

## A SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION OF COLOUR IN THE CULTURE OF MORDOVIANS

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**Abstract.** In the article the sources of semantic interpretation of white color in the Mordovian culture are considered. The correlation of the color palette nominations in the linguistic picture of the world of the ethnos with the mechanism of comprehension by the person of their own sensations and their subsequent fixing in the language and other elements of culture is determined. The scientific novelty of the work is the use of a systematic approach that allows us to determine the most promising ways of exploring folk art from the point of view of modern humanitarian knowledge, touching on questions of history, philosophy, philology and art history.

**Keywords:** Mordovian culture; origins; color palette; shine; white; lexical means of language.

### 1. Introduction

The human's perception and comprehension of colour is concerned with variety of meanings and implication in it. According to the researchers, colour is the strongest semiotic sign of the visual space, encompassing in a concentrated form and conveying the encoded message from ethnic culture (ideas, feelings, images, aesthetic norms), created by collective intelligence, assimilated through tradition and passed on from generation to generation (see: [10, p.93-110]). N.V. Serov presumes that colour bears on human senses, being manifested as physiological energisation or depression, that shows itself in certain emotions, moods, thoughts (see: [4]).

Ideas about the diversity of the colour palette of the surrounding reality are reflected in the linguistic world-image of Mordovians. To denote the concept of "colour" Mordovian (Erzya and Moksha; hereinafter – E. and M.) languages use a large number of words related in their origin to the proto-Uralic, Indo-Iranian, Indo-European, and Turkic languages (see: [6, p. 14, 138, 151, 192, 199]). A significant layer of this lexical material is an important source of research into the

originality of culture, close ethnic and cultural ties of the Mordovian ancestors with neighboring nations, together exploring the richness of their native land, developing their own language and improving living environment. Despite a long list of literary and scientific works by philosophers, art historians, cultural studies scholars that make up the historiography of the topic, it still remains understudied.

Of particular relevance is the aspect of cross-cultural communication of the Volga region nations – a specific crossroads of cultural ties and ethnic processes, where migration flows have been mixed since ancient times: from the West – (Balts, Slavs), from the South – (Iranian-speaking tribes), from the East - (Finno-Ugrians, Turks). The interference of different cultural and ethnic, ethno-confessional traditions contributed to the birth of new creative impulses. Consideration of colour in the traditional Mordovian costume, ritual, household items (see: [8, p. 297-298; 9, p. 146-149; 11, p. 219-222; 12, p. 108-111]) allows us to talk about the symbolic nature of colour perception in Mordovian culture.

The purpose of research is to look into the origins of value-based apprehension of the visual sign using the white colour as an example; to reveal axiological foundations of traditional Mordovian culture, explaining the commitment of a Mordovian woman to the white colour until the early twentieth century. The research draws on the vocabulary of Mordovian (Erzya and Moksha) languages, works of folklore, traditions and rituals, as well as archaeological artifacts found in the Mordovian region.

## **2. Results and discussion**

Mordovian folklore contains a significant amount of contexts where linguistic units with semantics of colour appear. Their semantic interpretations realise the religious, value-based system of concepts perceived by bearers of culture as topics of *life* and *death*, attitude to social values, God (see: [10, pp. 93-94]). The concept of "light" dates back to the origins of ethnic culture. In Mordovian (Erzya and Moksha) languages the word *light* - "*valdo*" e., "*valda*" m. is attributed by linguists to the Finno-Ugric proto-language, that is proved by cognate terminology in Finnish, Estonian, Vepsian, Livonian, Saami, Mari and other languages (see [6, p. 23]). Comparison of concepts *light* – *darkness* reveals in the Mordovian traditional culture the semantic categories of *life* – *death*, dominating in oral folk art, mythology, arts and crafts, customs and rituals of the Mordovian people (see: [10, p.94-96]).

The specifics of the ancient tradition of worshiping sun and fire in the Oka-Sursky interfluvium was firstly convincingly found in writing monuments of the fityan-balan tribes of the Indo-European family, which since the Eneolithic period penetrated the territory of the Middle Volga region. The cult of the Sun is associated with such cultural attributes as the choice of high places for the burial of tribesmen with such an effect that their faces would be directed to the

South, the presence of ornament at the bottom of ceramic tableware in the form of solar signs, etc. (see: [13, p. 35]). The semantics of the Indo-European protoforms, dealing with the colour meaning in the common Slavonic and old Russian languages is associated with *illumination, brilliance, radiance*: "For instance, the root \*bha-: \*bhe-: \*bho had the meaning "to give light, radiate, shine" [7, p. 41]. Linguistic research into the history of colour naming drawing on the Indo-European linguistic material confirms the widespread and universal relationship between colour and light characteristics (see: [2, p. 234]. As a result, the proximity of the origin of such concepts as *colour, light and radiance* is revealed – an important ontological aspect of thorough understanding of the development sequence of culture's value priorities.

The contacts of ancient Indo-European fityan balan tribes with local late Neolithic tribes of *volosovtsy* in the Oka-Sursky interfluvium ended, according to A. Kh. Khalikov in "dissolution of aliens" and the emergence, in the middle of II Millennium BC, of a new cultural formation of *shiromas* type, as well as anthropological light pigmented atlanto-baltic appearance resembling modern Finns, Estonians and a large group of Erzyans (see [5, p. 26]).

A significant role was played by the cult of fire in the worldview of a log structure cultural and historical community of the Mordovian region of the late Bronze Age. During the funeral of the tribesmen, representatives of the log structure culture were the first in the Mordovian region who began to use fire when making a funeral feast; the fire cleaned the place of burial. Sometimes the bottom of the grave and the area around it was covered with ash and chalk. Archaeological findings confirm the presence of burials performed in compliance with the ritual of cremation (see [1, p. 183]).

Therefore, the traditions of sun worship, which could be traced in many elements of traditional Mordovian culture until the middle of the nineteenth century, have ancient origins. The highest religious concept of God originated from the Indo-European proto-language "bhagas (destiny, happiness, the name of one of the deities)" (see [6, p. 135]).

Many Indo-European languages testify that the above stem highlights the meaning component "*light emitting, luminous*", which in common Slavic language triggered the designation of white colour (see: [2, p. 234]). The most important social values are imprinted in the religious canons of traditional culture. The front door of the Erzya house in the old days was facing the East side; during public prayers Mordovian peasants turned their faces to the East side as if to the light source, the sunrise, the divine spark; until the early twentieth century the Mordovians worshiped and venerated the sun as a giver and patron of harvest (see [3, p. 292]). It is important to note that the semantics of *the sun, light and whiteness* in many cultures is evidence of the presence of the divine in the world, a sign of holiness and purity.

### **3. Conclusion**

Therefore, the resort to the origins of the Mordovian people ethnogenesis helps to determine the depth and complexity of the processes of appearance of light denotations in the language, their borrowings and absorption by other elements of culture, in creative activity, in oral folklore and ritual-magic traditions. The real factors of *light* and *light time* of day, sunrise were initially understood as the highest life and moral values of a person, which explains the amazing commitment of the Mordovian people to white colour as the highest indicator of *light*, *luminosity*, determined by the value-based understanding of the meaning of *life*, *holiness*, *purity*, *divinity*.

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