

Linguistic analysis of an 18th-century Mordvin prayer

The most important of the 18th-century Mordvin language monuments is the dictionary of Damaskin, Bishop of Nizhny Novgorod, compiled at the request of the enlightened, science-loving Tsarina Catherine II in 1785. Two copies of the multilingual dictionary (Russian–Tatar–Chuvash–Erzya–Mordvin–Mari) exist, one in Nizhny Novgorod and the other in St Petersburg. In the introduction to the first volume, Damaskin gives a brief overview of the 18th-century beliefs and pagan customs of the Chuvash and Mordvins. A short 74-word Mordvin prayer is included here. In my article, I analyse this text in detail.

The transcription is good, with only a few spelling mistakes. The marking of the palatalization, important in Mordvin orthography, is very good and accurate. There are only five words of Russian origin in the text, most of which could have been replaced by Mordvin words *можно* 'may' and *чтобы* '(in order to)'. The text contains only two compound words, several formed words.

The text is clearly written in the dialect of Erzya, which I can prove with phonetic, morphological, and lexicological arguments. Several words have no Moksha equivalent (e.g. E *il'amak* ~ M *tät'* negative word, *iňazoro* ~ *oćazor* 'great lord', *šeja* ~ *šava* 'goat'). The dative form of the personal pronoun (*mońen*), the singular first person possessive suffix *-m*, the plural third person verb *-it'*, the plural first person plural definite predicate *-miž* and the participle present participle *-ića* are clearly Erzya.

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