

Cheremis folksongs

Notes on the song-texts

Linguistic observations

The songs published in this volume constitute valuable source material, not only for musicology and folklore, but also for Finno-Ugric linguistics. Thanks to modern facilities of communication, we have visited a considerable number of localities in Cheremis language-areas, including several for which no published, linguistic material is available. In addition to the research trips made with LÁSZLÓ VIKÁR, I have had repeated opportunities to make linguistic collections by myself. In the course of these tours, it was possible to obtain an adequate picture of the dialects of the Mari Autonomous Republic and of the Cheremis-inhabited neighbouring regions. A precise knowledge of dialectal boundaries is of use to musicologists also, since these boundaries coincide, in most instances, with those of musical forms. Cheremis dialectal differentiation can be accounted for by earlier tribal separation, memories of which are reflected in female clothing and primarily in the head-dress, today.

In transcribing the texts, I have used Setälä's symbols, though in a somewhat simplified form. One-letter symbols denote affricates, so that instead of *tš*, *tš'*, *dž*, *dž'*, *ts*, *dz* I have used *č*, *č'*, *ž*, *ž'*, *c*, and *z*, and *β* is shown by *w*.

WICHMANN and BEKE used *o*, *u* and *ü* symbols to mark reduced *o*, *u*, and *ü*. Here the letter *ü* is used both for *o* and *u*. It is clear from the tapes, that one and the same person may pronounce this sound sometimes with a tonal colour resembling *o*, sometimes resembling *u*. *ü* has been chosen for general use since there is historical evidence that this sound developed from *u*. In specialist literature on Cheremis linguistics, the sound is marked by an inverted Cyrillic *у*. In fact, these are not *reduced* sounds, since they are characterized by a lighter tonal colour; but they are very short. The same applies to the sounds *ə* and *ə̇*. These are distinctly articulated and markedly short, palatal or velar variants of *e*.

ü̇ is here used in place of the symbol *ü̇*.

In regions strongly under Tartar influence, the sound marked with *u* (Swedish *u*) is often accompanied by *ü* as a facultative variant, since in the Tartar idiom it is pronounced *ü*.

Particularly in the Mountain-Cheremis songs an unvoiced consonant in intervocalic position, or an unvoiced initial consonant preceded by a voiced consonant, will often assume a voiced or spirant character. This modification is consistently marked by WICHMANN and BEKE in their text publications. But they did not have the use of the tape-recorder and therefore had to simplify certain observed phonetic changes. Our tape-recordings show, however, that a performer repeating a line will often pronounce the same word in different ways. For example:

Salâm sola pokšalnet laštra šumet šalya,
Salâm sola wokšalnet laštra tumet šalya.

(In the middle of *Salâm* village there stands an oak-tree with wide-spreading branches.)

Since, however, the present book is intended primarily for musicologists, and since entering into such detailed text-notation would make it cumbersome for non-linguists, it was thought better to leave unmarked the sporadic cases where unvoiced consonants become voiced or spirant.

Nor have word stresses been marked either, since their general rule is very easy to understand. Among the Mountain Cheremis, as well as in the Lipsha and Kokshaga-Oshla dialects, penultimate syllables are stressed. In the Volga, the Central and Vyatka dialects, stress is laid on the final full tone, save for *e*, *o*, and *ö*, which have developed from reduced sounds, and therefore remain unstressed. If all the vowels in the word are reduced, the first syllable receives the stress. In the Eastern-Cheremis dialect, the last full sound is always emphasized (including also the *e*, *o*, and *ö* vowels). Irregularities are shown specially.

Earlier collectors, and in first place ÖDÖN BEKE, made use of administrative district boundaries prevailing at the time of their studies. These, however, rarely coincide with dialectal boundaries. BEKE, for example, placed the texts collected from Tursho Muchaksh in the Yaransk dialect, and those from Chikhaidorovo (correctly: Chikhaidarevo, recently a fringe area of Yoshkar Ola) in the Yoshkar Ola dialect, because they were collected from different administrative units. They are in fact variants of one and the same dialect.

Following the revolution, developing Cheremis autonomy has radically changed the administrative boundaries, and the last twenty-five years have seen considerable modifications. Even Cheremis linguists made the mistake of basing dialectal classification on the new administrative boundaries. For example, the dialect termed Malmizh by WICHMANN and BEKE has been called the Urzhum dialect.

Obviously, administrative boundaries – subject to change, and inconsistent with dialectal differentiation – cannot provide a basis suitable for a classification of the dialects. A more stable basis is required.

The term Mountain Cheremis has been used traditionally in both Soviet and Western literature. Initially it was used with reference to the Cheremis living on hills of the right bank of the Volga (Russian: горная сторона). The connotation is not quite exact since the Mountain-Cheremis dialect is also used on the plains of the left (Russian: луговая сторона). In August, 1968, I spent a month in the densely wooded and thinly populated region north of the Mountain-Cheremis area, in the Kilemari district of the prevailing administration. To my surprise, I found that the mountain dialect extended as far as the northern boundaries of the Cheremis Autonomous Republic, and furthermore, it also extends (according to statements from local informants) to overlapping areas also. These Cheremis call themselves *kožla marâ*, that is, Forest Cheremis. Consequently, a more exact term for the dialect would be Mountain-Forest Cheremis. But we have collected verbal dialect material only on the right bank of the Volga. From Yelasi and Mikryakovo, WICHMANN and BEKE published a number of songtexts that are not infrequently included (as variants) in our collection also. The Cheremis texts collected by RAMSTEDT originated from the vicinity of Vilovatovo, where we also collected.

Many thousands of Cheremis live along the Vetlyuga river, first of all in the Tonshaevo district of Gorki county. They speak a language very similar to the Mountain-Forest Cheremis-dialect. ÖDÖN BEKE collected a few texts and considerable lexical material from them. He called their dialect Vetlyugan, and this term is accepted. Another Cheremis group lives in the vicinity of the city of Yaransk. Its idiom resembles the Mountain-

Forest dialect. This is what is traditionally termed Yaransk dialect. We have not personally visited the two last-mentioned dialect regions. An isolated dialectal spot is represented by the idiom of Lipsha village, Zvenigovo district. The dialect seems to be a more archaic variant of the Mountain-Forest Cheremis-dialect. Our collection is the first to publish texts from this area.

In extensive stretches of land east of Lipsha, the Volga dialect is spoken, a term (introduced by those working on the Cheremis) that could hardly be replaced by any other, in spite of the fact that the dialect-area extends from the Volga towards the East. This dialect was termed Cheboksari by ÖDÖN BEKE. He, however, published only text variants, closely related to our collections from Krasny Yar. But the variants from Kokshamari and Sidelnikovo, distinguished by a *c*-izing feature, are so far unknown.

The existence of the *ũ* and *ũ̃* phonemes (or of *ũ* in certain places) is the most typical feature shared by variants of the Volga dialects. This is what most clearly distinguishes them from the rest of the dialects and, primarily, from those termed Central in our classification. The Central dialects, to be discussed in the following, constitute the basis of Cheremis literary usage.

Similarly, the existence of *ũ* and *ũ̃*, and the *c*-izing feature, are characteristic of the dialect adjacent to the Volga dialect in the northwest, spoken in Orshanka, Medvedevo and partly in Yoshkar Ola, and in the Soviet districts within the territories of the Autonomous Republic, as well as in the vicinity of Kirov and Pizhanka, outside its boundaries. The texts named Yaransk-Urzhum by WICHMANN belong to this dialect. The region where WICHMANN worked belonged at that time to the Yaransk district; but since the dialect concerned constitutes a transition between the western and eastern dialects, WICHMANN gave it the name Yaransk-Urzhum. He collected in the village of Upsha, as did we. The words of the songs gathered in Luzhbelyak and Staro Kreshcheno also belong to this dialect.

Among the collection of BEKE, the texts from Tursho Muchaksh and Chikhaidarevo belong here. In view of the existing administrative boundaries, he classed his collection from Tursho Muchaksh, situated three kilometers north of Upsha, as belonging to the Yaransk, that from Chikhaidarevo with Yoshkar Ola dialects.

On the other hand, L. P. GRUZOV (*Историческая грамматика Марийского языка. Йошкар-Ола, 1969. p. 47.*) regards the whole idiom as belonging to Yoshkar Ola. Neither of the two terms is acceptable. The names applied by WICHMANN and BEKE are out of date, and GRUZOV's term is objectionable since the dialect is also spoken in regions far from Yoshkar Ola, beyond the frontiers of the Autonomous Republic and having no connection with Yoshkar Ola. No one river courses through the regions mentioned, so as to justify the use of its name as a term. The two Kokshaga and the two Oshla rivers, however, by and large comprise this area, and perhaps their combined names might serve to name the dialect.

As expressed by WICHMANN's term Yaransk-Urzhum, the Kokshaga-Oshla dialect forms a transition between western and eastern usages. It contains the sounds *ũ*, and *ũ̃*, as does the Volga dialect, but here the stresses show an agreement with those of the western regions, while in the Volga dialect they conform rather with those of the Central dialects. The habit of *c*-izing is characteristic of the whole of the region; but in the eastern borders, influenced by the adjacent dialect area, *č* is often pronounced in place of *c*. This change is also supported by the spread of literary usage – through schools, radio and TV, etc.

East of the Kokshaga-Oshla dialect region, and extending well-nigh to the eastern frontier of the Republic, we find a rather uniform dialect in the most populous Cheremis bloc. This is the idiom on which Cheremis literary usage is based. In Cheremis scientific circles, the dialect is usually termed the Morki-Sernur dialect, after the two most significant villages in the area. There are, however, other communities in the region with no less claim to participate in the term. In my opinion, it would be more appropriate to apply the term Central dialects, so as to stress the fact that this idiom is also geographically situated in the centre. The texts, labelled as Morki by W. PORKKA, and Urzhum by WICHMANN and BEKE, originated from this dialect area (as also the latter's collection from Üshüty-tür, which he classed with Yoshkar Ola). We too visited many places in this area. The Central dialects have preserved numerous ancient phonetic features. They are characterized by the absence of the *ũ* and *ű* sound, the presence of which in other regions I ascribe to Chuvash and Tartar influence (cf. *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* LXX, 23–30). They do not observe the rules of vowel harmony, which again is a secondary development in regions exposed to Turkic influence (the primitive Finno-Ugric harmony of vowels had been lost in Cheremis long before the Turkic impact came into force). Especially in the Sernur region, the *o*, *e*, and *ö* vowels are strongly reduced in final unaccented position. Nevertheless, in my transcriptions, which aim to give the fullest possible rendering of the phonemes, they are marked as full-value sounds. Reduction of this kind is also an ancient feature. The full-value *o*, *e*, and *ö* sounds, where present, have come into being through the spread of labialization from reduced phonemes.

The song-texts collected in the village of Shurabash in the Tartar Autonomous Republic belong to this dialect, but a number of phonetic changes characteristic of Tartar (for example, *j* > *ǰ*, *e* > *i*, etc.; sometimes *ũ* > *u*, etc.), have taken place, owing to long bilingual co-existence with the Tartars.

In the eastern borderlands of the Mari Autonomous Republic, in the region of Kirov east of the boundaries, and also in isolated Cheremis-inhabited spots of the Tartar Autonomous Socialist Republic, the dialect spoken is that to which WICHMANN and BEKE applied the term Malmizh. Both scholars published texts from this dialect area, which includes many variants; common characteristics of these are: *-lak*, marking the plural, and a strong tendency to preserve the Finno-Ugric sound *s*. Under Tartar influence, vowel harmony has developed to some extent, and the *ũ* and *ű* sounds have also appeared in certain places. In our collection texts originating from Mari Bilyamor, Yelimbaevo, Ulisyal, Knyagor, Poch Kuchuk and Staraya Knya are representative of this dialect.

The term Malmizh, however, is inexact, since the dialect is used in many other districts, in addition to those listed above. As the powerful river Vyatka flows through the entire region, it might well lend its name as a term to cover the full extent of the dialect area.

I could not accompany LÁSZLÓ VIKÁR on his collecting tour in 1964, but with knowledge derived from the collections of WICHMANN and PAASONEN made in the region he visited, I had no difficulty in writing down, transcribing and translating the material from tape-recordings of excellent quality, and from the Cyrillic notations of Cheremis spelling. Nevertheless, personal field-experience was lacking. It was not always possible to establish whether a given pronunciation was local or reflected literary influence.

The dialect is termed Eastern both in Soviet and Western literature, and this term may be accepted.

To summarize, I distinguish the following dialects, proceeding from West to East:

(1) Mountain-Forest dialect (if only the Cheremis living on the right bank of the Volga are considered, this can be termed Mountain dialect for the sake of brevity)

(2) Lipsha dialect

(3) Vetlyuga dialect

(4) Yaransk dialect

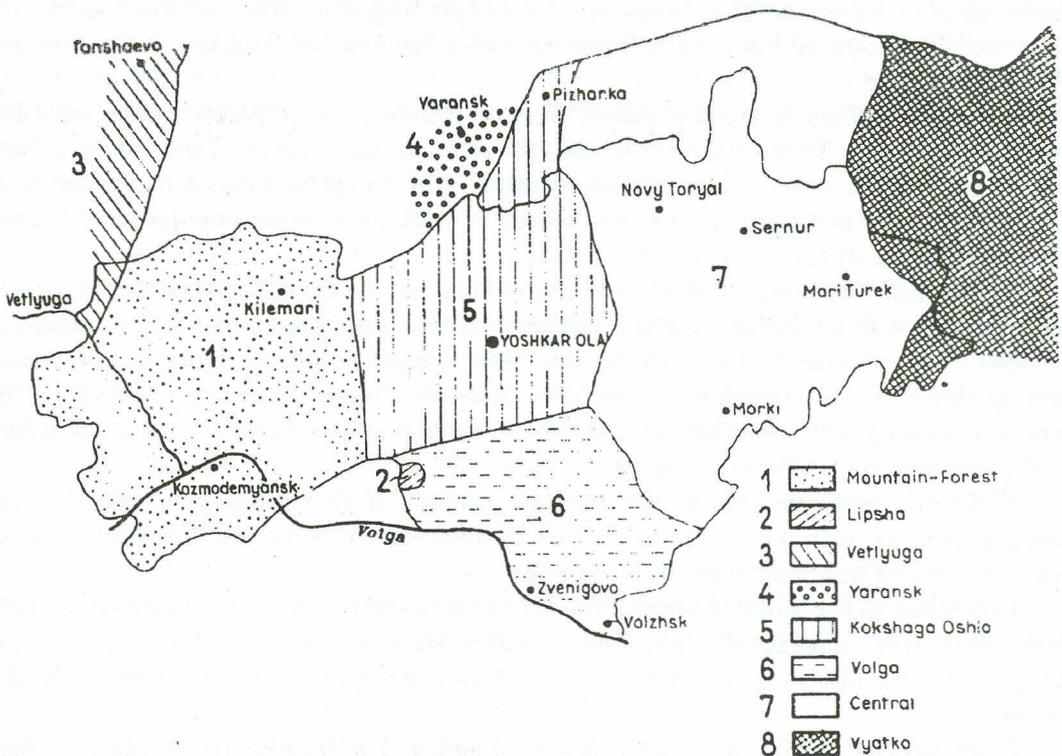
(5) Kokshaga-Oshla dialect

(6) Volga dialect

(7) Central dialect

(8) Vyatka dialect

(9) Eastern dialect (unmarked in the Map).



Cheremis dialects

The folksong-texts of the Cheremis published hitherto were collected as words only, recited without tunes (apart from some phonograph recordings made by WICHMANN). The words of songs contained in this volume, however, have been taken down along with their tunes; as such they reflect the modifications undergone during performance. A habit of inserting an *n* sound to facilitate pronunciation can be often observed in the western area. The phenomenon is not unknown to Chuvash songs. Consonant clusters in middle position are not infrequently pronounced in an entirely arbitrary way, particularly in the Vyatka dialect, by means of a full-value, or sometimes a reduced sound. These alleviating sounds are shown in round brackets, while sounds casually omitted by the singer are shown in square brackets.

I have made, and publish here, word-for-word Hungarian translations of the texts.¹ They may seem rough but have perhaps the merit of offering more direct access to the original.

A literary approach to the genre

The contents of this volume offer a survey of Cheremis folksongs and their typical genres as well. As already mentioned, the genre of lyrical songs is the only genre in Cheremis folksong. No trace whatever of heroic epic, or of epic fragments, has been discovered. Nor have we been successful in finding historical songs, such as are abundant in Russian and Mordvin folklore.

The ballad genre is equally absent from Cheremis popular poetry. A ballad from Morki, recorded in 1958, described a murder, but from the evidence of the names of persons, and from the tune, it was of Russian origin. The complete absence of this genre in Cheremis regions is striking, the more so since it is widespread in the popular poetry of the Mordvins, the nearest relatives of the Cheremis.

No original Cheremis lullabies have been found, nor do the collections of PAASONEN, WICHMANN or BEKE include a single specimen of this genre among the several hundreds of other songs recorded by them. At the same time, a Russian lullaby enjoys wide currency among the Cheremis (*Баюшки, баюшки, баю-баю* 'hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye'). The words, beginning with the lullaby phrases given above, are sung, sometimes in the Russian, and sometimes in the Cheremis version.

Children's songs are also unknown to the Cheremis. If the younger generation has become acquainted with one or two specimens of this genre, it is due exclusively to school-teachers' having translated them from Russian.

In contrast to the Mordvin population, the Cheremis do not sing any improvised lament over the corpse immediately following a death. Mention will be made below of the strophic, lament-like songs performed on determined dates in commemoration of the deceased.

From various people information has been gathered relating to the pagan sacrificer (*kart*) who habitually performed some simple chanted prayer during his silvan sacrificial

¹ It is mentioned here that also the English translations of the Cheremis songs are kept as close as possible to the original.

rites. In addition, according to the testimony of the old folk,² certain definite tunes without words were also performed on the *kisla*.

Songs attached to various calendar days, or to particular events, are fairly widespread among the Cheremis. Such are, for example, those sung when recruits are being escorted from the village. Two variants of the relevant stanzas seem to preponderate in major areas. One begins with the words "The water is flowing, the bank remains" (see Nos. 162, 182, 304), the other "Good-bye to you, good-bye to you" (see Nos. 123, 146, 152). In Tsarist Russia, even in the second half of the last century, the usual term of regular, military service was twenty-five years. Then there came the period of world wars and other wars in our century, when the enlisted son very often did not return at all. Times may have changed since then, but the young man leaving for military service is mourned, and informants (women) often sang their laments weeping at memories of past experiences.

Another large group of songs is connected with proposing to a girl or with wedding ceremonies. On the former occasions, the so-called "girl's drinking" songs are usually performed when those who ask for the girl's hand see her home. The girl, if willing to marry the young man, tastes the brandy offered her by the party of her intended.

A widespread wedding song in eastern parts of the Cheremis areas begins with the line "Wedding is coming" (see Nos. 143, 155). The eastern regions abound in songs performed in honour of a relative or friend, who is greeted, praised or bidden farewell.

Previous linguistic collections contain a very modest number of lament-texts performed *in memoriam*, and the present volume includes the first lament-tunes ever to be published. These are sung at burial feasts held on the third, seventh, and most frequently on the fortieth day, after the burial. On such occasions the clothing of the departed is placed in the middle of the room, or courtyard, or worn by the closest friend of the deceased (if male), and all the participants behave as if the lamented corpse were present. These songs are of a responsive character; sometimes the dead is addressed by the mourners, sometimes those left behind are addressed by the corpse.

A further considerable group of songs belongs to various pagan festivals.

Such are, for example, those connected with the festival called *šorâk-jol* (sheep's leg) feast (see No. 154). The *šorâk-jol* is celebrated in honour of the New Year on the first Friday following the New Year in the Russian calendar. (Evidently under neighbouring Muslim influence, the Cheremis have adopted the custom of celebrating Friday instead of Sunday.) On this day, a sort of masked play was performed in a house specially built or hired for the purpose, when also the girls and young men sang songs. The festival is also known to the Chuvash by the name of "sheep's leg".

Again, other songs were performed on Shrove Tuesday (*ü-arña* 'butterweek'). Songs of this kind have only been found in the Zvenigovo district, bordering on the land of the Chuvash (see No. 173). This type of song is widespread throughout the Chuvash region. (In Chuvash it is termed *šëvarhi jurri*.)

At the coming of spring, they used to celebrate the *sürem*-feast; for a period of two weeks or in some places a month, villagers went about blowing horns of bark on evenings prior to that feast. The horn was known as the *sürem*-horn and was regarded as having exorcizing power. The custom seems to have died now; it is not practiced anywhere, nor has

² On the Cheremis panan religion see U. HOLMBERG (Harva): Die Wassergottheiten der finnisch-ugrischen Völker. MSFOu. XXXII.

this musical instrument, used in former times to expel evil spirits, come to light as yet, although middle-aged folk of the Zvenigovo district still remember the custom of blowing the horn from their early years. The *sürem*-feast also had special songs of its own, some of which survive to this day (see No. 215).

Another great spring feast is known as *aya-pajrem* = 'plough-festival'. This used to be held when work in the fields began in early spring. Songs connected with this feast have only been collected from the population living in the territory of the Tartar Autonomous Socialist Republic.

In addition to those enumerated above, we have included in the volume several songs not particularly attached to one or another calendar day, though still containing pagan religious motifs (see Nos. 1, 80, 101).

The ancient Cheremis popular beliefs and religious traditions of the pagan past have reached a stage near to oblivion, and in most regions and particularly in the western regions, they are already extinct. The pagan priests who are still alive, the *kart*, are without exception old people. I have heard of none under seventy. Certainly, they will carry the last memories of pagan rites and myths to their graves.

Mention should be made here of hay-day. No special songs are attached to this day by the Cheremis, though these exist among the Chuvash, but the day of hay-making is a real festival in many places, celebrated with much singing and dancing. Particularly the Cheremis groups living in the vicinity of the Volga observe the custom of migrating to the extensive fens adjoining the river, at the time when the hay is mown. After the day's work, the young people entertain themselves with singing and dancing to the small hours of the morning.

I had the opportunity of spending a relatively long period in a village of the Mountain Cheremis, Yasmolkino, Yelasy district, during the summer of 1955. In that village, it was customary, even at that time, for the girls to come together in the evenings for a party, at which they sang without any kind of instrumental accompaniment. The same custom prevailed in neighbouring villages also. Each girl would write down the words of her favourite songs in a copy-book, so that she might take it to the singing party.

The most popular musical instrument of the region was the *küsle*, and every girl knew how to play it. It was held that a girl was unlikely to be asked in marriage unless she could play at least a few tunes on the *küsle*.

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Cheremis verse and stanza-construction show a close affinity with those of Chuvash, Tartar and Votyak ethnic groups. These structural features appear to have reached the Cheremis areas through the Volga-Turkic peoples, but it is not our intention to enter into a deeper analysis of this question.

An overwhelming majority of the songs published in this volume reflect Cheremis ways before the 1917 revolution. Many a peculiar trait of pre-revolutionary times has been preserved from the fields of both material and spiritual culture, especially in the mode of life and manner of thinking of the elder generation.

It has been our aim to collect the earliest possible layers of Cheremis folk music. Nevertheless, a considerable number of songs in our collection tell of work done in the kolkhoz

or, in general, of work and the glory of the new life. What is more, names of concepts that have come into general use following the Second World War also occur in the song-texts – words such as tractor, tractor driver, club, movie, etc.

The Cheremis villages are now on the way to rapid transformation; the old style of life is being ousted by the new. In consequence, and as a concomitant development, traditional folklore will be pushed further into the background. When collecting in the Mari Turek district in the autumn of 1966, I heard from Ivan Bocharov, aged 66, who acted as my landlord at that time, that a very typical figure of ancient Cheremis popular beliefs, called *owδa*, a scraggy, female creature with large, pendant breasts, who used to ride a horse with her face to its tail, no longer lived among them. Why? Because she was afraid of the tractor and had therefore left the region. The spirit of the hearth called *surt woδδž* has also followed suit, scared by the electric light.

In the thirties every Cheremis village was electrified, and no house is to be found without its radio and possibly its TV set, the number of which has increased recently, owing to the broadcasting of programmes in Cheremis.

In spite of all technical progress, however, ample scope still remains for the collector. Nevertheless, time is pressing, and pressing time is partly responsible for the appearance of this collection.