

MAGIC SPECIALISTS IN UDMURT CULTURE: SOME PORTRAITS

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ABSTRACT

This article* is dedicated to special people whom their community marked as having secret knowledge and magic power, and who belong of the institution of the initiated. My main sources are my field materials, interviews with these magic specialists, gathered between 2010 and 2021. My fieldwork data reveal that some healers have magic abilities from childhood, while others received them when they give birth or after some particular event in their lives. Some of these people specialise in and heal only particular ailments (for example of children), while others cure a wide range of diseases and difficulties. Some have special buildings to receive their visitors. The communities of which these personalities are part have ambiguous feelings towards them, and thus they become marginalised.

As examples, I present the characters and describe the activities of seven women healers. I attempt to analyse precise examples of magic and social interaction within the relationships between the community and the magic specialist, and to investigate the understanding of the world that these healers have. To date there has been no focus on the personal and subjective aspect of this question, as well as to the socially regulative aspect: most publications so far have mainly emphasised the magic and mythological aspects.

KEYWORDS: Udmurt • Udmurt culture • magic specialists • healers • magic practice • folk medicine

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INTRODUCTION

Historiography

Udmurt culture still has narratives about people who possess supernatural abilities. Moreover, both an overview of the existing literature on magic specialists (cf. for example, Churakova 2006; Lindquist 2006; Il'ina 2008; Khristoforova 2010; Neklyudov 2010; Minibayeva 2011; Publichuk and Toprokov 2012; Shevarenkov 2013: 241–268; Moroz 2013; Panina 2014; Krasheninnikova 2016; Anisimov 2017: 133–140; Vinogradova 2018; Arukask 2019) and the author's observations reveal that in the Russian space the practice of 'going to the crones' (*khozheniye po babkam*), meaning visiting wise women, is quite alive and even somehow popular, with no ethnic, confessional or age differences. Each woman has her own specific aims, which may not be connected to the healing of a disease but may be based on curiosity or self-interest. According to their own declarations, sometimes their visitors come intending to deprive them of strength and abilities, steal their spells and incantations or with other bad intentions, assuming they are wealthy.

I must comment that this question, from the social prescriptive, as well as personal and subjective points of view, has been practically ignored by research because existing publications emphasise the magic and mythological dimensions and analyse the practice of incantation.¹ Ol'ga Khristoforova (2010: 3), while reflecting on the discourse of witchcraft and local folklore traditions in Russia (based on the example of the Upper Kama), presents some reasonable and well-founded reasons why the problem of the sociocultural functions of mythological narratives within local folklore traditions was not investigated in Russian folkloristics during the 20th century:

Firstly, in the USSR, demonology and partly witchcraft, particularly from the contemporary point of view, was taboo for scientific analysis for ideological reasons. Secondly, the 'corporate' distinction between folkloristics and ethnography and the connection of these scientific disciplines with different orientations – philology and history – made the simultaneous investigation of mythological representations and social relations practically impossible. Thirdly, both in folkloristics and ethnography during the Soviet period, the dominant paradigm was evolutionary, so that scholars mainly researched questions connected to the origins and historical development of cultural phenomena, leaving aside questions about the functions of those phenomena in social life. Finally, research methods also contributed: researchers put topics and motifs at the centre of their research semantics, but not the pragmatics of folklore texts; mythological narratives were set into particular 'works', not taking into account the context in which they lived.

We must add to this picture the small number of researchers of traditional Udmurt culture and the insufficient investigation into the scientific topics connected with demonology, incantation practice, etc. The existing works shed light only on some general questions within the abovementioned problematic. We can find only some examples of personal peculiarities and descriptions of healers: the analysis of the video of a healing action by an Udmurt healer from the village of Bagyr (Krasnogorskiy district, Udmurtia)

(Antropova and Klyaus 2006); and the descriptive and analytical article on the healing practice of an Udmurt woman from the village of Dym-Dym Omega, Vyatsko-Polyanskiy district, Kirov Oblast (Napolskikh 2006). Nevertheless, according to other examples, in the Russian context “today attention to the medical practice of healers, bone-setters, phytomedics attracts more and more attention” (Il’ina 2008: 34). It is also important that researchers investigate the personality of the healer, for the person is the main topic and focus of archaic religious representation (Zaytseva 2003: 169). In addition, the media have started to show particular interest in magic specialists, with different articles in newspapers and journals, as well as radio and TV programs, documentary films, television shows, etc. Some of these concern Udmurt healers (see, for example, Puzanova 2004; Voices from the world beyond 2013; Kuchuk 2018; Ermakov 2019).

Investigated Questions and Working Hypotheses

This article investigates the people who are marked by local communities as having sacral knowledge and magical strength. I will only examine here the people who are seen as magic specialists according to public opinion, for as the field material shows, practically everyone living in a village has some knowledge of magical devices and is able, thanks to contextual knowledge, to cope with small life inconveniences (for example a sty on the eye, warts, the evil eye, etc.).

My fieldwork confirms that among the Udmurt the attitude towards these people is not unequivocal. Some see them in a positive light and often go to them, while others are suspicious, although, as informants recognise, they still address them for help. Others think that such people are able both to cause problems and to solve them. Yet others see them as charlatans or heretics. These are also the conclusions of Yelena Zaytseva (2004: 10) in her book *Folk Medicine of the Udmurt from the End of the 19th to the First Third of the 20th Century*: “If a person is able to heal it means she/he is also able to bewitch”. The authors of the book *Healers, Witches and Warlocks: Witchcraft and Ordinary Magic in the Russian North* observe:

Fear and respect, discontent and hope, irony and pity – all this defines the status of the ‘expert’ in the village. People are afraid of him/her, but turn to him/her for help, see in him both rescue and the reason for all misfortune. (Moroz 2013: 8)

We must be aware that contradictions between declarations and deeds relating to these members of the community are not mutually exclusive; often they are characterised by situativity, they are not rigid and categorical but depend on context and may change over time.

Communication with such, according to folk opinion, ‘unusual’ people also showed heterogeneity in the narratives about their magic abilities and their healing practices. Some argue that they were born with this talent; some say that they received their abilities from kin or from somebody else; others were convinced that some particular events in their lives were the reason that they became able to perform. We must emphasise here the gendered aspect because healing is mainly practiced by females, as a rule, elder women whose age ranges from 50 to 60 (although there are cases of practice by far younger women). According to folk understandings, women are closely connected

with the border between life and death (birth and funerals); they are seen as closer to the other world than men. Thus, Komi researchers Irina Il'ina and Oleg Ulyashev (2009: 156) write: "Only women give birth. They are those who wail over the dead and lament them" (for more detail, see *ibid.*: 156; 159). In addition, according to Irina Nazmudtinova (2017: 100–101), in Udmurt culture, middle-aged and elderly women play a significant role in the life of society. This allows us to argue that in the sphere of magic women occupy more space than men. However, I have met some middle-aged or elder men who dealt with incantation healings. Informants explain the domination of women in magic activities by their proximity to the world beyond, as well as the negation principle, which is tighter than in the case of men. Thus, if on your way you meet a woman, your journey will be unfortunate; if in the first days of the new year the first visitor to your homestead is a woman, it may be not a good omen, etc. Nadezhda Shamsiyakhmetovna Khatipova (born 1946) shares this observation:

Man is clean. Man is put in charge, not woman... Men have visible work, even if they do not work much. But women say: "I know", that's what they said to Inmar.² In her case, nothing is visible. [...] I do know how to work. The old man Inmar asked her: "Can you work?", he said. "I know, don't teach me!" [...] But man, the old man Inmar taught him how to work. [...] Therefore, the old man Inmar loved men, and women... well the woman said I know, so she knows, that's it. (FM 2016: Asavka, Baltachevo district, Bashkortostan)

According to some data, there are more wizards among men, while among women healers are more common because healing is harder work (FM 2021: Mozhga district, Udmurtia). All the quoted ideas are alive in contemporary Udmurt culture, which still emphasises the particular magical nature of women in folk culture.

Sources and Methods

This research intends to examine healing practice by magic specialists through portrait description. In Udmurt these magic specialists are called *pel'lyas'kis'*/*pel'lyas'pel'tis'* ('the one who blows'), *tunochi* ('the fortune teller'), *tuno-pellë* ('fortune teller-healer'), *emnes'kis'* ('healer'), *todis'* ('the one who knows'), *todysh'yas'kis'* ('the one who deals with knowledge'), etc. I have met seven women of different ages whom in one or other way the local community gave the status of healer, i.e. a person with particular sacral knowledge. In some cases, our meetings took place repeatedly, which allowed us to build friendly and trustful relations. Apart from interviews, these women showed their talents or even led a healing séance performed both on me and on others. I must emphasise that I also conducted interviews with people living in the same village, in order to understand the context. With the agreement of the person, all interviews were recorded using photo, video and audio devices. These materials, collected between 2010 and 2021, are the main basis for this research.

Relying on my data, I endeavour to analyse some precise examples of social interaction within the framework of relations between the community and the magic specialist, as well as to identify the worldview of the healers, to present their biographies as well as the clearest examples of their healing practice.

In order to achieve my research I have used Victor Turner's (1967) case method. This method allows us to understand social norms through individual behaviour, and cultural concepts through the way the culture-bearers themselves 'read' them. Relying on case studies helps to understand how a cultural phenomenon, preferences and orientations in values exist in a social group and how they vary in the cultural environment. It was important to develop awareness of ideas and practices in connection with magic specialists and how they correlate within the levels of community-individuals, and what details are relevant for both. The analysis relies on personal stories.

For ethical reasons and in agreement with my informants, I present in the text only their first names and their birth year, without any other information. As the aim of the paper is not to discover general rules, I have not emphasised local aspects. I may however add that this material has been collected on the territories of the Udmurt Republic and the Republic of Bashkortostan.

PORTRAITS OF MAGIC SPECIALISTS

These portraits are presented in an order defined by how magic abilities were obtained: in the first three examples (Flyuza, Irina, Zina), they have been received or acquired during life, and in the last four, they are innate (Nadezhda, Zamira, Pavlina, Gan'zada).

Flyuza, born 1960. About the social role of this woman, we can say that she is a magic specialist with a narrow profile who heals children. She received the status of healer in the local community only after giving birth to twins (Udm. *kykto*). According to folk understanding, all women who give birth to twins receive the ability of healing certain children's ailments – *em lüe* '[the care] becomes healing'. Among the main diseases one is the presence in the new-born of a third, superfluous soul – *kün' lul* 'three souls' (also called *kyk lul* 'two souls', *kuin' lul* 'three souls'; for more detail see Chernykh 1996: 296; Minniyakhmetova 2003: 56–59; Napol'skikh 2006; Panina 2014: 109; Anisimov 2017: 150–154). According to folk understanding, this disease occurs only in children and is due to the presence inside the child's body of one or more superfluous souls, which physically induce hard breathing and whining (for more detail, see Anisimov 2017: 150–154).

A while after the twins' birth, villagers started turning towards the woman asking her to examine their children and to heal them. At that time, she had not yet acquired enough knowledge in the field of magic healing. As she reported, she learned how to heal this children's disease from an old woman in the village, who had also given birth to twins. Her teacher explained some rules of the healing that must be implemented in different cases; she also taught her verbal formulas. For comparison, according to Udmurt folk understandings, a healer is allowed to transmit her knowledge to a younger person, otherwise she loses her abilities or her incantations lose their strength (Zaytseva 2003: 170; FM 2018–2019). So, the magic ability was acquired thanks to life circumstances, which gave her strength and competence to contact the disease.

People address Flyuza only in case of children's diseases, which confers on her the status of children's healer. My conversation with her showed that she uses the actions and words she received from a more experienced healer and only rarely includes her own improvisation. For example, when in December 2016 she showed us the ritual of

freeing a new-born of a superfluous soul, she was not able to comment upon the use of some paraphernalia, and only said that the other woman had told her to do so. She used a rolling pin, a knife and a poker as well as a verbal formula, which she repeated thrice: "I heal Kseniya's [disease] of the three souls. I kill two souls and I leave her one." (FM 2016) After having repeated the formula thrice, she spits on the sick child and passes her hands all over the child's body a few times, caressing it from the chest to the lower abdomen saying: "Let it go away there" (FM 2016). In this case, she probably intends to order the disease out of the child through the sexual openings and the 'back door'. It is interesting to compare this with Udmurt incantation practice, in which there is another verbal formula that shows clearly how to let out a disease or an evil eye: "Tfu, Tfu, Tfu! Let it go out with urine and faeces!" (FM 2017) This woman also knows magical means to free a child from the evil eye, and to perform a healing massage.



Photo 1. The healer Flyuza shows on a doll how she heals a child. Photo by the author, 2016.

In addition, according to Flyuza's words after the birth of her twins she acquired another ability, which is independent of her control. Her resentment is reflected on people who offend her or who in some way cause her trouble, with the negative effects returning to the aggressor. She discovered this ability by chance while healing children's diseases.

In general, this woman is quite modest, she is not remarkable at first glance, and does not advertise her abilities. Only the local community addresses her for help. In spite of her narrow specialisation (healing children's diseases), our conversation showed that she knows many other incantation rituals, verbal formulas, communicative patterns of behaviour in critical situations of contact with the world beyond, etc. Other villagers

have a good opinion of her; they are convinced that she received her magic abilities from above after the birth of her twins.

Irina, born 1986. According to Irina, around age 25 she started to feel that she has some ability that she is yet unable to control or to wield. She said that her unusual abilities expressed themselves through recurrent feelings of rising energy that she wished to direct somewhere, to use. Irina's grandmother told her that in their line there were people who took over healing practice, "meaning that after 40 the gift of healing should express itself with full strength" (FM 2017). According to Udmurt representations, any kind of magic reveals itself after 40. This figure is not accidental, it is a chronologic borderline across which people move from one status to another. This phenomenon is connected with the changes occurring at that time in the body. A young body able to bear children undergoes physical changes that lead to old age. Thus, according to traditional culture, losing one function leads to the acquisition of another, in this case, a magical one. After 40, a person is considered ritually pure, mature and able to fulfil special sacral functions and roles, such as being a midwife, a sacrificial priest, an organiser of rituals (see for example Sadikov 2008: 190; Il'ina and Ulyashev 2009: 158; Tolstaya 2010: 216–217; FM 2017–2021).

At this moment, Irina does not dedicate herself to healing; she only heals her children and livestock of diseases and the evil eye. However, her close acquaintances know about her abilities. So once at a neighbour's request, she took over the healing of a cow that had growths on its udders (*legez'*). Irina confessed that after she felt very bad, and since then she has refused to help outside her family.

As she observes, when she heals, she often uses salt, the stove in the sauna, and incantations that nobody else knows. She considers at the strongest 'magic weapon' to be obscene vocabulary, which she often uses. According to her, other experienced healers confirmed the peculiar role of invectives in apotropaic and aggressive actions. Because of this she often uses obscene vocabulary during incantations, and even when she is around livestock. Once, when she was healing a boil on her daughter's body, she used a kitchen knife and verbal formulas. She says that she never learned to heal, she does everything according to her experience of life, her knowledge or her granny's advice. She confessed that she has not yet learned to get rid of the consequences of magic healing, wherefore after séances she often feels unwell.

Most of those who live locally appreciate Irina. She is sometimes called a witch, by some people for fun, but by others seriously. She told the following story. Once she went to her granny's, who lives in the same village; in the house there is a woman whom the locals call a witch. All the family members, including the grandmother, were sitting spellbound and could not answer. Noticing this, Irina got angry. She addressed the witch, and ordered her to go away with obscene words. The witch did not obey. Afterwards, Irina took her by the collar and put her out of the house. She started to spit, and Irina cocked a snook at her. She answered by cocking a snoot with both hands. Then Irina also did it with both hands, spat on the woman's face, called her a witch and cursed her loudly. Finally, she went away, and after that, it is said in the village that there is no other witch stronger than Irina.

At the general level, this young woman is pretty active and communicative; she participates in the life of the village and the district. In spite of the fact that she knows some magic actions and formulas, she often turns to experienced healers for help. In

consulting them, she also receives magic knowledge from them. As she says, sometimes these experienced healers tell her right away that she has the strength and ability to heal herself.

Zina, born 1965. Zina acknowledges that she received the gift of healing from her mother-in-law, who was a healer and received people: "She left it to me" (here and hereafter FM 2021). The elder woman transmitted her knowledge one year before she died, and she said that she started to heal only after 45, earlier is not allowed. In her family, the gift was transmitted from one generation to the other. Zina declared that for her husband, her mother in law was a stepmother. Her husband, the healer's stepson and the other four children could not heal, but she saw the possibilities in Zina. The elder healer also had two sisters who both practiced healing, although neither of them had children. She had notebooks with her notes, but they were damaged and it was impossible to read the texts. The knowledge was transmitted orally with demonstrations of the necessary manipulations with objects. Zina says that after her mother-in-law's death she had no desire to start healing. But after thinking about it, she always had a dream, in which the deceased reproached her because she did not fulfil her promise.

After the transmission and the death of the elder healer, her first experience of magic healing was with an infant. A woman of her kin brought her child suffered from hernia to Zina. Zina refused, hinting that she had never done it, but finally was convinced and agreed. The rumour spread, and this event was the starting of her healing practice.

Her husband built her a single room across the street for her to receive her patients (Photo 2). Inside there is a heating oven and a corner with icons (Photo 3). In front of the gate and on the door there is the timetable (Photo 4). According to this, she receives people every day except on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 6 PM to 8 PM, on Sundays from 2 PM to 6 PM.

She is attended by people of different ages, ethnic origins and religious confessions, but, according to her words, she attempts to receive the children first. She argues that it is easier to heal children; if she tries to free an adult from a spell, she falls ill and it takes her much time to recover. She comments that when she receives a person suffering from magic interference (*söremyn*), she feels a heaviness and widespread cold coming from him or her. A person under a spell may have a good analysis, she observes, because physicians are unable to find anything wrong. According to her beliefs, even if somebody has been sent a death spell, he or she will not die before the time given by God has come, but will suffer and be tormented until the time of his or her demise. After healing drunkards, she feels hung over. Zina declares that she must not be photographed with a patient under a spell, because both will suffer.

Zina says that she first feels sickness and bad influences herself and only later is she able to get free. She pours over herself water with incantations, and 'releases' negativity towards waterbodies: "I stand by the river, by the pond, and only then do I feel lighter."



Photo 2. The single room where the healer Zina receives her visitors. Photo by the author, 2021.



Photo 3. The corner with icons in the single room of the healer Zina. Photo by the author, 2021.

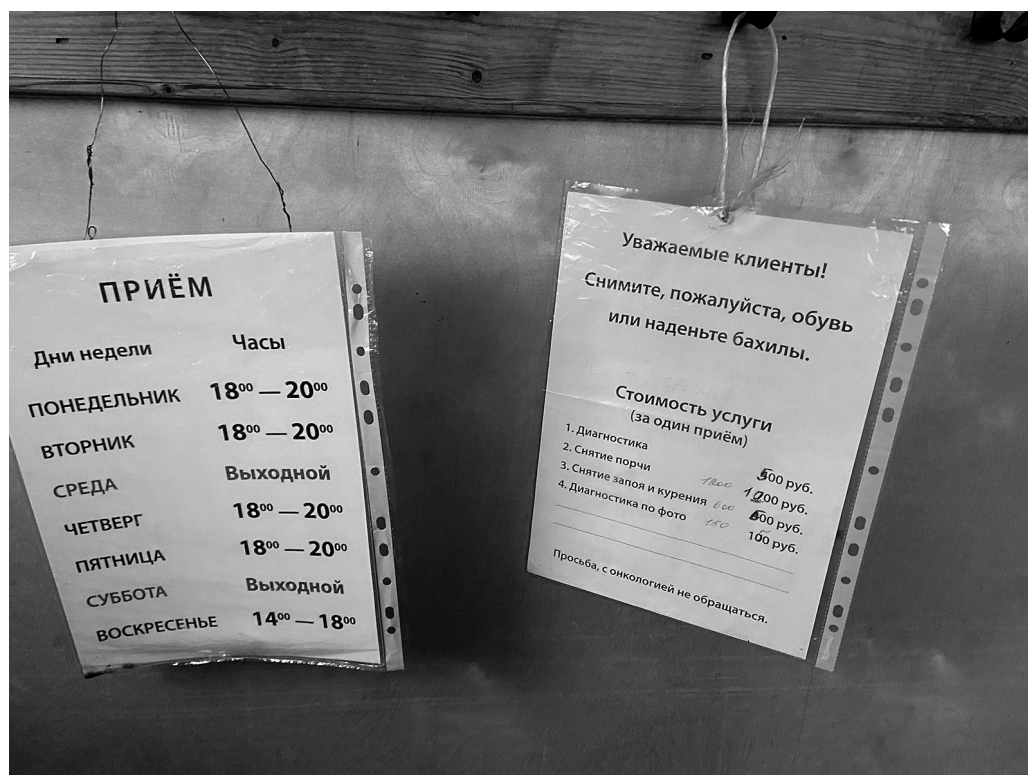


Photo 4. The timetable and pricelist for the healer's services. Photo by the author, 2021.

According to Zina's own report, she had the ability to hear and feel the world beyond. For example, when she visits the cemetery on commemoration days, she hears plaintive voices: "It is heavy, the earth presses down." She tries to communicate with the souls of the friendly dead, and then sometimes sees the dead in her dreams. As she comments, the dead hear the addresses from the living particularly well at Easter, because on that day it is possible to ask forgiveness from any dead person, and they always give it. "For them, Easter is the greatest holiday. Trinity is also a great holiday, but then they do not hear the living". Once, as she says, she also saw an angel:

I lived in an apartment in Krasnyy Posëlok village. And the landlady was kin to us. She was ill, very ill, she had hydropsy. She was transported into the garden, a folding bed was put there in the fresh air, they said. And there a white cloud came down, and there was an old man with a white beard. And all his clothes were white. Now I say, she was called Raya: "Aunt Raya, look, I say. Inmar is coming down to you", I say, astonished. And she looked, and everything disappeared. [...] This, they say, is an angel, because the hour of death had come, they say, to this aunt of yours [the elder said later].

She does not accept wizards, witches, and people who deal with harming others. She says that she immediately recognises them; if she looks at them, she sees a black veil.

Afterwards it happens that they start swearing at her and cursing her. She says that people have started to become evil and envious. For example, neighbours quarrel, and one of them comes to her to curse the other and even to kill him through incantations and spells. According to her words, she refuses these visitors. Misery can also be brought by envy and wickedness of kin.

The healer observes that if the curse comes from a Mari wizard or witch, she feels it immediately: "One feels it from them, it [the curse] is very strong! They have much knowledge." According to her words, wizards and witches are now able to curse with a wide variety of means: through wind, water, linings, soil from graves, etc. For example, through wind, they deliver a curse so that they utter some specific words in the rising morning wind, and the person who meets this wind gets sick. She calls it whirlwind (*tölperi*, lit. 'evil spirit of the wind'), and meeting such cursed wind *tölperi shory syurid* ('run into the spirit of the wind'). They use soil from a grave for a death curse, so that the dead attract the person to his or her death. In addition, says Zina, there are also people who devour magical literature and attempt to manipulate people.

According to Zina, while earlier wizards and witches were able to become werewolves, now they cannot. She reported a case in which people neutralised a witch so that she would stop hexing and cursing: "An elder woman, they say, sent curses, one woman said. Afterwards, they say, we did it, we gave her [her own] urine to drink, yes, she became they say as if mad. Nothing, she does not understand anything, they say."

Zina supposes that wizards are able to curse people only because God cannot protect everyone and people may have committed sins for which they must expiate; later, after death, one must answer for this in the other world. The healer says that many wizards and witches today go to church and that some of them manage to send curses during religious services.

She is often consulted for children's ailments, especially on Sundays. She comments that children are yet without sin, and without protection, therefore they are the easiest to curse. She frees them from the curse in three séances with spells on three objects: water, butter and towels. She says that "Inmar has three words, they say". She is probably referring to the sacred meaning of the number three, which is connected with the world beyond. To each curse there is a corresponding prayer, which she utters over these objects. She explains the use of the three specific things, water, butter and towels, in the following way:

There is nothing greater than water. Water is everywhere. There is nothing purer than water, they say. The butter – it is the softest, it is tasty, and, let's say, it comes from the cow [...] And the towel, it is necessary to wipe oneself, in some way.

She also uses other substances and objects, although this is the individual's choice, and for specific needs. For example, she uses juniper to heal fright (*kurdamles'*, *kyshkamles'*), an ailment for which she is more consulted, especially children's fright. For example, stress and fear about not succeeding in exams have consequences on children, who start to stutter, become withdrawn and start talking to themselves. To free someone from a curse (*sin us'kytem*) she uses holy water and incense smoke. On the peculiarities of magic healing, she says that if a patient has a different blood group than hers, it will be harder and longer to free him or her from a curse.

There are cases, in which she is called at home, but she refuses, referring her husband's prohibition: her husband does not support her in her activities. According to Zina, sometimes patients are brought to her directly from resuscitation. She tries not to receive patients with cancer, because after this kind of healing she may get heavily ill. Actually, in front of the gate of her single room are the words "Please do not come here with oncological problems". She also does not accept invalids, because she is convinced that these people need medical specialists, not healers. People coming with a pinched nerve she directs to manual therapy.

Zina confessed that in spite of helping and healing people, she is not able to heal people close to her: "As for healing, I heal people, but it does not help my people. Our old one [the mother-in-law] said it immediately." When help is needed for a family member she turns to colleagues from other districts, with whom she is in touch and to whom she sometimes sends her patients.

According to Zina, her relationship with priests is ambiguous: with some, she has a good relationship, they even send her their parishioners, but others forbid people from dealing with magic. Once she acknowledged her occupation to a priest; he reacted by advising her to receive patients on Sunday only after 2 PM, for in the morning there are services in church. On Saturdays, she does not receive patients at all because she goes to church and to the sauna. She also does not accept people during church holidays, relying on the priests' prohibition: "healers also need to say prayers". According to her words, some magical specialists receive people in the morning, but she does not, because it is a sin that afterwards one must expiate for a long time.

She has a precise pricelist for her different services, which hangs on the door of her small house: diagnosis 500 roubles, freeing of a curse 1,200 roubles, treating alcoholism and smoking 600 roubles, diagnose from a photo 150 roubles. However, when asked about her prices, she answered: "Well there I only wrote something. How much someone gives, how much one is ready to give, even if they bring bread, I am grateful. Perhaps they bring the last they have. Anything may happen."

In future, she wants to transmit her knowledge and power to her child (she did not say exactly to whom) – her mother-in-law, before dying, named him or her: "For now it is too early to transmit, I am not allowed to."

According to Zina, she has no conflict within her village, except when neighbours express their discontent that too many cars from outside disturb the traffic in the village. Nevertheless, the village people address her for magic help.

In contact, she is nice and agreeable. She is quite active, she manages all the work in her home and her farm, she works and after work receives those who need her help. She is asked not only by ordinary villagers, but also by well-known public figures. In her practice, she uses Christian symbols (icons, prayers, holy water, incense, etc.) as well as traditional Udmurt spells and incantations.

Zamira, born 1966. According to Zamira, she has had particular abilities since birth. She was 17 when she started to perform magical healings, although an older woman told her that she should actively use her gift only after 40: "After 40, there is more strength and also more experience" (here and hereafter FM 2017). In this case as in the previous one, we notice that there has been a violation of the rule. According to folk belief, a person who has magic strength hides it until 40 and only later reveals it, makes it public. Probably this is connected with the belief that this time is given to the future specialist

of magic for instruction, to strengthen her knowledge and abilities, and to develop her experience, all of which are traits that are not supposed to be manifest before this age otherwise this person is vulnerable to more experienced opponents and may suffer him or herself, or even cause patients to suffer. However, recent data show that this tradition may not be followed, illustrating modern changes in the "institute of the initiated" (term proposed by Udmurt professor and ethnographer Vladimir Vladikin, according to Zaytseva 2003: 170). Although one can also analyse this question as an ordinary discrepancy between the ideal and the real world, especially in the framework of cultures that emphasise rigor in respecting tradition. We may understand that the age fixed in the context of magic healing is firstly a pretext to correct one's behaviour in adapting to local Udmurt discourse.

At 17, as Zamira remembers, she met a supernatural being in the guise of an agreeable young man. Around midnight, she came back home from a walk and was addressed by a young man who, after some conversation, invited her to follow him, which she refused. Then he asked her to wait some time and he disappeared into a side street. Some minutes later, she saw a luminous object, a spinning dish that flew in her direction. Afraid, she bent down and asked not to be taken. The young man soothed her and finally they flew up and flew over the village. After that, she did not remember anything, only darkness and changing colours that melted into one another. Then some beings started asking her questions and she asked to leave. Later the same young man turned to them and said: "Leave her, she is still young." Finally, they left her at the same spot. She recognises that this is a story that she does not often tell, as other people could think she was mad.

During magic activities and healing, she "receives some signal" after which she acquires the ability to see, understand and feel the disease, the problem, the past, the future, etc. For example, close to the village where she lives there is a road where car accidents often happen with human victims. Zamira says that according to her internal voice, one must pour sugar on this place and, on the day of the village ceremony, pray for the whole village. However, as she observes, many people now attend the ceremony without faith and without spiritual feelings, only in order to watch and to eat porridge.

Zamira says that she 'sees' people from the point of view of energetics, through fire or a candle. She recognises that nobody taught her magic: "How one must do something just comes to one's head, at some intuitive level, at the level of feelings." She senses in what spirit each of her interlocutors comes to see her even before starting a conversation: she feels cold from those who are in a negative state of mind and warm from those who are friendly, expecting support. She is also called upon by other witches and wizards, and she addresses them immediately, declaring that they have come with bad intentions. In answer, they either deny it or just turn around and go away. Others stand on the threshold and are not able to go in, even if she asks them to, after which they are compelled to go away.

As she says, the more frequently she meets somebody, the more difficult it becomes to see his or her problems, to 'scan' his or her physical and psychic state. This can be compared with how folk beliefs consider magic specialists to be unable, or more precisely their gift is not active enough, to heal members of their own families or close kin. Because Irina's experience shows the contrary, this gives reasons to suppose that there are exceptions in folk culture. It is also possible that Irina is exceptional as she is only

at the beginning of her practice of magic healing and in future may rethink the healing of her family.

Zamira's family is not upset by her abilities, and her daughter, as Zamira argues, should reveal in the future signs of magic abilities. She does not intend to train her daughter, just to answer her questions.

Some people invite Zamira into their home, where she examines the house and the other buildings so that she 'sees' the bad spots and the haunted places. She argues that many misfortunes happen because of people's envy, which acts destructively on people and their lives. Concerning magic aggressors, she observes that witches or wizards are able to send their wickedness to a particular person or area through the full moon, through the air or through things from the cemetery (soil from a grave, flowers or others). There are also such visitors who turn to her wishing to harm others, but she refuses. People who are very ill or those supposed to die soon transmit "a dark and cold energy" to her. She remarks that the people who submit to magic influence are absent-minded, lose the ability to reflect precisely, lose strength, become aggressive quickly, have panic attacks, lose love, etc. Such people are damaged psychically and physically, which later leads to death or suicide.

She receives visitors every day, and as she says herself, from morning to midday "strength is up". She receives money for her work, but she never hints at an amount: "Just give what you want to give."

Before starting a healing, she protects herself magically, which she does not show to outsiders, considering that foes may break her protection. After the séances in her reception, she performs "magic purification" through contact with different trees (pine, fir, birch) and water. If the magic specialist does not perform protection and purification actions, she can suffer, Zamira argues. She did not disclose how the purification process takes place.

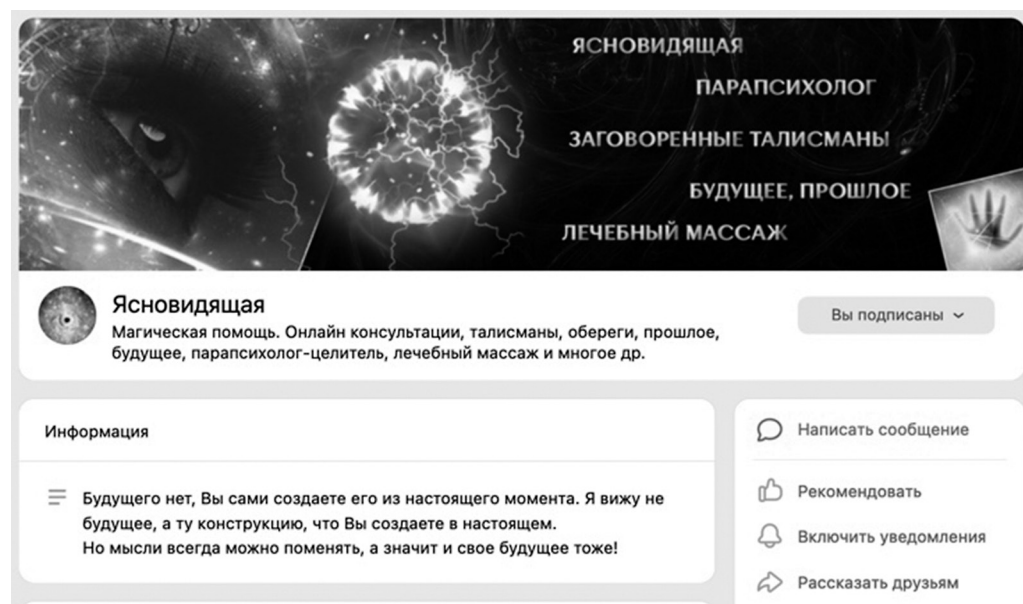


Figure 1. Screenshot of Zamira's group on the VKontakte social media network (accessed April 14, 2021).

Today, Zamira receives people at the centre of the district, in a rented space where she gives consultations and performs healing massage. She has visit cards and a group on the social media network VKontakte in which she offers online consultations and advertises protections and talismans, clairvoyance about the past and about the future, and healing massage. She positions herself as a fortune teller, a parapsychologist and a healer. She is asked for help and advice both by locals and people living in other regions of Russia.

Nadezhda, born 1970. Nadezhda presents herself as a *vedun'ya*, 'the one who knows', who drags people along behind her and puts them on the right path; at the same time she is like a psychologist. But among the people she is known as a healer (*pellyas'kis*, *pel'tis*). She has received special abilities from the seventh generation, meaning from the great great grandfather of her great great grandfather. Her supernatural abilities appeared when she was a small child. She predicted the future and misfortunes that were supposed to happen to the village: "I told my grandmother: 'Something will happen to this neighbour, he will fall under the tractor.' One week later it happened." (FM 2017) Her kin were frightened by the abilities of the young Nadezhda, supposing that she had been given the gift of witchcraft – *vedin' lyakis'kemyn*. For this reason, she was often harshly punished: she was locked up in a dark cellar, or she was beaten with switches. Her grandmother was very angry and cursed because out of five children (four boys and a girl) she was the one to have the gift. When she was at school, she predicted her friends' futures for fun: you will marry in this village, you in this other, and I shall get married in K...,³ while at the time she did not know about the existence of this village. As a schoolgirl, she knew the name of her future husband, how many children she would have and even where each one of them would be born (FM 2017).

She learned neither sacral activities nor words, but somebody guides her from above and dictates what to say. So, for example, she can stop big fires. She says that she has three protector-helpers: one woman and two men. One of the men is permanently with her, and she feels their presence as if they are always near her. If she doesn't do something properly, they make her understand it both at the mental and the emotional levels. Furthermore, according to her words, she is informed of the proximity of an enemy who intends to harm her by her dog, which starts to growl and bark when such a person comes near to her garden. The five cats she has in her household are her protectors, according to her words. They free her from accumulated bad energy and fatigue. However, she purifies herself of the negative energy of the day in the sauna, where she washes and takes the steam, whipping herself with the birch twigs and uttering verbal formulas. On the following day, she burns the twigs, saying "I burn all that is bad" (FM 2017).

In her dreams, says Nadezhda, she speaks Chinese and Japanese. Later, when she wakes, her husband asks surprised with whom she was talking in an unintelligible language.

When she heals, she uses no substances or objects, only her personal energy. She touches the body of the person with her hand and keeps it in the same position for some minutes. After each séance she washes her hands, in order to chase away the bad that she took from the patient's body, so that it does not come back and does not cling to her. In fortune telling and divination, she looks at the person's hands. If she cannot read all the information in the hand, she looks at the eyes. However, as she recognises, the eyes cannot give all the needed information, for there are 'closed eyes', 'open eyes' and

'half-open eyes'. Sometimes she is able to read people's thoughts. Therefore, after some conversation, she may understand the goals of the person in coming to see her. Some people, she argues, come to check her abilities, some just for interest. They identify her ability immediately after crossing the threshold. She also recognises witches and wizards: "If you look in their eyes, they turn aside and their eyes permanently move from one side to the other. These people's eyes reveal their personality, because they often avoid eye contact." She insists that all the local healers and witches are angry at her because she heals people to whom they have sent the evil eye in order to feed on their energy. Therefore, such foes attempt to damage her. She told me the following story: her enemies damaged her ability to walk, and therefore she suffered for a long time. So she turned to another healer, a woman, who refused to heal her, saying that she is able to heal herself. Finally, she was indeed able to heal herself and she started walking again. When, once, she went to the village store she heard behind her the voice of another local witch: "You are to stand on your feet! I'll find another way to cripple you!" (FM 2017)

Nadezhda often does not tell the people about their future, because she recognises that if she does, the people will fully absorb her words and start to live according to them. In some cases, she is absolutely forbidden from revealing people's futures.

The local community has an ambiguous attitude towards the healer. Some fear her, others are proud, others remain neutral. Her family is understanding, although her husband regrets that she gives so much energy to this activity. The gift has not been transmitted to any of the children, but she is convinced that it may manifest itself in the following generations. She does not like to talk about her future, although she knows perfectly well what will happen. About the opinion of the church, Nadezhda declared that the local priest sees her abilities as a gift from God. It is probable that this positive opinion is connected with the fact that in the house (Photo 5) where she performs her magic activities, there are icons, both hers and given to her as gifts (Photo 6), apart from which she also goes to church.

Now, the information about her talents is well-known even outside her district, therefore at her gate there is a permanent queue of people needing her advice and help. But sometimes, when the person is not able to walk, those who need help take her to the place. The furthest place that she has been driven to is the city of Samara (around 500 km from her home). We may appreciate the gratitude of her visitors through the numerous gifts they leave her: they are gathered in the small house of healing, built particularly for receiving visitors and performing magic healing. In addition to gifts, visitors also feel the need to give her some money for the work accomplished during her séances.



Photo 5. The single room where the healer Nadezhda receives her visitors. Photo by Eva Toulouze, 2017.



Photo 6. The iconostasis and gifts of the healer Nadezhda. Photo by Eva Toulouze, 2017.

Pavlina (1935–2021). Pavlina declares that she was born with her talents. Both her grandmothers practiced healing, which allows her to suppose that her gift was inherited. However, she did not suspect it as a child. She practiced magic healing (*pel'ton*) on her dolls and her friends while thinking she was only playing. When her mother asked her: "With whom are you talking?" (here and hereafter FM 2019) she answered: "There is a man, there above [in heaven]. He asks me [to do that]." When she was a child, the following happened to her. A cow disappeared and the next day she did not reappear. Her mother supposed that Tatars had killed it for meat. The young Pavlina endeavoured to soothe her mother and said that the cow would be back with two calves. On the following day, the cow was at the gate with two calves. The same thing happened when they lost a pig. Her mother was always surprised: how could she know and see such things? But she answered her mother that she got information from somebody unknown in the skies. When she was eight, she recognised that she had the gift of healing.

Pavlina acknowledges that if in childhood she heard a male voice telling her "the truth", now she does not hear any voices, she sees them in water instead. I must add that before my visit, the healer asked to bring a small bottle of water and some salt. According to her, different forms from which she draws her conclusions and answers questions are reflected in the water visitors bring her. "For some visitors, the water reflects at once and very much, for others, little or nothing." Later, the visitors have to drink all of the water. "There is no sense in telling fortunes on big Church holidays, nothing succeeds." When she lived in the village (now she lives permanently in town), she planted healing herbs. Depending on her visitors' ailments, she gave them dried herbs.

According to Pavlina, she is able to identify witches and wizards immediately. She was friends with one of them from childhood; she did not damage people but rather turned her negative energy towards trees and the forest. Pavlina says that during her life she has suffered only a few times through magic attacks from witches or wizards who were angry with her because she healed ailments they had sent to victims. She recognises that people who practice witchcraft produce a smell that reminds some people of herbs or a corpse. Witches often quarrel and are not on good terms with one another. Pavlina thinks it happens when they do not have the same *vedin' kyl* 'witch word', which leads to frequent conflict.

According to Pavlina, the magic talent to heal and curse people comes from the highest God, Inmar. When she was a child, her grandmother told her: "If [you have] the talent given by God, you shall practice healing." As she says, healers must not drink spirits; if they do, they will not be able to heal others. In her life, she only once drank a shot of alcohol, and she "almost died".

Pavlina attempts not to quarrel with people. When frictions emerge, or when someone hurts her, she goes to church, lights a candle and prays: "Lord, Jesus Christ the Son, I do not judge this person, I give him/her to you to judge. Just judge as God, just let me know." It is interesting to observe that this verbal address is in Russian, which tells of the healer's multiple-language arsenal and, probably, shows that she connects the Orthodox Church with Russian. In addition, the loading of other languages in words and texts used for the practice of spells and incantations with sacred significance and especially magic power is an ordinary phenomenon.

Pavlina endeavours to receive people she knows. "If you receive everybody, you may fall and faint," she declares. Visitors have different aims: some come to receive

healing, some to know the future, some to harm the healer; some expect that she gets much money. She has visitors every day from different regions of Russia. Among her visitors, she acknowledges, there are also well-known Udmurts. She does not refuse help to witches or wizards, for at the beginning of her activities as a healer the voice from above told her: "If your very first enemy comes, do not refuse." Thus, it seems that one witch even recognised that the help she received from Pavlina is why she is still alive. After healing such people, she is long ill and must be treated. The most difficult, according to her, is to heal infants and children; those who are still in the womb are also sensitive to magic action. Sometimes children are so strongly cursed that it is even very difficult to perform the healing ritual. However, Pavlina says that witches are not able to kill people without Inmar's permission. She reported the following interesting case:

We had a mother in law. She lived near a witch, yes. Our barn was close [to their barn]. I fed the livestock. I was a young daughter in law. Now [suddenly] there is someone weeping [somewhere]. I looked over the fence, their [neighbour] granny is weeping. She knelt on a white cloth [laid out in the barn over the excrement] and untied her hair. "Give him to me," she says [the person she wants to curse]. She asks Inmar for him. I am embarrassed, and I did so with my nose, I clutched it with my fingers, and "Eat your dog! Eat your dog! Eat your dog!" I say. Thrice, three persons, she asked Inmar [for permission to curse them]. Thrice, nine times, I said "Eat your dog!" Afterwards, one hour later, I come out and their dog was dead.

According to the informant, if Inmar agrees even once to have one person damaged by witchcraft, the wizards and witches will never leave that person in peace: "If Inmar even once gives somebody [lit. 'to be eaten'], he/she will permanently [be eaten]."

When Pavlina was young, wizards and witches started to afflict her and to bring anxiety to her life. Then she decided that her enemies could ask Inmar for permission to harm her. After having visited a stronger healer and diviner, Pavlina got to know that as long as she does not go to the village spring where she was born, she will have no peace from her foes. Another magic specialist advised her to rinse herself with river water, drawn down the stream – *ullan' vu* ('water below'). It is to be remarked that water is usually drawn this way when it is used to wash a corpse (Anisimov 2017: 354). In spite of this, she went to live in another place and came home only rarely. Another time a woman who was not friendly towards her gave her *taban'* (sour dough pancakes) to eat with the healer's own excrement, which she had brought from the healer's toilet. But she was informed in time by a neighbour who suspected foul play, and successfully avoided the cursed food. According to Pavlina, if a magic specialist eats her own excrement, she loses all ability to heal or foretell (for more detail, see Vladykina 1992: 127; Anisimov 2017: 69–70).

To protect herself, Pavlina performs rituals and says particular prayers, about which she did not give details. She is acquainted with the so-called 'prayer the other way round' (*mydlan' molitva*), the verbal content of which is made of Russian, Tatar, Udmurt and Mari words. This prayer is considered particularly powerful and has the ability to give protection from any magic aggression. She was taught this prayer by a Tatar acquaintance.

She assured me that healing must be performed before sunset; the most efficient healing is performed under the waning moon. For some of her visitors, she sees a swift

death; but she attempts not to tell them because they would start towards their end and lose any interest in life. She smells freshly dug soil from these people. In some cases, if somebody will die soon, healing from Pavlina helps (*pellyam tupa* 'the healing is convenient'), and may allow the person to live a while longer.

For her work people give her money according to each one's wishes. Sometimes they thank her with food. She never mentions any amounts.

Because of her age Pavlina is the most experienced healer among my interviewees. She knows a huge number of incantation texts and magic rituals, and a wide knowledge of incantation practice. Every day people of different ages, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds visit her from different parts of Russia. When conversing with the people in the village, it is clear that she is seen in an ambiguous way – "If a person is able to heal it means she/he is also able to bewitch." Nevertheless, people in desperate situations go to her for relief and even bring their children. She transmits her talent and knowledge to her close kin. She assures them that the magic gift is already manifest in some of her descendants. She has in her magic arsenal both traditional Udmurt incantation texts and Russian Orthodox prayers, and uses healing herbs, balms, ointments and infusions, which she prepares personally for each visitor. In some cases, she recommends addressing medical doctors, even sometimes to particular specialists. In contact, she is agreeable and straightforward.

Gan'zada (1924–2021). I happened to meet this healer in 2019. She called herself *emnyas'* or *emnyas'kis'* ('healer'), as did her local community. She learned healing abilities from her mother and grandmother, who were also healers although they mainly specialised in children's ailments. Her younger sister was also a healer.

In her magical arsenal, she had two small kidney stones from a woman and a man, which came out in a natural way, and a pebble she was given by an older healer in 1975. She called these "stones for healing" (*emnyas'kon köl'y*) and kept them in an out-of-the-way place wrapped in gauze and white cloth. She used these stones in healing hernia: she gave the patient water to drink that had rinsed the stone. In her practice, in addition to spells and incantations, she used healing massage.

She was called for help from within her region as well as from far away. People turned to her for different reasons. Some came to consult her, other to be healed of illness. To heal the child's three soul ailment, she used the following spell:

The 'three souls' illness I destroy, there. Let (this) be healed. Let the known and the unknown (what is and what is not) go away along the (river) Gereyka, along the water, through the fence, along the road. I heal the three souls.⁴ (Here and hereafter FM 2019)

She also healed the evil eye, *sim usën*. In this case, she uttered thrice over water the following incantation, each time blowing and spitting: "Red-eyes sent the evil eye, blue-eyes, black eyes, brown eyes. Let what is and what is not go away. I heal, I blow, I spit."⁵

After her séance Gan'zada threw the water outside her farm territory, towards the west. She also healed concussion, *d'yr kis'tis'kon*, by measuring the patient's head with a thread and then hitting and rubbing the head from one side to the other in order to 'correct the head' (*d'yr tupatyny*). The abscess called 'snake eye' (*kyy sim*) she healed with incantations both in Tatar and Udmurt while blowing and spitting on the sore spot.



Photo 7. The healer Gan'zada's pebble, which she used in magic healing. Photo by the author, 2019.



Photo 8. The kidney stone used in magic healing. Photo by the author, 2019.

Go away from here, there, I blow [she blows and spits thrice]. Snakes with a yellow head, snakes with a black head, go away from here, I blow and spit what is and what is not. I send you [away]. [She blows and spits thrice].⁶

According to Gan'zada's words, she also heals women's cystitis, *us'yk*: she sits her patient on the other side of the stairs and utters an incantation (which during the interview she did not reproduce) over a container of water, between the steps. With this water, the woman was supposed to wash her lower body.

If somebody fell ill after falling, they called the illness *zäkhmatly* or *zäkhmat luyny* 'to be *zakhmat* from an ill spirit' (see also Anisimov 2016; 2017: 68–73). According to Gan'zada, in order to get rid of this illness one has to perform a secret ritual: one has to wrap three kinds of yarn, a needle without an eye, a nail without a head, a hen's egg and a lump of bread in white cloth. This must be done in secret, so that nobody notices it, after sunset, then one must bury it in a place where the person treads. When burying the bundle, one must address the illness's spirit: "You, go away from here, there. To this man, give health. Here, a gift for you. To *Zäkhmat* I give a gift, health to this man."⁷ These offerings are a symbolic ransom for the spirits of the world beyond.

Gan'zada shared interesting information about witches. She reported that once, while she slept at a friend's place, a witch licked the sole of her bare foot during the night. According to her, this witch was able to transform into different animals, birds and flying fire, and after her death her spirit went back home. There had previously been many wizard and witches, now there are almost none left because there are power transmission cable everywhere, which do not allow them to move. In the past, witches could move as much as 40 km in one night. In order to metamorphose, they had to dip a hand or a foot in somebody's blood (she was not able to say whose blood it had to be) in a frying pan and then, in her chosen form, she went out through the chimney. Gan'zada says that they learn how to curse in the cellar or in the sauna. Once she even witnessed such a learning *séance*: the masters were sitting in the cellar, but the doors leading to it were open. In front of them there was a frying pan with blood, and they asked the witchcraft student to step on it and to bite off a bit of bread. Thereafter, he transformed into a cat. Gan'zada also talked about her relations with witches and wizards. She acknowledged that one witch told her directly that she has much power, wherefore they were not able to spoil her: during a party, a witch offered her home vodka and said: "You have great power, one cannot damage you. You have great power, we cannot damage you." On the other hand, according to Gan'zada, one witch told her right away that she was a witch. She answered by smiling and did not say anything.

She has been trying to transmit her knowledge and power to her daughter and to her daughter-in-law. She did not transmit the incantations by writing them, but through symbolic theft, *nushkasa*, which means orally, by remembering the healer's words. In this tradition it is believed that if one writes down the text of an incantation or learns it from a written form, the power disappears and it becomes useless. The healer observed that one must not thank her for healing, as this also makes the healing useless. Nevertheless, it is customary to give the healer small gifts or money for her work.

As Gan'zada's daughter observes, her mother is quite wilful and wayward. While we conversed, she indeed showed a strong character and keen intelligence in spite of her old age. She did not advertise her knowledge and abilities, but her power was well-known even far away from her village. The locals expressed good opinions about her,

and even expressed gratitude for her help, especially in healing children's ailments. As a woman living in a nearby village said, the whole village visited her, thus proving her authority in the community.

Among all my interviewees, this healer was the most experienced and knew the widest range of spells and incantations for different illnesses and magical interferences. In her practice she used incantations and magic objects as well as ritual actions. I must add that she also knew also spells in Tatar, which emphasises the breadth of her knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The above-analysed examples allow the assertion that the role of magic specialists in modern Udmurt culture continues to be considerable, in spite of the developments of medicine. The portraits of some personalities allows description of 'the one who knows' within society, identifying their worldview and different aspects of their healing activities as well as distinguishing the general and the particular as it relates to these people. In the local communities healers continue to have a particular status, as they are considered to have sacral knowledge and magic powers. At the same time, their possession of magic creates around them a complex relationship with other people: some approve, others do not, others still remain neutral. At the same time, depending on the situation, the peoples' attitude may change. The healers are aware of attitudes towards them, but still pursue their healing practice, for they consider it their duty to help those who are in need. Some consider that the highest power, which rewards them with special abilities, also compels them to heal all people including their enemies – wizards and witches. Practically all healers have the experience of conflict and magic fights with enemies. Only in one case, that of Pavlina, did a healer become friends with a witch, who does not harm villagers but projects her negative power towards the trees.

In almost all examples, with two exceptions, the women suppose they inherited their knowledge and power, for among their kin were ancestors who performed magic rituals. Their special abilities were discovered by chance or consciously from early childhood. In one case (Nadezhda) it seems that the kin were not ready for the child's talent and submitted her to different punishments in order to eliminate her undesirable abilities. Only two informants, Flyuza and Zina, said that they did not have the talent at birth: Flyuza's healing practice started only after the birth of her twins, while Zina started only after being taught by her mother-in-law, who transmitted her power. At the same time, Zina heals only children's ailments, while all the other women treat all the concerns and illnesses of their visitors – except Irina, who is at the beginning of her healing path.

The portraits of these magic specialists also show some differences with traditional representations. For example, the idea that open healing may only be practiced after the age of 40 has been ignored by Irina and Zamira. They started practicing on people and livestock when they were young women. Nevertheless, according to Irina, healing unfamiliar people made her ill and so she gave up. Since then she has healed only her close family, which is also in contradiction with the traditional representation that the power of the healer has no effect on her blood relatives. These examples show the exist-

ence of exceptions. That is to say, particular cases are outside the frames of ordinary representations. These are of particular interest and call for further investigation with more numerous examples.

Each healer has her own magic arsenal used for healing. Some healers (Flyuza, Irina) use means they have been advised on by more experienced healers; others (Zamira, Nadezhda, Pavlina) found magic objects and verbal formulas with time and experience. A third group (Zina, Gan'zada) represent hybrid cases that combine knowledge from teachers with the healers' own personal experience.

Most of the healers mention their high sensitivity to the ailments and thoughts of their visitors, as well as to the presence of their magical opponents. Zamira, Nadezhda and Pavlina mention the existence supernatural protectors who assist them in their healing activities.

Five of the examined healers (Zina, Zamira, Nadezhda, Pavlina and Gan'zada) receive remuneration for their work: some amount of money (depending on the will of the visitor), gifts or food. None of them, except Zina, ever mentioned a precise figure; moreover, they are convinced that those who name a precise amount are probably charlatans. For me, this form of remuneration for a specialist's work has roots in traditional culture. According to Udmurt representations, if one does not thank a healer materially, the healing will not be successful and her know-how will be ineffective (Anisimov 2017: 268–269).

All the women included here are part of their society and fulfil standard social roles (professional, demographic, etc.), but in addition have a sacral role as magic specialists. These examples reveal the active presence in contemporary Udmurt society of the practice of incantation healing, protected and represented by particular personalities with their experiences and characters. Il'ina (2008: 40) makes a point: "Undoubtedly, most folk healers are very bright personalities, with special, often extraordinary, abilities." In addition, these personalities accumulate precious and original testimonies not only in magic practice, but also in other fields of the cultural materiel or non-material heritages of their people (for example, they are experts in the fields of traditional customs, rituals or folk medicine; in some cases they have older magic objects, often family heirlooms).

NOTES

1 The same situation also concerns for example researchers of Russian witchcraft (Stepanov 2010).

2 Immar babay – the local denomination of the celestial god in the Udmurt pantheon.

3 For ethical reasons, I omit the name of the village.

4 *Kün' nil'ze bydtis'ko täni! Em med luoz! Gerey kuzya, vu kuzya, kener kuzya, syures kuzya med koshkylozy van'-övölez. Kün' nil'ze emnyas'ko!*

5 *Al sim usem, chagyr, s'öd sim usem, purisez. Van'-övölez med koshkozy! Mon emnyas'ko, pellyas'ko, syallas'ko.*

6 *Koshky tatys', mon pellyas'ko täni (kuin' pol pel'te, no syaldzhe). Chuzh d'yro, s'öd d'yro kyyës, koshkyle tatys', mon pellas'ko van'-övölze. Mon tiledyz kelyas'ko (kuin' pol pel'te, no syaldzhe).*

7 *Ton tatys' koshky täni. Ta piosmurtly tazalyk sët. Tynynd salam täni. Zäkhmatly salam sëtis'ko, piosmurtly tazalyk.*

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FW = Author's fieldwork materials from 2010–2021. Materials are kept in the author's possession.

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