

NIKOLAI ANISIMOV DEFENDED HIS DOCTORAL THESIS ON THE UDMURTS' BIRTH AND BURIAL CUSTOMS

Nikolai Anisimov. *Dialog mirov v matritse kommunikativnogo povedeniia udmurtov*. Dissertationes folkloristicae Universitatis Tartuensis 26. University of Tartu Press, 2017. 384 pp.

On November 10, 2017, Nikolai Anisimov defended his doctoral thesis titled *Dialog mirov v matritse kommunikativnogo povedeniia udmurtov* (Dialogue between the worlds through the lens of Udmurt communicative behaviour) at the University of Tartu. The thesis is a voluminous monograph, dwelling upon conceptions, beliefs, and ideas related to the Udmurts' birth and burial customs. The selected point of view – a dialogue between the worlds of the living and the dead within communication – enables the author to present his material systematically and is justified, considering Udmurt beliefs, as even today Udmurt birth and burial customs feature communication with the otherworld. It is namely a dialogue as, in addition to commemorating the dead on holidays as well as other similar acts directed from the living to the dead, the behaviour of many Udmurts, especially from the older generation, is influenced by the belief that the dead are able to actively find contact with the living and affect their life and activity.

In the introductory part of the dissertation, the author explains his ideas about the matrix of communicative behaviour, about the dialogue between worlds, and the ethnonym 'Udmurts', by doing so establishing a certain framework for the dissertation. He also gives an overview of his research object and domain and sets the objective – to show the peculiarities of the worlds' dialogue as ethnopsychological and behavioural stereotypes within the framework of the traditional imagery of time and space. He proceeds to introduce the novelty of his approach, highlighting its temporal-spatial borders, and discusses his research methods, the most important of which are semiotic and comparative-juxtaposing methods. The introductory part ends with a detailed summary of the research previously conducted in the domain.

The first two chapters of the dissertation provide an overview of the Udmurts' traditional worldview with the most important loci and borders between them, and dwell upon contacts between different worlds within the cycles of day and night, week, and year. Although this part of the dissertation largely repeats the viewpoints formerly presented by some other scholars (e.g. Vladimir Vladykin, Tatiana Vladykina, Elena Popova, Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, Ranus Sadikov, Galina Glukhova, etc.), the chapter is necessary for understanding the following parts of the dissertation and also involves the author's fieldwork materials.

The third chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the beliefs related to the birth of a child, beginning with more general beliefs and ending with the imagery influencing behaviour during the delivery and the time after it. The role of the dead in relation to a child's birth, development, and illnesses, as well as the possible intervention of the supernatural world (exchanged or exceptional child), is shown in the context of an active dialogue between the worlds.

The fourth chapter gives a detailed overview, within the framework of the worlds' dialogue, of the beliefs influencing burial customs, starting from the imagery related to death to a detailed description of the procedures performed on the deceased as well as

their religious reasons. At the core of the chapter is the deceased's arrival in the 'land of the dead' and the role of the dead ancestors in it, as well as the mourners' return to the 'land of the living'. This chapter also includes plenty of the author's fieldwork materials.

As a logical end to the dissertation, the fifth chapter discusses the period after the funeral – communication with the deceased, the visitations of the dead to the living, and the customs related to commemoration.

Nikolai Anisimov's dissertation is supplemented with a detailed list of informants and a dictionary of relevant Udmurt expressions (a hundred keywords in all). One of the appendixes presents a selection of funeral songs. As a researcher of Udmurt beliefs, I can say that this is the most systematic, detailed, and interesting treatment of birth and burial customs ever written on this topic. The rich material collected by the author, partly formerly unpublished, adds to the value of the dissertation.

Aado Lintrop