

# Mordva material in Estonian collections and Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) diasporas in Estonia in the late 20<sup>th</sup>–early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

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**Abstract:** This article is based mainly on materials collected in the period between 1994 and 2016 from the journal *KUDO* published by the Estonian Mordvin Society and reflecting the diverse life of the diaspora. We have also analysed recorded biographical data of Erzya and Moksha people residing in the Republic of Estonia and the archival material of the Estonian Mordvin Society. The article reviews the history of the first settlers, their number, formation of cultural societies and their interaction with other organisations, integration into Estonian society, information about the first Estonian expeditions to the places of the Erzya and Moksha as well as cultural and education ties between Estonia and Mordovia. All this reveals the activities of compatriots, trends in population change in this group, mechanisms of preservation of national identity and the role of Mordvin national and cultural non-profit organisations in the preservation and development of ethnic culture in the Republic of Estonia.

**Keywords:** diasporas in Estonia, Estonian Mordvin Society, cultural societies, preservation of national identity

## Introduction

The Erzya and Moksha are one of the largest Finno-Ugric peoples who live mainly in Russia. By number within the Finno-Ugric language family they are only than the Hungarians, Finns and Estonians. According to the 2010 census, nearly a million citizens of Erzya and Moksha nationality lived in the Russian Federation. The total population of Mordovia is 834,755. According to the 2010 Census, a total of 744,200 Mordvins (Erzya and Moksha) were recorded in Russia, while in Mordovia the number is 333,100 (Mordva: 148-160). One of the features of the Erzya and the Moksha is a large dispersal of settlement. Only one third of the Mordvin population of Russia lives in the Republic of Mordovia. Compact groups of the Erzya and Moksha settled in Samara, Penza, Orenburg, Ulyanovsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Saratov regions and in Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Chuvashia. A significant number lives in the Urals, Siberia, the Far East and Sakhalin. Significant groups of Erzya and Moksha are located in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and abroad (ref: Mordva: 7).

## Erzya and Moksha representatives in Estonia

We do not know when the first Erzya and Moksha representatives got to the territory of contemporary Estonia. Presumably they could have been in the troops of Ivan the Terrible in the Livonian War (1558-1583). They also served in the Russian garrisons in the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The academic F. Wiedemann, when writing his *Erzya-Mordvin Grammar* (1865) collected lexical material from Erzya and Moksha soldiers who had served at Revel garrison (Prozes: 2023).

The number of the Erzya and Moksha in Estonia is reliably known since 1934 when 3 people of Mordvin nationality were recorded. By 1959 their number had increased to 391, and it kept growing steadily to 985 (1989). According to the censuses of 1979 and 1989, the most numerous groups of Finno-Ugric peoples were the Finns, Karelians and Mordvins (Prozes 1994: 230). Many Erzya and Moksha began to settle in new places and raise families.

## Mordva material in Estonian collections and Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) diasporas

1897 – 22	In 1989, when 985 representatives of the Erzya and Moksha lived in Estonia (of which 487 were men and 498 were women), most lived in cities – 865 people, which constitutes 87%. Geographically 2/3 of the Mordvins live in the northern part of Estonia, more than half live in Tallinn. According to the last census (2011), 436 Erzya and Moksha lived in the Republic of Estonia.
1934 – 3	
1959 – 391	
1970 – 532	
1971 – 723	
1989 – 985	
1997 – 940	
2000 – 562	
2011 – 436	

**Table 1.** Population of the Mordvins (Erzya and Moksha) in the Republic of Estonia according to censuses from 1897 to 2011 (*KUDO* No 4. Prozes 2009: 20).

In 2000, 1.1% of respondents considered Estonian their mother tongue, 39.7% considered the Erzya or Moksha language their mother tongue, and 59.2% considered Russian their mother tongue (ref. Table 2).

Year	1959	1970	1979	1989	2000
Consider the Erzya or Moksha language their mother tongue	42.3%	37.9%	37.5%	37.2%	39.7%

**Table 2.** Population of Mordvins (Erzya and Moksha) in the Republic of Estonia according to censuses from 1959 to 2000 (*KUDO* No 4. Prozes 2009: 21).

## Language and identity

Jaak Prozes notes that the weak identity of the Erzya and Moksha was acquired in childhood and then brought to Estonia. According to the 1970 census, the Mordvins were ranked one of the most assimilated nations. In 1989, 367 people could speak their mother tongue or first language, 603 could speak Russian, and 13 Estonian Erzya and Moksha could speak Estonian. Respectively, 134, 348 and 66 people could speak the Erzya and Moksha, Russian and Estonian

languages as a second language. Thus, 484 people did not know their mother tongue, and 34 did not know Russian (*KUDO* No 1. Prozes 1998: 15).

As the materials of the 1990 survey show, there were no monoethnic Mordvin families, so at that time there were no children who spoke their native language (*KUDO* No 3. Prozes 2009: 21-23). However, in a number of surveys, there were four families among the members of the Estonian Mordvin Society where the children could understand the Erzya and Moksha languages, as they spent their school holidays with relatives who spoke their mother tongue (AFD and SAM). In almost all the families surveyed the main language of communication was Russian, although 76% of respondents considered the Erzya or Moksha language their mother tongue (*KUDO* No 3. Prozes 2009: 21-23). This is due to the fact that the spouses were of different nationalities and the home language was Russian.

In 1996, the Estonian Mordvin Society organised a survey among compatriots to find out the reasons that people came to Estonia. It transpired that many of the respondents in the Republic of Estonia came for work and family reasons. Many had friends or relatives here (SAM). Several people also came for research activities. Back then, scientific contact was established with the University of Tartu, where, under the guidance of the academician Paul Ariste, talented young people and scientists from Mordovia defended their theses and undertook internships.

Since 1998, the language and cultures of Uralic (Finno-Ugric and Samoyed) peoples state support program has helped students from Mordovia (2 Moksha, 5 Erzya and 1 Shoksha) came to Estonia. Then, in 2003, there were 3 more students (2 Erzya and 1 Shoksha). The Kindred Finno-Ugric Peoples Program is governed by a program council set up by the Minister of Education and Science. Currently 39 scholarship holders of different nationalities are studying in Estonia within the Kindred Peoples Program (over 150 scholarship holders in total, ref. <http://www.fennougria.ee/index.php?id=10429>).

The situation changed for the better in the 2000s, when these young people started multicultural families, in which Erzya, Moksha, Russian, Estonian, Udmurt and other languages were considered a priority. Typically, the roles of these languages are distributed in daily life. Each language has its own sphere of use, for example, communication at home with mother is carried out in Erzya or Moksha, with the father in the Udmurt or Estonian, in kindergarten or school in Estonian or Russian, in the Russian-speaking community in Rus-

sian, in Estonian society in Estonian, etc. These children identify themselves with two or more language communities, which is a prime example of a multicultural society.

The Udmurt language policy researcher Konstantin Zamyatin and the Finnish researchers of Finno-Ugric languages Annika Pasanen and Janne Saarikivi note that bilingualism and multilingualism benefit native speakers in different spheres of life:

- “Bilingualism promotes tolerance, flexibility, mental and creative abilities.”
- If each parent speaks to the children in their mother tongue, which they mostly identify themselves with, it is beneficial to the development of relations between the generations. Knowledge of a language also connects children with their grandparents and other relatives who speak this language (this statement also applies to the local Erzya and Moksha, ref. AFD). “Kindred heritage, passed to the child together with the language, in certain parts is unspeakable in other languages” (Zamyatin, Pasanen, Saarikivi 2012: 14-15). Today (2016), 4 students (2 Erzya and 2 Moksha) who originally came to study, now live in Estonia. In these young families, parents speak their mother tongue with their children. The rest of the students returned to Mordovia upon graduation. However, there are students who have moved to other countries, such as the USA and Germany (2 people).

Perestroika in the Soviet Union, which began in the second half of the 1980s, played an important role in the fate of different nationalities, including the Erzya and Moksha. At the same time that various types of migration were taking, various national organisations were established. Thus, since establishing the organisation, the diaspora has mainly been represented by specialists with higher education. They are teachers, managers, nurses, specialists, kindergarten teachers, research staff in universities, etc. It should be noted that non-profit organisations and communication with relatives and compatriots give nourishment to maintain their roots, but they do not always prevent assimilation.

## **Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) cultural societies in the Republic of Estonia**

In the 1980s, various cultural societies were established in Estonia. The Estonian Mordvin Society was organised by Yu. P. Kulnin together with A. I.

Chepanov; the head of the Fenno-Ugria organisation was Jaak Prozes. Kulnin got the inspiration to establish the Mordvin society from the Mari, who told him that they had created a Mari community in Tallinn. Prozes recalls that until 1993, however, he was an ordinary Russian man who met Mari on a train and observed them speaking to each other in the Mari language. Suddenly he began to think that he was not Russian after all. His wife was very upset with him, and a phone call to an activist of the Mordovian association ended with the words, “what have you done to my husband, he was a completely normal Soviet Russian person, but now he walks around the room saying ‘I am Mordvin, I am Mordvin’, while mumbling in some incomprehensible language. Make my husband go back to normal”. Thus, even his wife did not know for almost 25 years of living with Kulnin that he was actually Erzya (Prozes: 2003).

Soon, on March 18, 1994, at the Institute of the Estonian Language, he gathered 47 compatriots together and they made the decision to establish the society. The Charter was written by Kulnin and Jaak Prozes. On June 3, there was an official foundation meeting attended by representatives of the Parliament of Estonia, the Ministry of Culture, and local Erzya and Moksha (80 people), and so the Estonian Mordvin Society began its activities.

In the Republic of Estonia there are 3 active Mordvin societies. The oldest is the Estonian Mordvin Society (Tallinn, since 1994) now combined with the Vastoma folklore ensemble (its head A. Simberg (Tallinn, operating since 2011)). The first head of the Estonian Mordvin Society, from 1994 to 1996, was R. Klinova. Between 1996 and 2001 the head was Kulnin (1935-2001), between 2001 and 2003 the head was N. Bayushkin, between 2003 and 2019 the head was N. Ermakov and since 2019 it has been M. Kondrakova. The second Mordvin society is the Syatko Erzya Moksha Society (head R. Klinova, Tallinn, operating since 1997) linked to the Kileyne folklore ensemble (head N. Abrosimova). The third society is the Yalgay Mordvin culture Society, the head of which is Abrosimova (Pärnu, operating since 2011). People of different nationalities are members of these societies: the Erzya and Moksha from Mordovia, Tatarstan, Ulyanovsk, Saratov, Samara and Penza regions, as well as Estonians, Finns and Russians from Mordovia. In a foreign country the most important task of these communities is to preserve native language and culture, and transfer the spiritual values of their people to the younger generation as well as socialising and integrating them into Estonian society.

## The Estonian Mordvin Society

Taking the current situation into account, one of the main priorities of the Estonian Mordvin Society is conservation of national languages and culture, as well as cooperation with the homeland. The Society is composed of representatives of the creative intelligentsia, i.e. graduates of the University of Tartu, students of the academic P. Ariste (Dr N. Aasmyae, masters Yu. Yufkin, N. Bayushkin, V. Danilov (1942-2002), V. Kurvits, graduate and post-graduate students at Tallinn University N. Ermakov (Konstantinova), N. Abrosimova and the university of Tartu (A. Venchakova, T. Zirnask (Nadeykina). They are leaders and major organisers of Mordvin diaspora events (*KUDO* No 4. Bayushkin 2009: 5-9).

Professor Emeritus Waldeck Pall was an honorary member of the Society, in whose honour the Syatko Erzya Moksha Society established a fund named after Waldeck Pall (2013). Other honorary members are Dr Lembit Vaba and Toomas Help, who can speak Erzya. In the 2000s, the Society of the Erzya and Moksha was active in Tartu, with at its head University of Tartu Indrek Särg.

The organisation's work is visible through the activities carried out, such as the release of the animated feature film *Lullabies of the World* (Erzya lullaby). The Erzya lullaby was made in the tradition of national colour and was 're-lived' by children's drawings in the form of animation. The children of the Mordvin community drew pictures that depicted their dreams. On the basis of these drawings, students from the MEKSvideo studio made an animated film. Through the Kindred Peoples Program it was possible to restore the sacred springs in the village of Lunga, Ardatovsky district, Republic of Mordovia'; Erzya language courses were organised at Tallinn University; the Society also made a contribution to the translation of the Erzya anthology *Kov Valdon Vals* with Arvo Valton and were awarded the 2<sup>nd</sup> category by the Estonian Folklore Council for the preservation, development and introduction of their culture; and they performed in Paris at INALKO, at the ADEFO Finno-Ugric association and at a festival in Riga. The Society signed a joint cooperation agreement with Ogarev Mordovia State University and with the Volga Region Culture Centre of the Finno-Ugric peoples, among others.

Due to the active work of the societies, in recent years (before 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022) cultural contact between the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Mordovia have expanded and improved. Various cultural events were aimed

at strengthening the ties between the republics and diasporas. These events were: Erzya and Moksha Language Days, Kindred Finno-Ugric Peoples' Days, performances by folk ensembles, meetings with writers, poets and scientists, art exhibitions, presentations on Radio 4, Vikerradio and Estonian television, Kudo and Syatko public journals, publishing various information brochures, etc. These activities create a special positive atmosphere that encourages not only adults but also children and young people to study their own and local culture and language, as well as those of neighbouring groups, which helps in life and self-realisation.

In my opinion, the strong point of the Republic of Estonia is versatile maintaining and preserving different national cultures and diasporas through government and non-government organisations, education and cultural institutions, the media, etc. Such organisations include the Estonian Ministry of Culture (Eesti Kultuuriministerium), the Kindred Peoples Program (Hõimurahvaste Programm), the ERÜ Association of Estonian peoples, the INSA Integration Foundation, the Union of Regional and Minority Languages of Estonia (ERVL), and others. This confirms the affiliation of the above-mentioned diasporas to various institutions. Undoubtedly, the Mordvin diasporas in Estonia also need support from the Republic of Mordovia at the cultural level in a variety of ways.

The members of the Society are interested in the Estonian culture and language, thereby integrating into the Estonian society, but at the same time continuing to maintain and impart interest in the native language and culture. For example, the Estonian Mordvin Society is a member of several organisations:

- the Estonian Folklore Council and the working group of national minorities on traditional culture. The working group consists of highly skilled representatives of different cultures. The main objective is the promotion and preservation of the traditional cultures of different peoples and realisation of the value of cultural heritage. Through this organisation we are introduced to the Estonian traditional culture.
- the Association of the Peoples of Estonia, which includes 36 different cultural organisations. The Association involves close cultural activities between different ethnic groups living not only in Estonia, but also abroad. The Association represents the interests of national minorities,



develops, introduces and preserves identity, culture and traditions, including those of the Erzya and Moksha.

- the Estonian Union of Regional and Minority Languages aims to preserve different languages that are represented in Estonia, as well as cooperating with representatives of other language groups. It creates a variety of conditions for expanding the use of languages. For example, the expedition to the village of Pazelki, Republic of Mordovia and Penza region (2013).
- The Fenno-Ugria non-profit organisation, created to coordinate relations between the Finno-Ugric peoples. Currently, Fenno-Ugria brings together more than 50 institutions and public organisations.

The Syatko Erzya Moksha society is a member of the Finno-Ugric Association, while the Yalgay society is included in the Raduga umbrella organisation.

These organisations are influential in the preservation of the Erzya and Moksha culture in Estonia. Constructive integration into society in any country can establish the political, cultural and economic ties in various directions, which ensures that a new generation recognises and acquires cultural diversity as a positive aspect of the modern multicultural world (Ermakov 2013: 56).

## Some biographical data of compatriots and their reasons for coming to Estonia:

The writer and translator **Boris Kabur** (1917-2002) was an interesting personality. His popularity is associated with the children's book *Rops* and a translation of the epic Gilgamesh into Estonian. Few people know that his family belonged to the old famous Mordvin Baygunov family. His father served on a submarine in the tsarist army and remained in Estonia during the revolution. In 1936 he took the Estonian-sounding name Kabur from his wife, who was from Saaremaa. He took part in the War of Independence and is the only Mordovian to be awarded the Cross of Liberty, 1<sup>st</sup> order, 3<sup>rd</sup> class. After his military service, he stayed in Estonia, ran a meat shop and worked as a locksmith for the Fr. Krull factory. He is buried in the Inner-city (Siselinna) cemetery. After some time, his son Boris Kabur became known as one of the inventors of the Druzhba brand of chainsaw (*KUDO* No 4. Prozes 2009: 22-23). Boris Kabur

recalled his father speaking Mordovian on his deathbed. Apparently, it was a Moksha Mordva language. Unfortunately, he did not speak Mordovian because he learned about this only at the end of his father's life. Nevertheless, later he was proud of his origin and claimed that his father was a descendant of a well-known Mordovian shaman (Prozes: 2023).

- In the post-war time in Saratov it was hard to support a family, and a mother advised her son to go to work to Tallinn. She also bore in mind that the Erzya and Estonians are kindred peoples. Her son came first in 1949 and then, in 1951, the whole family moved to Estonia (**V. I. Avdeeva**).

- **N. Bayushkin** (born in the village of Kanakleyka, Ardatovskiy district, Republic of Mordovia). In 1966, he was sent for a postgraduate training program to the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies, University of Tartu in Estonia. The head of the Department was the academician Paul Ariste, who instilled even greater love for the mother tongue. Together with professor M. Mosin he published 2 textbooks, *The Erzya Language* and *Ersa-mordvan oppikirja*. In 1975, N. Bayushkin came to Tallinn University of Technology to get a job. Since 1994, he has been connected with public activities and is a board member of the Estonian Mordvin Society.

- **A. Simberg** was born in the village of Terenga, Ulyanovsk Region. She has lived in Estonia since 1979. Between 1982 and 2002, she worked as the head of a kindergarten. She was a pioneer of the Society and was a board member. Currently she is the music director of the Vastoma folklore ensemble.

- **M. Kondrakova** was born in the village of Torbeyevo, present-day Torbeyevesky District, Republic of Mordovia, to the Moksha family (her parents came from the village of Nosakino). She has lived in Estonia since 1984. After graduating from Torbeyevesky College for the dairy and meat industry, she worked as a senior foreman; since 1996 she has been head of the production department. She is an active member of the Society and ensemble.

- **Vera Paramonova** is a poet. The Russian-Erzya Paramonov family have lived in Estonia since 1981 (in the town of Kallaste). After graduating with honours from Astrakhan Marine College, a job placement in Tallinn connected George and his wife Vera forever with Estonia. The Mayor of Kallaste, Victor Nukka, is linked to the Erzya as his mother is from that area.

- **Valentina Koitla (Borishcheva)** is from the village of Staraya Yaksarka, Penza Region. In Penza she met Estonian soldier Väino and in 1959 they were married and moved to Paide, Estonia.

- **Zoja Oshkina** was born in the village of Staraya Shentala, Shentalinsky District, Samara Region. Through the Estonian Mordvin Society she met her husband, Mikhail Atyunkin (a representative of the Erzya, born in the village of Dyurki, Atyashevsky District, Republic of Mordovia). This is the only ethnic family in Tallinn. Both were part of the origin, and are active members of, the Society.

**Nadezhda Palukhina**, (born in 1957 in the village of Semiley, Kochkurovsky District, Republic of Mordovia) and **Lyubov Pashkovich** (born in 1960 in the village of Semiley, Kochkurovsky District, Republic of Mordovia) are sisters who moved to Estonia to stay with relatives. Both were also involved in the origin of the Society.

- **Yulia Kratko** was born in the village of Rybkino, Novosergiyevsky District, Orenburg Region. She graduated from school in Rybkino, entered Orenburg Pedagogical University, and after graduation (in the 1980s) moved to Tallinn (for family reasons).

- **Aleksey Milovanov** was born in Tallinn. His father grew up in the Erzya village of Pazelki, Penza Region. The father did not speak Erzya, but from his childhood he cited an example of the similarities between Erzya and Estonian, “one hundred in Estonian is sada, in Erzya syado”. The question of identity started to bother Aleksey when he lived in England, where he realised that his nationality was Erzya. Mindful of his origin, he enrolled on an Erzya language course, which took place in the spring of 2012 and was taught by N. Ermakov and N. Abrosimova. The Finnish scientist E. Kopponen was a visiting lecturer (and a student at the same time), and well-known folklorist M. Yoalayd also attended classes. Thanks to this course, the Vastoma folklore ensemble became a member of the Estonian Mordvin Society.

- **Tatiana Treufeldt (Maneyeva)** was born in the city of Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod). After the Second World War, her father was transferred from Moscow to the position of Chief of Gorky airport. He did not speak about his ethnicity because it was not customary, but her grandmother told her about their roots. Fate brought Tatiana Maneyeva to Estonia, where she met her husband Toivo Treufeldt, who takes photos and video of the ensemble performances.

- **Liubov Plodukhina** was born in Saransk. She finished 8 classes at School No 9 and entered medical college specialising as an obstetrician. Fate brought her to Tallinn where she worked in the surgical department of the port hospital, and then in the Medikum outpatient clinic, where she currently works.

- **Vassily Suldin** is Erzya, he is from the village of Ineley (Velikiy Vrag), Shatkovsky District, Gorky Region. In 1976, he served as a border guard in Tallinn. During military service, he went to an exhibition in Haapsalu where he met the chairman of the Sõprus kolkhoz and became a livestock specialist. He started a family in Haapsalu.

- **Vassily Kerdyashov** is Moksha. He was born in 1956 in the village of Novo-Kashtanovka, Penza Region. He came to Estonia in 1979 and started a family there.

- **Vera Savkina** is Moksha, from Kovytkinsky District, Republic of Mordovia. She has lived in Sillamäe for 2 years. She runs a business and writes poems in her mother tongue.

In the history of compatriots in Estonia, there are many interesting facts that help paint a picture of the regions where the Erzya and Moksha came from, as well as their reason for moving to Estonia.

The materials have been collected by various scientists from Estonia and other countries and are now stored in the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum, the Estonian Language Institute, the University of Tartu, the Estonian Music and Theatre Academy, and the archives of the various societies.

## **Mordvin collection of exhibits in the Estonian National Museum, Tartu, and other sources of conservation and development of Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) culture**

The first collection of items that marked the beginning of the Finno-Ugric collection in the Estonian National Museum was from Mordovia. The first 7 Mordvin (B1: 1-7) items came here in 1914 from Saransk Uyezd, Penza Governorate. Peeter Savi, who worked there, collected artefacts in 1913. In 1915, the collection was enriched with 57 objects (B 2) from V. Rozenstraukh from Penza and Saratov governorates, with the collection of E. Paavo (two sets of women's clothing, a total of 13 items from Penza Governorate (B 4), and also with the Mordvin adornments and national costumes (7 elements, B 3) collected in Samara Governorate by a student of the University of Helsinki Otto Väisänen. Thus, in 1928, 7 mannequins dressed in Mordvin clothing and some individual items from the collection were exhibited in Raadi at the ethnic

minorities exhibition. In total, there were 14 mannequins at the exhibition, including 3 Ingrian, 2 Liv, 1 Mari and 1 Udmurt.

Employees at the Estonian National Museum began to explore the Erzya and Moksha peoples in 1965. The first trip to Mordovia was taken by E. Saarde (Astel). In 1972, J. Maaring travelled to the Mordovia ASSR. In addition, between 1983 and 1987, the Estonian National Museum conducted comprehensive studies headed by H. Sarv and involving scientists, photographers and artists in Mordovia, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in areas inhabited by the Erzya and Moksha; the research was conducted in conjunction with Mordovia State University. The most recent studies were conducted in 1988-1989 under the guidance of M. Mikkor. The results of the expedition appeared in the museum collection (artefacts, drawings, photographs, written documents), which is still underexplored<sup>2</sup>; Marika Mikkor wrote about the customs of childbirth and funerals, K. Sarv compiled a dictionary of clothing elements, H. Sarv described history and demography. The museum's collection and the works of the Estonian researchers are still little known in Russia (a brief chapter on H. Sarv and the museum by Nikolai Mokshin *Mordvins in the eyes of foreign and Russian travellers* appears in Saransk 1993: 212-213.)<sup>3</sup>

Since 2014, a single museum portal has been actively updated with information and images (Eesti muuseumite veebivärv) d <https://www.muis.ee/search>), where collection information is available. For example, using the keyword “mordva” in the “kirjeldus” column will access information about Mordovian or Mordovian ASSR-related materials from various museums. There is a detailed search for individual museums, for example Eesti Rahva Muuseum (the Estonian National Museum).

The collections are partially digitised (objects, drawings, photos). There are also images. Informative handwritten material – diaries, ethnographic descriptions, correspondents' answers.

The Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu keeps valuable folklore and ethnographic material collected by the ethnographer and folklorist V. Danilov in the 1960s and 1970s in the village of Okhonkino and surrounding villages in Tatarstan where there was a high density of Erzya. The Estonian Mordvin Society plans to publish this material and make it available for everyone. The Estonian Folklore Archive has an estimate of a few hundred pages of Viktor Danilov's manuscript material and audio recordings. A total of 2,450 songs and about 50 stories and beliefs have been recorded. This indicates the need

to collect additional data on the prehistory of songs and other song culture phenomena, as well as to add data specifically about customs and narratives.

It should be noted that in the summer of 2015 the Estonian Academy of Music (Zh. Pyartlas and students of the Academy), the Estonian Literary Museum (J. Oras, A. Kalkun), the Estonian Mordvin Society (N. Ermakov) together with the Ogarev Mordovia State University (S. Isayeva) conducted an ethnographic expedition in the Republic of Mordovia collecting valuable folklore and ethnography material.

The Paul Ariste Centre for Indigenous Finno-Ugric Peoples at the University of Tartu issued an electronic Erzya language textbook by Niina Aasmyae titled *Kortatano erzaks/Räägime ersa keelt* ('Let's speak Erzya', Tartu, 2012). Niina Aasmyae is a researcher at the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, University of Tartu and a speaker of Erzya. The materials of the textbook are stored in the Archive of Digital Materials at the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, University of Tartu, where you can also find the textbook in English (<http://mariuver.com/2015/04/16/est-rzja/>).

The Finno-Ugric movement in Estonia is significant, with nearly a one-hundred-year history. Negotiations with different peoples at different times were both fruitful, and not, according to Marju Kõivupuu (Senior Researcher, University of Tallinn). She remembers friendship with the great Erzya narratress of folk tales Serafima Lyulyakina, whom she met at the Finno-Ugric folklore festival. S. Lyulyakina gave Marju jewellery worn by her grandmother as a sign of friendship and gratitude because an Estonian woman could sing in her mother tongue, i.e. Erzya. They maintained this friendship through the years.

Marju's 2011 trip to Tavla and the Yovlan Olo museum in the Republic of Mordovia refreshed her memory about cooperation in the Torama and Khelero ensembles. A representative of the Erzya, Viktor Danilov (1942-2002), made the Hellero ensemble special. Victor showed and explained how to wear traditional Erzya clothing and feel the spirit of the Erzya people.

Thanks to cooperation between Marju Kõivupuu and Professor Galina Kornishina, the University of Tallinn and Ogarev Mordovia State University signed a cooperation agreement in 2011.

Thus, the Estonian National Museum keeps valuable collections of national clothing, adornments and household items. The Estonian Literary Museum and the Academy of Music store important folklore and ethnography materi-

als. There is also a cooperation agreement between different universities and the Estonian Mordvin Society.

In conclusion, it should be noted that a large number of the Erzya and Moksha moved to Estonia during the Soviet period, mainly between 1959 and 1970, mainly youth who usually lived in the cities. The main language of communication is Russian, and, as a rule, second-generation migrants hardly speak their national language (except for young families started in the 2000s).

Materials from the archive of Estonian dialects and Finno-Ugric languages can be found at EMSUKA.<sup>4</sup>

Recordings with a file icon are available as digital files through the database, the rest of the original tapes are either not digitised or poor quality (the reshoots are digitised, but they are not yet in the database). The Estonian–Erzya electronic dictionary was released In 2019.<sup>5</sup>

The University of Tartu archive of Estonian dialects and related languages has materials in native languages.<sup>6</sup>

There has also been contact with the ethnic homeland in the form of restoring holy sites, and establishing agreements with universities and cultural associations. In addition, Expeditions to Pazelki and Ardatov regions resulted in valuable folkloric material for ethnographic preservation which is vital to keep Erzya cultural heritage alive in the modern world.

Various cultural events organised by societies help the local Erzya and Moksha to consolidate and preserve their identity and language. The work of these societies in Estonia contribute to the creation of a multi-coloured palette of cultures within the multinational Republic of Estonia.

The study of Mordovian (Erzya) materials shows the richness and versatility of the culture of the people, and every year the value of this knowledge only increases. Publication of the material is important because the written culture of Mordovia is young, while oral heritage is a very important part of the culture. The material in the Estonian archives is of great interest because of its authenticity. It provides valuable information for both folklorists and researchers in other fields and can also be used in the education system.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.maavald.ee/uudised-10225-2012/269-151010225-2012-ersamaa-pyhapaik-saab-hoimurahvaste-programmi-toel-korda>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.folklore.ee/rl/folkte/sugri/mordva>.

<sup>3</sup> On the first Mordvin items see also: <http://blog.erm.ee/?p=1307>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://emsuka.eki.ee/sound-collection>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.eki.ee/dict/ersa/>.

<sup>6</sup> They also have an online archive: <https://murdearhiiv.ut.ee/otsi.php>.

## Abbreviations

SAM – the Society archival material (Estonian-Mordvin)

AFD – author's field data

Expeditions (collections: B – items, Fk – photos, EJ – drawings, TAp – field reports)

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hThe Institute of Estonian Language. <https://www.eki.ee/dict/ersa/>

EMSUKA. The Sound archives. <http://emsuka.eki.ee/sound-collection>

Eesti muuseumite veebivärav [Museums Public Portal]. <https://www.muis.ee/search>

<https://www.muis.ee/search>

## Short bio

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Natalia Ermakov is from Mordovia and is a President of the Estonian Union of National Minorities. She was head of the Estonian Mordovian Society for 17 years. She is the founder and head of the National Minorities Working Group of the Estonian Folklore Council. She is also a researcher in the Department of Folkloristics, Tartu, Estonia.

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Presentation of the book *Kuum õõ*, Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves present, 2007. Photo: Natalia Ermakov



The Estonian Mordvin Society, 2012  
Photo: Estonian Mordvin Society

## Mordva material in Estonian collections and Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) diasporas

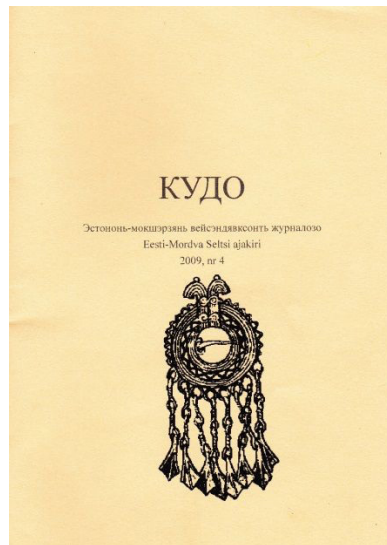
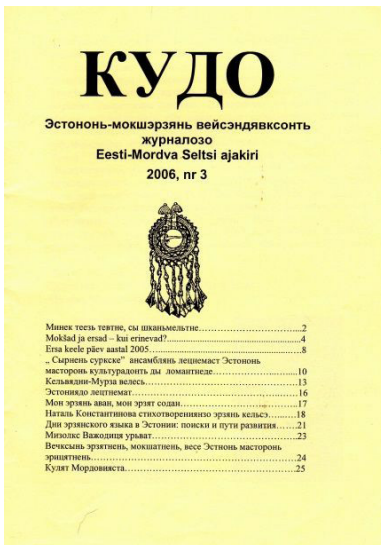


The Erzya language courses at Tallinn University, 2012

Photo: Natalia Ermakov



Lecture by V. K. Abramov on the Mordvin history for the Mordvin diaspora in Estonia. Guest Juku-Kalle Raid (head of the working group on the Finno-Ugric peoples under the Parliament of Estonia), 2012. Photo: Natalia Ermakov



The journal *Kudo*



The Vastoma Ensemble, V. K. Abramov, V. I. Mishanina, E. Tolouze. Photo: Natalia Ermakov INALCO university, France, 2013.



The Day of the Erzya language, 2013. Estonian president Arnold Rüütel with his wife the folklorist Ingrid Rüütel, writer Arvo Valton, Kshumantsyan Pirgush, Antonina Simberg and Natalia Ermakov. Photo: the Sjatko Estonian Erzya Community



Twentieth anniversary of the Estonian Mordvin Society, 2015. Photo: the Estonian Mordvin Society



Estonian Mordvin Society, 2018. Photo: the Estonian Mordvin Society

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The J. Olo Conference. Viljandi Traditional Music Barn. The Sjatko Estonian Erzya Community, 2021. Photo: Leanne Barbo



The Estonian Sjatko Erzya Community. Day of the Erzya language. 2021 Photo: Estonian Erzya Community