

MORDOVIAN WATER VEHICLES FROM THE ETHNOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rivers and lakes have always played an important role in the life of the Mordovian population living in the western and eastern regions of Mordovia and neighboring territories. The abundance of water (1,525 rivers and about 500 lakes) contributed to the spread of water transportation. Various types of boats were used in the traditional economy: boats, vessels, rafts and ferries. Boats were made of sawn planks or carved from tree trunks, they could be flat-bottomed or rounded-bottomed, narrow and long (up to 20-30 meters) or, on the contrary, short and wide. The boats could be moved by oars, sails, or poles that were used to push them. Vessels were more complex in construction, often specialized according to their purpose. There were fishing, cargo and passenger vessels (the latter could be either personal or public), but often a vessel would carry people and cargo at the same time. Large ships were moved by horses or burlaks (boat pullers) who walked along the riverbank and pulled the ship by ropes attached to it. From 1817 some vessels were moved by steam. Ferries and rafts were used to cross the river and to raft timber. The terminology, toponymy and native language reflect many facts that testify to the importance of water elements and water vehicles in the life of the Mordvians. Water vehicles are mentioned in incantations and proverbs. Sources (archives, memorial books, field data, etc.) and scientific literature allow us to say that for the Mordva and all the peoples of the Volga region water vehicles are an important part of the subsistence system.

Keywords: water vehicles, types, tradition, Mordovians, shipping, boat pulling, folk knowledge, toponymy

Author Info: Nikonova, Liudmila I. — Doctor of History, Professor, Leading Researcher of the Department of Regional Studies and Ethnology, Research Institute of Humanities under the Government of the Republic of Mordovia (Saransk, Russian Federation). E-mail: congress7@list.ru ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4327-9534>

For citation: Nikonova, L. I. 2025. Mordovian Water Vehicles from the Ethnological Perspective. *Herald of Antopology (Vestnik Antropologii)* 2: 301–323.

References

- Busygin, E. P. 1966. *Russkoe sel'skoe naselenie Srednego Povolzh'ya: istoriko-etnograficheskoe issledovanie material'noj kul'tury (seredina XIX — nachalo XX vv.)* [Russian Rural Population of the Middle Volga Region: Historical and Ethnographic Study of Material Culture (mid-19th — early 20th centuries)]. Kazan': Izdatel'stvo Kazanskogo universiteta. 403 p.
- Fokin, P. P. 2002. Traditsionnoe khoziaistvo chuvashei levoberezh'ia Cheremshana (Maksimkinskii kust) [Traditional Household of the Chuvash People of the Left Bank of the Cheremshan River (Maksimkinskii cluster)]. In *Problemy izucheniia nauchnogo naslediiia N. V. Nikol'skogo: Materialy konferentsii, posviashchennoi 120-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia uchenogo* [Problems of Studying the Scientific Heritage of N. V. Nikol'skiy: Proceedings of the Conference devoted to the 120th Anniversary of the Birth of the Scientist], ed. by V. A. Prokhorova, G. B. Matveev. Cheboksary:

- Chuvashskii gosudarstvennyi institut gumanitarnykh nauk. 102–179.
- Fokin, P. P. 2009. Okhota i rybolovstvo [Hunting and Fishing]. In *Chuvashi: istoriia i kul'tura* [The Chuvash People: History and Culture], ed. by V. P. Ivanov. Vol. 1. Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 245–248.
- Kirdan, B. P. (ed.). 1981. Ustno-poeticheskoe tvorchestvo mordovskogo naroda [Oral and Poetic Creativity of the Mordovian People]. Vol. 7(3). *Kalendarno-obryadovye pesni i zagovory* [Calendar and Ritual Songs and Incantations]. Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 304 p.
- Kolmikov, V. I. 1998. *Zhizn' lesa: Ocherki* [Life of the Forest: Essays]. Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 254 p.
- Kozlov, V. I. (ed.). 1981. *Mordva: Istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki* [The Mordva: Historical and Ethnographic Sketches]. Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 334 p.
- Luzgin, A. S., and V. I. Rogachev. 2005. *Osmyslenie traditsii ornamental'nykh motivov mordvy* [Comprehension of Traditions of Mordvin Ornamental Motifs]. Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 85 p.
- Luzgin, A. S. 2016. *Narodnye promysly mordovskogo kraia. Vtoraia polovina XIX — nachalo XX v. (etnokul'turnye aspekty)* [Folk Crafts of the Mordovian Region. The Second Half of the 19th — the Beginning of the 20th Century (Ethno-Cultural Aspects)]. Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 272 p.
- Mokshin, N. F. 2002. *Material'naia kul'tura mordvy: Etnograficheskii spravochnik* [Material Culture of the Mordvians: Ethnographic Handbook]. Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 208 p.
- Molotova, T. L. 2009. Transport traditsionnyi [Transport Traditional]. In *Entsiklopediia Respubliki Marii El* [Encyclopaedia of the Republic of Mari El], ed. by L. I. Markelov. Yoshkar-Ola: Izdatel'stvo Mariiskogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta yazyka, literatury i istorii, Galereia. 761–762.
- Nikitina, G. A. 1993. Khoziaistvo i zaniatiia [Economy and Occupation]. In *Udmurty: istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki* [Udmurts: Historical and Ethnographic Sketches], ed. by V. V. Pimenov. Izhevsk: Udmurtskii institut istorii, yazyka i literatury UrO RAN. 53–103.
- Poluboyarov, M. S. 1992. *Moksha, Sura i drugie... Materialy k istoriko-toponimicheskomu slovariui Penzenskoi oblasti* [Moksha, Sura and Others... Contents for the Historical and Toponymic Dictionary of the Penza Region]. Moscow. 197 p.
- Shubin, I. A. 1927. *Volga i Volzhskoe sudokhodstvo* [The River Volga and Volga Shipping]. Moscow: Transpechat' NKPS. 908 p.
- Skvortsov, M. I. (ed.). 1994. *Kul'tura Chuvashskogo kraia* [Culture of the Chuvash Region]. Textbook. Part 1. Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo. 350 p.
- Tuvina, A. S. 2004. Sudokhodstvo [Shipping]. In *Mordoviia: Entsiklopediia* [Mordovia: Encyclopedia], ed. by A. I. Sukharev. Vol. 2: M–Ya. Saransk: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut gumanitarnykh nauk pri Pravitel'stve Respubliki Mordoviia. P. 376.
- Vasina, T. A. 2012. Gornozavodskoe naselenie (konets XVIII — nachalo XX veka) [Highland Mining Population (late 18th — early 20th centuries)]. In *Udmurtskaia Respublika: istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki* [Udmurt Republic: Historical and Ethnographic Sketches], ed. by A. E. Zagrebin. Izhevsk: Udmurtskii institut istorii, yazyka i literatury UrO RAN. 131–138.
- Volkova, M. S. 2004. Suriak [Suryak]. In *Mordoviia: Entsiklopediia* [Mordovia: Encyclopedia], ed. by A. I. Sukharev. Vol. 2: M–Ya. Saransk: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut gumanitarnykh nauk pri Pravitel'stve Respubliki Mordoviia. 381.
- Yamashkin, A. A. 2003. Moksha [Moksha]. In *Mordoviia: Entsiklopediia* [Mordovia: Encyclopedia], ed. by A. I. Sukharev. Vol. 2: M–Ya. Saransk: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut gumanitarnykh nauk pri Pravitel'stve Respubliki Mordoviia. 556–557.
- Yamashkin, A. A. 2003. Vad [Vad]. In *Mordoviia: Entsiklopediia* [Mordovia: Encyclopedia], ed. by A. I. Sukharev. Vol. 2: M–Ya. Saransk: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut gumanitarnykh nauk pri Pravitel'stve Respubliki Mordoviia. 190.
- Yamashkin, A. A. 2004. Sura [Sura]. In *Mordoviia: Entsiklopediia* [Mordovia: Encyclopedia], ed. by A. I. Sukharev. Vol. 2: M–Ya. Saransk: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut gumanitarnykh nauk pri Pravitel'stve Respubliki Mordoviia. 279.