On the Issue of the Russian Peasantry Traditional Worldview Transformation in 1920s-1930s

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ABSTRACT
This paper is devoted to the analysis of the changes that had taken place in the traditional culture of the Russian peasantry from the establishment of Soviet power until the legal abolition of the institution of community. In this regard, home alcohol distilling and alcohol consumption were chosen as a criterion illustrating the process of transformation of the peasant worldview. The study was conducted on the example of the Mordovian peasantry, which still had strong community traditions in the first half of the XX century. The source database consists of the documents taken from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia: the materials of the Ardatovskiy uezd committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) and the Mokshaleyskiy, Tengushevskiy, Torbeevskiy volost committees of the All-Union Communist Party (b) represented by the protocols of village meetings, resolutions, instructions, reports of the party and Soviet authorities and law enforcement reports. The folkloric and ethnographic data were used in order to recreate the traditional community customs of the Mordovians.

Article citation
1. Introduction

In everyday life, the community acted as the guardian of moral principles. According to the unwritten "worldly" rules, each community member had to adhere to the "moral code": to respect the elders, to raise children, to work hard, to perform public work diligently, to pay taxes on time, etc. Therefore, the society struggled against extravagance, idleness, stealing, laziness, a neglectful attitude to work of individual family members. Drunkenness was under the special control of this code, because it sometimes was the root of the above given evils.

The ratio of the Mordovian ethnos to this vice is quite clearly and succinctly showed in the folklore: "Wine (vodka) leads a man down and brings him to prison"; "A drunkard is a man among pigs and a pig among men"; "Drink beer and you are half in trouble, drink vodka and you are gone" etc. (Mordovian Proverbs and Sayings, 1986).

The alcohol abuse of the head of the household was especially dangerous for the family. In this case, the Mordovian community preserved the right to intervene: it could obtain custody of the household and flog the offender. The drunkenness of the elected village administration brought even more evil and danger to the society (Oral-Poetic Creativity of the Mordovian People. The Mordovian Folk Songs of Zauralie and Siberia, 1982). In these circumstances, the village society used a protective mechanism: it withdrew such elected authority before the end of the term and confirmed the appointment of a more decent villager. We shall note that the Mordovians condemned rampant drunkenness, but not drinking alcoholic beverages in general. In its traditional culture drinking "hot drinks" (posa, pure) was allowed in case of family celebrations, religious events and mutual support. However, in the beginning of the XX century national beverages containing alcohol started to be replaced by vodka.

Getting to a worldly meeting for the first time, domestic transactions, "opivanie" of a guilty man, buying off the worldly positions by vodka, etc., not to mention family celebrations and funerals started to be accompanied by drinking dozens of buckets of vodka. Often the discussion of important public affairs and the meeting itself never went without alcohol (Oral-Poetic Creativity of the Mordovian People. Folk Songs of the Mordovians of the Penza Region, 1987).

Peasant communities tried to combat this social scourge with varying degrees of success. When it came to morality, society could subject violators to such measures of punishment as a monetary fine to the worldly treasury or public punishment, "separate" them from participation in community celebrations and even get them out of the village.

The change of the regime in the country and the subsequent modernization of the economy, social sphere and spiritual life proved to be a great challenge for the traditional way of life of the Russian peasantry in general and the Mordovians in particular.

2. Literature Review

Although the study of the processes of transformation of the worldview of the population through the prism of alcohol consumption and the study of the influence of alcohol policy of the state on the psychology of the residents are not a unique phenomenon in historiography, these issues are traditionally among the most actual problems. Thus, V. Treml (1975) analyzed the financial aspect of alcohol consumption in the USSR noting the benefits of the sale of alcoholic beverages for the state budget. H.D. Holder and G. Edwards (1995) focused on the consideration of alcohol state policy, noting the conflict of interests: replenishing the national budget or
preserving the health of the nation. Investigating the history of the alcohol problem in Russia, I. Takala (2002) pays special attention to the 1900s-1930s, noting the distortions in the perception of alcohol consumption. The author pays special attention to the reasons why Russia found itself in the "alcohol belt" of vodka. A. V. Nemtsov (2005) considers the problem of alcohol consumption in Russia in historical retrospect. Analyzing the dynamics of this phenomenon, he identifies a decrease in alcohol consumption in Russia in the early XX century.

Various aspects of the process of transformation of the traditional worldview of the Mordovian peasantry are reflected in the works of V. K. Abramov (1996), V. A. Balashov (1992), T. V. Eferina (2003), N. F. Belyaeva (2004) and V. V. Miroshkin (2013, 2014, 2015, 2017). In these works, the authors focused mainly on the changes associated with the religious and ritual sphere, labour activity and social values. The methodological basis of the study of the community archetype and the psychology of the Mordovian peasantry was developed by O. A. Sukhova (2007). At the same time, the problem has not been appropriately reflected in historiography from the proposed perspective.

3. Research Methodological Framework

The methodological basis of the research is the principles of dialectical knowledge of society based on the consideration of phenomena in their development and inextricable connection with other phenomena, as well as the traditional principles of historical research – historicism, science and objectivity. Among the general scientific methods used in writing this paper, it is necessary to highlight the analysis, synthesis and comparison. For a more in-depth study, such methods as comparative historical and problem-chronological were used. The first one allows to identify the patterns of a phenomenon and the second one makes it possible to reveal the nature, properties and changes in the studied reality in chronological order, to present the factual material identified during the research more succinctly and comprehensively. Also the statistical methods were used. Moreover, the principle of combining the macro- and micro-level approaches that contribute to the study of specific communities with typical development was observed. The hermeneutic method – the method of interpretation of text sources was also actively used in the research. An important role was played by the methods of ethnological and ethnographic sciences, the collection of field material in particular.

4. Findings and Discussion

In the first years after October Revolution, home alcohol distilling became widespread in the Mordovian village, as well in the Russia as a whole. This problem becomes particularly acute in the period of "military communism", when it was easier for a peasant to make distilled alcohol from corn than to hand the corn to the state according to the food rationing system. The famine of 1921s-1922s brought down the volume of home alcohol distilling, but after this there was an increase in alcohol production by artisanal method.

According to the archive materials, in the 20s of the XX century there was no decrease in the volume of home alcohol distilling among the Mordvians despite the measures taken by the authorities. Thus, in the protocol of the meeting of the village commission under the Ardatovskiy uezd committee of March 6, 1925, it was stated that "although in 1924 the number of closed home alcohol distilling cases, discovered equipment and hot spots has almost doubled since 1923, however, the amount of the distilled vodka has not diminished" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 1-P. Inventory 1. Case 533. Sheet 25, 1917-1928).

Success in the fight against private alcohol distillation was reported mainly in towns, although the authorities had to legalize a part of alcohol-containing beverages in order to achieve this result. This measure has
not changed the situation in the Mordovian village. According to the village commission of Ardatovskiye uyezd committee, "this legalization of alcohol-containing drinks did not give real results in the village because of the high cost and inaccessibility for peasantry" (Sukhova, 2007).

The effect of the introduction of the state wine monopoly in October 1925 seems to have calmed the authorities: in 1926 the preparation of distilled alcohol "for own use" moves from the category of punishable acts into the category of administrative cases. In 1927 there were no prohibitions imposed by the state on this type of "folk art".

Only in 1928 a new round of repressive measures was initiated against alcohol distillers.

Information reports on the progress of grain collection campaigns and other campaigns give some idea of both the extent of the spread of home alcohol distilling in the Mordovian and Russian villages on the territory of the Mordovian region and the effectiveness of the actions taken by the authorities. Thus, on the 20th of January, 1928 the Romodanovskiy volost executive committee decided on 58 administrative cases regarding distillation and storage of home distilled alcohol at the meeting. During the period from 22 to 28 January 1928, a fine of 110 rubles was imposed on alcohol distillers and the previously imposed fine of 912 rubles was collected in the same volost. In Mokshaleykskaya volost of the Saransky uyezd, the authorities prepared 24 protocols on alcohol distillers, 850 buckets of distillery dregs were poured out, a fine of 487 was recovered and a 370 rubles fine was imposed during the period 22-28 January 1928.

The fines were "strenuously" recovered also in Kochkurovskaya volost. In general, 45 protocols were written in Saranskiy uyezd during the period from 22 to 28 January and a fine in the amount of 1316 rubles was imposed (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 1-P. Inventory 1. Case 533. Sheet 25, 1917-1928).

This fact had little effect on the desire of the population to stop producing home distilled alcohol. For the next seven days (from January 29 to February 4, 1928) Kochkurovskaya volost had again been the leader according to the numbers identified: 14 protocols were made, a fine of 210 rubles was imposed, 4 distilleries were withdrawn, 1058 litres of distillery dregs and 234 liters of distilled alcohol were poured out. In the specified time period, B. Viyasskaya volost also showed good results in recovering fines from alcohol distillers. There the amount of 287 rubles 64 kopecks was recovered and 288 rubles were imposed again. In total, from January 29 to February 4, 71 protocols were written, fines in the amount of 691 rubles were imposed and fines in the amount of 646 rubles 64 kopecks were recovered, 17 distilleries were confiscated, 2804 litres of distillery dregs were poured out and 524.5 litres of home distilled alcohol were withdrawn in Saranskiy uyezd (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 557-P. Inventory 1. Case. 5. Sheets 25-26, 1917-1928).

As can be seen from the above mentioned data, the Mordovian peasantry continued producing alcohol with remarkable persistence despite the prohibitions. While discussing the laws adopted by the authorities on struggling against home alcohol distilling, the peasantry did not always understand the reasons of the prosecution of private distilleries by the state. Therefore, at village meetings, the peasants were asking the following questions: "Why are they struggling with home alcohol distilling?" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 557-P. Inventory 1. Case. 5. Sheet 37, 1917-1928). Agitators persistently told to "unconscious" peasants about the dangers of alcohol, and heard in reply: "Why do doctors drink distilled alcohol knowing that it is harmful?", "Why is purified wine produced, knowing that it is harmful?", "If we stop distilling, will the purified wine stop?", "Why are the prices for purified wine not reducing?" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 1-P. Inventory 1. Case 533. Sheet 27, 1917-1928).
The Mordovian community considered the fact that the state continues to trade alcohol while struggling with home alcohol distilling to be strange. As an alternative to home alcohol distilling, various measures were proposed: from reducing the price of vodka to the abolition of the state trade in alcoholic beverages. At the same time, the peasants themselves realized the futility of such proposals, rightly believing that the state would not refuse from earning revenues from the sale of vodka (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 563-P. Inventory 1. Case 66. Sheet 4, 1917-1928).

The peasants were well aware of the perniciousness of the alcohol addiction, condemned the immeasurable use of it, struggled against it, but at the same time sought to defend "their own", "peasant" interest. Thus, in protocol No. 2 of the meeting of the Starye Picheury village, the following resolution is recorded: "...Consider the announcement of the "Shockworker on the Struggle Against Home Alcohol Distilling" to be absolutely correct, because home alcohol distilling is progressing at a rapid pace which results in massive disasters, the enormous amount of wasted bread, the increased number of murders, thefts, robberies, vandalism, and many other disasters. All present here should pay serious attention to the struggle against home alcohol distilling and do everything possible to assist the police and the village council in clarifying the laws on home alcohol distilling and in identifying the alcohol distillers. In case of inactivity of the village council, bring to the attention of the authorities for bringing to justice. And at the same time the council also makes a wish to terminate the production of the purified wine in the near future" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 563-P. Inventory 1. Case 66. Sheet 4 back side, 1917-1928).

Traditionally, the decision made at the village meeting had the force of the unwritten law among the Mordovians. It would seem that it was the end of home alcohol distilling in the village. But at the next general meeting of citizens the "rumors that some citizens did not stop producing distilled alcohol" were noted. The village meeting issued the following order: "...all citizens should lead the final fight against the production of distilled alcohol and identify all the distillers and bring them to justice" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 563-P. Inventory 1. Case 66. Sheet 7, 1917-1928). However, the private production of alcohol still persisted. The protocol No. 10 of April 26, 1928 allows to ensure that. There it is recorded that in response to the assurances of the Chairman of the village council Gudkov about the elimination of distilled alcohol and about the extremely small numbers of drunkenness in the village, the remark "So far the distillation of alcohol is not noticed, the village council does not take any preventive measures" followed (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 1-P. Inventory 1, Case 533, Sheet 37 back side, 1917-1928). In our opinion, it is appropriate to talk about the collapse of the Mordovian community foundations and the loss of authority of the community institute, rather than about the fact that Mordovian peasants often took the decisions on the complete eradication of home alcohol distilling in order to "clear conscience" and to report to the party and Soviet workers. The example of the Starye Picheury village shows that the Mordovians, though openly advocating for the ending of home alcohol distilling, in fact, were not going to deny themselves this right.

The reasons for this were very different. Among the Mordovians, alcohol is traditionally associated with celebration, important life events, ritual actions. It was always used at weddings, christenings, funerals, memorial services, church celebrations, national ceremonies, in affording assistance, etc.

Carrying out violent withdrawal of grain, buying bread from the population for next to nothing by the Soviet power created a new impetus of the Mordovians to produce distilled alcohol. Especially since distilled alcohol had great "convertibility" and could be sold or exchanged for goods necessary in the household.

In conditions of instability, precarious life situation, in the presence of a constant threat of economic
independence from the new authorities in the life of the Mordovian peasantry, there arose a new factor provoking the consumption of "potion". It is embodied in the principle: "blast it all!". On the one hand, the reaction of this type can be considered as a protective mechanism that allows escaping from the harsh reality, to forget by losing the sense of reality of the hostile world. On the other hand, the desire to "drink away everything earned by hard work, so that no one could get it" was a kind of the peasant protest against the "atrocities" of the new authorities.

The temptation of becoming alcohol addicted increased, especially in a situation in which the local authorities which were obliged to take care of the welfare of people were binge drinking, when the chaos was erupting everywhere, and the society did not have sufficient influence to restore order. At that time the wave of alcohol consumption was able to overwhelm the village. Unfortunately, we have to note such cases in some villages. For example, according to the report of the agitator Shilov on the work of the Nekludovskaya mobile school, there was a "mass drinking bout" in the Erzyan Parakino village in January 1927. After carrying out explanatory work on struggling against alcoholism among the population, it was noted that "listeners supported this struggle and now it can be noted that alcoholism has decreased by 50%" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 1-P. Inventory 1, Case 306. Sheet 3 back side, 1917-1928). Apparently, not only persuasive discussions, but also restoring order at Parakinskii village council and taking control of drinking of the local authorities had their influence. Probably, the reporter "thickened the plot" a little bit in his picture of the rural revelry. But questions like: "How do we destroy distilled alcohol?" (Central State Archive of the Republic of Mordovia. Fund 485-P. Inventory 1. Case 52. Sheet 3, 1917-1928) stimulate the thinking about the existence of the problem of excessive alcohol consumption, at least in some Mordovian villages.

5. Conclusion

The dominance of community consciousness among the majority of the Mordovians oriented the population towards following the traditional order and norms not only in production, but also in public relations. The traditions of peasant solidarity and the authority of public opinion remained the key behavior regulator and the central organizing principle of interpersonal relations in the village. At the same time, the establishment of Soviet power brought changes in the social sphere of life of the Mordovian ethnic group. A new way of life started to be actively introduced in the minds of the masses, a new style of thinking started to be shaped. Under the influence of the pressure of the state and party machine in the depths of the community institute, the processes of transformation of traditional consciousness and foundations take place, in particular, there is a bias in the perception of alcohol consumption, and so far the community is no longer always able to resist this evil with the former efficiency. However, the Mordovian peasantry still had a powerful counterweight restraining the alcoholization of the village population: conservatism, strong influence of community traditions and public opinion, which do not allow the majority of peasants to put distilled alcohol above the interests of their own household and to neglect the rules and interests of the "world". The labour ethic of the Mordovians made sobriety the norm of everyday life. Mass alcohol drinking was possible only on holidays.

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