

PROTECTION OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS AMONG BASHKIRS

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Abstract: The aim of the research is to study and analyse the magical means of protection of domestic animals among the Bashkirs on the territory of the Republic of Bashkortostan in the middle of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries. In this article the author considers various types of magical means of protection of domestic animals amongst the Bashkirs living in the territory of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Bashkirs used amulets, metal objects, natural stones, etc. to protect pets from evil spirits and diseases. It has been revealed that magical items and amulets, which appeared in the deep past, are firmly rooted in the ritual practices of the Bashkirs and have not lost their significance even till the present day. As the author's field materials were collected from different territorial groups of Bashkirs have shown, at present they continue to preserve traditional ways of magical protection of livestock. In recent decades, the Bashkirs have started to use various means and amulets found on the Internet.

Key words: Bashkirs, domestic animal, magic, amulets, verbal charm.

The Bashkirs, who in the past were nomads, had a variety of religious-magical methods of protection, prohibitions, and omens connected with cattle breeding. They were intended to ensure safety (*кот; кот китмәһен өсөн* 'wellbeing') and to increase the number of livestock, as well as to scare away spirits of diseases and evil forces. For this purpose, the Bashkirs used amulets (skulls of horses, cows, rams, bears, wolves, branches of juniper, rowans, oregano) and natural stones. They also believed in the protective value of brightly coloured textile shreds, which were woven into the horse's mane. In spite of the fact that many ethnic features of Bashkirs' culture have been levelled out, many magical ways of protecting domestic animals are still preserved.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The source of the study was the author's field materials collected during the fieldwork expeditions in the southern, south-eastern, western, south-western, north-eastern regions of the Republic of Bashkortostan in 2017, 2019, as well as the materials of the Scientific Archive of the UFIC RAS, where photographs and reports of expedition trips of the UFIC RAS staff of different years are kept. Furthermore, the materials of ethnographic collections of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the UFITC RAS, collected from different districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Perm, Kurgan and Sverdlovsk regions, were also studied.

In conducting field research we used the method of traditional ethnography: in-depth interview, observation, and photographing. The interviews were conducted in the Bashkir language, which made it possible to record local names of magic items and to identify local specifics for certain groups of Bashkirs.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Magical means of protection of domestic animals among the Bashkirs were touched upon in the monographs of Bashkir ethnographers and folklorists: F. G. Khisamitdinova (2011), M. N. Suleymanova (2005), F.F. Ilimbetov and A.F. Ilimbetova (2012), as well as in the expeditionary materials of the folklore department of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the UFITC RAS, in published form (*Expedition materialdary 2004*). One of the volumes of the multivolume scientific publication 'Bashkir Folklore' on ritual folklore contains a small section on amulets and folk magic (Bashkir Folklore 2010). It includes field materials collected by scientists, participants of expeditions, and manuscripts from the fonds of the scientific archive of Ufa. In this article, the author summarises the materials on the means of traditional magic of the Bashkirs related to the protection of domestic animals.

Animal amulets used by the Bashkirs to this day have ancient roots. They are confirmed by archaeological materials, as well as mythological representations and oral folk art. According to archaeological excavations in the southern Urals from the Bronze Age to the late Middle Ages, burials contain horses, parts of horse equipment (stirrups, psalias, bone and metal bridles), amulets made of animal bones, as well as metal overlays on clothes with images of bears, horses, and other animals (Bader, *et al.* 1976: 16-33). In the mythological beliefs of the Bashkirs, the horse, ram, cow, wolf, bear are cult animals and are believed to possess supernatural powers (Ilimbetova and Ilimbetov 2012: 25). Many epics, legends, fairy tales, where animals acted as patrons and protectors of people, have been recorded in oral folk art. Therefore, the use of various body parts of totem animals as amulets is a very logically justified phenomenon.

Animal amulets were widespread among many groups of Bashkirs living in the territory of the Republic of Bashkortostan and beyond. They were used even when cattle did not breed, in accordance with the belief that animals were influenced by people's bad words. In order to protect livestock, the bones of domestic and wild animals were hung in the farm. In order to have a litter (*малдар атрыһын өсөн*), they used the skull of a horse, cow, ram (PMA 1). They were placed on poles or on a hedge, pointing towards the yard (*кәртәгә карай*) (PMA 3). Amongst the Dem Bashkirs, the skull was placed outside the barn so that the animal's 'look' was directed at those who entered the yard: '*Бер үгеззең башын азбарға ингән ергә кағып күйзык. Ул баш тыш якка каран тора*' (PMA 4). In the south-eastern part of the republic (the Baymaksky district), animal skulls were strictly directed towards the Kaaba (PMA 2). The Bashkirs had the following belief about rams' skulls with horns: "The more horns and more curls they have, the more reliable they are" (PMA 5).

Animal skulls were used not only to protect livestock and the farm as a whole, but also to protect apiaries. To protect against the evil eye, animal skulls were placed on a deck or a beehive or hung on poles.

A ram's head with horns or horns were often used as a magical means of defence. The horns were attached to the walls of farm buildings and to the fence of apiaries. The Bashkirs living on the Inzer and Kyzyl rivers still practice this custom (Fig. 1). The informants say that they do it to keep prosperity (*кот*) from leaving the yard. When installing the amulet, the mullah reads a prayer (PMA 8; PMA 10).



Fig. 1. Horns of rams nailed on the wall of a farm building. RB, Beloretsky district, in the village of Gabdyukovo. Photo by the author, 2010.

The first vertebra of a sheep (or a ram) can also be used as a magical object with a protective function, preserving prosperity. They were hung on the wall of outbuildings or fences (PMA 1; Fig. 2).

These bones are still used in many regions of the republic. Thus the Dem Bashkirs say: "We hang it inside the barn, sometimes several pieces are collected. And on the wall of the yard we hang them, they protect prosperity" (*Азбарға муйын сөйәген тағабыз, бер нисәһен тәнкә кеүек тезәләр. Коймаға ла әләбез. Кот саксысы ул*) (*Expedition*

materialdary 2004: 88). The north-eastern Bashkirs believe that these objects “wish animals to be fertile and multiply, and the next year they could be slaughtered” (*Икенсе йылда ла ошо ерзә һуғымдың булығын теләп тора*) (PMA 6). The south-eastern Bashkirs believe that the vertebrae of an animal “wishes that troubles would go away” (*салыу һөйәген элөп куйһаң, ауырыу килмәй*) (PMA 8). There were cases when the magic item was tied on the neck of cattle with a rope (*мин бәләкәй сакта бер һыйырҙың муйынына муйын һөйәген таққандарын исләйем*) (PMA 9). In the author’s opinion, the use of this object for magical purposes is connected with the fact that this is the place where the life-line of the animal is cut during the stabbing of cattle. Probably, that is why the first vertebra was left in the farm, so that the soul of the animal remained and contributed to the increase of the livestock.

The Bashkirs still have a reverent attitude toward the bones of domestic animals. They try not to throw them away, collect them and bury them in the ground. And between the 1940’s and 1990’s they were used to make laundry soap (PMA 15).

The Chuvashs of Bashkortostan also believed that the first vertebra of an animal has a powerful protective force. As an amulet it was hung on the wall of a barn or a dwelling house. A similar tradition was also characteristic of the peoples of Central Asia, such as the Turkmen (Vinnikov 1969: 272) and the Uzbeks (Shanyazov & Islamov 1981: 42).



Fig. 2. The first vertebra of an animal on the wall of a barn. RB, Abzelilovsky district, Askarovo village. Photo by the author in 2019.

Besides the bones of domestic animals, the Bashkirs used the bones of wild animals, primarily those of the wolf and bear, as amulets. These animals were seen as mythologised creatures, and perceived by the Bashkirs as masters, the patrons of hunters and livestock, and so on. For example, in the epic *Ural-batyr*, the bear is of human origin. In order to breed livestock, the Bashkirs buried a bear skull or hung it on poles in the cattle yard (Khisamitdinova 2011: 41). A wolf’s tail, or wolf hair, was hung in the stable (or in the barn) in order to protect livestock from evil forces. The skull of a wolf, as well as that of a bear, could be buried under the threshold of

a barn or under the gate (Khisamitdinova 2011: 122). In the south-eastern part of the Republic, a wolf leg-bone (from the knee) was used as a house protector (*Меһес башында ята ине атай өйөндә*) (PMA 5).

The Bashkirs used to display or hang the skull of a bear or a wolf in apiaries for the same purpose, believing that they repelled bee diseases (Khisamitdinova 2011: 41).

It is noteworthy that Bashkirs made the front bow of the saddle in the form of animal heads (horse, bear), birds (duck) or snake (Fig. 3). According to folk beliefs, they protected both the animal (horse) and the owner. Nowadays this tradition is practically lost and remains only in the memories of old residents.



Fig. 3. Wooden saddle. The image of a human face is scratched on the front bow. RB, Abzelilovsky district, Askarovo village. Askarovo Museum of Local History. Photo by the author. 2019.

Bashkirs, like many peoples of Russia, have long had a belief in the magic of metal. Metal symbolises strength, fortress, hardness and invulnerability. All iron objects are used in protective and purifying magic. Bashkirs still use sharp iron objects to protect livestock and farms practically throughout the republic. Thus, knives, axes, scythe fragments, pitchforks (without cuttings), sickles are stuck into the walls of the barn. Sometimes they are placed on the threshold of the room before locking up the doors for the night. The informants themselves explain this action by the fact that thanks to this, the ‘black forces’ do not approach livestock and do not disturb them in the dark. They try especially hard to protect cows before and after calving (PMA 10); PMA 11). The same tradition was found among the Eastern Slavs: “Bringing newborn calves into a warm room – put an iron object under the threshold” (Zhuravlev 1994: 44).

The Bashkirs of the south-eastern part of the republic also use metal objects to preserve well-being (*кот китмәһен өсөн*) (PMA 2); PMA 10). They specially set on a wooden pole from 3 to 5 metres high amongst the household buildings, and on it they fasten a used iron scythe with its point upwards. They attempt to make the scythe point towards Mecca (Fig. 4). When it is installed, the village mullah is invited to recite a prayer (*аят*) from the Holy Koran. This action represents the Bashkirs’ belief in the power of metal and the power of prayer. In the Baymak district of the Republic

of Bashkortostan they believe that an iron scythe protects not only from “evil spirits, but also Baba Yaga (*мәсекәй әбейзән*)”. There is a belief that when they ‘fly’ to the house at night and sit on the scythe by accident, they will damage their ‘tail’ and fly away in a hurry (PMA 11).



Fig. 4. A scythe directed towards the Kaaba. RB, Abzelilovsky district, in the village of Khamitovo. Photo by the author 2019.

The author of these lines was also spoke about the use of scythe and horseshoe to protect domestic animals by the Bashkirs of the Ishimbay district of the Republic of Bashkortostan: “In recent years, my horses suffered from various diseases. I took an old scythe, a horseshoe and invited the mullah. He read a prayer. After that I hung up these amulets and the illnesses went away” (*Бер йылы минең атым зыянлап тик торзо. Шунан мин даға, салғы укытып куйзым. Ауырыузар китте*) (PMA 7).

Horseshoes, as a rule, were nailed on the threshold, at the entrance to the cattle yard, or over the doors of outbuildings. It was strictly observed that the horseshoe had been used for its intended purpose as a horseshoe, and had actually been on a horse’s hoof (*Ат дағасын тунсаға казаклайсың*). Doing so may cause the device to break (*Юлда, ер өштөндә табылған булырға тейеш*) (*Expedition materialdary* 2004: 75). As the informants remark, the horseshoe should be found on the surface of the ground.

It is also important to note that when Bashkirs nail a horseshoe, they always say:

Шайтан килмәһен өсөн,
Хәрәм кермәһен өсөн,
Тел-геш бәсмаһын өсөн,
Бәрәкәт касмаһын өсөн!

*So that the shaitan does not come,
So that the unlawful may not enter
So that gossip and gossip won't prevail,
That prosperity does not leave!*
(Khisamitdinova 2011: 145).

The Bashkirs still believe in the protective function of a horseshoe. If they do not find a real horseshoe, they replace it with a metal object similar to it. During our fieldwork, we met quite a few such cases. The Bashkirs believe in the magic power of this object and believe that it scares away cattle diseases and the evil forces that torment cattle and take milk away from the cows, kill young animals, etc. (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Imitation of a horseshoe on a pole. The Republic of Bashkortostan, Abzelilovsky district, Burangulovo village. Photo by the author in 2019.

The Bashkirs still believe in the protective value of brightly-coloured objects. The Bashkirs assume that not only people, but also animals can be jinxed. To protect animals from the evil eye, they wove bright multi-coloured cloths into the mane of horses, and before calving they tied a red cloth to the cow's tail (PMA 8). The north-eastern Bashkirs used three-coloured fabrics (PMA 6), while the south-eastern Bashkirs used only one-coloured cloth: 'we tie a red cloth around the neck of a newborn animal so that the genie would not change it for his own' (PMA 12). This tradition is typical for many peoples of the Ural-Volga region, for example, also the Udmurts (Minnijakhmetova 2003: 153).

For protection against diseases, troubles and misfortunes, Bashkirs tied a triangular-shaped *bemey* on the horns of cattle and on the mane of horses (PMA 13). *Bemey* is a record of prayers of *аятов* (a structural unit of the Koran) in Arabic.

The Bashkirs also used sonic magic to expel evil forces from the courtyard or household buildings. They were extracted by hitting a metal utensil with an iron object. To perform the ritual one had to go round the courtyard and make several circles, making noise. After that, all iron objects that had been used were thrown into landfill. It is considered that they have become 'unclean' and cannot be used in everyday life (PMA 14).

F.G. Khisamitdinova and M.N. Suleymanova note that trees and bushes, primarily juniper and rowan, were also endowed with apotropaic properties. According to Bashkir beliefs, rowan is considered to be an effective remedy against evil spirits. Rowan 'buttons' made of dried berries were woven into the wool of sheep and goats (Suleimanova 2005: 23). Rowan twigs or dried berries were tied to pregnant cows and

young pets (Khisamitdinova 2011: 276). In order to protect from evil spirits, rowan branches were plugged into different places on the walls of barns and outbuildings. In addition, they were tied with rope to the horns of cows and sheep to protect them from the evil eye (PMA 15). According to the Bashkirs, juniper had the same power. Juniper branches were stuck or nailed to the walls of cattle sheds. In the Zilair district of the Republic of Bashkortostan, juniper branches are used to drive out cattle and beat young animals. The purpose is to drive away diseases and prevent the death of cattle (Khisamitdinova 2011: 80).

Juniper branch in combination with various herbs, or chaga, is used for the fumigation of houses, cattle yards and apiaries. The corners were fumigated especially carefully, as it was believed that ‘unclean forces’ dwell there. F.G. Khisamitdinova writes that fumigation is used as a way of cleansing the evil forces as well as in healing magic (Khisamitdinova 2011: 55). Therefore, newborn foals, calves, lambs were fumigated with smoke from smouldering wool or rags to ward off the evil eye. In case of diseases of domestic animals they got a ‘cleansing fire’ (with a cresal’) and used it to smoke all animals and cattle rooms (Khisamitdinova 2011: 55). Siberian Tatars also consider rowan and juniper as shrubs with magical powers (Valeev 2022).

Bashkirs widely used salt, over which the mullah read a prayer, to ward off the evil eye. Salt was pre-dissolved in water and then sprayed on domestic animals, washed the udders of dairy cows that were ‘jinxed’, etc. (PMA 13). In the Burzyan district of the Republic of Bashkortostan, salt dissolved in water is not touched with hands, but only splashed on the animal with a birch broom (PMA 16).

To avoid catching diseases and misfortunes, the Bashkirs also protected dairy products. In the past, stone amulets were tied to the milk-pit to protect it from them. Such artefacts are kept in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the UFIC RAS (OF No. 888–5, 421–15, 420–40) (Fig. 6). This shows that the Bashkirs have been worshipping stones and mountains since ancient times. In the author’s opinion, appealing to the power of stone as an amulet is a very ancient and stable tradition of Bashkir folk magic.

Sometimes a newly born calf, lamb, foal, as well as children are marked on the middle of the forehead with soot or charcoal. It is believed that the ‘bad’ look lingers on it and loses its harmful power.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the magic objects and amulets, which first appeared in the deep past, are firmly rooted in the ritual practice of the Bashkirs and have not lost their significance up to the present day. As the author’s field materials collected from different territorial groups of the Bashkirs have shown, the Bashkirs continue in the present day to preserve traditional ways of magical protection of livestock. They use amulets of animal and vegetable origin, fumigate them with herbs. And salt, over which the mullah reads a prayer, is often used. Metal objects were also widely used – a horseshoe found on the road (sometimes it was replaced by a similar metal object), scythes, pitchforks,

etc. Bashkirs used amulets – *бемей* – as a favourite means of protection from the evil eye and ‘evil forces’. In recent decades, Bashkirs have started to use various means and amulets found on the Internet.

SOURCES

- PMA1 = PMA. 2019. Author’s field materials Republic of Bashkortostan, Abzelilovsky district, Askarovo village. Recorded from M. Sh. Nurgalina, born 1927.
- PMA 2 = PMA. 2019. Republic of Bashkortostan, Baymak district, in the village of Verkhnetagirovo. Recorded from S. G. Nurgalina, born 1928.
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