

Winter in the Mythological Beliefs of the Udmurts*

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Udmurt mythology is closely connected with the natural cycle, in which winter is conceptualised not only as a climatic phenomenon, but also as a sacred transitional stage in the rhythm of human and world life. In traditional mythological representations of the Udmurts, winter symbolises the time of silence, death and preparation for rebirth. The study is based on ethnographic sources, folklore materials and field observations of the author.

The peculiarities of the winter cycle are clearly expressed in the folk calendar. Unlike the spring-summer period, winter is not so rich in rituals. The Udmurts divided the year into two half-years, each of which was perceived as a completed time unit. With the beginning of Christianisation the beginning of winter was considered to be the *Vedenye* holiday (Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Temple) celebrated on November 21 (December 4, New Style), which was associated with the 'letting in' of winter, which demonstrates an animistic interpretation of seasonal forces.

The winter solstice period was perceived as *Vozhodyr* (crossroads of time/transitional time), the time of activity of the spirits of the transitional time *vozho* and manifestation of other, chaotic beginnings. During this period prayers were held in shrines, emphasising the sacredness of cosmic transitions. The northern Udmurts concluded the winter cycle with the *Kyshno praznik* (women's holiday), which included symbolic elements of purification and inversion of social roles.

An important aspect is the perception of winter as a symbol of the world of the dead. The otherworld (*kezyt dunne*) was associated with cold, winter, and an inversion of the living reality. The dead were buried in winter clothes, and ritual actions were accompanied by elements of protection from the cold of the afterlife: mittens, wool, and the element of fire. Such elements symbolised the protection of the living and the adaptation of the soul to the 'eternal cold' of the world of the dead.

The mythological image of winter is supplemented by images of spirits and deities. *Lymy urt* - 'the soul of snow', *Vozho mummy* - the ancestress associated with the transition time, and *Vozho* spirits embody the notions of animistic and spiritual fulfilment of natural forces. Winter mourners represent dead ancestors, chaotic forces and magical mediators who ensure fertility and harmonisation of the cosmos.

The available materials allow us to say that winter in the Udmurt mythological tradition is not just a season, but a mythological and ritual knot linking death and rebirth, chaos and order, the cold of the afterlife and the warmth of the home hearth. Winter beliefs and rituals represent a complex syncretic layer combining archaic elements with Christian ones, reflecting the stability and adaptability of the Udmurt mythological system.

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