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# Metamorphosis of Gods: A Historical Study on the Traditional Religion of the Chuvash*

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After the Middle Volga region was taken under Russian control in the mid-sixteenth century, the Orthodox mission was developed in this region. Consequently, Christianity spread among the non-Russian people except for the Tatar, the greater part of whom were Muslim. The majority of the other nations such as Mari, Mordvin and Chuvash were baptized by the end of the nineteenth century.[1] Yet many elements of traditional religion never disappeared despite vigorous Orthodox and Muslim proselytizing. Among these elements the most salient objects of worship were *kiremet'* and *ierekh*. Although they underwent a drastic transformation in their features under the influence of Christianity, the worship was retained by the Chuvash people until the beginning of the twentieth century. The goal of this paper is to explore the historical process of the transformation of the traditional religion by analyzing in more detail these two objects.[2]

Historical documents illustrate the general notion that *kiremet'* and *ierekh* are the evil spirits which can harm people by diseases and other disasters. People feared them, but at the same time relied on them when they experienced misfortunes. However, a more careful consideration makes us aware that the above notion was formed through historical transition. The particular purpose

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1 According to the census taken at Kazan and Simbirsk province in 1897, 98.9% of Chuvash, 98.8% of Mordvin, 97.2% of Mari people have already been baptized. See, G.A. Nikolaev, "Sel'skoe narodnaselenie kazanskoi i simbirskoi gubernii v kontse XIX – nachale XX vekov," in *Sostav i polozhenie naseleniia chuvashii v XVIII – nachale XX vekov* (Cheboksary, 1990), p. 88.

2 By the term "traditional religion" I mean the religion which Chuvash and other nations in the Middle Volga and Kama region had held indigenously since the time before Islam and Christianity spread. While the term "animism" has taken hold the European and American historical school, the term cannot be applied here, because it presupposes the concept of spirit (*anima*) as a certain agent or some raison d'être. As I try to illustrate in this paper, the worship of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* among Chuvash was not so much based on such a firm concept of spirit, but rather it was formed historically in the interactions between social groups.

of this essay is to unfold the historical process by focusing the discussion on the fear factor in the worship of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* respectively. Thus, I will try to demonstrate the disposition that social relations and such kinds of collective emotions as fear were involved in the interactive development of each other.

## Variety of *Kiremet'* in Its Representations

*Kiremet'* worship is a phenomenon that was seen widely in the Volga-Ural region.[3] It has been held among the Chuvash until the time of the Russian Revolution. However, it seems that people really never had any determinate ideas about *kiremet'*. On the one hand *kiremet'* was known to be the spirit itself, but on the other hand it was said to be the place where the spirit dwelled. In fact, every *kiremet'* has a specific sacred place, such as a glade, isolated tree or grove, gully, lake, isolated graveyard – that is to say, a terrain differentiated from surrounding circumstances.[4] It was forbidden to do anything imprudent around *kiremet'*, say, to laugh, quarrel, cut off a twig or let alone a tree itself. In some cases, even looking back to it was avoided. Every village had its own *kiremet'* in several places, each of whom was individualized with its own name and a hierarchical gradation.[5] The higher the rank *kiremet'* is, the more people visited from afar to pray to it, and more people made sacrifices and offerings to it.

While every *kiremet'* had its own sacred place, people frequently perceived it with a personified image. In many cases, *kiremet'* had prototypical persons embodied in indigenous legends. At the same time, the personified images of *kiremet'* are hardly uniform. They may be classified tentatively by nationalities as follows: 1. Tatar. Some legends indicate that the prototype of *kiremet'* was a fugitive Tatar from battlefield.[6] On the other hand, it was said that a famous

3 R.G. Akhmet'ianov, *Obshchaia leksika dukhovnoi kul'tury narodov Srednogo Povolzh'ia* (Moscow, 1981), pp. 32-33. As to the name, I follow the pronunciation in Chuvash: *kiremet'*. While it is called *keremet* in Mari, and *rud* in Udmurt, I use exclusively the name *kiremet'* in my essay to avoid the complexity.

4 The Chuvash ethnographer O.P. Vovina points out the significance of the space of *kiremet'*. According to her, *kiremet'* was usually located on the boundary between the domain of human being and wild world, and that the danger and uncertainness dominating the borders endowed *kiremet'* with special sacredness. O.P. Vovina, "Chuvashskaia *kiremet'*: traditsii i simvoly v osvoenii sakral'nogo prostranstva," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 4 (2002), p. 41.

5 For instance, N. Ivanov, a Russian school teacher from Iadrinsk uezd, reports that there were four places which were regarded as *kiremet'* in his village: 1. a big elm tree named "The Golden Pipe," 2. a sacred grove named "Tushmat," 3. a tree named "The Beautiful White Birch," 4. a grove named "Kamaksal." See, N. Ivanov, "Iz iazycheskogo religioznogo kul'ta chuvash derevni Khodiakovoi, Iadrinskogo uezda," *Izvestiia po Kazanskoi eparkhii* (henceforth *IKE*) 34 (1905), p. 1036.

6 Nauchnyi arkhiv Chuvashskogo gosudarstvennogo instituta gumanitarnykh nauk (NA ChGIGN) ed. khr. 176, no. 5051. We can also find among Mari and Udmurt such legends that illustrate a fugitive Tatar as the prototype of *kiremet'*. See, M.G. Vasil'ev, "O kiremetiakh u chuvashei i cheremis," *IKE* 8 (1904), p. 241.

*kiremet'* named *Melim-khuzia* on Mt. Biliarsk was originally a Muslim sheikh, who had turned up in a carriage drawn by black horses.[7] 2. Russian. In some cases, *kiremet'* was visualized as a man in a red shirt (*rubashka*) and black boots on feet, that is, a man dressed in Russian fashion. There were cases that a local administrator such as a police superintendent was thought to be the model.[8] 3. Chuvash/Mari. In other cases one can know from legends that a wealthy Chuvash or Mari man was the prototype. Interestingly, one of the powerful *kiremet'* of Chuvash named Sorym has the origin legend quite similar to that of Makar *kiremet'* of Mari. According to the legends, Sorym/Makar was a greedy landowner. During the land measurement for redistribution, he buried his sons under the soil, and had them reply to the measurer's question by saying that the land was Sorym's/Makar's. The trick met with success, and he got the land, but his sons died under the ground. Later the land became *kiremet'*.[9]

The wide diversity of the images makes it difficult to grasp the essence of *kiremet'*. Besides, the nature of faith as well as the image makes it elusive. The word *kiremet'* itself is derived from Arabic "keremet," which means miraculous force of Muslim saints.[10] So it may be assumed that the *kiremet'* worship was originally related to the cult of the Muslim saints. However, in the light of model figures in the legends, the relation is marked with rather the departed soul, that of those who died of unnatural death, in particular. Some legends on the origin of *kiremet'* concerning Pugachev's uprising give us good evidence of the latter aspect. While some legends show that the Russian clergy who was hung by the rebel troops was the model of a certain *kiremet'*, other legends conversely indicate that the rebel soldier executed by tsarist administration was the model.[11]

In spite of the elusiveness of the idea of *kiremet'*, it is possible to find common features among the versions. First, they have exclusively male prototypes.

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7 Ibid., p. 241.

8 Ibid., p. 243.

9 V.K. Magnitskii, "Chuvashskaia legenda o proiskhozhdenii sorminskoi keremeti," *Kazanskie gubernskie vedomosti* 87 (November 7, 1870). It should be pointed out that, despite the distinction of nationalities between the Turkic nation of Chuvash and the Finno-Ugric nation of Mari, there are considerable similarities in respect to customs and ways of life between them, especially among those who reside on the right bank of the Volga.

10 Akhmet'ianov, *Obshchaia leksika*, p. 31.

11 During the Pugachev's uprising (1773-1775), Emel'ian Pugachev and his supporting troops passed through the land where the Chuvash Republic is now located in July 1774. It is said that uprising occurred in approximately 40 Chuvash villages then, involving 200-800 Chuvash farmers respectively. The farmer rioters assaulted and slaughtered the Russian administrators and clerics. See, V.D. Dimitriev, *Chuvashskie istoricheskie predaniia*, *chast' 2* (Cheboksary, 1986), p. 72. As to the *kiremet'* connected with Pugachev's uprising, see V.K. Magnitskii, "Shkol'noe obrazovanie i nekotorye cherty religiozno-nravstvennoi zhizni chuvash Iadrinskogo uezda (po arkhivnym dokumentam)," *Izvestiia obshchestva arkheologii i etnografii* (henceforth *IOAIE*) 30:2 (1919), p. 229.

Second, they are either fugitives coming from the outside world, or men with influential economic and political status. Third, they are all capable of planting fear in the hearts of people.

## From Blessing to Terror

Various sources show how *kiremet'* caused fear among people. The writings of the Chuvash intellectuals in particular provide immediate information. An early Chuvash author N.M. Okhotnikov wrote in his autobiography (1888): "*Kiremet'* terrified children from the very infancy. I remember what a fear it was to pass it by. We were afraid even to say anything there in order not to breathe a word that might make *kiremet'* angry. Somehow the words became stiff on the tongue."[12] *Kiremet'* was terrifying because it was thought to have magical powers, and was sometimes associated with sorcery. Another Chuvash intellectual, school teacher G. Timofeev noted in his ethnographical monograph that, "while we Chuvash from Tiurlema [Timofeev's home village in Cheboksarsk uezd] live in peace and quiet, we mostly go to the church and never think about the traditional rituals. However, once a misfortune occurred or an enemy caused a bitter experience, we did nothing but to go to *kiremet'*, and made efforts to do a certain thing [viz. to curse by sorcery]. So terror entered the hearts of all Chuvash..."[13]

The earliest Chuvash ethnographer S. Mikhailov's report to the inspector of the Kazan Medical Board illustrates well how deeply the fear factor ingrained itself in the lives of Chuvash. This report was written in 1856 upon the request of the inspector, who asked Mikhailov to explain the reason why non-Russians in Kazan province so often hung themselves, and to offer measures to prevent such practice. According to Mikhailov, 42 Chuvash in Kazan province committed suicide from 1843 to 1850. Of particular significance is his information that a third of them killed themselves on account of "fear."[14] Mikhailov stressed that so many suicides were caused by the sorcerers and diviners who were terrifying people, and by the local officials who oppressed farmers.

How people feared *kiremet'* is also illustrated in the writings of the Russian clergy. In particular, the depictions of criminal exposure illustrate how the fear of it was employed for a social function. According to an Orthodox

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12 N.M. Okhotnikov, "Zapiski chuvashina o svoem vospitanii (1888 god)," *IOAIE* 31:1 (1920), p. 27.

13 G. Timofeev, *Takhar'ial* (Shupashkar, 2002), p. 51. Timofeev wrote this monograph from 1896 to 1903. The writings of early intellectuals such as Okhotnikov, Timofeev and Mikhailov (see the next footnote) were being published or republished in recent years.

14 S.M. Mikhailov, "Otchego chuvashi daviatsia i kakie pravitel'stvo dolzhno priniat' mery dlia preduprezhdeniia etogo iavleniia," in V.D. Dimitriev, ed., *Spiridon Mikhailov: Sobranie sochinenii* (Cheboksary, 2004), pp. 172-186. Incidentally, the other reasons of suicide indicated in the report are disease – 8, grief – 5, poverty – 4, unidentified – 8.

archpriest V.Ia. Smelov, in an investigation of a crime, all suspected persons were forced to have a bread that was made of rye flour and water taken from a river flowing by *kiremet'*. True criminals could never eat it, because it was expected that people who really committed a crime would die by eating the bread.[15] The Kazan seminary educator P. Mike describes how the investigation was made on the occasion that 100 pood (equivalent to 1638 kilograms) of oats was stolen from the communal granary at the village of Teneevo. Then, all villagers 15 years and older in age knelt in turn in front of the big tree stump of *kiremet'*, and made an oath as follows: "God, hear me! If I stole the grain, let my body dry up like this stump; let my hands and legs be like the dead twigs of fallen oak; let my all family be killed by making smoke flow backwards into the house!"[16] This case indicates that *kiremet'* was terrifying enough to serve for Chuvash as a substitute for the police or court. The magical power of it was transcendent and could not be overcome.

It should never be overlooked, however, that *kiremet'* was not feared all the time and everywhere. The material provided by Timofeev proves this point. While the Tiurlema, his home village, was located on a trunk road and also near a railroad station, Al'sheevo to where he was appointed as a school teacher was a remote village in the hinterland. Before he went to his new post, Timofeev had anticipated that there would be more sorcerers, and that the people would be more devoted to *kiremet'*, since this particular village seemed more backward than other Chuvash settlements. In fact, it turned out that his anticipation was wrong. Timofeev found out *kiremet'* did not bother the residents so much as it did in his home village. He notes that in Al'sheevo the rites concerned with *kiremet'* was nothing more than one of the many traditional customs, "which are so familiar even to any children, that they never seem terrifying."[17]

Popular views of *kiremet'* varied not only from place to place but also from period to period. For instance, the Mari ethnographer V.M. Vasil'ev reports what he heard from his father, who had heard it from his uncle. The uncle had said that people used to be so proud of their own *kiremet'* that persons without it felt ashamed, and made every effort to acquire it.[18] Furthermore, there are several legends which indicate that *kiremet'* was originally a son of god (otherwise a messenger or a servant in different versions), who had produced the wealth and happiness for human beings. The Russian ethnographer V.A. Sboev (1856) provides an indigenous legend that points to this role of *kiremet'*.

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15 V.Ia. Smelov, "Nechto o chuvashskikh iazycheskikh verovaniiakh i obychaiakh," *IKE* 20 (1880), p. 539.

16 P. Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam (Iz moego dnevnika za 1898 g.)," *IKE* 22 (1904), p. 723.

17 Timofeev, *Takhar'ial*, p. 55.

18 V.M. Vasil'ev, *Materialy dlia izucheniia verovanii i obriadov cheremis* (Kazan, 1915), pp. 6-7. In this connection, it is quite natural that there is a hypothesis that the *kiremet'* worship should be a type of ancestor worship of paternal genealogy. See Magnitskii, "Shkol'noe obrazovanie," p. 227.

> Originally, the eldest son of god was called *kiremet'*. While he went around the land in a splendid carriage drawn by white horses, he delivered to people fertility and plenty of mundane blessing, prosperity and happiness. However, once the people stirred by *shuitan* [devil] killed him. In order to conceal their terrible sin from god, people burnt the dead body and threw the ash onto the wind. Then, trees sprouted up at every place where the ash fell, and at the same time the son of God reappeared, but many in number, who were all hostile to the people. Being fasten to the ground, the sons could not live with celestial gods any more, and that was how the multitude of *kiremet'* occurred. Later they married and bore a number of progeny, and increased further.[19]

This legend suggests that the fear of *kiremet'* was not inherent, but occurred among people as the result of a certain change through their historical experiences. It seems that in the course of modernization *kiremet'* lost its benevolent nature and acquired malicious features. Why did the nature of *kiremet'* change so radically, from good to evil?

## Contradiction of Interpretations

Explaining such a metamorphosis of *kiremet'* in the perception of the Mari people, V.M. Vasil'ev pointed out two conceivable reasons. One is that Mari followed the Russians' point of view. He notes that "though it is difficult to discern the period when the view of *kiremet'* changed so radically, it is no doubt that the change occurred as Mari, being converted to Christianity, incurred Russian influence. It is one of the manifestations of conversion that Mari began to see the deities of their own belief including *kiremet'* from the Russians' point of view and take them as evil spirits."[20] Following this, Vasil'ev came up with another reason. He continues: "while the cultivated people reduce the gods of uncultivated colleagues to the rank of evil spirits, the latter never give in, but rather pay back in their own coin. G. Mikhailovskii remarks that 'the higher tribe is not only suspected of bringing evil power, but even regarded in the same category as a crowd of the devils'."[21] Unlike the former part, Vasil'ev stresses here that the Mari people not only followed the Russians, but also reacted to the social change caused by Russian, and thus started to look at *kiremet'* negatively.

These two arguments are contradictory to each other. In the first one, Vasil'ev attributes the evilness of *kiremet'* to the Russians' perspective, which is followed obediently by the Mari people. On the other hand, in the second one, he ascribes the evilness to the viewpoint of Mari, who are not as obedient and are hostile and vengeful. The arguments are based on the two extremely different standpoints – the former on the logic of obedience, and the latter resistance.

19 V.A. Sboev, *Issledovaniia ob inorodtsakh kazanskoi gubernii* (Kazan, 1856), p. 110.

20 V.M. Vasil'ev, *Materialy dlia izucheniia*, pp. 7-8.

21 Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Available studies of *kiremet'* usually put emphasis either on the obedience or the resistance of the people, inevitably following the trend of times. Ethnographies published before the Russian Revolution were concerned more with factual materials rather than with analysis or the discussion on the historical transition of the people's view of *kiremet'*.[22] On the other hand, Soviet ethnographers paid much attention to the latter issue. They usually reduced the whole issue to the socio-economic structure, and considered the negative image of spirits as reproduction of the power domination in society. In his unpublished monograph written in the 1930s, the Chuvash ethnographer K.V. Elle argued that "like a distorted mirror, the cult of *kiremet'* reflected class struggle, domination and oppression in the feudalistic society. Such feelings as fear, helplessness and subordination of oppressed people were expressed in the practice of this cult."[23] This Elle's monograph was not published due to the regulation under the Stalin regime, but his viewpoint became dominant in Soviet ethnography.[24] In other words, it was somewhat a trend to attribute the negative way of looking at *kiremet'* to Chuvash who suffered from oppression.

Post-Soviet ethnography, on the contrary, pays more attention to the origin and the essence of *kiremet'*, considering it as the symbol of Chuvash national culture.[25] Post-Soviet scholarship more often than not ascribes the negative attitude to *kiremet'* to Russian missionaries and clergy, whose attitude allegedly was followed by Chuvash and Mari smoothly.[26] Such approach neglects any obstacles in the transference of the view depicting the non-Russian people as passive recipients of alien ideology.

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22 Of course, the discussion of V.M. Vasil'ev, which was first published in 1915, is an exception. The other exception may be the one of M.G. Vasil'ev, who noted how the images of *kiremet'* had changed among the Chuvash and Mari people under the influence of Christianity. However, he stressed not so much the change from good to evil as that from the variety to unity. See, M.G. Vasil'ev, "O kiremetiakh," p. 261.

23 NA ChGIGN, t. 1, ed. khr. 574, no. 7017. K.V. Elle learned from 1930 to 33 at the Leningrad Academy of History of Material Culture (GAIMK) on the recommendation of N.Ia. Marr, and then went back to Chuvash and published some ethnographic monographs. However, charged with the "nationalist" inclination, Elle left home in 1935 for fear of the purge, and lived in various places in former Soviet Union for the rest of his life. See, A.M. Simulin, "Nerealizovannye zamysly. Elle Kuz'ma Vasil'evich (1896-1974)," in A.V. Izorkin, ed., *Ikh imena ostanutsia v istorii. vyp. 2* (Cheboksary, 1994), pp. 115-121.

24 See, N.R. Romanov, "Kul't kiremetia u chuvash," *Uchenye zapiski Chuvashskogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta iazyka, literatury, istorii i ekonomiki* 15 (1957), pp. 190-209; N.R. Romanov, *Kiremetsem sinchen* (Shupashkar, 1958), p. 16; P.V. Denisov, *Religioznye verovaniia chuvash* (Cheboksary, 1959), p. 87.

25 See, Vovina, "Chuvashskaia *kiremet'*," pp. 39-65; V.P. Stan'ial, "Chuvashskaia narodnaia religiia Sardash," in *Obshchestvo, gosudarstvo, religiia* (Cheboksary, 2002), pp. 96-111.

26 See, A.K. Salmin, *Kiremet'* (Cheboksary, 1992), p. 19; L. Toidybekova, *Mariiskaia iazycheskaia vera i etnicheskoe samosoznanie* (Joenshu, 1997), p. 125. Salmin touches upon the above arguments of V.M. Vasil'ev, but his reference to Vasil'ev limits itself only to the first part.

We have to recognize that ascribing the evilness of *kiremet'* either to Russians' viewpoint or to Chuvash and Mari, in other words, the invocation of either the theory of obedience or that of resistance, hinders the more nuanced view of why and how the people's perceptions changed in time. It is necessary to assess their ground by comparison, but not apart from each other. Now, let us see each point of view in turn.

## The Orthodox Church's Point of View

It must be taken into consideration that the Orthodox Church did not entirely dismiss the Chuvash traditional deities, but tried to appropriate them to propagate Christianity. Thus, missionaries picked up some elements of traditional religion suitable for the Christian doctrine and equated with those of Christianity. Consequently, the dualistic schema of God and the devil was applied to the organic system of traditional religion composed of many strata of deities from *shulti tura* (supreme god) to the lower spirits including *kiremet'*. In this way, the Orthodox Church equated *kiremet'* with the devil as the antipode of *tura* (god) instead of taking it as one deity in the organic composition of the traditional religion.

As a matter of fact, the equation of *kiremet'* with the devil is far from the traditional way of thinking, because Chuvash distinguished it from *shuitan* (devil) definitely.[27] The Orthodox Church confused them and diabolized *kiremet'* as a consequence. A good example is the report to the Holy Synod by Archbishop Filaret of the Kazan diocese (1829). After the statement of his wishful thinking of the success in missions among Chuvash in the near future, Filaret revealed the real state of the people as follows: "Living separately from Russian settlements all over the uezd, Chuvash still retain in their lives the vestiges of uncultivated primitiveness up to now, and have not broken off the pagan delusion of their ancestors yet."[28] Furthermore, he pointed out that the ritual of sacrifice was being repeated innumerably for the devil "under the pretense of *kiremet'*."

It is notable that the clergy on the whole had some aversion to the animal sacrifice, which was essential to the prayer rites of the traditional religion. Some clerics did not hide their emotion in witnessing the scene and depicted their shock plainly. The cleric named D.S. from the Tsivil'sk uezd wrote in 1910 in the newsletter published by the St. Gurii Brotherhood, the missionary association of the Orthodox Church: "What a sorrowful fact! Such a childish deed in this day of the twentieth century! Having so long as more than 200 years been Christians, Chuvash are still making sacrifices openly in broad

27 It should be remembered that the above legend provided by V.A. Sboev also indicates that *kiremet'* is a character which is distinct from *shuitan* (devil).

28 A. Mozharovskii, *Izlozhenie khoda missionerskogo dela: po prosveshcheniiu kazanskikh inorodtsev s 1552 po 1867 goda* (Moscow, 1880), p. 152.

daylight."[29] Another cleric V. Teniaev from the Buinsk uezd similarly noted, "I was terribly shocked as if I was at sword point to see the fact that such a literate man carrying a title of noncommissioned officer (*unter-ofitser*) was engaged in the sacrifice of ox. What on earth did they learn at school? Those who stood before me were none other than adults in their 50s and 60s with the minds of children."[30]

These statements show that the clergy seem to have been disgusted instinctively at the practice of animal sacrifices, considering it the product of uncultivated pagans with infantile minds.[31] Meanwhile, it must be noted that animal sacrifices in the traditional religious rites were devoted not only to *kiremet'* but also to other deities, such as *tura* (god). However, the clergy reduced the entire practice of sacrifices to *kiremet'* and downplayed sacrifices to *tura*. Because missionaries adopted *tura* to inculcate Chuvash with their concept of Christian God, it was inconvenient for them to admit the relation between *tura* and animal sacrifices. Consequently, they regarded sacrifice as the synonym of *kiremet'* specifically and negated it.[32] Moreover, they considered the abolition of the sacrifice a prerequisite to convert the non-Russians to Christianity. In fact, this contradicted their own missionary policy, for while the clergy struggled to evoke the "internal" conversion of non-Russians through the Il'minskii's educational system, at the same time they made such an "external" deed as sacrifice a yardstick of conversion.[33] However, it is essential to remember that although the clergy regarded *kiremet'* as evil, they never treated it as a terror. It is hardly possible that the fear of *kiremet'* among Chuvash and Mari originated from embracing the viewpoint of Russian clerics.

Among those few indigenous people who did follow the Russian Orthodox view, we may find clerics of the Chuvash origin. Owing to Il'minskii's

29 D.S., "Iazycheskoe zhertvoprinoshenie v Tsivil'skom uezde," *Sotrudnik bradstva sviatogo Guriia* 52 (1910), p. 827.

30 V. Teniaev, "Prikhod sela Bol'shoi Aksy, Buinskogo uezda, Simbirskoi gubernii," in S.V. Chicherina, ed., *U privolzhskikh inorodtsev* (St. Petersburg, 1905), Prilozhenie no. 7, p. 48.

31 N.I. Il'minskii, the proponent and the leader of the Orthodox mission among the non-Russian people in their native languages, often used the figuration of "child" regarding the indigenous peoples. See, Robert P. Geraci, "Window on the East: Ethnography, Orthodoxy, and Russian Nationality in Kazan, 1870-1914." Ph.D. dissertation in history (University of California at Berkeley, 1995), p. 112.

32 According to P. Werth, the clergy often looked down on the non-Russians who engaged in animal sacrifices, and called them *keremetniki* (people of *kiremet'*) or *keremetstvuiushchii* (people doing *kiremet'*). See, P.W. Werth, "Big Candles and 'Internal Conversion': The Mari Animist Reformation and Its Russian Appropriations" in R.P. Geraci, M. Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 148.

33 Werth points out that the missionaries, who worked on the ground of Il'minskii's education system after the 1860s, considered that the "internal" proselytizing was more important than the "external" appearance and legal procedure. See, Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 142-143.

educational system and several organizations to promote it, a number of native clerics were trained in the last quarter of nineteenth century. At least until the 1905 revolution, when indigenous nationalism emerged in the Middle Volga region, they were apt to deny their own nationality, and strived for assimilation with the Russians.[34] A.S. Ivanov, one of those Chuvash clerics who graduated from the Kazan Teachers Seminary, notes in his essay on the way of missions among the fellow countrymen that

> the superstitious people fear what is in fact nothing to be afraid of. They think of themselves as surrounded by the shady power, which may harm them every time. The noxious magic caused by supernatural power haunts them, though everything maintains its own order. This weighs heavily on the people's heart. The duty of clergymen is to root out this fear and to show to the people the trivial and shallow nature of the charms by the light of the Word of God.[35]

Ivanov's message makes it clear that if the people had followed obediently the Russian's viewpoint, Chuvash would have defused the fear of *kiremet'* as Ivanov did. However, it was obvious that the majority of Chuvash did not share his way of thinking at least until the first Russian Revolution.

## The Chuvash Point of View

Now, let us explore the second standpoint that takes the transition of the idea of *kiremet'* as Chuvash reaction to social changes. It can not be denied that the spread of Christianity since the seventeenth century was one of the most influential social changes. As the missionary work was expanded, such elements of Christianity like churches, icons and clergy permeated into Chuvash religious lives. However, they accommodated these elements not as the Orthodox Church wanted but in their own manner. There are glimpses of something uncanny in this gap between the doctrinal course of Christianity and the indigenized perception of it.

Several documents report that, in the nineteenth century, not only Chuvash but also Mari and Mordvin people made pilgrimage to the church of the Ishaki village in Koz'modem'iansk uezd. The church celebrated the miracle icon made of black stone which represented the image of St. Mikhail and the Great Vasilii on the one side and St. Nikolai on the other. The icon was found by a Chuvash farmer at a nearby field in 1751. A century later, the Chuvash ethnographer Spiridon Mikhailov wrote regarding this holy image that "Russian and non-Russian visitors come here every day from various places, even from neighboring provinces. It is no exaggeration to say that in the eyes of

34 See, Paul W. Werth, "Inorodtsy on Obrusenie: Religious Conversion, Indigenous Clergy, and the Politics of Assimilation in Late-Imperial Russia," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2000), pp. 117.

35 A.S. Ivanov, "Mery k iskoreneniiu iazycheskikh obychaev, sueverii i zhertvoprinoshenii, sushchestvuiushchikh sredi inorodtsev," *Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastyrei* 20 (1900), p. 30.

the different tribes (*inoplemennik*), especially Chuvash, Ishaki is literally the metropolitan bishop. They visit this place and pray here more often than in their own parish churches."[36] To be exact, to Chuvash the Ishaki church served more as a *kiremet'* rather than the metropolitan bishop. For they visited the church more often than not when someone in their families became ill, and when diviners advised them to do so.[37] They visited this church to offer wax candles or coins to the icon of St. Nikolai instead of sacrifices to *kiremet'*. In a peculiar twist, while the clergy diabolized *kiremet'*, Chuvash turned the church and the icon into *kiremet'*.[38]

A school inspector and at the same time an ethnographer V.K. Magnitskii reported another case of transformation of Christian elements into *kiremet'*. After his 1882 survey tour that gave him a chance to observe the feast of St. Nikolai at the Ishaki village, Magnitskii went further and stopped at the Morgaush village. There he met Father L., a young Russian cleric appointed to the newly-established parish of Morgaush. This fresh seminary graduate complained to Magnitskii that, while the parishioners visited the chapel eagerly, they worshipped at the same time the *kiremet'* which was called "Torganzi." According to villagers, "Torganzi" was the name of a Chuvash, who once put a Russian peddler of icons up for the night. Blinded by the money of the peddler, however, Torganzi killed him during that night. In order to dispose of the icon left behind, the killer put it on a pine tree. Knowing that, a cleric carried the icon from that place toward the church in a religious procession manner. Since then, the icon came to be worshiped as the "Torganzi tora" (the god of Torganzi).[39]

Not only could the churches and the icons but also the clergy be transformed into *kiremet'*. Ten years later from the Torganzi case, Magnitskii received a letter from an archpriest of Koshek village V.Ia. Smelov. In his letter Smelov wrote that, "on such occasions as when the Chuvash parishioners have a backache or a pain in other part of a body, and also when Ivan Stepanovich Protopopov appeared to them in their dream, they throw coins to my garden,

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36 S. Mikhailov, "Selo Ishaki v Koz'modem'ianskom uezde," in Dimitriev, ed., *Spiridon Mikhailov: Sobranie sochinenii*, p. 192 (Originally published in 1857).

37 The diviners are called *iomzia* or *iumash*, whom Chuvash often consulted when they experienced misfortunes like diseases. For more information about the Chuvash diviners, see: A.V. Rekeev, "Iz chuvashskikh predanii i verovanii," *IKE* 3 (1897), pp. 72-76; A.K. Salmin, *Kolduny i znakhari* (Cheboksary, 2002).

38 For more detail on the cult of the Ishaki church and the miracle icon, see: S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie ikon," *Sotrudnik bratstva sviatogo Guriia* 49 (1910), pp. 783-784.

39 V.K. Magnitskii, "Chuvashskii krai. Putevye zametki po Koz'modem'ianskomu i Iadrinskomu uezdam Kazanskoi gubernii," *Volzhsko-Kamskoe slovo* 165 (July 31, 1882). In a variant of this story, the Russian peddler was not killed, but had his icons tumble down on the road and went away leaving the icons behind. Being frighten by the scattered broken icons, people began to make offerings to them and to pray there saying, "Leave me alone, Torganzi!" NA ChGIGN, t. 168, no. 4944.

or stand candles by the house of psalm-reader, both of which were inheritances from the late Ivan Stepanovich." Magnitskii explained that Protopopov conducted clergy work for 52 years, and had been long-time rural dean until his death in 1871 at the age of 92. "It is said that he had some house-serfs in his house, which stood higher than the wooden parish church. There were four turrets at the each corner of the house, on which he sometimes rose to watch out for suspicious smoke that usually came from somewhere in the woods surrounding the village. Catching the sight of smoke, Ivan Stepanovich ordered to tie the troika and hurried toward the smoke in order to seize Chuvash in the act of sacrifice."[40]

These cases show that such objects of Christianity as churches, icons, wax candles, and even clergy had particular meanings for the Chuvash people. Especially in the second half of the nineteenth century missionary work was systematically reinforced by the foundation of the St. Gurii Brotherhood, which promoted the education of native children at the seminaries and schools. In the course of reinforcement of education, the clergy and missionaries sought to replace the *kiremet'* worship with Christianity. Consequently, Chuvash accepted the Christian elements, but differently from how the Orthodox Church recognized them. It seems that the feeling of fear among the people arose out of these differences in meaning of the Christian elements.

It must be said, of course, that the people's way of life has changed not just in religious aspect. In the nineteenth century, the indigenous people experienced the development of market economy as well as Orthodox proselytizing. V.A. Sboev, a scholar from the Kazan University, especially emphasized this aspect of socio-economic modernization:

> The frequent relations with Russians and the intensification of commercial activities and production have also changed the consciousness of Chuvash. The Russian monopoly of bazaars ceased to exist: Now a large number of Chuvash themselves provide or purchase in Kazan and other towns of the uezd their living necessities, and sell them at their bazaars. At the same time, many Chuvash buy from or barter with their fellow-tribesmen. The bought or bartered items include lard, leather, eggs, honey, hops, and so forth, which they transported for sale generally to Kazan.[41]

As Sboev notices, the market economy was embraced in the people's lives in the nineteenth century, which was evident from how the land, the farm produce, and the work force were treated. The people inevitably experienced sharp fluctuations of the price of these items. Sboev pointed out further that the price of hop, one of the special products at the Middle Volga region, had fallen down to less than a tenth in such a short span of time. Besides, the poor men were sometimes obliged to sell the crop at a lower price during harvest

40 V.K. Magnitskii, "Iz byta chuvash kazanskoi gubernii, irikhi, kiremeti, braki," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 18:3 (1893), p. 134.

41 Sboev, *Issledovaniia ob inorodtsakh*, p. 6.

time so that they could pay the tax, recognizing that they would have to repurchase it later out of necessity at a higher price in turn.[42]

It can be noted that the expansion of market economy was reflected in the rites concerning *kiremet'* in some respects. First, the value of the offerings and the effectiveness of the rituals themselves were thought to be so unstable that the people were always afraid lest the practice should be irrelevant. They usually carried out the prayer rites to *kiremet'* in early morning or in the middle of the night. There was a fear that if the rites were witnessed by someone else, especially by the Russians, then they would have no effect.[43] Such a fear of breaking secrecy is contrast to the openness which was illustrated in the case of aforementioned Timofeev's new post at Al'sheevo. In the latter the secrecy was non-existent to the extent that the rites were "so familiar even to any children that they never seem terrifying."[44] This signifies that, while secrecy does not matter when the rites have the common meanings for everyone, however once the meanings of the rites come to fluctuate like market price, the practice to preserve the effectiveness becomes crucial.

Second, it can be said that *kiremet'* was often accompanied by such a feature as proliferation and self-reproduction. In some cases, the places where trees grew quickly and vigorously were worshiped in the name of *kiremet'*.[45] According to some legends, *kiremet'* was so greedy that he demanded offerings from people, beginning with porridge, and further upgraded – chicken, goose, ram, cow, to the extent of horse.[46] Furthermore, many legends commonly indicate that *kiremet'* was prolific and disseminated its descendants all around. Inclination to proliferation and expansion can be found in the behavioral aspect, too. According to N.M. Okhotnikov, while a diviner told a man to visit the church of Ishaki and offer some candles to the miracle icon of St. Nikolai, if this man did not want to go, he threw some money into the neighbor's house.[47] Finding the thrown money, the neighbor would make out what the money

42 According to the Chuvash historian Kuznetsov, the farmers had no room for choice in what time to sell the crop, because the period of tax payment was appointed to be the last quarter of the year. Using the data of the statistics taken in two uezds of Kazan province in 1883, Kuznetsov notes that 92% of those who sold the crop repurchased later. See, I.D. Kuznetsov, *Krest'ianstvo Chuvashii v period kapitalizma* (Cheboksary, 1963), p. 217.

43 For instances, see; N. Ivanov, "Iz iazycheskogo religioznogo kul'ta," p. 1037; V.K. Magnitskii, *Materialy k ob''iasneniiu staroi chuvashskoi very* (Kazan, 1881), p. 218.

44 Timofeev, *Takhar'ial*, p. 55.

45 V.K. Magnitskii, "Iz poezdki v selo Shumatovo, Iadrinskogo uezda Kazanskoi gubernii," *IOAIE* 3 (1884), p. 172.

46 Magnitskii, *Materialy k ob''iasneniiu*, pp. 2-3.

47 It must be considered that continuation of the practice was the golden rule of the prayer rites. It was said that once a person visited Ishaki to pray, he or she had to go there to pray every year since then. So it was entirely possible that while some persons, who had been there before, went to Ishaki ardently, some others who had never been there did not like to visit. See, S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie ikon," p. 783.

meant. Then the neighbor had to visit Ishaki in place of the first man, otherwise had to throw the money into the third house, only doubling the amount. In this manner, it could happen that more and more money be thrown from house to house. Okhotnikov reports a case of a poor man who came to the cleric to consult. The man asked, "What on earth to do, Father? I found plenty of money under the eaves of my house, but can not throw them out – I am afraid!"[48]

Judging from these cases, it should be considered that the development of market economy as well as the spread of Christianity could have promoted the transformation of the idea of *kiremet'*. It must be stressed, however, the fear of *kiremet'* was not caused by just the passive adaptation of people to the new order, nor by just the rejection and resistance to it. While Christianity and market economy did not replace the old order completely, a lot of elements of the Church and the market were adopted and made patch-like components of the people's lives. The elements such as churches and icons as well as the inclinations of fluctuation and proliferation composed the patches woven into the lives of Chuvash. The fear arose out of the seams of these patches. In other words, the fear was provoked by the tension caused by the need to reconcile the traditional way of life and modernity.

It would not be irrelevant in this connection to compare the *kiremet'* worship of Chuvash with the devil-belief among the workers of South America illustrated by Michael Taussig. He noted that in the transitional period of economic system the devil was feared but at the same time relied upon by workers. According to Taussig, the devil performed the role of the mediator of "the opposed meanings and sentiments that the development of this economy engenders."[49] While the worship of devil followed the preexisting way of practice, it was the new experiences of people that promote the worship in another context. If the *kiremet'* worship was a similar phenomenon to this, the evil nature could never be ascribed to just one aspect of the different orders, but rather it should be taken as a reconciliation of them. This is resonant with what David Parkin remarked: "Evil *is* not *anything* : it denotes rather an area of discourse concerning human suffering, human existential predicaments and the attempted resolution of these through other humans and through non-human agencies, including a God or gods."[50]

It can not be denied, however, that these explanations of evil as a certain agent for mediation and solution of contradictions include somewhat teleological inclination. They may explain how and for what the evil arose, but do not explain why it must be feared. The formation process of the fear of *kiremet'* still remains unclear. In order to pursue this question further, it would be helpful

48 Okhotnikov, "Zapiski chuvashina," p. 30.

49 Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 124.

50 David Parkin, "Introduction," in David Parkin, ed., *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 10-11. Italic is Parkin's.

to turn our attention to another object of the traditional religion and compare it with the *kiremet'* worship.

## At the Border of Lineage

Now, I turn to another spirit *ierekh* (or *irikh*). To dwell on *ierekh* here and compare it with *kiremet'* is quite relevant, because the transitional process of the *ierekh* worship is more obvious than that of *kiremet'*. *Ierekh* by nature makes a total contrast to *kiremet'* in various aspects. However, these two objects of the traditional religion are often seen as the same kind, and even confused on occasion. The examination of *ierekh* with the issue of contrast and analogy to *kiremet'* in mind will give us some clues to depict a general picture of transformation of the traditional religion.

*Ierekh* was regarded as an evil spirit which could cause diseases of the surface parts of body, such as eyes and skin. It was embodied in a small doll-like figure made out of wood and a piece of cloth, which was put in a bark basket with various offerings to it. Meanwhile, it was only in the southern area of Chuvash and southward region along the lower stream of the Volga that *ierekh* had such a personified figure. In the middle and the northward area including Kazan province, *ierekh* lacked the figure, and was only a bark basket with various offerings which was hung on the wall of a bath-house or a barn.[51]

Careful examination of *ierekh* demonstrates the notion that it brings about a total contrast with *kiremet'*. Most of all, *ierekh* was frequently endowed with feminine features, whereas *kiremet'* was exclusively viewed as a masculine spirit. The doll-like figures incarnating *ierekh* could be both sexes, but the female-looking ones were far more in number and sophisticated than the male ones.[52] Moreover, *ierekh* was often called by female name, such as "Maria *ierekh*," for instance.[53] According to the Soviet ethnographer Akimova, people sometimes called it flatteringly "*pike*" ("lady" or "beauty") instead of *ierekh*, awing in the presence of it.[54] Just to note, one should be aware that it was called "*pike*" but not "*maira*." The latter is also a flattering name in frequent use, but exclusively in relation to non-Chuvash (usually Russian or Tatar women). This shows that

51 T.M. Akimova, "Materialy po kul'tu ierekha u saratovskikh chuvash," in *Sbornik Nizhnevolzhskogo kraevogo muzeia* (Saratov, 1932), p. 22. In addition to this, a certain tree was often regarded as *ierekh* in the northern Chuvash along the upper stream of the Volga. It should not be overlooked that the difference between *ierekh* and *kiremet'* seems to be vague in the northern area, where Chuvash were in frequent contact with Russians.

52 G.I. Dzeniskevich, "O kul'te 'ierekha' v Chuvashii," *Iz kul'turnogo naslediia narodov Rossii. Sbornik MAE* 28 (1972), p. 228.

53 Akimova, "Materialy po kul'tu ierekha," p. 24. In other cases, they were called not by the personal names but by the kinship names, such as "*man akka*" (my aunt), "*kinemei*" (aunt – the wife of uncle). See, N.I. Ashmarin, *Slovary chuvashskogo iazyka,* vyp. 5 (Cheboksary, 1930), p. 141.

54 Akimova, "Materialy po kul'tu ierekha," p. 23.

*ierekh* was thought to be Chuvash in nationality. With respect to this point, *ierekh* makes a good contrast to *kiremet'*, whose prototype was often thought to be non-Chuvash fugitives and foreigners from another place. That is to say, while *kiremet'* is others for Chuvash, *ierekh* is not.

The feminine features of *ierekh* marked not only the objects, but also the people's practice with relation to it. It is said that originally mothers handed *ierekh* to their daughters when the latter went to marry into other families, because *ierekh* was regarded as the guardian spirit of the maternal lineage.[55] Some materials show that women worshipped *ierekh* more eagerly than men did. We can find an instance in the notes of N.I. Ashmarin, the compiler of the 17-volume dictionary of the Chuvash language that includes abundant ethnographic information. Among the Ashmarin's reports, there is such a case that once men threw the *ierekh* into the river so that it would not bother their family anymore. After that, however, the family women remade it for fear of evil consequences.[56] Another material is provided by the Chuvash ethnographer N.V. Nikol'skii, who notes that at the end of nineteenth century a group of clergy and the parish of Karmaly village in Samarsk uezd went into the Easter procession through the parish. Then clerics found an *ierekh* at a farmer's house and tried to throw it into the river.[57] Later the psalm-reader Lavrentii Kapitonov, the Nikol'skii's informant, narrated to the ethnographer on the scene he witnessed:

> "In the full vestments and with a cross in his hand, the cleric clambered up the bench in the house. He removed the small bark basket from the roof, and showed it to us gathering around him. At the very moment the *ierekh* was removed, the women there suddenly began to weep and cry. It is difficult to suppose what made women cry – whether fear of ravaged *ierekh* or fright at the responsibility for the situation. For the women could presume that the cleric ought to be responsible for that. In the meanwhile, the cleric brought the removed *ierekh* to the river in solemn manner to put it under water."[58]

The impulsive reaction of women clearly shows that women in comparison with men particularly clung to *ierekh*.

The way of practice to offer various things to *ierekh* brings us another aspect of its feminine features. It can be said that offerings are the essence of *ierekh* worship, because it is supposed that the word *ierekh* itself etymologically derives from the word that means "offering."[59] Nevertheless, while *kiremet'*

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55 Dzeniskevich, "O kul'te 'ierekha' v Chuvashii," p. 230; Akimova, "Materialy po kul'tu ierekha," p. 25.

56 Ashmarin, *Slovary chuvashskogo iazyka*, p. 142.

57 The Orthodox clergy sought to exterminate *ierekh* as intensively as they did with relation to *kiremet'*. I will take up this point later.

58 NA ChGIGN, t. 215, no. 5665.

59 N.Ch. Zolotnitskii, *Kornevoi chuvashsko-russkii slovar', sravnennyi s iazykami i narechiiami raznykh narodov tiurkskogo, finskogo i drugikh plemen* (Kazan, 1875), p. 150.

required various animals as sacrifices, the offerings to *ierekh* were limited to non-animal food and humble things. Unlike *kiremet'*, *ierekh* dispensed with good offerings because the latter was usually regarded as a lower spirit. In his explanation about the traditional religion, the Chuvash cleric A.V. Rekeev notes in some scornful tone that, "no more than kissel [flour porridge] is offered to the poor *ierekh* or the youngest spirit. Even a flat cake and porridge with butter are not needed. People cheat *ierekh* by offering tin or lead medal instead of money, which they hang on it with red thread, as if they do to a simpleton (*glupen'komu*). Chuvash consider that even this can content *ierekh* sufficiently."[60]

Rekeev's scorn, however, might be caused not only because he was a clergyman, but also because he was a man. As for the medal that Rekeev refers to, we can find the clue to this small metal disk in the prayer, which was read at the rites. The Hungarian ethnographer Gyula Mészáros, who stayed in Chuvash for one and a half year from 1906 to conduct ethnographic research, recorded such a prayer read on the occasion of the rite to *ierekh*: "Aunt *ierekh*, have mercy! Make me well. Heigh! I offer (*paratap*) flour porridge to you. I offer flat cake, too. I hang (*shakatap*) money besides. Have mercy!"[61] The alleged money not to "offer" but to "hang" must symbolize something different from the currency. Another text of prayer gives us more clear idea about what the disk means: "We hang *surpan shakki* on you, we dress you up with silk and thread."[62] Taking these words of prayer into account, we can suppose that the small disk of tin or lead was not so much a false coin as the symbol of breast ornament.[63] This ornament sewn on closely with clustered silver coins is one of the items put on by married women of the Turkic and Finno-Ugric nations in the Middle Volga and Kama region, such as Mari, Mordvin, Udmurt, and Chuvash.[64] If we suppose that the small metal disk is the symbol of the breast ornament, the offering of it to *ierekh* may be a representation of the scene that a daughter would be married off.

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60 A.V. Rekeev, "Iz chuvashskikh predanii i verovanii," *IKE* 2 (1897), p. 51.

61 Diula Mesarosh, *Pamiatniki staroi chuvashskoi very* (Cheboksary, 2000), p. 34.

62 In the original as follows: "*Surpan shakki shaksa paratpar. Purshansempe sipsempe ilemle tumlantaratpar*." The prayer is included in the archival collection of N.V. Nikol'skii, which was narrated by a farmer of Sin'-Aldysh village in Iadrinsk uezd. NA ChGIGN, otd. I, t. 179, no. 5135. *Surpan shakki* is the breast ornament with silver coins for married women.

63 There are other interpretations of the metal disk yet. For instance, the disk was supposed to have an effect of sympathetic magic in the light of its casting process. That is, when the disk was made by dropping the melting metal on the side of ax, to peel off the metal from the surface of ax was supposed to be symbolizing to peel off scab from skin. See, V.K. Magnitskii, "Ob irikhakh u chuvash" *IOAIE* 9:1 (1891), p. 8.

64 The Soviet ethnographer Gagen-Torn supposes that the origin of the breast ornament with silver coins can be traced back to the Bolgal era before the thirteenth century. See, N. Gagen-Torn, *Zhenskaia odezhda narodov povolzh'ia (Materialy k etnogenezu)* (Cheboksary, 1960), p. 97.

In addition, such small things as feather, down, piece of bone, leather, and cloth were offered to *ierekh*. Hence, the baskets contained hodgepodge of various offerings and often appeared quite messy. Interestingly, the Soviet ethnographer Akimova notes that untidy women were sometimes called cynically "*ierekh* basket."[65] However, each of the apparently useless articles have quite important meaning for women. As for cloth, to spin into yarn out of flax grown in the field, and to weave it into cloth were important labor of women during the off-season for farmers. Besides, by-products such as feather and down out of poultry, or fur, wool and leather out of livestock which the bride brought as dowry were acknowledged as personal property of the wives.[66] The messy baskets filled with various products and by-products of women might have served as, so to speak, the sanctuary for wives who had married into other families from their native homes.

At the same time, *ierekh* worship had another aspect. Some legends and narratives indicate that the original model of *ierekh* was supposed to be an unmarried old woman.[67] In order to grasp the meaning of such a supposition, we have to consider the particular social context lying behind it. In the late nineteenth century the system of land redistribution was practiced in Russia. On the occasion of redistribution conducted at regular intervals, land was allotted to each household in accordance with the number of the male members of the family. Meanwhile, women were assumed to be provided for through the shares held by their husbands or fathers.[68] Therefore, while parents mostly looked forward to the birth of boys, they appreciated the work of daughters and made them engage in domestic duties and work in the fields from childhood. Also, it is said that if they lacked workers in the family, parents did not want to marry their daughter off until she was in her late twenties.[69] Since it was not uncommon for Chuvash brides to be older than bridegrooms, to be long unmarried might not have had such a negative meaning for women. However, as far as it was thought that when woman died without being married, she would become the wife of *esrel'* or the spirit of death in the other world, marriage must have been a serious problem in woman's life.[70] *Ierekh*

65 In Chuvash, "*ierekh kunti*." Akimova, "Materialy po kul'tu ierekha," p. 24.

66 K. Prokop'ev, *Brak u chuvash* (Kazan, 1903), p. 46.

67 For example, NA ChGIGN, otd. I, t. 154, no. 4643; t. 150, no. 4579.

68 Atkinson notes that the practice of land redistribution spread by the active introduction among the state peasants for the purpose of preserving order in the countryside at the end of the eighteenth century, following the Pugachev uprising. See, Dorothy Atkinson, "Egalitarianism and the Commune," in R. Bartlett, ed., *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1990), p. 15.

69 G.I. Komissarov, "Chuvashi kazanskogo zavolzh'ia," in G.I. Komissarov, *O chuvashakh* (Cheboksary, 2003 [first published in 1911]), p. 63.

70 Magnitskii, "Iz byta chuvash," p. 138.

worship and the practice of offering of a small metal disk to it thus might represent earnest wishes of bridal dream.

Generally speaking, we can suppose that the exchange of women between different linage is at the root of *ierekh* worship. As long as women were put in such an unstable position in the lineage, they might face difficulties at any time. Once a woman married into another family, she might have some frictions with relatives of her husband. On the other hand, if she did not marry, she would be placed at the edge of her own lineage. Thus, *ierekh* worship, at least for women, served as the reconciliation of social frictions and the regulation of social relations on the border of lineage.

## Change through Appropriation

Now, let us turn to the issue of how the Orthodox Church dealt with this *ierekh*. Like in the case of *kiremet'*, the clergy saw the *ierekh* from their own point of view. While they regarded *kiremet'* as the synonym of devil in connection with animal sacrifices, clerics took the worship of *ierekh* as typical idolatry. In fact, however, as mentioned above, it was only in the region of the lower stream of the Volga that *ierekh* had a small personified figure. Nevertheless, the Russian clergy had a common idea that *ierekh* was an "idol" of heathen fetish. Such an idea of *ierekh* as an "idol" was distributed through the medium of reminiscences written by the clerics who served among Chuvash.

It can be said that in those reminiscences clerics often confused *kiremet'* with *ierekh*, and took them both as something connected with a diabolic force operated by sorcery. A good example is found in the essay of Aleksandr Alekseevskii, who served as clergy at the village near from the boundary between Ufa and Samara province in the 1860s. He explains the situation of his former parish:

> Going through the forest, you will come across the village where *iomzia* [diviner] has been making sacrifices to *kiremet'*. You will find the trace of rite which has just been conducted by a large number of people. Going through the field and pasture, you will find idols in the shape of crude dolls, which is the object of the superstitious belief remained among Chuvash from the age of paganism. These things seem to be for the use of sorcery. They have to be dealt with carefully. Otherwise *irikh* will harm you. It is said that *irikh* could even kill you.[71]

Curiously enough, such a view of *ierekh* linked with sorcery began to be shared with Chuvash afterward. The Chuvash ethnographer N.V. Nikol'skii reports that, according to a farmer, "Chuvash were afraid of *ierekh* that could make them a rash or eye disease. When the symptoms appeared, they consulted the *iomzia* [diviner], who told that *ierekh* in the barn or kitchen of a cer-

71 A. Alekseevskii, "Sluchai iz praktiki prikhodskogo sviashchennika u chuvash," *IKE* 13 (1868), p. 365.

tain person's house did harm. Further the diviner suggested making offerings to the *ierekh*."[72] It was not rare for diviners to indicate a certain person whose *ierekh* was supposed to cause diseases. N.M. Okhotnikov provides such an instance in his memoir. Being suggested by a diviner what person's *ierekh* caused the disease, a family member of a sick person visited the indicated house with flour porridge and a small metal disk and asked to offer them to *ierekh*. Then the man of the house offered the things with prayers to his *ierekh* for the recovery of the sick person.[73]

We can find more violent cases in the later reports. It was already after the October Revolution that a farmer P.G. Nikitin, one of the informants of Akimova, narrated to the ethnographer: "With a desire to revenge on an opponent, one takes a doll made of dough wrapped around a bark frame and throws it into the house of the opponent. Then the family of the latter will get ill. In this manner, once all members of a family were killed in Shniaeva village. It was in 1919 that an *ierekh* was thrown into the house, but no one noticed it at that time. The last person of the family died in 1921. If *ierekh* was thrown into your house, bring it to the *iomzia* [diviner] without breaking, and you can avoid the disaster."[74]

These instances illustrate the transitional process of the nature of *ierekh* worship. The clergy interpreted the doll-like figure of *ierekh* as an "idol" of paganism and linked the alleged "idolatry" with the practice of sorcery. Chuvash subsequently appropriated the clergy's interpretation of their own belief through diviners. It is obvious that the *ierekh*, which is supposed to cause diseases and be used for sorcery, has lost every former feature. Consequently, the total contrast between masculine, greedy, communal, outsider's nature of *kiremet'* and feminine, humble, domestic, and insider's nature of *ierekh* has been diminished. Instead of the contrasting distinctions between them, an awkward analogy was formed in the fear of sorcery. To put this matter differently, unfamiliar "idol" of *ierekh* as well as animal sacrifice of *kiremet'* aroused the image of "otherness" in the clergy. The latter, at the same time, made another "idol" of "otherness" in their turn by linking *ierekh* and *kiremet'* respectively with malicious power of sorcery. The Chuvash people appropriated this imaginary "idol" of the clergy's interpretation and applied it to their practice.

## Conclusions

The fear factor of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* thus arose in the course of the transformation of their features from the mutual contrast to analogy. The clergy neglected the distinctive features of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* and twisted them into the imagination of "otherness." Clerics imagined that this "otherness" should

72 NA ChGIGN, otd. I, t. 179, no. 5135.

73 Okhotnikov, "Zapiski chuvashina," p. 25.

74 Akimova, "Materialy po kul'tu ierekha," p. 26.

be connected with the malicious practice of sorcery. Afterwards, the fear of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* settled down in the mind of Chuvash by appropriation of this clergy's interpretation.

It may be suspected, however, that as a consequence our discussion might be back where we started, because it looks as if Chuvash obediently followed the clergy's point of view through appropriation of it. Nevertheless it should be considered that such a practice of appropriation of the other's view can never be ascribed only to the side of Chuvash. As a matter of fact, the Orthodox Church also appropriated the divinities of the traditional religion in various respects. The Church synchronized the feasts with the periods of the traditional farming rites, which were devoted to *kiremet'* and the *shulti tura* (supreme god). Besides, such constructions of chapels, churches and monasteries were often made at the sites of *kiremet'* and the places where the traditional rites had been carried out.[75] The appropriation can be pointed out not only in the immediate adoption of the features of the traditional religion. As the Mari ethnographer Iu.A. Kaliev suggests, the clergy constructed the social mythology by taking *kiremet'* as the symbol of paganism. In other words, the clergy obtained the divine power of Christianity by detaching *kiremet'* from the organic system of the traditional religion and exterminating it.[76]

Taking these into consideration, it is not sufficient just to say that the Chuvash appropriated the idea of the Russian clergy. More precisely, the Chuvash re-appropriated the magical power that the clergy had appropriated at the non-Russian people. The appropriation was never unilateral but bilateral, and it was circularly repeated in the mutual relations between the two parties. Thus it can never be said that the transformation of the idea of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* occurred just as the result of that Chuvash followed the idea of the Russian clergy.

Nor can it be said that the transformation was the result of the "syncretism" of the traditional religion and Christianity. For the "self" and the "other" are not connected immediately keeping each given disposition, but the formation of the "self" is promoted only by the "other's" image on the "self." Judging from this point, it is not so much "syncretism" as "synergism" in Michael Taussig's term that fits the worship of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* among Chuvash. Analyzing the history of the rubber plantation and folk healing in South America, Taussig illustrates how the history of reality was formed through the "synergism" of the dichotomous schema, such as whites and Indio, Christianity and shamanism, God and demon, ruler and oppressed. Both parties of these pairs not only oppose but reinforce each other. This "synergism" works in the

75 L.A. Taimasov, "Deformatsiia obraza verkhovnogo boga v religii narodov Srednego Povolzh'ia," in *Khristianizatsiia narodov Srednego Povolzh'ia i ee istoricheskoe znachenie: materialy regional'noi nauchnoi konferentsii* (Ioshkar-Ola, 2001), p. 50.

76 Iu.A. Kaliev, "Kul't Keremeta," *Marii El. Vchera, Segodnia, Zavtra* 1 (1996), p. 93.

way how "folk healing respectfully takes Church doctrine from the priests, and icons from the walls of the church, reappropriating for its own use what the Church has appropriated from popular mythology drawn from the dreams of the oppressed."[77] The fear factor of *kiremet'* and *ierekh* could be considered as the result of such a synergistic process worked in this manner. The fear was invigorated in the circle of appropriation and reappropriation of the other's view between the Russian clergy and the Chuvash people. Therefore, it should not be ascribed to just one side.

77 Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 169.