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**The linguistic affinity of the Volgaic  
Finno-Ugrians and their ethnogenesis**  
(early 4th millennium BC - late 1st millennium AD)

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## **Introduction**

This study is mainly concerned with the ethnogenesis of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians – the Cheremis, the Mordvins, the Merja and the Muroma – in the light of the evidence from three interrelated disciplines: linguistics, archaeology and history. Owing to the proliferation of studies on this subject it has become well nigh impossible to become proficient in more than one discipline, and I am almost certain that linguists, archaeologists and historians will hardly be satisfied with the evidence drawn from their respective disciplines that is presented here. I can only hope that this study will fulfill its purpose in that other researchers and the general reader will find more information on the disciplines that fall far from his particular field of research.

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## Mari-Mordvin language contacts

The relation between Mari and Mordvin is still not entirely clear. There now seems to be an emerging consensus that the two languages cannot be derived from a common so-called Volgaic Finno-Ugrian parent language, as outlined by Setälä (1926, 128) in his comprehensive work, *Suomen suku*. However, this problem has received notoriously little attention since then.

Interest in the Mari-Mordvin language contacts and the Volgaic parent speech was aroused in the 1950s. In one of his papers on the origins of the Permian substantive formants, Beke (1953, 57-94) compared the Komi *-an* and the Udmurt *-on* participle formant to the Mari *-en/ən/ân* adverbial participle formant, and considering them to have a common ancestry he concluded that "Mari stands much closer to the Permian languages than to Mordva, suggesting that the Mari-Permian linguistic unity had still existed when Mordva had already separated." In his comments on this paper, Lakó (1953, 90-94) rejected this argument, claiming that the Permian and Mari formants can be correlated with the Mordvin 3rd participle *-n* formant, even though he did point out that possible Mari-Permian language contacts could be conceivable on the basis of the following:

(1) The Mari *-lan/län* allative-dative etymologically corresponds to the *-lan* allative of Permian;

(2) according to Wichmann the *-ke/-γe* suffix of the Mari comitative has a common ancestry with the *-ke* element of Komi *-ked*, *-keti*, etc.;

(3) Ravila and Toivonen have argued that the Mari instructive ending in *-a/ä* had previously ended in *-i*, and according to Toivonen this *-i* was also present in the *-ja* element of the Udmurt adverbial and the *-ja/ji* comitative of Izhma Komi.

To the examples quoted in point (1) one can add the Finn adessive *-lle* and the Izhor adessive *-len*; in other words, the evidence cited by Lakó is unsuitable for proving early contacts between Mari and Permian.

In his paper read at the First Finno-Ugrian Congress held in Budapest in 1960, Berezky analyzed the interrelation between Mordvin, Mari and Permian. In the first part of his paper he reviewed the results of his research on the vocabulary, noting that Mari has considerably more words of Finno-Ugrian origin than Mordvin, a language that had been assigned to the same language group and derived from the same parent language. He found eighteen words of Finno-Ugrian origin that only occur in the Volgaic languages, whereas the number of Mari-Komi correspondences was forty-six, and Mari-Udmurt correspondences came to a total of forty-seven. In addition to these lexical correspondences, Mari and the Permian languages share a number of morphological features that are entirely lacking in Mordvin. Berezky concluded that the lexical and grammatical correspondences between Mari and the Permian languages can only be explained by a long secondary contact that had been preceded by a very short Volgaic linguistic phase. The absence of Baltic loanwords in Mari would also point to the early separation of Mordvin and Mari: the forebears of the Mari had separated from the ancestral Mordvins well before the advent of Baltic influences (Berezky 1963, 202-203).

The implication of Baltic loanwords for prehistoric studies warrant a lengthier discussion of this issue. Serebrennikov (1957) suggested that the Baltic loanwords in Permian originate from an ancient Proto-Indo-European tongue that is very close to the modern Baltic tongues. In his paper on the origins of Mordvin, read at Saransk in 1965, he offered a detailed

survey of Mordvin-Baltic language contacts. He listed a number of Mordvin words that could, in his opinion, be derived from Lithuanian, such as

Md. E. <i>kardaz</i> , ‘udvar’ [court]	Lith. <i>gardaš</i> , ‘állás’ [stand], ‘kerítés’ [fence]
Md.E. <i>pejel</i> , ‘kés’ [knife]	Lith. <i>peilis</i> , ‘kés’ [knife]
Md.M. <i>purči</i> , ‘malac’ [pig]	Lith. <i>parsas</i> , ‘malac’ [pig]

(Serebrennikov 1965, 245).

There is in fact historical evidence that a Baltic people, the Goljadi, had earlier lived near the Mordvins. The Ipatiev codex of the Kiev Chronicle records that "*I sed Svjatoslav i vzja ljudi Goljad' verh Porotve*" (PVL, II. 391). Vršantsev (1897) has suggested that the Goljadi had lived between the Ugra and the Protva (identical with the Porotva of the above quote), both tributaries of the Oka. Sobolevski (1911) considered the Volga to mark the northeastern boundary of the Baltic peoples, while Vasmer (1958, 293) argued for a Baltic influence in the toponyms of the Volga region. In his opinion the Tsna river, whose name can be associated with ancient Prussian *tusna*, ‘quiet’, marked the boundary of Baltic influence.

Knabe (1962, 67-73) devoted a separate study to the Baltic loanwords of the Finno-Ugrian languages, in which he analyzed not only Serebrennikov’s 1957 article, but also reviewed the very first study in this field, Thomsen’s 1890 study. He noted that about ten per cent of the etymologies given for the seventy-odd Finno-Ugrian words of Baltic origin are incorrect. Some were in fact reverse borrowings (Finno-Ugrian > Baltic), while others were actually borrowings from the same third language in both the Baltic and the Finno-Ugrian languages. He ordered the remaining words into several groups. The first group included some twelve per cent of the words; these have parallels in one of the modern Baltic tongues, i.e. they can be considered to be chronologically the closest. The next group comprises the words (roughly fifteen per cent) which were adapted by Finno-Ugrian from a Baltic or Balto-Slav proto-language. Indo-Iranian words make up the third group: in the Baltic tongues these are the relics of an earlier linguistic stage. And by far the largest group (over thirty per cent) can be derived from a proto-language from which both the Baltic and the Iranian languages had developed. In other words, in terms of chronology the second group lies in the middle, while the third and the fourth are the oldest. It is yet impossible to establish their chronology relative to each other, although Knabe assumed the fourth group to be the oldest. However, groups speaking Proto-Iranian and a Baltic-Iranian proto-language may well have existed at the same time. In his 1957 article Serebrennikov dated the so-called Baltic loanwords to the early 2nd millennium and considered them to have been transmitted by the Fatjanovo culture. Knabe rejected this possibility, his argument being that Fatjanovo was an intrusive culture and that it had no contact with the local population. (Gordeev [1967, 180-203] again argued in favour of a Fatjanovo-Balanovo origin.)

In his comprehensive survey of Indo-European and Uralian language contacts Rédei (1986, 25-26) assigned the Indo-European loanwords of the Uralian languages to five chronological phases; the Baltic loanwords of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrian languages can only be sought among the words of the fourth and the fifth phase. Rédei dated the fourth phase to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC, i.e. to the Finno-Permian period, assigning the fifth phase to the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, i.e. to the Finno-Volgaic period.

The Baltic loanwords in Cheremis have been amply discussed. Bereczki (1963) had earlier rejected the Baltic origins of these words, and Serebrennikov (1967) too favoured a Proto-Indo-European influence. Khalikov (1987, 81-86) accepted the existence of contact between Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC, but he also suggested late Baltic-Cheremis contacts in the 3rd-7th centuries AD. He argued that the

Imenkovo culture of the Volga-Kama confluence was of a Baltic, or to be more precise, of a Lithuanian origin. However, the Cheremis-Lithuanian etymologies proposed by him must be treated with caution since Professor Khalikov was not particularly familiar with the discipline of comparative historical linguistics; the archaeological evidence quoted by Khalikov is likewise tenuous. The Imenkovo culture shares a number of similarities with the Finno-Ugrian groups of the forest steppe and, at the same time, it also absorbed influences from the nomadic pastoralist culture of the steppe. A few Indo-European elements might be assumed, but Khalikov was the first to suggest a Baltic connection. Khalikov's suggestion can be rejected in the light of Rédei's data. Of the forty Indo-European loanwords cited by Khalikov as dating from the Finno-Permian and Finno-Volgaic period, eight have a common Mordvin + Cheremis etymology, seventeen have a Mordvin, and seven have a Cheremis etymology, suggesting that the possibility of significant late Cheremis-Indo-European language contacts, possibly reflecting the settlement of an Indo-European, or more specifically, of a Baltic population group near the Cheremis in the mid-1st millennium BC can be definitely ruled out.

The above data can be compared with the Permian etymologies of the same group of words: of the forty Indo-European loanwords from the Finno-Permian and Finno-Volgaic period, seventeen have a Votyak + Zyryan correspondence, one has a correspondence in Zyryan only, and there is not one single Votyak correspondence among the Permian etymologies. (In Rédei's study these forty words can be found under nos. 15 and 26-64, on p. 45 and pp. 49-64.)

A comparison of the number of late Indo-European borrowings that have a Permian or Volga correspondence would suggest that in the Finno-Permian and Finno-Volgaic period contact between the ancestors of the Mordvin and the forebears of the Cheremis were weaker than the contact within the Permian population which, in the light of the above data, still formed a unity in this period; in contrast, the Volgaic population already began to split into ethnic groups that developed parallel to each other.

In his paper read at Saransk Serebrennikov (1965) surveyed in detail Mordvin-Balto-Finnic and Mordvin-Mari language contacts. He quoted Donner, Thomsen, Anderson, Tomasek, Smirnov and Kuznetsov as the pioneers of this particular field of research, and he noted that the past decades had brought little in the way of previously unknown new data or new research results. He argued that Mordvin shares the highest number of lexical correspondences with the Balto-Finnic tongues, with a conspicuously high correspondences in the case system: e.g. Fi. elative *-sta/stä* ~ Md. *-sto/sta*; Fi. inessive *-ssa/ssä* /< *-sna/snä* / ~ Md. *-so/sa* /< *-sno/sna*; Fi. translative *-ksi* ~ Md. *-ks*.

Serebrennikov (1965, 238-239) invoked a lengthy symbiosis or proximity between the two peoples as an explanation for the contacts between Mordvin and Balto-Finnic, arguing that the assignment of Mordvin and Mari to the same group was erroneous since Mordvin can more readily be linked to the Balto-Finnic languages. He then went on to survey the linguistic features common to both Mordvin and Mari. He first reviewed the lexical correspondences and the infinitive ending of common origin:

Md. *lovnoms*, 'olvasni' [to read] ~ Mari *luḁaš* (*luḁeš*), 'olvasni' [to read]

the old illative *-ka* suffix:

Md. *virga*, 'erdöbe' [to the wood] (old meaning: 'erdö irányába' [in the direction of the wood],

Mari *oncäko*, 'előre' [forward],

and the comitative *-ge/k* suffixes:

Md. E. *kudonek*, 'házsal' [with the house]

Mari *vožge*, 'gyökérrel' [with the root].

Another feature shared by both Mordvin and Mari is the formation of third person imperative with suffixes that correspond to the genitive marker:

Md. E. kortazo,	‘beszéljen’ [he should speak]
Mari luðšo,	‘olvasson’ [he should read]
Md. E. kortast,	‘beszéljenek’ [they should speak]
Mari luðššt,	‘olvassanak’ [they should read],

as well as the identical transformation of the first and second person plural verbal suffixes (-mek, -tek) of the ancient Finno-Ugrian proto-language:

Md. E. lovnotano,	‘olvassunk’ [we read]
lovnotaðo,	‘olvastok’ [you read]
Mari luðšna,	‘olvassunk’ [we read]
luðšda,	‘olvastok’ [you read],

even though Serebrennikov considered this to be a more recent development in Mordvin. He concluded that, unlike in the Baltic-Finn languages, Mordvin and Mari were more analytical in nature, with more postpositional structures that replaced the old locative. There are a number of shared features that are equally characteristic of Balto-Finnic, Mordvin and Mari, suggesting that after the Finno-Permian branch had split into Permian and Finno-Volgaic, the Finno-Volgaic group split into Balto-Finnic, Mordvin, Mari and Lapp groupings without an intermediate linguistic phase. Following this separation, the ancestors of the Mordvins settled between the forebears of the Balto-Finns and the ancestors of the Mari, but somewhat closer to the former (Serebrennikov 1965, 239-241).

In his paper Serebrennikov concentrated on the significance and implication of the Mordvin-Balto-Finnic correspondences and thus the fact that only some of the Mordvin-Mari similarities are suitable for confirming the special relation between the two languages escaped his attention. The -s infinitive can be derived from the Finno-Ugrian -s lative, while the -ka illative originates from the Finno-Ugrian -k lative.

The keynote address at the Mari Prehistoric Congress held in 1967 at Joshkar-Ola was again delivered by Serebrennikov. He focused on two main problems: the peculiar transitional position of Mari and the attribution of Merja. He gathered together and presented the common features shared by Mordvin and Mari (new elements, not mentioned in his Saransk paper, have been marked with a +):

- (1) a common lexical stratum;
- (2) in Mordvin and in Mari the plural is unmarked more often than in the Permian languages (+);
- (3) in the Permian languages the possessive suffix also has an -l, whereas Balto-Finn, Mordvin and Mari does not (+):

Mari	čodran,	‘erdőnek a’ [of the forest],
Md.	vireń,	"
Fi.	metsän,	"
Komi	verleń,	"

- (4) the Mordvin and Mari past tense has preserved traces of a past tense with the -ś marker (in Mordvin only in the third person), a feature that can also be observed in the conjugation of the negative auxiliary verb (+):

Mari	vozššëm,	‘megírtam’ [I wrote]
------	----------	----------------------

- |  |            |                              |
|--|------------|------------------------------|
|  | vozâšâc,   | ‘megírtad’ [thou wrote]      |
|  | vozâš,     | ‘megírta’ [he wrote]         |
|  | Md. E. tuś | ‘elment’ [he went away]      |
|  | tust’      | ‘elementek’ [they went away] |
- (5) in the third person singular the possessive suffix is formed with a reduced vowel, in the plural without one (+);
- (6) in Mordvin and Mari the imperative is formed with the possessive personal suffixes (similarly to Lapp) (+):
- |  |        |          |                                  |
|--|--------|----------|----------------------------------|
|  | Mari   | luďšo,   | ‘olvasson’ [he should read]      |
|  |        | luďšâšt, | ‘olvassanak’ [they should read]  |
|  | Md. E. | morazo,  | ‘énekeljen’ [he should sing]     |
|  |        | morast,  | ‘énekeljenek’ [they should sing] |
- (7) Mordvin and Mari privative suffixes are very similar (+):
- |  |        |                        |                                    |
|--|--------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
|  | Mari   | vij, ‘erő’ [strength], | vijdâme, ‘erőtlen’ [strength-less] |
|  |        | kid, ‘kéz’ [hand],     | kiddâme, ‘kezetlen’ [hand-less]    |
|  | Md. E. | kudo, ‘ház’ [house],   | kudovtomo, ‘házatlan’ [house-less] |
|  |        | piks, ‘kötél’ [rope]   | piksteme, ‘kötéltelen’ [rope-less] |
- (8) both have a *-te-* extension at the demonstrative pronouns (+):
- |  |        |                           |
|--|--------|---------------------------|
|  | Mari   | <i>sede</i> , ‘ez’ [this] |
|  | Md. E. | <i>sete</i> , ‘az’ [that] |
- (9) the Mari *-meke* gerund participle is related to the Mordvin M. *-mok* participle of similar function (+):
- |  |        |  |                                      |
|--|--------|--|--------------------------------------|
|  | Mari   | <i>kočmeke</i> , ‘evén’ [having eaten],            | <i>jóllakván</i> [having been sated] |
|  | Md. M. | <i>srgozəmâk</i> , ‘felébredvén’ [having woken up] |                                      |
- (10) in contrast to the Permian languages, the participle *-ma* is used only in the function of a passive in Mordvin, Mari and Finn (+):
- |  |        |  |                                      |
|--|--------|--|--------------------------------------|
|  | Mari   | <i>luďmo</i> , ‘olvasott’ [read],                          | <i>elolvasott</i> [having been read] |
|  | Md. E. | <i>večkema loman</i> , ‘szeretett ember’ [the beloved man] |                                      |
|  | Fi.    | <i>tekema</i> , ‘elvégezett’ [finished],                   | <i>megtett</i> [done]                |
- (11) in contrast to the Permian languages, the *-l* frequentative of the Finno-Ugrian parent speech has faded from Moksha, and is hardly used in Mari and Erza (+);
- (12) several Mari aspectual suffixes are closer to Mordvin than to the Permian languages (+):
- |  |        |  |   |
|--|--------|--|---|
|  | Mari   | <i>koltaš</i> , ‘elenged’ [lets go of] | <i>koltâlaš</i> , ‘hagy’ [allows],        |
|  |        |  | ‘enged’ [permits]                         |
|  | Md. E. | <i>kandoms</i> , ‘visz’ [takes]        | <i>kant/ems</i> , ‘hordoz’ [carries]      |
|  | Mari   | <i>puaš</i> , ‘ad’ [gives]             | <i>puedaš</i> , ‘szétoszt’ [distributes], |
|  |        |  | ‘kiad’ [gives out]                        |

Md. M. *valgoms*, ‘leereszkedik’ [descends], *valgongoms*, ‘ereszkedik’  
[goes down]

- (13) the Mari *-əž* and *-š* suffix (part of the *-ešt/əšt* frequentative) are related to the Mordvin *-se* frequentative (+):

Mari *jodaš*, ‘kérdez’ [asks]            *jodəštəs*, ‘kérdezősködik’  
[keeps asking]

Md. E. *sokams*, ‘felszánt’ [ploughs]    *soksems*, ‘szántogat’  
[keeps ploughing]

- (14) both Mari and Mordvin has preserved the *-kt* suffix of the causative verbs (in a *-vt* form in Mordvin); in contrast, this suffix has virtually disappeared from the Permian languages, occurring occasionally as *-ekt* in Udmurt (+):

Mari *ludeş*, ‘olvas’ [reads]            *luðəktəš*, ‘olvastat’ [causes to read]

Md. E. *kandoms*, ‘visz’ [carries]      *kandovtoms*, ‘vitet’ [causes to carry]

- (15) in the first and second person plural the verbal suffixes of the present tense are very similar (for examples see p. 7);

- (16) the *-s* illative is a common feature of the Volgaic and Balto-Finnic languages:

Mari            *olaš sočəñ*,      ‘városban született’ [town-born]

Md. E.            *kudos*,            ‘házba’ [to the house]

Md. M.            *ošs*,              ‘városba’ [to the town]

whereas in Finn the independent use of the *-s* illative is reflected only by the postpositions:

Fi.                *alas*,            ‘alá’ [under]

*ylös*            ‘fel’ [up]

- (17) in Mordvin, Mari and the Balto-Finnic languages the *-s* illative also occurs in other cases (elative, inessive):

Mari *olašte*, ‘városban’ [in the town]      *olaške*, ‘városba’ [to the town]

(for Mordvin and Finn examples, see p. ....);

- (18) Indo-European borrowings of common origin can be found both in the Volgaic and in the Balto-Finnic tongues (+);

- (19) in the Permian languages the numerals from 11 to 19 are simple compounds, while in Mari and Mordvin other elements also occur; the formation of 15 is identical in Mari and Mordvin (+);

- (20) the infinitive is formed with the *-s* illative both in Mari and Mordvin (+):

Mari            *koltas*,            ‘küld’ [to send]

Md. E.            *kodams*,            ‘fon’ [spin], ‘sző’ [weave]

- (21) Proto-Mari and Proto-Mordvin originally had a *-ge* comitative (for examples, see p. 6);



(22) participles containing the *-n* suffix of Balto-Finnic had earlier been dominant in the Volgaic tongues (+):

Mari *nalân*, ‘aki elvett’ [who has taken]      *vozân*, ‘aki írt’ [who has written]

Md. *kundań narmuń*, ‘elfogott madár’ [captured bird]

*pektsań orta*,                      ‘zárt kapuk’ [closed gates]

In addition to the above, Serebrennikov (1967, 166-170) also pointed out a number of features, such as the *-t* suffix of the accusative and the *-ne* marker of the optative, that occur only in Mari and the Balto-Finnic languages.

The above list appears, at first glance, to be very thorough, but unfortunately it does contain a number of inaccurate data. The features listed under nos 4, 8, 13, 19-21 are unsuitable for proving special contacts between Mordvin and Mari since these occur in other Uralian tongues as well. The past tense formed with the *-ś* marker occurs in Samoyed, in Obi-Ugrian and in the Lapp languages (no. 4), and compound demonstrative pronouns are also to be found in the Balto-Finnic languages (no. 8), while the Mari frequentative harks back to a Finno-Ugrian *-st*. The data cited in no. 19 are also unsuitable for proving the existence of a Volgaic parent speech since even though the formation of the numerals from eleven to nineteen indeed differs from that of the Permian tongues, they also differ – with the exception of fifteen – from each other (for comments on no. 20, see p. 7). The examples purporting to prove special contacts between Mari and Balto-Finnic are again unsuitable since Mordvin too has a *-t* definite accusative.

Serebrennikov also reviewed Mari-Permian language contacts which, in his view, could not be explained by a close affinity. He linked Mordvin and Mari to a greater extent than two years earlier. He argued for their derivation from a common parent speech since Mari had originally been most closely related to Mordvin, an argument that he tried to confirm with evidence drawn from related disciplines (Serebrennikov 1967, 175).

In his paper he also addressed the question of Merja, offering a brief critique of the paper read by Semenov at the VIIth Russian Archaeological Congress of 1887 (Semenov 1891), who tried to prove the Merja-Mari identity. Serebrennikov rejected a Mari origin for hydronyms ending in *-ma*, *-ga*, *-ša*, and he also challenged the possible Mari origins of toponyms ending in *-mar* for such names were distributed over a rather extensive area. He did, however, consider toponyms containing the *-anger*, *-iner*, *-ener*, *-bur*, *-tur*, *-nur*, and *-er* element to originate from Mari, claiming that the Kostroma province that abounds in such names had been settled by the Mari. In this he basically seconded Vasmer’s (1935) views that had earlier been rejected by Ravila (1937).

Aside from a discussion of the Merja-Mari identity, Serebrennikov (1967, 178-180) also suggested possible Merja-Obi-Ugrian language contacts. He considered geographical names containing the *-bol* element (Pusbola, Brembola, Jahrobol, etc.) to be of a Merja origin, relating them to the Mari *ümbal*, ‘surface’, M. *falu*, Mansi *pavâl*, ‘village’ word. However, these are not related words. He considered the hydronyms of the Kirov province ending in *-im*, *-um* (Abzhim, Kurchum, etc.) to have a Kama and western Siberian origin. He also quoted Gorjunova’s archaeological findings that certain Merja archaeological finds have good parallels in the Kama region and in the Urals. However, these are insufficient for proving the Obi-Ugrian affinities of Merja and thus Serebrennikov left the origins of the language and the ethnicity of the Merja open.

The analysis of the toponyms of the areas settled by the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians offers invaluable information on their prehistory. There is now a general consensus that hydronyms ending in *-ma*, *-ga* and *-ša* and the toponyms derived from them are among the earliest in this

region and, also, that they can be linked to the population of the Volga-Oka archaeological culture. As a result of detailed surveys it is now clear that these toponyms also occur beyond the Volga-Oka Neolithic province, from Karyala to Siberia. In Serebrennikov's view (1970, 45-46) the ethnic group to whom these hydro- and toponyms can be linked drifted from the Volga-Oka mesopotamia to the northern areas of present-day Russia sometime in the 3rd millennium BC. Serebrennikov (1955, 21-31) did not identify this ethnic group either with Baltic, Finno-Ugrian or Slavic peoples. In contrast, Matvejev (1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1967) has argued for a Finno-Ugrian origin for these hydro- and toponyms. This debate, that has engendered considerable literature (for a good review, see Maticsák 1995, 25-30), has recently been again revived: Finnish scholarship has again become preoccupied with the ethnic attribution of the Volga-Kama culture, and on the basis of the archaeological evidence, this culture is now being defined as Finno-Ugrian.

The problems of the Merja language have been discussed at length by Tkachenko (1979, 241-242) who turned to Russian for its better understanding, claiming that Merja could be reconstructed from what has been preserved in Russian. Tkachenko quoted various words from the Jaroslav and Kostroma provinces that were obviously borrowed by Russian from Merja:

*lejma* ~ Fi. *lehmä*, 'tehén' [cow]

*sika* ~ Fi. *sika*, 'disznó' [pig]

*urma* ~ Fi. *orava*, md. E., M., Mari, Komi *ur*, 'mókus' [squirrel]

In more recent studies, Tkachenko (1985, 1987) has attempted to reconstruct Merja using increasingly complex techniques.

It emerges clearly from the above that the available data on the Merja language and ethnic group is controversial to say the least. The geographic names would suggest an affinity between Merja and Mari, whereas Tkachenko's findings would rather point to an affinity with the Balto-Finnic tongues. Gábor Bereczki has recently also come to share this opinion. These can perhaps be reconciled with the archaeological record which would suggest that several distinct groups can be distinguished in the Djakovo distribution.

In a paper read at the Joshkar-Ola conference. Gruzov (1967, 228-230) too addressed the issue of possible Mari-Mordvin language contacts, and quoted some phonetic correspondences. He noted that in both languages there was a tendency for vowels to become more closed; the disappearance of the word-final vowel is another feature common to both Mordvin and Mari; voiced consonants occur in words of Finno-Ugrian origin in both Mari and Mordvin, but only between vowels or after consonants, whereas in the Permian languages there were word-initial voiced consonants already in the Proto-Permian period; the Mordvin-Mari pairs are highly similar to each in the case of Finno-Ugrian words, and this also argues in favour of a Volgaic parent speech. Gruzov accepted the existence a Volgaic Finno-Ugrian linguistic unity, albeit he maintained that it had existed for a short period only. Of his arguments quoted in the above, the fading of the word-final vowels is unsuitable for proving Mordvin-Mari contacts since this is a relatively late phenomenon that can be demonstrated in other Finno-Ugrian tongues too.

The main developments in the research of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians was surveyed by Erdélyi (1969, 290); he reviewed not only the linguistic evidence, but also the findings of related disciplines. In contrast to Zsirai's and Hajdú's more cautious conclusions, Décsy considered the Mordvin-Mari parent speech unity to be a proven fact and he dated this unity to between 400 BC and 600 AD. Erdélyi considered the gap between the Volgaic languages to be so deep as to imply that any similarities were to be attributed to secondary contacts between neighbouring the Proto-Mordvin and Proto-Mari tribes.

This problem was addressed again by Bereczki in 1974, offering a broader linguistic survey than in his 1960 paper. He pointed out the absence of phonetic features common to Mordvin and Mari, as well as the lack of morphological correspondences that occur in these two tongues only. He then convincingly proved that the Mari temporal *-sek*, Md. comitative *-šek/ček*, the Mari collective number suffixes, as well as the essive *-nek/ńek* and the Md. comitative *-nek* suffixes in Mari are only coincidental correspondences. Bereczki quoted several linguistic features that would link Mordvin to Balto-Finnic. He first quoted lexical correspondences which in his opinion are a reliable indicator of the extent of affinity between two tongues. In the four *SKES* volumes he found ninety-one Finn words that only have a correspondence in Mordvin; this number can be expected to increase to 110-115 following the publication of the final *SKES* volume. This number is roughly six times as high as the number of Mari-Mordvin etymologies. A number of features common to Mordvin and Balto-Finnic can also be quoted for vocalism. In contrast to Mari, the short and long Balto-Finnic vowels have various correspondences in Mordvin, a phenomenon that can be explained by the fact that the Mordvins had been part of the western Finno-Ugrian unity (i.e. this unity was comprised of the Balto-Finns and the Mordvins) that innovated the long vowels, while the Mari were not. Among the case endings relative, translative as well as the comparative have a common origin in Mordvin and in the Balto-Finnic tongues:

Md. E. *-ska* ~ Fi. *-hka/hko/hkö*, Vepsian *-hk*.

And even though the Mordvin ablative does have a Mari correspondence, the use of the partitive is a feature shared only with the Balto-Finnic languages. The correspondences of Md. E. *-do* and M. *-da* adverbial suffixes are to be found in Vepsian and Estonian. The *-k* praesens marker always stands at the end of the negated verb in Mordvin and the Balto-Finnic tongues. In Md. E. the *ila* negative auxiliary verb, used for negation in the imperative, has a common ancestry with *älä, älkä* of Finn.

Bereczki (1974, 84-85) concluded that there had existed a rather protracted Balto-Finnic-Mordvin linguistic unity even after Mari had separated. Mari is undoubtedly a Finno-Volgaic tongue and within the Finno-Volgaic unity the ancestors of the Mordvins and the Mari were closely related, but the evidence is insufficient for proving the existence of a Volgaic Finno-Ugrian parent speech.

The year 1976 saw the publication of the third volume of *Osnovy finno-ugorskogo jazykoznanija*, the comprehensive survey of Mari, the Permian and the Ugrian languages. The author of the section on Mari, Kovedjaeva (1976, 5-6) argued for the existence of a Volgaic parent speech, citing Mordvin and Mari linguistic features that she considered to be shared by both tongues: a similar ablative and genitive; pronouns of identical form; the tendency for vowels to become more closed; the disappearance of the word-final vowel and, occasionally, also of syllables; a common lexical stratum; and identical verbal forms. This list of linguistic features is not particularly long, and most had already been mentioned in earlier studies. The derivation of the Mordvin and Mari genitive and ablative from a Volgaic parent speech was a wholly new element. Since, however, the genitive can be derived from the Uralian *-n* genitive in both languages, this argument cannot be used for proving the existence of a Volgaic parent speech.

The problem of Mordvin-Mari contacts was set in a new perspective by Gheno (1981). He did not concentrate merely on individual features that would reflect a Mordvin-Balto-Finnic or Mari-Permian contacts, but – with the exception of phonetics – he offered a comparative analysis of Mordvin and Mari grammatical structures. He ordered his data into tables, giving thus a clear overview. The case endings can be seen to be virtually identical in the Balto-Finnic and Volgaic languages. The table showing the possessive personal suffix contains, beside the Mordvin and Mari suffixes, also the Hungarian, Komi and Lapp correspondences. Gheno then

went on to analyze the peculiarities of adjective comparison, numerals, pronouns, verbal suffixes, the markers of verbal tenses and the postpositions. In his estimate, only fifteen of the eight hundred words denoting similar or identical concepts in the Mordvin and Mari basic vocabulary can be documented exclusively in Mordvin and Mari (i.e. a meagre 1.8 per cent).

Gheno (1981, 121) concluded that Mordvin and Mari cannot be derived from a common Volgaic parent speech.

Bereczki (1985, 3-28) too returned to the problem of the Volgaic unity, dating its dissolution to 1000 BC, to an earlier date than Setälä and Zsirai, based in part on his analysis of Baltic loanwords. In his comparison of the lexical stock, Bereczki (1977, 57-77) found nineteen words that are exclusively characteristic of Mordvin and Mari (in terms of ratio, this corresponds to Gheno's fifteen words), which he contrasted with the fifty-six Permian loanwords in Mari, twenty-eight of which are early borrowings either from the Permian parent speech or from Proto-Udmurt. He then went on to examine the Mari temporal *-sek/šek*, Mordvin comitative *-šek/ček*, the Mari number suffixes and essive *-nek/ňek*, as well as the Mordvin comitative *-ňek* suffix pairs, producing new arguments for their independent development and their coincidental correspondence. Neither can the formation of the *-s* infinitive from the *-s* lative be seen as a feature unique to Mari and Mordvin since the use of the lative in the formation of the infinitive is common to all Finno-Ugrian languages. The *\*a* negative auxiliary verb stem of the Finno-Ugrian parent speech cannot be derived from the Volgaic parent speech for it is an earlier development that occurs in an *-e* form in the Permian languages. There is thus nothing in morphology to substantiate the existence of a Volgaic Finno-Ugrian parent speech. In contrast, a considerably greater degree of affinity can be demonstrated between Mordvin and the Balto-Finnic languages both in terms of vocabulary and morphology (Bereczki 1985, 3-28).

A study by Kazantsev (1985), also has a bearing on our present theme. Although concerned mainly with Mari prehistory, Mari-Mordvin language contacts are discussed in the chapter 'The Mari and the development of the Mari language'. Kazantsev notes that at the 1967 conference on Mari ethnogenesis at Joshkar-Ola, linguists had furnished a suitable body of evidence in the light of which Mari and Mordvin must be considered a separate branch of Finno-Ugrian. Beside a recapitulation of earlier arguments, Kazantsev advanced little in the way of new data: he mentions the word-initial *n>l* phonetic change that is characteristic only of Mordvin and Mari.

Mari *lüm*, 'név' [name], 'elnevezés' [designation] Md. *lem*, 'név' [name],  
'elnevezés' [designation]

Komi, Udmurt, *nim*, 'név' [name], 'elnevezés' [designation],

and he also discussed with the word-medial Čk > šk, kČ > kš, Čt > št phonetic changes. His arguments for the Mordvin-Mari morphological correspondences hardly contain new elements

Kazantsev (1985)	Serebrennikov (1967)
no. 1	no. 2
no. 2	no. 5
no. 3	—
no. 4	no. 20
no. 5	no. 6
no. 6	no. 4
no. 7	no. 14

Under no. 3 Kazantsev discusses the correspondence between the Mari numerical adverb, the essive *-nek/ňek* suffix and the Mordvin comitative *-ňek* suffix. Gábor Bereczki had refuted this argument earlier.

Kazantsev (1985, 42-44) considered the ancestors of the Mari and the Mordvin to have remained together over a long period of time even after their separation from the ancestral Balto-Finns, the Gorodets culture being the archaeological reflection of this symbiosis; he conspicuously fails to quote the studies that do not support his theory (including works by Bereczki and Gheno, as well as basic archaeological studies).

In 1985 Serebrennikov again returned to the question of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrian linguistic unity. Rejecting Kazantsev's views, he maintained that there is no conclusive evidence for the existence of a Volgaic Finno-Ugrian parent speech and that Mordvin stands closer to the Balto-Finnic languages than to Cheremis (1985, 10-21).

A new approach is marked by Puzstay's study (1989). In the first part Puzstay published the comparative statistics of the entries in the *Etymological Dictionary of Uralic*, which served to demonstrate that aside from the already known Balto-Finnic contacts, Mordvin also has contacts with the Ugrian and Samoyed languages. Quoting various linguistic phenomena – indeterminate and determinate conjugation, the expression of several objects in the verbal system, predicative noun and adjective declension, the expression of the object of the sentence with the locative – he convincingly demonstrated that Mordvin had distinctive contacts not only with the Ugrian and Samoyed languages, but also with certain Palaeo-Siberian tongues. Puzstay considered the common Mordvin-Ugrian-Samoyed-Palaeo-Siberian features to be an indication that Mordvin had been part of the eastern group of the Uralian unity; Puzstay too rejected the existence of a Mordvin-Cheremis proto-language phase, even though he based his conclusion on other phenomena than the intensity of the Mordvin-Balto-Finnic contacts.

In 1991 I compiled a similar set of statistics from the dictionary *A magyar szókészlet finnugor elemei* [The Finno-Ugrian elements of the Hungarian vocabulary]. I was interested less in the contacts between the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians, than in the possible implications for Hungarian prehistory. The statistics offered further data to the Mordvin-Cheremis linguistic problem. Table 1 of this study shows how many Hungarian words of Finno-Ugrian origin have an etymology that is common with a single Finno-Ugrian subgroup. The dictionary contained 149 words of Obi-Ugrian-Hungarian etymology, 42 of Permian-Hungarian and 34 of Balto-Finnic-Hungarian. I did not find one single word that had a common Volgaic Finno-Ugrian (i.e. Mordvin-Cheremis)-Hungarian etymology; in contrast, there were 8 Cheremis-Hungarian and 7 Mordvin-Hungarian words, that again contradict the existence of a Volgaic proto-language phase (Klima 1991, 362-368).

Wiik has recently published a study on the emergence of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrian peoples and languages (Wiik 1993). He based his findings on the archaeological record, but his linguistic starting point was the assumption of a Volga Finno-Ugrian parent speech. He derived three branches from this Volgaic parent speech: Proto-Cheremis, Proto-Mordvin and the language of the Djakovo culture, the latter defined as an extinct, unknown language. Wiik was rather schematic in his search for correspondences between in the linguistic and the archaeological record, leading to a number of inaccuracies in his conclusions (see also pp. ....).

In sum, it is clear that the linguistic evidence suggests considerably more complex processes than the traditional genealogical model:

Finno-Ugrian parent speech unity

Volgaic parent speech unity

Mordvin

Cheremis

The above definitely challenge the existence of a Volgaic linguistic phase, and suggest strong Cheremis-Permian and perhaps Mordvin-Siberian (Ugrian + Samoyed + Palaeo-Siberian) contact in the Uralian-Finno-Ugrian phase, and, later, Mordvin-Balto-Finnic language contacts. The background to these contacts will be outlined in greater detail in the sections dealing with the historical and archaeological record.

## The Finno-Ugrians of the Middle Volga region in the historic sources

The names of the Finno-Ugrian peoples of the Middle Volga region first appear in the historical sources from the mid-1st millennium AD. Various attempts have been made to identify various tribes, such as the Amadokoi, the Androphagi, the Melanclaeni, etc., mentioned in various earlier, Greek and Roman works, with Finno-Ugrian peoples; however, in view of the uncertainties in these identifications (some of which have since been shown to be wholly unfounded) and the fact that the body of data in question are too early, dating from a period when the ethnogenesis of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians was at a very rudimentary stage, I have not included this body of evidence in the present study. In this section I will survey the occurrence of the Merja, Muroma, Moksha, Erza, Mordvin, Cheremis, Meshchera and Burtas ethnonyms in various sources, and their bearing on Mordvin and Mari prehistory.

### *The Mordvins*

The various groups of the Mordvins are, according to the written sources, the Mordvins proper, the Moksha and the Erza. The Muroma can probably also be considered as a major grouping of the Mordvins, and therefore the testimony of the written evidence on the Muroma will also be considered in this section.

The Mordvins are first mentioned by Jordanes in his *Getica*, together with the Merja (*mordens, merens*) and the *imniscaris* tribe, who can perhaps be identified with the Cheremis. Jordanes lists them among the subject of the Crimean Gothic king, Hermanarich (*Getica* XIII, 116). They are next mentioned in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De administrando imperio* (37, 45-50): a land called Mordia that lies at a distance of ten days' journey from the Petchenegs' land. In the first Russian chronicle, the *Povest' vremennyh let*, edited in the early 12th century, the Mordvins appear as Mordva (*PSRL* I, 10-11). The Mordvins are regularly mentioned in the reports of European travellers, a group of written sources that can be dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is uncertain, however, whether Rubruck's account does in fact refer to the Mordvins since he definitely maintains that the *Merdas, Merdinis* were Muslim (Rubruck, XIV, 1), an observation that would contradict other sources that describe the Mordvins as pagans (Julian, *De facto...* 5) and in fact the name used by Rubruck appears to be the combination of the Mordvin and Burtas ethnonym.

Of the surviving reports from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the accounts by Plano Carpini, Benedictus Polonius and C. De Bridia form a distinct group. All three were members of the same expedition, and John of Plano Carpini's account of his travels is by far the most detailed. It is clear from his description that he never set foot in the Mordvins' land since he only mentions the Mordvins in his description of Batu's campaigns, a clear indication that his information was second-hand (Plano Carpini, V, 29-30). Benedictus Polonius in essence repeats Plano Carpini, with the Parossitae and the dog-headed peoples appearing after the Mordvins, the Bulgars and the Bashkirs (Benedictus Polonus, 7, Plano Carpini, V, 29-30), suggesting that they drew their information from the same source. C. De Bridia's account is somewhat shorter than his companions', and György Györffy has suggested that he had simply digested Plano Carpini's report and peppered it with his own observations (C. De Bridia).

Most important among the 13<sup>th</sup> century sources mentioning the Mordvins are the two reports by Friar Julian. On his first journey he travelled through the Mordvins' land: it took him fifteen days by boat to cross their land (Julian, *De Facto...* 5). He had probably sailed down

the Volga, the Oka and the Desna on his way back to Hungary – for according to Mongajt (1985, 121) this was the shortest route from the Volga Bulgars' empire to Kiev. The distribution of dirhems from the early 9<sup>th</sup> century that were recovered in the course of excavations in the Oka and Desna region outlines this route. In his report Julian mentions the unexceptional savageness of the Mordvins and their apparent delight in murdering their fellow men (Julian, *De facto...* 5).

In his second report Julian describes what he had been personally told of the Tatars and their invasions ("I have been told"). He records that "they subjugated also .... the land of the Mordvins, who had two rulers, one of whom submitted, together with his entire family, to the rule of the Tatars, while the other fled to the fortified places with the remnants of his people, hoping that he might resist." (Julian, *Epistola de vita...*). Julian's first report is important because he records his own experiences, while the second can be regarded as authentic owing to the vividness of the descriptions and the wealth of detail.

The sources are silent on the Mordvins following Julian's report. The 15th-17th century Russian annals and chronicles merely quote or repeat the words of the oldest Russian chronicle (Kir'janov 1971, 148-149). Beginning with the 16th century, however, more and more travellers visited the Mordvins, offering a wealth of new information and data, and only in the wake of these reports did it become clear that the Erza and the Moksha are in fact the two major groups of the Mordvins. The first accounts of the affinity between the Mordvins and the Cheremis also stem from this period.

### *The Erza*

Of the two major branches of the Mordvins, it is the Erza who are first mentioned in the written sources as *arisa*, together with *c-r-mis*, i.e. the Cheremis, in a letter written by Joseph, the Khazar kaqan. Although dated to 968, the letter might in fact have only been written some two or three centuries later (Kokovtsov 1932; Telegdi 1940). The Erza also appear in Arab sources, most of which are based on al-Balkhi's reports from the 9th-10th centuries, that were later elaborated by al-Istakhri and his disciple, ibn Hawqal. A wealth of details on the Erza has been preserved in al-Istakhri's 10th century account, according to which the Rus' (*ar-rus*) can be divided into three groups: *kujada*, *as-salavija* and *al-arsanija*. The first name corresponds to Kiev, the second is the Slavic ethnonym or can be identified with the Slovens living around Novgorod, whilst the third is identical with the Erza ethnonym. Al-Istakhri recorded not only the name *al-arsanija*, but also describes the people themselves: accordingly, the *al-arsanija* are the most dangerous among the three groups of the *ar-rus* for they kill all strangers who set foot in their lands. They only leave their fields if they set off to trade, and then they sail down the rivers and barter their furs, but they do this without uttering a word, revealing nothing of their country or of themselves. Their king lives in the town of *Arsa* (Zahoder 1967, Vol. II, 101-102).

Russian scholars interpret this particular group of sources in various ways. In his work on the history of medieval Rostov, Dubov (1982, 104-123) devoted a separate chapter to the location of the town of *Arsa* and the *al-arsanija* people. He rejects the identification of *Arsa* and the *al-arsanija* with Rjazan, his main argument being that Mongajt, who had first proposed this identification, had later also abandoned this view. Dubov is more than skeptic on pairing off various peoples and places merely on the strength of phonetic similarities, even though this approach – if the phonetic and phonological rules of the relevant tongues are not neglected – can offer new insights. Dubov eventually located *Arsa* and *al-arsanija* to the Upper Volga region, to the environs of Rostov, and in his arguments he interchanges the *Arsa-*



*Arta*, *arsanija-artanija* forms, arguing that the *Arta*, *artanija* orthography is more widespread following Garkavi's translation from the 19th century (Dubov 1982, 105). However, Zahoder's new translation, published in the 1960s, employs the form *arsanija*. It would appear that Dubov adhered to the earlier, erroneous orthography in order to blur the similarity between *Arsa* and Erza, in a somewhat overzealous attempt to demonstrate the importance of the Rostov region where he conducted his researches. In a later study Mongajt (1985, 113-115) again addressed the problem of *Arsa* and *al-arsanija*, and linked them to the references on the *aru* people. In his comments on Abu-hamid's report he correctly identifies *aru* with the Ar-land of the Rus' chronicles. He quotes various chronicles to prove that Ar-land lies near Kazan, on the Kama. He compares *aru* to Chuvash *ar*, 'Udmurt', noting that a town called Arsk still exists some 52 km to the north Kazan, offering a plausible and convincing argument in favour of identifying the *aru* with the ancestors of the Udmurt. But then he unexpectedly also quotes (mistakenly in my view) al-Istakhri's piece of information on *Arsa* and the *al-arsanija*.

The identification of al-Istakhri's data with the Votyaks has also been suggested in a more recent study on the Finno-Ugrians. Grishkina (1994, 12-19) published a study on the history of the Votyaks, citing a number of new data. Her work illustrates the wealth of new information that has at long last become accessible to scholarship from formerly closed archives. Grishkina accepts Mongajt's identification of *al-arsanija* with *aru*, even though this is hardly tenable in light of the linguistic evidence. The identification of *al-arsanija* with the southern Votyaks is based on the phonological similarity between *al-arsanija* and the toponym Arsk. The first three phonemes of the words are seemingly identical, but this is merely a misleading coincidence. The toponym Arsk ends in a Russian toponymical suffix that occurs in a host of other toponyms as well (e.g. Saransk, Omsk, Tomsk, etc.). Without this Russian suffix the toponym would have no relation whatsoever with the ethnonym *al-arsanija*. (Grishkina also mentions that Arsk had previously been called Archa and this latter name cannot be linked to the *al-arsanija* ethnonym.) The toponym Arsk can only be identified with Chuvash *ar*, 'Votyak', the Ar-land of the Russian chronicles and Abu-hamid's *aru* ethnonym. The report that goes back to al-Balkhi's original and that has been quoted by both al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal refers to the *al-arsanija* people of the Volga region. This ethnonym has the same suffix as the ethnonym *madzharija* or *madzhgirija* (the ancient Hungarians) mentioned by other Arab writers (Ibn Rusta, Gardizi). Without this suffix the *al-arsanija* ethnonym can be unambiguously identified with the Erza.

Scholars who reject the identification of *Arsa/al-arsanija* with the Erza have failed to consider a particular body of data. First among these is the ethnonym *arisa*, appearing in Joseph's letter that is basically identical with al-Istakhri's *Arsa* and *al-arsakija*. This similarity remains meaningful even if the letter is later, as has been suggested, than al-Istakhri's report from the 10th century. The second is Friar Julian's personal observation on the savageness of the Mordvins, that corresponds exactly to what al-Istakhri has to say about the *al-arsanija*. The third is a letter written by an anonymous Hungarian bishop in which he describes the capture and the questioning of two Tatar spies: "And these two men wished to mention other news, namely of how certain peoples, called Mordvins, went before them; they kill, without any distinction, anyone who crosses their path. None of these Mordvins dares to put a sandal on his feet before he has killed at least one man..." (Fest 1934, 223-225). In sum, sources independent of each other agree on the unusual savagery of the *al-arsanija* and the Mordvins. This would definitely suggest that *al-arsanija* can be identified with one of the major groupings of the Mordvins, the Erza. The Merja of the Rostov region can hardly be identical with the *al-arsanija* since they were a peaceful lot who received the intrusive Slav groups rather placidly.

Dubov (1982, 114-115), however, claimed that their relatively advanced economy made the Merja of the Rostov region the most likely candidates for more intimate contacts with the merchants sailing up the Volga, the implication being that *al-arsaniya* can be most plausibly be identified with the Finno-Ugrians who would have been known to historians from the reports of contemporary merchants. The merchants did in fact know about the various Finno-Ugrian groups of the Volga region and they were quite capable of trading with the less developed peoples using some sort of sign-language (the so-called ‘silent trade’) (Zahoder 1967, Vol. II, 101-102; Abu Hamid .....).

The picture drawn by the reports would suggest that the *al-arsaniya* were in fact one of the less developed peoples.

The Erza are later mentioned as *ardzhani* in Rashid ad-Din’s report from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (*Sbornik...* 1941, 96), and as *rzjan* by Jusuf, the Nogaj khan (Safargaliev 1964, 12). In Russian sources the ethnonym Erza only appears from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mokshin 1977, 47).

### *The Moksha*

The ethnonym Moksha first appears at a rather late date, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Rubruck, the Franciscan monk who was dispatched to the Mongols, called them *moxel* (V, 5). This ethnonym, however, failed to make its way into European or Oriental reports and geographic works. It does occur in Rashi ad-Din’s above-quoted work, together with the Erza ethnonym, and it appears in the Russian sources from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Mokshin 1977, 47).

### *The Muroma*

The ethnonym Muroma was unknown to travellers and merchants from various lands, and only appears in the Russian sources, in the *Povest’ vremennyh let*, where the Muroma are listed among the peoples of the Oka region (*PSRL* I, 10-11).

### *The evaluation of the historic records*

For a better overview of the available evidence I have arranged the sources quoted in the above into a table:

<i>Mordvin</i>	<i>Erza</i>	<i>Moksha</i>	<i>Muroma</i>
Jordanes 6 <sup>th</sup> century			
Constantine Porphyrogenetus 10 <sup>th</sup> century	Joseph, Khazar kaqan 10 <sup>th</sup> century		
	al-Balkhi, al-Istakhri Ibn Hawqal 9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> century		
<i>Povest’ vremennyh let</i> 12 <sup>th</sup> century			<i>Povest’ vremennyh let</i> 12 <sup>th</sup> century
Rubruck (?) 13 <sup>th</sup> century		Rubruck 13 <sup>th</sup> century	

Plano Carpini, C. De Bridia, Benedictus Polonius 13th century	Rashid ad-Din 14th century		
European travellers from the 16th century	Jusuf, Nogaj khan 16th century		
	Russian sources from the 18th century	Russian sources from the 17th century	Russian sources only

I have tried to analyze the data in the above table in terms of which Mordvin grouping and to which areas a particular source refers to. What must be minutely examined is whether the authors of these reports had personally visited the peoples they describe and if so, from which direction they had approached the Mordvins' land, or whether they based their reports on hearsay, and if so, who were their informants and which Mordvin grouping they were familiar with.

Spicyn (1905, 167) had argued that the Rus' expansion into the Volga-Oka region started from the Smolensk area, that was inhabited by the Krivich tribe. In contrast, Tret'jakov (1966, 290; 1970, 122-141) considered the intrusion from the Novgorod region to have been more significant. From the Volga-Oka mesopotamia the Rus' tribes advanced in a west-east direction along the Volga, implying that descriptions of the Finno-Ugrian peoples of the Volga region in the *Povest' vremennyh let* can be attributed to such encounters.

The Khazar Empire lay to the south of the Mordvins' land, and from the Khazar capital they could most easily be reached by the Volga, implying that the Khazars could approach the Mordvins from the both the east and the north.

Likewise, merchants arrived to the Mordvins from the same direction, towing their ships laden with various commodities up the Volga. The authors of the 9th-10th century Arab sources too most likely reflect this approach, a possibility that is wholly confirmed by al-Istakhri's account, who reports that the Erza sail down the rivers to exchange their furs for other commodities. This barter can only have taken place in the area between the Oka confluence and the Kazan section of the Volga since the rivers of the Mordvin land join the Volga in that area.

The monks who were sent on a political mission brought news of the Mordvins and the Moksha. Similarly to Rubruck, Plano Carpini and his companions crossed the Lower Volga on their way to the interior of the Mongol Empire, suggesting that they received their information from people who were familiar with the southern Mordvin lands. It is equally possible that they had met Mongol warriors and military leaders who had fought in the campaigns against the Volga Bulgars and who thus also knew about the eastern and northern lands of the Mordvins that lay beside the Volga. Information of these areas could also be gathered from merchants who had travelled there.

Rubruck is perhaps the most important among the travellers who visited the Mongolian court, for his is the only report in which the Moksha appear.

Julian also travelled through the Mordvins' land on his way home from his first journey. His route probably led along the Volga and the Oka, the two rivers bordering the Mordvin lands, suggesting that he had met the Mordvins of the northern and western territories.

These data can be collated with what we know about Mordvin settlement patterns as reflected in the archaeological record. The Erza and the Moksha can be archaeologically distinguished by the differing orientation of their burials in ancient Mordvin cemeteries, as well as by the presence of various elements of the Erza and Moksha costume in ancient Mordvin cemeteries from the mid-1st century AD – in other words, the finds that can be associated with

the ancestors of the Moksha and the Erza can be separated well before these two peoples are actually mentioned in the written sources.

Following the proliferation of archaeological investigations, Stepanov (1968, 275-277; 1970, 27-28) assembled maps showing the shifts in the settlement territories of various Mordvin groupings in the 1st millennium and early 2nd millennium AD, which clearly showed that the ancient Erza had been located on the Middle and Lower Oka region and the right bank of the Middle Volga region, mainly in the Tjosa and Pjana basins.

The Muroma were restricted to a very small territory, to the environs of the modern town of Murom.

The Moksha inhabited the inner Mordvin territories, the Upper Sura region and the Moksha and Tsna valley.

There were undoubtedly certain changes and shifts in the settlement territories outlined in the above. Beginning with the late 1st millennium AD, the Erza gradually drifted from the Oka to the east, to the Tyosa, Pjana and Alatir valley.

The collation of the written sources with the distribution of archeological sites would suggest that the Khazars, as well as the Arab travellers and merchants probably met the Erza who lived on the Volga, and it was this Mordvin grouping whom they described as *al-arsanija*.

The Mordvins of the Russian sources can likewise be identified with the Erza, since it was this Mordvin grouping that lived on the Oka and the Volga, i.e. in the area where the Rus' tribes could have met any Mordvins.

If he had indeed crossed the Mordvins' land by sailing down the Volga and the Oka, Julian too could only have met the Erza, whom he called Mordvins in his reports.

The above can be taken to imply that the Erza grouping became independent, signalled also by the independent use of the Erza ethnonym, sometime in the 9th-10th century, even though this ethnonym did not entirely replace Mordvin, for both were alternately used. My assumption is that the ethnonym Mordvin had originally probably been the self-designation of the entire Mordvin community, even though this possibility had earlier been rejected on the grounds that the Mordvins currently either call themselves Erza or Moksha (Mokshin 1971, 286). There is, however, strong supportive evidence for the use of 'Mordvin' as a self-designation: the early, 6<sup>th</sup> century occurrence of the name, the survival and continued use of Mordvin as a self-designation is documented in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Russian sources which continue to call the people inhabiting the Oka confluence as Mordvins – and even though the relevant data preserved in the *Povest' vremennyh let* were undoubtedly adopted, the old accounts were 'updated' e.g. in the case of the Cheremis who were by this time called Meshchera in a number of sources (Kir'janov 1971, 148-149).

Of the 13th century travellers, Plano Carpini and his companions seem to have known the least about the Mordvins, perhaps implying that their informant(s) was not particularly familiar with them. What nonetheless emerges clearly from their accounts is that a picture of a uniform, homogenous Mordvin grouping existed among their neighbours.

Julian came closer to the Mordvins on his second journey than Plano Carpini and his companions, since the Hungarians living in the eastern homeland were the eastern neighbours of the Mordvins. It was from them that Julian heard of their two princes (Julian, *Epistola de vita...*), that perhaps reflects the Erza-Moksha separation. The Hungarians who had remained in the east were undoubtedly well informed and they were the ones who told Julian of the route to Hungary leading through the Mordvins' land.

If Rubruck's travels and his notes on the Moksha are examined at greater length we find that his informant(s) had been a southern neighbour of the Moksha and had little idea of possible related peoples. The ethnonym Moksha appears in the sources some three hundred years later than the Erza. Two basic reasons can be cited: the first, that the Moksha were even

more isolated than the Erza, and very few travellers ever reached them; the other – and perhaps more important one – that they began to call themselves by their own ethnonym much later than the Erza, other major grouping of the Mordvins. The ethnonym Moksha can apparently be linked to their settlement on the river Moksha. The primacy of the hydronym is also confirmed by the fact that this name is very ancient and can be assigned to the group of hydronyms characterized by a *-ma*, *-ga*, *-ša*, etc., ending which, according to Serebrennikov (1965, 237-256), represents a pre-Finno-Ugrian substrate. A Finno-Ugrian etymology for this hydronym has also been suggested (Matvejev 1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1967); but irrespective of its etymology, most scholars agree on the early dating of this hydronym group. Neither is a self-designation after a river particularly unusual among the Finno-Ugrians – a case in point being the assumed link between the hydronym Vogulka and Vogul, the ‘foreign’ name of the Mansi (Hajdú 1981, 24).

Popov (1948) identified the Muroma with the Mordvins on the strength of the toponyms, while the comparison of the archaeological heritage of the Muroma and the Erza led Stepanov (1968; 1970) to conclude that the Muroma and the Erza were one and the same people. The Muroma can hardly be said to have been one of the major Finno-Ugrian groupings of the Volga region. They are generally mentioned together with the other extinct peoples, such as the Merja, although the archaeological evidence and the historic sources both point to the fact that the Merja had by far eclipsed the Muroma in significance. Jordanes mentions the Merja together with the Mordvins, and in later times they appear also in sources other than the Russian annals and chronicles, for Julian too was told about a land called *Merovia* (Julian, *Epistola de vita...*). Merja archaeological finds have been reported from the Kostroma, the Ivanovo, the Jaroslav and the Vladimir provinces; in contrast, Muroma cemeteries form a very closed, small group in the Lower Oka region (Stepanov 1968, 276; Golubjeva 1987). The identification of the Muroma with the Erza is not a particularly well-grounded proposal seeing that there are certain differences between their archaeological relics, and neither are there any grounds for doubting, on the basis of the Russian sources, the existence of a Muroma people. It seems most likely that they were a small ethnic group who had separated from the ancestors of the Erza at an early date. Their proximity to the Erza and their archaeological finds, even if not entirely identical with the Erza assemblages, would suggest that they were closely related to them and that they most probably spoke a tongue that was close to Erza, most likely a variant of it.

### *The Meshchera and the Burtas*

Some scholars have associated the Meshchera and the Burtas with the Mordvins, even though this view has long met opposition. The identification of the Burtas with the Mordvins was first proposed in the last century (Savelev 1847). Another proposal would have the Burtas identified not with the Mordvins in general, but with one of their groupings, the Moksha. This view was championed by Minorsky (1937, 464-465). The historical sources, however, do not confirm these hypotheses. Reports on the Burtas stem from a well circumscribed group of sources, namely the reports by Ibn Rusta, Gardizi, the author of the *Hudud-al-Alam*, al-Bakri, al-Marwazi and Afi, who all drew from their great Bokharan predecessor, from Dzhajhani's work, written in the early 10th century. The sources describe the Burtas as nomad pastoralists, tending to horse, cattle and camel herds. Gardizi also describes their armour: their warriors were equipped with two lances, a battle-axe and a bow; they did not wear a cuirass or any armour, and only the wealthy could afford a horse (Barthold, 1897). Marwazi's description differs to some extent: he calls the Burtas a tribe of the Ghuzz, whose lands are extensive,

incorporating large tracts of forest. They were the subjects of the Khazars, and regularly attacked the Bulgars and the Petchenegs. They were pig-breeders and they were also engaged in farming. One very important piece of information is that they had two distinct burial practices: one group interred their dead, while the other cremated them. Marwazi also mentions that the Burtas had settled on the right bank of the Volga, and maintained close contacts with the Khazars (Minorsky 1942, 162). From her analysis of Masudi's and Ibn Hawqal's works Alihova (1949, 52, 54) concluded that the Burtas had lived along the lower reaches and the estuary of the Volga, including the western coastline of the Caspian Sea, implying that they fought the Bulgars of the Azovian Sea, rather than the Volga Bulgars. There is also evidence suggesting that they had later strayed even farther from the Volgaic Finno-Ugrian territory, with some groups living in the foreland of the Caucasus, in close proximity to the Ossets and the Cheremis.

The evidence is controversial, to say the least. It would appear that several ethnic groupings had made up the Burtas community. The data on nomadism most probably refers to the groups living in the steppeland, while references to pig-breeding and agriculture point to more northerly groups. Although the so-called Penza group of the ancestors of the Moksha lived fairly close to the right bank of the Volga, their territory did not actually extend as far as the river. Neither does the archaeological evidence on the Mordvins support the description of the lifeways cited in the above. And even though 10th century Mordvin cemeteries have yielded horse burials, as well as finds (such as belt fittings, strap ends, strike-a-lights, sabres, arrowheads, battle-axes, etc.) reflecting a horse-breeding pastoral culture and the use of a light cavalry in warfare, these finds are mostly individual pieces, and do not appear to form a uniform culture within the Mordvin community. Another group of sources too would imply that the ethnonym Burtas in fact was a blanket term, covering a variety of several ethnic groups. The toponyms definitely point to the migration – in the 13th-14th centuries – of one Burtas group to the right bank areas of the Middle Volga region, where they were assimilated by the Mordvins, and it was apparently their appearance in this area that inspired their identification with the Mordvins.

Toponyms on the right bank of the middle Volga also indicate a Meshchera presence. In his comprehensive survey of the Burtas-Mordvin problem, Vasil'ev (1960, 181-209) published a map which showed the toponyms preserving the Burtas, Meshchera and Mozhar ethnonyms, and he also included the settlements that according to the Russian sources had been populated by the Meshchera. The ethnonym Burtas first appears in 13<sup>th</sup> century Russian sources (*Slovo o pogibeli russkoj zemli; Khudozhestvennaja proza...* 1957, 252). The data contained in this text refer to the later 11th and the 12th century. The Meshchera appear in Russian sources from the 14th century. Vasil'ev (1960, 205-106) assumed close links between the two ethnonyms and the two peoples, suggesting that Meshchera had gradually replaced Burtas, and that by the 16th century the two became synonyms of each other, with Meshchera eventually evolving into Mishar. In other words, the inhabitants of the Meshcherskaja zemlja in the Middle Oka region, beside the Moksha, were the descendants of the Burtas, and the ancestors of the present-day Mishar-Tatars. Vasil'ev also places the Hungarians who had remained behind in the east among the Burtas-Meshchera. Wiik (1993, 56-57) grouped the Meshchera among the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians and considered them to be linguistically mixed, with a Djakovo-Mordvin ancestry. This, however, is pure speculation. There are no Meshchera linguistic remains and the late occurrence of this ethnonym, exclusively in Russian sources, confirms the assumptions that we are dealing with an immigrant group. If the Meshchera had indeed earlier inhabited the area delimited by the Meshchera toponyms, they would undoubtedly have been mentioned in the Oriental sources for this area was easily accessible to merchants. The archaeological evidence clearly shows that this area had been populated by the

ancestors of the Erza in the 1st millennium AD. Most Hungarian linguists would agree that, together with Mozhar, the ethnonym Meshchera in fact denotes Hungarian groups who fled to the Volga region in face of the Tatar advance and remained there. The ethnonym Mozhar can be derived from the form *magyar*, while Meshchera is usually linked to the form *megyer* (Vásáry 1977, 282-290). In my view the Burtas and the Meshchera cannot be grouped among the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians.

### *The Merja and the Cheremis*

The Merja first appear in the written sources in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, in Jordanes' *Getica*, as the subject of the Hermanarich, the Crimean Gothic king (*Getica*, XIII, 116). In the *Povest' vremennyh let* their abode is described as lying in near Lake Rostov and Lake Kleshchino (*PSRL* I, 10-11). The Merja appear also in the Russian annals: in 859 they have to pay a tribute to the Vikings, in 862 they participate in the campaign against the Vikings, in 882 they accompany Oleg to Kiev, who established himself there at this time and in 907 they too took part in Oleg's Byzantine expedition. The archaeological record shows that at the turn of the 1st and 2nd millennium AD they played the most active role in long-distance trade, and they were the ones to be first affected by the inroads of the Rus' tribes, as shown by a number of 'international' finds, such as various Bulgar-Turkic, Scandinavian and Western European tools and implements, jewellery and weapons, as well as Arabic dirhems. In consequence of these strong inter-regional contacts and the rapid Rus' advance the Merja had, by the early 12th century, been all but assimilated by the newcomers. The very last piece of information on the Merja is a 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century source that mentions a 'Merja settlement' on the left bank of the Volga, at the confluence of the Medveditsa (Tret'jakov 1970, 136).

The Cheremis make their appearance in the historical sources in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, first in Joseph kaqan's letter, and in the *Povest' vremennyh let*; according to the latter the Cheremis lived at the Oka confluence, a rather perplexing piece of information, since the Mari, who – according to our present knowledge – are identical with the Cheremis are known to have lived more to the east of this area. In the last century this apparent contradiction was resolved by proposing that the Mari can be identified with the Merja. The first proponent of this hypothesis, Semenov (1891) quoted a series of toponyms from the Middle and Upper Volga region which he derived from Mari. This issue continues to fascinate researchers. Vasmer (1935) too presented a collection of toponyms from the Merja territory that he ostensibly derived from Mari, although these were later challenged by Ravila (1937). Chetkarev (1954) too thought to identify a number of Mari linguistic features among the toponyms of the Upper Volga region and the Volga-Oka mesopotamia. Of the archaeologists working in this field, Genning (1967) was a strong advocate of the Mari-Cheremis-Merja identity. He conjectured a so-called Merja community in the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries that encompassed the Merja, the Cheremis and the Muroma, which he derived from the eastern branch of the Djakovo culture. This hypothesis was later challenged by Gorjunova (1967, 72) who correctly noted that in the *Povest' vremennyh let* a sharp distinction is drawn between the Cheremis and the Mari and that they are located to different areas. In fact, the identification of the Mari with the Merja does not solve the contradiction between the data preserved in the Russian chronicles and the present-day distribution of the Mari since the Merja are at least as far from the Oka confluence as the Mari.

The historical sources only reveal so much that at the turn of the 1st and 2nd millennium AD an ethnic group called the Cheremis had settled by the Oka confluence who were most certainly not identical with the ancestors of the Mari. The archaeological finds may

eventually outline the settlement territory of the Mari and, also, in elucidate the relations between the Cheremis and the Mari, the Merja and the Mordvins. There was some, as yet little understood contact between the Merja and the Mari (Rozenfel'dt 1974, 193-194) and the Cheremis, located roughly half-way between the two, most probably played an intermediary role.

The *Povest' vremennyh let* does contain some indication of the Cheremis settlement territory. If the area indicated in the chronicle is compared to the present-day Mari settlement territory it becomes evident that the Mari's 'foreign' name can be only a Rus' designation and that it was the Rus' who linked the Mari and the Cheremis ethnonyms. After penetrating the Middle Volga region, the Rus' tribes probably first encountered the Cheremis and moving further to the east they found another people whom, perhaps on account of their outward appearance, their similar costume, or like tongue, they also called Cheremis. A designation based on a certain set of similarities is not at all uncommon in this region: the Sölkup have also been called Ostiak Samoyeds (Hajdú 1975, 12), while the Chuvash have been designated as Tatar Cheremis by Zalánkeméni (quoted by Szamota 1892). And even though the ethnonym had been diffused by the Rus', it cannot be derived from any Slavic language. Hajdú (1981, 48) favours a Volga Bulgarian etymology on the basis of the link between the ethnonym Cheremis and Chuvash *s'armis*. In view of the location of the Cheremis it is also possible that they received their name from the Khazars.

The Mari ethnonym does not occur in the historic sources of the period discussed in the present study (the later 1st millennium and the early 2nd millennium AD) and thus further information on the nature of the Cheremis-Mari relations can only be gleaned from the archaeological record.

The following sections will offer a survey the archaeology of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians, bearing in mind the conclusions offered by the linguistic and historic record.



## The prehistory of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians: the archaeological record

### *From the Neolithic to the Iron Age*

Owing to the relative abundance of archaeological finds the prehistory of the Mari and the Mordvins is fairly well known. Archaeological studies have been concerned not only with the ancestors of the Mari and the Mordvins, but also with extinct Volgaic Finno-Ugrian peoples such as the Merja and the Muroma. It has by now been established that the ancestors of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians are to be sought among the Djakovo, the Gorodets and the Ananino population and their descendants, Pjanobor and Azelino. This section will therefore focus on these archaeological cultures, with the aim of drawing as complete a picture as possible of the prehistory of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians.

A brief overview of the research into these cultures seems in order. Finno-Ugrian prehistoric studies have yielded a wealth of new information in recent decades. Earlier proposals, locating the Uralian homeland to Western Siberia and the European slopes of the Northern Uralian Mts in the Neolithic have been replaced by suggestions that the ancestors of the Balto-Finns had already colonized their present-day homeland in the Mesolithic. The latter view has been traditionally favoured by Finn and Estonian scholars, whilst the advocates of a Uralian-Western Siberian homeland are mostly to be found among Hungarian and Russian prehistorians. Moora (1956) linked the appearance of the Finno-Ugrians in the Baltic to the Pit-Comb pottery culture of the 3rd millennium BC, while Itkonen (1961) had suggested that the Uralian homeland had extended as far as the Baltic Sea. Meinander (1984) assumed that the Baltic had been colonized by groups from the east sometime during the Mesolithic. Nunez (1987) and Makkay (1990) both investigated how, following the retreat of the ice-sheet, the present-day forest zone had been gradually settled by southern groups. The fascination of this theme is reflected by the paper read by Sammallahti (1995) at the Finno-Ugrian Congress held in Jyväskylä. Veres (1991) too has published a paper in which he proposed that the location of the Uralian-Western Siberian homeland should be modified according to the new palynological findings. It follows from the above that during the Neolithic, which in the western areas of the forest zone means the Pit-Comb pottery and the Volga-Kama culture in the east, the ancestors of the Uralian peoples had been dispersed throughout the entire forest zone. In terms of linguistics, this period can be regarded as the final phase of the parent speech community, with local dialects existing side-by-side within this linguistic unity (Korhonen 1984, 60-61), implying that the Uralian parent speech community did not evolve in the present-day forest zone.

The above theories have a bearing on the prehistory of the Volga Finns insofar as the Middle Volga region was the contact zone between the two major cultures of the Neolithic: the Pit-Comb pottery and the Volga-Kama culture. This dual influence and double bind influenced the ethnogenesis of the Volga Finno-Ugrians from this period. The linguistic evidence would suggest that the Proto-Mordvins developed contacts with the west, with the ancestors of the Balto-Finns, whilst the ancestors of the Cheremis came into close contact with the Proto-Permian population. These contacts and interrelations can be archaeologically traced from the Neolithic to the ethnogenesis of the Cheremis and the Mordvins (second half of the 1st millennium AD).

The population of the Ural-Kama culture of the 4th and 3rd millennium BC can, for the greater part, be identified with a community of Uralian groups that spoke a more or less similar tongue. Two origins have been proposed for this culture: Chernetsov (1953, 7) derives this

culture from the Kelteminar culture that was distributed in the region of Lake Aral, while Smirnov (1957, 21-23) and Raushenbach (1956, 147-149) derive it from the local Mesolithic. The various find assemblages of the Ural-Kama culture from the European distribution were first assigned to an independent group by Bader (1956, 10-20), who labelled this group the Kama culture. A fairly high number of Kama sites have since been identified in the Middle Volga region also, and the name of the culture was therefore changed to Volga-Kama culture. Local groups of the Volga-Kama culture began to appear in the second phase, no doubt in part under influence from contact with neighbouring cultures and population groups. The Volga-Kama culture had its closest and longest ties with its western neighbour, the Balakhna group of the Volga-Oka culture. The Balakhna group expanded eastwards in the first half of the 3rd millennium BC, reaching as far as the Kazan bend of the Volga and penetrating also the Vjatka-Vetluga mesopotamia (Nikitin 1978, 113-114).

The Volga-Kama culture was followed by the Volosovo culture on the territory that is one of the prime candidates for the ethnogenesis of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians. Several hypotheses have been proposed for the origins of this culture. Bader (1953), Tret'jakov (1966) and Khalikov (1969) derive the Volosovo culture from the Volga-Kama culture, and the departure of the Balto-Finnic population from the Finno-Ugrian homeland can be linked to the westward migration of the Volosovo culture. According to another view the Volosovo culture evolved from the Volga-Oka (or the Pit-Comb pottery) culture (Tsvetkova 1970; Krajnov 1973). Krajnov later modified his views; the clarification of the stratigraphical sequence of various sites in the Upper Volga region also enabled a precise definition of the Early Neolithic culture of the Upper Volga region (Krajnov–Hotinskij 1977). According to Krajnov the fusion of the Neolithic culture of the Upper Volga region with the Volga-Oka culture led to the emergence of the Volosovo culture in the Upper Volga and in the Oka region, while in the Volga-Kama and the Middle Volga region the Volosovo culture emerged from the Volga-Kama and the Balakhna variant of the Volga-Oka culture. It would appear that the Volosovo culture can be dated between the mid-3rd millennium and the first quarter of the 2nd millennium BC (Krajnov 1981, 8-9), that marks the beginning of the Bronze Age in this region. Five regional groups of the Volosovo culture have been distinguished: the Middle Volga, the Oka, the Upper Volga, the western and the northwestern. The Kazan culture evolved from the Middle Volga group, while the Pozdniakovo culture developed from the Oka group.

These developments, however, were preceded by a series of other momentous events in the Volga-Oka mesopotamia and in the Middle Volga region: the intrusion of various tribes – the Fatjanovo, Balanovo and Abashevo cultures – engaged in animal husbandry from the south. The Fatjanovo culture was distributed in the eastern and central areas of the Volga-Oka mesopotamia, but Fatjanovo sites have also been reported from the Upper Moskva and Kljazma region. These were the first population groups in this area to be engaged in animal husbandry (based primarily on sheep and pig breeding). Krajnov (1972, 251-252) has derived the Fatjanovo culture from the Battle Axe culture that in his view had disseminated from the area between the Dnieper and the Vistula. There were no prolonged contacts between the Fatjanovo and the Volosovo population – only in the Kostroma Volga region has a small-scale intermingling been demonstrated (Gurina 1963, 133, 139).

The Balanovo population first encountered the Proto-Finno-Ugrians at roughly the same time as the Fatjanovo culture, at the turn of the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, when the Balanovo population migrated to the right bank of the Volga, to the areas between the Oka and the Kama confluence. Anthropologically, the Balanovo and the Fatjanovo population shows marked differences. Bader (1964, 114) and Khalikov (1969, 191-192, 281) both assumed these two cultures to have evolved in neighbouring territories, in the Middle Dnieper

region. In the Middle Volga region the Balanovo culture merged with the indigenous population to the extent that a new culture, labelled Chirkovo-Sejma was distinguished.

The sites of this culture show a concentration in the Lower Oka region and along the Volga in the Sura and Vetluga confluence, with some sites lying in the Upper Volga region, as well as in areas somewhat farther from the Volga in the Mari Republic (Khalikov 1969, 205). The Chirkovo-Sejma culture survived into the third quarter of the 2nd millennium and its disappearance can be linked to the expansion of the Pozdniakovo culture to the Lower Oka territory.

The descendants of the Chirkovo-Sejma culture survived in the Kazan culture and, later, in the Ananino culture, implying that the duality of the Volosovo period continued in the latter half of the 2nd millennium BC. The culture of one part of the Middle Volga population shared numerous similarities with their eastern relatives, while other groups had closer ties with the west.

The last of the southern peoples to appear in the Middle Volga region was the Abashevo culture in the mid-2nd millennium BC; however, they were unable to carve out a permanent settlement territory for themselves (the archaeological finds too reflect constant clashes with the local population). The Abashevo sites are scattered over a large territory, with concentrations along the Sura and the Svijaga, in the Vjatka-Vetluga mesopotamia, and in the Upper Belaja and Upper Ural region in the Uralian Mts. In spite of the constant clashes with the local population, Abashevo metallurgy nonetheless exerted a lasting influence on the indigenous culture.

By the mid-2nd millennium the Pozdniakovo culture had appeared in the Middle and Lower Oka region (Popova 1970, 162). The culture can be traced until the early 1st millennium, its early phases can be correlated with the Balanovo and the Chirkovo-Sejma culture. There is a general consensus that the Pozdniakovo culture evolved on a Volosovo basis; only Popova (1970, 177) has argued for an evolution from immigrant Timber-grave groups in the Volga-Oka mesopotamia. Her arguments can be rejected on the grounds that the early 'Timber-grave' traits of the Pozdniakovo culture faded later, suggesting that influences from the south – that could be simply cultural or the actual settlement of smaller Timber-grave groups engaged in animal husbandry – were gradually absorbed by the local population (Bader 1970, 62; Tret'jakov 1966, 131-135).

At the close of the 2nd millennium BC textile impressed pottery appeared in the Finno-Ugrian community from the Baltics to the territory of present-day Kazan region. This is generally attributed to lively interrelations between various cultures and population groups (Tret'jakov 1966, 135), even though the Middle Volga region still acted as a divide within the Finno-Ugrian community. In the east, the textile impressed pottery only extended as far as the Kazan culture, and did not spread to the Kama and the Ural Mts, appearing rather late in the Kazan culture, in which it never became typical (Khalikov 1980, 39).

Similarly to the Pozdniakovo culture, the Kazan culture too flourished in the 16th-9th centuries BC. Evolving from the easternmost branch of the Volosovo culture, the Kazan culture migrated westwards, assimilating the Chirkovo-Sejma groups. The diverse elements that contributed to the makeup of the Kazan culture are reflected in the divergences – most noticeable in pottery – between the western and eastern groups of the culture (Khalikov 1980, 34-40).

The Pozdniakovo and the Kazan cultures were the predecessors of the three cultures (Djakovo, Gorodets and Ananino) from which the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians evolved, and in the following I shall discuss these at greater length.

One of the most important historical phenomena in the period between the Volga-Kama period and the Kazan culture is the cultural watershed in the Middle Volga region, that marked

a divide between east and west, with the ancestors of individual Finno-Ugrian peoples evolving in different cultural milieus. This phenomenon may perhaps be invoked to explain the linguistic divide between the Mordvins and the Mari – assuming, in this case, that the ancestors of the Mari lived to the east, and the ancestors of the Mordvins to the west of this divide: two neighbouring, but nonetheless separate groups.

### *The Djakovo culture and its role in the ethnogenesis of the Volgaic Finno-Ugrians*

The Djakovo culture is one of the oldest known Finno-Ugrian cultures, its hillforts have been investigated since the last century. The dating of the culture has remained controversial. Spicyn (1903, 111-142) assigned the culture to the 6th-8th centuries AD, suggesting that some sites may have survived into the 9th century. On the basis of his excavations in two hillforts, Gorodtsov (1926; 1934) dated the culture between rather broad limits: the Starshaja Kashira hillfort was assigned to the 7th-4th centuries BC and the Ogubskoje site to the 1st-5th centuries AD. His dates were adopted by other archaeologists for dating later finds. This chronology was only modified after Tret'jakov (1941) and Bader (1947; 1950) had published the finds from their excavations in the 1930s. Gorjunova (1961) and Tret'jakov (1966) continued the research into the Djakovo culture; Tret'jakov (1966, 146) assigned the finds from the third fourth of the 1st millennium AD to the late Djakovo culture and regarded a specific type of unornamented pottery as its hallmark. In his opinion the ethnic composition of the culture changed at this time, with Baltic elements becoming predominant in the western areas of the Volga-Oka mesopotamia (Tret'jakov 1966, 294). In contrast, Gorjunova (1961, 45) considered the culture to have retained its essentially Finno-Ugrian traits, and she identified the Vladimir-Moskva and Jaroslav-Kostroma groups with the Merja. In her opinion the culture had survived until the close of the 1st millennium AD. Concurrently with the publication of these studies, intensive fieldwork was begun in the Moskva basin and in the Upper Volga region; the findings of the excavations on the Troitski hillfort were published in *MIA* volumes 156 and 184, and in 1974 a separate collection of studies was devoted to the Djakovo culture (Smirnov 1974b). And while a consensus had evolved as far as the beginning of the culture was concerned, opinions differed widely as to its end, often with differences of four to five centuries. Rozenfel'dt (1982) devoted a separate study to the upper time limit of the culture.

In 1932-1933, prior to the construction of the Moskva canal and the Ivankovo reservoir, Bader conducted a series of excavations in the Kalinin province. One particularly distinctive group of finds were the so-called Djakovo type clay weights that had perhaps been used as loom weights (Bader 1950, 104). Most pottery fragments bore textile impressions. The Sannikovo hillfort yielded vessels whose form and fabric corresponded to the textile impressed pottery, but were undecorated. Bader considered this ware to be chronologically later.

Tret'jakov too conducted a series of field surveys and excavations in the Volga region during the 1930s, along a 350 km long section between the Nerl confluence and Jaroslav, and from his observation he tried to reconstruct the migrations of the culture, suggesting that in the mid-1st millennium BC the Djakovo culture had drifted from the Mologa and Sheksna mesopotamia to the Upper Volga region, to the area above the Mologa confluence. Concurrently, the population of the Kostroma plainland was absorbed by the population inhabiting the coastal areas of Lake Nero and Lake Pleshchejevo. The population of the Upper Volga region, inhabiting the area above the Mologa confluence had, until the close of the 1st millennium BC, built small hillforts; Tret'jakov himself had identified a dozen such sites. The animal bone samples from some of these hillforts showed a predominance of horse bones. The primacy of horse breeding can be attributed to influences from the south. He concluded that

the Djakovo population was mixed: the finds reflected divergences between the upper and the lower sections of the river in the Upper Volga region. The pottery from the hillforts along the Kostroma section shows affinities with the pottery wares from the Vetluga and Kama regions, and tend to more squat (often provided with a collar) than the vessels from the uppermost Volga section. Their ornamentation corresponds to the local, Upper Volga wares, with an absence of motifs that can be derived from 'bomb-shaped' vessels. Another difference is the structure of the buildings uncovered in the hillforts: log cabin type buildings predominate in the Volga section above the Mologa confluence, while semi-subterranean houses erected around a framework of vertical posts characterize the sites along the lower section (Tret'jakov 1941, 20-25, 30, 46). This observation obviously applies to the period before log cabins – mostly under Slavic influence – became common over the entire distribution of the culture in the 10th-11th centuries AD.

Tret'jakov's excavations in the 1930s also enriched our knowledge of the mortuary practices of the Djakovo culture: the discovery of a *domik mјortvih*, a 'house of the dead' found in the 4th-5th century AD hillfort at the Sonohta confluence. Measuring 2.25 m by 2.25 m, it had been constructed of oak and fir, and contained the burnt bones of some five to six individuals, as well as ornaments and an assortment of metal tools and implements. The funerary rite involved the cremation of the deceased and the transportation of the remains to this site (Tret'jakov 1941, 58-60). This funerary rite was probably practiced over the entire Djakovo distribution and comparable burial sites have also been identified separate from the hillforts. This funerary rite predates the cremation burials of the Eastern Slavs in the northern territories, and can thus be considered a local tradition or an earlier adoption. Aside from cremation, the Djakovo culture also practiced inhumation: several cemeteries containing inhumation burials, with only a handful of few cremation graves, have also been identified, mostly in the Jaroslav Volga region, in the environs of Lake Nero and Pleshchejevo, i.e. in the very area which differs from the Djakovo population of the Upper Volga region in several other respects too. Tret'jakov (1941, 90-91) identified this group with the easternmost Krivich groups, while the Jaroslav and Kostroma groups were identified with the Merja. The finds from the latter share numerous similarities with the Proto-Mordvin finds, for example in burial customs, since Proto-Mordvin cemeteries are likewise characterized by the presence of a few cremation burials alongside the inhumation graves.

In consequence of the intensive research of the Djakovo culture we now have a better knowledge of the different types of hillforts and their buildings. Most were established at river confluences, on the elevation between the two rivers. The fortifications were often reconstructed in the course of later building activity. Two types characterize the earliest ones: one with the residential buildings dug into the fortification bank, the other having a palisade instead of an earthen bank, with a shallow ditch or a series of concentric ditches outside the palisade (Smirnov 1974a, 10-13). The buildings of these hillforts range from round structures with a diameter between 4,5 and 7 m – some dug into the soil, some being above-ground structures with only the floor lying slightly lower –, to round houses connected with a 'corridor' that perhaps hark back to the Volosovo tradition. Longhouses which, judging from the several fireplaces, had perhaps housed a larger community, most probably an extended family, were also uncovered. The latter two types were later supplanted by rectangular houses constructed around a frame of wattling. The last phase is characterized by rectangular log cabins (Smirnov 1974a, 19-26).

Predominant among the finds from the Djakovo hillfort are the tools and implements of fishing and hunting which at first were made exclusively of bone, and were only gradually replaced by iron artefacts. Arrowheads, harpoons and hooks were, similarly to iron spearheads and maceheads, local products. Some artefacts, such as sickle shaped knives and quiver

suspension loops, originated from the south, while the horse-shoe shaped enamelled fibulae (a variant of the buckle fibula, often called a *sjulgam*) came from the Baltic; most finds (knives with slightly arched back, socketed axes and the buckle fibulae) nonetheless point to the Finno-Ugrians of the Volga and Kama region.

Several schemes have been proposed for the periodization and the distribution of the Djakovo culture. It had earlier been suggested that the Djakovo distribution could be correlated with the distribution of textile impressed pottery and the clay weights, but it later became clear that these were distributed over a fairly extensive area. Textile impressed pottery is still considered a hallmark of the Finno-Ugrian community and its distribution over an extensive area is generally interpreted as reflecting the trend towards uniformization within the Finno-Ugrian cultures. Clay weights too have a fairly wide distribution, and have been found in Smolensk and in Bjelorussia. Regional groups of textile impressed pottery and the pottery weights have also been distinguished, and further investigations in this field will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of the relation between these finds and the Djakovo culture. The boundaries of the Djakovo distribution has also been variously defined. According to Smirnov (1974, 77-79) its northern boundary lay in the Kostroma province, in the east it was bordered by the Gorodets culture, its southern boundary was marked by Oka, while in the west it extended to the Protva, as well as the Moskva and Vazuza drainage, incorporating also the Upper Western Dvina region. Smirnov dated the culture between the 7th-6th centuries BC and the 5th-6th centuries AD and distinguished three main phases.

In his study of the Djakovo pottery, Rozenfel'dt distinguished four phases, suggesting that the culture had survived until the turn of the millennium. In his view, the Djakovo culture was distributed over a less extensive area. He excluded the Kostroma province owing to the absence of Djakovo type weights and differing pottery wares; the upper section of the Western Dvina too could be excluded in view of the scarcity of textile impressed pottery in the early period and the fact that even after its appearance in the area, it differed markedly from Djakovo textile impressed pottery. The eastern areas of the Volga-Oka mesopotamia could also be excluded since in the early period the textile impressed pottery betrays Kama traits (rounded base, ornamentation), there is a marked absence of clay weights and the pottery too differs, being characterized by the so-called Merja-Kama type. There is a conspicuous lack of Upper Oka type polished ware and inhumation burials dominate in the cemeteries. Rozenfel'dt located the Djakovo distribution to the Volga section between the Ivankovo and Ribinsk reservoirs, the Moskva canal and the Moskva valley and a short section of the Upper Oka, above the Moskva confluence. He did not assign the finds of the Proto-Merja to the Djakovo culture. Rozenfel'dt distinguished two Baltic migrations into the Djakovo culture, the first in the early of the 1st millennium AD, the second in the 3rd-5th centuries AD (Rozenfel'dt 1974, 189, 191-194, 197).

The suggestion that the Djakovo culture in fact reflects the symbiosis of several ethnic groups was first proposed by Tret'jakov (1941, 90-91). A Baltic immigration to the Djakovo distribution territory has also been favoured by several other scholars. Sedov (1970, 102; 1974, 32) considered headdresses of bronze plaques and spirals to reflect a Baltic immigration not only in the Djakovo culture, but also among the Proto-Mordvins. Smirnov (1974,79) has suggested a Slavic immigration in the late phase of the culture (2nd-3rd to 5th-6th centuries). Krasnov (1968, 4-5, 8) too favoured a Baltic immigration, citing the Baltic features of the sickles as his main evidence. Dubinin (1974, 251) has also regarded the culture to have a mixed ethnic makeup, especially in its late phase; he may have based his arguments on the sickles and the female headdresses, although nowhere does he expressly state this. He nonetheless considered individual groups (the population of individual hillforts and settlements) to have

been ethnically homogenous, and thus this 'mixed' culture was in fact made up of the closed groups of two distinct populations.

I have some reservations concerning the Baltic immigration. If an immigration from the Baltics to the Djakovo distribution is assumed, why is a similar immigration not considered from the east, from the Gorodets and the Pjanobor cultures, even more so, seeing that the Djakovo culture maintained extremely close links with these cultures. Why is an immigration from the Volga Bulgars and from the southern Urals similarly not considered? The archaeological finds from the later 1st millennium AD would support an immigration from this direction. The find assemblages of the Djakovo culture reflect various inter-ethnic contacts, and the Rus' tribes, as well as the Vikings in fact simply adopted and exploited this intricate network of interrelations at the close of the 1st millennium AD. Neither can it be excluded that the various Djakovo groups were all Finno-Ugrians, with the Jaroslav and Kostroma groups being identifiable with the Merja. The western branch of the culture – in the Volga and in the Western Dvina source region – probably played a key role in the prehistory of the Balto-Finns, for this group had come under stronger Baltic influences than the other groups.

### *The Gorodets culture and its role in Mordvin and Mari ethnogenesis*

The Gorodets culture was first distinguished from the Djakovo culture by Gorodtsov (1899, 210). Spicyn (1916, 73), however, rejected the assignment of the Iron Age hillforts of the Middle Volga to two cultures. The dating of the Gorodets hillforts was not as problematic as that of the Djakovo hillforts. The Gorodets culture emerged in the 8th-7th centuries BC and was first thought to have lasted until the 1st-2nd centuries AD, a date that was later modified to the 4th-5th centuries AD. Trubnikova and Smirnov (1965, 9-10) defined the distribution of the culture as follows: its western boundary lay somewhat to the west of the Tsna river, in the north and in the east its boundary was marked by the Volga, while in the south it bordered on the northern areas of the Saratov province. This distribution was somewhat modified in the late 1st millennium BC, when a gradual move to the left bank of the Volga can be noted. The Gorodets culture is generally derived from the Pozdniakovo culture, i.e. the Gorodets population is considered to be descended from the local population of the preceding period.

The Gorodets culture shares numerous similarities with Djakovo culture, that is likewise descended from the Pozdniakovo culture. The first phase of the Gorodets culture (lasting roughly until the 3rd-1st centuries BC) is characterized by a conspicuous lack of cemeteries. The finds from the Gorodets hillforts too have much in common with Djakovo assemblages. Pottery was generally coarse, with textile and cord impressed, as well as comb-marked patterns. Unornamented pottery gained currency in the later phase of the culture. In contrast to the Djakovo culture, Gorodets pottery is also characterized by mat impressed wares. Aside from pottery, the hillforts also yielded a rich variety of bone tools and implements, as well as stone artefacts. Very few metal finds were recovered; these were mostly knives, arrowheads, horse bits, spearheads, socketed axes, and hoes. Tools and implements were generally manufactured from iron, while jewellery was mostly in bronze. A number of moulds and crucibles recovered from the hillforts attest to local metalworking (Smirnov–Trubnikova 1965, 16-181).

The hillforts of the Gorodets culture are mostly known from field surveys: they are generally triangular in groundplan, protected by natural gullies or a watercourse on two sides, and with earthwork banks and ditches on the third. Little is known about the internal layout of the Gorodets hillforts, but they do differ slightly from the Djakovo hillforts. The houses were built against the internal side of the earthwork bank or were grouped on one side of the hillfort.

Several house types could be distinguished. In the Gorodets hillfort the semi-subterranean houses were 7 to 13 m long and at least 6 m wide, with a fireplace in their middle (Gorodtsov 1910, 378). In the Chardimi hillfort the houses measured 4 m by 4 m, while the remains of round structures were also identified in the Paletskij hillfort. Some Gorodets hillforts also contained cult places: at the Toporok and Gorodets sites these had clay altars, and in Aleksejevskoje a fireplace surrounded with stones was found that yielded flat burnt stones, ashes, charcoal, as well as animal and human bones (Smirnov–Trubnikova 1965, 12-13).

Smirnov and Trubnikova (1965, 19-27) distinguished six subgroups in the Gorodets culture, mainly on the basis of the pottery finds both from the hillforts, and from the cemeteries (the late, unornamented pottery wares). Consequently, this grouping can only be valid for the later phase of the Gorodets culture (3rd-4th centuries AD). Their six groups are the following:

- (1) Middle Oka group  
Distributed along the Razan section of the Oka, from the Moskva confluence to the Tsna confluence .
- (2) Lower Oka group  
Distributed along the Oka section in the Murom area.
- (3) Northeastern group  
The sites that can be assigned to this group lie east of the Sura, in the Svijaga and Tsvil basins, along the Volga in the Uljanovsk province and in the Lower Tsna and Moksha region.
- (4) Central group  
Distributed in the central areas on the right bank of the Middle Volga region.
- (5) Eastern group  
Distributed around Kujbishev.
- (6) Southern group  
The hillforts of the Saratov province and the environs of Hvalinsk are assigned to this group.

Most of the known hillforts lie in the Middle Oka region. Concentrated over a relatively small area, the northeastern hillforts are the second largest group, whilst the hillforts of the Lower Oka, the eastern and the southern groups have numerically fewer hillforts. The central group shows a less dense distribution of sites. The pottery from the later phase of the Gorodets hillforts and the pottery from the Proto-Mordvin cemeteries are practically identical, implying that these cemeteries and hillforts had been used by the ancestors of the Mordvins. These cemeteries will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

#### *The cemeteries of the Proto-Mordvin period*

This period is generally dated from the first centuries of the 1st millennium AD, and its very first relic is the Andrejevka kurgan. The finds unearthed at the Andrejevka site reflect the interaction between several cultures. One alien element of the burial site is the kurgan itself, the timber-lined grave pit and the partial horse burials, the ‘Sarmatian’ weapons and the Pjanobor jewellery (Stepanov 1967, 206-267). It is also quite possible that the grave had contained the remains of the élite or warriors of an Iranian ethnic group, or that an earlier cult place began to be used as a burial site, a practice that has been documented in the 6th-3rd centuries among the Scythians of the Maeotis region. The structure of the Andrejevka kurgan, with a platform



resting on a series of posts in its centre, definitely reflects an influence from that direction (Leskov 1985; Leskov–Lapushnan 1989). It is nonetheless probable that this élite or these warriors had been taken in by the Proto-Mordvins since the grave goods from later burials that had been dug into the kurgan can be definitely assigned to the Proto-Mordvin find assemblages. A number of Proto-Mordvin cemeteries are known from the period following the construction of the Andrejevka kurgan, i.e. from the 3rd-4th centuries AD. These cemeteries can be assigned to three regional groups: the Koshibej, the Razan and the Penza groups (Vihljajev 1979, 140). Aside from finds of Gorodets origin, the grave goods reflect steppean and Pjanobor influences, the latter being the successor of the Ananino culture. The Pjanobor analogies to the finds from the Koshibej cemetery had already been pointed out by Spicyn (1901), and Poleskih (1979, 13-14) too had duly noted a number of similarities with the finds from the Penza cemeteries. A Pjanobor influence can also be discerned in the cemeteries of the Razan group, the Proto-Mordvin grouping that lay farthest from the Pjanobor distribution. It has also been argued that these well-discernible Pjanobor influences reflect a Pjanobor settlement among the Proto-Mordvins, although this proposal did not gain wider currency for, as Gening (1970, 191-195) has correctly pointed out, the assumption of such a settlement does raise certain chronological problems, seeing that the Koshibej and the Penza cemeteries can hardly be dated before the 3rd century, while the Pjanobor sites predate these cemeteries in his system. He also pointed out that the so-called ‘Pjanobor’ finds are not diagnostic of the Pjanobor cemeteries. Gening therefore suggested that we are in fact dealing with a reverse distribution. He also suggested that there may have existed a smaller culture province in the Middle Volga region at this time to which the hillforts of Andrejevka, Piseral and the Chuvash land can be assigned.

In an earlier study I have also briefly discussed the Pjanobor-Proto-Mordvin relations (Klima 1985). In my opinion it is not necessary to invoke migrations or a settlement for explaining analogous archaeological finds. Trade contacts and other day-to-day events – through which neighbouring, but even more distant peoples and tribes may have come into contact with each other – can equally well explain the contact between two peoples or archaeological cultures. The Pjanobor culture and its possible irradiation is also important in terms of Mari ethnogenesis and shall be discussed in below.

The history of the Koshibej, Penza and Rjazan groups of the Proto-Mordvin cemeteries can be traced to later periods. The relics of the descendants of the Penza group can be identified with Armijevo type cemeteries of the mid-1st millennium BC and with the Ljada type cemeteries at the close of the millennium. This group is generally identified with the ancestors of the Moksha (Poleskih 1979, 51-53). The Erza and the so-called Muroma type cemeteries of the mid-1st millennium pose a somewhat more complicated problem. Moksha and Erza burials can best be distinguished by their orientation, Erza graves being generally north-south, Moksha graves being south-north oriented. Geraklitov and Stepanov thus linked the Razan cemeteries to the Erza. Stepanov (1970) did not separate the history of the Erza and Muroma grouping, suggesting that the Muroma cemeteries in the Lower Oka region began to be used when the Razan cemeteries were abandoned, the implication being that there was no such grouping as the Muroma – the Erza had simply migrated to the Lower Oka region. His views invited few comments. It nonetheless seems more likely that the Muroma formed a smaller ethnic grouping within the Erza and that in the early 2nd millennium they were assimilated by the Rus'. Martjanov and Nad'kin (1979, 121) too had suggested that the disappearance of the Proto-Mordvins from the Razan section of the Oka and the Oka confluence can be explained by their assimilation. They studied the Finno-Ugrian isoglosses of the Russian dialects east of Moscow and compared these to the Erza and Moksha dialects of Mordvin; and they also

examined the hydronyms of the Razan section of the Oka. The linguistic evidence suggested that the Oka valley had been populated by the Erza.

No consensus has been reached on the evaluation of the Koshibej group, mostly because of the 'transitional' nature of the finds: the group is alternately identified with the ancestors of the Erza and with the forebears of the Moksha.

The next period of the Proto-Mordvin cemeteries, spanning the period from the mid-1st millennium AD to the 8th-9th centuries saw a change in the burial rite, with fire playing an increasingly important role – traces of burning can be observed in the grave fill and cremation graves too make an appearance. From this period on, cremation burials make up about fifteen to twenty per cent of the burials in the Proto-Mordvin cemeteries. Links with the south, mostly through long-distance trade, continue to colour Proto-Mordvin culture, as reflected by fibulae from the Cherniakhov culture and from the Pontic towns (Ambroz 1966, 26, 41, 71-72, 82-83).

Similarly to other Finno-Ugrian peoples of the Middle Volga region, the Mordvin women too wore a wide variety of jewellery. This, however, does not mean the activity of workshops with highly-skilled goldsmiths, for most ornaments were simple trinkets made of bronze wire or sheet bronze, with only a few made by casting. In contrast to the Proto-Mari, where the tools and implements of bronze metallurgy – including moulds and crucibles – were recovered from male graves, these finds generally came to light from female burials among the Proto-Mordvins. One important item of female costume was the headdress of bronze tubes and bronze spirals alternating with rectangular or round plaques, arranged into several rows and attached to leather or textile backing (Jefimenko 1926, 82). Another typical Mordvin jewellery was a headdress: a 3 to 5 cm long leather strip around which was coiled a bronze wire (with fifteen to twenty twists) and from which hung diamond shaped pendants. Braid ornaments too were generally of a leather strip around which was wound a bronze wire and from which bottle, star or bell shaped pendants were suspended. Most women wore several such ornaments (Spicyn 1901, Pl. VI. 29, Pl. XIX. 7). Female dress was adorned with openwork bronze mounts, semicircular, rectangular or triangular in shape, with the occasional bird or horse shaped mount, from which were suspended a variety of pendants. Disc terminalled bronze neckrings are also quite frequent (Jefimenko 1926, 71-76, Fig. 2. 21, Fig. 4. 19, Fig. 5. 16). Round buckle fibulae were recovered from almost every female burial (Polesskih 1979, 11-13), another frequent ornament type being penannular armrings ornamented with a herringbone pattern or punctates, their terminals hammered flat or to a point, turned inwards or thickened slightly (Spicyn 1901, Pl. XVIII. 2-4, Pl. XXIII. 1, 3-9). Boot mounts of sheet metal were also recovered from a handful of graves (Polesskih 1979, 29). There has been a proliferation of studies on Finno-Ugrian female jewellery from the Middle Volga region, most recently by Ildikó Lehtinen (1986; 1994). The Proto-Mordvin male burials tend to be poorer than the female graves, containing archaic socketed axes whose use survived until quite late (*Materialnaja kultura...* 1969, Fig. 173. 1, Fig. 175. 1). Belt mounts are quite varied, and most often tamga shaped. The distinctive Finno-Ugrian types had not evolved yet and these early mounts were modelled on Caucasian, Crimean and southern Uralian prototypes.

The Proto-Mordvin culture of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries shows a number of new features. Several artefacts seem to have gone out of fashion, such as the red paste beads, the disc ornamented neckring and the armrings with flat terminals. The number of pectoral discs too decreases. The pendants of headdresses become more elongated, with more twists to the wire spirals, and the diamond shaped pendants too become slightly more elongated. One new ornament type is the spiral ring of three twists with a widening middle section and the transformation of the round buckle fibula into a *sjulgam*. These round buckle fibulae are occasionally designated by their Mordvin name (*sjulgam*), but the general tendency is to use

the latter label only for the variety which has plaques instead of the tubes at the bent-back the terminals of the ring. Among the Moksha the plaques widen into a triangular element by the early 2nd millennium AD. Some changes in the Proto-Mordvin costume can be attributed to outside influences, which can be traced from the 8th-9th centuries, when the Volga Bulgars settled in their neighbourhood. Primarily affected was the male costume and equipment, reflected by the appearance of mount ornamented belts and new weapon types: battle axes and sabres. It is also quite possible that they came into contact with the ancient Hungarians, either directly or indirectly, as evidenced by sabretache plates and belt mounts that have their best parallels among the finds of the Hungarian Conquest period (Erdélyi 1977, 65-77; Dienes 1964, 18-40). As far as female costume is concerned, the Mordvins were the transmitters. The majority of jewellery found in female burials of the Bulgar cemeteries have a Finno-Ugrian origin, and it is possible that the women themselves might have been of Finno-Ugrian stock for the written sources mention that the Volga Bulgars regularly kidnapped women from their neighbours, a fact indirectly confirmed by friar Julian, who received most of his information on the homeland of the Hungarians from a Hungarian woman he had met in a Bulgar town (Abu Hamid, Murib... description of Bulgar, Abu Hamid 1985, 43; Julian, De facto... 3). One jewellery type that became popular among the Mordvins and was not of Finno-Ugrian origin was the earring with bead-row pendant.

Although differences between the Erza and the Moksha became more prominent in later periods, there still remains a high degree of similarity with 16th-17th century finds and the ethnographic material. The *sjulgam* and a horse shaped comb that can be traced to a particular type of horse shaped pendant is still an essential feature of Mordvin costume. A rudimentary proto-state emerged in the 12th-13th centuries among the Mordvins, and the names of several Mordvin princes have been preserved (Mokshin 1977, 63-66). However, this proto-state did not developed into a full-fledged state owing to the threatening Rus' and Tatar pressure. Finding themselves in a buffer zone, the Mordvins alternately sided with one or the other, serving in their armies; and the social development of the Mordvins was in consequence arrested for quite a long period of time.

This brief history of the Mordvins in the 1st millennium AD has left a number of questions unresolved. It is still open to debate whether the hillforts in the Svijaga and Tsvivil basin, as well as in the Volga region, and the population of the southeastern hillforts played any role in Mordvin ethnogenesis. On the testimony of the hitherto excavated cemeteries, the Erza appeared in the Razan section of the Oka, while the Moksha emerged in the Penza region. The hillforts in the Tsvivil and Svijaga basins should rather be assigned to the Cheremis ethnogenesis. Insofar as it is accepted that the groups who had migrated to the left bank of the Volga had played an important role in Mari ethnogenesis, this migration can only have started from the Chuvash and Tatar lands on the right bank of the Volga.

#### *The Ananino culture: a possible historical setting for Mari ethnogenesis*

The Ananino culture is the oldest Iron Age culture of the Finno-Ugrians that has been researched since the late 19th century. However, the origins of the culture are still not entirely clear, and most scholars agree that the culture is made up of several elements (Abashevo, Sejma, Timber-grave, Kazan, etc.). The Ananino culture is generally dated to the 8th-3rd centuries BC, although it has also been suggested that it survived somewhat longer in its peripheral territories (Khalikov 1976, 18-20). What is important is that the Ananino culture emerged on Finno-Ugrian territory and on a Finno-Ugrian basis. The Ananino culture evolved from the Kazan and Chirkovo-Sejma culture. The Ananino sites lie along the Volga and the

Kama, near the confluence of the two rivers, and along their tributaries – the Vetluga, Bjelaja and Chusovaja. Most Ananino hillforts lie beside watercourses, on well defensible sites. Excavations have uncovered semi-subterranean longhouses, as well as log cabins. In contrast to the Gorodets and Djakovo culture, the Ananino population practiced inhumation from the very beginning, with the graves oriented in a manner that the feet of the deceased pointed to the river. Ananino pottery is round-bottomed, the neck and the upper third ornamented with stamped and impressed patterns. This occurrence of this pottery is very important for the research of the Iron Age process of Mari ethnogenesis since Gorodets and Djakovo pottery is flat-bottomed and can thus be easily distinguished from Ananino wares. According to the traditional view, the Ananino culture and its successors played a major role in the ethnogenesis of the Permian peoples. Beginning with the 1970s, however, the view that the Ananino culture (or rather, its western groups) also played a key role in Mari ethnogenesis, also gained currency. Several local variants – Vetluga, Vjatka, Middle Volga and Lower Kama – of the Ananino culture can be distinguished. Pertinent to Mari ethnogenesis are the Middle Volga, Vetluga and Lower Kama groups. The Ananino culture began its westward expansion in the 7th-5th centuries BC. The lower levels of the hillforts in the Vetluga region yielded textile impressed pottery, but later levels contained Ananino type finds, including round-bottomed wares (Khalikov 1976, 13-14). Later, however, Gorodets wares, notably the later, unornamented flat-bottomed variant again became predominant in this region. The most important Ananino sites of the Middle Volga region are the Akozino and Ahmilovo cemeteries. Akozino has been dated to the 8th-5th centuries BC, Ahmilovo to the 8th-6th centuries BC (this Ahmilovo site is generally known as Starshij Ahmilovskij Mogilnik in contradistinction to the Mladsij Ahmilovskij Mogilnik site, a Proto-Cheremis burial site). The Ahmilovo cemetery is characterized by the wide variety of burial rites, ranging from collective burials with five to six burials, small round grave pits containing a skull and various grave goods, to the so-called *domik mјortvih*, above-ground ‘house of the dead’, similar to the ones of the Djakovo culture (Patrushev–Khalikov 1982; Patrushev 1984). This similarity of burial rites between the Djakovo and the Ananino culture suggest that the contacts between the Proto-Volga ethnic groups on the left bank of the Volga that had survived into the 1st millennium AD, as reflected by similarities between the Proto-Merja and Proto-Cheremis cultures. (The so-called Merja archaeological unity is in fact based on these contacts.) According to Khalikov (1962, 112-113) the Ananino group of the Middle Volga region is the earliest; in fact Smirnov and Trubnikova (1965, 15) assigned the Akozino cemetery to the Gorodets culture in view of the Gorodets finds found there. This seems to be justified in view of the fact that after the 5th century BC this region is characterized by sporadic Gorodets finds.

Other Ananino groups may also have played a role in Mari ethnogenesis, notably the Lower Kama group from which the Pjanobor culture evolved. The so-called epaulette shaped buckles with disc and question mark shaped pendants were diffused by the Pjanobor culture in the 3rd century BC. More important in terms of Mari ethnogenesis, however, is the role of the Azelino culture that evolved from Pjanobor. The Azelino culture was first defined by Gening (1963, 18): in his view the Pjanobor population was driven from the Kama to the Vjatka valley in the 3rd century AD, and the late Pjanobor assemblages of the 3rd-5th century are the ones he calls Azelino culture. The newcomers mingled with the local population, the descendants of the Vjatka group of the Ananino culture, and neither can Gorodets influences, or even the appearance of Gorodets groups be rejected. The meadow Mari population appeared after the fusion of the local Vjatka population with the Azelino population (Khalikov 1976, 20).

### *Mari ethnogenesis: Ananino or Gorodets?*

One of the greatest problems in Mari ethnogenesis is the question indicated in the title. Several conflicting hypotheses have been proposed as to the extent of Gorodets and Ananino participation in Mari ethnogenesis, and whether there had been a Gorodets migration to the left bank of the Volga, and if so, when. Adherents of a possible migration base their arguments on the occurrence of flat-bottomed Gorodets pottery in the upper levels of the hillforts on the left bank of the Volga, although it has been pointed out that this flat-based pottery may equally well have reached the Vjatka-Vetluga mesopotamia from the Kama valley (Smirnov-Trubnikova 1965, 9).

Smirnov and Trubnikova (1965, 9-10) are convinced that the flat-bottomed pottery from sites on the left bank of the Volga reflect the migration of the Gorodets culture. Other proof for this migration is afforded by finds, such as flask shaped pendants and openwork round discs, from the Tum-Tum cemetery that can be derived from the Gorodets culture (Oshibkina 1974, 25-26). Even more Gorodets finds are known from the 4th-6th century cemeteries of the Mari territories of the Volga region: *sjulgams*, pyramid shaped pendants, as well as openwork discs with pendants. These cemeteries are distinguished from contemporary Azelino burial grounds also by the occurrence of partial horse burials (Archipov 1976, 31-32).

Archipov (1976, 34-36) cited the textile impressed pottery from the upper levels of the Vasilsursk and Malahaj hillforts, rather than late Gorodets pottery, as proof that the Gorodets population crossed to the left bank of the Volga; in his opinion this supports a fairly early, 8th-7th century BC migration. In his view the Mari people evolved from the fusion of the population of various archaeological cultures, but that this fusion was not complete. The differences between the mountain and the meadow Mari can be traced to the differences between their ancestors. Archipov derived the mountain Mari from the Gorodets and the meadow Mari from the Azelino culture; in his view, the northwestern Mari dialect that contains both mountain and meadow features reflects the merging of the Gorodets and Azelino culture, that could be observed during the excavation of the Kubashevo hillfort, lying on the northwestern dialect territory.

Khalikov (1976, 16-20) proposed an alternative solution to the Gorodets migration to the left bank of the Volga. In his opinion this migration can be dated to the 3rd-5th centuries AD, and he claimed that the Mari population emerged on an Ananino base in spite of this migration. He considered the Middle Volga region to have acted as a watershed between the western and eastern Finno-Ugrian branches in the Neolithic; the Bronze Age boundary (that also survived into the Iron Age) between the Kazan and the Pozdniakovo culture being the Vetluga and the Sura. (The role and importance of this boundary has already been briefly discussed in the above, in the section on Mordvin and Mari prehistory.) In the earlier 1st millennium BC the Vetluga-Vjatka region was settled by the early Ananino population, that came under Gorodets influence from the other bank of the Volga (in this case, Khalikov does not assume any migrations). This Ananino-based population was the ethnic grouping from which the Merja, the Muroma and the Mari evolved. The right bank of the Volga, until the Kama confluence, was dominated by the Gorodets culture, which also assimilated some Ananino groups. In the first centuries of the 1st millennium AD the late Ananino presence became more stronger on the right bank, i.e. the migration from the right to the left bank involved the intermingling of three distinct, but ultimately related groups: the Ananino-Gorodets group of the left bank, the late Ananino-Gorodets group of the right bank and the similarly Ananino-based Azelino group. In other words, Khalikov considers the Mari to have evolved on a predominantly Ananino basis, with the Gorodets elements playing a predominant role in the case of the mountain Mari.

Most archaeologists tend to draw a distinction between the ethnogenesis of the mountain and meadow Mari. This seems to contradict the linguistic evidence according to which differences between the mountain and meadow dialects were practically negligible as late as the 13th-14th centuries (Bereczki, pers. comm.). These two conflicting views can only be reconciled if it is assumed that only the material culture of the mountain and meadow Mari were independent in the early periods assumed by Khalikov and Archipov, their language still being fairly close to each other.

Kozlova (1978, 39-54) took a different view of Mari prehistory. Her opinion on early Mari prehistory more or less agrees with Khalikov's, in that she too searched for the ancestors of the Mari among the population of the Kazan culture and its successor, the Ananino culture. Kozlova, however, considers Mari ethnogenesis to have occurred in the Kazan section of the Volga, on both banks, but mainly on the right bank, in Chuvash land, where, according to Smirnov and Trubnikova, the northeastern Gorodets group was distributed. But while Khalikov has proposed that the Gorodets population of this area migrated to the other bank of the Volga and participated in the ethnogenesis of the mountain Mari, Kozlova rejects a strong Gorodets influence in this area, suggesting that the Ananino population came under a minimal Gorodets influence and that the Mari population on the left bank of the Volga had evolved from this population. Kozlova has also suggested that the Azelino culture did not play a role in Mari ethnogenesis since the Azelino population had belonged to the ancestors of the Permian Finno-Ugrians and any intermingling with the ancestors of the Mari would no doubt be reflected in the latter's tongue.

In his study on Mari prehistory Kazantsev (1985, 26-29) accepted the existence of a Mordvin-Mari parent speech unity and suggested that the separation of the Gorodets and Djakovo culture in fact reflected the start of the independent life of the ancestors of the Mari and the Mordvins. Through the etymology of toponyms he tried to prove that after this separation the forebears of the Mari migrated to the present-day Chuvash land from the Lower Oka region on the right bank of the Volga.

Before evaluating the above hypotheses, a brief overview of the archaeological assemblages of the ancestors of the Mari from the 1st millennium AD seems in order. This Mari archaeological finds were first identified in the 1890s. Two graves were uncovered in 1890 near Lake Boriskovo, and a year later the Jumi cemetery was investigated. The first scientific excavation was led by V.I. Kamenskij, at a site named Cheremiskoje kladbische ('Cheremis cemetery') that lay on the left bank of the Ludanga, a left bank tributary of the Vetluga. The finds from this burial are still unpublished. In 1928-29 investigations were begun in Veselov, also lying on the Vetluga, in Kochergino, on the Vjatka and in Mari-Lugovaja, on the left bank of the Volga. The Mari archaeological expedition was launched in 1956. The excavations at Veselov, Cheremiskoje kladbische, Mari-Lugovaja and Jum were resumed, and a 9th-11th century cemetery was investigated at Dubovo, the 12th-13th century burial ground at Rutkino and the 2nd-3rd century kurgan group at Piserál (Archipov 1973, 5-7).

The investigations on the Piserál site were directed by Khalikov (1962, 116-138). The finds, the burial rites, as well as the dating of this site shared a number of similarities with the Andrejevka kurgan that had been associated with the Proto-Mordvins. The Piserál kurgans lie in the Mari Autonomous Republic, in the area settled by the mountain Mari, on the right bank of the Bolshaja Junga, a right bank tributary of the Volga. Eight mounds, considered to be kurgans were investigated in 1958, five of which contained burials, some of which had been robbed in antiquity. In his publication of the finds from these kurgans Khalikov (1962, 133-135) drew parallels from the Pjanobor culture. In his opinion the shallow depth of the graves, the eastern orientation and the practice of laying the deceased to rest extended on their back reflected a Pjanobor origin, while the practice of erecting a mound over the burial was a local

feature. Khalikov considered the round glass beads, the bronze and iron buckle fibulae, the boot shaped pendants, the unornamented pectoral discs, the openwork rectangular mounts ornamented with three pairs of small discs along their side, the openwork or beaded rosettes and the epaulette shaped iron buckles to be of Pjanobor origin. Although the Piseral finds also included mount ornamented belts that were unknown in the Pjanobor culture at the time when these finds were published, every single element of these belts – the boot shaped pendants (some variants of which recall cicada fibulae), the rosettes and the unornamented discs – had a good Pjanobor origin. Khalikov also considered the knives, the swords, the daggers and the horse bits to be of the Pjanobor type and he thus assigned the Piseral kurgans to the late phase of the Pjanobor culture (2nd-3rd centuries AD). The Piseral and the Andrejevka finds have a special relation: both sites are characterized by tumulus burials, and a Pjanobor influence can be discerned in the same category of finds. At Andrejevka partial horse burials were also uncovered which, although lacking at Piseral, occur at other Azelino sites (and Azelino, it should be recalled, was a late variant of the Pjanobor culture). It would appear that certain regional variations can be noted. Horse burials are more common in the Volga and the Lower Kama region (Mari Lugovaja, Mladseje Ahmilovo, Rozdjestveno, Urzhumka), the only notable exception being Atamanovi Kosti from the Vjatka valley (Archipov 1976, 32). Khalikov (1962, 178-179) noted that the assemblages from Mari Lugovaja on the Volga included finds, such as the openwork rectangular or round dress ornaments, the flask and bell shaped pendants, the buckle fibulae and the neckrings that suggest contacts with the Koshibej group that had been identified with the Proto-Mordvins. Khalikov (1976, map II) also notes that of the 4th-6th century cemeteries that have been identified as the ancestors of the Mari, the burial ground of the Azelino culture are found along the Vjatka and in the Volga-Kama confluence, mixed Azelino-Gorodets sites lie in the Vetluga and Sura confluence, where Gorodets sites too have been identified, and Gorodets sites have also been reported from the upper sections of the Vetluga. Most distinctive among the Azelino finds are the round-bottomed pottery wares and the epaulette shaped buckles; the weapons, tools and implements also including specific Azelino type swords, battle axes, daggers, socketed axes and knives, while other artefacts, such as the bracelets, the round discs reminiscent of buckle fibulae, the red paste and glass beads, are equally characteristic of both the Azelino culture and the Koshibej group of the Proto-Mordvin cemeteries (Khalikov 1962, 178-179).

The Pjanobor culture exerted an equally powerful influence on the ancient culture of the Volga and the Permian Finno-Ugrians. The shared features of the Andrejevka and the Piseral finds have been briefly mentioned in the above; Khalikov assigned the Piseral site to the Pjanobor culture. Spicyn (1901) and Poleskyh (1979, 13-14) had both suggested that the finds from the Proto-Mordvin cemeteries also included elements of the Pjanobor culture. In my opinion we can assume significant Proto-Iranian elements or cultural traditions, and even Proto-Iranian communities in the Pjanobor culture. This possibility is supported by the archaeological record insofar as the Andrejevka kurgan can perhaps be linked to the Scythian culture province of the Maeotis. Influences had perhaps come indirectly, through the mediation of the Pjanobor culture. There are also linguistic arguments, for the period of the Pjanobor culture coincides with the last phases of Indo-European influence on the Finno-Ugrian tongues (Rédei 1986, 25-26, 28-30). I have tried to show in the above that the Indo-European linguistic influence was separate in the case of the Proto-Mordvin and Proto-Cheremis communities at a time when the Proto-Permian linguistic and cultural unity had still existed. It must here also be recalled that this Proto-Permian unity too came under a strong Indo-European influence: Rédei (1986, 64-82) lists fifty-one Proto-Iranian borrowings in the Permian languages. The important role played by the Pjanobor culture in Permian ethnogenesis offers a suitable backdrop to the significant contacts between Proto-Iranian and Permian, while

the role of the Pjanobor culture – through the Azelino culture – in Cheremis ethnogenesis, and the sporadic Proto-Mordvin-Pjanobor contacts offer a convenient historical framework for the less momentous and independent language contacts between Proto-Cheremis and Proto-Iranian, as well as Proto-Mordvin and Proto-Iranian.

Archipov has described the period characterized by the 9th-11th century cemeteries as Proto-Mari. In this period, influences from neighbouring peoples, primarily the Mordvins and the Volga Bulgars, became stronger, the former reflected by flat-bottomed pottery and a similar fashion in female jewellery: headdresses of metal plaques and tubes, lockrings, earrings, neckrings, openwork dress ornaments with flask, cone, pyramid, bell, and spectacle shaped pendants, as well as comparable burial rites: the occurrence of cremation graves (about twenty per cent) beside inhumation burials, and a predominance of northern orientation (a characteristic of the Erza). The Volga Bulgar influence is reflected in belt mounts, strap ends, Volga Bulgar type sabretache plates, Saltovo type axes, rings ornamented with four knobs, earrings with bead-row pendant, stirrups and horse bits.

In sum, there are several problems that still need to be clarified before we can see clearly in a number of issues. The various Finno-Ugrian disciplines are not equally in Russia today. In the Soviet era, the research of the history of the Finno-Ugrians was neglected for the relevant sources were all but inaccessible. Archaeological research, however, has been continuous, but it is somewhat difficult to gain an overall picture of what has been done owing to hitches in the flow of information – the all too rare possibilities for personal consultations and the stream of new publications that are often inaccessible to scholars outside Russia.

The above must be definitely be borne in mind when considering the possible role of the northeastern groups of the Gorodets culture in Cheremis ethnogenesis (see the section on the cemeteries of the Proto-Mordvin period, p. 32-35); there seems to have been an independent group in the Sura and Vetluga region, centered around the confluence of the two rivers, and extending also to the Upper Vetluga region, defined by Smirnov and Trubnikova (1965, 21) as the northeastern group of the Gorodets culture, and by Khalikov (1962, 13) as the Middle Volga and Vetluga group of the Ananino culture.

Khalikov (1976, 19) and Archipov (1967, 46) both agree that this region had been settled by ancestors of the mountain Mari, who had migrated from the right to the left bank of the Volga. This group of sites, characterized by transitional, Gorodets-Ananino features might equally well be defined as an independent group, although the final word must obviously be pronounced by the archaeologists working in that region, a fact that has been repeatedly emphasized by Patrushev. His terminology (the Ahmilovo culture) has also been accepted by Wiik (1993). The suggestion that an independent ethnic group, whose archaeological finds form a transition between the Ananino and Gorodets culture, had occupied the Sura and Vetluga confluence, in the Lower Sura region and in the Vetluga region in the 1st millennium AD is apparently gaining currency. Owing to this double cultural bind, the tradition of round- and flat-bottomed pottery had both been strong in the culture of this population group. This region had in earlier times already been characterized by the interaction of eastern and western influences, a phenomenon reflected also in pottery: in the Kazan culture, textile impressed pottery, spreading from west, had only reached as far as this area, the western provinces of the culture (Khalikov 1980, 39). In other words, the question of "Ananino or Gorodets?" cannot be decided either way. The dual influences outlined in the above seems to have played a decisive role in the ethnogenesis of the mountain Mari.

The situation is even more complicated in the case of the meadow Mari. The northeastern group of the Gorodets culture extended beyond the Sura and Vetluga confluence to the Volga region in Chuvash land, from where a number of Late Gorodets hillforts are known (such as Pichke-Sorcha, Nozha-Var and others) in which a strong Pjanobor influence



can be demonstrated (Trubnikova 1964a, 1964b, 1964c). Opposite these hillforts, on the other bank of the Volga, are the Urzhumka and Mari-Lugovaja cemeteries which are generally assigned to the Azelino culture, although the distinctive features, such as horse burials and Gorodets type finds, have also been pointed out (Khalikov 1962). In other words, it would appear that the meadow Mari evolved from the intermingling of the ancestors of the mountain Mari (who were migrating from the Volga to the interior of the Mari land) with the Azelino population (also moving from the Vjatka to the interior of the Mari land).

## Summary

In sum, I would like again to review the problems, some of which have remained unresolved.

(1) The Mari language did not develop from the same branch as Mordvin; Mordvin had significant contacts with Balto-Finnic tongues, while Mari had secondary contact with the Permian languages.

(2) The beginnings of the two major Mordvin groupings can be distinguished as early as the 5th-6th centuries AD. The Erza were the first to use their own, self-designation in the 9th-10th centuries, while Moksha can only be traced from the 12th-13th centuries.

(3) The Muroma were a smaller Mordvin grouping who emerged in the 6th-8th centuries; the Muroma stand closest to the Erza both in terms of language and culture and they were assimilated by the Rus' in the early 2nd millennium AD.

(4) The Merja occupy a special place, having contacts with the Baltic Finno-Ugrians (archaeologically they belonged to the same culture province, to the Djakovo culture), and they also maintained contacts with the ancestors of the Mari and the Mordvins.

(5) It is still unclear to which Volgaic, Permian or perhaps Finno-Ugrian ethnic group the Cheremis mentioned in the historic sources stood closest. The Cheremis were most probably identified with the ancestors of the Mari by the Rus' who were expanding eastwards along the Volga.

(6) The ethnonym Mari does not appear in the historical sources in spite of the fact that owing to their geographical location they could have been known both to the Rus' and to the Arab geographers and travellers. This would suggest that the ethnic consciousness and the perception of a Mari unity among the Mari appeared at a rather late date, in any case later than the early Russian and Arab sources (i.e. after the 11th century). This is not contradicted by the fact that the Mari ethnonym originates from the period prior to the appearance of the Bulgars since in the lack of historical sources we do not know which ethnic group it had designated.

(7) A cultural watershed can be noted in the Middle Volga region from the Neolithic. There was a constant interaction between eastern and western influences on the settlement territory of the ancestors of the present-day Mari.

(8) The Mordvins and the Merja evolved into an independent ethnic group on the western side of this watershed from the Gorodets and the Djakovo culture.

(9) The Mari emerged as an independent ethnic group in this border area.

(10) The culture of the mountain and the meadow Mari reflect the mingling of several elements of different ancestry than the culture of the Erza and the Moksha.

(11) The two major groups of the Mari did not evolve from the same stem. The main component in both groups was a cultural unity characterized by both Gorodets and Ananino elements, as well as various other influences, that might be defined as an independent culture after future investigations.

(12) The Azelino group, that owing to its Pjanobor origins had Proto-Iranian traditions, also played a role in Mari ethnogenesis. The same cultural tradition and the latest layer of Indo-European borrowings reached the Mordvins through the Pjanobor-Proto-Mordvin contacts.

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## Abbreviations

AÉ	Archaeológiai Értesítő (Budapest)
ALH	Acta Linguistica Hungaricae (Budapest)
CIFU	Congressus Internationalis Finnougristarum
FUF	Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen (Helsinki)
<i>Hudozhestvennaja proza</i>	<i>Hudozhestvennaja proza Kievskoj Rusi XI-XIII vv.</i> Moskva.
IAK	Izvestija arheologicheskoi komissii
IGAIMK	Izvestija Gosudarstvennoj akademii istorii materialnoj kultury (Sankt-Peterburg)
KSIA	Kratkie Soobshchenija Instituta Arheologii AN SSSR (Moskva)
MAR	Materialy po arheologii Rossii (Sankt-Peterburg)
MIA	Materialy i issledovanija po arheologii SSSR (Moskva-Leningrad)
NyK	Nyelvtudományi Közlemények (Budapest)
PSRL	<i>Polnoe sobranie russkih letopisej.</i> Moskva.
PVL	<i>Povest vremennuh let.</i> Moskva.
RF	Régészeti Füzetek (Budapest).
SA	Sovetskaja arheologija (Moskva)
SAI	Svod arheologicheskikh istochnikov (Moskva-Sankt-Peterburg)
SE	Sovetskaja etnografija (Moskva)
SKES	Suomen kielen etymologinen sanakirja
Trudy GIM	Trudy Gosudarstvenno Istoricheskogo Muzeja (Moskva)
Trudy MordNII	Trudy Mordovskogo Nauchno Issledovatel'skogo Instituta
UAJb	Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher (Wiesbaden)
Uch. zap. ChuvNII	Uchenyje zapiski Chuvasskogo nauchno issledovatel'skogo instituta
Uch. zap. MarNII	Uchenyje zapiski Marijskogo nauchno issledovatel'skogo instituta
Uch. zap. PGU	Uchenye zapiski Permskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta
VAU	Voprosi Arheologii Urala (Sverdlovsk)
VJa	Voprosy Jazykoznanija
ZORSA	Zapiski Otdelenija russkoj i slavjanskoj arheologii Russkogo arheologicheskogo obshchestva (Sankt-Peterburg)

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