

BIRD IMAGE IN THE TRADITIONAL VISION OF THE MARI PEOPLE (ETHNOLINGUISTIC ASPECT): THE CUCKOO

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Abstract. This article gives an overview of the cuckoo image from the ethnolinguistic perspective. The cuckoo symbol is very old and is connected with ancient Mari concepts. The cuckoo is often associated with the image of a widow or an orphan. In addition to this, the image of the cuckoo also is connected with images of the funeral and memorial cult of the Mari people. The cuckoo is present in the symbolism of death. It manifests itself not only in fortune telling, but also in a number of omens and superstitions. Like other European peoples, the Mari people ask the cuckoo about the years left for a person to live. The cuckoo is often regarded as a frightening omen. It was regarded as an unhappy omen to hear the cuckoo calling from the right. It is considered to be lucky to have money in the pocket when one hears a cuckoo first. The voice and way of life of this bird distinguishes it from other birds. Girls would ask the cuckoo how many years it would be before they get married. It is said that when the cuckoo starts cuckooing, the water is warm enough to swim. The cuckoo calls incessantly – the weather will be bright and good. A cuckoo near the house foretold misfortune. For the Mari people, cuckoo is a prophetic, sacred bird.

Keywords: Mari language, ethnolinguistic aspect, bird, cuckoo, symbol.

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1. Introductory comments

This research represents the first attempt to describe the birds in the traditional Mari vision on the basis of linguistic, dialectal and folkloric materials. The work is done within the framework of ethnolinguistics which studies language as a source of information about traditional spiritual culture of the people.

In the paper we rely on the methods of animals description¹ which are used in the “Slavjanskije drevnosti: ètnolingvističeskij slovar”

¹ A. V. Gura in his book “Simvolika životnyx v slavjanskoj narodnoj tradicii” (1997) presented a scheme of animals description. One can read information about animals included in the introductory article of the ethnolinguistic dictionary (for more information see SD I: 12).

‘The Ethnolinguistic Dictionary of Slavic Antiquities’ edited by N. I. Tolstoy (further SD) and in the scientific research “Simvolika životnyx v slavjanskoj narodnoj tradicii” ‘Symbolism of Animals in Slavonic Popular Tradition’ by A. V. Gura. When describing birds attention is paid to the names and phraseology including data about the usage of the birds names in botanical terminology, in object names, etc. Such folkloric sources as myths, legends, tales, folk songs and so-called small genres, for example, omens, fortune-tellings, oneiromancies, proverbs, riddles, prohibitions (taboos, Mari *ojörö*²), superstitions, games are used in the work. The use of birds in rites, rituals (as an object, a victim etc.), folk medicine, birds portrayal in fancyworks and in woodcarving (on platbands) is taken into consideration. The choice of concrete names of birds was made according to the meaning of the names for the traditional Mari culture.

Human concepts about this or that bird have been formed for centuries. The man observed birds and fancied some images which were assigned to concrete birds. Thus a certain stereotype was forming which later became a symbol with its own positive and negative qualities.

For example, *agytan* ‘cock’ in the Mari language symbolizes a parvenu, a squabble (SMJa I: 38). Fiery symbology of a cock which is determined by its red comb and its feathers is projected in Mari phraseology as fire: *joškar agytan* ‘fire’, *joškar agytanym koltaš (purtaš, čykaš)* ‘to commit an arson, to cause a fire, to set fire’. If we compare the Russian phrase *pustit’ krasnogo petuxa* ‘to commit an arson’, we will see that the Mari phraseological unit is a loan translation. In Mari the bird *šogerten* ‘magpie’ means a chatterbox, a gossip or a light-minded, frivolous person who draws a straight furrow (SMJa IX: 178). Let’s take for instance the following phraseological unit: *šogerten poč* (‘a tale of a magpie’) – ‘a prissy girl’, which is used for a light-headed, inconstant person (SMJa IX: 178). K. G. Juadarov mentions that Mari people living in the mountainous regions call a son-in-law who makes use of what others have achieved by hard work as *pyryš mary – šbingörtiš* (Juadarov 1995: 28), he is compared to a starling which moves into a ready birdhouse without making any effort. For the eastern Mari people the bird *vyrljanje* ‘wagtail’ symbolizes a beautiful, slender young girl. The meadow Mari people call a skinny person using the ornithonym *kupšül’ö* ‘jay’: *kupšül’ö – vičkyž*

² Transliteration in the case of Mari, Tatar and Russian ornithonyms and examples is in accordance with the code presented on the internet site “The Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics”, the symbols added here are: ä = ä, ɱ = ɱ, ö = ö, ý = ü, ɛ̃ = ɛ̃, ɔ = ɔ.

ej (MPĚ-RMĚ Kužen.). In the vision of the Mari people a muddle-headed person is associated with the bird *tumna* ‘owl’, cf. informal, figurative *tumna* ‘blunderer, muddler, muddle-head, blind’ (SMJa VII: 254). The motif of foolishness is expressed in the phraseological unit *tumna vuj* (‘owl’s head’) – ‘stupid, absent-minded’ (MPĚ-RMĚ Zven., Kužen., Mari-Tur., Novotor.), though for some peoples the owl is the symbol of wisdom³.

2. Cuckoo (*Cuculus*)

This article presents an ethnolinguistic description of the cuckoo which is the brightest image in the traditional culture of the Mari people. In the article the cuckoo (*Cuculus*) related Mari folkways are analyzed. In the Republic of Mari El where the majority of the Mari people reside there are two species of the cuckoo family: the common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) and the Himalayan cuckoo (*Cuculus satyrus*). The first one is a widespread species, the second type is less widespread than the first one and that’s why it is unfamiliar to the people. The Himalayan cuckoo’s voice resembles the hoopoe’s voice “hoop-hoop-hoop”, and the sound doesn’t spread as far as the common cuckoo’s voice (KKRMĚ: 75).

3. The linguistic image of the cuckoo: names and phraseological units

In the Mari language there are the following names of cuckoos: *kuku* ‘the common cuckoo’, *dudykkuku* ‘the Himalayan cuckoo’, in the Hill Mari language (further H) *ruškuku* ‘the Himalayan cuckoo’ (ad verbum ‘Russian cuckoo’) (MRSBT: 43, 95, 186); *kuku* (SMJa III: 107; SGJa: 109). In the Mari language the ornithonym *kuku* ‘cuckoo’ is an onomatopoeic word⁴. V. M. Vasil’ev gives the variant *kuko* for the Meadow Mari language (Vasil’ev 1928: 89), and the variant *kükö*⁵ for the Hill Mari language (Vasil’ev 1928: 83, 89).

³ “During the Middle Ages the owl became an important symbol of learning and intelligence” (Martin 1993: 136).

⁴ “It was concluded that *ku* in a simple or reduplicated form appears in 67% of the names of *cuckoo*, 100% of the verbs *to cuckoo* and 75% of the interjections *cuckoo!*” (Marttila 2009: 173).

⁵ It should be noted that Isanbaev derives the name *kükö* from the Tatar language source (Isanbaev 1994: 88). V. I. Veršinín believes that *kükö* can be an ancient variant of *kuku* ‘cuckoo’ (Veršinín 2010: 51).

The Himalayan cuckoo is an immediate relative of the common cuckoo. In the Mari language it has got the following folk names: *dudykkuku* and *H ruškuku*. The first name is an onomatopoeic word: “One gave the cuckoo such a name because of its male’s mating song. It doesn’t sing a voiced “cuckoo”, but a muffled, low “Doo-Doo-Doo ... Doo-Doo ...” (PPÈ: 153). The ornithonym *ruškuku* consists of two components: the adjective *ruš* ‘Russian’ and the ornithonym *kuku* ‘cuckoo’. We have every reason to believe that the adjective *ruš* ‘Russian’ underlines the singularity, atypicity of the bird for its species⁶. Thus the ornithonym *ruškuku* means an unusual, non-typical bird for its species which differs by its sound.

According to T. V. Kozlova, a set of association attributes reflected in phraseological units can be identified for each name of animals. The cuckoo is connected with the following most stable characteristics and semantic aspects as carefree, dissolute, unstable, lonely, withdrawn (Kozlova 2003: 60–61). The image of the cuckoo occurs in a number of Mari language phraseological units and set phrases: *kuku gaj ava* ‘a woman not caring for her children’, the literal translation is ‘mother as cuckoo’ (MPÈ-RB Šaran.); *kükö ige* ‘alone’, ‘orphan’, the literal translation is ‘cuckoo chick’; *kükö muno gae ikte gyna ulat* ‘a lonely person’, the literal translation is ‘a lonely person as a cuckoo egg’ (MPÈ-RB Mišk.); *kuku ige gai* ‘lonely or abandoned by someone’, the literal translation is ‘as a cuckoo chick’, *kuku gai jočam šolen kodaš* ‘to neglect the child’s upbringing’, the literal translation is ‘to abandon smb’s children as a cuckoo’ (MPÈ-RMÈ Kužen), *kuku kojyšan* ‘irresponsible’, ‘to have such character as cuckoo’ (literally), *kukun muryžym it muro* ‘there is no need to be sad’, the literal translation is ‘do not sing the cuckoo song’ (MPÈ-RMÈ Mork.), *kuku kumyl* ‘loneliness, sadness’, ‘cuckoo mood’ (literally) (MPÈ-RMÈ Sovet.).

The idea of colour diversity in cuckoo feathering is reflected in the name of the chicken: *kuku čyve*, *H kukula cëivy* ‘pied chicken’ (SMJa III: 107); in the name of the owl: *kukula tumna* ‘hawk owl’ (SMJa VII: 254). Cuckoo’s egg spottiness is linked to freckles: *kuku muno (šürgyštö)* ‘freckles (on face)’ (SMJa III: 107), the literal translation is ‘cuckoo’s egg’. *Kükük* is the onomatopoeia of the cuckoo crying, for example, *kuku kükük-kükük šotla* (the literal translation is ‘the cuckoo

⁶ We agree with E. V. Lysova’s opinion, according to which the meaning of the adjective of the ethnicon or its derivative can be defined as ‘exceptional’, ‘unusual for its species’ (Lysova 2002: 44). The researcher notes that “... the names of birds which have pejorative meaning are perceived (or had been perceived) as unusual, atypical and it was provoked by either external or sound characteristics” (Lysova 2002: 45).

is counting cuckoo-cuckoo’) (SMJa III: 225). This imitative word is used while children play hide-and-peek: *kükük! kuku!* ‘Look for me!’, hence the expressions related to it: *küküm yšta* ‘somebody is hiding’, *kükük lijaš* ‘to hide’ (SMJa III: 225). It is also worth noting that many peoples have the game “cuckoo” and equivalents of this game, e.g. in Russian “ku-ku”.

The word *kuku* can act as the component of complex plant names: *H kukunjanja* ‘young shoots of horsetail’ (SGJa: 109; SMJa III: 108). According to A. S. Efremov the component *kuku* is connected with the time of the occurrence of horsetail (Efremov 1986: 57). Many people previously ate young shoots of horsetail, in our time some people still eat young shoots, for example, this tradition is widely spread in the Komi-Permian cuisine. The coincidence of the plant blooming phase and of the cuckoo cuckooing time is reflected in the phytonym *kukulüngö* ‘primrose’: *Kukulüngö aprel’-majyštak kuku čot murymo godym peledes* [‘Primroses bloom in April or in May, when the cuckoos cuckoo hourly’] (SMJa III: 107). Slender brownish stems of the haircap (in Mari: *kukujytyn* (SMJa III: 107) are covered with small dark green leaves, they are reminiscent of the flax plant in miniature. This resemblance gives the name to the second part of the phytonym – *jytyn* ‘flax’, cf. in Russian *kukuškin lën* – moss *Polytrichum commune*. The pistillate plants cases are similar to a cuckoo sitting on the “pole”. Feathering coloration is reflected in the following phytonyms: *kukuvuj* ‘corydalis’ (SMJa III: 107) (herbaceous plant with dissected leaves and with purple-, white-, yellow-coloured flowers), *kukupeledyš* ‘white robin, job’s tears’ (SMJa III: 108); *kuku peledbiš*, *kukuveledbiš* ‘pheasant’s eye, job’s tears’ (SGJa: 109). The plant *job’s tears* is speckled like the bird cuckoo. The leaves of the plant *kuku šudy* ‘crowfoot’ (SGJa: 109) are dark spotted. Evidently the crowfoot leaves’ diversity of colours motivates to compare the plant with the cuckoo (with motley cuckoo feathering), cf. the names of crowfoot related to cuckoo in Slavic languages (for more details see Kolosova 2009: 257–258).

4. Myths and legends

Everyone knows that one of the most interesting peculiarities of the cuckoo nature is putting furtively its eggs on other birds' nests⁷ and other birds take care of incubation and fledging. Very often nightingales and wagtails fulfill this task. In Mari songs it is referred to this distinguishing feature, cf. *Kuku mura ik vere, pyžašyže ves vere ...* 'The cuckoo sings in one place, and her nest is in another place'. People have the following explanation of the absence of the cuckoo nest, which was probably arisen under the influence of Christianity. On the day of the Annunciation (on April, 7 according to the Orthodox calendar) the cuckoo made a nest that is why God has deprived her of family happiness. Now the cuckoo does not build nests and she leaves her eggs in the nests of other birds. The Annunciation Day of the Holy Mother of God is considered to be a great holiday, which is confirmed by Mari superstition *Blagoveščenij peš kugu pajrem, kajykat pyžašym ogeš opto, üdyr üpym ok udyro (puno)* ['Annunciation is a great holiday, a bird does not build a nest, a girl does not braid her hair'] (MPÈ-RMÈ Gorn.).

According to Ju. A. Kaliev among Mari cosmogonic myths an insignificant place is given to the explanation of wildlife (Kaliev 1994: 141). *Cuckoo* (mar. *kuku*) – a mythological bird with a distinctive feminine symbolism. In the perception of Mari people cuckoo are often associated with a widow or orphan image. They are engaged in a perpetual search for the lost. Ju. A. Kaliev proposes to consider one of the mythological stories that explains the emergence of this image in the Mari beliefs to reconstruct the detailed picture of the image of the cuckoo.

One girl was swimming in the river. Out on the beach, she found a snake lying on her clothes. The snake asked her to marry him to get the clothes. The girl was forced to agree. Arriving home, she told about it her mother. The latter grabbed an ax, and began to wait for the appearance of a snake. But they were so many that she did not dare to cut off the head of a snake-groom.

After a year or two she came to visit her mother. Mother, finding out how the daughter calls her husband out of the water, came to the river, calling snake, cut off his head. Daughter, tired of waiting for her

⁷ The Cuckoo family includes approximately 130 species. Not all species are brood parasites; some of them evolve cooperative breeding and build nests. There are 80 species of these birds, almost all of them from the Western Hemisphere (PPÈ: 153).

husband, turned into a cuckoo, still looking for and is calling him the wide world. (Kaliev 2004: 88).

According to another Mari legend, the first wife's child of a Mari has become a cuckoo. The first wife died, so he married another woman. The new wife did not want to live in this house, because the Mari had a son. She killed this child. The boy turned into a cuckoo and flew:

Cuckoo is the child of his first wife. The first wife died, and the second wife comes in the family. She does not want to live: he had a son from the first wife. But she does not want to go away. She stabbed the son of his first wife, cooked and fed pigs with the meat. The cauldron boils. At night, the rooster crows, "Father caught, mother stabbed." During the rooster singing the boy, who was boiled in a cauldron, three times sang like a cuckoo. They open the door and the cuckoo flew out. "Cuckoo, cuckoo, father caught, mother stabbed! Now catch me, I will fly to a large forest, a deep ravine!"— it sings. And now, the cuckoo sings well. (TMO: 39).

The Mari consider the cuckoo and crow to be prophetic birds. The stepdaughter, who died as a result of the persecution of stepmother, appears in a fairy tale turned into a cuckoo, which sits on the roof of the house of the dead girl and sings, complaining of her ill-fated destiny (Vasil'ev 1949: 21).

5. Cuckoo mediator

We should note that the image of the cuckoo also applies to the images of funeral and memorial cult of the Mari. As the researchers state, before the XXth century figures of cuckoo were widely spread in cemetery gates, in gravestones pillars. Ju. A. Kaliev explains it as evidence of "an understanding cuckoo as mediator between the worlds or its connection with the soul of the dead". In his opinion, the image of a cuckoo at the grave column reflects the mythological picture associated with astral notions of the Mari, where the grave column symbolizes the inverse image of the Earth's celestial pole. According to the researcher, the common motive in the spell formulas is *jumyn kuko* 'heaven or God's cuckoo' sitting on a pillar of fire (as variants, silver, gold, copper pillars) (Kaliev 2003: 60). During the field expeditions to the Eastern Mari regions it has been discovered that in the

Kulchubaevo village of the Mishkinsky district of Bashkortostan there is a custom to attach figures of cuckoo to the wooden columns of the tomb: *kuku gaj čonešten koštaš*, literally ‘to fly like a cuckoo’. It is believed that in the guise of a cuckoo the soul flies to the earth to talk to close relatives. N. S. Popov noted that this custom is associated with the belief in the possibility of soul reincarnation of the deceased into a bird (Popov 1981: 169).

6. Omens

Different signs are associated with the cuckoo’s flying and with the first cuckooing⁸: *Kuku mura, šüšpyk šüška gyn, kece turtas tünaleš* [‘If the cuckoo cuckoos, nightingale whistles, the day begins to decline’] (MPĚ-RMĚ Mork.). It is believed that if the cuckoo sings, then you can swim: *Kuku muraš tünaleš – vüdyš puraš lieš* [‘The cuckoo starts to cuckoo – you can swim’] (MNP: 260; MPĚ-RMĚ Zven.). Nonstop cuckooing of one cuckoo or chorus of these birds predicted clear warm weather: *Kuku peš mura gyn, ojar da šokšo lieš* [‘Cuckoo cuckoos incessantly – it will be a clear hot weather’] (MNP: 164). *Kuku mura gyn, umyr lieš* [‘If the cuckoo cuckoos, then it will be warm’] (Evseev 1994: 61). *Kuku kukšo pušenyšte mura gyn, jüštö toleš* [‘If the cuckoo sings on a dry tree, it gets cold’] (MPĚ-RMĚ Mari-Tur.). According to the popular conception, the end of the cuckoo singing is timed to coincide with St. Peter’s day. Cuckooing after St. Peter’s day, or the end of cuckoo singing to St. Peter’s day has a negative prediction: *Kuku Petro deč vara mura gyn, šyže kužu lieš* [‘If the cuckoo sings after St. Peter’s Day, it will be a long fall’] (Beke⁹ I: 401, 562; Vasil’ev 1918: 53; MPĚ-RB Mišk., Kalt.). If the cuckoo is heard after St. Peter’s day, the snow does not lie long (Evseev 1994: 61; Vasil’ev 1918: 54). According to another superstition if the cuckoo ends cuckooing a week before St. Peter’s day, it will make the autumn short, snow will fall early: *Petro keče arnja ožno čarna gyn kuku murymym, šyže küčyk lieš (lum ondak vozeš)* (Beke I: 562). A number of popular superstitions are associated with beekeeping: *Kuku*

⁸ S. M. Evchina who was born in 1969 in the village Marie-Shoy, Kuzhenerskiy district, the Republic of Mari El kept a diary of birds observations from 2003 to 2006. According to her data the first cuckoo in 2003 was timed to coincide with May 14, in 2004 – with May 6, in 2005 – with May 12.

⁹ Examples in Ö. Beke’s works are in Cyrillic, according to the norms of the literary Mari language, punctuation and dialectal features are retained.

keņežym uzak mura gyn, mükš igym kužun kolta [‘Cuckoo cuckoos in summer long – bees swarm late’]. *Kuku nur vokten mura – muij lieš* [‘Cuckoo sang at the edge – there will be honey’] (MNP: 239). The singing of cuckoo in the garden predicted the flight of a bee swarm: *Kuku pakčaš tolyn mura gyn, mükšige lektyn kaja* (Evseev 1994: 64). The first cuckooing is the sign of the beginning of the flax sowing time: *Kuku muraš tünjalyn gyn, jytyn üdaš žap šuyn* [‘If the cuckoo began to cuckoo, then it is time to sow flax’] (MPĚ-RMĚ Kužen). It was the sign of a poor harvest if a cuckoo was heard in early spring, when the forest was not in leaf yet: *Kuku lyštaš lekme deč ončyč muraš tünjaleš – šurno tüvyrgö ok lij* [‘Cuckoo begins to sing before the appearance of leaves – the bread will not be abundant’] (MNP: 197).

According to the established ideas of the Mari the arrival of a cuckoo to the village was considered to be a bad sign. It was a bad omen if the cuckoo came to the village and sang which promised a bad year (MPĚ-RB Mišk., MPĚ-RMĚ Sern.), misfortune (MPĚ-RB Kalt., Mišk., MPĚ-RMĚ Zven., Mork., Sern.), death (MPĚ-RB Kalt., MPĚ-RMĚ Volž). *Kuku jal voktenak kyčkyra gyn, porylan ogyl* [‘If the cuckoo cuckoos near the village, it’s not good’] (MPĚ-RB Balt.). The arrival of a cuckoo close to the house was a bad sign: *Kuku pört dek toleš gyn, osal lieš* [‘If the cuckoo flies to the house, there will be a misfortune’] (literally: evil) (MPĚ-RB Mišk., MPĚ-RMĚ Volž). *Kuku jalyš tolyn mura gyn, iктаž-mo titak lieš, manyt: ala ey kola, ale vol’yk kola, iктаž-mo ala jüla* [‘If the cuckoo comes to the village and sings, there will be a misfortune: a person will die or cattle will die, or something will burn’] (Beke III: 76, 432). From the point of view of modern morality the next sign is evaluated as bad: *Kuku jalyš toleš – üdyr müškyran lieš* [‘The cuckoo will arrive in the village – a girl will become pregnant’] (MPĚ-RMĚ Kužen.). Perhaps somewhen this prediction was regarded as good news.

The first cuckoo singing is associated with the idea of that you need to have money in your pocket¹⁰, then the whole year will not feel need for money (MPĚ-RMĚ Volž., Kužen.). According to another sign it is recommended to count the money so as to be with money, to be rich person (MPĚ-RMĚ Sovet., Novotor.). It is believed that it is

¹⁰ Money in your pocket in this case portends wealth. A similar phenomenon can be observed with the Belarusians, Kashubians, Bulgarians, Germans, who are recommended to have money at the first voice of cuckoo, as at the first meeting with a stork (Gura 1997: 652). “In Germany and England, however, it was considered lucky to have money in one’s pocket when one hears a cuckoo for the first time” (Martin 1993: 42).

better initially to hear the croaking of frog, then you will live happily with no worries: *Kukum ikymše gana kolat gyn, oksa lijman küsenyšte. Ondak užava jükym kolaš tyršyman. Užava gaj oňyrešnen, kuanen ilet* [‘When the first time you hear a cuckoo, there should be money in the pocket. First you should try to hear frogs croaking. You will live carefree, cheerfully’] (MPĚ-RB Mišk.).

Negative predictions of cuckoos spawned a series of measures (verbal formulas of protection, restrictions) to protect against unkind predictions. As L. S. Tojdybekova notes, often the singing of a cuckoo is identified with an ominous sign and hearing this bird voice people tried to ward off disaster with a spell: *Sajyn muret, ške vuetlan muro!* [‘Sing well, sing to your own harm!’] (Tojdybekova 2007: 131). Popularly, there is a ban to tease cuckoo: *Kuku vaštareš muraš ok jörö. Ku-ku manaš ok lij* [‘One must not sing in reply to a cuckoo. One must not say coo-coo’] (MPĚ-RMĚ Zven.). According to the national representations is not recommended to stand with your back towards the cuckoo singing: *Kuku murymo godym jük dek tup den šogyman ogy!* [‘You must not stand with your back towards the singing of a cuckoo’] (MPĚ-RMĚ Kužen.). According to the beliefs of the Eastern Mari, there will be no happiness if you hear the first singing of a cuckoo in the right ear: *Šošym pervyj kükü murymym purla pylyš den kolat gyn, bāxōitan¹¹ ot lij manyt* [‘If you hear the first the voice of a cuckoo in the right ear in the spring, you won’t be happy’] (Sebeok, Ingemann 1961: 60). Cf.: “Cornishmen¹² say it is lucky to hear the Cuckoo from the right, unlucky from the left” (Loyd 2010: 130). It is believed that a person will become deaf if he/she is hearing cuckoo singing in the spring, when eating a swede: *Šošym, kuku murymeke, šere-ušmenym kočkat gyn, gluxoj lijat* [‘If in the spring after singing of a cuckoo, you eat a swede, you will become deaf’] (Beke I: 401). According to the national representations of the eastern Mari (Birskiy dialect), if a pregnant cow hears a cuckoo singing, she won’t calve in time: *Uškal tüž lieš gyn, èr prezylže! Kükö murmašes kodeš gyn, jyle ogeš prezyle: (kükö murmym koleš gyn, 12 tylzyšken ogeš prezyle)* [‘If a cow with calf, let it early calve! If remains at the time the cuckoo

¹¹ *bāxōit, bāgōit* ‘happiness, fortune’. *Bāxōitem ulo* ‘I’ve got happiness’, Tatar *baxet*, Bashkir *baxet* ‘happiness, luck’. Compare the literary word: *pial* ‘happiness, luck’ (Ilieva 2009: 26).

¹² “Cornishmen (Kernowyon) – the ethnoterritorial group of a Celtic origin which is historically inhabiting Cornwall county in the southwestern part of the United Kingdom” (ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kernowyon).

cuckoos, it won't calve quickly: (if it hears a cuckoo singing, it won't calve for 12 months)'] (Beke IV: 392).

7. Fortune-telling about marriage and lifespan

Predictions are connected with the sounds produced by the cuckoo. Thus, the girls tried to foretell future marriage: how many times cuckoo cuckooed so many years are left before the wedding: *Kuku mynjar gana ku-ku manyn muralta, tunar ij gyč marlan kaet* ['How many times a cuckoo cuckooed after so many years you will marry'] (MPĚ-RMĚ Paran'g.). *Kuku mynjar gana jükym lukteš, tunar ij gyč tide murym kolyštšo üdyr marlan lektes* ['How many times a cuckoo cuckooed after so many years the girl, who hears this singing, will marry'] (MPĚ-RMĚ Volž.). The Mari try to count life duration listening to cuckoo singing. To obtain reliable information, they say that one should stick a snathe or stick into the ground (MPĚ-RB Mišk.), other people recommend to embrace the tree arms on which the cuckoo sings (MPĚ-RMĚ Gorn., Mari-Tur., Mork.; Beke III: 77) and to count the number of the cuckoo shouts which means the number of remaining years of life: *Kuku murymo kuèm öndalat gyn, mynjar gana muralta, tunar ij ilet* ['If you embrace a birch where the cuckoo cuckoos, as many times it cuckoos – so many years you will live'] (MPĚ-RB Mišk.). *Kükün šinčyn murymo pušengyžym èltalen šogalat gyn, mynar ij ilet, tunar gana mura, manyt* ['They say that if to embrace a tree on which the cuckoo cuckoos, so many years you will live as many times she cuckoos'] (Beke IV: 452). The same idea of the necessity to embrace the tree on which the cuckoo cuckoos is widespread with the southern Estonians, the only difference is that if you don't like the number of cuckoo singing shouts, it is possible to continue crying out "ku-ku" yourself. According to M. Mäger, "the prerequisite of foretelling by a cuckoo of life expectancy probably is based on the dissection of her singing into separate "kuku"" (Mäger 1963: 23).

According to Ülo Tedre, throughout Estonia the following custom is known: in the morning, before going to work it is necessary to eat something. It was believed that with an empty stomach one cannot hear birds singing. It meant that birds deceived a person (especially the cuckoo). To avoid this, the Estonians ate a piece of bread standing and it was called *linnupete* 'deception of the birds' (Tedre 1991: 106). According to the beliefs of the Mari, if in the morning you hear the

singing of the cuckoo with full stomach – it is for the good, and vice versa, if you hear the singing of the birds with empty stomach – it is not for good, it foretold famine. The singing of the cuckoo in the evening was also a bad sign (MPĚ-RB Mišk.). According to the Karelian custom if a cuckoo poops on your head it is a sign that in the spring you will hear the song of the cuckoo without having breakfast (Ogneva 2013: 140). The Estonians also paid attention to the cuckoo's time, depending on this it was called in different ways: “Homnikul *hoolekägu*, sööma ajal *surmakägu*, lõuna ajal *leinakägu* ja õhtul *õnnkägu*” [‘In the morning the cuckoo is the cuckoo of care, at meal-times – the cuckoo of death, at dinner – the cuckoo of mourning, in the evening the cuckoo of happiness’] (Mäger 1969: 115).

8. Cuckoo's metamorphosis

According to the color and the size, the cuckoo somehow reminds of sparrow-hawk. This probably explained the Mari's popular idea that a cuckoo to the end of life turns into a hawk (*Kuku šonjemmekše varašyš savyrna* (MPĚ-RB Mišk.), into a kestrel – a bird of prey in the falconidae family (*Kuku myraš cärnäät, kal'a vārāšiš sārñälteš*) (MPĚ-RMĚ Gorn.). This metamorphosis is found in the beliefs of many nations. “Among the Slavs the belief that by ceasing to fall of its cuckoo, cuckoo turns into a hawk, a vulture or a falcon (sometimes an eagle, falcon, owl) is widespread. This belief is known since antiquity (Aristotle, Pliny) and was noted in many European nations.” (Gura 1997: 696)

The cuckoo's image the lyrics of songs

The cuckoo's image which is included in the main symbols (Gluxov, Gluxova 2012: 78), is often found in the Mari's songs, but it must be said, often these songs are sad like the cuckoo singing in nature which is also depressing and alarming. It is noted in the following lines of the song:

<i>Kükyžat-laj küküik manyldaleš,</i>	[‘The cuckoo cuckoos “cuckoo-cuckoo”,
<i>Ala-molan törzaškem ras šokta.</i>	Somehow I clearly hear it through the window.
<i>Omat-laj ojgyro, omat moňajal.</i>	And I do not grieve, and I am not gloomy,
<i>Ala-molan kumylem todylteš</i>	Somehow, I feel sad in my soul’].

(PVM: 250)

Often the cuckoo appears together with the birch tree in the songs, the birch is the attribute of the cuckoo: *Užargyšē kuèrlašte kuku jükšö šergylteš* [‘In the green birch forest cuckoo’s signing is heard’]. V. M. Berdnikov and E. A. Tudorovskaja think that in the Mari’s songs the cuckoo is a symbol of the wistful mother, maiden or widow; the cuckoo – a symbol of mother’s weeping (Berdnikov, Tudorovskaja 1945: 46). The cuckoo can symbolize relatives, father, mother, maid; its small-birds portray the youth. By means of the cuckoo symbol women’s loneliness, longing, sadness are rendered (Gluxov, Gluxova 2007: 85, 2012: 78, 80). In the lyrical song two cuckoo small-birds are identified with two lovers who are separated as those two cuckoos who find themselves in different nests (MNPs: 58). In the following example the cuckoo symbolizes mother, the babe is portrayed by the cuckoo small-bird:

<i>Vakšyldalme tüšakem, aj, jükčö pun,</i>	[‘My feather bed is of swan’s down
<i>Tojedalme mynderem – kükö pun.</i>	The pillow under the head is of cuckoo’s down
<i>Ačæem – jükčö, avaem – kükö,</i>	My father is swan, my mother is cuckoo,
<i>Ške ulam kükynat igyže</i> (PVM: 48)	I am myself the cuckoo’s child’].

In a memorial song of the Eastern Mari the cuckoo presents the image of sadness and loneliness.

<i>Kükýžö-laj kükukat manyldaleš</i>	[‘The cuckoo cuckoos “cuckoo”
<i>Šugarla-laj kapka vujyšto.</i>	On the cemetery gate.
<i>Min’ynat-laj izaem kuško kaen? –</i>	Where is my brother? –
<i>Kijamat-laj tóra kidyške</i> (PVM: 281)	In Kiyamat-host’s holdfast’].

9. The cuckoo’s loneliness

According to the folk belief the cuckoo does not have a pair. According to some legends the cuckoo lives with the hawk or with the nightingale (Toidybekova 1997: 131). It is common knowledge that the cuckoo does not bring out nestlings itself and leaves its eggs in the nests of other birds (see above). The people’s ideas about the cuckoo are formed on the basis of the riddle:

*Škenžyn munyžym ok püktö,
Igy m ok pukšo, ok jüktö,
Vesylan ogeš lij kum,
Paleda, vekat, kukum.*

[‘It does not lay eggs, doesn’t nourish, doesn’t water the small-birds, will not be the godfather for others’] (MNZ: 161).

The family and domestic relationships are reflected in the proverb: *Kukuat munym munča, no ške ogeš püktö* [‘And cuckoo lays the eggs but doesn’t hatch to itself’] (Ibatov 1960: 64). The image of the cuckoo occurs in the proverb mocking a boastful person: *Ončyč muryšo kuku varaš kodeš* [‘The cuckoo which sings early gets late’] (Ibatov 1960: 94).

10. The conclusion

The image of the cuckoo is deeply penetrated in the Mari culture and has many associations, does not bear obvious negative or positive connotations. The image of the cuckoo in the Mari tradition mainly fits the European tradition. It should be noted that many similarities can be found in other nations both in related and unrelated ones. The cuckoo is often associated with the image of a widow or an orphan. Note that the image of the cuckoo also applies to the funeral and memorial cult of the Mari people. The symbolism of death is connected with the cuckoo image. It manifests not only in the cuckoo fortune-telling, but in a number of omens and superstitions. The call of the cuckoo is often regarded as an ominous sign. The voice and the way of life of this bird singles it out from many other birds. Marriage and life fortune-telling is related with the song of this bird. The popular superstitions predict weather and harvest. A number of omens are related to beekeeping, which is one of the oldest crafts of the Mari people. The cuckoo’s arrival close to home in the village alarmed the Mari people, it was considered to be a bad sign. It can be concluded that for the Mari people the cuckoo is a prophetic, sacred bird.

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Abbreviations

MPÈ-RB: Balt., Kalt., Mišk., Šaran. – Materialy polevoj èkspedicii v Respubliku Baškortostan: Baltačevskij rajon: d. U Tepteryš; Kaltasinskij rajon: d. Babaevo, d. Vasilovo; Miškinskij rajon: d. Bikšikovo, d. Buklendy, d. Sosnovka, d. Čebykovo, s. Čuraevo; Šaranskij rajon: s. Akbarisovo.

MPÈ-RMÈ: Volž., Gorn., Zven., Kužen., Mari-Tur., Mork., Novotor., Paran'g., Sern., Sovet. – Materialy polevoj èkspedicii v Respubliku Marij Èl: Volžskij rajon: d. Berezniki, d. Nuršari, d. Šarembal, s. Sotnur; Gornomarijskij rajon: d. Cyganovo; Zvenigovskij rajon: d. Mari-Otary, s. Ismency; Kuženerskij rajon: d. Bol'šoj Ljaždur, d. Mari-Šoi; Mari-Turekskij rajon: d. Agači, d. Mari-Kupta; Morkinskij rajon: d. Kubyš-Ključ, d. Nuž-Ključ, d. Čodrajal; Novotor'jal'skij rajon: d. Šemermučaš; Paran'ginskij rajon: d. Murzanaevo; Sernurskij rajon: d. Mari-Kupta; Sovetskij rajon: d. Vasleevo, d. Verx-Ušnur.

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- MNPs = *Marijskie narodnye pesni*. 2-e izd. V per. S. Podelkova. Joškar-Ola: Marijskoe knižnoe izdatel'stvo, 1976.
- MNZ = Kitikov, Aleksandr Efimovič (2006) *Marij kalyk ojpogo: Marij kalyk tušto-vlak. Svod marijskogo fol'klora: Marijskie narodnye zagadki*. Joškar-Ola: MarNIIJaLI.
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Kokkuvõte. Kristina Yuzieva: Linnu kujutamine mari rahva traditsioonilises nägemuses: kägu (etnolingvistiline aspekt). Artiklis antakse ülevaade käo kujutamisest, lähtudes etnolingvistilisest vaatepunktist. Käo sümbol on väga vana ja seotud mari muistsete mõistetega. Kägu seostatakse sageli lesknaise ja vaeslapsena. Lisaks sellele on käo kujutamine seotud mari rahva kujutlusega matustest ja mälestusteenistustest. Kägu kuulub ka surma sümboolikasse. See tuleb esile mitte ainult tuleviku ennustamises, vaid ka arvukates ennetes ja ebausukommetes. Nagu mitmed teisedki Euroopa rahvad, küsivad marid käolt, kui palju aastaid on inimesel jäänud elada. Kägu peetakse sageli kurjakuulutavaks endeks. Kui kuuldi kägu kukkumas paremal pool, siis peeti seda õnnetuse endeks. Kui keegi kuuleb kägu esimesena, siis peeti seda õnnelikuks endeks, et taskusse tuleb raha. Hääl ja eluviis eristavad kägu teistest lindudest. Tüdrukud võivad käo käest küsida, mitu aastat kulub, kuni nad abielluvad. Arvatakse, et kui kägu hakkab kukkuma, siis on vesi piisavalt soe, et ujuma minna. Kui kägu lakkamatult kukub, siis tuleb selge ja hea ilm. Kägu maja lähedal kuulutab ebaõnne. Mari rahvale on kägu prohvetlik ja püha lind.

Märksõnad: mari keel, etnolingvistiline aspekt, lind, kägu, sümbol