

Some Facts of Main Ethnic Groups' Ceremonial-Game Traditions in Their Theatrical Aspect in the Chuvash Republic

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Abstract: The article presents facts about ceremonial-game traditions of main ethnic groups living in Chuvash Republic, such as Chuvash, Russian, Tatar, and Mordovian. *The purpose of the research* was the survey of ceremonies, customs and celebrations which are kept in the present time in Chuvashia. The research was focused solely on theatrical aspect of rites or ceremonies where a person uses dressing up, masks, makeup, and acts for Mummers' plays. Furthermore, the research aimed to identify the mutual cultural influence of the above mentioned ethnic groups on each other. The field study was conducted using *the methods* of interviewing, observation with video and audio recording. The data were gathered from all of Chuvash Republic districts. *In conclusion*, it was established that mummering traditions are being revived in some rural areas of Chuvashia; traditions of mummering have not been changed since the second half of the XIX century, but people created new characters, especially in the second half of the XX century; the content of ceremonial-game traditions is fully demonstrates the worldview, mentality and value system of the main ethnic groups presented in Chuvashia.

Keywords: Mummers' plays, ceremonial-game traditions, Chuvash, Russian, Tatar, Mordovian.

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Некоторые факты об обрядово-игровых традициях в их театральном аспекте (на примере основных этнических групп Чувашской Республики)

Резюме: В статье представлены некоторые факты об обрядово-игровых традициях основных этнических групп, проживающих на территории Чувашской Республики, – чувашей, русских, татар, мордвы. *Цель исследования* – выявление фактов бытования обрядов в их театральном аспекте, где участник обряда или игры перевоплощается при помощи переодевания, ряжения, маски; выявление фактов взаимовлияния культур вышеуказанных этносов. *Методы исследования* – интервью и наблюдение с видео- и аудиозаписями ответов информаторов. Основные *выводы*, сделанные по результатам проведенного исследования: в настоящее время зафиксированы случаи возрождения традиций святочного ряжения в сельской местности Чувашии; традиции ряженья мало изменились со времен второй половины XIX века. Изменения в основном затронули типы – появились новые персонажи, особенно во второй половине XX века; содержание национальных традиций в полной мере отражает мировоззрение, менталитет и систему ценностей народа.

Ключевые слова: ряжение, обрядово-игровые традиции, чуваша, русские, татары, мордва.

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Introduction

The territory of the Chuvash Republic was historically formed as a multi-ethnic region. According to the 2010 Russian Population Census, the Chuvash are presented by the largest number of people in the Chuvash Republic, precisely 67.7% of the total population; Russians – 26.9%; Tatars – 2.8%; Mordovians – 1.1%.

It should be noted, that in the Chuvash Republic there live the Mishar Tatars, who are a subgroup of the Volga Tatars, and the Erzya, who are an ethnic group of the Mordovians.

Our research started in 2010. Thirty-one rural settlements were investigated, forty-five native inhabitants were interviewed. The oldest interviewee person was born in 1919.

Materials and Methods

Our research is concerned with the only one aspect of rite, which is theatrical aspect of rites or ceremonies

in which there is a person who uses dressing up, masks, makeup, and acts for Mummers' plays. We also studied costumes and folk houseware that were used in the Mummers' plays. The field study was conducted using the methods of interviewing, observation with video and audio recording. The data were gathered from all of Chuvash Republic districts.

Results and Discussion

The Chuvash rites and customs were described by many scientists, such as V.D. Dimitriev [1], V.P. Ivanov [2], R.R. Ishakov [3], V.G. Rodionov [4], A.K. Salmin [5; 6] and others. Speaking of ethnocultural influence of above mentioned ethnic groups, it is necessary to emphasize that today there are many noteworthy scientific works, such as «The History Of The Chuvash People In Ethnographic Facts» [5], «Transfer of the Chuvash to Tartars and Loss of Identity» [6], «Jetnokul'turnyj portret Chuvashskoj Respubliki» [2] and others.

Mummers traditionally appear at Christmas time. This time is called 'Surkhuri' in the Chuvash language. Mummers (in the Chuvash language it is 'svetke') change their look by means of dressing up, and behave limitless.

We have revealed some facts.

For example, the traditions of mummerring are still preserved in some settlements of Chuvashia, and they were almost everywhere until the middle of the twentieth century.

The following are details recorded during interviews with people living in Chuvash villages. Sazonova Nina Pavlovna, born in 1951 (Morgaushsky district, Chumankasy village) told us about Mummers' plays in which she took part when she was young. She and other young people went out of the houses in the evening. They were wearing fur coats which are turned inside out. Their faces were covered with gauze, and they had a whip with them. There were women and men, adults and young among them. They were attacked by local people for fun, for example, local people could push mummers in a snowdrift. Among others, the mummer's group included two people; one impersonating a guard and the other impersonating a Cossack to prevent them from identification.

Next interviewee is Ivanova Aleksandra Alekseevna, a native of the Tenevo village, Alikovsky district, born in 1930, mentioned the Cossacks too. She told us that the mummers covered their faces with shawls or put on self-made masks. She told us that the mummers were dressed up into animal characters such as a dog, a goat, and a bear. When the mummers entered the house, they didn't speak and didn't say a word to avoid recognition. According to her reminiscences, the mummers-men misbehaved, for example, sat on the girls' knees. Also, they could steal someone's washed and hung to dry clothes, dress it on and come to the clothes' owners in this look. Therefore, on the eve of this day people hid washed clothes in sheds. The mummers came into the houses without invitation, and they didn't come to lonely, boring old people, they came to sociable young girls.

Next interviewee Grigoryeva Raisa Viktorovna is a native of the Podlesnye Shigali village, Batyrevsky district, born in 1930, told us that the mummers used to wear their fur coats turned outside, and beards, which were sewn to hats. They held a hand roll in their teeth, scolded, and asked each person they met, what that person would wish them. She remembered that one day she and her friend had come into another house. Raisa Viktorovna was dressed as an old woman and her friend Mottya was dressed as an old man with a handmade hump. They danced and suddenly the homeowner picked up her friend and threw her over the fence but Raisa Viktorovna managed to escape. After that they danced in another house and when they were leaving that house the homeowner hit on the hump and pushed them out of the house. In the other house the girls danced with the sheep that came into the house with them from the yard.

The next interviewee Kozlov Alexander Vasilievich is a native from Molgachkino village, Shumerlinsky

district, born in 1952. He and his wife Kozlova Lyudmila Alexandrovna, born in 1955 told us that at Surkhuri time young boys were dressed up into girls' clothes and girls were dressed up into boys' clothes, furthermore, they could dress up old folk dresses. The native speakers mentioned masks, gauze, and the turned inside out fur coats too. They added that the mummers drew eyes and mouths on gauze with coal. The mummers came into houses, sang, danced, scattered peas on the floor. If they met people in the street, they scared the people, wallowed them in the snow, and didn't hurt them, but simply had fun.

Some native speakers remarked that at Christmas time there were only men who took part in mummerring, and, what is more, children were forbidden to dress up as mummers. The men-mammers masqueraded as girls; for this they made up plaits from spikes. Not many people wanted to let mummers into their house but the mummers came into the house anyway. According to the most informants, mummers' faces were covered with gauze on which eyes and mouths were painted, sometimes mummers' faces were smeared with soot.

This part of article describes facts recorded in the Russian villages of Chuvashia. So, the Russians told us about different characters, such as a soldier, a gypsy, a doctor, and a cock. In addition to these characters there were used other characters from popular comedy movies. For example, Krasnenkova Ekaterina Nikolaevna, a native of the Ichiksy village, Alatyr district, born in 1941 had dressed up as a comic character Popandopulo of the Soviet musical comedy 'Wedding in Malinovka'. She dressed in a sailor's striped vest, made teeth from potato, hung a big purse around her neck and was walked and said: 'Why am I in love with you?' Other native of the Ichiksy village, Sazonkina Antonina Fedorovna, born in 1938, told us about dressing up as a soldier. In order to look like a soldier, they put on a kaftan to which a shoulder-strap made from the sole of the boot was sewn; they put on many skirts to look like a gypsy; and they glued feathers on clothes to look like a cock. The native speakers told us that they expected mummers to come. Hosts met them with joy; provided them with cakes, sweets and even moonshine. At such time potential brides and grooms were paid special attention to offering a better treat. After visiting all the houses, the mummers got together in someone's 'kelya'. The word 'kelya' means a house of single or widowed women, most often the poor ones. In English it sounds like 'cell'. In 'kelya' they ate, sang, and danced.

The natives of the Russian villages told us that sometimes there were mummers at the wedding. We have a photo made in 1958, which shows the mummers at a Russian wedding in Alatyr district: one of them is wearing a turned inside out fur coat; the others are wearing a soldier's (with an accordion) and a doctor costumes, and the other man wearing a hat and riding-breeches.

According to a native of the Mordovian village of Altyshevo, Alatyr district, Galkina Alexandra Fedorovna, born in 1947, the characters of the mummers

at Christmas time were a gypsy, a devil, a Baba-Yaga (a witch in Russian tales), a clown. She remembered that men always dressed as women. According to her story, the hallmark of the Mordovian wedding in this village was the mummings. They dressed up to look for a 'jarka'. In the Russian language 'jarka' means a newly-married wife.

We have revealed that in the Tatars traditions there are no mummings.

We have identified the mutual influence of the main ethnic groups cultures on each other. For example, the natives of the Tatar villages of Chuvashia had told us that about 5–6 years ago young people began to celebrate Maslenitsa which is a Russian holiday. This holiday had been not celebrated before. We learned about a case of burning a scarecrow at the Nowruz which is a holiday that marks the beginning of spring or of the New Year. This fact is absolute novelty for Tatars observing folk traditions, because the burning a scarecrow is a typical rite for Russians. Currently, the Chuvash and Tatars of the Komsomolsky and

Batyrevsky districts of Chuvashia have begun to celebrate two similar holidays – the Chuvash Akatuy and the Tatar Sabantuy – in conjunction.

As a conclusion we should mention the following:

– The traditions of mummerring are still preserved in some settlements of Chuvashia, and they were almost everywhere until the middle of the twentieth century;

– Traditions of mummering have not been changed since the second half of the XIX century, but people created new characters, especially in the second half of the XX century, such as heroes of films and cartoons);

– New methods of transformation the face appeared due to new material used for making the masks; along with this, people started using ready-made masks;

Currently, mummering traditions are reviving in the rural areas of Chuvashia. The ways of makeover, such as a turned inside out fur coat, gauze for hiding a face, dressing up men in women and vice versa are kept till now, and their content fully demonstrates the worldview, mentality and value system of the main ethnic groups presented in Chuvashia.

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