

THE CONCEPT OF WILDNESS IN MARI FOLKLORE ABOUT THE SPIRITS OF FOREST SPACE

The author examines the concept of wildness and the image of the “wild (forest) man” in modern Mari folklore. According to Mari beliefs, forests, lowlands, hills are inhabited by host spirits (chodyra kugyza, chodyra oza, leshii) and other demonic characters (ovda, chodyra iya, korem iya, targyltysh). These folklore characters, who can communicate with people, are described as anthropomorphic creatures. According to the local beliefs, they are not isolated from the natural world; rather, they are part of it. This allows us to consider these characters in the context of the image of the “wild man”, which is widely represented in the folklore traditions around the world. In Mari non-fabulous narratives, the main characteristics of the “wild man” are: 1) zoomorphic features; 2) ways of communicating with the human world; 3) the idea that demonic characters represent an ancient population of the region, and a separate biological species. The specifics of the Mari forest spirits are their feminization and defensiveness. Based on field materials collected among the Meadow, Mountain and Eastern Mari people, the author examines the local images of “wild” people, characterized by pronounced demonic features. In particular, the article highlights the main nominations, visual characteristic, and functions of forest folklore characters.

Keywords: *Mari folklore, wild man, ovda, the owner of the forest, Mari demonology, unspeakable prose*

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For citation: Ustyantsev, H. Yu. 2025. The Concept of Wildness in Mari Folklore about the Spirits of Forest Space. *Herald of Anthropology (Vestnik Antropologii)* 3: 211–226.

Funding: The study was funded by the Russian State Foundation, project number 24-18-01119.

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