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#### CONSTANT MYTHOLOGEMS AS A COMPONENT OF REGIONAL CULTURAL MEMORY

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#### *Abstract*

The modern sociocultural situation is characterized by an increasing interest in deep foundations of human existence. The need to preserve cultural memory in the context of culture globalization is becoming increasingly recognized. For this reason the study of social memory becomes an important need of modern society. Against this background, the problem of determining the initial positions of Russian culture as a whole and its regional variants is of particular relevance. Regional being is a complex and contradictory phenomenon. Therefore, the study of every local formation must be formulated with an understanding of its specificity. From the standpoint of a system-typological approach, regional culture is considered as an integral sign system that reflects a certain chronotope. Semantic dominants of regional culture are revealed through the peculiarity characterization of the world perception and worldview of members of the regional community, the particular picture of the world, identity and self-identity of individual and local society. The foundation of regional culture is a set of cultural constants. The complex of cultural constants is also the main content of cultural memory. The article discusses some of the realities of the Kursk urban chronotope as an example of the correlation of specific historical and cultural forms with constant myths. Conditions of social and political transformation led to the remifologization of regional public consciousness. The formation of post-Soviet mythology in Kursk region took place on the basis of heroic mythology. This was facilitated by historical conditions of settlement and formation of culture of Kursk territory.

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## **1. Introduction**

The modern sociocultural situation is characterized by an ever-increasing interest in the deep foundations of human existence. Today, a large number of people, especially young people, are disoriented in the cultural space; the connection between generations and the internal continuity of the cultural tradition are broken. Intuitively, the need to preserve cultural memory in globalized culture is increasingly recognized. That is why, the study of social (cultural, historical, ethno-cultural) memory is becoming an important need of modern society.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Against this background, the problem of determining the initial positions of both Russian culture as a whole and its regional variants is of particular relevance. Regional being is a complex and contradictory phenomenon. Therefore, the study of every local formations must be formulated with an understanding of its specificity. When analyzing the socio-cultural sphere besides political and economic factors, one should also take into account the territorial-natural or geographical, demographic and other components, since “the ethnocultural sphere is an integral part of the broader problem to find regional identity and formation of regional identity in post-Soviet Russia. Today, the understanding of the correlation of regional, national and civil values, an analysis of the parameters of regional self-awareness” (Murzina, 2004, p. 27).

## **3. Research Questions**

The research subject in the article is a set of cultural constants which determine the uniqueness of spiritual, moral and artistic representations of each region to a large extent. Regional mentality is based on the archetype of consciousness that persists over long historical periods, forms a special mental text, according to which culture is read and which has figurative and attitudinal components (Listvina, 2008). From this perspective, the components of a local text are the layout and spatial solution of a provincial city, its mythology and history, toponymy and urban folklore, buildings and monuments, stereotypes of consciousness and behavior of its inhabitants, cultural reality and prospective development, and much more.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the paper is to identify cultural constants characteristic of Kursk region, and a detailed review of some of them. It is important to consider the constants of regional culture in a complex, since they are significant not so much by themselves, as in interaction and interrelation, actualization in this segment of the historical development of the region, etc. The foundation of the regional culture, its cementing core is a set of cultural constants, which determines the uniqueness of spiritual, moral and artistic representations of each region.

## **5. Research Methods**

The methodological basis of the study is a systematic analysis of constant myths that form the basis of the cultural memory of the region. From the standpoint of a system-typological approach, regional

culture is considered as an integral sign system reflecting a certain chronotope, accumulating a cultural charge and saturated with its own spirituality. Semantic dominants of a regional culture are revealed through peculiarity characterization of the world perception and world outlook of members of the regional community, the particular picture of the world, identity and self-identity of the individual and local society, through the formation of a system of signs and meanings.

## 6. Findings

The complex of cultural constants is the main content of cultural memory. Cultural memory is understood as a special symbolic form of transmission and actualization of cultural meanings that goes beyond the experience of individuals or groups, is preserved by tradition, formalized and ritualized (Assman, 2004). It is expressed in memorial signs of various kinds - in memorable places, dates, ceremonies, in written, graphic, and monumental monuments. Its semantic system of cultural memory develops in each region, including Kursk (Zvyagintseva, 2014).

Cultural memory is transmitted from generation to generation through certain channels. The mechanisms of such a translation were repeatedly subjected to accidental, and more often to purposeful destruction. Unfortunately, various political or social forces turned to them when they came to power, trying to impose their own understanding of historical and cultural reality on the society.

Holding only the most significant past, cultural memory includes a mythical story as its part. According to the Ukrainian researcher Pocheptsov (2001), a myth is a universal construction that can always be filled with specific content. This circumstance explains the existence of regional mythology, which retains the dominant images and plots.

According to Lotman and Uspensky (1994), “living culture cannot be a repetition of the past - it invariably gives rise to structurally and functionally new systems and texts. But it cannot but contain the memory of the past” (p. 45). At the same time, historical time is not reduced to a mythological or archetypal level, creatively interpreting and integrating them.

Khrenov (2002) expresses the opinion that

*... at the time of the change of epochs, history already manifests itself in the fact that it extracts a familiar archetype from collective memory, namely, that which is associated with historical events, or, more precisely, is provoked by them. The uniqueness of the historical stage asserts itself by the fact that it stimulates the extraction from the past not of an archetype at all, not a constantly renewable archetype, but a special kind of archetype corresponding to a new historical situation (p. 58).*

At the same time, “the most enduring myths are those that serve the survival and strengthening of the community ...” (Apinian, 2005, p. 18). Thus, the myth is an important part of our worldview. According to the apt expression of Tsuladze (2003), “upon careful consideration, everyday consciousness is woven from myths” (p. 53).

We consider some of the realities of Kursk city chronotope as the example of correlation of specific historical and cultural forms with constant myths.

Kursk evolved as an ancient frontier city with a pronounced core-center (detinets) and growing settlements. Until now, in conversation, the inhabitants of Kursk use persistent informal toponymy. For example, “Go to the city” means “Go to the center”. The mythopoetic category “center of the world” - “center of the city” is one of the fundamental ones in the archaic consciousness and expresses a deep need to identify its place in the hierarchical structure of the universe.

The main square of Kursk has the name of Red square, like the capital. The name itself is symbolic and traditional, as the monument to Lenin is now standing on the square as a tribute to Soviet fashion. In traditional culture, the capital is always understood as a sacred space, endowed with the meaning of the city of heaven or the archetype. The name’s identity of Moscow and Kursk center underlines the genetic stress of our city towards Moscow. This affects not only the relative territorial proximity, but also the dominant historical and cultural orientations.

It is known that “red” in the language and mentality of our ancestors meant “beautiful”. In the post-revolutionary time, there was a return to the understanding of “red” as the “main”, “most significant” (compare the expression “pass by the red line”). This is due to the property of the red color to have the strongest physiological and mental effects on the person. In the Orthodox tradition, temples were painted red (the color of blood) in honor of the holy martyrs who died at the hands of the pagans. However, since antiquity, red has also symbolized power and greatness. Apparently, there is a tradition in our city that has been preserved even now - to paint the main administrative buildings red (for example, buildings of the city or district administrations).

In the heart of Kursk there are two main streets-directions: Moscow and Kharkov, which are located in the center and lead to different directions. At the end of each of them there was the gate of the same name, which marked the entrance to the city (unfortunately, now this gate has not been preserved). On both sides, there was a cemetery with an obligatory church near it: these cemeteries are called All Saints and Nikitsky in churches.

The ritual meaning of this planning is transparent and characteristic of many cities. Cemeteries were originally taken out of the line of our city and became an element of the urban environment only in the twentieth century. Gate is a symbol of transition from one territory to another. They mark the border between the outer and inner worlds, urban and intracity, dangerous and safe; profane and sacred space. According to Lotman (1996), “movement in a geographic space becomes a movement along the vertical scale of religious and moral values, the upper degree of which is in heaven and the lower degree in hell” (p. 62). The opposition one’s own / others’s is manifested in the desire to sanctify, clean the border territories, protect the inner space from the penetration of evil. Outlying temples take on this function.

The actualization of the archaic image of transitivity as an archetype caused the construction of temples not only on the borders of historical ancient Kursk, but also at the crossroads. The road is one of the most significant elements of the structure of the universe. It is associated with infinity, perpetual motion, constant movement in space, uncertainty and chaos. That is why the road often correlates with negative perceptions, dangers lurking on it, difficulty in choosing a path, etc. It opposes the temple as a symbol of peace, peace and enlightenment. The territory of the temple is almost always protected, outlining a symbolic barrier to external chaos and protecting the inner space.

The recent tradition to erect monuments and lay flowers on the roadsides and in other places where people died in car accidents is connected with archaic ideas about the need to cleanse the land of spilled blood. In the text of the city, these buildings acquire a deep cultural meaning. According to legends, blood is not absorbed by the earth, it defiles it and demands revenge (“Human blood is not water!”). The consecration of places where blood was shed is a ritual known to many cultures (for example, churches are “on the blood” in the Russian tradition). The archetypal cultural content acquires a new symbolic form, leaving unchanged the sacred meaning of the action.

In the past decade, many “mirror” houses were built in Kursk (as in other cities). Undoubtedly, this is a tribute to fashion on the use of materials with similar technical and aesthetic qualities in decorating not only interiors, but also exteriors. Buildings “mirrors” visually expand the space, emphasizing its illusiveness, vagueness, transforming and distorting real directions and sizes. There are also mirrored glass windows and cars, large mirrors for the view of the road by drivers. Reflection doubles, multiplies reality, often creating an effect that is interesting for the perception of streets and avenues.

There is a deeper cultural meaning reflecting the ancient mythological ideas about the magic of mirrors. The sacral symbolism of reflection is axiological and ambivalent. On the one hand, mirror accurately reproduces (copies) the visible appearance of the original object. On the other hand, it distorts it, revealing an inner, “other” meaning hidden from the eyes. The image of mirror is inextricably linked with the semantics of water (water surface), which is the boundary between the real world and the otherworld (The custom is still to curtain all the mirror surfaces in the house of the recently deceased).

Among the “eternal” myths, heroic myths have a special place. They often become the basis of national ideology (for example, the use by fascists of images of German mythology), fueling the notorious “national idea”. “Heroism, heroic, hero - the problems characteristic of transitional times: when breaking the worldview, changing religions, revolutions and wars. It is this time, and the first in the history of mankind, was the time of the formation of mythology and mythological consciousness. In a stable society, “heroic” is doping for individual and social life; the tone, colors the routine raise” (Apinian, 2005, p. 35). In modern culture, heroic mythology is successfully used in political technologies, advertising, etc.

In the regional mythology of our region, heroic issues occupy a special place. The main body of the oldest legends, preserved in Kursk region, dates back to the time when Kursk's land was the border line of Kievan Rus. Everyone knows the lines from “The Tale of Igor's Campaign”, where Kursk warriors are sung: “And my those Kurds are experienced warriors ...”. In fact, as Rybakov (1971), “the praise of the Kuryans in The Tale of Igor's Campaign had a real basis” (p. 35). The difficulties of living abroad, constant readiness for enemy raids, formed from Kuryan skilled warriors and real defenders of their city. At the same time, as convincingly shows in his book “And my ones are Kurds - experienced warriors ...”. Baskevich (1993), not only the princely warriors, but also the Kursk “Kmet” were capable of military feats. “Simple peasants and artisans possessing weapons, by some level of their organization, represented a real force with which it was impossible not to reckon” (Baskevich, 1993, p. 31).

Legends tell about heroic battles of the Kuryans with the Tatar-Mongols, about the construction of the “one-storied” (line of guard posts against the raids of the nomads), about the feats of arms. The military theme is traced in the toponymy of Kursk suburbs (Cossack, Pushkarnaya, Streletskaya), Oboyan (Cossack, Pushkarnaya), some settlements of Kurshchyna (Protective, Pushkarnoe, Rat, Reytarovka, Stanovoye,

Soldatskoye, Storozh, Strelitz, Ulanok, etc.). Apparently, the first settlers in them were people associated with the protection of the southern border of the Russian state, and their military "specialization" was reflected in the old names.

During the ruling time of Peter I generously bestowed on Kursk lands not only his close associates - Hetman Mazepa, Alexander Menshikov, but also simple gunners, archers and other service people. This was the time of the state colonization of Kursk Territory, which was also reflected in the toponymic traditions (many of the names of the villages derive from the names given by Peter first settlers) (Gridina, 2010).

No less interesting is the cycle of legends about robbers recorded in our region, which is also due to the border position of Kursk lands and the peculiarities of the settlement of the territory. The robbers in folk prose appear as cruel villains and noble people, in whose images the people's dream of deliverers, protectors from oppressors, was embodied. However, all of them are united by such traits as fearlessness, courage, ability to wield a weapon well.

There are numerous legends about the mysterious Kudeyar. "They say he was a sorcerer. He owned such a force that one eye could sleep, and the other guard: if there was a chase. The right eye fell asleep - the left one guards, the left one sleeps - the right one guards. As the detectives envy, he will throw the coat on which he slept into the water, and will become a coat with a boat with oars; Kudeyar will sit in the boat - and remember the name" (Gridina, 2010). At the end of his life, Kudeyar repented of his atrocities and made a vow to chop down a huge oak tree with his sword that grew on Kudeyarova mountain near his cave. It was only at the cost of tremendous efforts that he managed to fulfill his vow, and after that he became a monk of the Solovetsky monastery, where he died in old age under the name of old man Pitirim.

The psychological type of the personality that took shape in our region was largely due to the heroic mythological scenes, stories about military exploits and deeds of specific historical personalities and legendary heroes revered in this territory and enshrined in folklore. Such plots emphasized the collective principle in culture necessary for the survival and development of the people, and contributed to the glorification of social life.

The historical folk prose about the feats of Kursk soldiers covers events from the battle with the Nogai horde to the battles of the Great Patriotic War (a cycle of legends about Marshal Rokossovsky). One of the main military events - the Battle of Kursk in 1943 - is also mythological. According to Pocheptsov (2000), "all events that are bright from the point of view of a nation are always mythological" (p. 21). Prokhorovsky field ranked with real (Lake Peipsi, Kulikovo Field, Borodino, etc.) and mythological (Smorodina River, Kalinov Bridge) battle sites.

In Kursk region, the first monuments to soldiers who fell into the Great Patriotic War appeared in 1943: a monument to the gunners was erected by personal order of K.K. Rokossovsky. He represented a wooden pedestal, on which there was a gun that actually participated in the battles. Nowadays, only state-protected monuments in the region are 507, mostly they are mass graves.

In Soviet culture, such places and burials of the times of the Great Patriotic War acquire the status of cult. Victory Day becomes a holiday, reconciling and uniting all members of society: the fallen and the living, who fought and not war, remembered the war and were born after it.

However, after the collapse of the USSR, Soviet mythology was discredited. It also applies to the events of the Second World War. Tsuladze (2003) notes:

*The mythology of Victory is replaced by the mythology of Defeat. During the years of “perestroika”, they liked to compare “winners” and “losers” - veterans of the Soviet army and veterans of the Wehrmacht, living standards in the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR. The conclusion was obvious - the “losers” live better than the “winners”. They won the war, not us. Victory is worthless. And with it all Soviet mythology collapsed (p. 42).*

It is being replaced by a new state and regional mythology. Malyakin (2000) believes that the all-Russian identity crisis

*created for mythogenesis in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation the conditions of a kind of most favored treatment, almost completely freeing it from the influence of federal factors and weakening the national ideological paradigm as much as possible. Moreover, regional mythogenesis can be viewed as a direct response to the crisis, as a search for local self-identification instead of a lost federal one (p. 29).*

The conditions of the social and cultural crisis have led to the remifologization of regional public consciousness. The formation of post-Soviet mythology in Kursk region took place on the basis of an archetypical plot about a cultural hero. His features were endowed with a new regional leader - A.V. Rutskoï, in whose election his profession and military experience played an important role - respectful attitude towards military men is traditionally preserved in our region. In this regard, the glorification in Kursk of Alexander Nevsky, which does not have special historical ties with our city, but is absolutely consistent with the regional heroic myth about “Kurans - valiant warriors”, seems understandable and symbolic.

The construction of the Arc de Triomphe, one of the most popular attributes of military glory from the time of Ancient Rome, does not look accidental either. This event can also be inscribed in a mythological context. Built to the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Kursk near the Northern Cemetery, the Triumphal Arch and the temple in the name of St. George the Victorious retain a sacred meaning. It is known that in ancient times the triumphal arches had a ritual and mystical origin: passing under this building, the victory was separated from the enemy's world, alien and returned to his native city (world) performed the rite of inclusion, accompanied by cleansing ritual sacrifices (Gennep, 1999).

As a result of the study, the main mythologies were noted, which retain their relevance at the present time, and the reasons for remifologization and transformation of the complex of mythological ideas in the post-Soviet period were analyzed.

## **7. Conclusion**

Summing up the research, we can conclude that the main constant mythological archetypes are preserved in the cultural memory of the region. In Kursk regional mythology, the heroic component remains

dominant, despite the dethronement or disappearance of the heroes themselves. The mythological foundations of the regional mentality seem to be quite strong. This is facilitated by the historical conditions of settlement and the formation of culture of Kursk region as well as the effectiveness of the use of constant myths for social and political purposes

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