

A child before one year of age could not have his/her hair cut (the first hair was kept until majority); cutting hair before a journey was not common (you will cut off your way). One was not allowed to throw away one’s hair (otherwise a bird will build a nest and one will have bad headaches). It was customary to burn the hair that had been cut off (if a witch managed to take it, its owner was lost). It was forbidden to unplait the hair plaited by “Yurkhtawa” (the patroness of the home) – she could kill for that.

For the purposes of love magic (bewitching a beloved person), a lock of cut hair was twisted round a button on one’s clothes or round adornments, or it was wound round a finger, or placed in one’s bosom.

With the help of hair one could exhaust another person (in this case it was buried at the

cemetery), pass one's disease on to someone. During the rite of christening, people watched and concluded: if a baby's hair inside a ball of wax sank to the bottom, it betokened a short life for him/her. During a thunderstorm it was not allowed to go bareheaded (lightning could strike and kill).

Loose hair symbolized a specific ritual hairstyle connected with magic and the fertility cult. A woman in childbirth had loose hair; when practising their witchcraft, witches wore loose hair as well. A young girl let her hair down as a token of mourning her dead mother and went to the cemetery to bury her.

A double crown of hair on a person's head betokened another marriage. Mokshans considered that one should eat sinews in order to make hair grow faster. It was observed that, if while combing hair, a lock fell, it meant an imminent journey.

Lit.: Paasonen H. *Mordwinische Volksdichtung*. Bd. 2. Helsinki, 1939; Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947; Devyatkina T. P. *Narodnye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi)*. Saransk, 1994.

**Half-mythical creature** (Wárda, E. [vardo - enemy, slave, evil spirit]), cunning, ill-tempered and envious little girl-ragamuffin.

A mark on her back indicates her unusual origin and connection with the other world. She can make birds work, learn news from the moon. Mothers protected their children against her evil deeds with the help of a spit under the children's arm-pits or on the embroidered hem of their shirts.

Lit. UPTMN. T. 3, ch. 2, *Erzianskie skazki*. Saransk, 1967.

**Healer, witch, sorcerer** (sóday lóman', M., sódytsya, E. (sodams - to know; loman' - man, human being). Such people are spoken of in this way: "Af shtadon' kyaden' kundama" (They are not to be taken with bare hands, i.e. they are cunning, deft, resourceful and never at a loss). Their acts have a mythological base and are deeply rooted in primitive magic. Among them there are healers who practise folk medicine (white magic), witches, werewolves (black magic), "pokrasa kayakht'", M., (pokry - usually, a plum stone, kayams - to put), i.e. a person who uses "pokry" in fortune-telling and also those who can bewitch, cast a spell, cause spoiling and damage. Their gift for being able to do all these things is acquired in various situations: at or by birth, from the deuce or from a dying person who himself possesses this gift. Because of this, people avoided staying with such a person in the last moments of his/her life. These people say that at first they themselves do not realize that they possess such a gift. Sometimes they begin healing or bewitching unconsciously or because they feel an overmastering desire to practise this kind of activity.

The most popular way of healing practised by them is a spell, a charm accompanied with various magic acts. They drew a cross or a circle on a sore spot with a knife or an axe and blew on it three times having spat over the left shoulder. A spell was usually cast over food (bread, sugar, water, etc.) and clothes (any particular article depended on the kind of the illness or damage). Nevertheless, the healers did not undertake to treat all diseases.

People went to sorcerers in all difficult situations, they feared them and at the same time treated them with respect. At wedding parties people tried to offer them the best food lest they should spoil the newly-weds (who were mostly open to the evil spirit).

Such people could cause a man or cattle a disease with the help of the evil spirit but they could also give much useful advice, help in some business, warn of misfortune, get rid of love pangs with the help of a spell cast on bread, water, clothes. Healers never ask about the ailment, they say themselves what a patient complains of and who caused him this disease. It

was believed that if a sorcerer or witch did not damage anybody at least once a week, he/she lost his/her power, and could fall ill and even die. It is considered that much "black" energy accumulates with them and therefore they are always dreadfully depressed. If at the moment there is no man thereabouts, they get rid of this energy and let it out "with the wind" or at a crossroads. Those who were injured and damaged in this way practically could never be cured.

They are hostile to each other and this fact is often used by people when they try to get rid of the damage caused by them with the help of another, a stronger sorcerer. The greatest harm is done by them at wedding parties where they can damage even their own children. They damage people when they meet them, striking them with a hand on their shoulder (a contagious magic).

It is said that their soul flies out at night through a chimney (sometimes looking like a fiery serpent) while their body remains at home (as if they were asleep). The actions of sorcerer are described in "orazhiyamot vedundo", E. (a spell against a witch), where he within a minute takes iron bees out of iron eggs lying in a frying-pan inside a stone lying on the bottom of a sea (an ocean); in a wild steppe he takes a golden duck out of a silver trough with the help of a golden arrow that will cure any sick person if he eats it. It was believed that sorcerer was a whirlwind and it is his spirit that flies with the wind. If one throws a knife at the whirlwind, he will be wounded. The most popular protective means against him are such objects as a needle, a pin, a cross, a prayer, and nettles which are always to be about any person. For this purpose, people also sew on different buttons. One should always pass a sorcerer in silence having joined a thumb to the fourth finger in the shape of a ring as a protection. One should also ignore his questions and, when speaking to him, it was advisable that a person should ball the hand into a fist, having placed the thumb between the forefinger and the middle-finger. At home it was necessary to turn over oven prongs and a besom, to stick a knife into a door. In order to protect oneself against the evil eye, one should spit three times over the left shoulder after being praised by sorcerer.

To get rid of damage when addressing such person, one should swear at him, call him or strike him on his shoulder in a more effective manner than he did. To deprive sorcerer of his power, people used to pierce his clothes with a needle, fired guns at a wedding party, knocked on oven-doors. It was believed that such people died in terrible pangs. Their soul left the body only after they passed on their knowledge (s. Death) to someone else. People believed that sorcerer's spirit could go out of the grave and therefore an aspen pole was driven into it. It was considered that the Earth did not want to accept his body for three years.

The behaviour and everyday life of all "competent people" had many particular features. At their homes they usually had numerous bunches of herbs, a dry head of a snake, small stones and fruit-stones for fortune-telling. When speaking they avoided looking people in the face and averted their eyes aside or downward. They are notable for a low voice, taciturnity, unsociable nature, manner of speaking to him/herself, their eyes that are usually brown or black, but sometimes different-coloured. They live in solitude and do not marry, as a rule, if they do, their family life is far from happy. Sometimes they speak to people through a closed door and never appear before them, they prefer to sleep in the daytime and at night go for a walk and they even go to the forest. According to informants, some of them could speak to snakes, and knew the languages of animals. They are perspicacious, can read other people's thoughts, know the past, the present and the future. They can find lost property, tell a thief's name, show his picture in the water. There occurred cases when such people were assaulted and their houses burnt. They are supposed to have concubinage with the evil spirit.

The witches feel newly-born children and try to fly to them through a chimney. It was

believed that unless the chimney was closed, a witch could fly in and strangle the infant or suck all its blood. In order to revive such children, people opened their mouths and poured there several drops of "pyaryakat", M. (broth of meat dumplings). Missing children were considered to be eaten by witches. To protect the house against them people hang on a fence "lapti" (bast shoes) with shoe-laces and kept bear's and horse's skulls at home and at the apiary. According to the plot of several tales, they could go under the ground, fly over trees, walk through walls, burn hay and do all possible transformations (e.g. change a kerchief into a hare).

Witches – werewolves could change into a pig, dog, ram or cat. As it is known with the Erzians, a mythological creature – the werewolf "Tyryntay" – appeared before fishermen and hunters as a hare and a sheat-fish. All attempts to catch him were in vain. A favourable period of time for them is at midnight and in the evening. When they met a human being, they tried to bite him, to frighten him, to sit on his shoulders, etc. As a rule, such people were known in the village and villagers tried to teach them to eat cat's and horse's meat, beat them and cut off their ears, noses. Having turned into a human being, these werewolves fell sick and tied up their heads to hide the cut-off ears lest people could see their links with evil spirits.

According to a popular belief, there were many werewolves in villages in the past. The werewolves learn their trade not only from evil spirits, but from other werewolves or acquired it independently, by hearsay. As recorded in a fairy-tale whose sources are found in Mordvinian mythology, son "Yurtay" was given by his parents to an old man-sorcerer for apprenticeship. "Yurtay" acquires the wisdom of the werewolf's trade better than his tutor, who does not want let him go to his parents. Turning into various animals, "Yurtay" compels his father to sell them and in this way helps him to earn his living. According to a popular belief, not all people can acquire sorcery and werewolf's craft, because they don't stand the tests connected with evil spirits. However, there is no way back to their previous state. Such people begin to waste away, suffer and die soon, being unable to acquire the "werewolf's science" (e.g. their soul can't give itself up to the evil spirit).

At the same time they tried to conceal themselves as werewolves lest other people could guess about them (they attended holidays, visited churches).

Lit.: UPTMH. T. 10, Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983; T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; Mordovskie narodnye skazki. Saransk, 1978.

**Hen** (sáraz, M., E.). In the mythological concepts of the Nizhni Novgorod Mordvinians, she is the favourite bird of "Ange Patyay", the Goddess-mother of the Gods s., because she was the only one who did not refuse to fulfil the goddess's desire to bear fruit every day.

By tradition, hens were sacrificed at various magical ceremonies. A special one called "Saraz ozks" was performed after sowing the spring corn. Nine hens were killed for the "Baban' Kasha" magical ceremony; a black hen was sacrificed to "Mastorava", the deity-patroness of Earth, at a ritual in her honour; at a house-warming party a bird of the same colour was thrown into the cellar for "Kudava", the deity of the home for propitiatory purposes. Hens were also sacrificed, when laying the foundation of a church or a town (after cutting a hen into four parts people put each piece in the corners of future building).

When someone in the household died, the mistress immediately caught a hen in the yard and cut off its head under the door of the shed or under the gate. Mordvinians threw a hen's legs into the grave of a dead man and put a hen's head on the bosom of a dead woman so that she could have eggs and chicks in the next world.

Mordvinians watched and concluded: if some straw stuck to a hen's tail or if the hen flew out of the smoke window of a bath-house or if it crowed, the deceased was to be expected in the

household. It was believed that a hen's crowing (foreboding a misfortune) could be neutralized if the master of the house killed the hen, took out its throat, burnt it and threw the ashes to the wind. It was considered that a hen could have a foreboding of misfortune in the family. It was believed that if a hen laid eggs or hatched chicks secretly – the family would grow poor; if a hen crowed loudly it betokened a quarrel.

Mordvinians used to forecast the weather by hen's behaviour. If it looked like rain, they preened themselves, bathed in the dust and hid in the daytime; if they cleaned themselves, it promised an early autumn; if they shed feathers in autumn, it promised a cold winter. If a hen cast her tail, it meant that it was not going to lay eggs any more. It was said, "If a hen wetted the feet on Eudokia's Day (March, 14) (i.e. it is thawing), the summer will be good".

For protective purposes, various bans were imposed: it was forbidden to take back home a piece of bread from the fieldwork (the hens will die), to bring small stones (hens will cease to lay eggs) or the plant called hens' blindness, i.e. "buttercup", (the hens will get blind). When the hens were ill, a special praying was organized in honour of "Narava", the deity-patroness of the grass.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsinki, 1889.

**Heroine of myths, earthly girl** (Litówa, E.). In different villages the girl's names vary: "Witowa", "Lituwa", "Lituma", "Lityuwa", etc. In A. I. Maskayev's opinion the name originally was "Lifti (livti)awa" – a flying woman. In legends devoted to the origin of the Mordvinian tribes, the original mother of the Erzians bears the name "Lifta". The common Finnic element denoting not only "flying" but also "connecting" (cf. Estonian "Lituma") cannot be excluded here either.

Similar myths with different names existed among Mokshans ("Wasalgva") and among Erzians ("Syrzha", "Azravka", etc.) In myths, for some unknown reason, the girl is an unloved daughter (or a loved one, but a wonderfully born one). The antipathy to a daughter can be understood as a specific echo of various initiation ceremonies, bans, protests against keeping young people in isolation in special houses. This heroine in her turn, has a conflict with her parents as well. In spite of her beauty and skill in embroidery nobody wants to marry her. In the similar myth of "Syrzha", the girl is proposed to by a black man with fiery eyes who came from an unknown country – "Pur'ginepaz", the God of Thunder.

In several mythic plots, she becomes "Endol's" wife, M. (the God of the Lightning) and a daughter-in-law to "Nishkepaz", the son of the Supreme God, in others – the Mokshan "Shkabavaz's" wife (the Supreme God) or his daughter-in-law. He is also said to have abducted her for some unknown person. Most often the girl is abducted by the God of Thunder, who seizes her in the street from a spring round dance or from the festive swings and raises her to Heaven in a cradle. Her abduction is favoured by a storm or rain, which began naturally or was sent on purpose. The girl is usually abducted at the time of midday thunder-storm or during calm rain or when a cloud appears. Sometimes she asks herself for a silver cradle with a copper chain to be lowered from Heaven so that she could get to Heaven.

In the heavenly family the girl is endowed with fairy wealth, but she does not enjoy equal rights as a daughter-in-law. She was to do only work about the house and at the same time numerous bans were imposed on her: she was not allowed to turn over her right shoulder, look through the fairy window, to enter one of the barns (usually the seventh). Her position in Heaven, just as on Earth, is regulated; she must co-ordinate every step of hers with senior people. Nevertheless, the girl breaks some of the bans (she opens the seventh barn and sees her parents and the house). She misses her earthly life, parents, she often weeps, feels miserable,

asks for permission to go home on a visit. Her husband and father-in-law allowed her to visit her native house, but laid down conditions: to stay there only an hour (more seldom three hours), not to say goodbye when leaving and not to be seen off lest anybody should see her go and rise to Heaven. In one of the songs, “Shkabavaz”, Mokshan Supreme God, punishes her younger brother (who broke the ban and saw his sister to the threshold) by killing him. As a rule, the girl visits her parents alone, but often they are out at the moment. She leaves some marks of her presence on the table and walls. Only in several songs she visits her parents with her heavenly husband.

Songs devoted to the girl still exist in our time. In Saransk, the Mordovian Republic, there is a modern Song Ensemble named after her.

Lit.: Yakov. O mordvah, nahodyashchihysya v Nizhegorodskom uezde Nizhegorodskoi gubernii. SPb., 1848; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964.

**Holiday, magical ceremony accompanied with praying in honour of oxen** (Buká ozks, M., E. [buka - ox, ozks -magical ceremony, holiday]) observed in the Saratov province before Ascension Day. There was made a sacrifice of an ox, brewed “kvass” and a honey drink. The holiday was organized on a hill where birch-trees grew. Four men conducted sacrificial ceremonies. Every year different people were elected to perform the ritual. Elderly widows and widowers climbed the birch-tree, under which the ritual was performed and stayed there until it was over (some food intended for them was put in a vessel tied to a branch). When hanging the ox’s skin on the lower branch of the birch-tree the people kneeled with their hands raised; one of the ritual performers said a prayer to the Supreme God asking him for justice, a bumper harvest, yield of cattle. After the ritual the skin was sold and the money was deposited in the common fund to make arrangements for the next praying.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to cattle-shed** (Káldaz ozks, M., E. - [kaldaz - yard, cattle-shed; ozks - magical ceremony, holiday]), observed in families after driving cattle back from summer pastures for a winter stay (in the Karsun district it was observed two weeks after Epiphany). To celebrate it, four small ritual loaves of bread were baked and a pig was roasted. The praying was organized in the middle of the yard where a table with various dishes was placed. No icons were used when celebrating the holiday. People fastened a burning candle to a salt-cellar and prayed with their faces turned to the East. They asked “Kaldazawa”, M., “Kardo syarko”, E., the patroness of the cattle-shed, to take care of the cattle. After the praying the rest of the ritual food was left in cattle-sheds and people went home for a ritual dinner. The peculiar feature of it was a ban on using a knife. The bread and roasted pork were broken with hands and eaten out of palms. The bones left after the meals were given to the pigs so that they could breed well.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to a hen** (Sáraz ozks, M., E. [saraz - hen, ozks - praying, magical ceremony holiday]) - a traditional village holiday, celebrated after the sowing of the spring crop. It was called “Saraz ozks” because hens were sacrificed at public praying (one hen from one house). They were killed on a river-bank, where the ceremony took place, and boiled in common cauldrons. The blood was poured into a special pit, feathers and down were burnt, the bones were thrown into the water. When praying, Mordvinians asked the Supreme God to grant a good harvest, health for people, fertility for cattle.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony in honour of barn** (Avín Ozks, M., E. [avin - barn; ozks - magical ceremony, holiday]), which Erzians observed twice a year individually in every family or kin (usually before and after harvest). Mokshans celebrated it once a year at Eastertide and on the first Sunday after Easter. A red rooster was sacrificed in the barn, his head and blood being let down into a cellar under the barn. At dinner-time the boiled rooster (here and there with feathers), "poza" (Mordvinian alcoholic beverage) and dishes were brought to the threshing-floor. The barn deity was prayed to and thanked for keeping the crop safe and for successful completion of the harvest. The praying was followed by a ritual meal.

Lit.: Orlov N. P. Mordva-Moksha // Penz. gubern. Ved. No. 106-108. Penza, 1876.

**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to horses on Ascension Day** (Álashan' ozks, M., E., [alasha - horse, ozks - magical ceremony, holiday]). A day before the holiday people purchased pigs, geese as well as some honey to brew "pure" (honey beer, mead) with common money. The hosts, who were in charge of organizing the holiday, moved with all the necessary objects (fire-wood, cauldrons, cups) to the place of the ceremony (near a pine-tree) and began cooking ritual food.

One person from each house attended the holiday carrying a ritual loaf of bread. On top of the bread a hen's egg was placed so that its greater part was inside the loaf. All the loaves of bread that had been brought were put in a row on the ground, in front of them the icon of Flor and Lavr, the patrons of horses, and a burning candle were fixed on a concave pole. The chosen three old men performed praying and asked the Supreme God ("Verepaz", E.) and also the patrons of horses to protect them from every possible trouble. After that, the old men went round the loaves three times and touched each with their hands. When they were making a third round, the old man, who was standing ahead of others, took a knife, cut a piece from each loaf and put it in a cup. All this was then buried under a bush and after that a ritual meal began.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to porridge** (Balamyk ozks, M. [balamyk - thin porridge, ozks - praying, magical ceremony holiday]) - a ritual performed in June on a meadow in front of birch-trees. Only women and young girls participated in it. Its peculiarity was manifested in a very specific dish that was cooked there - "balamyk" (made of flour, cereals and eggs) and the prayers for the birth of children.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba, Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to wooden plough** (Keret' ozks, E. [keret' - a wooden plough, ozks - a praying, a holiday]), - a public ritual performed before the beginning of tillage, by tradition, on a lawn under an old elm at the outskirts of a village. As a sacrifice on the day of the holiday a cock or a drake was slaughtered and a soup was boiled out of them.

A loaf of bread was brought from each house, bread and salt and the boiled poultry were put on a white towel. With his face to the East, one of the old men, appointed for praying, said a prayer, in which he addressed himself to the Supreme God, "Shkay" on behalf of all participants and asked him for a bumper harvest, yields of cattle, rain, and protection against wind and perils of a dark night.

After the praying a small piece was cut from each cock, drake and loaf of bread "ozon-

doma pakh", M. (a praying piece). All this was laid in a basket and hung on to the elm for deities-patrons. People sat at the ritual table in groups of tens in accordance with "dessiatinas" (measure of length = 2.7 acres) into which land was usually divided. After the ritual meal people appointed the beginning of field work and the man who was the first to start it. There was always chosen a lucky man who was expected to bring luck to everyone and whose crops were the best.  
Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony in a village** (Véle ozks, M., E. [vele - village; ozks - a praying, holiday]) - a holiday in which men, women and children participated and which lasted three days beginning from St Peter's Day (July 12). On the first day, an ox was sacrificed, on the second - a heifer, and besides beer was brewed. During the first two days people prayed to "Skay", the Supreme God, for villagers' health and a good harvest, on the last day - for soldiers' health and the health of those who had been enlisted and were serving in the army at that moment. There was left a tub of beer for that purpose and porridge was made. After that praying, people did not go home for a long time, till late at night. Elderly people drank common beer; the young were at play. There was performed a ritual called "syukoron' las'feme" M., - running for a cookie. Two runners volunteered to participate in the competition. One was given a rich cookie, the other was to run after him and take it back.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony on village meadows** (Láima ozks, M. [laima-bird-cherry tree, ozks - a praying, holiday]) performed on a hill-side with meadows under it. The name of the holiday is possibly connected with the bird-cherry trees that happened to grow near the place of the ceremony. This holiday was sometimes called "aksha kal ozks", M. (praying to a white fish, i.e. bream, pike perch, etc.). A sacrifice of two sheep was made, the God of the Sun was prayed to for help in haymaking and raking and requested that the hay bring good health to the cattle.  
Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to driving the cattle to pasture** (Líftema-suvaftoma ozks, M., Lívtema sovávtooma ozks, E.) [liftems, M., livtoms, E. - to let smb. out; suvaftoms, M., sovavtoms, E. - to let smb. in]). It was performed at the outskirts of the village, where the cattle (except pigs) were driven. On that day water was poured on the hearth fire in all houses. In the place of the ritual "od tol" (new fire) was produced by rubbing dry wooden bars against each other. A bonfire was made, from which each master of the house took some burning coals in a pot and kept up the fire all year round till the next ceremony. In this place over a pit dug specially for this occasion and covered with turf a sort of platform made of boards was built. During the praying in the middle of the platform there was placed a pot with new fire. The cattle were driven under it three times in order to purify them of the evil spirit. A sheep was sacrificed and loaves of bread were placed as a sacrificial grant. In prayers people asked for health, fertility of domestic animals, milk, wool, honey.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical ceremony of women** (bában' ozks, E. [baba - woman, old woman; ozks - praying, holiday; literally: women's praying]); Baban' kasha, E. (woman's porridge) - among the Nizhni Novgorod Erzians this holiday meant a magical ceremony throughout Whitsuntide performed by widows (no other people were admitted). Among the Penza Erzians, it is praying

on the first Sunday after St Peter's Day or on St Peter's Day (July 12) in which both men and women participated.

In the ritual and magic practices of this ceremony one can clearly see both Mordvinian beliefs in mythic deities and remnants of totemism. For the holiday in the village there was collected food and money to buy a sheep. On the day of the holiday all the stores (a sheep, 9 hens, 15 pots of porridge) and a birch-tree with many white kerchiefs and towels on it were taken to the place of the ceremony. Near the grove, a fire was made and food was prepared: people cooked "salma" (a dish of batter and butter), fried eggs. They placed the supplies on the ground, put the birch-tree in the centre and said a prayer three times. They asked the God "Nishke", the son of the Supreme God, for bread, "Vedyawa", the deity of water, for health. By tradition, after breakfast they went to bed. At noon they made a sacrifice: slaughtered a sheep and 9 hens; poured the blood into a pit and filled it up with earth. After preparing the ritual meat, they kindled a candle ("shtatol") in front of an icon, said another prayer three times in which they addressed their deities and ancestors and asked them to safeguard their village against diseases, famine, etc. After the ritual, one part of the porridge remains was buried in the western corner of a sheepfold and the other - under the stone of the deity of the cattle-shed ("Kardo syarko"). The birch-tree was placed in the sheepfold; its branches were hung onto the roosts.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday (Ivan Kupala's)** (Kupalnya, M., Válnoma Chi, E.) - Midsummer Day (July 7), Precursor's birthday, Summer Solstice Day (among Slavic peoples it is called Ivan Kupala's Holiday). The Mordvinians assimilated this holiday after their conversion to Christianity, but the very essence of this holiday was changed due to their religious dualism.

Up to the present day, in many Mokshan and Erzian villages the main part of this holiday is occupied by throwing water on each other. It was considered that the more water was poured, the better. So people tried to pour a bucketful of water over each other and make each other wet from head to foot. The Mordvinians thought that the ritual was aimed at improving people's health and driving away evil spirits. It was customary to believe that on the night of Kupala's Holiday water and verdure acquired a fairy power. By tradition, late at night on the eve of the holiday people picked flowers, "kupalnya panchft", M. - kupalnya's flowers, dried them and kept at home till the next holiday. According to Mordvinian beliefs, on the night of Kupala's holiday candles over all grasses are burning. On one flower 12 candles are burning which can be seen only by honest people. If someone happens to pick a little petal from this flower he is sure to understand the language of animals, snakes and birds. It was believed that on the holiday night a buried treasure reached the surface of the Earth as a silvery steed with a golden shaft-bow and a golden bell, heard only by those who are worthy of this treasure.

In order to heal themselves, people went to a river on this day before sunrise. Several magic procedures were performed: people crossed themselves three times and went out of their houses backwards; they were obliged to keep silence all the time. They had three dips and mentally asked the holiday for recovery. They came back home in silence and went to bed.

On the day, it was forbidden to give somebody something from one's own house (in this way you could give somebody your health and strength). There was also a ban on work that day and particularly on weeding kitchen gardens (otherwise you will have no crop). People also used to forecast the weather judging by this day; a sunny day betokened a good summer, rain promised a rainy summer.

**Holiday, magical public ceremony devoted to sacrificing a stallion** (Aigor ozks, M., E.,

[aigor – stallion, ozks – magical ceremony, holiday]), – a heathen public holiday called so due to the sacrificing of a stallion, whose skin was afterwards hung onto a tree. It was observed in autumn after a sowing campaign once in three years on a field, where winter crops were sown. Only men could participate in celebrating the ritual. When praying to the deity of the field (“Paksyava”), they asked her to grant a bumper harvest.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Holiday, magical public ceremony of women’s beer** (Áwan’ póza, M. [awa – woman, mother; poza – Mordvinian traditional drink – beer]), – a ritual holiday observed before a sowing campaign (a week after Easter) in honour of “Paksyava” M., deity-patroness of field with a view to propitiating her. Currently it is celebrated after the campaign. Only women could take part in the preparations for the ritual. Every year villagers elected a woman (usually in regular succession), in whose house beer (“poza”) was brewed. On Friday they prayed to deity-patrons and asked them to grant people good health and a bumper harvest. On Saturday a sheep was sacrificed and ritual food was prepared for children. After the ritual meal children were treated to “poza” (nonalcoholic one). On Sunday the major “Awan’ poza”, magical ceremony with praying would be performed. The house hostess invited all villagers to the party and received an egg from each family (symbol of fertility and life). Before the ceremony a praying was offered again. If a young daughter-in-law was in the house, she was obliged to bow to elderly villagers, who blessed her after the bows with a happy life. After the holiday had come to an end late in the evening, all the ritual plates and dishes were taken to another house, which was chosen for the next year’s ceremony. The holiday is still practised in several villages of the Kovytkino region of the Mordovian Republic.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Horse/steed** (alasha, M., E.) – In a folk tradition and religion, a horse is an object of worship, a particularly honoured sacrificial animal, a symbol of warmth and spring. Archaeological finds show that horses were known to Mordvinians as far back as ancient times. In the mythological song “Horse and Falcon”, horse is brown, white-legged, with a star on the forehead. Horse wins a single combat with Falcon in order to have the right of being the people’s bread-winner, the owner of the land.

According to I. Barbaro, sacrificing horses goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A horse with its legs tied together and its head fastened to poles, driven into the ground, was shot with an arrow. A stuffed animal was made of his skin and placed on the ground, people prayed to it and sacrificed furs (sables, squirrels, foxes) hanging them on trees. Special rituals were performed over the meat and then the participants of the praying ate it. Sometimes the stuffed animal was put up in a tree and honoured as the Sun. The deification of horses was reflected in many rites and customs. In the Erzian village Lobaski of the Atyashevo region of the Mordovian Republic a horse was sacrificed at the remembrance parties that were organized in honour of dead men. After the repast the horse’s skin was left at the cemetery hung on an oak. Later, cut into strips (for better preservation), it was put on the grave. In Christian times, a horse ceased to be a sacrificial animal and horse-flesh was no longer served at funeral repasts. Nowadays it is not eaten at all.

The representation of horses in the form of stuffed animals, sometimes with a horseman or a horsewoman on top was widely spread (in several villages it still exists) in calendar and kin festive ceremonies and acts. In the Simbirsk province, on Whitsunday, by tradition two men rep-

resented a horse, they tied bells to their necks, seated a small boy on and ate ritual fried eggs.

The worship of horse was reflected in several rites and rituals, as, for instance, in the transportation of a kin's candle ("shtatol"), in women's races on sticks symbolizing horses. Sacks filled with millet and decorated with bows represented the horse's body. To one of the sacks two small balls of red cloth were fastened underneath to create the image of a stallion. When going to another magical ceremony, women jumped astride these sticks and imitated horse's neighing. Other women with wooden horses decorated with bells and many-coloured ribbons, were beating rhythm of songs with them.

Ritual and magic practices connected with the cult of horse were common in wedding ceremonies. In the Simbirsk province when carrying wedding pies from the house to the barn, where the bed had been made for a young couple, one of the women was led in front of the whole procession with a harness on her head. She imitated a horse, stamped her feet, jumped and neighed. Even nowadays, in the Atyashevo region of the Mordovian Republic when meeting a wedding procession, elderly women sitting astride decorated sticks come out to meet a newly married couple returning from the registry office.

The image of a rider on a sunny horse was widely spread among Erzians at Eastertide. The person, who played the role of Easter, was elected at a village gathering. It was a man with a white or grey horse. The rider was met with bread and salt on his coming to the village. He halted a horse near each house and wished the family luck and wealth. In return, the host and hostess treated him to home-brewed beer ("braga"). At the end of Easter the horse was seen off as far as the outskirts of the village and people fired rifles.

The Erzians believed that Easter appeared astride a white horse. The figure of a horse, as the personification of the Sun's image was used at Shrovetide and Eastertide, on Whitsunday and New Year's Day, i.e. on holidays which peasants associated with their hopes for nature's mercy and the Sun's generosity. All this accounts for bright New Year's bonfires urging the sun to shine brighter; Shrovetide pancakes - a symbol of the Heavenly body, Easter eggs coloured in onion-skins, which symbolize both the Sun and life; breaking young birch trees - the rite which meant endowing the Earth and people with the forces of Nature and the Sun.

On Christmas house day - "roshtuvan' kudo's" day (Christmas house s.) a horse was the main figure of the holiday, which was organized in honour of New Year. The frame of the stuffed horse ("alasha") was made of rough canvas and the head imitated the original. In the village of Rybkino (the Kovytkino region of the Mordovian Republic) people used a genuine horse's skull which was put on a stick. The erotic plays of horses with young women signified nature's rejuvenation. A young girl dressed in bright clothes and sitting astride a horse symbolized New Year.

On Whitsunday, during women's prayings, the role of a horse was played by one of the women dressed in men's clothes who participated in the festive meal. The main object identifying a horse was a bridle on the performer's head. The horse was violent; she jumped, neighed, fought with men. Prayings accompanied with such games on Whitsunday were held in one and the same village several times.

In several villages, at Pentecost people dress up a stuffed horse as the personification of spring up till now. In spring festive ceremonies, in addition to the symbol of a "playing" Sun, a horse also serves as personification of the verdure's spirit reviving at that time. For a peasant a horse is identical to a plant and bread.

People noticed that, feeling the change in weather, a horse rolled on the ground and, feeling the approaching rain, it quivered and snorted. According to a popular belief, one should hang a small sack with several horse teeth on the beam in front of a stove in order to make

one's horses always come back home. The horse's skull served as a protection in apiaries.

Seeing a horse in a dream was thought to be a sign of a disease, falling down from a horse meant recovering. If a horse takes the bit between its teeth, it is a sign of a house on fire.

The horse cult is reflected in women's adornments (horse-shaped pendants) of the Iron Epoch.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**House** (kud, M., kúdo, E.). In the Mordvinian popular culture, a house reveals itself as a specific model correlating to the macrocosm: the four corners of the house face the four cardinal points. The roof (kud pryá, M. kudo pryá, E.; pryá – head), the frame (kud potma, M., kudo potmo, E.; literally: the interior of the house), the cellar (under the floor) (sedyal, M., mastoralks, E.; mastorks – floor, sed' – bridge, al – the lower part) are associated with the three levels of the universe (the sky, the Earth, the nether world). In ritual poetry, the interior of the house expands to the limits of the universe, e.g. the newly-married couple is identified with the moon and the sun. According to myths, the sky was originally situated quite close to the Earth, over the windows of the house (s. Sky).

House is the family's place of residence; thus, the joining and opposition of the feminine and the masculine origins underlie the everyday symbolics. As a rule, the image of the house is perceived by people from dual positions. The roof personifies the sky – a man, the frame – the woman. The stove, “the red corner” (the front corner), the table and the threshold are considered to be the sacred elements of the house. The center of the house was the place under the beam where match-makers used to sit trying to win the favour of the hosts and the deity-patroness of house (“Kudawa”). Some household articles and parts of the house had their own deities: “Keren' Shochkon'paz”, E. (the deity of bast and logs), “Pyanakudawa”, M., “Kashtomawa”, E. (the deity of the stove). The supernatural world, deities-patrons, ancestors were communicated with through the chimney and windows (they were invited to a party and prayed to). In wedding laments, the future husband's house is identified with the other world and even death. By contrast, in funeral laments, a coffin is called a house, where a man's body moves after death. On account of this fact, people made windows and a door in a coffin as they did in a house (s. Coffin).

The construction of a house was accompanied by various ritual procedures. For the first row of logs people used oak so that the house could be firm and stable. After the third row of logs was laid, tables with money, bread and salt were brought out into the yard in order to ensure wealthy life in this house. For this same purpose, people put money into the “red corner” and buried ants there taken from a forest. There existed a lot of magic actions aimed at protecting the house from misfortune, the deuce and witches, e.g. a rowan-tree together with its root was buried in the cellar (under the floor), a bear's skull was kept in the house, a “lapot'” (a bast shoe) with shoe-laces was hung on a fence towards the street, a poker was turned upside down, a bunch of herbs gathered on Midsummer Day was hung on a wall; before Epiphany crosses were drawn with pieces of coal on windows and doors. In order to prevent misfortune, the host was to touch a person entering the house on Shrove Monday with a poker.

When moving to a new house people invited “Kudawa”, the deity of the home, to go with them. In her honour, they brewed “od kudon' poza”, M. (the beer of the new house). The first living being to enter a new house was a cat. According to a belief, she accepted the first death in the new house. People watched the animal: the place the cat found the best to lie in was the best place for their bed. It was a bad omen if a cat did not want to enter a new house and moved backwards. If a cat disappeared from the house, it was believed that it protected the

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host from misfortune. At the house-warming party, people let a cock into the house and into the cellar they dropped a hen, which was intended for the deity-patroness of house. In order to make her help people become rich, when moving to a new house, a table with bread and salt was placed in the yard; shreds of cloth were tied to the table-legs as a present for her.

There existed numerous bans aimed at preserving happiness and wealth in the house, e.g. after sunset it was forbidden to lend money (one will become poor), to throw out rubbish (one will show one's house to the deuce), to make notches on walls (a sign of quarrels), to whistle (one can run out of money), etc. Greeting a person standing on the other side of the threshold promised parting with him forever, standing on a threshold signified making one's life shorter. It was not customary to visit people on Shrove Monday (the cattle will stop breeding). A bird building its nest under the roof of the house – a good omen; a swallow sitting on the roof – a sick person will recover.

The person who was the first to enter the house on New Year's Day was seated on a fur-coat so that cattle could breed well (this person was like a brood-hen). It was believed that the whole year would be very bad, if a man with an "unlucky" foot was the first to enter the house on New Year's Day. That was the reason why the owners of the house with a "lucky" foot were the first people who entered their own houses.

It was considered a sign of death to dream about bees flying into the house or about lightning striking the house, or a corner of the house being destroyed. A bad omen was also dreaming about a house-frame, a house without a ceiling, a house being built and some damp earth being put on the ceiling.

Lit.: Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947; UPTMN. T. 6, ch. 2. Mokshanskaya svadebnaya poeziya. Saransk, 1975; T. 6, ch. 1. Erzianskaya svadebnaya poeziya. Saransk, 1972; Devyatkina T. P. Tainy snov. Saransk, 1995.

# I

**Illness, disease** (syáryadema, M., urmá, M., orma, E., séredema, E.). The Mordvinians believed that a serpent, that had a nest in a man's body, caused every disease. In addition to this, every illness was thought of as a result of witches' deeds, damage or a punishment imposed by angry deities. The ability to cause a disease (including lethal diseases) was also attributed to dead ancestors when they were no longer remembered and spoken of with no due respect. A person could cause his/her disease himself/herself. It was believed that when eating one could bewitch oneself saying that one is a good eater. An illness could also be sent as a punishment for violating bans and, in particular, bans on work at Easter, Christmas or on Whitsunday, etc. Besides this, an illness could originate from wind, whirlwind (if a person happened to be caught by it) or from a person's hair (if it chanced to get into a bird's nest). It was considered that a rainbow (if someone broke the ban on pointing the finger at it) or the Moon (for lack of respect) could send a disease.

It was believed that it was very easy to cause a disease if one threw at a person a heap of chips which were left after making a coffin, a piece of cloth from someone's clothes or a lock of hair. A sick person could recover only after he/she performed a special ritual over the rubbish taken from that place.

The idea of a disease was very vague (it was imagined as someone, as an obscure figure). Some of the ailments and "mashtyks" (fever), in particular, were imagined as a midge. No one knows where it lives but it is considered that it comes from afar.

A forerunner of a disease in dreams was meat and a horse (to ride or mount a white horse). In order to get rid of it one was to propitiate the god who had sent it and also the dead ancestors by making a sacrifice to them or saying prayers. Among numerous means of folk medicine used for curing the disease there were practised spells and incantations, bathing in morning dew, going to a spring (s. Water), meeting the morning dawn and evening glow as well as magic acts performed over a man and his things, which symbolized driving out or destroying the disease.

A typical way of saving oneself from a disease was its symbolic burning (as a rule, in a bath-house in front of a stove), washing with spelled or "holy" water, throwing the disease over the witch's left shoulder, passing it to another person or animal (dog or a cat), digging and drawing it between trees (s. Birth, Oak), scattering it with the wind, giving to a beggar through the window. The ritual naked, hanging clothes on a sacred tree, throwing things on a crossroad served the same purposes. According to Mordvinian views, suicides and hanged people could help to cure a disease, if they were asked about it. The bite of a blind snake (orma, E.), which can see only on Midsummer Day, was treated with ginseng-water or the blood of a white dove that was torn in two. Typhoid fever caused by the penetration of this snake into a person's body was treated in a bath-house. In order to relieve the pain, a sick man was given some milk or hemp oil to drink, then he was raised by his feet to the ceiling and kept so until the snake's roots went out of his internal organs.

In spells, people addressed various mythic deity-patrons with the request to cure them. In myths, there occurs the Great Bird pecking the disease of the eye, a white hawk, and a white old man. For protective purposes against epidemics, the Mordvinians hung a lock on sick children's necks. They used to plough round the village with an iron plough and rang bells when the cattle were ill.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966; Devyatkina T. P. Tainy snov. Saransk, 1995.

**Iron, metal** (kshni, M., E.). People attributed specific magic properties to metal, which can be accounted for by its usage for protection, viz. for making weapons. Metal symbolizes the male origin. Weapon and tools were made of it and this may stand for the omen: if a knife falls on the floor, a man is sure to come. Nevertheless, adornments were also made of iron, metal. Some metal adornments express deep mythical symbolics emphasizing that human unusual appearance is identical to the deities' appearance. Among adornments the prevailing type was "ten'kat", M., small circles of metal resembling money or fish scales (otherwise called "kuyen' pryat", M. - snakes' heads); young girls' and womens' loin adornments, which consisted of metal buttons and bells. They were believed to scare away evil ghosts with their ringing. Very popular among girls and women were "pil'kst" or "pile pryat", M. (pile - ear, pryat - head, top). They were round, in the shape of the Sun and were worn like ear-rings. Erzian women fastened them to their headdresses. Kyat'ks, M. (a bracelet) was also worn by many women. Bright metal adornments personified a light, good principle. In myths, heroes used metal chains to rise to Heaven or to come down to the nether world. The mythical hero "Tyushtya" was born with iron heels, his knees being entwined with wire. He also had an iron baton with which he clove the water of the sea. His helper - a prophetic crow - had an iron beak.

When fighting against witchcraft and supernatural forces, people practised using metal objects (e.g. in the traditional and modern Mokshan and Erzian weddings): they fastened needles with a broken eye to the clothes of the newly-weds, stuck in knives over doorways.

An indispensable attribute of the Master of wedding ceremonies - "toron' kandy", M., E. was "tor", M., E. (a ritual knife), with which he made crosses round the wedding cart of the newly-married couple, driving away the evil spirit from them so that it could not harm them.

Among Erzians, the Master's sword was used for the same purpose. When praying to "Nishkepez", the son of God the Master asked him to surround the newly-weds with an iron fence or ring in order to protect them. On several territories in case of epidemics Mordvinians made a furrow round their villages with an iron plough as a kind of protection. According to Mordvinian views, "Nishkepez's", the son of God, dwelling in Heaven is surrounded with an iron fence behind seven heavens and nobody can peep through it.

In folklore laments and fairy stories, death is depicted as an old woman with a sharp iron scythe or as an old man warning its victim that it would cut his/her sinews with a ritual and magic knife "tor", M., E. which death always has about itself and keeps in a copper jar filled with blood. Up to the present after the deceased was carried out of the house, an axe is immediately put where the coffin had been placed. In order to prevent the dead person from returning home and to save oneself from the fear of the deceased a knife is placed near the door.

An iron spade, and metal rings were used in fortune telling; people put an iron linchpin found on a road in their bosom so as not to be sick or giddy.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964.

# L

**Legend/mythological or fantastic story** (azondoma, M., evtrema, E.) about some event, which became a tradition in a post-mythological (historical) period of time. Among them there are legends on the creation of the world and interrelations between deities and people, on the origin of some human vices, on ancient Mordvinian deities. Certain religious and biblical texts were borrowed from the Russians. However, the deities possessing characteristic features and functions have been reinterpreted and perceived as the Mordvinian proper ones. Sometimes even their names were changed. Fabulous motives are most typical of such legends; their heroes are sometimes endowed with supernatural qualities. All this was aimed at making the narration sound true. The recorded legends of giants represent the earliest layer of stories of the first dwellers on uninhabited lands. They reflect the ancestors' ideas of mankind's origin and development. The reality finds its symbolic embodiment in giants. The height and force of these gigantic creatures (Batoron' panda, M., - Bator's mountain) are often emphasized by comparing them with an ordinary man - a ploughman who seems a small bug to the giant. Of ancient origin are mythological "azondomas" of Mordvinian tribal chiefs (e. g. "Tyushtya"), of the Mokshan queen "Narovchatka". During their struggle with nomadic steppe peoples - the Nogaiti - the Supreme Gods "Nishkepaz", and "Skay" render them aid. The legends abound in various narrations of people's encounters with supernatural creatures. They reveal the link of the current religious views, reflected in them with the earlier and later Christian beliefs, adopted by Mordvinians in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These sequences of religious views led to a dual nature of several mythological images. The main characters of folk-tales are people and mythological deities of wood "Wiryawa", of water "Wedyawa", of house "Yurkhtawa", and also patron of house "Kuygorozh". The plot is based on a man's encounter with creatures of the other world.

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya skazka. Saransk, 1947; UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Lime-tree** (pyáshe, M., pékshe, E.). It is a sacred tree, an object of worship among Mordvinians. M. E. Evseyev registered "prashchenay pyashet", M. (forgiven or absolved lime-trees) in the village of Vechkenino of the Narovchat district of Russia, which were thought to have grown on the blood of two sisters killed by wolves. According to a legend, people wanted to cut down the lime-trees but with the first blow of an axe blood spurted from them. In special praying addressed to "Pekshepaz" (the deity of lime-tree), Erzians asked him for a good harvest. According to Mordvinian views, any disease was sent to people by deities in anger as a punishment, and in order to get cured, one should propitiate them. It was believed that "forgiven, absolved" lime-trees possessed such a power. So they were asked for help by people who suffered from all ailments, but mainly by sterile women and those who had children lacking vital capacity. People brought various kinds of food to lime-trees as a grant, prayed kneeling, and begged for help. The presents (canvases, kerchiefs, new shirts, etc.) were hung on the tree. People took off crosses, shirts, and belts from sick children and left them under a lime-tree thinking that they could take their illnesses together with the clothes. The time of worshipping lime-trees was not regulated, but public prayings usually took place in summer and autumn.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1990.

# M

**Man/human being** (lóman', M., E.). According to a legend, the Mokshan Supreme God made a human being from the stump of a thirty-year-old tree, but first he had asked it for some water. He made the stump stand up (thus legs appeared), move a little (arms appeared), rub its eyes open (he began to see). According to another variant, God made the first human from clay and made a dog guard him lest the deuce should damage him and went to bring a breath for the newly-made man. The deuce promising the dog to cover it with wool (it was very cold) spat at him several times. Later the God turned the places with spits inside and they changed into illnesses.

The Mordvinians of the Nizhni Novgorod province thought that a human being was created by the deuce. He stuffed the body with clay and sand taken from 77 various places, but understood that he would not be able to give proper shape to the man without the Supreme God's help. First man resembled a pig and a dog; he did not speak, but only barked. At the deuce's request a bat built a nest in Heaven in one of the corners of the God's towel. The towel weighted with the nest fell onto Earth and the deuce wiped the creature with it, who became like the Supreme God "Chipaz" in appearance. Nevertheless, the man remained lifeless. Seeing him the God got angry, quarreled with the deuce, but later he breathed life into the man and suggested preserving him. Since that time the deuce has had power over man only in his lifetime and after his death does his soul return to the creator on the towel, which the God lowers to Earth in order to wrap the soul in it. The body, the deuce's creation, turns into dust after death. According to a legend, at first the Mokshan God "Shkay" created people as tall as giants, their height being 99 arshins (an arshin = 28 inches), longevity ranged from 700 to 800 years. Up to 300 years people were single. They were very powerful (could pull oaks out of the soil). Horses were a match for them. Each of their steps covered 40 versts (a verst = 3500 feet). The Deluge swept away the giants. It was considered that those, who were saved, became smaller year after year, their age shortened.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiosen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952; UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Marriage/wedding** (Véntsýama, M. Vénchamo, E.) - church or heathen marriage. It is one of the traditional wedding rituals, which registered a marriage officially and secured it. It also reflects mythological motives of overcoming spatial magic borders (the houses' threshold, gates, road). Many facts of a Mordvinian heathen marriage have been preserved. Judging by the materials of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among Mokshans this ritual was conducted by an elderly woman who took a bride-groom's cap and a bride's ribbon. Having moved these objects round their heads several times, she put the cap on the bride and the ribbon on the bride-groom. Thus, the wedding ceremony was completed.

The wedding ritual of the 1830s was as follows: a newly-married couple was taken to a special place where they prayed to deities asking for blessings, happiness, wealth, abundance of bread and cattle, children. After that they bowed very low, the performer of the ritual knelt and put both of his hands on the bride and bride-groom's heads.

When a bride was abducted by mutual consent or when a marriage was a misalliance in respect of age (e.g. a young girl was married to a three-year-old child) the wedding ritual was not

always performed. Among the christened Mordvinians up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main wedding procedure (after which divorce was impossible) was a church marriage. No rite correlating to a church marriage was discovered among ancient Mordvinians (and evidently it did not exist).

According to a popular belief, on the very day of marriage the newly-married couple is opened to evil spirits and witches. Mordvinians thought that the latter could not help doing them harm (they do harm even to their own children).

For protective purposes, during wedding ceremonies the bride and bridegroom had various objects about them: “pilefema salmokst”, M. (needles without an eye) fastened to a collar on the seamy side of clothes; a piece of a drag-net with which the bridegroom was girdled; small pieces of coal, “shur’khkya pryа”, M. (onions) which were put in their bosoms, etc. It was believed that in case a sorcerer threw a pod with nine peas, the wedding horses would not be able to move or, on the contrary, to stop – and there would be no luck for the newly-weds.

In order to protect the newly-married couple from harm, the performer of the ceremony encircled the bride’s cart with his knife three times (among the Erzians – with a sword), made crosses, fired his gun three times to kill the evil spirit and cracked his whip round the wedding cart (thus he drove away witches and sorcerers).

Some events before and during the marriage ceremony were supposed to influence the newly-weds’ future life and children. If on their way to church somebody crossed the road with empty buckets in their hands, the horses were driven in the opposite direction and it was forbidden to enter the church from the side of sunset (otherwise the newly-weds will live in poverty). The marriage ceremony was not allowed on the bride’s birthday; otherwise she would suffer in childbirth both for her mother and herself. It was believed that one should not bargain when buying an icon for the marriage ceremony, because this betokened a mischief. When entering the church, the bride touched the door staples in order to make her future husband cater to every whim of hers after she got pregnant.

Many omens are connected with a marriage ceremony. Meeting a funeral procession was considered lucky in one village and unlucky in some other. The person who was first to step on a towel spread on the church floor was expected to be the chief in the house. If the candles were burning brightly, it betokened a happy life; if they twinkled – an unhappy life. The person, whose candle was burning faster, was expected to die sooner. It was categorically forbidden to go between the bride and the bridegroom – otherwise they would not live together. A good omen was a bright sun throughout the marriage ceremony. If it rained or snowed, it betokened tears; thunder was a bad omen as well. The bride was strewn with hops after the ceremony as a guarantee of future fertility and protection. For the same purpose, she was whipped with a sauna whisk and her fur-coat was stepped on. There was a practice of thrusting in a knife over the door before entering the bridegroom’s house in order to cut off a sorcerer’s hands, not to allow evil spirits to penetrate into the house. Clothes, candles, icons used during the ceremony were kept to the end of the newly-weds’ life.

Children were considered to be black “golbyoshes”, M. (charred chocks), if their parents were not married in church and a preacher did not usually christen them. Some facts of getting married before death are known, and sometimes even after death.

Among the Erzians there was recorded a symbolic marriage ceremony at a remembrance party where the role of a dead girl was played by her girl-friend.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. *Mordovskaya svadba*. M., 1931. Devyatkina T. P. *Narodnye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi)*. Saransk, 1994; Devyatkina T. P. *Mokshanskie svadebnye obyady i pesni*. Saransk, 1992.

**Marriage/wedding ritual** (R'vyáaftomas' - máksomás', M., Ur'vákstoma, E.) which revealed Mordvinian mythological views particularly distinctly. The Goddess-mother of the Gods "Ange Patyay" was considered to be the patroness of love and marriage among the Erzians of the Nizhni Novgorod region. Young people called their patroness to come as soon as possible, sang in her honour glorifying songs, danced and sang in a ring round birch-trees. Several ways of consummation are known among Mordvinians: by abduction (a simulated abduction by mutual agreement between a fellow and a girl and more rarely a forcible abduction), by a young girl's escape (when a girl left her home and secretly married her boy-friend); by purchase and sale of a bride (numerous elements of later marriage ceremonies as well as songs recorded before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century testify to the practice of buying/selling a bride, who entered her husband's house as a slave, bondmaid (ur'va, M., E.) On the whole, a wedding ceremony meant admitting a bride from "other people's kindred" into "one's own". Later the ceremony was aimed at its being recognized by the community. The most popular way of marrying was a marriage preceded by match-making and ratified by a marriage contract in the presence of witnesses and accompanied by striking hands, "tyashten' putomas", M. (setting a star mark upon the bride), fixing a dowry, etc. In heathen times, match-making with chase also occurred. After sacrificing bread and honey to deities - patrons and dead ancestors, the bride-groom's father cut off an end of a loaf, took the soft part of the bread out of it and put some honey into the hollow. At midnight, he secretly rode a horse to the bride's house, put the end of the loaf on the gate's pole and, having knocked on the window with a knout, shouted that he came to ask for her in marriage. After that he rode home as fast as possible. If the bride's relatives overtook him - a wedding was never to take place.

The mythological base of the wedding ritual is conditioned by its understanding as a sacrament and by interpreting the very situation of love as the expression of the gods' will "for the welfare of the world". Love sent from Heaven did not require either parents' consent or sanctifying by a rite. Later, approximately at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a deft bride-groom used to put a piece of bread on the gate of his beloved girl and then declared to her father that he was going to marry his daughter. In this case, the bride-groom never met with a refusal. Only orphans and poor parents' children married without match-making.

In heathen times, a Mordvinian man could marry as often as he wished and have as many wives as he was able to support. The traces of this custom can be seen also in folk poetry. In legends and songs, there occur several cases of incest (when a brother was married to his sister or a father to his daughter). The survivals of group marriages revealed themselves in songs glorifying fertility and its symbols. These songs were sung during wedding and calendar rites and rituals; singing these songs at some other time was found to be dishonourable, shameful and blasphemous.

Getting married was considered obligatory. Mordvinian fellows and girls very seldom took a vow of celibacy (as a rule, only girls who took the veil). Later appeared several taboos and restrictions on marriages because of relationship, nationality and faith (marriages between Mordvinians and Tatars [more rarely Russians] were forbidden). The order of priority in marriage was very strict and was determined by the right of seniority. It was believed that a junior brother or a sister who married before senior brothers and sisters took away their happiness.

Besides traditional marriages, some other types occurred: when a son-in-law was accepted in his wife's house (sodamoks sovamo, E. - entering a household, being accepted as a son-in-law). This event took place if in the father-in-law's house there were only daughters (a son-in-law was usually accepted as the husband of a senior or a junior daughter and never of a middle one). Orphans and junior sons of poor parents were also accepted as sons-in-law. They entered

the father-in-law's household straight after the marriage, which was financially supported by the father-in-law.

In songs, there are to be found many facts revealing the sexual freedom before getting married. Nevertheless, such sexual relationships were later condemned. Being married to a girl with a baby was thought to be unlucky. No marriage ceremony was performed in this case. The bride left her parents' house not through the gate but over a fence, which was usually dismantled by those who came to take her. It was believed that, if a girl who had a baby left the yard through the gate, all the troubles that she was fated to have for her illegal loss of virginity would remain in her parents' house and all possible misfortunes would fall on it. If she left over a fence, she took all the misfortunes with herself.

Only widowers (more rarely widows) married for the second time. Adultery was never encouraged; moreover, it was punished. Divorce as a ritual never existed among Mordvinians. Wives abandoned their husbands very rarely. Old men could take such a wife back to her husband at any moment.

Various symbols of wedding ceremony can be traced among Mordvinians. The most characteristic one was a circle: the heads of the bride and the bridegroom were encircled with a ribbon, among the Erzia and Moksha they were led clockwise round a table three times before being married. Other symbols are symbols-objects - (a ring), "kopshi", M. (a round loaf of bread), "onava", M. (a coverlet for a wedding cart). The symbols of the ritual as a transition from one state to another revealed themselves in changing: a hair-style (on the first or second day of the wedding a bride was seated on a stump and a little girl divided her hair with a comb making a center parting such as women wore); a head-dress, clothes, adornments, gait. Symbols were closely connected with the magic number 7, which denoted a limit of distance (seven roads, fields, forests, villages, rivers). Marriage symbols consisted also in breaking pots, dividing the marriage loaf of bread into two parts between the bride-groom's and the bride's relatives. Wedding rituals symbolize the unity of the bride and the bride-groom (girdling with one towel, drinking and eating out of one cup, from one pie), joining a new house (giving a new name to a bride near the stove, feeding decorated food to her out of a mother's-in-law hand).

Symbolic marriage was preserved in folklore texts (fairy-tales, legends). The following plots may serve as illustrations: the marriages of an abducted woman and a bear; a swan-maiden and a hunter who stole her swan feathering. In mythological songs there is to be found a motive of the sacred marriage between "Pur'ginepaz", E. (the God of Thunder) and an earthly girl "Wasal'gya" (with the Moksha) and "Litowa" (with the Erzia).

The wedding rituals motive is reflected in burying unmarried girls, putting wedding clothes on them, organizing a symbolic wedding at a funeral repast when the dead girl's role was played by her girl-friend, omens (seeing a wedding in a dream is unlucky), fortune-telling. The time and terms of getting married in some villages depended on everyday habits and skills that a person was to acquire, e.g. a fellow was allowed to marry only after he learned to make hives.

Many marriage rituals and rites have a mythological base. Some of the rituals - measuring the table with a girdle, the newly-weds' staying on a fur-coat turned inside out, their strewing with hops and grain, seating a little boy in the bride's lap, etc. were performed for magic purposes. It was considered that all these procedures would stimulate fertility and promote house-keeping further. Ritual pies, loaves of bread (kopshat) and salt are regarded as the ancient mythic embodiment of welfare, happiness and symbols of the bride and bride-groom.

Among the Mokshans-Shoksha the rite of "seriyamot" (serems - to call smb. loud), performed in the first spring after the wedding during Lent, reflected a favourable influence of the newly-married couple on the Earth's returning to life after winter. On "Seriyamot" day the

newly-weds were glorified and addressed with songs. The young girls visited houses, sang, demanded tasty food. The newly-married couple treated them to such food but in case the girls did not like it, they reproached the newly-weds.

Marriage as a change of a young girl's social status, as a symbolic death and afterwards returning to life, was reflected in the rite performed by a bride. During several days before her wedding, after the first cock-crow, she went to the middle of the yard, stood on a clean spot (van'ks tarka, E.) at the back gate and raising her hands over her head and with her face to the East she addressed the God's son "Nishkepaz", E., "Kardo syarko", E. (the deity-patroness of the yard), "Kastargo" ("Nishkepaz's" daughter) asking them to wake up. Then she went three times round the draw-well "in the direction of the sun". After each round, bowing to the ground, she returned to the "clean spot", woke the dead ancestors and invited them to the wedding. Then she went home, glorified the dawn, woke her relatives, lay on the front bench, lamented, invited her girl-friends to mourn her virginity to the place of her symbolic death and return to life.

The bride was under the protection of gods, she asked "Kardo syarko", the deity of the cattle-shed, to hide her, to guard her with the cross, to fumigate with the censer. The house was perceived as a model of the Great Cosmos: the iron floor (Earth), the silver ceiling (Heaven), two windows (the Sun and the Moon). As the ritual purification of the bride there was regarded the rite of the baths, where fortune-telling was also practised and the young girls tried to find out what their future husbands' temper and their future life would be like.

A significant role in marriage ceremony was played by protections (against the evil spirit and witches). The number of carts in a wedding procession was odd (usually 3, 5, 7), the driving was a rapid one lest evil spirits should catch up with the carts; "toron' kandy" M. (the leader and master of the wedding) crossed the cart of the newly-married couple with a knout and a knife; "ovto", E. (bear) whipped entering guests with a sauna whisk on their backs; a "suspicious" man (a witch) was given some wine to drink with ashes and dog's faeces added to it; over the door a knife was stuck in, etc. Among the Mokshans and Erzians it was common to use noise effects for this purpose: they fired guns, knocked on oven-doors, walls and empty buckets with sticks, and broke pots. Among the Erzians there existed a special rite of "kudan' livtema" (expulsion of people who brought the bride to the bride-groom), observed on the last day of the wedding mainly for the expulsion of the evil power, which penetrated to the house together with strangers. It was believed that in case the rite was violated, one would not be able to live in the house, because ghosts and spirits would sing and dance at night.

Protection was spread on all household articles, clothes, beds and the bedding, ritual pies, loaves of bread, etc. (a burning splinter was moved three times clockwise round a kneading trough). Among the Mokshans there was a special rite of fumigating the bride's clothes. Before the wedding, needles and pins were stuck into the bride and bride-groom's clothes; under their bed sharp objects were placed (scissors, an axe, etc.). The newly-weds were sent to a barn where on the ceiling there was no earth. They went there together with the match-maker and the Master of the wedding to the accompaniment of erotic songs, which were to guarantee the happy end of the wedding and at the same time to protect against evil forces.

The mythological joining of the bride to a new house revealed itself in numerous rites: "lemdema", M., E. (giving a new name to the daughter-in-law in her husband's house near the stove), "eshi langs likhtemas", M. (taking the daughter-in-law to the spring, a draw-well), among the Mokshans - baking pan-cakes by the daughter-in-law when she was interfered with in everything she did (people stole pan-cakes, pushed buckets, splashed with water), "tsesten' syavoma", M. (to take happiness).

Mythological notions of "the top" and "the bottom" can be traced in the Mokshan rite

“kuts’fnema” (kutsems – to rise), performed usually on the second day of the wedding. The daughter-in-law was to find the bride-groom’s close relatives, who on purpose climbed a tree or the roof of a shed (the higher, the better as it meant closer to Heaven) and gave them presents. In the Erzian post-marriage rite of “organ’ syavordoma” (pouring yeast), people invited mythic patrons and dead ancestors for the last wedding dinner, then they poured out the yeast from beer tubs on some clean spot.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Mordovskaya svadba, 1931; Devyatkina T. P. Mokshanskije svadebnye obryady i pesni. Saransk, 1992.

**Menses/menstruations** (odézhat, M., mésyachnoit’, E.). According to Mordvinian views, this is a period when a young girl or a woman was unclean. There existed numerous directions and bans, connected with menses. They were thoroughly concealed from others; otherwise they were thought to be painful, plentiful and prolonged. Witches and sorcerers could use menstrual blood for doing people harm and damage and for bewitching a beloved man. Linen was allowed to be washed only after menses were over and in the evening. After the washing the water was to be poured out in some clean place. Linen stained with the blood of the first menses was to be thoroughly hidden. A young girl having menses for the first time was spoken of as a girl who “lotkas’ kasomda”, M., (“stopped growing up”), “stir’ks aras”, M., (became a young girl). In ancient times such girls were isolated (sent to special houses). The beginning of maturity reflected in a young girl’s manners, gait, and clothes; her head was covered “stir’ks” (in a young girl’s way), she wore more adornments.

It was strictly forbidden to mix many women’s linen while washing it, because menstrual blood was thought “shoryavoms”, M. (to mix). If a young girl’s or a woman’s menstrual cycle was out of order or blood was abundant, some magic practices were accepted when washing their linen: girls and women took three handfuls of water where the washing had been soaked and said, “Mondine saty tnyars”, M. (This will suffice for me). Bans and restrictions were aimed at protecting people and public places from “unclean” women. It was forbidden at the time of menses to visit public prayings (and later – go to church), to go to the cemetery, to touch icons, holy water, kindle a candle in front of an icon-lamp, to participate in a christening ceremony. In addition, an “unclean” woman was not allowed to do some work about the house: to prepare sauerkraut, to fetch apples from the garden (otherwise the apple-trees will wither), to start any affair. Several drops of menstrual blood mixed with drinks were used for bewitching young fellows and for healing.

Children’s birthmarks were smeared with virgins’ menstrual blood three times. In order to cause bleeding, women steamed in baths or simply steamed feet in hot water with some salt added to it. When menses were over, the woman was again considered “clean” and thus she acquired a different status in the life of the community (she was invited to the ritual washings of a child or a dead person, to deliver babies).

**Milky Way** (Kárgon’ ki, M., E. [karga, M., kargo, E. – crane; ki, M., E. – way, road]). According to Mokshan mythology, the sky was created by the Supreme God “Skay”. He made stars of stones that he gathered on Earth and scattered over the sky, so that the Milky Way could appear. Birds coordinate their flight with the Milky Way: they fly round the globe. The Milky Way is one of “Nishkepaz’s” (the son of Erzian Supreme God’s) places of residence.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Moon** (kov, M., E.). In Mordvinian tradition, the moon depending on her phase (od kov pryá,

M., E. “new moon”, mashty kov, M., E. “waning moon”, peshkse kov, E., pyashkse kov, M. “full moon”) – is connected with numerous directions, bans, ritual and magic practices. Mordvinians imagined the Moon as a young fellow and the Sun as a young girl. In folklore, they usually act together (first asking “Chipaz” E., [the God of the Sun] and then “Kowpaz”, E. [the God of the Moon] for happiness and everything good). In mythical stories, the moon comes down (from Heaven) to the top of “the world-tree” (s. Birch-tree), lights up the world, and reflects the connection of heroes with the motion of heavenly bodies. In wedding poetry, a bride-groom usually has the moon at the back of his head and a shining sun in his forehead. In songs devoted to reading dreams, an omen is mentioned: seeing the moon from one side betokens marriage. The cult of the moon was reflected in everyday life. The Erzian women used to embroider the pattern in the shape of the new moon on a women’s loin cloth. Women wore white and red kerchiefs in order to provide themselves with the patronage of the Moon and the Sun; the red colour dominated in the patterns of women’s clothes.

Among Mokshans it was not allowed to gaze at the moon too long. The Precursor violated this ban and “Skay” (the Supreme God) beheaded him. He is seen on the moon standing near “Skay’s” table without a head up to now. When the moon was in her wane people abstained from sowing crops, planting vegetables and starting a new affair (a bad omen), cutting hair (the moon may deprive one of life power and cause headaches). When on the wane, the moon was favourable for charming away toothache and warts (the ailment wore off together with the wane). A good omen was seeing the new moon (it was considered a good sign for all affairs), but dreaming about the new moon meant death in the nearest future; seeing the moon over one’s shoulder betokened great amazement and seeing a very big moon meant misfortune. Omens connected with the moon referred to social phenomena as well (visible moon on the night before Easter betokened misfortune or even a war).

Of great importance were the notions “right” and “left” when seeing the moon (s. Angel). Mokshans and Erzians interpreted them in a different way. The former thought that taking a front or a left-side view of the moon meant misfortune. On the contrary, seeing the new moon from the right side betokened luck for the whole month. The latter (Erzians) considered that seeing the moon from the front or from the right side meant a blow, seeing her from the left side promised love.

By the moon’s position in the sky people used to define weather: the new moon (on the edge a bucket could be hung) meant good weather, a pale moon or the moon in a circle, the moon with an edge directed down, the moon “as if on her back” promised rain, storm; clear-cut spots on the moon betokened strong wind. Bluish and grayish circles and strokes round the moon betokened cold weather. It is noticed that the first fall of snow coincides with the new moon. According to a popular belief, people fated to drown saw “Wedyawa”, the deity of water, who usually appeared before them in white clothes. The moon was referred to by sorcerers and witches in fortune-telling practices, but they kept their knowledge and methods of interpretation secret. A lunar eclipse was considered a foretoken of Doomsday and elderly people began their preparations for death.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 6, ch. 2. Mokshanskaya svadebnaya poeziya. Saransk, 1975. Narodnye primety / Compiled by Devyatkina T. P. Saransk, 1992.

**Mythological personage/tribal chief** (Tyúshitya, M., E. [tyashte, M., teshte, E – star]). In early folklore plots (legends, tales, stories and songs), he is a positive image; in later plots he is negative. The Erzian Supreme God “Nishkepaz” was present at the moment of his birth and granted him happiness. Thus, his origin testifies to his belonging to the supreme world. He is

endowed with magic power: he can plough with 12, 24 horses, to operate 30 wooden ploughs, 40 harrows. On "Tyushtya's" forehead is the sun, on the back of his head is a light new moon, and on the ends of his hairs are bright small stars. He is born with iron heels, a stone top of the head and his knees are wound with wire.

In other mythological sources "Tyushtya", sits astride a white horse, his helpers being a prophetic raven with an iron beak, three swallows, a queen-bee, and a steed. He could change into a steed, bee, swallow, pike, cock, etc., assume different aspects: with the new moon he is young, with the full moon he reaches manhood, with the waning moon he turns into an old man.

He lives on the mountain where the sun rises. He is the richest person on Earth. He has a silver palace, golden clothes; he is handsome, slender, well-dressed, with a white shirt on. He is a sorcerer, magician who rules land and water. At a glance he can build towns, at another glance he can create people, he can govern natural phenomena. That is the reason why poor crops and other natural calamities were attributed to Tyushtya (his anger and malediction).

He is an idol of musicians. In accordance with his desire people dance, sing, enjoy themselves. He has a stick in one hand and a trumpet in the other. Blowing the trumpet he calls people together to fight with enemies. His trumpet sounds like thunder, like the voice of gods and ancestors, the Supreme God patronizing him.

Later this image came from myths to epic songs and fairy-stories, which depict him as a ruler, a priest and a warrior, a ploughman at the same time. The people themselves elect him their king. Thus, an ordinary, industrious, strong and rich man cultivating the land holds the position of king. He is a worthy man, usually the son of a poor widow, who had to suffer much. The fairness of his election is symbolized by the rebirth of a dry tree. The procedure of election was determined by fortune-telling: people watched the handle of a ladle turn in a pot of mead, where it moves, the man standing there is elected king. At first "Tyushtya" is a just, strict king, a protector of common people, he keeps order in his kingdom, punishes for theft by the gallows. In the folklore of the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, he is shown as an unjust, cowardly king; he no longer defends his people. A queen-bee warns him that he is fated to perish at a child's hand. In another myth, a seventy-year-old widow is delivered of a new "Tyushtya" who is like the mythic iron-heeled one. The narration of "Tyushtya" is usually completed by his going over the sea to the other shore, where, according to the biblical motive, the son of Erzian God "Nishkepaz" gives food to people. According to legends, "Tyushtya" feeling his death approach asks his kinsmen, where he should go to die. People decided that he was not to do it in the public eye. Thus, he goes in an unknown direction and leaves his trumpet as a keepsake. In bad weather when it was particularly windy, a chimney produced strange sounds and people said that "Tyushtya" was still living. There occurred stories of "Tyushtya", which ran that he was still living and preparing for a war against his enemies. This war would be the last, because the whole world would perish.

Heathen Mordvinians organized special communities, tribal holidays called "tyushtyans". It should be stated that this tradition was not typical of all villages. The chief candle of the kindred, a necessary attribute of a ritual praying in the Torbeyevo district of the Mordovian Republic is also called "tyushtyan". Up to the present day, there occurs a proverb: "tyushtyan' pinge", M., "tyushtyan' pinget", E. (this means the same as the Russian expression "in the year dot" [i.e. "from time immemorial"]).

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epichesкая pesnya. Saransk, 1964.

# N

**Name** (Iem, M., E.) is thought to possess magic power in the structure of the traditional Mordvinian culture. It was believed that the choice of the name determined a person's fate. The name serves as a protection to its owner, one's own mark among other people. This idea was more typical of the Moksans than of the Erzians. Nearly each child in the family depending on his/her character, appearance and behaviour had a nickname (or a second name which stuck to him/her for the rest of their life and was even inherited by children). Before Christianity



*Performing of chastushkas during a Mokshan marriage.  
Photo: T. Devyatkina, 2003.*



*Mokshan women before a marriage.  
Photo: T. Devyatkina, 1995.*



*A Mordvinian ritual brooch "s'ulgam". End of 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

giving a name to a child was accompanied with various magic rites aimed at providing a child with a happy future life.

The earliest data concerning Pre-Christian names are to be found in the ancient Russian chronicles of the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Traditional names were preserved mainly in cadastres, copied and judicial documents of the Russian clerical work of the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries; most of ancient Mordvinian names are mentioned in folklore texts recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The most widespread heathen names were Azrawka, Vitowa, Litowa (feminine names), Andyamo, Suray, Tyugay (masculine names), etc. Pre-Christian names are poorly preserved in Russian written sources.

Tsarist authorities gave official documents only to men.

Women's names sometimes contained the word "awa", M., E. (woman, mother) as their second part, but most names consisted only of one word and differed little from men's names as far as their word formation model was concerned: Awaksha, Andyamka, Waraka, Karda, Velmaika, Kuyanka, Tundya, Chinzhay, etc. In addition to this, several names could be used both as men's and women's names (Lopay, Syrka, Putyaika, Andyamo). Alongside Christian names given in church after a christening ceremony, children were also given heathen names.

A number of Russian Orthodox names were adopted by Mordvinians in a modified form (Tanya - Tatu, Awdotiya - Olda, Nikolay - Mikol, etc.). Mythical heroes have the same names as ordinary people (Litowa, Andyamo, etc.). More rarely there occur specific names, characteristic



*Participants of a contemporary village marriage. Photo: T. Devyatkina, 2003.*

of some mythical personages: Sisem Karyaz, M. (sisem – seven; karyaz – back, spine, backbone), Bobo, M., E. (a creature used to frighten children up to now).

A name was often given by “iden’ baba”, M. (midwife) to her liking. Sometimes it was the name of some object or the first comer. The last case was considered a happy one, because it was believed that the baby would live since the first comer lives. When choosing a name, some other facts were taken into consideration, i.e. the place and circumstances of birth, social factors.

Traditional proper names denote not only a trait of a person’s disposition or character (e.g. Kezhdey – kezh, M. E. – ill-natured), but also an attitude towards a child, its parents’ emotions (Wechkas – vechkoms, E. “to love”). They may as well denote the place of birth (Nuyat – nums “to reap”), etc. Very popular were the names with stems denoting names of animals, birds, trees (e.g. Owtay – ovto, E. “a bear”; Tumay – tuma, M., E. “an oak”; Kargash – karga, M., E. “a crane”). The Pre-Christian anthroponimic model was bilateral. It included a father’s name (a patronymic), which preceded an individual name and was used in the genitive case, and the individual name proper (e.g. Pivtsayen’ Nuyanza, Vedyayen’ Kolomas, etc.).

The custom of giving a child the first comer’s name or the name of any object, bird, animal was motivated by the belief that such a depersonalized name would guarantee a long life for the child. The ancient cult of ancestors, which presupposed the archaic belief in the incarnation of the dead man’s soul in a new-born child revealed itself in the custom of giving

*From a Mokshan marriage to home – end of a marriage. Photo: T. Devyatkina, 2003.*



a child the name of a dead grandfather, grandmother, brother, etc. It was believed that the name of a person who died not long ago would provide a new-born child with happiness for all its life: “lemonts kenereze”, M. “he took the name”.

A praying was organized on the occasion of giving a name to a child. If a woman had her first baby, her relatives brought to her house a bucket filled with flour, on the top of which they put a round loaf of white bread and pancakes. For the christening party, people also brought eggs, rolls and buns, some corn in a cup; they put a child on a fur-coat lest its future life should be hungry and fruitless.

After a thanksgiving sacrifice devoted to the mythical deity-patroness of the home (“Kudawa”) and the deity patroness of kindred (“Yurkhtawa”) and dead ancestors, a midwife made someone hold a loaf of bread over the child’s head, while she herself took another loaf and striking these loaves against each other said the child’s name.

When giving a name to a child, numerous bans were observed. The most frequent was the ban on giving one and the same name in the same family (a grandfather’s, father’s, brother’s names). If this ban was broken, it was expected that someone bearing this name was to die or the child named after his/her father would never be happy. It was also forbidden to give a new-born child the name of the child who had died before another was born. It was considered that the same sad fate would overtake him/her.

A person’s name, identified in myths with its bearer and being at the same time independent, to some extent, was a part of many rituals. Names were differentiated according to sex, age and social criteria. Children were often called by diminutive names: (Tatkanes’, Anchanes’, etc.); married men and those who were of marriageable age were called by a full name, but married women’s names were changed. There was a custom of giving a new name to a daughter-in-law on the first or second day of the wedding. The name given under such circumstances determined the daughter-in-law’s rights and duties in large Mordvinian families, which represented a strictly regulated hierarchic system. Names were given in the order of priority. The name of the eldest son’s or brother’s wife was “Parawa”, M. (para – good, well), the name of the second brother’s or son’s wife was “Mazawa”, M. (mazy – beautiful, red); the third son’s or brother’s wife was called “Vezhawa”, M. (vezha – small, little), etc. A new name given to the daughter-in-law was intended for relatives (nephews, sisters-in-law); her husband’s mother and father called her “r’vyanya”, M., “ur’va”, E. (daughter-in-law). Husband and wife did not call each other by name either (they addressed each other as “Hi!”). The daughter-in-law bore her new name till

her death. It was this name that was registered in cadastres.

The ceremony of giving a daughter-in-law a new name took place in the middle of the house or near the stove. An indispensable attribute of this ritual was a round loaf of bread or pies. In the structure of the traditional Mokshan and Erzian wedding there existed a special post usually occupied by a boy – “lemidnya”, E. (idnya – a child), later “lemdernya”, M. “lemditsya”, E., “lemon’ maksy”, M. (the person who gives names), who legalized the new name by crying it out. Sometimes this function was fulfilled by “toron’ kandy”, M., E. Master of the wedding.

The rite of giving a new name to a daughter-in-law had variants in different villages. Among the Erzians of the Simbirsk province it was customary for “lemidnya” (the person who gives names) to climb the lower step of the stove and to chop off a chip from the third log of the ceiling with two strokes of an axe. Having put the chip and a loaf of bread on the daughter-in-law’s head, he said her new name and then, while going round all the guests with the axe still in his hand, he asked them what the bride’s name was. Then he put the chip in his bosom. He repeated these actions three times, then having taken a cap off his head, he chopped it with the axe into small pieces. When the ritual was over, the daughter-in-law gave him some beer. On the next day the chip with the spokes of the bride’s broken cart (“onava”, E.) were burnt in the stove. The idea of chopping evidently lay in the ban on calling the daughter-in-law by her former maiden name. The ritual of naming the daughter-in-law – “lemdema” exists among Moksha-Mordvinians up to now, but among Erzia-Mordvinians it ceased to exist in the 1950s.

A person’s name was used in spells against diseases, in love magic for bewitching a beloved person (for this purpose a bride-groom’s name was uttered three times into the chimney, in curses). A person could be damaged through the magic effect produced on his/her name. It was forbidden to respond to one’s own name, if one went at night to the ceremony of fortune-telling to “dangerous” places (to a crossroad, a bath-house, a river) as it promised misfortune. Judging by the name of the first comer and by cabbage leaves young girls used to define their future husbands’ names (s. Fortune-telling).

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966; Mokshin N. F. Tainy mordovskikh imen. Saransk, 1991; Devyatkina T. P. Narodnye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

**Next world/abode of dead people** (tóna shi, M., tóna chi, E. [tona, M., E. – that; shi, M., chi, E. – day]). Mordvinians thought that the life in the next world was the continuation of the life on Earth. The people were thought to sow, practise bee-keeping there, the young fellows and girls were thought to marry and have children. Honest people were supposed to be well-to-do there and sinners were boiled in tar; witches, suicides and those who died of alcohol were in fire up to their neck. The next world being situated under the ground is imagined very dark and gloomy. Mordvinians thought that the dead lived there in communities and therefore they sent them their best regards, sent also messages concerning their life on Earth. According to Mordvinian views, the dead needed food, clothes, various utensils and therefore they scraped some object with a knife thinking that in this way the dead would have the necessary thing.

It was believed that in the next world the dead died a second time and this raised them to a higher level of their existence. A second death comes if some other person from the same family dies. A person who died a second time is called “sire atyat”, M. (sire – old, atya – husband, old man). At the same time Mordvinians believed that the dead could leave their graves at night, come to the living in order to help them or do harm. These beliefs show that Mordvinians were able to differentiate between a person’s body and soul.

Later, under the influence of orthodoxy, the next world was imagined to consist of hell and paradise. The notion of Doomsday came into being, which meant that good deeds and the

*Erzian girls.  
Photo taken at the  
beginning of 20<sup>th</sup>  
century.*



burden of sins would be determined. Mordvinians thought that the deceased is judged in the god's court for 6 weeks and after that sinners are sent to hell, while the sinless go to paradise.

In laments, the way to the next world is shown as a very difficult one. No matter where the deceased might be sent (to hell or paradise), he had to go down or up 25 steps and on each step he had to give an answer concerning his life on Earth (his attitude to faith, the sick, his charity, etc.).

Paradise was imagined as a similarity of the life on Earth (there are the sun, a garden, birds), as for hell, it was considered to be a dark place. A person could get to the next world with the help of hair and nails; one had to offer payment in order to go through a fiery impediment.

Dreaming about a calf meant seeing the next world.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 7., ch. 1. Erziānskie prichitaniya-plachi. Saransk, 1972; T. 7., ch. 2. Mokshānskie prichitaniya. Saransk, 1979.

**Numbers** (chislat, M., E. [the Russian loan-word, the corresponding Mokshan and Erzian equivalent is not preserved]) – are of ritual and magic significance in folk beliefs and rites. Numbers and calculations were originally connected with the parts of a human body and various objects of the environs (two arms, three fish, one finger). Calculations were done mainly on fingers or by means of special marks that were set on a piece of wood. In due course, numbers assumed great importance as classes of signs describing the mythological worldview; some of them acquired the sacral meaning.

In the traditional Mordvinian culture, almost all numbers preceding 10 were endowed with special symbolics. Numerous rites and bans were connected with the number “one”. A baby under one year of age could not have his hair cut; it was forbidden to take him to a mirror (otherwise he would not learn to speak for a long time). It was believed that a child taken to

the field on the first day of the sowing campaign would learn to walk sooner. When a child was cutting teeth, the first tooth that had appeared was scraped with a silver coin; the first tooth that had fallen out was thrown into the cellar (to make the teeth strong). It was believed that a woman who ate one of the sprouts from the root of the herb "kyad" (a hand) would not be able to give birth to a child during a year. According to the law of initial magic (the magic of the first day), Mordvinians tried to determine all subsequent events by the first of them, e.g. judging by New Year's Day they made a conclusion of the next year on the whole, by the first thunder they determined the weather in summer and a future harvest.

Great importance was attached to the first person entering the house on holidays and particularly on Easter Sunday (what kind of person – the same kind of year); by the first comer young girls determined their bride-grooms' names, the success of their weddings, purchases, journeys, etc. Several rituals were devoted to the first driving of the cattle to pasture: people put a belt in the gate, whipped the cattle with a willow twig, handed eggs to a shepherd, etc. A young wife washed her face secretly near the stove for the first time so that her husband's relatives could love her.

The number "two" occurs more seldom (usually in riddles and games).

The number "three" ranks as a very important category in Mordvinian mythological perception. The Mordvinians tried to choose a place in the forest with three trees nearby (a lime-tree, a birch and an oak) for their prayings. In mythological plots, three fish (a beluga, a sturgeon and a sevyuga [a kind of sturgeon]) hold up the Earth; the Earth has three origins and three abysses, the heroine being bricked up in a crypt is visited by her mother three times; death comes to take a young sick fellow three times, but he asks for three years of delay; a pregnant old woman expects her baby for three years and the childbirth lasts three weeks; in a Mokshan song, the God of Thunder takes the earthly girl "Vasalgya" to Heaven after her swings had swung for the third time; the mythic serpent has been seeking its rescuer for three years; a quarrel and struggle take place among three sisters and brothers. After childbirth the woman and the baby were washed obligatorily in three baths and three waters (it was believed that unless three bath-houses were prepared, the baby could die); the Mordvinians believed that a sick person could recover if he was steamed three times with a sauna whisk of three birches, if three stones were taken to a bath-house and the water from three springs was poured on them. To cure a child of fever, the Mordvinians took the water from three springs and washed him/her with it; a baby born prematurely was "baked" three times (he was put three times in a stove after baking bread there, so that he could "ripen" in this way). According to religious beliefs, a bell in church very seldom tolls three times in the evening, because at this time those were praying who died a premature death (drowned and hanged people and those who died of alcohol); a bride and a bridegroom were led three times round a table; the Master of the wedding went round their cart with a knife in his hands also three times for protective purposes. To protect oneself against witches and the evil eye, people used to spit three times over their right shoulder; three needles or three pins were stuck in the bride's clothes; three kinds of thread (red, white and black) or three beads were tied to children's hands or hung to their necks.

The number "three" creates the vertical structure of the world, i.e. three kingdoms – Heaven, Earth and the next world.

In Mordvinian traditional culture, and particularly in rites preserving the remnants of ancient notions, traditions and customs, the number "six" is of particular significance: a bride's shirt has six embroidered stripes, the rite of packing six shirts in a bride's "par", M., E. (chest, box) is accompanied with ritual songs, etc. This number can be traced in the woodcarving, which decorated the chests where women's clothes and adornments were kept. Several scholars

suppose that seximal notation, substituted later by decimal notation, was in practice (or nearly was being put into practice) during the period of the Finno-Ugrian community.

Numerous adornments of the ancient Mordvinians are made as a complete set of 3, 6, 9, 12 objects. In the children's game "chakasa" (playing stones) six small stones were used.

In Mordvinian mythology and rites, the number "seven" is also of great importance. In songs, a good girl's fame spreads further than seven forests and seven fields spread. In this case, the magic number "seven" symbolizes the limit of distance. From there, from far away, from behind seven forests match-makers come to the bride. After the traditional bath, the bride addressing "Banyawa", the deity of the bath, asks her where the trees that have been cut down for the firewood grew, who felled them, and answers herself that they grew on the other side of the Sura and Rava (Volga) rivers in a pine forest, they were felled with seven axes and brought on seven "troikas" (three horses harnessed abreast); the guests at the wedding party wished the bride to have seven daughters and seven sons; it was forbidden to marry people related within seven generations.

The Erzians wore mostly "lapti" (bast shoes) made of seven strips of bast; in songs about mythological hero "Tyushtya", he ploughs with seven horses and his arrow weighs seven poods (nearly 115 kg). According to a mythological plot, after the Supreme God created the Erzia-Mordvinians, their population increased and they lived in seven villages; the girl intended for a sacrifice, which is made when a fortress is being built, is carried in a cart with seven horses and seven bells that muffle her weeping which is heard within seven miles. In mythological songs, the God forbids "Azrawka", an earthly wife of the deity "Endol", M. (Lightning), to open the seventh barn because only from there could she see her parents' life. In the song "Vasalgya", the parents having seven sons ask the God "Shkabavaz" to grant them a daughter; the mythic dragon "Karyaz", M (karyaz - back, spine, backbone) has seven backs and seven heads.

Up to the present day, the number "seven" occurs in curses: "Tuk sisem sel'kht' modava", M. (May you come seven fathoms down into Earth); a popular wish for an enemy was a furuncle - "sisem pryasa, bayaron' kudryasa", M. (with seven heads and a boyard's curls, i.e. a very big one). In spells intended to bewitch a beloved person, seven deuces were called for help.

In Mordvinian mythology and rites, the numbers 4, 10, 12 also occur: Earth has four corners in which four poles stand; a sacrificial animal in honour of the deity of earth "Mastorava" is divided into four parts and is buried under the four corners of the house; Mokshan shirts were embroidered with four strips.

The feathering of the twelfth swan-girl is stolen by a young fellow, whose wife she is soon destined to become; the Erzian traditional wedding pie "Luvon' kshi" was made of 12 layers, the last being decorated on top with four hen's eggs or four doves made of pastry. It was believed that luck and happiness would fall upon the newly-weds from the four parts of the world.

In folklore, the numbers 30, 77 are also to be found: the mythic hero "Tyushtya" can plough land with 30 horses; at the Erzian wedding party 77 match-makers are present. In a spell against witches, people addressed 77 angels and 77 saints; this number is often mentioned in spells against fever, injuries (77 bones, 77 joints, 77 locks, etc.).

Odd and even numbers had a magic significance. At a wedding party, when the bride was redeemed, the number of roubles was to be odd (in order to show that there was no one in the family to form a pair with a dead person); on the contrary, to the funeral or remembrance parties people brought everything in even numbers (in order to show that there was no one too many in the family and no one was expected to die). It was believed that somebody else would die in the family, if two coffins were made for one dead person.

Several numbers (usually 3 and 9) were used in witches' magic: a pod of 9 peas thrown in front of the newly-weds' cart, allegedly, halted horses (it meant no luck); in folk medicine

## Mordvinian Mythology

warts were cured by touching them with “kolma veikhksosa”, M. s. (three times with nine peas).

The number “ten” played a magic role in Mokshan beliefs: after harvesting, 10 ears were left for the mythic “paksyan’ kazandi”, M. (the goat of the field), which was to guard the field for 10 years and help to grow crops.

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1966; UPTMN. T. 1. Epicheskie i liro-epicheskie pesni. Saransk, 1963; Martyanov V. N., Nadkin D. T. K voprosu o finno-ugorskoj sisteme schisleniya // Materialy po arheologii i etnografii Mordovii. Saransk, 1975.

# O

**Oak** (tuma, M., túmo, E.). It is a personification of strength, firmness and masculine origin. An oak is a most widespread object and place of worshipping among Mordvinians (it is usually a solitary tree on the edge of the forest or on a hill at the outskirts or in the centre of a village). Near the oak, various public magical ceremonies and rites with sacrifices were performed. For this purpose, the biggest tree was chosen which necessarily had a hollow or a fork of two or three branches. The ritual food (meat, eggs, pies, beer) was brought to the tree. Three people were elected for the ritual of the thrice-repeated going round the tree: two men and a young girl. Among the Mordvinians of the Saratov province, the first man carried bread and salt, the girl following him was dancing a ritual dance, the second man played the bagpipe. An old man usually said a prayer in which he asked the Supreme God to grant a bumper crop and success in all affairs. The praying was followed by a ritual meal. Before the meal people put money in the hollow of the oak. In honour of the deity of oak "Tumopaz", public prayings were performed with the request to send rain in proper time. Near the oak, people also performed prayers asking for protection against drought and plague.

In several Erzian villages of the Chamzinka region of the Mordovian Republic, up to the present day people go to "oznomo tumo", E. (literally: a praying oak on which they hang or tie to it grants) and ask for wealth, help, a bumper harvest, children, rain, etc. The sacred oak-tree was not always allowed to be touched; it was prohibited to cut it down. Violation of the ban caused great troubles and poor crops. According to a popular belief, this tree protected people against misfortunes, it was considered to be the patron of the village and the environs. Nevertheless, during a storm it was not allowed to stand under an oak-tree (you can be killed by lightning). At that time the oak was contacting the upper (heavenly) world.

In the legend "A shepherd's daughter", the God of Thunder kills a young fellow because of jealousy towards his earthly bride Alduna. The fellow changes into a young oak. In songs, this motive serves to depict the mythical growth and to indicate an unusual origin. In children's funny tales, an oak is mentioned as a wish for a child to grow into a strong person and be as steady as an oak. Through the hollow and clefts of an oak people used to draw sick children (s. Birch-tree, Lime-tree); they steamed themselves with oak sauna whisks to cure themselves of chill. When building a house a young oak-tree was placed in the centre of the framework, after the first row of logs had been laid so that the house could be steady.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; UPTMN. T. 8. Detsky folklor. Saransk, 1978.

**Omens/beliefs** (sódamat, M., primétat, E. [sodams, M. - to know, to learn, to find out]) which reflect man's mythological perception being formed in different epochs. They reveal the economic, moral and social state of ancient people as a result of their harmonious relations and contacts with the environment; they also give one an idea of the cultural surroundings where people's knowledge of the world was formed.

Up to now, there occur numerous omens connected with weather, everyday and economic activity, and superstitions. According to their exactness (this quality being the final result of all omens), they are divided into real (the most exact), probable (less exact, less true) and absurd ones. Weather was forecast judging by insects', birds', animals' behaviour as well as by plants,

natural phenomena (the state of the Sun, the Moon, the stars), by several days which were later identified with the chief Christian holidays, and by the physical and mental state of man.

In omens connected with people's everyday and economic activity, the reference is made to snow, weather, the months of the year, natural phenomena, birds' flight, religious holidays (it was believed that a magic link exists between the weather and several days and periods). The same facts were taken into consideration when people tried to define the time of sowing and harvesting.

Numerous omens dealing with the symbolic organisation of the interior space of the traditional dwelling still exist nowadays. These omens are determined by the specific character of this organisation based on the principles of sacral space (there is singled out the masculine part - the front corner and the feminine part - the beam). The necessity to choose trees when building a house reveals the existence of their cults connected with the bans or some of them, which are allegedly able to cause a misfortune (s. Asp). It was supposed that a tree fallen by lightning or wind, when being used for construction, can cause failures and diseases in the future dwelling. Many items of a peasant's house (table, window, door, stove, etc.) were endowed with quite definite magic significance. Various taboos were observed: it was prohibited to put a head-dress on the table, to crack eggs against it, etc. (s. Table) which later were confirmed as omens. Economic and everyday omens reflect people's mode of thinking by means of concrete images dealing with a peculiar worldview which, in its turn, proves to be nothing but a set of oppositions: masculine - feminine, illness - death, fortune - misfortune, good - evil, luck - unluck, etc.

Superstitious omens (which, by their function, approximate to popular beliefs) are rather numerous (they are connected with birth, death, marriage, etc.). The threat of death was associated with the behaviour of poultry, domestic animals, and mythological deities - patrons. "Kudazorawa" M., the deity-patroness of the home, with all the Mordvinians was considered a herald of death. The deceased was thought to possess a supernatural power, he was looked upon as a foreteller (open eyes, soft body betokened another death in the family). Marriage omens and those related to birth are connected with protection against the evil spirit.

A great number of superstitious omens originate from reading dreams; their meaning in this case consisted mainly in foreseeing the future (luck - unluck, life - death, etc.). The interpretation of dreams was based chiefly on likeness, associations, traditional rites (s. Dream).

Some of the omens were associated by people with parts of a human body (ears, tongue, palm, soles, etc.). It was believed that itching soles betokened a journey.

There are also singled out individual omens. People said in this connection, "Er' lomant' uli sontsen' primetats", M. (Everyone has an omen of his own). In addition to this, in villages there exist omens referring to some concrete people, who symbolize good or evil (according to Mordvinian views, having a "light" or a "heavy" foot). In case someone happened to meet such a person before a journey or any important event, this meeting made him very melancholy.

Lit.: Devyatkina T. P. Narodnye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

# P

**Parents' day** (Kálmolágon' shi, M., Kálmolágon' chi, E., [kalmo, E., kalma, M. – grave; lango, E., langa, M. – top, place]) – a common remembrance party in honour of all ancestors. At the party people performed various magic rituals in which ancient ideas of the next world and their relation to the dead were expressed.

According to the materials dated as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was performed twice a year, in summer and in autumn. The time and the rites varied: in the Penza province, it was the next Saturday after Easter and the eve of St Dmitri's Day, among the Erzians of the Ardatovo district of the Simbirsk province, it was the first Easter Tuesday and Friday before St Dmitri's Day. In other districts, parents' days were observed on Holy Thursday, St Peter's Day and Ascension Day. According to Mordvinian views, the ghosts of ancestors came to their houses a day before. By tradition, people did not sleep before this day.

To celebrate this holiday in autumn, people went to the cemetery, remembered the ancestors all day long and at night they made fires, ate ritual food, sang ritual songs and put small pieces of food into small holes in the graves for ancestors. In several districts (of the Penza and Simbirsk provinces), a special magic ritual of inviting ancestors to the house was performed on the day. This ritual goes back to Mordvinian mythological images and ideas. In "ezembryas", M., in the front corner, a thick felt carpet was spread and a pillow was placed. Having taken a white towel, the master of the house went out and stood in front of the gate on a special place for inviting dead ancestors and called each by name standing with his face to the North or to "pyaleven' pyali", M. (midnight). Mordvinians thought that the souls of the ancestors penetrated into the towel that later was spread on the pillow. They bowed to it, and asked the ancestors to participate in the ritual meal.

As an element of the rite there should be regarded collecting ritual towels and handing them over to a chosen old man, who tied them together and visited all relatives' houses in order to take part in remembrance parties there. After returning to the house, which belonged to his kin, (the fact testifying to the ancient origin of the ritual), he spread the towels on pillows that had been prepared there beforehand. At the remembrance party, songs were sung, young girls and women danced and believed that in this way they entertained the dead who were supposed to be present there at the moment. At the end of this party, the towels were redeemed by their owners.

The final ceremony of the party was devoted to seeing the ancestors' souls to the cemetery (before sunset). The master of the house begged their pardon and asked not to do the living people harm, but to protect them from witches, to provide a good harvest and yields of cattle and not to come to their home without being invited. In the end, they shouted a spell "Let fire burn behind your backs". For protective purposes, every master made a fire in front of his house and shook the towel over it. The participants of the ritual supposed that some ancestor's soul came to live in a living person's body that would not later be able to die. In the Simbirsk province, people saw the ancestors' souls off to the cemetery with oven prongs in their hands and demanded that the souls be off as soon as possible.

In addition to common elements, some other local variants that are characteristic of the parents' day should be stated here: preparing a bath-house, "atyan' pure, M., E. (ancestors' beer), making a sacrifice, kindling "atyan' shtatol", M. (ancestor' candle, s. Candle), collecting

money and eggs in “atyan’ shapka”, M. E., (ancestor’s cap), placing “vaime ket’ks”, M. (a box where various household articles were kept that belonged to many generations of ancestors) in a kindred’s house, scraping a coin, inviting others for a remembrance party at the threshing floor.

According to the sources of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mordvinians organized great parties on parents’ day for the whole kindred in spring once in 50 and more years. Sacrificing (usually a horse or a cow) was their compulsory element.

The second parents’ day on Easter Sunday was celebrated more frugally. Mordvinians often limited the celebration only to visiting the cemetery. Here a horse was sacrificed and its skin was hung on a cross, ritual food was prepared and people were jumping over the fire. Mordvinians believed that their ancestors regarded them with favour, but they could get angry and cause troubles (diseases, houses on fire, etc.). In order to propitiate them, occasional remembrance parties were organized (sacrifices were made and spells were said with the request to forgive and help). Occasional remembrance parties were also organized in case people dreamt too often about the deceased, who complained and asked for something. Such parties were held not only at cemeteries, but also at home and at “shuksha pryа”, M. (a place for rubbish). As it was not easy to find out to whom a sacrifice should have been made, all ancestors’ names were mentioned in a prayer as well as acquaintances’ names and names of those who were the first people buried on the cemetery.

Lit.: Milkovitch. Byt i verovaniya mordvy v kontse XVIII stoletiya // Tambov. eparh. Ved., <sup>1</sup> 18. Tambov, 1905.; Smirnov I. N. Mordva. Kazan, 1895.

**Patron (-ess) of house** (spirit of profit, enrichment [Kúygorozh, M. (kuy – snake; korozh – owl), Tryamka, E., Tryamo, E., Tiryamin’ge, E., Tiryamka, E. [tryams – to feed, bring up]). This creature did not live in every house. In the Lukoyanovo, Shatki and Smirnov districts of the Nizhni Novgorod region “Tryamka” is understood as an evil spirit.

“Kuygorozh” can be born in different ways. According to some myths, a master of the house keeps a cock for 7 years who lays two small eggs. The master and the mistress keep them under their armpits and at last the creatures hatch. “Kuygorozh” can also hatch after 7 weeks out of a red cock’s egg; out of the first egg laid in spring or an owl’s egg in the forest which was taken by a peasant from the edge of an owl’s nest; out of a black hen’s egg. In this case it is black and invisible. The master and the mistress (an old man and an old woman) brood eggs themselves for 3-6 weeks.

“Kuygorozhs” are different in appearance, they may look like: a creature with a bird’s head and a snake’ tail, a small she-cat with invisible small bags on her cheeks where two pounds of grains can go, a chick taking, according to a belief, the aspect of a very small man who is of a finger height or sometimes at the moment of his birth, even of a thimble height and who will live and grow for 7 years under a stove until he reaches the height of an elbow and gains enough strength to serve his master. Usually after his birth the creature is invisible and seldom appears before people. Among the Mokshans of the Tengushevo region of the Mordovian Republic, it is considered that “Tiryamin’ges” can take the aspect of chicks but, as a rule, they look like people. In addition to this, they do not hatch out of eggs; on the contrary, they are invited by the master who must go to a cemetery on the first dark night in spring and invite it in a very competent manner. It was absolutely impossible to force “Tiryamin’ge” out of the house. It was therefore considered that in the house where they live, they eat porridge leaving the crust untouched. The mistresses, who were said to keep them, put a pot of porridge on the table on great religious holidays. If a priest invited to the house found out that the crust gave way when he pressed it, it meant that the pot was empty and that “Tiryamin’ge” had eaten the

porridge. Thus, it lived in this house. Their presence also revealed itself in a mess and a dirty table in the house. When they are treated badly, they bring their masters to ruin, steal their things, mix grain with manure, and defecate in the middle of the table and the house.

"Kuygorozh" is stubborn, he demands work even if everything has already been done. He makes his master rich, takes care of his cattle, increases the cattle and the poultry population, etc. He can fulfil any of his master's desires and is endowed with fantastic strength. He is a fast worker and in one night he can build a house or a cattle-shed, plough a field and sow it, gather a crop, cook hundreds of dishes.

"Kuygorozh" is not malicious but, if his master forgets to provide him with work, he can destroy everything he has done and leave his master forever. To get rid of the annoying helper, his master may assign him a task that really cannot be fulfilled, e.g. to make a rope from sand, to take out water from a bog, etc. In this case the creature disappears or changes into some animal.

They can steal corn, money, etc. for his master from the neighbours. People show therefore ill will towards the family where the creature lives. It is said that sometimes other people's ones are stolen by means of a special charm, they are taken home and kept in the house or in a barn for profit. "Kuygorozhs" are supported by their masters who feed them. If the creature feels his death approaching he becomes very naughty.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 3, ch. 1. Mokshanskije skazki. Saransk, 1966; T. 10. Legendy, predaniya, bylichki. Saransk, 1983.

**Pentecost/Whitsunday** (Tróitsya, M., Tróvitsya, E.) – the 50<sup>th</sup> day or the seventh Sunday after Easter. In the church calendar, it is included in the number of the 20 chief holidays and connected with one of the events from the posthumous activity of Jesus Christ – the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven on the apostles; the Trinity as the union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit participating in it. With the Mordvinians the holiday was adopted after their conversion to Christianity (approximately in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) in a transformed form and was observed together with heathen holidays. At Pentecost people first prayed in church and then performed a heathen magical ritual under a lime-tree; young girls (no men were admitted) performed "ozks" (a ceremony devoted to a birch-tree).

At Pentecost, customs connected with the cult of verdure were observed. On the eve of the holiday windows were decorated with birch branches (afterwards they were hung in the passage as a protection against evil spirits and for healing magic). Young girls wove wreaths from birch branches and flowers, put them on their heads and hung them on the outward walls of houses in the number equal to the number of girls in the house. By tradition, the girls visited houses, sang ritual songs, asked the deity-patrons to give them good bride-grooms, glorified the girls who offered food for the holiday. In the evening the girls went to the river with a decorated birch-tree, put it on the river bank and bowed before it, took off the wreaths and threw them into water. They watched and concluded: if the wreath floats – the girl is expected to marry soon, if it sinks – the girl will die. By tradition, they washed their feet there. After performing the rite, the girls took off all the adornments from the birch (kerchiefs and ribbons), broke it and threw it into a fire where they prepared ritual food. Before the ritual meal "pryavt teiter", E. (pryat, M., E. – head; teiter', E. – girl), the leader of girls said a prayer (she asked for health and good bride-grooms). They made sacrifices of the prepared dishes to the gods (during the ceremony frying-pans were raised three times). After the ritual meal, having sung a ritual song the girls kissed each other through big birch sauna whisks. The holiday was completed with a song in honour of the Trinity. On the second day there was organized "Baban' ozks" (magical ceremony of women), "Velen' ozks" (magical ceremony of the village) accompanied with sacrifices

(usually a sheep was stuck, which had been carefully prepared for the procedure: it was washed in a river, and its horns were decorated with birch branches). Then a ritual meal followed. In the Samara region, sacrifices were substituted by drinking “pure” – a national alcoholic beverage. In the place of sacrificing a rowan-tree was planted.

It was forbidden to work at Pentecost. On Saturday on the eve of the holiday, the dead were remembered. This day became one of the chief remembrance days (kalmalargon' shi, M. – the remembrance day of the dead) and visiting cemeteries became a tradition. People connected the custom of making besoms and planting turnips with the holiday.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981.

**Pies** (Pyáryakat, M., Pryákat, E.) In the structure of Mordvinian cultural tradition, pies had a ritual and magic function in addition to their everyday usage. They were usually baked on the occasion of calendar holidays and most often for public magical ceremonies: in honour of Assumption Day – “kashan' pies, M., E. (millet porridge pies), “maren'” pies, M. (apple-pies in honour of Apple Spass, i.e. a holiday of sanctifying apples, August 19). Baking pies for the traditional Erzian wedding was an obligatory ritual. Their number varied: in some villages 9 pies were carried to the bride, in others – 7 or 5 (but not less). Each pie had its name as well as ritual and magic significance. The greatest and most important of them was “luvon' kshi” (luvoms, M., E. – to count, to say a prayer; kshi, M., E. – bread), a ritual loaf of bread, round in shape with an oak hoop round it (the symbol of the Sun). It consisted of 12 layers. The lowest layer (the personification of Earth and fertility) was of millet porridge, the second – of cottage cheese, the third – of fried eggs, the fourth – of porridge, the fifth – of cottage cheese, etc. The highest, the 12th layer consisted of four hen's eggs that were not peeled and were intended for the Supreme Gods in order to pray to them for fertility. On the upper crust there were placed several adornments of pastry – usually a horse with a rider or two doves (sometimes four doves) and in addition to this, a fir-tree branch was stuck in with decorations of coloured paper – this symbolized, on the one hand, a “different” world and, in particular, a bride-groom's house; on the other, a fir-tree which was a tree of life and longevity. This pie was left on the table of the bride's parents; the crust with decorations was taken by the match-maker back home and handed to the bride-groom's mother; the fir-tree branch was fastened over the bed of the newly-weds and remained there until it was lost. The fir-tree branch was also an obligatory attribute among the Shoksa-Mordvinians. Nevertheless, among them pies were fed to pigs in order to increase their fertility.

The second ritual pie “sovamo pryaka” (an entrance pie) was believed to make easier the messengers' entrance to the bride's house and her neighbours' house. The latter serving her as a shelter was also the place where the pie was divided into two parts: one part for the girls and the second – for the hostess. The function of the third pie “ava lovtso” (mother's milk) was a form of gratitude to the bride's mother for feeding her daughter with the milk from the breast. The fourth pie “van'ks tarkan' pryaka” (pies to enter the bride-groom's house) was intended for taking the bride (before going to the bride-groom's house) to a “clean” place to say good-bye to dead ancestors. In several villages, it was called “atyavan' pola” (the ancestors' part). The fifth pie “toy pryaka” (the wedding pie) was used in the praying ceremony in the bride's house, when the wedding procession came there. Afterwards it was distributed among the bride's relatives.

Before putting the pies into the stove and taking them out of it, the women who were engaged in cooking them performed a ritual praying and sang “pazmoro”, M. E. (a divine song) in which they asked “Kashtom kirdi” (the patroness of the stove) to bake them nicely without

crumbling the edges and thanked her for good pies. Then a public praying was organized, where the God was asked for help in conducting the marriage ceremony happily and safely. People also asked the God to protect the newly-weds from the evil eye and grant them fertility. Decorating pies with eggs and figures of horses and doves superseded, to some extent, sacrificing animals, which was made for propitiatory purposes. It was partly reflected in the women's behaviour: when taking pies out of the stove they stamped their feet and neighed as if they were horses, rang bells and asked the owner of the stove to stand a treat to the "grey horses", because they could not carry the pies.

To provide the newly-married couple with fertility, Erzians baked together with the wedding pies 30-40 pies of a smaller size in the shape of women's breasts called "oder'van' pott'" (a young woman's breasts). These pies were used in a special praying in the bride-groom's house. The Supreme Gods and "Kashtom kirdi", the patroness of the stove, were asked to provide the young wife with milk and butter in her breasts and help her give birth to seven sons and seven daughters.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Pigeon/dove** (Gulnyá M., Gúl'ka, E.). According to Mokshan views, it is "shkayen' narmon'" (a divine bird), an anthropomorphic creature. Several tales deal with it as if it were a human being - 'loman' (a man). Eating doves and pigeons was strictly forbidden, it was a sin that was never to be forgiven. There existed taboos connected with the destruction of their nests. Otherwise a pigeon or a dove could bring fire in its beak, set a house on fire and kill the family.

In calendar and ritual poetry (Christmas carols), pigeons' and doves' activity reminds one of a human activity: a pigeon (or a dove) bakes cakes of grains that it brought in its beak, ground and sifted, spreads butter on them and treats children singing Christmas carols to these cakes. In mythological songs, a young girl turns into a dove. In wedding folklore, a dove symbolizes the bride's gentleness and meekness (she is a domestic dove). In traditional Erzian wedding rituals the twelfth layer of the main ritual pie "lupon' kshi" was decorated with two figures of pigeons made of pastry (in the Ardatovo district there were four figures). In this case, they symbolized divine power and future peaceful life.

In mythology, the Nizhni Novgorod Erzian Goddess "Ange Patyay" sometimes changed into a snow-white dove and threw from above flowers for bees to gather honey and crumbs for hens. The son of Erzian God, "Nishkepaz", a cultural hero and demiurge, could also take the aspect of a pigeon.

According to popular beliefs and omens, a dove flying through an open window betokens misfortune. If a dove only knocks at the window, it means a piece of news or a warning of danger, especially of a house on fire. Doves and pigeons were also referred to in fortune-telling practice (s. Fortune-telling).

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendaro-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk. 1986; Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Porridge** (Yam, M. Kásha, E.). A very popular kind of ritual food among Mordvinians (particularly Erzians). Porridge was an obligatory sacral kind of food at magical ceremonies, at wedding parties and when assisting childbirth, at remembrance parties. Among the Erzians, there existed a special magical ceremony "Baban' Kasha" (elderly women's porridge).

In the traditional wedding, porridge is ranked mainly as a fertility symbol. The last day of the Erzian bride's stay at her parents' house is called "Kashado Yartsamo chi" (the day of porridge).

The porridge was prepared not only in the bride's house, but in all her relatives' houses from

where it was brought to the bride in pots. The number of pots was marked with a piece of chalk on a beam, so that guests and the bridegroom could know about the number of her relatives. In this rite, the magic function of porridge is reflected in the bride's laments in which she adjures the deity - patrons to grant wealth and everything good to everybody who brought the porridge to her. In several villages, the bride together with girl-friends visited her relatives' houses and ate porridge there. One of the traditional rites was preparing millet porridge in a bath-house by a woman recently confined just after her delivery; the ritual porridge is still served at remembrance parties, which is regarded as a popular tradition not only among Finno-Ugrian peoples, but among many other peoples as well.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. *Mordovskaya svadba*. M., 1931; Devyatkina T. P. *Mokshanskiye svadebnye obryady i pesni*. Saransk, 1982.

**Praying (public)/religious and magic ceremony** (Ozks, M., E. [ozondoms, M., oznoms, E. - to pray]) observed before and after a sowing campaign, at the end of harvesting, before hay-making, in honour of deity-patrons, domestic animals, etc. On the day of important rituals, people did not work (it was considered sinful). The ceremonies were collective and domestic, they were divided into festive ones observed at quite definite calendar dates and occasional ones performed on different occasions. The greater part of the rituals was identical both among Mokshans and Erzians. The common element was the object of praying (deities, dead ancestors), the locality (under a lime-tree, birch, elm, pine; at the outskirts of a village, near a spring or a brook, at a glade, on a special fenced territory "keremet") and participants (in some ceremonies only women participated, e.g. "Baban' Kasha", in others - only men, e.g. "Buka ozks", M., E. [buka-ox], in the third - both men and women). Domestic or family magical ceremonies were performed by senior people in the house (by the master or, more rarely, the mistress), who paid special attention to all rituals. With their faces to the East, people put their hands in the armpits, bowed, knelt or prostrated. The same respected old men and old women were usually elected to perform public ceremonies. The duties of the chief ("pryavt" among the Teryukhans and Erzians; "inyatya" among the Mokshans) were carried out by the oldest villager. They were not priests (they made arrangements for sacrifices but did not make them). They were given sacrificial meat and a ladle of beer first. They gathered people for the ceremony and dismissed a meeting. They kept a sacred ladle, tubs, sacrificial knives and other utensils necessary for the ritual at home. They appointed the day of the ritual. In some villages they were called "Ozks atya", M., E. (atya - old man), "Ozks baba, M., E. (baba - old woman), "Imbaba", M. (the chief old woman), "Azorava", M., E. (azor - host, master; ava - woman, mother), among the Teryukhans and the Erzians - "Vozatya" (voz - load, luggage; atya - an old man, father). Before the ritual, its chief tried to find out by means of special ceremonies if the sacrifice (a bird or an animal) that was to be made would please the deities. In some villages, an animal chosen for the sacrifice was favoured with various honours, it lived several days in the house, was fed on special food and decorated with birch branches, ribbons, etc.

The Erzian chief had helpers (12, as a rule) who did special duties each: some gathered the bread to brew beer, honey, butter, eggs, money all over the village; others served beer, the third served sacrificial meat on special sacrificial knives, the rest kept order. To maintain order, they stood on stumps or tubs turned upside down.

They also prepared and installed ritual candles (s. Candle). In addition, three days before the public ceremony three more people were elected, who went about the village looking for a one-coloured animal, usually a red ox and white ram. Having bought it for common money, they slaughtered it on a stone named after "Kardo Syarko", E., the deity of the yard, and poured

out the blood in a special place. Mordvinians thought that pouring the blood in some other place was an unpardonable sin. It may cause a curse on the house.

In the Erzian villages of the Simbirsk region a sacrificial ox was flayed alive, the ceremony being accompanied with a public praying so that deities could hear the ox's voice. In ancient times, all skins were hung on poles and left forever.

After the ritual, the food was sanctified and distributed among gods and people. Then the holiday changed into a general feast, at which all those present were divided into kindred groups – "yur", M., E. (yur – root) if there were any. The feast was accompanied with singing songs – "pazmorot", M., E. (paz – god; morot – songs) as well as choral, dancing songs and dances.

With the Mokshans in the Narovchat district, when carrying ritual candles from one house to another women participating in the party rode astride sticks and shouted imitating the horse's neighing, "Igo-go". The other women were holding in their hands forked sticks decorated with multi-coloured ribbons and bells and called "alashat", M., E. (horses). They clanged them beating time in accordance with dancing songs.

People had fun when preparing sacrificial food. For instance, on the God's son, "Nishkepaz" Day all participants of the ritual party went to a ravine near a river to brew honey beer in a cauldron. They went round the cauldron three times with ritual dances and music trying to amuse their respected deities-patrons. After the rituals, honey "kvass" was drunk in each house. Some of the magical ceremonies still exist in villages up to the present day in a modified form. Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981.

**Praying after a cow's calving** (Míchkon' ózondoma, M. [michke – cottage cheese, ozondoms – to pray]). On the third day after calving Mordvinians – Mokshans prepared cottage cheese and prayed to their deities and patrons, and, in particular, to "Kardazawa", the patroness of cattle-shed asking her for heifers. At that time young girls sitting at the table were slightly struck with a spoon on their foreheads. In honour of this praying, people prepared "kurgonyat", M., E. – small pies with cottage cheese and treated their villagers to them.

Lit.: Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947.

**Praying ("heavy")** (Stáka ozks, E. [staka, M. E. – heavy; ozks, M., E. – a praying, holiday]) performed at night, on the outskirts of a village in case of an epidemic. Several (5–6) people participated in it. To the outskirts there were brought food-stores prepared in the house of the village elder, people prayed to "Stakapaz", the deity-patron of heaviness, asked him to relieve the village of the imprecation. Then they encircled the village with a furrow made with an iron spade or a plough, which they dragged themselves returning in the end to the place where they had prayed. The prayer was followed by a ritual meal, the rest of the food being buried for the deity. After that everybody went home.

By tradition, people prayed in silence; the prayers were said in a whisper. People also saw to it that no noise was made in the village at the moment and all villagers had been warned beforehand.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Praying on a boundary-strip of neighbouring villages** (Gran' ozks, E.). The deity of fertility (Norowawa, s.) was prayed to for a good harvest and for "sporina" (rapid growth, profit, benefit) in grains, which are not nutritious without it. People asked "Norowawa" to prevent it

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from going to their neighbours' fields. Mordvinians thought that a small lump of earth was sufficient for "sporina" to go to the neighbours and sometimes "sporina" happened to get there quite accidentally, when a lump of earth from a plough or wheel fell over the boundary.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Praying on the occasion of locusts** (Tasto ozks). It was performed in case this insect appeared in the fields. People were praying in the field, asked the Supreme God to pacify the locusts, which ate grass and crops.

Lit.: Evseyev M. E. Izbr. tr. T. 5. Mordovskaya svadba. Saransk, 1966.

**Praying at night** (Ven' ozks, M., E. [ve - night; ozks - praying]) performed in case of frequent ailments in a family or in case of cattle's diseases. It was devoted to "Yurkhtawa", patroness of the kindred, household and yard with all its buildings. For this purpose a big pie was baked and 40 candles were placed on it. The patroness was asked to drive all diseases out of the house and from the yard. People went round the yard and the house with hot pieces of coal in a pot. This rite still exists in several villages of the Temnikov region of the Republic of Mordovia.

**Praying for rain** (Pízem ózks, M., Pízemen' ozks, E. [pizem - rain; ozks - praying, holiday]). In the drought, all villagers went to a river to pray. They woke up "Vedyawa", the deity-patroness of water, and asked her for rain. Afterwards people splashed, threw water at each other and dropped boiled eggs into the water for the deity in order to propitiate her. In several villages, people prayed near a draw-well, then they went to the cemetery and addressed the dead ancestors, "Kalmazorawa", the deity-patroness of the cemetery, with the request to prevent them from droughts. It was believed that after this ritual was performed and the rain sent, the God of Lightning (Jondolpaz, M.) took a sacrifice for himself (killed an animal or set a house on fire).

# R

**Rowan-tree** (pízelks, M., pízel chívto, E.). The Mordvinians used this tree for magic purposes, mainly as a protection. When a new house was being built, a rowan-tree with its roots was put into the cellar under the floor and heaped with earth; sometimes this was done in the yard. At the wedding party, a bride and a bride-groom also put small twigs in their bosom for protective purposes and for happiness. The Erzians placed branches of a rowan-tree on either side of the door in order to scare away the deceased who used to come home. It was customary to plant rowan-trees near the house. In addition to this, people also tried to keep a twig of a rowan-tree at home to protect them from the evil eye. It was forbidden to cut down a rowan-tree (otherwise misfortunes will overtake you). If there were problems with the cattle, it was necessary to dig out a young rowan-tree together with its roots and to bury it in one of the corners of the cattle-shed in order to restore the cattle's fertility.

It was believed that the deity of cattle-shed could kill all the domestic cattle if she happened to dislike them. In this case, praying was performed in honour of this deity and a twig of a rowan-tree was stuck into the wall. It was considered that a bumper crop of rowan-berries betokened cold weather or problems with health (and particularly the diseases of the eye) all year round. Lit.: Devyatkina T. P. Narodniye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

# S

**Shadow** (tsil'f, M., suléy, E.). It is an object of magic impact. In the village of Vechkanono of the Buguruslan district, a child's fright was cured by addressing his/her shadow. In the moonlight a witch licked the child's face and then spat on his/her shadow, saying a spell, which ran that the shadow was without kith or kin (it had no brothers, sisters or any congenial soul). Then the sorcerer asked the shadow to take the child's fright. It was forbidden to step on a person's shadow or over it (one could be taken ill). It was believed that the deuce and witches cast no shadow and due to this reason they were recognized among other people.

Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952.

**Sky** (ménel', M. E.). According to myths, the Mokshan Supreme God created the sky blue and transparent. The deuce threw black, leaden-coloured clouds on it. The God noticed it, filled the clouds with water and ordered them to be open from time to time when Earth needed a refreshing rain.

The sky was imagined as a crystal dome (possibly under the influence of the Russians) over which God and Paradise were situated. The eternal light fell onto the Earth from the sky through an opening in the firmament. According to a popular belief, the road to Paradise lay along the smooth firmament and nobody could get there without nails.

According to myths, in ancient times the sky was nearer to the Earth than it is nowadays. In the Simbirsk province, a myth was recorded which tells that clouds touched chimneys and an Erzian woman moved the sky away with a poker; a Mokshan woman - with a frying pan. A myth recorded in the Kazan province, narrates that one could touch the sky with one's hand and due to it people's prayers reached the Supreme Gods sooner. According to one of the legends, God raised the sky because he got angry with an Erzian woman who reproached him that the smoke went back into the house when a fire was made in a stove.

Lit.: Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947; Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki. 1952.

**Snake** (súy, M., gúy, E.). According to Mordvinian views, it is a symbol of good and evil. Among the Erzians of the Penza region, a grass-snake ("giger' pryá guj") is considered to be the patron of the cattle-shed even today. It was the last creature made by "Nishkepaz", the Erzian God, without arms and legs and doomed to creep. Snake lives in a forest, marsh, under the ground, in a yard, river, deep draw-well, and cattle-shed. In folklore, it is sometimes imagined as an anthropomorphous creature, a fiery one, having wings and eating people. In spells, it flies (being a grey or black viper). The lascivious one flies from under a dung-hill or from the top of a hillock. Its flight is accompanied with noise and whistling. In wedding poetry, it is a symbol of swiftness, quickness and rapidity (referring to horses or a wedding chart, wedding procession). The king of all snakes is "Inekuy", M., "Ineguy", E. Perhaps, snake was once a totem, later it became the patroness of the hearth, arable farming. In myths, it directs a hunter to his home, makes him become a farmer. With the development of agriculture the totem of snake changes into an artistic image (the image typical of songs) of a redoubtable ruler who made a hunter take up farming and even gave him a wife.

In some sources, snake is shown helpless: being very strong it cannot come down from

a burning tree, get out of a pit filled with water or a draw-well. Sitting in a burning tree or on a tussock (stump), surrounded with water or fire, it asks for help speaking with a human voice, promises to reward a rescuer or change into a girl and marry him. Nevertheless, it deceives a man and repays him evil for his kindness and eats the rescuer. Girls cursed by their parents changed into a snake, but in some miraculous way they assumed their former aspect when hunters returned them back home. One of the myths tells us that a snake that twined round a young fellow's neck hit itself against the floor and changed into a wonderful girl. It was forbidden for parents to use curses and obscene words in their speech, otherwise snakes would always surround their children. If someone happened to step on a snake, he begged its pardon lest it should punish him.

Snake was thought to be endowed with reason and to understand human speech. According to a popular belief, on the night of Midsummer Day one could learn to understand snake's language (s. Holiday (Ivan Kupala's)). It was supposed that witches and sorcerers could understand its language and use it for their magic purposes. They could also change into fiery snakes. Dead people also used to fly home through chimneys, looking like fiery snakes. In Erzian beliefs, meteorites, concealing the sun and light were considered to be fiery snakes or evil spirits.

Healers used to charm away snake-bites with the help of a snake's head, they drove away illnesses, bewitched a beloved person; "kuen' pryа", M. (a snake's head) was also used as an adornment by young girls and women (s. Iron). According to a popular belief, a snake-bite was not dangerous for a person who washes his/her face with a red cow's milk. Mordvinians thought that snakes feed on a cow's milk. Thus, a cow was milked through "morgа varyava", M. (a hole in a board left after a knot) so that a snake could cease to suck milk.

The image of a snake is used in curses (kuys' pupalenze, M. – may a snake bite you), to show a negative attitude towards a woman. Seeing in a dream was a bad omen. A lot of snakes in a forest promised a bumper harvest. According to a belief, all snakes gather once a year (in spring) for "kuen' ket'mafks", M. (snakes' council, gathering).

Lit.: Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947; UPTMN. T. 3, ch. 1. Mokshanskіe skazki. Saransk, 1966; T. 3, ch. 2. Erziānskie skazki. Saransk, 1967; Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964.

**Snakes' King/Great Snake**, (Ínekúj, M., Ínegúj, E. [ine – M., E. – great; kuj, M., guj, E. – snake]) – in early myths, this snake symbolizes all sorts of evil spirits; in later myths, he is Great Snake, King of snakes. He is white (in early myths he is black), he can be fiery, many-headed (7 or 12 heads) and can fly in the sky. In mythic tales, he lives in a faraway country (which cannot be reached by any bird) in a castle over a tar-black sea, on a high black rock. There is a garden with towers there and on them "zoltan' kuykht", M. (snakes of gold) are situated. Three-headed snakes guard the castle. The king's arrival is accompanied with thunderous noise.

In fairy stories, a man learns the language of animals by eating the flesh of the white snake. Single combats with the king of snakes are usually won by a valiant fellow born by miracles (born in the marriage of a woman and a bear). The image of the snake is used in curses (may a furuncle appear "sisem pryasa", M., E. – a seven-headed one). According to popular beliefs, the king of snakes is a symbol of evil and sliness.

Lit.: Maskayev A. I. Mordovskaya narodnaya epicheskaya pesnya. Saransk, 1964; UPTMN. T. 3, ch. 2. Erziānskie skazki. Saransk, 1967; T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarно-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Soul** (váime, M., oime, E.), originally understood as breath (vaimon' targama, M., oimen' tark-sema, E. – to breathe) – the initial cause of life and everything living. The Nizhni Novgorod

Erzians thought that souls of the people who had not yet been born were over clouds in the house of the goddess "Ange Patyay". They believed that all plants and trees had a soul of their own. Human beings receive their soul from their mother when they are born. According to other views (much later ones), it comes from God and is situated in a man's heart. People assumed that soul could leave a living man's body while he was sleeping. At this time sorcerer's souls could do evil deeds. According to a popular belief, their soul obeyed the deuce. Mordvinians thought that soul left the human body after death and turned into a light-blue cloudlet. In funeral and remembrance laments, it is sometimes represented as a green butterfly which symbolizes the airiness of the soul, its immateriality. When a person dies, people say, "Vaimots liss", M. (his soul went out), "Oimenze noldyze", E. (he let his soul go).

By custom, a glass of water is placed in front of a dying man - "vaimo ved", M., "oime ved", E. (the water for a soul), with which a soul washes itself. Over the glass, a wooden chip is placed which means a bridge to the next world. A coin was also put into the glass of water in order to propitiate the soul, and beside the glass a loaf of bread or a cookie was placed. In Erzian lamentations, the third saint who was sent by God to Earth (in a cradle) took a man's soul and brought it to the river to wash (s. Death). It was considered that after death a soul could go into a child who was to be born or into a woman's womb (after that she became pregnant). Dead people's souls went to the next world which lay somewhere in the East under Earth.

The Nizhni Novgorod Erzians thought that "Nazarompaz", "Ange Patyay's" third son, accepted all people's souls to his kingdom. He sent good, kind souls to his elder brother the Supreme God "Nishkepaz" and drove all evil souls away to deuce. According to a popular belief, if a dead person's body became hairy in a coffin, it meant that God did not accept his soul; it roamed the village and could not find any place for itself. If a person's life on Earth was pious, the soul was transferred to Heaven on a piece of stretched thread or on a lock of hair. It was believed that after death, a soul could see everything (how the dead body was mourned and buried) and hear what was said of the body. That is the reason why people did not give bad characteristics to a dead person.

After conversion to Christianity, it was considered that a dead person's soul still stayed at home during 40 days. After that, it was seen off to the next world; people organized a funeral repast, went to the cemetery and left some food there. It is mentioned in folklore texts that sinners suffer in the nether world. There is a wide spread belief that at Eastertide, a soul comes home. The Erzians had an omen: if the soul feels miserable and fretting, it is a sign of death. Lit.: Harva U. Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Mordwinen. Helsinki, 1952; Melnikov P. I. (Andrey Petchersky). Ocherki mordvy. Saransk, 1981; UPTMN. T. 7, ch. 1. Erziānskie prichitaniya-plachi. Saransk, 1972; T. 7, ch. 2. Mokshanskis prichitaniya. Saransk, 1979.

**Spell/verbal formula** (mormatsyama, vorozháyama, M., orozháyamo, ozolma, E.). The terms vary depending on the purpose of spells. They are mostly known in the oral form; only after the introduction of Christianity did they acquire a written form as prayers. People should always have them about themselves because they will help them to protect themselves against "the evil eye" or when on a journey. In addition to this there existed a practice of using bewitched objects, food and water for some definite purposes.

The roots of spells go as far back as ancient times. They are inseparably connected with the practical activity of people. Both Christian and heathen views on Nature can be traced in these spells as well as attempts to influence Nature with the help of magic. The first most complete texts of Erzian and Mokshan spells were recorded by H. Paasonen and published in the Mordvinian languages with a German word-for-word translation in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> volumes

of “Mordwinische Volksdichtung”. According to the spheres of their usage, all spells are divided into several groups: (1) everyday spells (they are connected with cattle-breeding, bee-keeping, farming, starting a journey, etc.), (2) “syaryademada”, M. (to protect oneself from illnesses), (3) “shyatemat”, “ezhdemat”, M. (love spells). The spells protecting a person from illnesses were most frequent. Among them are spells protecting from: diseases of the eye (sel'men' ozolmat, E.), dropsy (ozolma narfotte, E.), erysipelas (rozhado ozolma, E.), a snake's bite (kuen' pupaf-ta, M.), injuries (pramo tarkado, E.), splenitis (kos'ke checheide, E.), fever (mashtyksen', E.), haemorrhage (veron' lotkaftoma, M.), burns (pitsevt, E., pidefta, M.), a bitch's udder (komadan' palda, M), etc.

Spells can be “positive” (aimed at protection against evil spirits or a sorcerer and belonging to the so-called preventive magic; if spells are aimed at benefit and success, the magic is called producing) and “negative” (causing diseases, harm, misfortune).

More complicated spells include a short preface, i.e. words of address to certain deities and patrons; the enumeration of their magic functions, sometimes by the thrice-repeated addressing one or even two and more deities: the patroness of house “Kudawa”, the deity of cattle-shed “Kardo syarko”, the deity of earth “Mastorawa”. A sorceress asks each patroness to accept a reward and to help cure a disease, to protect against evil witchcraft. It is characteristic of spells to address the deity of water “Vedyawa”, the king of all snakes “Inekuj”, daybreak and evening-glow, St Nicholas, Adam and Eve.

In several spells (e.g. protecting from a wall eye), the mythic scene is laid at the sea-side, in an enormous elm where “Ine narmun” (the Great Bird) is sitting and pecking a disease with its beak. In other spells, a mythic old man, white and silvery all over, helps to cure diseases of the eye. He is sitting on a silver mountain, on a silver post, dressed in silvery clothes and is chopping off a disease with a silver hoe. A spell protecting against a snake's bite narrates the creation of the Earth by “Nishkepaz”, the son of the God, who created “great water” and put three fish there, which hold up the Earth.

The narrative part of the spell sometimes includes the promise to thank deities-patrons for their help by means of a sacrifice, e.g. a sacrifice of a seven-year-old ox.

Spells are usually said by a sorceress (soday loman', M., sodytasya, E.), who was asked for help. A spell has a specific secret ritual, performed by a sorceress who fulfills the functions of a priest. The sorceress possesses quite definite professional skills; she usually pronounces the text of the spell in a whisper without saying the words distinctly and at the same time performing some actions which have symbolic meaning: she crosses herself, spits over her left shoulder three times, blows on the face, a sore spot, an object, a thing etc. The best time for saying a spell was “shobdavan”, M. (daybreak, dawn) and “ilyaden”, M. (evening-glow). The place was chosen in accordance with the purpose of the spell, e.g. a roost that was suitable for curing children's screaming at night, a crossroads where a person was taken to be absolved, forgiven “prashchen-gas”, M. The factor that ensured the efficiency of the spell was a mystery of the psychological preparations for a mini-séance of auto-suggestion before and during the act of saying a spell.

Some of the healing spells were accompanied with hypnosis and practical actions: steaming in a bath-house, massaging, drinking bewitched water. In case the result was not achieved from the very first, a thrice-repeated spell was recommended. The sorceress gave her knowledge and strength only before her death and to a person who could be trusted. If such a person was not at her disposal, she gave her knowledge and power to a besom. If a sorcerer or a sorceress practiced “black magic”, their death was very hard and heavy. In these cases people raised a beam in order to let the soul out.

Lit.: Mordwinische Volksdichtung. Bd. 3. Helsinki, 1941; Bd. 4. Helsinki, 1947; Bd. 6. Helsinki, 1977;UPTMN.

T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarsno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981.

**Stove** (pyánakud, M., káshtom, E.). This is a most mythical household item, one of the sacral places of the house, connected with numerous ritual and magic acts. In addition to various everyday functions (people slept on it, prepared food, including ritual food) a stove expressed the symbols of birth and death. The Mordvinians thought that the deity of kindred lived near a chimney or under the stove, "Kuygorozh", a mythical creature also lived under the stove; from an old woman's finger lying on the shelf of the stove a small mythical boy is born who is the height of a finger. In the stove magic acts were performed which were aimed against witches (clothes spoiled by them were burnt) and thieves (a mouse was thrown into the stove to cause a thief's death). It was believed that fire devoured all possible evil.

Domestic fire gained during a village magical ceremony by rubbing dry wooden bars against each other was kept in the stove until the next ritual. It was not allowed to give this fire to some other house lest, together with the fire, family happiness and prosperity should also be yielded. Right up until the present day, pieces of coal from the stove are used when meeting the newly-weds at the bride-groom's home. By tradition, a bride was to throw a frying pan with coals in it; the way she did it was enough to define her temper. In order to gain the favour of her husband's household, a young wife was to wash her face secretly on the shelf of the stove. Numerous marriage rituals are also connected with the stove. Even today, among the Mokshans, there is observed a ritual of giving a young wife a new name near the stove right after she entered her husband's house. In order to get rid of the fear of the deceased the relatives tried to look at the stove after returning from the funeral.

Folk medicine is also connected with the stove. The rites of "rebaking" a child were performed in it, which symbolized both the death of his/her disease and a new birth; near the stove Mordvinians "burnt" some of their skin diseases.

People watched and concluded: in case porridge prepared in the stove ran over, or the bread baked there came out of the mould or from a burdock leaf on which it was baked - all this betokened death (a child's death, as a rule), misfortune, the ruin of the house. The logs that fell forward into the stove, a piece of coal or a sparkle that came out of it betokened guests.

Buzzing in a stove while wood was burning promised a change of weather, a brick fallen out of it - a misfortune. Dreaming about stove's collapse meant death of the owner; to fall down from it meant a misfortune. In front of the stove Mordvinians hang a small bag of horse teeth to prevent horses from being lost. People used to throw away some article of stove utensils (a poker, a dough stirrer used to stir dough) as a means of bringing a thunder-storm to a stop. To scare away witches and sorcerers, Mordvinians put a poker upside down near a stove.

A chimney played a particular role. Mordvinians believed that through it danger could penetrate into the house: into and out of the chimney deuces fly, as well as witches, and the souls of the dead which look like a fiery serpent. To protect themselves from all these creatures, Mordvinians used to shut the chimney when performing marriage rituals and when a woman was in childbirth. Right up till the present day, shutting the chimney (the stove vault) is considered to betoken a lucky journey and especially a lucky matchmaking. The same was done during thunder-storms.

Lit.: UPTMN T. T. 3., ch. 1. Mokshanskíe skazki. Saransk, 1966; Devyatkina T. P. Narodniye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

# T

**Table** (shra, M., túvor, E.). In the structure of Mordvinian culture, it is an object, a sacral place connected with a number of directions and bans. According to Mordvinian views, their violation was punished by supernatural forces originating from mythology. The most important spheres of human life were regulated in accordance with the role of the table in it and thus, ethic norms were observed.

A very big, usually a high table was characteristic of Mordvinian's everyday life. In former times, broad and stable "ezem", M., E. (benches) were placed round it. The table was situated in the front corner. Some bread and salt was always on the table and this was thought of as a guarantee of wealth and happiness at the house. The symbolics of the table correlates to the idea of a starting point (in one's journey or affairs). By tradition, before a long journey, matchmaking or other important affairs, people used to sit at the table, they put a mug of water and bread and salt on it in order to have a good result. It was considered a bad omen if people forgot to serve the ritual bread before a marriage ceremony. From the bride-groom's house "bashkuda" (the person who was the first to arrange marriage matters with the bride's parents) tried to steal secretly a duster used to wipe the table. Later in the bride's house he sat on it so that the wedding could be successful.

Among the Erzians, up to the present day, there occurs the ritual of the newly-weds' (among the Mokshans only the bride's) going round the table three times clockwise. The idea of the ritual evidently consists in their protection provided by the power of the exclusive circle. Nevertheless, going round the table without regard for the ritual was forbidden. A person was to rise from table resuming the same direction in which he went when he sat at table.

Numerous omens are connected with the table: if a piece of bread happens to fall at breakfast, there will be unexpected news; at dinner - some of the dead relatives demanded that he/she be remembered; at supper - you will be frightened; if some salt is spilled on the table - there will be a quarrel; if a spoon or a fork happens to fall or be left after a meal, a woman is expected to come, and a man in case of a knife; if a knife falls with its edge upward, a "sharp" person is expected to come, if a leg of the table happens to break, someone will die.

After Christianity was adopted, the table was associated with the church's altar, the communion table. It is forbidden to put a cap on the table (you will have a headache or will never be able to speak in public); to crack an egg (a bad omen), to leave the table unclean (the deuces will go about the table all night and lick plates), to swing one's legs under the table (the deuces will swing children afterwards), to knock on the table (it is an altar!). It was not advisable for the young to sit at the corner of the table (they will remain unmarried for a long time).

It was believed that one could cause a quarrel if one wiped the table with a piece of paper or scraped it with a knife. If one swore at table, one might be taken ill. It was also believed that people could bewitch each other with the evil eye when sitting at table. Thus, speaking too much was forbidden at this time.

It was customary among heathen Mordvinians to place a table in the yard when a new lodger moved in. Bread and salt were put on the table, and in addition, small pieces of cloth were tied to the legs especially for "Yurkhtawa", the deity-patroness of the kindred.

The place occupied by a table revealed the social and family status of a man as well as his particular respect and attention to the table. The front places at the table were usually intended for chiefs and family members.

In the structure of the Mordvinian traditional wedding, the front places were occupied by the closest relatives; they also occupied them at remembrance parties.

A daughter-in-law had no right to sit at the table during meals until she had the first baby. Lit.: Devyatkina T. P. Mokshanskie svadebnye obyady i pesni. Saransk, 1992.

**Time** (pinge, M., shka, E.). Together with space it is one of the basic categories of the mythological worldview model. It is imagined as a unity of the past, present and future. In the structure of Mordvinian culture, time is divided into "tya shi", M. (this time, this world or the life time) and "tona shi", M. (that time, the other world (the next world) or the other time). That time is single, indivisible, and infinite. Depending on man's behaviour in this life, his future life was predicted in the next world (as a light or a dark one). People concluded: those who are not fond of looking at fire will live in darkness in the next world.

People have always considered time to be transient and fleeting and thus a saying appeared: "pings' etay - afi fatyat", M (time will fly too quickly for you to look around). The lifetime is divided into two parts. The first half of human life goes slower, the second - faster. The time of the day is also perceived differently: in the afternoon it goes faster. According to a belief: "shis' zavtraks moli peke langsa, obeds vr'gaz langsa, ilyad' - numol langsa", M. (before breakfast the day creeps on its belly, before dinner rides a wolf, in the evening it rides a hare). The tradition of obsequial rites requires that the deceased should be carried out of the house in the afternoon but it was not customary to visit the cemetery at this time. It was believed that the dead would not be able to see those who came to see them.

The Mordvinians believed that there existed the beginning and the end of time (world). The initial time is mythic time, when eternity was established. This revealed itself in the motives of the world's birth and the birth of deity-patrons. The end of time (world) is connected with their disappearance. Later, the end of time was sometimes thought to be connected with lunar eclipses. When determining the time, people oriented themselves to the sun's or moon's position. The notion of "twenty-four-hours" did not exist, there was only "shi", M. (day) and "ve", M. (night). The day included the notion of the solar time (the terminology of the day and the sun is the same: "shi", M, "chi", E.). The messenger of the day is "shobdavan' zarya", M. (daybreak, dawn), i.e., Maria, who is a mythological embodiment of dawn in a woman's image. The messenger of night is "ilyaden' zarya", M. (evening-glow), i.e., Daria. They were asked for help in healing various diseases and also in spells.

Various bans are connected with the evening time: to start a new affair (it will be no good), to clip hair and to have it clipped (it will never grow), to sweep the floor (a sign of quarrel), to carry rubbish out of the house (you will show the deuces the way to your house and they will irritate you), to give back money, to repay one's debt (you will run out of money), etc. According to a belief one could not cross oneself at the time of evening chime because it is at this time that people who died a violent death are praying.

The day's, month's, year's time is divided into favourable and unfavorable periods (pure and impure ones). The midday time was considered impure and dangerous. That was the reason why several taboos were imposed: it was forbidden to leave home, to start an affair. Witches' or evil spirits' time was thought to be the interval from midnight till a cock's crow. It was believed that a cock's crowing at midnight saved people's souls from the evil spirit that tormented them at that time.

The evening time was considered to be the most favourable for various magic practices: healing and fortune-telling. In the evening (or more often at midnight) people went to a cross-roads "prostindama", M. (to be absolved) in order to get rid of the harm caused by witchcraft.

There were strictly fixed periods of time for other magic practices. On great Christian holidays (Easter, Epiphany, Christmas), people performed protective rituals. On the night of Epiphany, they drew crosses on windows lest the evil spirit should penetrate into the house. Before Easter they bathed in spring water in order to be cured of the scab. The time of holidays was considered favourable. Definite taboos were observed during spaces of time between holidays. For instance, people did not throw out anything in the interval from Easter till Ascension Day, from Easter till the beginning of a sowing campaign one could not make a fire; from Christmas till Epiphany spinning was forbidden (otherwise Our Saviour's chasuble will be covered with dust).

There were also restrictions for rites and rituals, e.g. marriages during a fast were not allowed. The Mordvinians believed that positive or negative results depended on the time of the action or deed; so they tried to find favourable points in a period of time (during a day, week, month) for starting any activity (match-making, sowing, building a house, digging a draw-well, etc.). On Wednesday, Friday and Sunday they did not start a new activity, on Tuesday they did not sow (otherwise the harvest will be very poor), though the day was thought of as a favourable (light) one because it is the day of the deity of water who washes and comforts people. A number of bans were connected with the so-called "clean" Monday, i.e., the first Monday of Lent ("pil'gon' sindema shi", M.; literally: the day when people break their legs). On that day it was forbidden to make a fire, to sing songs, to give something to neighbours, to present them with something. Those who broke this taboo could ruin their household and do great damage to the kindred and village. If somebody happened to enter the house, the master touched his/her feet with a poker three times in order to prevent his family from misfortune. The master might also not admit anybody in (lest anyone with a "heavy, bad" foot should come in). On the whole, Monday was called "the day of the new Moon" and considered a good one: the new Moon lit up the work.

Mythic traces reveal themselves in the name of Wednesday - "verzhi", M. (ver - blood; shi - day). This must be connected with particular ritual practices (sacrifices made to "Shkay", the God of Time and the Sun).

"Shuvalanya", M., (Thursday) was regarded as the most favourable and light day of the week, which was thought of as the day of the deity of forest hives (he is fond of working). On this day, brides were usually proposed to, a new affair was started and heathen holidays were celebrated. The Mordvinians believed that on this day spring water could purify external diseases and therefore they bathed in rivers, brooks, did the washing, tidied up their houses before Easter.

Friday was considered the day of deity of crops. Numerous bans were connected



*Cooking of ritual food for a night praying. Photo: T. Devyatkina, 2003.*

## Mordvinian Mythology

with “pyadentsya”, M. (Friday): it was prohibited to make a fire in a bath-house, to set a brood-hen on eggs – it will take long for the chicks to break out, (particularly before Easter), women did not spin (otherwise one could get blind) and did not do the washing (a house could catch on fire).

Saturday is the day of the subterranean God, the day of farming and labour. It was regarded as a favourable day. Sunday (“nedlyashi”, M., “nedlyachi”, E.) is the cleanest day, the day of the God of the cattle and the day of rest (people did not work because it was a sin).

The Mordvinians thought that the time of birth determined a person’s fate. Those who were born at the beginning of a month, on Tuesday, Saturday and great Christian holidays were considered lucky. They believed that prematurely born people were ill-willed people (they have a “heavy” eye, hand, foot).

Years were counted by a summers, that was the reason why contemporary notions “year” and “summer” are expressed by one and the same word – “kiza”, M., “kize”, E. People believed that a leap-year is a difficult time for their health and cattle; the beginning of the year was considered favourable.

The four seasons of the year were perceived as units of natural time: “kiza”, M., “kize”, E. (summer), “tyala”, M., “tele”, E. (winter), “tunda”, M., “tundo”, E. (spring), “sekse”, M., E. (autumn). They reflected the stages of labour connected with agriculture and cattle breeding as well as the periods of Nature’s state. The seasons of the year, their beginning and end were determined by the Moon. The modern words denoting seasons are of later origin and are borrowed from Russian. In the Mordvinian languages, the notions of “the moon” and “the new moon” are identical and expressed by a word – “kov”, M., E.

Lit.: Mainof W. Les restes de la mythologie Mordvine // Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne. Helsingissä, 1889; Devyatkina T. P. Narodniye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.

# W

**Water** (wed', M., E.). According to Mordvinian views, it is the source of life and magic purification. "Ineved'", M., E. (ine - big, great; wed' - water) - a sea, an ocean, the initial state of reality, correlates to the origin of the world and light. Sacrifices to the mythical deities "Wedyava" and "Wed'mastorawa" testify to worshipping water, springs and wells. People threw ritual food into the water or buried it near the river while they were performing magical ceremony. Birth, death, weddings are connected with ritual ablutions, purificatory protections (baths, a bride's walk to a spring, to water). It was considered that water removes all misfortunes caused by evil forces. The purificatory role of it reveals itself in various spells.

People addressed water when they suffered from eye diseases or needed help in "ezhdema ozolmat", E. (spells aimed at bewitching a beloved person). The last procedure is as follows: some water was poured into a cast-iron pot and a spell was said in which "Inewed'" (The Great Water) was asked to give no rest to a young girl's heart. Childless women and newly-married couples also asked water for help. Charming away sick people's diseases was also practised on a wide scale.

It was considered that the first drops of the rain possessed a peculiar life-giving power, which made people healthy and provided children with rapid growth. That is the reason why they were made to go outside (the grown-ups were running themselves) to be caught by the first spring rain. Young girls washed their faces with rainwater in order to have a white complexion.

The water taken from springs (and nowadays from water-piping taps) on the eve of Epiphany is considered to be magic and wonder working. It is believed that "holy" water never goes bad. The water taken in the morning is considered to be particularly valuable. Later on Epiphany Day, water was sanctified in churches - the procedure that made it, according to popular beliefs, even more holy. The water that was particularly salubrious was called "ved'brya", M., E. (ved' - water, pry - head). Such water is used to wash faces, it is given to sick cattle, people sprinkle their houses with it in order to force out evil spirits; "Kudawa", the deity of house is also made to leave a new-built house with the help of this water.

Salubrious qualities were attributed to the water with which icons and door-posts were washed. By contrast, the water used for washing a dead person was considered very dangerous. That was the reason why people poured it out in a special place, which was not visited by anyone. On remembrance days, water was brought to graves lest the dead should be thirsty in the next world.

Great importance was attached to the water produced by thawed snow. People did their best to wash themselves with this water on "clean" Thursday. For the same purpose, they took water from three springs and went to the spring to get absolution for all their sins.

Water was used in fortune-telling procedures (s. Fortune-telling), on Midsummer Day. People scared away sorcerers and witches with the help of boiling water that was left in an open cast-iron pot. There was such an omen: if someone crosses your way with a full bucket of water, you will be lucky. A glass of water was placed on a table in order to ensure a successful journey. Readers of dreams used to say: "Washing in a bath-house means illness, going through water means death; muddy water betokens no good, deep and clean water means a long and happy life."

There existed many bans connected with water: it was forbidden to bathe in a river after the prophet Elijah's Day (August 2) (seel's' vedti syar's', M. - a hedgehog urinated into the water); it

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was not allowed to spit or urinate into the water either. Such deeds were understood as urinating in the ancestor's eyes ("atyatnen' sel'mosnon s'yar'sait', M.), they could get angry and punish.

The most popular are plots dealing with "living" and "dead" water with the help of which a dead hero was revived. One of the mythological songs narrates about three sisters who saved their brother by means of salubrious 'eri ved', E. ("living" water). Only dead ancestors know the location of "living" water. It was considered that it was in the nether world. In the Erzian song "Uroz Tatyusha" ("The Orphan Tatyusha"), a girl goes to her dead mother and the latter provides her with the water of life. The location of "living" water is known also to those who are able to change into a bird and fly to the place inaccessible to an ordinary person.

Lit.: UPTMN. T. 1. Epicheskie i liro-epicheskie pesni. Saransk, 1963; T. 7, ch. 3. Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory. Saransk, 1981; Devyatkina T. P. Narodniye primety mordvy (mokshi i erzi). Saransk, 1994.





## GLOSSARY

**Angel** (Angol', M., Angel, E.)

**Apple-tree** (Marlyu, M., Umarina, E.)

**Asp** (Poyu, M., Poy, E.)

**Baths** (Banya, M., E.)

**Bear** (Ofta, M., Ovto, E.)

**Besom/sauna whisk** (Tyalme, M., Tenst', E.)

**Birch-tree** (Kelu, M., Kiley, E.)

**Birth** (Shachema, M., Chachoma, E.)

**Bread** (Kshi, M., E.)

**Buzzard** (Panzey, E.)

**Candle** (Shtatol, M., E.)

**Cemetery** (Kalmolanga, M., Kalmolango, E.)

**Christmas** (Roshtuva, M., Roshtova, E.)

**Christmas house** (Kshtiman' kud, M., Kishtiman' kudo, E.)

**Clothes (adornments, foot-wear)** (Shchapt-karyapt, M., Orshavt- Karsevt', E.)

**Coffin** (Lazks, M., Kandolaz, E.)

**Cuckoo** (Kuku, M., Kuko, E.)

**Death** (Kuloma, M., E.)

**Deceased** (Lovazha, M., Kulytsya, E.)

**Deceased' deputy** (Vastozay, M., Ezem Ozy, E.)

**Deity-patroness of the apiary and bee-hives** (Neshkeava, M., E.)

**Deity-patroness of the barn** (Avin Ava, M., E.)

**Deity-patroness of baths** (Banyava, M., E.,)

**Deity-patroness of all bees (queen bee)** (Meshava, M., Mekshava, E.)

**Deity-patroness of the cattle-shed** (Kardazava, M.)

**Deity-patroness of the field** (Paksyava, M., Paksya syarko, E.)

**Deity-patroness of fire** (Tolava, M., E.)

**Deity-patron of fire** (Tolpaz, E.)

**Deity-patroness of the grain** (Serava, M.)

**Deity-patroness of grass** (Narava, M., E.)

**Deity-patroness of harvest and farming** (Norovava, E.)

**Deity-patroness of the home** (Kudava, M. E.)

**Deity-patroness of hops** (Komlyava, M., Komolyava, E.)

**Deity-patroness of the kindred and family** (Yurkhtava, M., E.)

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- Deity-patroness of the meadow (Lugava, M., E.)  
Deity-patroness of the pussy-willow (rapid growth, vital power, fertility) (Vermava, M., E.)  
Deity-patroness of some definite place on Earth (Modava, M., E.)  
Deity-patroness of the stove (Pyanakudava, M., Kashtomava, E.)  
Deity-patroness of the village (Velyava, M., E.)  
Deity-holder of water on the whole Earth (Veden' kirdi, M., E.)  
Deity-patroness of water, marriage & childbirth (Vedyava, M., E.)  
Deity-patron of water on the whole Earth (Ved' mastorpaz, E.)  
Deity-patroness of the whole Earth (Mastorava, M., E.)  
Deity-patron (holder) of the whole Earth (Mastoron' kirdi, M., E.)  
Deity-patroness of wind (Varmava, M., E.)  
Deity-patron of wind (Varmapaz, E.)  
Deity-patroness of woods (Viryava, M., E.)  
Deity-patron of bast and logs (Keren' - Shochkon' paz, E.)  
Deity of frost (Old Man-Frost) (Kel' me atya, M., Atypaz, E.)  
Deity of Heaviness (Stakapaz, Kezheypaz, E.)  
Deity-patron of pigs (Tuvon' paz, E.)  
Deity patronizing the praying place (Keremet' paz, E.)  
Deuce (Shyaytan, M.)  
Dream (On, M., E.)  
Duck (Yaksyarga, M.)
- Egg (Al, M., E.)  
Earth (Moda, M., E.)  
Enchantress (old woman) (Yaga-baba, M., E.)  
Eastertide (Ochizhi, M., Inechi, E.)
- Fire/flame (Tol, M., E.)  
Fortune-telling (Gadadondama, M., Gadayamo, E.)  
Funeral repast (remembrance party) (Pominkat, M., E.)
- Ghost of the deceased/spectre (Shopacha, M., Chopacha, E.)  
Gods' mother (patroness of love and marriage) (Ange Patyay, M., E.)  
Goddess of the Moon (Kovava, M., E.)  
God-patron of the Erzians (Nishkepaz, E.)  
God Nikolay (Saint Nicholas) (Mikulapaz, E.)  
God-patron of the nether world (Mastoratya, M., Mastorpaz, E.)  
God of Thunder (Atyamshkay, M.)  
God of the Sun, Time/Supreme God (Shkay, Chipaz, E.)  
Grave (Kalma, M., Kalmo, E.)
- Hair (Shyayar'kht', M., Chert', E.)  
Half-mythical creature (Varda, E.)  
Healer/witch, sorcerer, magician (Soday loman', M., Sodytsya, E.)  
Hen (Saraz, M., E.)  
Heroine of myths/earthly girl (Litova, E.)  
Holiday, magical ceremony in honour of a barn (Avin Ozks, M., E.)

- Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to a cattle-shed** (Kaldaz ozks, M., E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to a hen** (Saraz ozks, M., E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to porridge** (Balamyk ozks, M.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to a wooden plough** (Keret' ozks, E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to horses on Ascension Day** (Alashan' ozks, M., E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony devoted to driving the cattle to pasture** (Liftema-Suvaftoma ozks, M., Livtema Sovavtoma Ozks, E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony in honour of oxen** (Buka ozks, M., E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony in a village** (Vele ozks, M., E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony on village meadows** (Laima ozks, M.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony preformed by women/widows** (Baban' ozks, E.)  
**Holiday (Ivan Kupala's)** (Kupalnya, M., Valnoma Chi, E.) Midsummer Day (July 7)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony with sacrificing a stallion** (Aigor ozks, M., E.)  
**Holiday, magical ceremony of women's beer** (Avan' poza, M.)  
**Horse/steed** (Alasha, M., E.)  
**House** (Kud, M., Kudo, E.)
- Illness/disease** (Syaryadema, M., Seredema, E.)  
**Iron/metal** (Kshni, M., E.)
- Legend/mythological or fantastical story** (Azondoma, M., Evtrema, E.)  
**Lime-tree** (Pyashe, M., Pyakshe, E.)
- Man/human being** (Loman', M., E.)  
**Marriage/wedding (church or heathen)** (Ventsyama, M. Venchamo, E.)  
**Marriage/wedding ritual** (R'vyayaftomas' - maksomas', M., Ur'vakstoma, E.)  
**Menses/menstruations** (Odezhat, M., Mesyachnoit', E.)  
**Milky Way** (Kargon' ki, M., E.)  
**Moon** (Kov, M., E.)  
**Mythological personage/tribal chief of the Mokshans and Erzians** (Tyushtya, M., E.)
- Name** (Lem, M., E.)  
**Next world/abode of death people** (Tóna shi, M., Tóna chi, E.)  
**Numbers** (Chislat, M., E.)
- Oak** (Tuma, M., Tumo, E.)  
**Omens/beliefs** (Sodamat, M., Primetat, E.)
- Parents' day** (Kalmolangon' shi, M., Kalmolangon' chi, E.)  
**Patron-ess of the home/spirit of profit, enrichment, luck, sometimes theft** (Kuygorozh, M., Tryamo, E.)  
**Pentecost/Whitsunday** (Troitsya, M., Trovitsya, E.)  
**Pies** (Pyaryakat, M., Pryakat, E.)  
**Pigeon/dove** (Gulnya, M., Gul'ka, E.)  
**Porridge** (Yam, M. Kasha, E.)  
**Praying (public)/religious and magic ceremony** (Ozks, M., E.)  
**Praying after a cow's calving** (Michkon' ozondoma, M.)

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**Praying** (“heavy”) (Staka ozks, E.)

**Praying on a boundary-strip of neighbouring villages** (Gran’ ozks, E.)

**Praying on the occasion of locusts** (Tasto ozks, E.)

**Praying at night** (Ven’ ozks, M., E.)

**Praying for rain** (Pizem ozks, M., Pizemen’ ozks, E.)

**Rowan-tree** (Pizelks, M., Pizel chuvto, E.)

**Shadow** (Tsil’f, M., Suley, E.)

**Sky** (Menel’, M., E.)

**Snake** (Kuy, M., Guy, E.)

**Snakes’ King** (Inekuy, M., Ineguy, E.)

**Soul** (Vaime M., Oime, E.)

**Spell** (Mormatsyama, M., Orozheyamo, E.)

**Stove** (Pyanakud, M., Kashtom, E.)

**Table** (Shra, M., Tuvor, E.)

**Time** (Pinge, M., Shka, E.)

**Water** (Ved’, M., E.)

## ABBREVIATIONS

M. - the Moksha, Mokshan, the Mokshans

M.n.p. - Mordovskie narodnye pesni (Mordvinian folk songs)

RM - the Republic of Mordovia

UPTMN - ustno-poeticheskoe tvorchestvo mordovskogo naroda (Mordvinian folklore)

Sh. - the Shoksha, Shokshan, the Shokshans (a Mordvinian ethnographical group)

E. - the Erzia, Erzian, the Erzians



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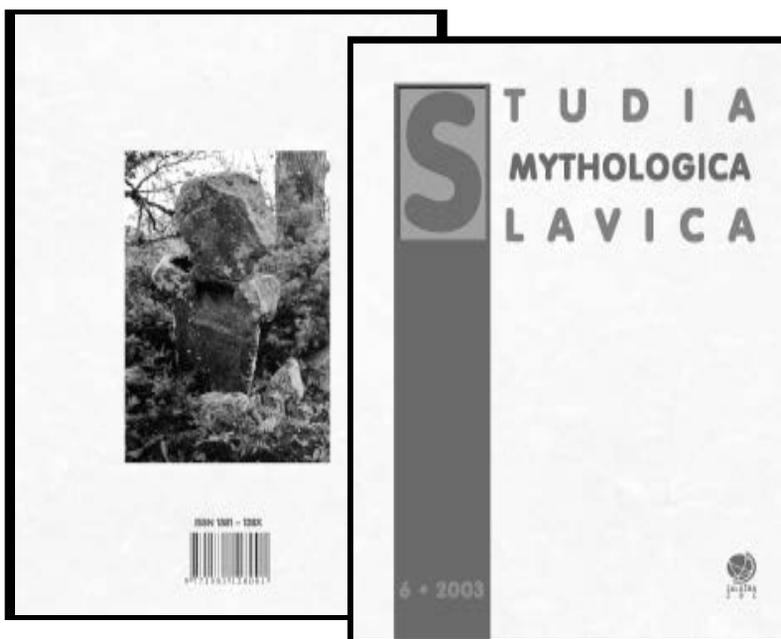
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