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Редакционная статья / Editorial

The Mari are the People of Onar

Russia is a special cultural-historical world, the fate of which is determined, first of all, by its constituent peoples participating in the historical and cultural formation of the Russian civilization. Among them is the *Mari* people, an autochthonous original representative of the Finno-Ugric community of the Uralic language family. The Mari people live in the Republic of Mari El, the Republics of Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Udmurtia, Chuvashia, Kirov, Sverdlovsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Tyumen regions, Perm Krai, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and other territories. The number of Mari people is more than 423 thousand people. The self-name of the people is *мару*, *mäpöi*, *марэ*. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Mari El (Article 15), the Mari language (mountain and meadow), along with Russian, is one of the state languages of the Republic of Mari El¹. The modern Mari language is divided into four dialects: *mountain*, including the right-bank, or Kozmodemian, and left-bank dialects; *meadow*, uniting the Morkinsko-Sernursky, Volzhsky, Yoshkar-Olinsky, and Urzhumsky dialects (the latter is referred by some researchers to the Eastern dialect); *Eastern*, consisting of 12 dialects: Malmyzhsky (some researchers refer to the Meadow dialect), Kilmezsky, Kukmorsky, Yelabuzhsky, Menzelinsky, Kaltasinsky, Birskey, Belebeyevsky, Baltachevsky, Pribelsky, Krasnoufimsky, Kungursky; *Northwestern*, having Yaransky, Tonshaevesky, Sharangsky dialects.²

According to the studies of archaeologists, anthropologists, and linguists, the origins of ethnogenesis of the Uralic community go back to the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic. In the 5th–4th millennium B.C. it divided into Samoyedic and Finno-Ugric groups, and in the 2nd–1st millennium the Pra Permian and Prafinno-Volga subgroups were formed. The former became ancestors of the Komi and Udmurts, and the latter — the ones of the Mari, Mordva, Meri, Muroma and Meschera. The 8–7th centuries B.C. are distinguished by archaeologists as the time

¹ Constitution of the Republic of Mari El of June 24, 1995 (as amended on December 5, 2024). 26 Dec. 2024, <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/304200038>

² See: Mari language. 25 Dec. 2024, https://ru.ruwiki.ru/wiki/Марийский_language. (The italics are ours. — G. Shkalina.)

when blacksmithing and jewelry art flourished on the vast territory of the Volga-Kama territories. The artifacts of that period show typological similarities with Caucasian and Scythian products made of high-carbon steel with the use of cementation and forge welding.

The formation of the Mari ethnos, according to scientific data, began in the first half of the 1st millennium A.D. around waters of the Oka, Sura, Vyatka, Kama, Volga, Vetluga, Ileta. The geopolitical position of this vast region between the West and the East, the North and the South caused constant exposure to the cross-influence of different civilizations, meeting and interaction of different cultural worlds. Here, on the banks of the largest rivers, where taiga, mixed forests and forest-steppe meet, man has always had a wide range of choice of the type of economy, main occupations, the possibility of survival in cases of any drastic changes. Since the 5th century, the ancient Mari have constantly interacted not only with Finno-Ugric kin, but also with Turkic and Slavic peoples.

The question of the origin of the *mapu* ethnonym remains debatable. Linguists derive the meaning of the self-name of the Mari people from the Indo-European term *map* or *mep* ('man', 'husband') in various sound variations. Historians note that the Mari are mentioned in Jordan's work 'Getica' in the 6th century as a northern people, subject to the Gothic leader Germanarich from the 4th century. In the 10th century in a letter of Khazar Khagan Joseph mentioned the people *цармис*, in Russian chronicles of the early XII century — *черемисы* (Cheremis).

'Cheremis' — this is how the Mari were called in foreign and Russian sources from the 10th century until 1917 meaning *a forest man, a man-warrior*. The problem of etymology of the word 'Cheremis' is complicated by the fact that until the 17–18th centuries Mari's neighbors — Chuvash and Udmurts — were also called so. The self-name of the people has always been *мари*, *mäpöi*, *марэ* ('human', 'man') and was on a par with such ethnonyms of related peoples as *Komi*, *Mordva*, *Magyar*, *Udmurt*, *Muroma*, *Merya*, *Meshchera*.

According to most anthropologists, the Mari belong to the Subural anthropological type, occupying an intermediate position between the Caucasoid and Mongoloid races. In 9–11th centuries the Mari ethnos divided into two main dialect groups — *Mountain Mari* (right bank of the Volga) and *Meadow Mari* (Volgo-Vyatsky interfluvium). Today, there are also groups of *Northwestern Mari* (in the southwest of Kirov and northeast of Nizhny Novgorod regions) and *Eastern Mari* (migrants to Bashkiria and the Urals from the meadow side of the Volga). Of all Finno-Ugric communities, the Mari were the most closely related to the Turkic tribes that moved to the Volga region.

Noteworthy are Russian annalistic evidences of the 12–14th centuries, which tell about the Cheremis principedom headed by *kuguz* — the eldest man in the clan (elder). In some sources the word *кугузство* (Kuguzstvo) (hence the word *кугыжа* (kugyzha), i.e. sovereign, prince) is used instead of ‘principedom’. Kuguzes were chosen from the most brave, experienced, authoritative military leaders, which was characteristic of the period of ‘military democracy’. The Vetluzhskoye Kuguzstvo had their own fortified proto-towns: Vetlya-Yur and Shangan. Chronicles call Mari Kuguz by names: Khoja-Yaraltem, Kai, Osh-Pondash (Bai-Beard), Keldibek. Historians note at that time quite developed relations of the Kuguz with European countries. After Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan in 1552, the Mari region was incorporated into the Russian state.

With the formation of the Russian Geographical Society in 1845, Mari narratives came into the orbit of scientific research. In the second half of the 19th century, the Kazan Society of Archaeology, History and Ethnography carried out great work on collecting and studying historical legends, stories and myths of the Volga region peoples. In the ‘Proceedings’ of this Society were published the researches of Ivan Nikolaevich Smirnov, a native of the Mari region, Russian historian and ethnographer, professor of the Imperial Kazan University. His researches ‘Eastern Finns, historical and ethnographic sketch. Vol. I: Privolzhskaya, or Bulgarskaya, group. Ch. I: Cheremis, Ch. II: Mordva; Vol. II: Prikamskaya, or Perm group. Ch. I: Votyaks, Ch. II: Permyaks’, awarded the Uvarov Prize in 1896. I.N. Smirnov’s scientific work is based both on the study of printed material on the Finno-Ugric peoples and on the author’s direct empirical data: he undertook an expedition to collect linguistic and mythological material and to research the history of the Finns through the archives of the Nizhny Novgorod and Tambov archival commissions.

In the history of Mari culture an important date is December 10, 1775 — the day of appearance of the book ‘Works belonging to the grammar of the Cheremis people’ under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences in the stores of St. Petersburg. The author of the first Mari grammar was Archbishop of Kazan and Sviyazhsk Veniamin Putsek-Grigorovich. Mari students of the Kazan Theological Seminary participated in the preparation of the edition. The ‘Works...’ included about 1000 Mari words, including *muume* — an archaic Finno-Ugric substratum. In ancient times this word meant ‘star’ (in Finnish *tähti* — ‘star’), then it acquired heraldic meaning in Mari traditional religion (‘sign’, ‘banner’), and already in modern times the term *muumep* appears in the meaning of ‘alphabet’. Since 1990, every year on December 10, *Марий Тууме кече* — the Day of Mari writing — has been celebrated as a national holiday, and since 1998 – as a state holiday.

In the early 20th century, Mari students studying in Kazan united around the first Mari language journal “Марла календарь” headed by a talented linguist, folklorist, and ethnographer V.M. Vasiliev. In 1908 they appealed to the national intelligentsia to collect folklore in order to study the ancient history of the Mari people. Several books were subsequently published on the rich materials of Mari oral folklore: *Марий калыкын мурьжо, туштыжо да йомакше* (“Mari folk songs, riddles and fairy tales”). Kazan, 1908; *Марла ойлымаш-влак* (“Mari stories”). Kazan, 1909; *Марий мут: тошто гыч тўналын таче марте ойлымо муро, тушто, йомак, пале, туныктым мут, молыжат*. Kazan, 1918; *Марий муро* (“Songs of the Mari people”). Moscow: Tsentrizdat, 1923; *Марла ойлымаш-влак* (“Mari Stories”). Krasnokokshaysk, 1926; *Марла ойлымаш-влак: Вес лукмаш — кузурак икшыве-влаклан* (“Mari stories”). Krasnokokshaisk, 1927; Materials on Mari poetics. Kazan, 1930.

In July 1917, the First All-Russian Mari Congress was held in *Пырё* (Birsk, Bashkortostan). The delegates of the forum — well-educated people of that time — discussed the topics of national education, science, printed publications, folk art, Mari traditional faith, etc. The turning point of the forum was the restoration of the **Mari** self-name at all levels instead of the *Cheremis* that had existed until then. In fact, since that time the formation of Mari national culture, which synthesizes traditional ecological practices of the people, a unified scientific picture of the world and modern social technologies, began. The fundamental basis of such a project was traditional culture, which has been rediscovered, reinterpreted and harmonized with Finno-Ugric and other worldview systems ever since.

In the 1920s, with the formation of the Mari Autonomous Region (since 1936, the Mari ASSR) a new period in the history of science of the Mari region began. On the initiative of V.M. Vasiliev and other prominent scientists the Mari Local History Society was organized. Rare records of folklore materials were made by T.E. Efremov, F.E. Egorov, and M.N. Yantemir. In the 1930s, in connection with the organization of the Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History, folklorists, ethnographers, linguists, teachers, writers and students took part in scientific work. The first large expeditions of 1934–1936 and 1938–1939 made it possible to record hundreds of unknown ethnonarratives. G.I. Karmazin, K.A. Chetkarev, A.M. Berdnikov, M.M. Kalikaev, T.E. Evseev, V.A. Mukhin and others made a great contribution to the study of language, literature and history in that period. The Mari folklore is addressed by a major Soviet historian, academician M.G. Khudyakov, archaeologists A.P. Smirnov, O.N. Bader and others.

In the 60–90s of the 20th century, the Mari scientific community conducted large expeditionary works to study the tangible and intangible heritage of the Mari

people in the Mari Republic, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Udmurtia, Gorky, Kirov, Kostroma, Ivanovo, Sverdlovsk, Perm, and Tomsk regions. On their basis the collection of Mari legends and legends ‘Тошто марий ой-влак’, collective monographs ‘Main tendencies of development of Mari folklore and art’, ‘Folklore and art in modern artistic culture of Mari ASSR’ and other books are published, among which the works of V.A. Aktsorin, a widely known specialist in Mari folklore in the Finno-Ugric world, are of special interest. Among the linguistic scientists I.S. Galkin, F.I. Gordeev, L.P. Gruzov, I.G. Ivanov, D.E. Kazantsev, N.T. Pengitov, etc. stand out for their major developments.

In 1970–1990s and in the early 21st century, the scientists of the Republic of Mari El carried out a comprehensive study of the Mari language, literature, folklore, history, archaeology, ethnography, folk art, general and specific issues of Finno-Ugric studies, modern social problems and processes. Among historians the luminaries are K.N. Sanukov, G.N. Aiplatov, V.S. Patrushev, A.G. Ivanov, G.A. Sepeeov and others. K.K. Vasin, A.A. Asylbaev, S.Y. Chernykh, A.A. Vasinkin and others have made a great contribution to the study of the process of formation and development of the artistic system of Mari literature.

In modern conditions, the axiology of Mari culture is being actively developed, in which Mari literature acts as a “value center”. The scientific school of R.A. Kudryavtseva, together with specialists in the field of cultural studies, conducts systematic research of axiological dominants of the Mari ethnoworld, studies the value nature of ethnonarratives functioning in the mentality of Mari culture, as well as the development of genre system and poetics of Mari literature. Mari cultural and philosophical science (G.E. Shkalina, Y.A. Kaliev) has been enriched by solid studies of Mari mythology, traditional religion of the people. The scientific direction connected with linguocultural science and linguofolkloristics (N.N. Glukhova, L.A. Abukaeva) has powerfully declared itself.

The direction of bilingualism and transcultural practice was marked by S.S. Sibatrova’s study “Mari-Russian language contacts: morphology of the Mari language”, O.A. Sergeev’s work “The language of Mari language writing monuments (end of 17–18th centuries)”, editions of “Russian-Mari dictionary: in 2 volumes” (E.M. Andrianova et al.), “Mari-Russian phraseological dictionary: in 2 volumes” (E.M. Andrianova, L.I. Bartseva, F.T. Gracheva, etc.), as well as studies by specialists in general pedagogy (S.N. Fedorova) and methodology of teaching the Mari language (V.V. Konstantinova).

The sphere of folk art is actively studied by V.G. Kudryavtsev, ethnosociology and sociolinguistics — by V.I. Shabykov.

The present issue of the journal presents articles by Mari scientists – such as specialists in the field of philology, cultural studies, art history, pedagogy — of Mari State University and Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History named after V.M. Vasiliev. They present to the reader actual scientific directions of modern Mari humanitarian science: the linguistic system of the Mari language, language in the field of linguocultural studies, traditional culture of the Mari people, axiology and poetics of fiction, translation using the Mari language, experimental methods in the framework of bilingual education. The articles are aimed at researching the spiritual foundations of the historical and cultural heritage of the Mari people, who called themselves the descendants of Onar. Recognition of the fundamental value of culture implies its understanding as the main resource of human development in our society at all levels — ethnic, regional, all-Russian.

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