

## SUMMARY

A religious historian would divide Udmurts into Christians and heathens. While among the Udmurts of the Vyatka province, which came into Russian sphere of influence earlier in its history (in the 15th century), 6 % of the adult population were not baptised in 1870, in the Kazan province even as late as 1914 one third of the population were heathens. In the case of South Udmurts we have to take into account Islamic influences that began under the Volga Bulgar kingdom and deepened under Kazan khanate, and the fact that the southernmost Udmurt villages are situated in the neighbourhood of Tatar and Bashkirian villages, or even form oases encircled by the latter. Although even at the beginning of this century marriages between baptised and unbaptised Udmurts were hardly common, this does not mean that there was no communication whatsoever between the two communities. Baptised Udmurts preserved many old beliefs and customs, including several heathen prayers, which were partly connected with church festivals (for example, the spring festival *akayaška/akaška* was associated with Easter).

One must keep in mind that in the process of clarification of Christian doctrines and translating spiritual literature several formerly heathen concepts acquired a Christian content. For example, in the fourth edition of the Udmurt Catechism we can read the Creed, beginning with the following words: “*Оскысько одиг Инмар Аилы [- -] оскысько остэлы кыльцин-инмар Иусус Христос лыно [- -] оскысько инмарлэн лулземезлы-но.*” The Udmurt equivalent for God the Father is the heathen sky-god *inmar*; God the Son is *kjľčin-inmar*, i. e. the heathen god *kjľdjšin*, a deity connected with earth and agriculture; the Holy Spirit is designated by the concept of *inmar*’s soul. In the clarification of the sacrament of baptism in the same edition the formula ‘In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost’ has been translated as follows: “*Инмар Аилэн нимыныз, Пиезлэн кыльцин-инмарлэн, инмар-лулземлэн Святой Духлэн.*” (Blinov 1898: 71). From the point of view of heathen tradition the passage can also be translated as follows: In the name of Father *inmar*, Son *kjľčin-inmar* and the soul of *inmar* the Holy Spirit’. For example, the first commandment begins as follows: “*Мон вань Осто Инмарэд тынад.*” (Ibid.: 15). Here the equivalent for Lord is the heathen formula *osto, inmar*. In his schoolbook, published in 1889, Isentyev translates “God bless (us)” with the words *осто, Инмарэ, козьма* (ibid.: 15), a formula that the heathen Udmurts have used until now. Naturally, we cannot rule out the possibility that the formula has developed under the influence of church prayers. Christian influences have also been seen in the development of the specifically Udmurt divine triad of *inmar, voršud, kuaž* or *inmar, kjľdjšin, voršud*.<sup>88</sup> ‘Because of three manifestations of their saints and their god, Christianity (for Udmurts)

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<sup>88</sup>*Kuaž* - the heathen deity connected with air and weather, *voršud* - the guardian spirit of family and clan.

seemed fit to serve as a religious compromise. By the way, missionaries also had their part in it. *Inmar*, *kıldiřin* and *kuař* merged with Christian God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, *vorshuds* merged with guardian angels, while individual saints were identified with elemental spirits – for example, the forest spirit was identified with St. Nicholas,’ wrote Ven. N. Blinov who had studied the folk religion of Udmurts (ibid.: 72). The other party concerned, the Udmurts, have seen the issue from the following point of view: ‘Yet God accepts our prayers. Votyaks only have to pray in their fields, and it will start raining – everybody knows that. There are even some Russians who look forward to our prayers to have some rain. As for our praying with bread – you also use the host in your services, the only difference being that we pray with black bread, but it’s all the same, isn’t it? You smoke your incense, while we have our fire sacrifice, a part of the sacrificial animal is burned and the smoke rises from the field or wood directly to God. As for you saying that we have many gods, well, you also have many saints, while, in essence, we also have a single main godhead. Our priests are also appointed by God through shamans, while the shamans are trained by God’s angels,’ says Moissej Stepanov, a peasant from the village of Buranovo in Sarapul province (Vasilyev 1906: 345). This text also shows Christian influences, as Moissej calls supernatural beings angels. Namely, the southern dialectal form for *kıldiřin*, *kılčın*, means “angel” in the Christian tradition. In several regions the word *kılčın* was substituted for the words *kuřo* - “master”, or *murt* - “man” that formed a part of the names of several supernatural beings. So the water spirit became *vu kılčın* (originally *vumurt*), the house spirit *jurt kılčın* (originally *jurt kuřo*). These must have been the ‘angels’ that Moissej Stepanov actually had in mind. Both *inmar* and *kıldiřin* were mentioned in all agricultural prayers; they were mostly invoked to ensure favourable weather for crops: rain, warm nights, protection from hailstorms. In family shrines and holy groves the prayers also often began with an invocation to these deities. Even when making offerings to forest, water or house spirits, god and *kılčın* - *kıldiřin* were often mentioned. For example, a prayer to the forest fairy begins, ‘*oste, inmare, kıldiřine, kuaře, durga vorřude! tan d’žeč buskelen, d’žeč řemjajen sultim puksim...*’ (Lord, *kıldiřin*, *kuař*, *durga* vorřud! Here we are praying together with our kind neighbours, good families... Wichmann 1893, 2: 148). On some occasions *kılčın* or *kıldiřin* was used to denote the Redeemer, which is illustrated by the following prayer where gods and spirits of different periods occur side by side: “Lord, great *inmar*, we are praying for the sown breadcrops. May you shelter us from the north wind and storms, grant us good warm mild rain, *inmar*. Ripen the crops sown by us, lay the crops sheaf by sheaf, shock by shock, *inmar*. When taken to the drying barn, let there be piles by piles of it! Grant plenty of food and drink to us and our families! May we have children to give to the Tsar and may we have enough to pay taxes, *inmar*. We pray for the birth of *mu-kılčın* Jesus Christ, for our resurrection. We pray the bridles for luck, for a good hold. Sun-Mother, we pray to you to grant us intelligence. We bow down before great *vořřud inmar* for looking after our houses. Protect our homes from invaders, *vořřud inmar!*” (Wichmann 1893, 2:

129 – 130 The original passage identifying Christ with the local spirit is as follows: *mu-kjľčjn isus kristos vordiskem ponna vöšaskom.*). By way of comment, here the ‘bridles’ (*šermet*) probably stand for a ceremony where a waterfowl is sacrificed together with the usual sacrificed animal; for example, in the village of Varklet-Bodya such prayer ceremony is called *čuhjn šermet vöšan* – ‘prayer of foal’s bridles’. Baptised Udmurts often used to put an icon to the holy shelf on the wall at the farther end of the Udmurt shrine or *kuala*, where in former times the bast offering box of vorshud or the guardian spirit of the tribe had been kept, but nevertheless they continued to use the shrine. Gradually, the name for the shelf, *mudor*, was transferred to the icon, and today its main meaning is ‘icon’. At the same time, the ritual aspect of church liturgy has influenced the customs of heathen Udmurts. The custom of burning wax candles at some prayers and on the day of commemoration has certainly originated from church.

In the 1860s the so-called Ilminsky system was introduced in the educational and cultural policy of peoples on the Volga. The position of the author of the system, the orientalist N. Ilminsky, can be illustrated by the following quotation: "In order to communicate the Christian dogmas and morals to non-Russians so that it would not be perceived as abstract words but would become the foundation of their thinking and living, we must adapt ourselves to their religious notions and moral views, the individuality of their mode of thinking and its various directions." (Vladykin 1994: 210). Ilminsky believed that to non-Russians the Orthodox tenets would sound the most convincing and acceptable in their own native tongue. Accordingly, they began to translate spiritual literature, local inhabitants were trained to become clergymen, religious instruction was given in the language of the local indigenous population wherever possible. These policies no doubt contributed to the convergence and merging of religions. In fact, old customs and ancient shrines were honoured in many baptised Udmurt villages. Occasionally a sort of compromise was made between state church and folk religion. For example, Rev. I. Smirnov describes how a traditional ritual sacrifice was arranged in the Ponino parish of Glazov county before autumn ploughing – an ox was sacrificed, prayers were said under the leadership of sacrificial priests, meat and porridge was cooked. Then the local clergyman came to bless the food offering. The head of the sacrificed animal was given to him on a plate (usually it is given to the sacrificial priest); he made a sign of cross and sprinkled holy water over it. The head and entrails of the sacrificed animal were given to the priest, while the skin was donated to church (Smirnov 1890: 241). Russians and Tatars attributed to the Udmurts a special power of praying for rain. Reverend I. Vasilyev complains, ‘I have had to hear some morally advanced Russian women, even some host-bakers, say, “I wish the Votyaks would pray<sup>89</sup> sooner, perhaps God

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<sup>89</sup>Russian words *моление* - praying, *молить* - to pray are commonly used for the translation of the Udmurt words *vöš*, *vöšaskon*, - sacrifice, praying, *vöšanj*, *vöšaskinj* - to sacrifice, to pray. There are not different words for prayer and sacrifice in the tradition of heathen Udmurts.

would grant us some rain.”.’ He adds a commentary: ‘It is often true that it will start raining after the Votyaks have made their sacrifices, because their priests make weather observations through the winter-time, so that already in winter they can forecast the weather in summer.’ (Vasilyev 1906: 345). Often Christianity did not hinder Udmurts from praying to their ancient deities. For example, G. Vereshchagin describes how an offering was made to the forest fairy in Glazov county. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday the mistress of the household took some flour and eggs and baked an odd number of pancakes. At about noon the master of the house brought the pancakes on the table, bared his head and made three bows towards the corner where the icons were, then he put the cakes in his bag and went out of the village. He was not to meet anyone on his way, it was particularly inauspicious to see someone cross his way. If he encountered someone, he pretended not to see that person and went on in silence. By the fence that surrounded the field he spread a cloth on a tree-stump or on a shelf on the fence, laid the pancakes on the cloth, and made three bows facing south, his head bared (Vereshchagin 1909: 45-46).

The following legends, written down by the priest, suggest that heathen beliefs could influence the world outlook of Christians in more respects than merely praying for rain. ‘They say that the parish clerk of Buranovo went to pick mushrooms in a holy grove; after he had picked all he needed, he wanted to come out of the grove, but an invisible force held him fast. He threw the mushrooms immediately down and managed to get out of the grove in good health. They also say there were a deacon and a priest who under the instruction of a great sage sacrificed a horse in the grove and then ate it, to be cured from a disease that they had caught because they had earlier desecrated a holy grove’ (Vasilyev 1906: 197 – 198).

Among Udmurts, as among other peoples, several ancient traditions merged with church festivals. For example, there was the common custom of banishing evil spirits and diseases from the village after Lent. People walked around in the village with rattles and bunches of burning twigs, made all the noise they could and beat against walls with cudgels. Afterwards the cudgels were burned behind the village (ibid: 330). Of course, similar customs relating to the beginning of Lent are known among many European peoples and it is not altogether impossible that they were introduced among Udmurts only with the coming of Christianity. Another widespread custom is walking around in the village and beating with willow twigs on Palm Sunday; it may have come to the Udmurts through Russians. However, the custom has some special features in Udmurtia – usually the walking took place on the eve of the holiday in torch-light. People started from one end of the village and finished in the other. Not only people were hit with twigs, but also beds, girders, logs in the walls. The act was accompanied by the words *‘ki’lez-dejez ul’laškom!’* – ‘Let’s drive away all diseases and misfortunes!’ The twigs and torches were thrown in the fields behind the village. In some places people used to draw circles around their yards and houses, using objects of metal

(ibid: 329). On the eve of Maundy Thursday people walked around the village making noise, shooting guns and shouting; scythes, oven brushes and fire-shovels were used to draw circles around dwellings. On Maundy Thursday they brought juniper or fir twigs into the house, lit them and purified themselves with the smoke; every corner in the house was also smoked and juniper or fir twigs were stuck into crevices in the walls to keep away evil spirits (Pervukhin 1888, 2: 113, 115). While the Udmurt customs on Maundy Thursday resemble those of many other European peoples, the Easter has merged with the ancient spring festival called *akaška*. On this day men, boys and girls used to mount their horses and ride to the place of someone who was the oldest or otherwise highly respected in the village. A table was brought out into the yard, bread, eggs, beer and home-distilled vodka were put on the table for the prayer. One of the elderly men was chosen as the prayer leader and he had another person to assist him. Both the prayer leader and his assistant walked from one household to another. On the way they sang special spring festival songs or *akaška gur* that are still circulating among the heathen Udmurts. Everybody carried a cudgel or twig with which they hit the roof of the house at the end of the song (Vasilyev 1906: 332). The Easter prayer of baptised Udmurts was as follows: ‘Lord! Vorshud, bless our prayer. Lord, grant us good health, here we are with our children worshipping you, Lord, with our cattle, grant us (well-being), Lord. Let whatever we have sown sprout and grow well, Lord, pray, Lord, lay sheaf by sheaf, shock by shock, pile by pile, Lord. Grant plenty of food and drink to the Udmurts, Lord. Give us bees, give us honey, Lord. We ask our ancestors, grant us plenty of food and drink, Lord... We ask our ancestors, do not be angry, Lord.’ (Blinov 1898: 27). The quoted prayer differs in no respect from the prayers of unbaptised Udmurts.

Sometime before the Multan case Bogayevsky wrote: ‘When the researcher asks to which god they make a certain sacrifice, the Votyaks always answer that to *inmar*, even when the inquisitor knows beforehand that the sacrifice was actually designed for another deity. Answering in this way, sometimes from ignorance, sometimes from fear for the clergy, they are trying to say that at the moment they are making a sacrifice to God, using their native name “*inmar*” for the Russian word “*bog*”’ (Bogayevsky 1890: 142). I think Bogayevsky was wrong, often it was not ignorance, but a religious compromise that had taken place – at least in the northern part of Udmurtia (Vyatka province) both the heathen religion and Christianity had acquired a new meaning for Udmurts. The convergence of Christians and heathens was facilitated by:

- 1) The fact that the words for old heathen concepts were used to convey the basic Christian concepts. So every heathen could say to a Christian that he believed in god, while the Christian could interpret it as being the same Jehovah who is worshipped in church. At traditional prayers he could believe that it was his God to whom the offering was made, since the text of the prayers could be interpreted both ways.

- 2) The relative tolerance of Orthodox Christianity, combined with the limited availability of religious instruction and limited literacy, as well as the lack of revivalism in local Orthodox tradition. Consequently, little of the real essence of Christianity got through to the people. Often the folk beliefs negotiated by Russians were more consequential than church doctrines.
- 3) The official cultural policies of Russia in the second half of the previous century, which partly served for giving a new significance to old heathen concepts but which, instead, contributed to their preservation.
- 4) The self-awareness of the Udmurts, which was dominated by characteristics that tended to unite rather than detach the two groups. One identified oneself first and foremost as an Udmurt, and only secondarily as a Christian or a heathen.
- 5) The oral tradition that was common to both communities.

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