

**Glossary from the Orenburg expeditions:  
Johann Gottlieb Georgi's collection of Mordvin expressions (1776)**

In the summer of 1769, an important astronomical event happened: the transit of Venus across the Sun. This made possible for astronomers to calculate the distance between the Sun and the Earth. For the exact calculation it was necessary to observe the transit of Venus from various parts of the world. Therefore, 77 expeditions had been organised all over the world.

On the initiative of the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg, with considerable support from Catherine II, eight teams set off within Russia. Measurements were carried out on the Kola Peninsula, in two settlements near Murmansk, in Orsk, Orenburg, Guryev and Yakutsk. Besides the astronomical expeditions, the academy also started another great scale project aiming at the study of not the celestial but the earthly phenomena. The goal was to explore the geography, flora and fauna of Russia. This undertaking was officially named as the Great Northern Expedition, but it was commonly known as the Orenburg Expedition. This latter expression is not very exact, because the expedition had five divisions, three of which were named as the Orenburg Expedition while two were named as the Astrakhan Expedition. The inaccuracy also lies in the fact that the explorers reached much further: to Siberia and Lake Baikal in the East, to the White Sea in the North and to the Caucasus in the South-West.

The leaders of the divisions were chiefly foreign scientists: the German Peter Simon Pallas, Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin and Johann Anton Gmelin, the Swedish Peter Falk and the Russian Ivan Ivanovich Lepyokhin. The scientists collected a large amount of material between 1768 and 1774. They explored the flora and fauna of a large part of Russia, discovering and taxonomically classifying a lot of new species. They also made geographical, geological and meteorological observations and obtained a large amount of information about the residents, customs, lifestyle and culture of these far-off lands, including some linguistic material as well.

Three of the divisions (Pallas's, Lepyokhin's and Falk's) moved across the Middle Volga Region, where they collected Finno-Ugric (among others Mordvin) linguistic and ethnographic material. The German origin Johann Gottlieb Georgi worked in both Pallas's and Falk's team and wrote the first

detailed description about the various peoples living in Russia (*Beschreibung aller Nationen des Russischen Reichs, ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidung und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten*). The first section of his work contains some information and linguistic material of the Mordvins as well. This paper is a study of Georgi's Mordvin glossary. His text contains 23 Mordvin common nouns and eight proper nouns. The common nouns are related to clothing and religious beliefs, while the proper nouns are Mordvin names from the pagan times that are difficult to identify.

*Keywords:* transit of Venus (1769), Orenburg Expedition, Pallas, Lepyokhin, Falk, Johann Gottlieb Georgi, Mordvin

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