

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, possibly reading 'J. J.' or similar, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Folklore Department of the Language and Literature Institute
Folklore Department of the Literary Museum of
Estonian Academy of Sciences

TRADITIONAL FOLK BELIEF TODAY

Conference dedicated to the 90th anniversary of Oskar Loorits

TARTU 1990

PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS IN THE AREA BETWEEN THE
KAMA AND THE VIATKA RIVERS DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

L. D. Makarov, Izhevsk

The problems of mutual influence of pagan and Christian religions are of major importance while trying to reconstruct the ideology of the peoples of the medieval East Europe. Significant contribution for the solving of these problems has to be found from the research by D.K. Zelenin, N.M. Galkov, ^{sk}E.V. Anichkov, B.A. Rybakov. The 1000th-anniversary of the Russian Orthodox church stirred up unusual interest in both the history of religion in general as well as the present subject in particular.

The christianization of the pagan Russia has been viewed as a historical process. However, the pagan beliefs, having millennia-old traditions in the consciousness of the people, could disappear only gradually and, thus, the 11th-13th centuries are considered to be the period of double beliefs and that of the struggle of the Orthodox church with the relics of the pagan traditions. The ancient Russians incorporated among themselves also other ethnic groups with their ancient beliefs and so the Christian tradition was even more in danger. Especially it holds to the region between the Volga and the Oka Rivers and the Novgorod territories - the regions serving as the starting points for the Russian colonization of the areas between the Kama and the Viatka Rivers.

In the historical monuments of the Viatka territory there can be observed the traces of the pagan culture of the 10th-13th centuries: a bronze figure of a man with a beard and a hat has been connected with the figure of Perun by a number of researchers; a pendant-spoon - the symbol of well-being; a pendant resembling a blade of an axe and pointing at the worshipping of Perun; an oval iron plate used for cutting in the middle of which there is an anthropomorphic figure resembling the pendants of the Siberian peoples; amulets made of tusks and teeth of the wild

animals and "thunderbolts" of flint worn as charms against the evil. The monuments of the double beliefs are also the serpentine amulets of the 13th-15th centuries found at the borderline of the Viatka territory.

There are numerous findings related to the Christian religion. These are the crosses (over 40 items), stone and bronze icons and figures dating back to the 12th-16th centuries. However, the presence of the outward material objects of Christianity should not actually mean its prevailing position in the people's mentality. The burial customs, for example, tend to question the influence of the official religion (graves dug not too deep, varying position of the corpses and of their hands, cinders found in the graves hinting at full or partial cremation; single cases of the skeleton being broken or buried with crooked legs, pair-burials, etc.).

The Slavic invaders occupied the lands inhabited by the Udmurts and the Permyaks. The common abode mixed the nations and the system of their worldviews acquired a compound pagan-Christian character. So the messages of the metropolitans John and Geronti sent to the peoples of the Viatka territory and their bishops accuse them of distorting the rituals of the Orthodox church, condemn the Christians' contacts with the pagan population and complain about the incompetence of even those having taken the holy orders. In spite of the dubious character of these documents, the facts mentioned there have to be considered. The long isolation of the Viatka land, the participation of its warriors in the wars with the neighbouring peoples in the 15th century, brought along the breaking off of the contacts with the central territories of Russia. The ecclesiastics were frequently the former war-prisoners or just volunteers among the local population who had received some instructions. All it could but leave its mark on the learnedness of the clergymen. The contacts and influence of various peoples on each other were just inevitable.

The Finno-Ugric population preserved its own pagan beliefs, even if officially they were christianized; the state-

ment is well illustrated by the letter sent by the metropolitan Simon to Perm (in 1501) and the account by N. Witcen, a Dutch, about the Viatka land (in 1687). Voluntary christianization has been registered only seldom and as a rule it actually indicates the hope for some benefits. For example, the Udmurts of the Syryansk volost of the Slobodsk county received in 1557 benefits for their formal conversion to Christianity. P.N. Luppov supposes that the Orthodox church became more easily acceptable for the pagans after the 1588 reform was passed which alleviated the situation of the Udmurts in the Viatka land as well as due to the activities of the monastery in the 16th-17th centuries. The missionaries were not always successful in their undertakings: if Stephen of Perm and Trifon of Viatka were lucky, then Benjamin Ivshin had to flee and Pitirim was killed. However, Christianity spread, in the 18th century the peoples of the Povolzhia and Pre-Ural regions were christianized by force which caused later a mass return to the pagan beliefs.

The conflicts of the Orthodox clergy with the pagan peoples continued. So, in the document by Vassili III, the mayor of Slobodsk, Ivan Karaulov, was in 1528 ordered to prosecute the skomorokhs as well as the Christian sects (the razboiniki et al.). John, the archbishop of the Viatka and the Velikoperm region in the final quarter of the 17th century, inspected all the religious festivals and forbade the rites having any pagan elements. In the middle of the 18th century the Dean Timofei Khlobystov inspected the ten churches of the Slobodsk county in order to root out the superstitious elements, as a result he found from a local chapel the reliquiae of a Saint John the Hermit that were believed to heal people. Analogous superstition, concerning a Mary the Killed from Kukarka, was tried to discover in 1834, but the attempt failed.

The documents analyzed by D.K. Zelenin et al. allow us to suppose that the pagan traditions were widely spread even in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The pre-Christian elements can be traced in the folk feasts, the tradition of pilgrimages, in the beliefs connected with

the icons. Everything this was preserved within the official framework of the Orthodox religion, intermingled with the latter and was treated as the inseparable part of the spiritual culture.