

THE CONTEMPORARY ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL SITUATION AMONG THE UDMURTS OF PERM TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

The article, which is based on both published sources and field expedition materials from recent decades, sets out to examine the confessional processes taking place in a small area in the south of Perm Territory that is settled by Udmurts, the foundation of whose religious tradition was the preservation of traditional beliefs. The author has conducted an analysis of the historical prerequisites for the formation of a multi-confessional community, characterised by both the preservation of traditional religion and the active spread of Islam and Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The historical experience of this period has influenced the modern ethno-confessional situation. Today, each of the religious traditions observed by the community being studied has a different potential for development. Following the restoration of the system of prayers and institutions, traditional religion has played a vital role, both in the modern ethnic identity of the group as a whole, and in the local identity of the inhabitants of specific villages and hamlets. In their capacity as significant and major social events of the year, prayers occupy an important place in the contemporary ethno-cultural life of the Kuyeda Udmurts. At the same time, the symbolic nature of prayers, the loss of a developed system of ideas, along with the absence of outstanding confessional leaders are often the reasons for the absence of public religious life in some Udmurt villages, and for the lack of involvement of a significant part of the local community in contemporary confessional events. Christianity currently has significant potential to spread within the group individual strategies, as well as missionary work, are the main reasons for its active spread in recent decades. Islam has maintained its position in the same period.

KEYWORDS: Udmurts • Perm Territory • confessional processes • traditional religion • Islam • Christianity

INTRODUCTION

Ethnocultural complexes and processes, notwithstanding their robustness and tradition, continue to flourish dynamically in the world today. This thesis can also be applied to ethno-confessional processes, which demonstrates that, on the one hand, ethnic communities preserve traditional institutions and confessional traditions, while on the other, these same communities are characterised by dynamic changes in the confessional sphere as a whole. One such community which is driving the dynamic development of its confessional processes is a small group of Udmurts from the Kuyeda district of Perm Territory.

The Kuyeda (Buy) Udmurts are one of the local groups of Udmurts belonging to the Eastern (*Zakamskiye*) ethnographic group, whose settlement area is the north-western regions of the Republic of Bashkortostan and the Kuyeda district (now the Kuyeda Municipal District) of Perm Territory. The Kuyeda Udmurts, along with the majority of the Eastern Udmurts, first became established at the end of the 16th and 17th centuries as a result of the re-settlement of Udmurts from the southern regions of modern Udmurtia and its adjacent territories (Chernykh 2002). Currently, according to information from the 2010 census, 4,695 Udmurts live in the Kuyeda district of Perm Territory (Peoples of the Perm Territory 2014: 359), with most of them settled in historical villages and hamlets such as Bol'shoy, Malyy and Verkhniy Gondyr, Kirga, Kipchak, Baraban, Vilgurt, Soyuz, Gozhan, Udmurt-Shagirt, in the Russian village of Staryy Shagirt, and finally in Kalmiyary, a village geographically remote from the main cluster of Udmurt settlements.

Interest in the study of ethno-confessional processes among the Kuyeda Udmurts is due to interfaith dialogue, as well as to the spread within this local group of both traditional Udmurt religious ideas and the active penetration and spread in recent centuries of Christianity and Islam. By studying them, it therefore becomes possible to identify patterns and features of confessional development and dynamics, which in the past were characteristic of many peoples of the Volga region and the Urals, but where we are already witnessing the completed results of these processes. In the case of the Kuyeda Udmurts, we are observing dynamic processes in the present. This article presents a historical and ethnological study of the contemporary religious situation among the Kuyeda Udmurts, and the ongoing confessional processes over the past three decades from the 1990s to the present day.

The main source for this work is materials drawn from the author's own field research conducted in the Udmurt villages and hamlets of Perm Territory's Kuyeda district over the period from 1992 to 2023. These materials take the form of recordings of interviews with local respondents, their evaluative arguments regarding the current confessional situation, the reasons for its dynamics, and the motives for religious preferences. No less significant are the personal observations of confessional life in an Udmurt village during expeditionary trips to the region. The materials and sources collected make it possible to highlight different aspects of religious life and modern confessional processes.

TRADITIONAL RELIGION BETWEEN ISLAM AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY: HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

One of the defining features of the Kuyeda Udmurts, indeed of the entire Eastern group as a whole, was the preservation of traditional religious beliefs as an integral, actively functioning system, with a complex set of ideas and cult practices right up to the beginning of the 20th century. According to researchers from the 19th and early 20th centuries, adherence to traditional religion contributed to the consolidation of the Udmurt as a group, as well as to the formation of ethnic boundaries in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional regional community. Traditional religion was also an important factor hampering active assimilation processes as Nikolay Tezyakov (1892: 3–4) noted in the second half of the 19th century:

Constant clashes have finally brought these two diverse tribes closer together. The Votyaks have adopted many customs from the Bashkirs. The Votyak's dwelling does not differ from the Bashkir one, only a small difference is noticed in the costume, the Votyaks' songs are mainly borrowed from the Bashkirs, etc. The pagans remain, however: the Eastern Votyaks could not merge with the Bashkir Mohammedans, and were therefore able to preserve many of their national characteristics to the present time.

Following their resettlement, the Eastern Udmurts found themselves in the multiethnic environment of the Bashkir and Tatar Muslim population, and the Kuyeda group has been in active contact with the neighbouring Russian Orthodox population since the 18th century. Contact with a multiethnic environment, along with the activities of both Muslim and Orthodox Christian missionaries were the main reasons and conduits for the penetration of Islam and Orthodox Christianity among the Kuyeda Udmurts. These processes were especially active among the Kuyeda Udmurts in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is evident that the spread of Islam among the Eastern Udmurts began quite early, indeed from the very moment that the Udmurts moved to the Transkama region and formed a group. Unfortunately, such processes dating to the 18th and early 19th centuries are poorly documented and have not been investigated. For the most part, we can observe only the results of completed processes, a change in not only confessional, but also ethnic identity. Villages on the territory of the Permian Kama region in which the transition processes had already been completed quite early, before the middle of the 19th century, included Ust-Ashap and Tatarskiye Chikashi in the Osa uyezd, which were located on the periphery of the main Udmurt settlement area (Chernykh 2002). In the second half of the 19th century, Muslim missionary activity intensified, and the active processes of spreading Islam began in the Udmurt villages Verkhniy and Bol'shoy Gondyr in the Bol'shoy Gondyr volost of Osa uyezd. Statistical data show both the pace and the processes of Islamisation: whereas in 1876 the Muslims could count the heads of seven families among their ranks, by 1900 there were 14 (64 males in total), and a little later there were 650 pagan Udmurts and 300 Muslim Tatars living in the village (Sadikov 2011: 92–93). A similar pattern was observed in the neighbouring village of Bol'shoy Gondyr: according to Tezyakov (1892: 6), by the early 1890s, 43 families of Udmurts in the Bol'shoy Gondyr volost, 359 people in total, had officially converted to

Islam, of which 26 families had long since converted, and 17 of them had received the Highest Command in 1881. In 1914, according to information from Orthodox Christian missionaries in the Bol'shoy Gondyr volost, the number of converts to Islam doubled, amounting to 698 people (Chernykh 1996: 270–272). In 1897, the Muslims in the village of Bol'shoy Gondyr received permission to build a mosque, and a second mosque was built in the village of Verkhniy Gondyr. In this way, over the course of several decades, fairly large Muslim communities were established in Udmurt villages. The reasons for this change of religion were not only the existing proximity of cultures and active contacts with neighbouring Muslim peoples, but also the fact that Islam raised the social status of those who accepted it, so it primarily spread among the prosperous parts of an Udmurt village, including those related to trade. By the beginning of the 20th century, the adoption of Islam and the concomitant change of confessional identity led to more significant transformations of ethnicity. Those who converted to Islam also switched to the Bashkir/Tatar language and endeavoured to follow Bashkir and Tatar traditions in everyday life. In addition there was a change in ethnic identity from Udmurt to Tatar or Bashkir. In this way the spread of Islam led not so much to a confessional dialogue within one ethnic community, but rather served as the basis for assimilation processes and changes in a once unified ethnic group. The further spread of Islam might have led to the assimilation of even more Udmurts, but the revolution of 1917 and subsequent anti-religious Soviet government policy brought these processes to a halt.

The activity of Orthodox Christian missionaries among the Udmurts of the area under study began fairly late, at the end of the 19th century. It is hard to explain why the missionaries were so late in turning their attention to this group of 'unbaptised' Udmurts, as active conversion to Christianity was conducted throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in other parts of the Volga region, including in the main areas of population. Possible reasons for the lack of attention to this region in the Perm province were its peripheral location on the border of two provinces, Perm and Orenburg (later Ufa), the small population of the group, as well as the absence of significant Orthodox Christian parishes in the immediate vicinity, at least until the middle of the 19th century. In any case, Orthodox Christian missionaries only started paying attention to this group of Udmurts in the 1870s. There were several reasons for this: in 1870, the Russian Orthodox Missionary Society was founded, and in 1872 the Perm Diocesan Committee of the Orthodox Missionary Society began its active missionary work including among the Udmurts of the Osa uyezd in Perm province (Chernykh 1996). Another reason for the intensification of Orthodox Christian missionary activity in this area was Muslim activity, countering which was one of the mission's objectives.

The Orthodox Missionary Society conducted its activities in several areas, one of which was the opening of a missionary schools in which, along with education subjects, the Law of God and the conversion of non-Christians to Orthodoxy were taught (Chernykh 1996). But although the introduction of missionary education met with significant success, given that schools were opened with the assistance of the Perm Diocesan Committee of the Orthodox Missionary Society in the villages of Bol'shoy Gondyr (1873), Kipchak, and Gozhan (1895) (Chernykh 2005), the spread of Christianity among the Udmurts did not bring substantive results. Despite the fact that in 1889 an Orthodox prayer house was opened in Bol'shoy Gondyr, and in 1897 the Peter and Paul Missionary Church was consecrated in the same village, only a few Udmurts converted to

Orthodox Christianity. According to Tezyakov (1892: 6), by 1888 there were around 20 Udmurts who had converted to Orthodoxy, and by 1914 that number had decreased to 15 (Chernykh 1996). There are several reasons for this. The long-term proximity and interaction with the Tatar and Bashkir populations played an important role, which was expressed not only in the formation of many common features of cultural and everyday traditions, but also in the perception of the Tatar language as the language of interethnic communication. Against this background, at the beginning of the 20th century, Muslim traditions were perceived as 'closer to home' than Orthodox Christian ones. Historical memory was also an important factor in the perception of Orthodox Christianity at that stage. The spread of Orthodox Christianity throughout the Volga region was one of the factors that actually caused migration, and in both historical legends and historical memory this was the main reason for resettlement, which in turn also hindered the spread of Orthodox Christianity during that period. The main parishioners of the Orthodox church in the village of Bol'shoy Gondyr were merchants and burghers who were either passing through or staying in the village on business, along with teachers from the Udmurt schools in the district and peasants from neighbouring Russian villages (SAPT F 37, inventory 6, case 666).

These examples reveal quite dynamic confessional processes and rivalry between Orthodox Christians and Muslims, along with the establishment of significant Muslim communities in villages. However, of the ten Udmurt villages in Perm province, the situation was felt most acutely in the municipal village of Bol'shoy Gondyr, a large administrative and commercial centre for the district, as well as in the village of Verkhniy Gondyr. In the remaining Udmurt villages, despite the opening of missionary schools, and in some cases the activities of Orthodox and Muslim missionaries, the confessional picture did not change, and the inhabitants of villages and hamlets remained adherents to their traditional religious beliefs.

The religious situation among the Kuyeda Udmurts in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries has repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers due to its dynamism, and it has been investigated in detail (Chernykh 1996; 1997; Werth 1998; 2015; Sadikov 2016; 2019b; 2019a).

THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE: THE CONFESSIONAL SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE AND SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

By the beginning of the Soviet-era transformations, and the change of ideological paradigms in relation to religion and cult practices, the Kuyeda Udmurts had reached the zenith of their confessional dialogue. On the one hand, there was a traditionally functioning religious system with a developed set of ideas and an organised system of prayers and cult practice, while on the other, most of the Udmurts, especially in the villages of Bol'shoy, Malyy and Verkhniy Gondyr, had converted to Islam, thereby changing not only their confessional, but also their ethnic identity. The trends of Islamisation and the expansion of the number of followers of Islam during this period were of the most relevance. Orthodox Christianity was also becoming noticeable in the confessional space of Udmurt villages, as evidenced not only by the presence of an Orthodox church and the introduction of Christianity into the education space, but also by the influx of

teachers and intellectuals from the main settlement areas, baptised Udmurts, and the formation of an albeit small Orthodox Christian community.

However, during the Soviet period, with its anti-religious attitudes and propaganda, and the pressure it brought to bear on religions, the processes that had been developing dynamically in the previous period were brought to a halt, and the active missionary work of the Orthodox Christian and Muslim missionaries came to an end. The confessional map that had developed by the beginning of the 20th century entered a period of stasis, and for many years there were no significant changes in confessional life.

A system of traditional beliefs with a developed cult practice continued to exist in an active form until the 1930s. Subsequently, the integrated and developed system of prayers was destroyed, and they were no longer held in any of the Udmurt villages of the Kuyeda district. Until the 1980s, only occasional prayers were held when there was drought. At the same time, traditional beliefs showed immense stability during this period: in spite of the fact that public prayers were banned, family prayers persisted, stories about prayers became an important component of group identity and memory, and spatial loci in the form of shrines served as a constant reminder of the ancestral faith. The older generation preserved traditional ideas and beliefs, and was the main bearer of the confessional oral tradition.

Islam's position was significantly weakened during the Soviet period: missionary work was discontinued, mosques were closed, and religious traditions were preserved and shared only at the level of family groups. Udmurts who had changed their confessional affiliation, along with their descendants, continued to consider themselves Tatars and Muslims, although as a result of mixed marriages, clear confessional and ethnic boundaries became blurred.

Orthodox Christianity, notwithstanding the efforts of missionaries at the beginning of the 20th century, occupied the weakest position in the group under study. During the Soviet period, the influence of Orthodoxy on the Udmurt environment was to all intents and purposes nullified. The Orthodox church was closed down and converted into a medical facility, the Orthodox cemetery that used to be in the village of Bol'shoy Gondyr was abandoned and by the 1990s part of it was used as land for the village's expansion, with several tombstones still standing in the remaining part. No burials were conducted there. Traditionally Orthodox Christian, the population of Bol'shoy Gondyr underwent significant changes. Whilst at the beginning of the 20th century it was based on societal layers associated with trade and handicrafts, in the Soviet period the 'Orthodox' Russians and Udmurts of other regions were few in number and were represented by specialists mainly in the education system, agriculture and other areas. They did not, however, flaunt their confessional affiliation or their religious traditions in this era of universal atheism.

At the same time, significant transformations took place in the local group during the Soviet era, and these transformations largely determined the vectors of confessional processes during the post-Soviet period. During Soviet times, the language of inter-faith communication became Russian, which by the beginning of the 20th century was spoken by the vast majority of residents of Udmurt villages. Administrative borders, their location in the Perm Territory's Kuyeda district, and a multinational population with a predominance of Russians, led to significantly increased communication with the neighbouring Russian population, both at the official and day-to-day levels. Urban

residents, and immigrants from Udmurt villages who retained kinship and fraternal ties, also began to exert a significant influence on the rural community. Confessional identity, which played a substantive role in the discourse of the 19th and early 20th centuries, ceased to be relevant, and ethnic identity came to the fore, becoming the main factor in the implementation of national policy.

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE REVITALISATION OF TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND THE PRAYER SYSTEM

By the end of the Soviet period, in the 1980s, traditional religion had suffered significant losses: the system of public prayers had completely ceased to function, a number of shrines had been destroyed and shut down, some of them being converted into civil buildings, and a few small shrines were forgotten altogether. The institution of ministers of worship had also stopped functioning. Not only was the expanded pantheon forgotten, so too were many ritual practices, and the range of ideological concepts was reduced.

The restoration of the system of traditional religion began in the 1990s, in the wake of the intensification of religious life in the country. The restoration of prayers took place in parallel with the observed activation of the Udmurt social movement. Since the processes of the restoration of prayer were not a direct continuation of the tradition, they happened in a complex manner, with various different ways of integrating traditional prayers and other public holidays. The villages of Kirga and Kipchak became centres of religious life, with the most significant prayers for these hamlets being *Bue d'uk vös'* and *Keremet vös'*, which resumed in the 1990s. Since 2011, the winter prayer *Tol vös'* has been held in a sacred grove between the village of Bol'shoy Gondyr and the hamlet of Baraban. The district prayer of *Elen vös'*, restored in 2008, and held every three years in villages of the Yanaul district in the Republic of Bashkortostan, has since 2010 also been held every three years in the hamlet of Kirga. The restoration of prayers has not occurred in the post-Soviet period among the northern group of Udmurts, in the villages of Gozhan and Udmurt-Shagirt. In the village of Gozhan, initiatives to hold village ceremonies have been discussed only in recent years. It should be noted that the complex and extensive ceremony system that existed at the beginning of the 20th century, when five or six ceremonies would be held in each village, with some being inter-village and extended across an entire district, has not been restored. For various reasons, only individual prayers, those of the most significance for the local community, have been resumed. In comparison with their early 20th century counterparts, modern prayer services are less complex in their structure and ritual practice (if in the past several donations were made to different deities during prayers, now they are limited to one, etc.) and often have a conditional and schematic character. The main function of the ceremonies is not only ritual practice, they are also characterised by their symbolic nature, i.e. in the designation of the presence of a special religiosity and its presence in the modern social context.

Despite significant losses, modern ceremonies have been restored on their own ethnic and confessional basis, they have been organically accepted and supported by local com-

munities, and have become significant events in the public life of Udmurt villages and hamlets. For this reason, prayers serve as an important marker of confessional and ethnic identity at different levels, from the local level to covering all Udmurts. They play a representative and presentational role, revealing the characteristic features of confessional and ethno-cultural traditions (Chernykh 2021). Similar processes of prayer revitalisation are typical for the Udmurts of the Republic of Bashkortostan, with the only difference being that in some cases we are dealing with an ongoing tradition of religious prayers, which is not applicable of the Kuyeda group (Sadikov and Toulouze 2017).

THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY TODAY

Islam is also present today in the confessional space of the community under study. The majority of Muslims are now represented in the hamlets of Verkhniy and Malyy Gondyr and the village of Bol'shoy Gondyr, with individual families and representatives also living in the hamlets of Kipchak, Baraban, Rabak and others. Despite the fact that the descendants of the Udmurts who converted to Islam retain a predominantly Tatar ethnic identity, and keep to the Tatar language as their language of everyday communication, they are quite well integrated into local communities. They speak both Udmurt and Russian, are eligible for marriage (mixed marriages are a regular occurrence) and in some cases confessional boundaries appear quite blurred. As is noted in the Udmurt villages, in everyday dealings they are no different. The only main markers of 'other-ness' are ethnic and confessional identity. There are four functioning Muslim cemeteries, in the village of Bol'shoy Gondyr and the hamlets of Malyy Gondyr, Verkhniy Gondyr and Kipchak, which are called *Bashkir shay* or *Bashkort ziyarat*. Islamic traditions in these villages are preserved mainly at the level of family groups, with religious rituals accompanying the birth of a child and his or her naming, *Nikahs* (Muslim marriage ceremony) and weddings, as well as funeral and memorial rituals. At the same time, funeral and memorial rituals occupy a central place in the system of modern religiosity, since Islamic rituals might not be performed in the case of other family celebrations. Until recently, the elders, residents of the villages of Verkhniy and Bol'shoy Gondyr who have authority and know the traditions of the ritual, were invited to read prayers and perform rituals. If necessary, they have turned for help to the mullahs from neighbouring districts in Perm Territory and the Republic of Bashkortostan, from the village of Kuyeda in the Perm region, the village of Verkhniye Tatyshly, and the hamlet of Aksaitovo, or other villages in the Yanaul and Tatyshly districts, depending on family and kinship ties. The intensification of religious life in the 1990s did not lead to any increase in activity on the part of the Muslim community in Udmurt villages, no restoration of Islamic institutions took place, not least of mosques, even in those villages and hamlets where they had been built in the past. Currently, Muslims are less active, and their religious life rarely enters the public space. It should nevertheless be noted that the Muslim community is currently the second largest and most powerful in Udmurt villages, and retains a high potential for development and confessional activity.

CHRISTIANITY: INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES AND MISSIONARY WORK

During the three decades since the 1990s, Christianity, barely accepted by the Udmurts at the beginning of the 20th century, has significantly strengthened its position. There are several reasons behind conversion to Orthodox Christianity. The active presence of Orthodoxy and Orthodox paraphernalia in the public space (TV, media and other spheres) makes it noticeable and familiar. Contacts with the Udmurt Republic and the dissemination of Orthodox literature in the Udmurt language along with other religious content also play a role in the perception of Orthodoxy among peripheral groups at the present time. Relatives and acquaintances who have moved from Udmurt villages to cities and converted to Orthodoxy, but who retain ties with their homeland, play a significant role in the processes of acquaintance with and dissemination of Orthodox Christianity. The active perception and acceptance of Orthodoxy is also influenced by the fact that, in this instance, no conflict arises either with ethnic identity or traditional beliefs and the observance of calendar and family celebrations. Those who have converted to Orthodox Christianity participate in Udmurt prayers and perform traditional calendar rituals, and here there is no intra-religious conflict, the new faith is perceived as an addition to existing ideas and practices. In the case of the adoption of Christianity, we can now observe an organic symbiosis between traditional religious beliefs and practices and Christian teachings. Another possible reason for choosing Orthodoxy at the present time is the weak organisational component of traditional beliefs, the lack of permanent ministers of worship, the need for constant self-organisation, and the generally fragmented and impoverished state of its idea system.

The Russian Orthodox Church does not currently conduct active missionary work among the Udmurts, indeed its presence is outwardly invisible in Udmurt villages. The adoption of Orthodox Christianity, and the desire to perform the rite of baptism, can be attributed exclusively to individual strategies. Against this background, the district centre in the village of Kuyeda, and the church in the village of Staryy Shagirt in Kuyeda district, have become the main local centres for Orthodox Christianity. For a significant portion of the newly consecrated, the adoption of Orthodoxy is expressed only in the performance of the rite of baptism and not in active participation in parish life.

One of the notable channels for the spread of Christianity was the missionary activity of Protestant churches in Udmurt villages. The city of Izhevsk is primarily the centre from which missionaries come to Perm Territory, and the success of their missionary activity is facilitated by the use of the native Udmurt language in missionary preaching. It was Protestant missionaries who managed not only to achieve the conversion of some residents of Udmurt villages to Christianity, but also to organise groups of followers who regularly gather for Sunday meetings, which missionaries quite frequently attend. The active work on the part of Protestant churches is generally characteristic of the Finno-Ugric territories of Russia. Significant Protestant Christian communities have also developed among the Mari people of Perm Territory and the Republic of Bashkortostan, that is, among groups which in the past had also preserved traditional religious beliefs (Sadikov 2020).

THE CONFESSIONAL SITUATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

For all the commonality of the ongoing confessional processes in a group comprising several villages, the situation in each local community is nonetheless defined by its own specific characteristics. The hamlet of Kipchak was one of the first Udmurt villages in the post-Soviet period to restore public ceremonies, which continues to this day. The majority of the villagers are Udmurts, adherents to traditional religion, while several other families represent the Islamic tradition. Between 2000 and 2010, Christianity also took hold in this village, and there were several reasons for this. Among the first in the village to convert to Orthodox Christianity was one of the leaders of the traditional religion, for whom this choice was an individual strategy, but their decision also affected the overall situation in the hamlet. The missionary activity of Protestants led to the emergence of a group of Christians. In spite of the group's small size – it included no more than ten families – conversion to Christianity and the activities of the community were noticeable, and were discussed and reflected by the local community. At a certain stage at the turn of 2000s and the 2010s, a division occurred in the group, and supporters of official Orthodoxy were separated from it. The current confessional situation continues to persist to this day, although the activity of Christians has significantly decreased of late.

Kirga is also one of the villages whose inhabitants were among the first to attempt the restoration of ceremonies back in the early 1990s, but the community has been sidelined by the activities of Muslim and Christian missionaries, both in the past and in the present. The village of Gozhan is the largest settlement in the northern group. The spread of Islam in the early 20th century was not typical for this group, and the first 30 years of the post-Soviet period did not see traditional ceremonies restored. At the beginning of the 21st century, this village is notable for the spread of Christianity, in terms of both official Orthodox Christianity and Protestant movements.

Today, the village of Verkhniy Gondyr represents, as it did in the past, two communities: a traditional and a Muslim one. There are no traditional prayers in the village. The Muslim community is quite numerous, although the village mosque has not been restored in the post-Soviet period. The community is characterised by an orientation towards family rituals in religious traditions, and inviting imams from the surrounding centres of Islam to perform rituals.

The village of Bol'shoy Gondyr and the hamlet of Malyy Gondyr currently represent a single settlement that fulfils an important administrative function in the district, having retained the status of the centre of the rural settlement which includes most of the Udmurt villages of the Kuyeda district. The village is complex both in terms of its ethnic composition, including as it does Udmurts, Tatars, Russians and representatives of other peoples, and the fact that not only are indigenous people represented among the villagers, but also people from other Udmurt villages of the Kuyeda district of Perm Territory and the Republic of Bashkortostan. For this reason, the village is not an accepted leader in the confessional sphere of traditional religion, since local traditions in the village appear poorly preserved. Winter prayers have been held in the village for more than ten years (Chernykh 2021). The Muslim community is quite numerous, and its religious life is characterised by the main trends described above.

Apart from these hamlets, which are the centres of confessional life, religious processes are all but undetectable in the small hamlets of Soyuz, Udmurt-Shagirt, and Baraban.

CONFESSIONAL DIALOGUE: RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the current situation among the Kuyeda Udmurts, just as it was in the early 20th century, is characterised by dynamic processes in the confessional sphere. The dialogue of religions at the beginning of the 20th century led to the formation of a multi-confessional community, as well as the development of mechanisms for the co-existence of different communities within the same village. The vectors of religious life were laid down in the early 20th century and the presence of traditional religion, as well as Islam and Orthodox Christianity, continue to determine the group's development today. Over a century of living in conditions of confessional dialogue has determined that confessional processes proceed today with no obvious conflict, either external or internal.

At the present time each of the religious traditions among the community of the Kuyeda Municipal District in Perm Territory has a different potential for development. The traditional religious system, in the wake of the restoration of the system of ceremonies and institutions, plays a vital role, both in the modern ethnic identity of the group, and in the local identity of the inhabitants of specific villages and hamlets. Ceremonies, in their capacity as significant and major social events of the year, occupy an essential place in the contemporary ethno-cultural life of the Kuyeda Udmurts. At the same time, as we have noted above, the symbolic nature of ceremonies, along with the loss of a developed system of ideas and institutions, and the absence of outstanding confessional leaders, are often reasons for the lack of public religious life in some Udmurt villages, and the lack of involvement in modern confessional events of a significant part of the local community.

Christianity currently has great potential. Individual strategies, as well as missionary work, are the main reasons for its active spread in recent decades. Having said that, the activities of religious groups are not sustainable, and their activity often depends upon external circumstances, although it should be noted that Christianity is a more attractive religious concept among the younger generation. However, dependence on external factors often shows the undulating nature of interest in a given religious tradition.

Islam has maintained its position over the past decades. Large Muslim communities operate in Bol'shoy and Verkhniy Gondyr that are currently perceived not only in a confessional, but also in an ethnic context, since most believers are of Tatar ethnic identity. This correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity is important in modern confessional processes. The adoption of Islam in the early 20th century brought about a change not only of confessional, but also of ethnic affiliation, which is one of the reasons that this religious tradition is currently perceived as non-ethnic. There has been no further spread of Islam in the local community.

In contrast to this trend, the spread of Orthodox Christianity currently has no effect upon ethnic identity, nor does it involve a change in ethnocultural traditions (in every-

day life, in the native language, etc.). In our view, this factor is also quite important in regard to the modern possibility of choosing a confessional tradition.

In recent decades, the religious life of the community under study has been flourishing once more in a confessional dialogue between traditional beliefs, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity. Even given the compromises and stability that have been found, the confessional situation still exhibits factors that could change the existing balance, due to missionary activity, external factors, and the emergence of new leaders. However, at present, a change of confessional identity is unlikely to lead to significant changes in the ethnic situation among the Kuyeda Udmurts.

SOURCES

SAPT = State Archive of Perm Territory. Fund 37, Inventory 6, Case 666.

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