



KRYASHENY PAGANS: A CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF OLD TYABERDINO VILLAGE, THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN

KRYASHENY PAGANS: ESTUDIO CULTURAL Y PSICOLÓGICO DEL ANTIGUO PUEBLO TYABERDINO, LA REPÚBLICA DE TATARSTAN

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ABSTRACT

Based on the expedition materials received by the authors in 2014, the article reveals the cultural and psychological characteristics of the sub-ethnic group of Kryashen-pagans in the village of old Tyaberdino, the Republic of Tatarstan. The purpose of the article is to study the ethnocultural characteristics of the Kryashen pagans. The main attention in the article is paid to the traditional rituals and customs of the life cycle, and the issues of ethnic self-awareness and self-identification of “unbaptized Kryashens” are raised. The article demonstrates the way paganism and Christianity are closely intertwined in the Kryashen calendar, festive and everyday traditions, folk beliefs and customs. First of all, such a synthesis of pagan and Christian rituals is due to the geographical location of the area and interaction with neighboring peoples. Secondly, during the periods of mass Christianization, paganism was not completely ousted from the consciousness of the Kryashen people, and Christianity was not fully understood yet. The authors of the article also describe the sacred rituals and places of worship that have survived at present among the Kryashen pagans. The materials of this article can be useful for ethnologists, social and cultural anthropologists, historians, museologists and culturologists, as well as anyone interested in this topic.

Keywords: Kryashens; Kryashen population; people; paganism; pagans; ethnocultural practices.

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RESUMEN

Basado en los materiales de la expedición recibidos por los autores en 2014, el artículo revela las características culturales y psicológicas del grupo subétnico de kryashen-paganos en el pueblo de la antigua Tyaberdino, República de Tatarstán. El propósito del artículo es estudiar las características etnoculturales de los paganos de Kryashen. La atención principal en el artículo se presta a los rituales y costumbres tradicionales del ciclo de vida, y se plantean las cuestiones de la autoconciencia étnica y la autoidentificación de los "kryashens no bautizados". El artículo demuestra la forma en que el paganismo y el cristianismo están estrechamente entrelazados en el calendario Kryashen, las tradiciones festivas y cotidianas, las creencias populares y las costumbres. En primer lugar, tal síntesis de rituales paganos y cristianos se debe a la ubicación geográfica del área y la interacción con los pueblos vecinos. En segundo lugar, durante los períodos de cristianización masiva, el paganismo no fue completamente expulsado de la conciencia de la gente de Kryashen, y el cristianismo aún no se entendía completamente. Los autores del artículo también describen los rituales sagrados y los lugares de culto que han sobrevivido en la actualidad entre los paganos de Kryashen.

Los materiales de este artículo pueden ser de utilidad para etnólogos, antropólogos sociales y culturales, historiadores, museólogos y culturólogos, así como para cualquier persona interesada en este tema.

Palabras clave: Kryashens; población de Kryashen; pueblo; paganismo; paganos; prácticas etnoculturales.

INTRODUCTION

The Kryashens are an ethno-confessional group of Tatars with a number of ethno-cultural characteristics: Orthodox faith and stable ethnic identity. There are different versions of the Kryashens origin (Linch et al., 2020). The most widespread and well-grounded theory tells that the formation of the Kryashens on the territory of the former borders of the Kazan Khanate is associated with the mass adoption of the Orthodox faith during Christianization in the second half of the 16th century, after the conquest of Kazan by Ivan IV. This group is referred to as "newly baptized" in various documents. The second wave of baptism took place in the 18th century, after which this category of the population began to be called newly baptized, and those who were baptized in the previous period were named old baptized (Tovar García, 2014; Sabirova et al., 2016).

However, a large number of "newly baptized" Tatars returned to Islam again in the 2nd half of XIXth - early XXth century, while almost all "old baptized" remained Orthodox. N.I. Vorobyov wrote, that this is due to the fact that in the 16th century Islamic culture did not have time to penetrate into everyday life when the "old baptized" appeared, and some part of the population continued to adhere to traditional beliefs, thereby partly remaining "pagan". N.I. Vorobyov wrote about this in 1929: "Observing everyday life and even the language, one can say with a significant degree of probability that these Tatars were either not Muslims at all, or were so little in Islam that it did not penetrate into their life" (Vorobiev, 1929).

There is also another theory, according to which the Kryashens are the descendants of the Orthodox

population that lived on the territory of the Middle Volga region until the XIV century. However, no documentary evidence was found. During the 19th century, pagan Kryashens lived in the Kazan province, which is documented. Nowadays, there are “unbaptized Kryashens”, which are a small ethnic group of the Molkeev Kryashens in the village of Staroye Tyaberdino of the Kaibitsky region, the Republic of Tatarstan. This group of Kryashen pagans consider themselves Kryashens, having nothing to do with Orthodoxy, being unbaptized and worshipping pagan gods (Dulmukhametova et al., 2019; Akhmetshin et al., 2019).

METHODS

The methodological basis of the research involves the study and consideration of the ethnic group of unbaptized Kryashens based on a polyparadigmatic approach. The work uses general historical research methods: cultural-anthropological, historical-comparative, descriptive, as well as the method of complex analysis. Also, the article uses quantitative and qualitative methods: discourse - a mass survey through questionnaires, participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews.

This article is based on field materials from the ethnographic expedition of 2014. As part of the study, 100 Kryashens were interviewed, of which 52 were women and 48 were men. The study covered the Kaibitsky administrative-territorial region of the Republic of Tatarstan, which is conditioned by the compact residence of the Kryashens on this territory. There were 2 focus groups and 5 interviews with the representatives of the Kryashen population in the area.

The interviews with Kryashens - pagans in the Kaibitsky region of the Republic of Tatarstan provided unique information about their lifestyle, social identity, beliefs, origin, national language, family rituals and traditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Paganism is a mythological worldview associated with the worship of nature, worship of the spirits of nature, belief in magic, witchcraft, usually based on traditional beliefs, mythology and folklore of a particular people (Anichkov, 2009).

Kryashens - pagans live in the village of Staroye Tyaberdino, Kaibitsky municipal district of the Republic of Tatarstan. This group of Kryashens (the so-called unbaptized Kryashens or pagan Kryashens) consider themselves as Kryashens, having nothing to do with Orthodoxy, being unbaptized (Golikova et al., 2016).

This area is bordered by the Chuvash Republic, where a local group of lower Chuvash (Anatri) lives, among whom paganism is very widespread. These intercultural interactions influenced the ethnic identity of the Kryashens of the Kaibitsky region, where 27% of respondents consider themselves Kryashens, 69% - baptized Tatars, 2% - Tatars, and 2% - Russians. This picture is conditioned by the geographical location, as well as the ethnocultural specifics of the area. Many respondents note that the Tatar population of the Kryashens is called Chuvash in the Kaibitsky region, because of the Orthodox faith, and the Chuvash call them Tatars, because of their linguistic peculiarities. It is worth noting that the cultural mutual influence of the Chuvash and Kryashen population on each other is very noticeable both in words and in the preservation of ancient pagan rituals (Titova et al., 2017). It should be noted that the Kryashens separate themselves from both the Tatar and Chuvash population.

“It happened that Russians and Chuvashes call us Tatars, but they call us Chuvashes in Kaibitsy” (from the interview by a 54-year-old man, village Molkeevo, Kaibitsky district).

“We call our cemetery mazar, and mazar is translated as the burial place of saints from Arabic. And this is what the Azerbaijanis say, and this is a Turkic name in general, and we, the Kryashens, also say so. And the Tatars have the name zirat ... it turns out absolutely different.” (from the interview by a 54-year-old man, Molkeevo village, Kaibitsky district).

This group of Kryashens living in the Kaybitsky region identifies itself as "baptized Tatars", because the ethnonym "baptized Tatars" and "Kryashens" are synonymous words for this area, and this explains the high percentage of respondents in this region who call themselves "baptized Tatars".

The self-identification of the Kryashen pagans is also fragmented. In the village of Staroye Tyaberdino, Kaibitsky region, several families have survived, worshiping pagan gods, whom the locals call "chukynmagannar" - "unbaptized".

“... My father believed, as I did. We prayed to different Gods - heaven, rain, sun, earth. We are rural people raised by labor, and we were close to nature.” (from the interview with 57-year-old man, village of Staroye Tyaberdino, Kaibitsky district)

“... I had 5 brothers, all unbaptized were pagans. We didn't know how to pray, we hid. Father and aunt did everything on the sly. We didn't pray, at least I didn't see it.” (from the interview with 65-year-old woman, Staroe Tyaberdino village, Kaibitskiy district)

Unbaptized Kryashens tried to enter into marriages with unbaptized Chuvashes living in the neighborhood, because of similar ethnocultural characteristics and pagan beliefs. But there were also the marriages among fellow villagers with the representatives of the Orthodox Kryashens. It was strictly forbidden for men to be baptized in such marriages, however, there were the cases when it was allowed for women. Informants told about the cases when older men forbade their sons, and sometimes daughters, to be baptized.

Before me, there were 5 sons in the family, my mother asked my father to convert the next child to Orthodoxy, if she had a girl to be born. He did not agree, he was against it, so we never had anything Orthodox in our house. Mom kept the only cross, she hid it, and father found it and crushed it all with an axe. (from the interview with 65-year-old woman, Old Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

My brother's wife forced the children to fast, hung icons, and even drove him to baptize being drunk. Then he threw out everything related to Orthodoxy, burned icons and buried Orthodox books. But it was all bad. He and his son died in a car accident. Probably, everything does not happen in vain and you have to pay for all your actions. (interview, woman, 65 years old, Old Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

During the Soviet era, it was not customary to talk about their confessions. The Kryashens are pagans and were completely silent so that no one would find out about them, condemn and force them to be baptized.

The Pope hid his faith because he was afraid that he would be baptized. (from the interview with

65-year-old woman, Old Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

The Kryashen pagans still have their cults and places of worship. One of the most significant is the old sacred oak, where all believers in pagan gods come to worship the oak and ask for help. A temple has been preserved - a cult place of pagans for various rituals in a clearing near an oak. Not only local residents (pagan Kryashens) come there, but also the adherents of pagan beliefs come from neighboring regions.

In 1999, when I started to build a new house, I sacrificed a rooster (ətəch tubəgə). It is customary to do this through the male line. I asked the gods for the construction blessings and built it. The Chuvash often go to this oak tree, maybe they make sacrifices - I don't know, but they are more religious than we are. (from the interview with 57-year-old man, Staraye Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

Not far from the sacred oak, there is an old pagan cemetery of its own, where all the descendants of this local group are buried. There is a following sign at the entrance to the cemetery:

To you - our ancestors,

To you who died heroically for the faith of the Fathers,

To you - who kept the traditions of the hoary antiquity,

To the mortals - who saw the death of the immortal Gods,

Forever Glory to those who went into the Golden Svarga after them!

The cemetery is not large, basically all burials of the middle of the 20th century and many graves are without fences. There are no crosses in the cemetery, and there are tombstones made of granite or stone instead of crosses, and before their installation they put a wooden board with the information about the deceased. This cemetery has a tombstone with Arabic characters, which has not been dated or attributed yet. According to the legends, there are hidden jewels there with buried ancestors.

At present, many traditions and rituals have been lost for various reasons, the differences in funeral and memorial rites preserved most well. The deceased is buried in a coffin without a prayer and with certain music, with his head to the sun - facing east, thus, the monument was placed in the place where the head is located, when the Orthodox have a cross (a tombstone) at their feet. After death, it was customary to light candles, which they made themselves from wax. The commemoration was celebrated on the third, ninth and fortieth days, which also characterizes the Christian tradition.

We lit candles like the Orthodox, but we made them ourselves - from wax. (from the interview with 65-year-old woman, Old Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

There is no funeral service, there are no such differences. A person is not left alone in a coffin. Candles burn with no prayer. Nobody prays at the grave. The pagan faith is very logical in this regard, we are not touched, and we do not touch anyone. (from the interview with 57-year-old man, Staraye Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

The festive culture of the Kryashen pagans differs little from the Orthodox Kryashens. At present, the

following calendar holidays are celebrated especially by unbaptized Kryashens - Easter, Peter's Day (Pitrau), Trinity, Maslenitsa, and Semik (Khusnutdinova et al., 2017).

Semik is a pagan holiday. We go to the cemetery on Saturday during Semik, other villages visit it on Thursday. Many people stoked the bathhouse in the evening, and we started to stoke it in the morning to go to the cemetery clean. (from the interview with 65-year-old woman, Old Tyaberdino village, Kaibitsky district)

These holiday traditions are of great importance for the Kryashen pagans, because many have their origins in ancient pagan cults.

Thus, the traditional culture of the Kryashens-pagans has much in common with the Kryashens, however, a number of features have survived and continue to be observed, namely the worship of pagan gods, which fundamentally distinguishes them from the Orthodox Kryashens.

The study of the ethnic group of the Kryashen pagans was presented in the works of both pre-revolutionary and Soviet researchers.

In the pre-revolutionary literature, special studies of the Molkeevsky Kryashens are associated with the re-Islamization of the baptized Tatars, which A. Galbansky carried out, making missionary visits and making important reports on them. The missionaries N.I. Ilminsky, M.A. Mashanov, E.A. Malov, whose works introduce not only the customs and rituals of the Kryashens, but also their religious beliefs, also studied the life and culture of the Kryashens of that period. However, none of them considered the culture of the Kryashen pagans in detail.

During the Soviet period N.I. Vorobyov was one of the first scholars to study the origin of the Kryashens thoroughly. He raised questions about the ethnogenesis problems of the Turkic-speaking ethnic groups of the Volga region. According to N.I. Vorobyov, the Kryashens preserved their ancient way of life almost entirely and can, to a certain extent, serve as an example of the way of life that the Tatar people had before the Russian conquest. Vorobyov classifies the Kryashens as a group "isolated from their own people through baptism" (Vorobiev, 1929). He sees the reason for the differences between the Tatars and the Kryashens, both in their different origins, and in the various cultural influences under which these groups were for more than three centuries (Barth, 1989).

At the present stage, the ethnic identity of the Kryashens is growing, the ethnocultural Kryashen movement is reviving. In the collection of articles "Molkeevsky Kryashens" Gabdrakhmanov et al. (2016) covers various aspects of the history of traditional culture of the Molkeevsky Kryashens, their dwellings, traditional costume, mythology and folklore, song traditions, ritual cycles, and dialect peculiarities. The works of the Kryashen leaders also occupy a special place. G.M. Makarov (Makarov, 2001) is the author of various Kryashen song collections, as well as one of the prominent figures in the study of Kryashens and Kryashen culture, who considers ethnocultural processes, as well as linguistic components of the language. The head of the executive committee of the board of the republican public organization of the Kryashens of Tatarstan, L.D. Belousova, publishes interesting facts and information from the life of the Kryashen pagans on the pages of the Tuganailar newspaper. However, the pagan Kryashens remain a poorly studied ethnic group.

SUMMARY

The culture of the Kryashen-pagans of Staroye Tyaberdino village, the Kaibitsky region, the Republic of Tatarstan is quite exceptional and unique.

However, a significant layer of the traditional culture of the Kryashen-pagans was erased during the Soviet era, and the Orthodox Kryashen environment had a great influence on this living with the Kryashen-pagans on the same territory (Frolova et al. 2016). Christian rituals performed by neighbors became an integral part of the spiritual life of the Kryashen pagans, and were reflected in the celebration of traditional Christian holidays. Despite this, a few representatives of unbaptized Kryashens continue to preserve customs, rituals and traditions, sacredly believe and worship pagan gods, performing pagan cults. These phenomena occur, firstly, as a tribute of respect and reverence to their ancestors, primarily men, because it was forbidden to accept Orthodoxy along the male line, rather than women. Secondly, the borderland with the Chuvash Republic contributed to the conclusion of marriages between the Kryashens - pagans and Chuvash - pagans, which helped, albeit in part, the pagan culture.

The considered pagan rites of the unbaptized Kryashens, told by the informants, are very interesting, although many of them are almost not carried out anymore. Currently, some of the most pronounced pagan traditions are still in use: the worship of the sacred oak, as well as funeral and memorial rites associated with their own production of candles, and certain funeral rituals in their own pagan cemetery.

CONCLUSIONS

Having studied the historiography of the issue under consideration, one can come to the conclusion that, despite the study of the Kryashens by various authors, there are few works about the “Kryashens-pagans”, some of them are even fragmentary.

In the context of world globalization, when the interaction of neighboring peoples has a strong influence on each other, it is becoming more and more difficult to preserve identity for small local representatives of one or another ethnic group (Titova et al., 2019). It should be noted that at present the ancient pagan traditions and rituals have been lost for various reasons. The festive tradition of the Kryashen pagans almost does not differ from the Orthodox Kryashens, they celebrate the same holidays. However, pagan Kryashens still use special funeral and memorial rites. Besides, it is strictly forbidden to accept Orthodoxy through the male line, however among the Kryashen pagans, but there are concessions on the female line.

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