

Summary

As an Erzya, I have the pleasure of inviting you to read the book “The Erzya Heritage in Estonian Archives”, which reveals collections of rich culture, along with telling you about the activities of the Mordovian diaspora in Estonia. In addition to folklore, material culture and other data collected by Estonian scholars, the archives also contain material stored by researchers from Mordovia, Tatarstan and Kuibyshev (Samara) regions.

The material collected by Estonian scholars is diverse and includes, besides examples of spiritual and material culture, field work diaries, comments and notes taken from 1913 to 2024. Over more than a century-long period much has changed, as we can see through the eyes of folklorists, ethnographers, language specialists and musicologists, students, photographers and cameramen and by means of their experience. Fieldwork took place to a greater extent in the Mordovian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, now the Republic of Mordovia, but in 1983 the collecting expeditions also led to the Tatar and Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (now the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Bashkortostan).

With a great sense of mission, knowledge was collected by Erzya-mordvalians Mikhail Chuvashov (1909–1973) and Viktor Danilov (1942–2002), whose material comes from the Samara region of the Kuibyshevo District of Tatarstan, where the Erzya community lives compactly.

The collected material has overwhelmingly come from elderly informants, primarily from villagers. Among them are well-known folk singers, lamentation singers, teachers, collective farmers and simple villagers. Viktor Danilov and Mikhail Chuvashov collected their empirical material using qualitative methods: oral interviews and thematic conversations. When collecting material on the Mordovian diaspora, I preferred participatory observation, being a member of this community. I have also applied personal observations and transcripts as an empirical source.

Only a small number of sources have previously been published by Estonian and foreign researchers, which is why I chose previously unknown texts for analysis and publication. The book contains new transliterations and explanations of dialect words, because the language has changed a great deal in recent years. The list of interviewees by Viktor Danilov and Mikhail Chuvashov is published in a systematized form. Working with recordings and diaries was not easy. In part, it was complicated due to handwriting, which was difficult to read, as well

as finding translational matches to words, phrases and phraseology in Estonian. The quality of the audio recordings and the dialect made transliteration difficult.

Material on the Erzya is stored in the archives of Estonian folklore of the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum, the Institute of the Estonian Language, the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, the University of Tartu, the personal archive of musicologist Zhanna Pärtlas and the personal archives of the Estonian – Mordovian community. As mentioned above, there are corpora in various forms: alongside manuscripts and diaries, there are audio, video, digital recordings and other visual recordings, including pictures, diagrams, illustrations, maps and objects.

When preparing this book, I searched in various archives and research institutions. In addition, I turned to various print materials: periodicals, publications issued in several countries and internet sources.

Cooperation with colleagues and scientists left a deep impression on me, as well as the careful attitude of the institutions towards the materials. With deep respect and gratitude, I appeal to all who are committed to preserving the heritage of small nations, including Erzya.

In preparation for publication, systematic cooperation with senior digital archivist Olga Ivashkevich took place. Together with her, we specified and translated the metadata, received digitized manuscript materials and added them to the repository-information system “Kivike” of the Estonian Literary Museum to ensure access to them via the web. The website dedicated to the culture of Erzya and Moksha which I have been developing in recent years in collaboration with Ilona Kolossova (<https://www.folklore.ee/rl/folkte/sugri/mordva/>) also contains valuable material and research. Photographs, examples of manuscripts and sheet music have been selected for the book’s appendices.

The purpose of the book is to provide an initial systematic overview and description of the archives of the Erzya in Estonia, and of the history of Mordovians and their cultural societies in Estonia, as well as to shed light on the activities of cultural societies and persons associated with them.

With the help of collected and stored material, features specific to certain periods in Erzya folklore and ethnography can be explored, along with current topics related to customs.

Virtually all collections have been digitized, but further data processing, enrichment-replenishment, classification of genres, assignment of languages and translation of texts is still to be done. One of the reasons for writing about collections is the fact that they are located in different repositories even within the boundaries of one institution: for example, manuscripts in one, photographs

and videos in another, audio recordings in a third, not to mention objects or prints. Between the covers of this book, Mordovian materials come together.

I am extremely thankful to my colleagues for their help, support and advice: Mare Kõiva for her comprehensive support and assistance throughout the project; Asta Niinemets and Nikolai Kuznetsov for editing the text and advice; Olga Ivashkevich for entering and specifying the data of the files. To Jaak Prozes for information about the diaspora, Diana Kahre, Maris Kuperjanov and Sergei Sidorov for the design and layout of the book, and members of the Estonian-Mordovian diaspora for the promotion and preservation of their culture and language in Estonia. Many thanks to Svetlana Karm for a comprehensive review of the Estonian National Museum's materials and explanations. I am grateful to Anna Venchakova for her help in classifying the Erzya and Moksha collections. I owe thanks to Zhanna Pärtlas for the review of the material which is in storage and awaiting publication at the Estonian Academy of Theatre and Music.

The Finno-Ugric movement in Estonia is really significant, boasting an almost century-long history. During this time, valuable collections of national costumes, jewellery and household items have been stored in the Estonian National Museum. There are also important folkloric, ethnographic and linguistic materials in the Estonian Literary Museum, the archive of the Senior Research Fellow of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, the University of Tartu and the Institute of the Estonian Language.

Expeditions have been organized to Mordovia and the oblasts which existed in the Soviet Union, as well as to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, due to which valuable folkloric and ethnographic material was obtained, which is crucial for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Erzya and Moksha in the contemporary world. The materials of Mordovia (Erzya and Moksha) highlight the richness and versatility of the cultural phenomena under study, and the value of this knowledge is growing from year to year.

Mordovians living in Estonia also play a major role in preserving their cultural heritage, since they have maintained contacts with their ethnic homeland, where the restoration of sacred sites has been organised, and contracts have been concluded with universities and cultural associations here and there. It should be mentioned here that the greatest number of Erzyas and Mokshas arrived in Estonia during the Soviet period, mainly in 1959–1970, when a significant number of specialists were sent here to work after graduating from higher education institutions. Those who arrived were mainly young people, and they mostly lived in cities. The main language of communication was Russian, and generally the second generation of immigrants hardly spoke their native language at all

(except for young families created in the 2000s). The cultural activities of the Societies help the local Erzyas and Mokshas to consolidate and maintain their identity and language. This is similar to how Estonians who fled abroad from the war to different countries maintained their knowledge of their origin and their distant homeland, creating their own societies, establishing Estonian-language schools and organizing Estonian gatherings.

The Mordovian (Erzya-Moksha) community living in Estonia, their activities and creations and the Mordovian language and culture materials found in Estonia are remarkable and representative; they are an important part of the variegated palette of the cultures within the Republic of Estonia.

The publication of historical and folkloric material matters a great deal, because the written culture of Mordvins is young, and oral heritage is a very important part of the culture, which guarantees Erzyas and Mokshas the knowledge of where they come from and what is their inheritance. On the other hand, the materials collected in the Estonian archives are of great interest as they are authentic and provide valuable information to folklorists as well as researchers in other fields. Furthermore, this knowledge may also be applied in the education system.