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The magic of Mari names: Baby-naming traditions

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Alexander Pustyakov

University of Helsinki
PL 24, 00014 (Unioninkatu 40)
University of Helsinki, Finland
esmenek@gmail.com

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Abstract: This article analyses the Mari traditional pre-Christian baby-naming practices in the past. The following questions are considered in this article: the meaning of the name among the Mari, the period of the name bestowing, name givers, methods of selecting names, and the occurrence or absence of naming ceremonies.

The main part of the article is preceded by brief information about the Mari. The Mari are the indigenous inhabitants of the Middle Volga Region in Russia. Nowadays nearly half of all Mari live in the Republic of Mari El, with significant populations in the Kama river catchment area.

There are regional and temporary variables in the naming practices of the Mari. A name in the Mari culture had great significance. On the whole, according to Mari tradition, a child was ordinarily named twice. The first name would be given immediately after birth, while the second (permanent) name would be given after one to three days or more had passed. A permanent name could be changed if the child cried often or was very sick. The parents, midwife or priest were usually the name givers. Ways of choosing a name varied greatly. The choice of a name was determined by beliefs (e.g. meaningful names, magic rituals for correct name choosing), traditions (e.g. patronymic linkage names) and for other reasons.

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Keywords: Mari onomastics, culture, pre-Christian baby-naming practices, personal names, name change.

La magie des noms maris : traditions dans la nomination des enfants

Résumé : Cet article analyse les pratiques traditionnelles préchrétiennes de nomination des enfants chez les Maris. Les questions suivantes sont examinées : la signification du nom individuel chez les Maris, la période de nomination, les personnes qui choisissent le nom individuel, les méthodes de sélection du nom, et la présence ou l'absence de cérémonies d'attribution du nom.

La partie principale de cet article est précédée par une brève section d'information sur les Maris. Les Maris sont un peuple indigène de la Moyenne-Volga, en Russie. Aujourd'hui, environ la moitié des Maris vit dans la république des Maris, Mari El, avec une population importante dans le bassin de la Kama.

Il y a des variations régionales et temporelles dans les pratiques de nomination chez les Maris. Un nom individuel a une grande importance dans la culture marie. Selon la tradition marie, un enfant était nommé deux fois. Le premier nom individuel était donné immédiatement après la naissance, alors que le deuxième, permanent, était donné un à trois jours plus tard. Le nom permanent pouvait être changé, si l'enfant pleurait souvent ou était très malade. Le nom était habituellement choisi par les parents, la sage-femme ou le prêtre. La méthode pour le choisir variait beaucoup. Le choix du nom individuel était déterminé par les croyances (par exemple les noms significatifs ou les rituels magiques pour le choix correct du nom), les traditions (lien avec les noms des parents) et d'autres raisons.

Mots-clés : Onomastique marie, culture, pratiques de nomination préchrétiennes, noms individuels, changement de nom.

Die Namenmagie der Mari: Gebräuche der Namengebung bei Neugeborenen

Zusammenfassung: Im Aufsatz wird die traditionelle vorchristliche Namengebung der Mari (veraltet *Tscheremissen*, als Sprache *Tscheremissisch*) untersucht. Es werden folgende Fragen behandelt: die Bedeutung des Namens in der marischen Weltanschauung, die zeitliche Begrenzung der Namengebung, die Namengeber, die Methoden der Namenwahl, das Auftreten zeremonieller bzw. förmlich schlichter Namengebung.

Dem Hauptteil geht eine kurze Übersicht über die Mari voraus, die ein indigenes Volk in der Mittleren Wolgaregion in Russland sind. Etwa die Hälfte der Mari lebt heute in der Republik Mari El. Außerdem ist eine bedeutende Gruppe östlich davon, im Einzugsgebiet der Kama, ansässig.

Die Traditionen der Namengebung variieren sowohl territorial als auch zeitlich. Der Name eines Neugeborenen hatte in der historischen marischen Kultur wesentliche Bedeutung. Ein Kind erhielt für gewöhnlich zweimal einen Namen. Der erste, vorläufige Name wurde gleich nach der Geburt verliehen. Der permanente Name wurde ein bis drei Tage, manchmal auch noch später, gegeben. Auch der permanente Name konnte gewechselt werden, wenn das Kind oft weinte oder krank wurde. Namengeber waren gewöhnlich die Eltern, die Hebamme oder der heidnische Geistliche. Es gab verschiedene Methoden der Namenwahl. Diese war bestimmt durch religiöse Überzeugungen (z.B. bedeutungsvolle Namen, magische Rituale der Wahl des richtigen Namens), Traditionen (z.B. patronymische Verbindungen) und andere Gesetzmäßigkeiten.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Namenkunde der Mari, Kultur der Mari, Personennamen, vorchristliche Namengebung, Namenwechsel.

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The magic of Mari names: Baby-naming traditions

ALEXANDER PUSTYAKOV

Introduction

The Mari are a Finno-Ugric ethnic group living in the Middle Volga and lower Kama region of Russia. In literature predating the October Revolution of 1917, the Mari are referred to as Cheremis, and they are often denoted with this ethnonym even in later scholarly literature. Today nearly half of all Mari live in the Republic of Mari El, with significant populations also in the Kama River catchment area. Traditionally, the Mari people have practised a nature-worshiping pagan faith.

The practice of naming a child among the Mari have significantly varied depending on the region they inhabit, as well as the period from which records date. As shown by ethnographic field expeditions, traditions of naming can differ to some degree not only among various ethnographic microgroups, but also across different villages and even families, which is probably even more common for later periods. This variation in the traditions and rituals of baby-naming is conditioned by the influence of the religion and culture of neighbouring peoples, the migrations of the Mari population, changes in their level of socioeconomic development, as well as the degree to which they retain traditional rituals. All these factors have led to the disappearance or transformation of certain Mari customs, but as Tamara Fedianovich (1990: 51) writes, it is rites connected with the birth of a child that have undergone the greatest changes.

The main focus of this paper is on the Mari people's traditional pre-Christian baby-naming practices and name use in the past. The issues to be addressed in the article are: (1) What has the role of names and naming been in Mari culture? (2) How many days pass before a name is given? (3) Who chooses the name for the baby? (4) How is the name chosen? (5) Is the name bestowed in accordance with a ceremony or without one? This study, besides its descriptive aspect, also offers an explanatory approach. A reconstruction of the most ancient traditions is not within this article's scope, but general conclusions will be presented. In addition, the article introduces wherever possible evidence of the traditions of the peoples with whom the Mari have had or continue to have

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contacts. In cases where a particular ritual, according to the information available, has a narrow, local use, then the specific region is named.

Traditional baby-naming practices represent an important issue for Mari onomastics, but currently the literature on them is limited. A number of publications have been devoted to topics of Mari anthroponymy, but the rituals of naming have not received close scholarly attention. There are several onomastic works which briefly describe the name choosing ways and principles among the Mari (e.g. Gordeev 1970: 259–260; Pustyakov 2017: 328–338). The traditions of naming in the ethnographic literature are mainly discussed together with the traditional maternity rites of the Mari (see e.g. Molotova 1993: 88; 2015: 78–81; Toidybekova 1997: 278–281; Fedianovich 1997: 92–103, etc.).

Ethno-linguistic description of the Mari

For thousands of years, the Middle Volga has been a place of coexistence for different peoples. On this territory, there are three different faiths: Orthodoxy, Islam, and paganism (in order to avoid a negative connotation, "animism" is used in this paper rather than "paganism"). The Mari living in this territory have historically had contacts with other peoples and their respective cultures and languages. The long-term coexistence in the same territory and, in general, the same living conditions of different peoples in the Volga region (Turkic, Finno-Ugric) contributed to the formation of unified cultural attitudes and religious beliefs. The Middle Volga region in this sense is a uniform historical and cultural area. Many similarities in the beliefs and culture of the peoples inhabiting the area have been recorded (Vladykin 1994: 64).

Christianization of the Mari proceeded slowly, and only in the 18th and 19th centuries did this process undergo significant acceleration. In spite of the fact that the majority of Mari have converted to Christianity, a significant portion also follow pre-Christian traditions, i.e. they are simultaneously adherents of two faiths. The Mari continue to hold pagan rites in sacred groves and perform other traditional ceremonies in the Republic of Mari El and elsewhere. The nature-worshiping pagan faith is also reflected in Mari naming practices and the choice of names.

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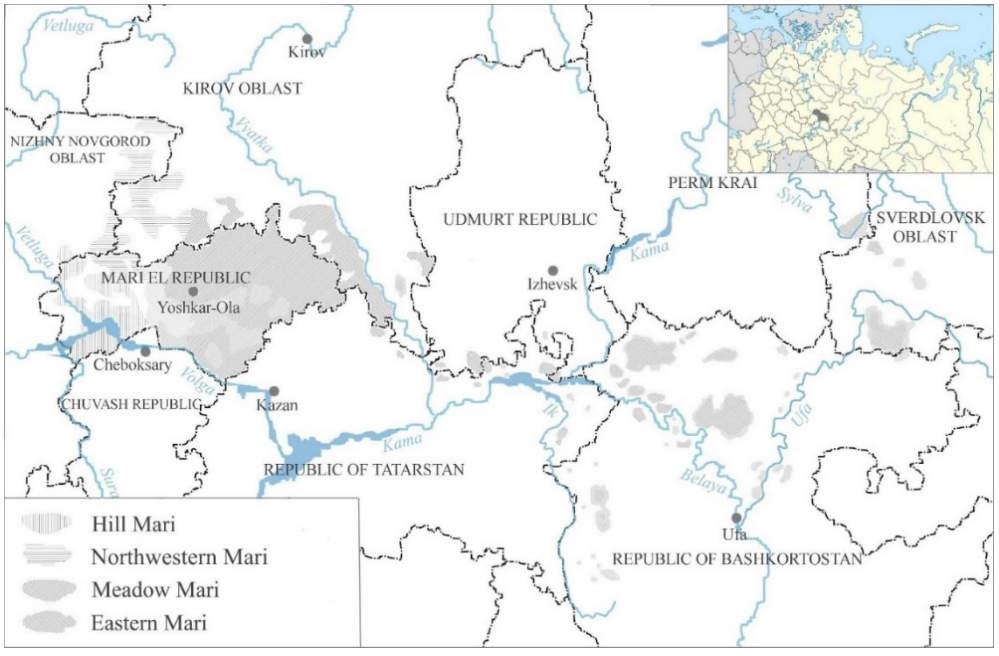


Figure 1: The map of ethnographic groups of Mari.

There are four main groups of Mari: Hill, Northwestern, Meadow and Eastern Mari. The Hill Mari are a Mari ethnographic group that live compactly within the Republic of Mari El on the right bank of the Volga, as well as in small numbers in adjoining regions of the left bank of the Volga. The Northwestern Mari live in the southwestern districts of Kirov Oblast, as well as in northeastern districts of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. The Hill Mari and Northwestern Mari, unlike the Meadow Mari, were subject earlier and more intensively to the influence of the Russian language and the Orthodox Christian faith, but they preserved elements of pagan belief. The numerically largest group of Mari are the Meadow Mari, who live predominantly in the Republic of Mari El on the left bank of the Volga, but also in the southern districts of Kirov Oblast. The bulk of Meadow Mari have converted to Christianity. A smaller portion of the Mari population, mainly in the east and northeast of the Republic of Mari El, have remained adherents of the traditional pagan faith of their people. The Eastern Mari are a group of the Mari people who live to the east of the Republic of Mari El in the republics of Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Udmurtia and in the Kirov, Perm and Sverdlovsk Oblasts. The ancestors of the Eastern Mari fled there to avoid Christian persecution and hefty taxes, and the peak of their migration to the east came in the first half of the 18th century. A portion of the Eastern Mari has remained unchristianized down to the present day and still adhere to their

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traditional beliefs. It should be noted, however, that young people among the Eastern Mari are nowadays converting to Christianity.

Baby-naming practices of the Mari in early sources and other material

For research data, I have used the following: 1) published ethnographic works; 2) the manuscript collection of scientific texts of the Mari Research Institute (Yoshkar-Ola, Russia) and the archives of the Finno-Ugrian Society (Helsinki, Finland), and 3) data collected during fieldwork in Meadow Mari and Eastern Mari territories (2010–2018).

The first brief testimonies of child-naming traditions by the Mari date from the 17th and 18th centuries. Naming practices were noted by travellers who visited the Middle Volga region in these centuries (Adam Olearius, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, Johann Gottlieb Georgi, Nikolai Rychkov). Their works contain brief information about how names were chosen and given to children among the peoples of the Middle Volga. However, early comments on name-giving by ethnographers and travellers give overall only fragmentary evidence of the methods of name-giving characteristic of particular ethnographic groups among these peoples. In addition, some travellers from the 17th and 18th centuries provide only some general information about the life and culture of several peoples. They give only general information applicable for all of the peoples they describe (Miller 1791: 65), or they refer to different peoples using only the single ethnonym "Cheremis Tatars" (Olearius 1656: 343; Aiplatov & Ialtaev 2014: 6–8). As a result, it is difficult to determine to what extent the traditions described really apply to all of the peoples named in these works, and who exactly is being referred to here with the ethnonym Cheremis Tatar – the Mari or the Chuvash.[1]

Adam Olearius in his *Vermehrte newe Beschreibung der Muscowitischen und Persischen Reyse* gives a brief account of naming among the "Cheremis Tatars":

> Wenn ein Kind ein halb Jahr alt, bestimmen sie einen gewissen Tag, an welchem dem Kinde sol der Nahme gegeben werden; wer dann am selbigen Tage zuerst zu ihnen kömpt oder fürüber gehet, dessen Nahme muß das Kind bekommen. (Olearius 1656: 343)

The ethnonym "Cheremis Tatars" in Olearius's work can be understood as the Mari (Cheremis) as well as the Chuvash. The editors of the *Khrestomatiia po kul'ture Chuvashskogo kraia* (Reader on the culture of the

[1] It is known that in sources dating from the 16th to the 17th centuries, the term "Cheremis" could also refer to the Chuvash (Aiplatov & Ialtaev 2014: 6).

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Chuvash region), Nikolai Egorov and Margarita Danilova believe that the term "Cheremis Tatars" in Olearius's work refers to the Chuvash (Khrestomatiia 2001: 80, 83). Historians Gennadii Aiplatov and Ivan Ialpaev (2014: 8–9) do not agree with the position of Egorov and Danilova and, pointing to a number of errors in the reader, they offer a series of convincing proofs that the term "Cheremis Tatars" can refer to both the Mari and the Chuvash. Aiplatov & Ialtaev (ibid.: 12), following the editors of the reader, believe that Olearius's account of name-giving should be ascribed to the Chuvash, because according to the information available to them, such a name-giving practice is not characteristic of the Mari but "survived among the Chuvash until as late as the early 20th century". Without entering into polemics with the authors of these works, it is worth pointing to a number of significant facts that, in my opinion, allow one to attribute Olearius's description of name-giving customs to an equal degree to the Mari. One should also take into account the existence of inaccurate and unreliable claims about name-giving in Olearius's book.

First of all, one should note that according to much later ethnographic descriptions, the naming of a child among both the Mari and Chuvash (and other Turkic peoples of Middle Volga region) is done right after the child's birth (Chuvashi 2009: 120) and not months later as Olearius claimed. In Olearius's view, it might be a matter of the giving of a second, permanent name.[2] According to Timofei Jevsevjev,[3] among the Eastern Mari a child received a second name between two weeks and six months after birth (Ethnographica IX: 94), but this may be the influence of the Turkic culture (cf. Bikbulatov & Fatykhova 1991: 103). The naming of a child after a guest (MFE–RB Mish. 2016) or passerby (Sigov 1929: 103) is known, according to field expeditions and ethnographic works, among the Eastern Mari.

Johann Gottlieb Georgi in his encyclopedic work *Beschreibung aller Nationen des Russischen Reichs*, published in the late 18th century, writes that among the Mari (Cheremis), a boy is given the name of the first man to visit the woman giving birth, while a girl is given the name of the first woman (Georgi 2005: 73). Among its description of Chuvash and Udmurt customs, however, Georgi's book does not mention any practice of naming children after a guest or with a guest's participation (ibid.: 82, 93). The information on the Mari and Chuvash given in the book was collected by Georgi on site. In addition, Georgi used materials by Johan Peter Falck and Gerhard Friedrich Müller (ibid.: 26, 11).

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[2] The Mari practised a custom of naming a child twice (see below).

[3] All forms in languages that are not written with the Latin alphabet are given in transliteration in accordance with the American Library Association and the Library of Congress (ALA-LC). The name of the folklorist and ethnographer Timofei Jevsevjev is given in accordance with how his name is recorded in the National Archives of Finland, where his Ethnographica collection is stored.

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The second half of the 19th century and early 20th century saw the publication of many works of an ethnographic nature dedicated to the customs and culture of certain regional Mari groups, including traditions of name-giving. In the early 20th century, a rich collection of material on the Mari people's spiritual and material culture was gathered by Jevsevjev. This researcher's manuscripts are now held in the Finno-Ugrian Society's collection at the National Archives of Finland. Starting in the 1950s, material on the spiritual culture of the Mari was collected during field expeditions in the regions where the Mari live. The material from these field expeditions is held in the manuscript collection of the Mari Research Institute. On the whole, the data on traditional methods of naming in the ethnographic literature and other sources is quite scanty, but what we do have provides us with a general picture of the types of name-giving ceremonies.

Pre-Christian name-giving traditions among the Finno-Permic peoples

In this part of the article, I will describe the baby-naming traditions peculiar to the Finno-Permic group of people speaking languages of the Finno-Permic branch of Uralic. On account of the common history of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Volga region (the Mari, Mordvins, Udmurts), including strong influences from Turkic and Slavic cultures, the baby-naming rites of these peoples are similar. In the traditions of the Mari, Mordvins and Udmurts there are specific features, not elaborated on in the available material, for all three peoples. According to Fedyanovich (1997: 92–96), the name of the newborn was given by a midwife, religious specialists (among the Mari and Udmurts), or parents. It is noted that the names of birds, animals, and objects were common among the Udmurts and Mordvins, as well as names related to the time or place of birth of the child. For instance, among the Udmurts, among other ways of choosing a name, the following are known: the name could be chosen by the priest with the help of a magic ritual, it could be determined according to the name of a visitor, or the youngest member of the family could be asked to say some name, which was subsequently given to the newborn (Atamanov 1985: 93–95). Each of these three peoples have a traditional view that by changing the name of the child one might protect the child from illness or death.

Due to the early Christianization of the Finnic peoples, information about the pre-Christian baby-naming practices remains very fragmentary. A brief sketch of the traditional ways of naming is reflected in the letters of the Novgorod archbishops Macarius and Theodosius, dating from 1534 and 1548 (Dzhakson et al. 1990: 61, 68). According to their information, in the mid-16th century, the Karelians, Ingrians, and Votes, when the newborn was named, turned to pagan rituals. To name the baby the priest (arbuj) was invited, who

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performed a magic ritual to determine a name for the child. Among the Finnic peoples, it was customary to give the newborn the name of relatives (ancestors) (Forsman 1891: 27–29; Ainiala et al. 2012: 159). For example, pre-Christian Finnish names are often compound. The most frequent components are *Hyvä* (good), *Iha* (glad, good spirit), *Mieli* (pleasant), *Päivä* (sun, day), *Toivo* (hope, promise), *Valta* (power), and *Vilja* (grain) (Ainiala et al. 2012: 158).

More accurate data on pre-Christian naming practices are known with the Sami. According to the Sami, one's name and identity are directly related to each other. Therefore, the mother prayed to the birth goddess to help choose a name for her newborn and the identity connected with it. In the event that the name of the child or adult did not match with their identity, the name was replaced with a new one (Valtonen 2017: 293). After the baptism of the newborn in the church, the Sami held a new naming ceremony during which the church name was annulled. The new name was often the name of a relative, and it was chosen, at least at a later time, according to the following principle: the eldest son received the name of the paternal grandfather, the second son took the name of the maternal grandfather, the third son received the name of the father, and so on. A metal object was usually placed in baptismal water, which later became an amulet for the newborn, and birch branches were often placed in it as well (Forsman 1891: 33; Kiviniemi 1982: 46–47).

The meaning of a name

The traditional names of the Mari are inseparable from their language, history, belief system, and other aspects of their culture. In the past, the Mari believed in the power of words and the power of religious figures and folk healers, as Nikolai Nikol'skii (1920: 69) writes. The giving of a name endows a newborn with the status of a human being and integrates him or her into a particular society. Names and naming in Mari culture have supernatural implications. Being an integral part of the person, a name was an object and instrument of magic. According to Mari belief, a name was able to protect the child and bring wishes for him/her to life. According to Mari beliefs, a name had to fit, it had to match the person, and if it did then the person would be happy and healthy. In the event of a name's "unsuitability" for a child (manifested by crying or illness), magical rites were carried out in order to determine a name that would be suitable. Based on these conceptions, the Mari developed ordered methods of giving children names. The following information attested to the importance and place of names in a person's life. A name was given to a child soon after birth (Iakovlev 1887: 50; Ethnographica VI: 71; IX: 95; XIII: 27; MFE–RB Mish. 2018, etc.), for if a child died without a name his soul turned into an evil spirit, walking the woods and screaming at

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night, catching people and tickling them to death (Gerd 1993: 70). Even stillborn children were given a name[4] (MFE–RB Mish. 2016, 2018).

Initial and later naming

According to ethnographic accounts, a Mari child was given a name once or even twice. The practice of naming twice was developed because of high infant mortality and in keeping with the Mari belief that a newborn must have a name by necessity. Thus, the first name was usually temporary, while the second was permanent. However, the first name could remain unchanged if the parents liked it (Ethnographica IX: 95; MFE–RB Mish. 2016). Mari who had turned to Orthodoxy but had not completely abandoned their pre-Christian traditions, gave a child a "bath name" (see below) that could be either a traditional Mari one or a later Christian borrowing. Afterwards, when the child was baptized, the parents would replace the "bath name" with a new one taken from a saint's name, but parents often continued to use the traditional name (Iakovlev 1887: 51).

The child's "permanent" name could be changed later, for example, during the ritual of "selling". This custom is known among all Mari groups. More narrowly attested is the ritual of giving a child a new name if the child is rescued from drowning (more details are given in the section *Name changes and "child selling"*).

It should be noted that according to many ethnographic works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, not all Mari who adhered to pre-Christian traditions followed the custom of giving a child first a "bath name" and later a permanent one. It is likely that not all works give the full picture of how names were given. It can also be assumed that in the second half of the 19th century until the 20th century, when the majority of the most ample ethnographic descriptions were compiled, in various traditions the principle of staged naming of children had broken down to some degree.

Period of initial and later naming

The first name is denoted in the Mari language by the expression *monča lüm*[5] '*banya* (bathhouse) name'. This is due to the fact that births took place usually in the family's bathhouse, where the baby was bathed after birth. Only more rarely were children born in the home. According to my respondents'

[4] This tradition finds a parallel among the Udmurts living across the Kama River (Minniiakhmetova 2003: 42).

[5] The Finno-Ugric transcription system is used in the transcription of Mari.

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data from the village of Churaevo and Sosnovka, the child must be named during the first bathing (MFE–RB Mish. 2016, 2018). In relation to the first name, Gavriil Iakovlev (1887: 50) uses the expression *pupochnoe imja* "umbilical cord name" and notes that a midwife gave the name to the child when the umbilical cord was cut. Jevsevjev (Ethnographica IX: 95), describing the Eastern Mari, writes that "the first name is given at birth, i.e. when the umbilical cord was cut by the elderly woman." The child was given a name during the cutting of the umbilical cord among the Mari of the former Urzhum province (in what is now the northeastern part of the Republic of Mari El and nearby regions of Kirov Oblast on the right bank of the Vyatka River). The process of name-giving was described in detail by Vasilii Miliutin and Petr Shestakov in their publications on Mari life from the mid-19th century:

> При разрешении от бремени призывают по несколько бабок, которыя водятся с больною. По разрешении одна из них, если родится сын, возьмет топор, на обух котораго положит пупок, потюкивая ножом, приговаривает *"Будь плотник и трудолюбив"*; даст имя младенцу, потом и отсекает пуп. А если родится дочь, то пуп отрезывает на прялке, приговаривая *"Будь трудолюбива и заботлива до пряжи"*. Тоже даст имя и отсекает пуп. После сего родившаго младенца отец возьмет непочетой каравай хлеба, от коего отрежет небольшую краюшку, положит в зыбку, называя его именем, какое дала бабка при говоре: *"Будь тверд здоровьем как этот хлеб и будь счастлив"*. (Miliutin 2002: 146) [During birth, several old women are called to accompany the one giving birth. As the child is born one of them, if it is a boy, will take an axe and lay the umbilical cord over its buttocks. She will tap it with a knife while saying "Be a craftsman and hardworking." She will then give the child a name and cut the cord. If the child is a girl, she cuts the umbilical cord on a spinning wheel while saying "Be diligent and attentive to spinning." She then gives the girl a name and cuts the cord. After that the father will take a whole piece of bread, cut off a piece and place it in the cradle while calling it the name that the old woman gave and saying "Be firm in health like this bread and be happy."]

A similar custom of name-giving is known among the Udmurts (Atamanov 1985: 93–94). Among the Chuvash, the cutting of the umbilical cord was done in a similar way (Egorova 2003: 39, 47).

In the 20th century when childbirth began to take place in hospitals, among the Eastern Mari the bathing and naming rituals were conducted after leaving the hospital (MFE–RB Mish. 2016). The midwife would give the child a name if the parents had still not chosen one. Names could be motivated by the Mari language, i.e. meaningful, or they could be modern ones borrowed from other languages.

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The permanent name was generally given to a child from one to three days after birth (Rittikh 1870: 191; Ethnographica VI: 72; XIII: 27). With the Eastern Mari the period from birth to the giving of a permanent name could in specific cases be longer: from two weeks to six months (Ethnographica IX: 94; cf. above Olearius 1656: 343). In the early sources (from the 17th and 18th centuries) I could not find any information that a child was named twice.

The period in which a child was named was determined by the Mari conception of an inseparable bond between a person's soul and his or her name, as well as sociological and family factors (e.g. the death of previous children).

Name-givers

In Mari culture, various individuals have had the right to name children.

The midwife (midwives). The child's first name was often given by the midwife (Mari *kâlâmde kuva* (*kuvavaj*, *vava*), *pavâška*) (see e.g. Skalozubov 1892: 36; Ethnographica VI: 71; IX: 94; XIII: 27; MEE–76, f. 76, p. 11; MFE–RB Mish. 2016; cf. Gorodskoi 1864: 24; Alonzov 1865: 6–7). The midwife was guided by different principles in this case. Among the Morki Mari[6] the midwife would choose the second permanent name as well by performing certain magical actions (Ethnographica VI: 72).

A sacrificer (or fortune-teller) designates the name. In the ethnographic literature it is repeatedly noted that a sacrificer is invited to name the child. In the Meadow Mari language the sacrificer is called a *kart* and in Eastern Mari a *molla*. Fortune-tellers in Hill Mari are known as *mužan*. The sacrificer usually performs magical actions to reveal the correct and appropriate name (Fuks 1840: 252–253; Alonzov 1865: 6–7; Znamenskii 1867: 68; Rittikh 1870: 191).

On behalf of a visitor (or the visitor chooses the name). According to the early sources (Miller 1791: 65; Sigov 1929: 103) and field data (MFE–RB Mish. 2016), the child was named on behalf of the first visitor or passerby. Miller (1791: 65–66) notes that among the Mari, Chuvash and Udmurt, a visitor who comes to the house soon after a birth was considered a good omen. He points out that if a woman enters the house where a boy had been born, she chooses a name for him. Georgi (2005: 73) writes that the first man who visits a woman after childbirth gives the name to a boy, whereas the first female visitor gives the name to a girl.[7] Subsequently, the child calls this person "father" or "mother".

[6] The Morki Mari are those (Meadow) Mari living in the Morki region of the Republic of Mari El.

[7] This means perhaps that the guest gave the child his/her own name and did not assign a completely different name to the child.

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The child's parents could also name the child (Alonzov 1865: 6–7; Ethnographica IX: 94; MEE–76, f. 76, p. 11; MFE–RB Mish. 2016). Possible names could be discussed beforehand by parents even if the child would later be named by somebody else, such as a sacrificer or a midwife (Fuks 1840: 253; Gorodskoi 1864: 24).

Other name-givers. In the ethnographic literature there is also some information about other name-givers, such as members of the older generation like grandparents (Sigov 1929: 83; cf. Ivanov & Sepeev 1994: 83) or other elders (Znamenskii 1867: 68). An interesting account comes from Nikolai Rychkov (1770: 92–93), who states that for the newborn boy the name was chosen by the maternal grandfather, while for the girl the name was chosen by the maternal grandmother.

As the name-giver can be considered a person responsible for establishing or forming the child's identity (Alford 1988: 36–40), it can be said that a person who has experience is regarded as an important figure in the formation of the child's identity. This can be illustrated from the following quotation drawn from records of field data stored in the Mari Research Institute:

> *Могай павышка, тугаяк икшуво лиеш манеш.* (MEE–76, f. 76, p. 13)
> *As the midwife is, so too shall the child be…*

Religious specialists in turn have been able to determine the correct name for the child. We can speculate that in the case of visitors as "name-bringers", they might be assumed to be people with a suitable and correct name, and were thought to be sent by supernatural higher forces. In the process of naming, the main role was usually given to a man in naming a boy child, and to a woman in naming a girl child (cf. Rychkov 1770: 92–93; Fuks 1840: 253).

Ways of choosing names and ceremonies of naming

There have been several traditional ways of naming a child among the Mari. In the majority of ethnographic works, it is not indicated which of the naming methods described relate to the giving of the first name and which relate to the second, permanent name. However, some of the methods described can be tentatively ascribed to a certain stage of naming.

The first name could be given according to the day of the week. Some information about this method of naming is provided in the ethnographic literature. This method of naming was found among the Eastern Mari, for example, as reported by field expeditions in the Mishkinsky district. Hence, if a child was born on Thursday, then this child would be named with an initial component *izi-* < Mari *izarn'a* 'Thursday' (< *izi* 'small' + *arn'a* 'week'): *Izerge*

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(< *iz(i) (< izarn'a)* + *erge* 'son') if a boy and *Izüdâr* (< *iz(i)* + *üdâr* 'daughter, girl') if a girl. If a child was born on Friday (Mari *kugarn'a* < *kugu* 'big' + *arn'a* 'week'), a boy was given the name *Kugerge* (< *kug(u)* (< *kugarn'a*) + *erge* 'son') and a girl *Kugüdâr* (< *kug(u)* + *üdâr*). A child born on Saturday (Mari *šumat(keče)*) would be named *Šumat* (Iakovlev 1887: 50; Ethnographica VI: 71–72; XIII: 27). According to Jevsevjev, the Eastern Mari could use other names for children born on Thursday and Saturday: Thursday – *Izibaj, Izambaj, Imanaj*; Saturday – *Šumataj* (Ethnographica IX: 94). Among the Eastern Mari other names given to children born on these days have been documented: Thursday – *Izikaj* (f), *Izâlan* (m), *Izâlaj* (m), Friday – *Kugobaj* (*Kugubaj*) (m), Saturday – *Šumaj* (m), *Šumatij* (m), *Šumatbaj* (m) (MFE–RB Mish. 2016). Some informants noted that the child should be given a name that starts with the same letter as the day of the week on which the child was born. For example, a girl who was born on Friday (Mari *kugarn'a*) could be named e.g. *Kâzâkaj* or *Külvüstan*. The name *Izerge*, which was given to a boy born on Thursday, is recorded in different variants among the Mari in all districts (cf. Chernykh 1995: 158), indicating that the first name was used as the permanent one.

The significance of Thursday, Friday and Saturday is explained by some aspects of Mari culture. According to Mari beliefs, Friday is a holy day (Znamenskii 1867: 61; Tikhomirov 1896: 8; MFE–RB Mish. 2016), and this shows the influence of Turkic (Chuvash) culture. A child born on Friday was considered lucky. Thursday is a "clean" day. Saturday also held a special position among the Mari people, again showing the influence of the Chuvash (see Galkin 1985: 37–39).

According to Iakovlev (1887: 50), children born on other days of the week were given names that followed other principles. However, in the Mishkinsky district, for example, children born on other days of the week were given the following names: Wednesday (Mari *vürgeče*) – *Vürzümbaj*, Sunday (Mari *rušarn'a*) – *Rushaj (Rusaj), Rušin'ga*. One informant said that the name *Kubuka* was used for children born on a Tuesday (Mari *kuškâžmo*). Naming children according to the day of the week consists, according to informants, of having the first component or even letters of the name match the beginning of the name of the day (MFE–RB Mish. 2016).

On the other hand, a name for a child derived from the name of the day could come about due to the child being "sold", and it was not the child's initial "bathing" name. Informants told, for example, of a case when an ill child during the rite of "sale", on the recommendation of an elderly woman, had his name changed to *Šumat* (< *šumatkeče* 'Saturday'), since this child had been born on a Saturday and, accordingly, this name would be appropriate for him (MFE–RB Mish. 2016).

The child's name could be determined by the place where the child was born (*Nurij* (m) < *nur* 'field' > surname *Nurijev*; *Pasubaj* (m) < *pasu* 'field' + *baj*), or by an event or holiday (*Pajram*, *Pajramal* (m) < *pajrem, pajram* 'holiday', *Semik, Semikej* (m) < *Semâk* 'Semik, a celebration in May or early June').

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In the past, the Mari used various forms of divination or enchantment in selecting names. Magic actions were usually performed by a sacrificer or fortune-teller, a midwife or an older person in the family. In some sources, it is said that a prayer or spell was said during the birth of a child or during the ritual of naming (Rittikh 1870: 191; on the Vetluga Mari,[8] see Tikhomirov 1896: 9; on the Kama Mari,[9] see Kharuzin 1883: 277–278).

The sacrificer, for example, was involved in the following magical actions. When the baby cried, the sacrificer took him in his arms, swung him around and listed different names. The baby was given the name that was uttered at the moment when it stopped crying (Fuks 1840: 252; Znamenskii 1867: 68) or started crying (Rittikh 1870: 191). A similar custom is also known among the Chuvash, but the magical ritual there was carried out by the midwife (Egorova 2003: 50). Among the Mari, the sacrificer performed another ritual as well. A fire was lit near a newborn child with the help of flint and steel. The child was given the name uttered when the tinder erupted into flames (Fuks 1840: 252–253; Alonzov 1865: 6–7; Znamenskii 1867: 68; Sigov 1929: 103, etc.). Aleksandra Fuks (1840: 252) and Aleksandr Rittikh (1870: 191) note that this method was used if the child was not crying. It must be noted that in local traditions (probably during the time when traditions of naming children with the help of magic were falling into decline) the sacrificer could chose a name in agreement with the parents without performing any magical ritual (Fuks 1840: 253). If a sacrificer was missing for any reason at the moment of naming the child, his function could be taken over by any of the elders in the family (cf. Znamenskii 1867: 68).

Jevsevjev (Ethnographica VI: 72–74) described the following ritual. A midwife would knead dough made from rye flour and make three loaves. Each loaf was given a name. The selection of these names depended on the principle of co-naming, i.e. the name of the son must be consonant with the father's name, the daughter's name with the name of the mother. The bread was baked and the name of the child was determined according to which loaf had the densest consistency. This method was used by the Morki Mari when choosing a permanent name. A similar custom is described by Prof. Stefano Sommier[10] (1999: 199) with the

[8] The Vetluga Mari are a population of the Northwestern Mari living in the northeastern regions of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.

[9] The Kama Mari are Eastern Mari living in the southern part of the area between the rivers Vyatka and Kama (south Republic of Udmurtia, north Republic of Tatarstan).

[10] Sommier (1999: 190) does not specify which Mari group this information came from. The author was in the Urals in the villages of Karshi, Artem'evka, Nizhnii Potash, Iuva (Krasnoufimsky District of Sverdlovsk Oblast), and on the Volga in the villages of Pet''ial and Sotnur (Volzhsky District of Mari El Republic). Most of the information that he relates is on the Eastern Mari, but such a method of naming is described among the Morki Mari, the neighbours of the Sotnur Mari.

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difference that the bread is baked by the matron of the house and not the midwife. Besides this, no further information is given on how names were chosen.

Jevsevjev notes that among the Morki Mari, guests could be invited to celebrate the giving of a name:

> Во время наречения имени бывает угощение. Для этого стряпают блины и варят кашу. Зовут близких соседей и родственников, которые приходя в дом новорожденнаго, посадятся за стол. До начала кушания произносится особая молитва о здравии новорожденнаго. Во время молитвы разрезывается тот каравай, который был с именем новорожденнаго и куски положатся на стол, сюда ставятся блины рядом с хлебом ставятся блины и чашка с кашей. Все приходящие кладут деньги на масло. После кушания считаются деньги, если в копейках получится не парно, то есть в нечет, то новрожденный счастлив. (Ethnographica VI: 179–180) [When a name was given, guests were invited. Pancakes and porridge were made for the occasion. Close neighbours and relatives were called and they would come into the home of the newborn and sit down at the table. At the beginning of the meal, a special prayer would be said for the health of the newborn. During the prayer, a loaf with the name of the newborn was cut and a piece placed on the table, the pancakes were put there, and next to the bread, pancakes and a bowl with porridge were set. All of the visitors contributed money for oil. After the meal the money was counted, and if there were an odd number of kopecks, then the newborn would be lucky.]

According to Kuzebai Gerd's (1993: 70) data, the Birsk Mari[11] had a custom of naming frail children in the following way: the child was brought to the *pechka* (the traditional oven in rural homes) and the names of dead ancestors were shouted out. If the child made a sound while one of the names was uttered, he or she would be given that name. The oven and its chimney figure in the naming customs of the Udmurts across the Kama River (Minniiakhmetova 2003: 40, 41). The oven was a sacred place and seen as connected with the supernatural world (ibid.: 41), and thus names "received" through the oven chimney have a protective power. Jevsevjev (Ethnographica IX: 94–95) notes that the Eastern Mari[12] often gave children hereditary names (names of relatives). It should be noted that across different Mari traditions, the rules and prohibitions on naming children after deceased members of the

[11] Gerd (1993: 91) calls the Birsk Mari those who lived in the Birsky Canton of the Bashkir ASSR. The Birsky Canton included the territory of the northern and northwestern parts of Bashkortostan. Information provided in Gerd's work was reported by a resident of the village of Ishimovo in the Mishkinsky district.

[12] Jevsevjev's work contains information gathered in the village of Kel'tei in the Kalegin volost of the Birsky Canton (now the village Bol'shoi Kel'tei in the Kaltasinsky district of the Republic of Bashkortostan), as well as the village of Iuva in the Iuva volost (now the village of Iuva in the Krasnoufimsk okrug of Sverdlovsk Oblast).

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family could differ. Field expeditions to settlements in the Mishkinsky and Birsky districts (Bashkortostan) have not confirmed that children are named after forebears. According to accounts from respondents, if children were given the name of a deceased forebear, then he/she would repeat the life and fate of that forebear. In this case, the children would be deprived of luck (Mari *râskal*) (MFE–RB Mish. 2016, 2018), and so children were not given the same names as forebears. According to Tamara Molotova (2015: 80), among the Mari newborn children could be named after deceased ancestors, especially those who were successful and positive.

To sum up, the primary principle in choosing names was co-naming (Mari *počela l'ümdaš*): the child's name should be consonant with the parents' name. A boy's name was supposed to be consonant with the name of his father, a girl's name with her mother's name, that is, the names of the children and the parents had to contain the same initial or final elements, i.e. the same sounds, syllables and components (Alonzov 1865: 6–7; Iakovlev 1887: 50–51; Ethnographica VI: 72–74; XIII: 27–28, etc.). Among the Morki Mari, this principle was taken into account when choosing a second permanent name for the newborn (Ethnographica VI: 72–73). Ivan Galkin (1997: 66) suggests that this way of naming could have come about under the influence of the Chuvash anthroponymic system. However, the practice of naming children with such similar names has existed among many peoples (Nikonov 1974: 131–141), which does not allow us to flatly claim the influence of only Chuvash anthroponymy on the Mari people's development of this naming principle. Furthermore, children could be named in such a way that the names of sons shared the same features, and similarly the names of daughters would agree in some aspect (for more details, see Pustyakov 2017: 333–337).

In other cases, the "family" component of a name was intentionally changed. As Jevsevjev writes, if within a family children had died one after another, the midwife would give a newborn a name in which the family component was replaced with another. The new component would usually be taken from another family that had many children (Ethnographica VI: 75; XIII: 28). The magical property of such a name was based on a symbolic transfer of the desired features of that other family and children to the child now being named.

Moreover, as we have seen, the child's name was determined by the name of the first visitor or passerby. Pavel Sigov (1929: 103) describes such a ceremony: "Someone from the family, usually the grandmother takes the child in her arms and goes with the child up to the gate; the child is named after the first man who appears on the street at this time."

Informants also reported that the child was sometimes given the name of a personally-known and respected person with good qualities. In this way it was expected that the child would be similar to his or her namesake (MFE–RB Mish. 2016).

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All of the methods of naming described above were intended to form the child and determine a correct and suitable name for him or her.

Concluding the discussion of the ways of choosing names, it is worth noting that there are differences between male and female names. Originally Mari male and female names, as far as we can tell from the meagre material available to us, differed in the semantics of their lexemes. Take, for example, the male names *Oza* (*Ozaj, Ozak*) < *oza* 'master', *Patâr* < *patâr* 'warrior; strong', *Pojan* (*Pojanaj*) < *pojan* 'rich' and the female names *Šâmaj* < *šâma* 'affectionate, tender, kind', *Čezek* < *čezek* 'swallow'. In some compound names, as the second element the words *erge* 'son, boy', *kače* 'youth, bridegroom', *marij* (*mari*) 'man' and *üdâr* 'daughter, girl' were used, which have differentiating semantics. As the majority of pre-Christian Mari names are of Turkic origin, they feature determinants and formants that in Tatar and other Turkic languages are used to distinguish between male and female names. It is also worth noting that among the Mari there have been cases where a certain name is used for both males and females (or mentioned as male and female) (*Arn'aš* < *arn'a* 'week, *Friday', *Elaj*, *Iljaš*, *Kugas* (*Kugaš*), *Meŋaj* < *meŋ* 'birthmark', *Okanaj*, *Süanaj* < *süan* 'wedding', and others), but such cases according to our data are few.

Name changes and "child selling"

As mentioned earlier, a child's (permanent) name could be changed, the reasons being a change in circumstances.

A baby's name might be changed if the child cried, for it was believed that a child's crying meant that the name given was wrong for him or her. Names could be changed in different ways (for more details, see Shestakov 1866: 36; Miliutin 2002: 146; MEE–87, f. 115, p. 19). Shestakov (1866: 36) describes one method: the father took the child in his arms when it cried and uttered names. The cessation of the child's crying was the sign that a suitable name had been spoken. This custom of changing a child's name was practised even in families that had their child baptized. This is attested by an account in Nikol'skii's work (1920: 172). According to his information, if a child constantly cried after baptism, the parents assumed that "*pop tjazhela imja daval*" ('the priest has given the child a heavy name'), and they would then change the child's name to another Christian one with the method described above.

To stop a baby from crying, the ritual of "selling" the baby (Mari *ikšâvâm užalâmaš, ikšâvâm pumaš*) was carried out. "Selling" the child could be carried out if the child was very sick, or if children in the family had died. This ritual was carried out among different groups of Mari for quite a long time. There are cases of "child-selling" in the 20th century among the Meadow Mari, and

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among the Eastern Mari even as late as the end of the 20th century. Different forms of the "child-selling" ritual took place in different local traditions. A ritual of child-selling described for several villages of the Mishkinsky and Birsky districts (MFE–RB Bir., Mish. 2016) worked generally as follows. The parents who decided to "sell" their child would prepare food (pancakes) in the morning, wait for a visitor and then "sell" their child (fictitiously that is). Reasoned thus: "to whom it is destined, he will be the first to come." Sometimes, however, they would invite beforehand a particular person to whom they wanted to sell the child. This "new parent" then gave the child a new name, and the guest would be given clothing as a gift. On the next visit soon after, the guest with his or her spouse was to bring a shirt and put it on the child. Later the guest would be invited to the wedding of the child the guest had "bought", and the former child would present the father or mother to whom the child had been "sold" with the gift of a shirt or dress. A rather peculiar rite of "child selling" was recorded by Jevsevjev (Ethnographica IX: 95–96) among the Eastern Mari:

> При таких случаях, когда у матери дети часто умирают или хворают, то делают такой обычай: сварят какое-нибудь кушанье: кашу или напекут блины, достанут бутылку водки, и мать пригласит к себе соседку или родственницу, имеющую ребенка. При этом угощении хозяйка продает имя своего ребенка ребенку соседки. С этого време[ни] ребенок хозяйки получит имя ребенка соседки, а ребенок соседки получит название ребенка хозяйки. С этого времени они будут называться новыми именами, хотя на регистрациях будут их настоящие имена у каждого свое. [In cases where children often die or get sick in the family, then a custom is carried out: some food is prepared (porridge or pancakes), a bottle of vodka is procured, and after that the mother invites a neighbour or relative who has a child to her house. While treating them, the hostess sells the name of her child to the child of the neighbour. At that point, the hostess's child receives the name of the neighbour's child, and the neighbour's child receives the name of the hostess's child. From that moment on, they will be called new names, although their true names will be recorded in the documents.]

"Child selling" was designed to trick evil spirits, as they were unable to harm a child with a new name. Sometimes even an unborn child could be "sold" in cases where a previous child had died (MFE–RB Bir. 2016).

Child-selling rituals could differ in terms of whether the child had his or her name changed or whether the child retained the old one. In some local traditions the child's name remained unchanged after this ritual was performed (e.g. Tikhomirov 1896: 10). One can assume that this transformation dates from a later period and was connected with the influence of Christianity and socioeconomic development. The ritual of "selling" one's child is known in

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different variations from many peoples, including Finno-Ugrian, Slavic, and Turkic peoples.

When a birthmark was found on the child's body, he or she would be given a name with the component *meŋ* 'birthmark': *Meŋaj* (m, f), *Meŋalče* (f), *Meŋsə̑le* (f) and others. This was done with the goal of making the birthmark disappear. A respondent from the Birsky district stated that a girl was given the name *Meŋlijan* by shouting this name into the open oven chimney (MFE–RB Bir. 2016). This way of naming children is also known among the Bashkirs (Bikbulatov & Fatykhova 1991: 107).

In the Mishkinsky district (namely the village of Kayrakovo), a man who saved a drowning child could change the child's name and became the child's "new parent" (MFE–RB Mish. 2016).

After a child has been "sold", family members and neighbours call him or her by a new name (Mari *užalə̑me lüm*), but in official documents the child's former name is retained.

As stated above, according to the Mari worldview a person's name had an effect on his or her fate and well-being. All of the methods of naming and name-changing described above were intended to shape the newborn's fate and determine a name that would be suitable for the child.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have described the main aspects of the Mari traditional naming system. In traditional Mari culture, naming a child is a meaningful action. A child was ordinarily given a name twice: the first name would be given immediately after birth, while the second name would be given after two to three days or more had passed. In some cases, the giving of a permanent name for the child could happen much later. The initial name could be used as a permanent name. The leading role in name-giving was played by people who had life experience or a certain social or religious status, as well as by the child's parents. Ways of choosing a name varied greatly. Like "bath names", symbolic names could often be given, such as *Temir* < Tat. *timer* 'iron' (this name had a symbolic sense, as iron items had a protective role) and the names *Šumat, Kugüdə̑r* and *Izerge* given to children born on certain days of the week. In choosing the child's permanent name, the determination of a correct and suitable name as well as a sequence of initial elements and rhyming final elements in child's and parent's names played a key role. According to materials from field expeditions, there were often cases when a child's name was changed, which consisted in searching for a more appropriate name and relieving the child of anguish or illness. Some pre-Christian name-giving

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traditions of the Mari find parallels in the traditions of the neighbouring Finno-Ugric and Turkic peoples.

At present, most Mari do not adhere to the traditional rites of naming and the names for newborn children are generally Russian or foreign names. However, it is worth remembering that the Eastern Mari adhered to some traditional rites of naming until at least the end of the twentieth century.

The results of this study can be used in future studies of Mari anthroponymy and in cross-cultural studies of naming practices. The subsequent collection of anthroponymic material in field expeditions, as well as ethnographic material about baby-naming practices in local traditions, will make it possible to clarify the features of the formation of Mari anthroponymy and draw more concrete conclusions about the traditions of the personal naming and associated conceptions that the Mari people had.

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