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### CONTINUITY AND REVITALISATION IN SACRIFICIAL RITUALS BY THE EASTERN UDMURT

#### PART II. COLLECTIVE SACRIFICIAL RITUALS BY THE BASHKORTOSTAN UDMURT: REVITALISATION AND INNOVATION

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**Abstract:** This is the second part of an article that focuses on a marginal Udmurt group living in Bashkortostan, which has retained, in a Muslim environment, its original Udmurt religious practice. In some places, in spite of decades of anti-religious Soviet policy, the Udmurt were able to pursue their traditional rituals, thus warranting full continuity of their practice. In other places, the tradition was discontinued for some longer or briefer periods. But everywhere there has been a revival at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century.

The aim of this article, which is based on the authors' fieldwork in one district, is to examine these processes and analyse them. In this second instalment, we analyse the changes that were introduced in the revitalisation process in several dimensions of religious practice: the use of sacred space, the role of different actors, the proceedings of the rituals, the transmission of the prayers, the costume of the priests, the behaviour of the participants.

**Keywords:** agrarian religion, anti-religious policy, diaspora, prayers, religious practice, ritual, sacrificial ceremonies, sacrificial priests, transmission, Udmurt, village community

In the first part of the article<sup>1</sup>, we presented religious traditions of the Eastern Udmurt in the Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan. We insisted on the importance of continuity in the religious practice of this particular group of the Eastern Udmurt. Now we will focus on the revitalisation process that has been going on since the 1990s, and the innovations that have been introduced into Udmurt religious practice.

Herein we examine the latest developments of the different aspects of Tatyshly Udmurt's religious practice: the ritual cycle, actors, sacred places, prayers and sacrificial rituals, participants.

We have already mentioned that the Tatyshly Udmurt were organised in two religious groups and that their collective ceremonies were structured in seasonal cycles. Let us now observe how the spring cycle is functioning today.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: THE CYCLE NOWADAYS

In 2016, the situation of the ceremonial cycle was the following in both groups:

- In the right bank group (or the Vil'gurt group), all the villages including the district centre held their village spring ceremonies and gathered for the *mör vös*<sup>2</sup> in Vil'gurt one week later. The winter *tol mör vös'* was held also in Vil'gurt, with three villages in attendance (in 2016).
- In the left bank group (or the Alga group), all the villages held their village spring ceremonies on the first Friday of June in Nizhnebaltachevo (with Alga), in Verkhnebaltachevo (with Dubrovka), in Kyzlyar (with Tanyrovka), in Bigineyevo (with Utar El'ga, where it was revived only in 2012), and in Starokalmiyarovo (with Petropavlovka). One week later, all these villages – with the exception of Starokalmiyarovo – organised an intermediate ceremony, called *Bagysh vös'*. This is a peculiar feature to be noted: while in the right bank group the three villages' ceremony has been seemingly once and for all eliminated, in the left bank group the

intermediate ceremony has grown so much that almost all the villages attend. When we attended the *Bagysh vös'* in June 2015, Bigineyevo had just joined for the first time. This shows that the population of the left bank villages expresses a thorough need for intense religious activity, for each ceremony requires a real involvement of the population: people donate crops, butter and money, which allows to buy a ewe; it also demands hard physical involvement from the sacrificial priests and the helpers. One week later, all the villagers then gather for the *mör vös'* in Alga. In winter, in December, they hold both the *tol Bagysh vös'* and *tol mör vös'*. Until recent times, no winter village ceremony had been revived, but in December 2016 we heard about a village winter ceremony in Starokalmiyarovo. This is to be investigated in our forthcoming fieldwork.

So there is, as a result of both Soviet adaptation strategies and post-Soviet revival choices, an increasing gap between the Vil'gurt and Alga groups.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: THE ACTORS**

Since the end of the 1980s, the Tatyshly Udmurt have started a process leading to a massive revival of their religious practice. It is important to emphasise that nowhere here they started from scratch. In many places ceremonies were already held, with sacrificial priests and confirmed helpers and sacred places functioning. In other places, the memories were still fresh in most of the people's minds, and the sacred places were still there.

These processes were launched in the ritual subgroups of the Tatyshly district and in all the other districts with an Udmurt population. But their materialisation was related to the group's peculiarities and traditions. The starting point, that is, the level of preservation of the rituals in both groups, differs: the right bank group – the Vil'gurt group – had somewhat simplified the rituals and loosened some rules, as compared to the Alga group (the left bank group), which seems to have retained more complex rituals and somewhat stricter rules.

Before delving into the evolution of the rituals, we shall now concentrate on the actors of the revival and try to evaluate their respective roles.

### **The role of sacrificial priests**

The first actors to be mentioned are the sacrificial priests, without whom neither revival nor ceremonies would exist. In the traditional religion of the Udmurt, the sacrificial priest was a member of the rural community, who had to fulfil

certain requirements: he had to be married, to be respected in the community, to know the rituals and prayers, and to be over forty years old.<sup>3</sup> Usually, among the Eastern Udmurt, he was officiated until his death, and then a new priest was elected (Sadikov 2008: 190). Older sources inform us that there were different categories of priests, all elected by the village assembly, officiating at the collective sacrificial ceremonies: the *vös'as'* (Udm. *вöсьась*) or *kuris'kis'* (Udm. *куриськись*, “the one who prays”), the *tylas'* (Udm. *тылась* “the one who burns”) and the *partchas'* (Udm. *партчась*, “the one who cuts”).<sup>4</sup>

These distinctions are not relevant anymore. Nowadays, there are *vös'as'* (sacrificial priests), who take care of the entire ceremony, and they are assisted by helpers whose tasks are assigned by the *vös'as'*. As we can see, there has been a change in the role of the sacrificial priest but for lack of information we are not able to pinpoint the moment of the change. Sometimes Nazip Sadriev (the previous *vös'as'* in Balzyuga) uses the word *partchas'*, but without meaning anything else than helper. We may only presume that during the Soviet period, when it became more difficult to find people wishing to take over the tasks of a sacrificial priest, the different tasks melted into a single one.

Anyhow, the acting sacrificial priests were a significant initiative force to reckon with. The name of Nazip Sadriev has already been mentioned several times, and the time has come to introduce him properly, because for a long time he has been one of the cornerstones of the religious practice in the Vil'gurt group, and in Bashkortostan on a wider scale. Nazip Sadriev was very young when he started to observe the rituals led by the sacrificial priests. He started his “professional” activity as an assistant, and then as a main priest, in 1954, when he was only 24 years old (Toulouze et al. 2017). Actually this was exceptional, for in the olden days the sacrificial priests had to be older men, at least 40 years old. But the times were difficult, and there was no choice. He learnt the prayers from the older priests, listened to them and memorised the texts, which was the traditional way to transmit oral knowledge. Until 2010, Nazip Sadriev held the village ceremony (*gurtin vös'*) in his own village every year and was the head priest in the *mör vös'* in Vil'gurt. Thanks to his efforts, another ceremony was revived, the winter *mör vös'*, which had been discontinued in the Soviet times. According to tradition, all the right bank villages are supposed to be represented, but in practice, when we attended this ceremony in December 2016, there were only sacrificial priests from four villages.<sup>5</sup> He is the one whose perseverance allowed to re-establish ceremonies in all the villages of the right bank of the Yug River, for there the village ceremonies had been forgotten in several villages – except Vil'gurt and Bal'zyuga.<sup>6</sup>

He “appointed” and trained sacrificial priests in the villages, all respected men usually from priests' families, which means that among the ancestors there

were priests, who taught them or who wrote the words of the prayers. Nazip taught them the ritual acts while they participated in the *mör vös'* under his leadership. In some cases, he went to different villages himself and trained the local sacrificial priests.<sup>7</sup>

The appointment of priests and their training are serious issues. As the informers observed, usually, in former times, the priests themselves prepared their replacement: they detected smart children and took them to the ceremonies, where the latter learnt the rituals and the prayers. Most probably they attempted to teach their own children; so did Nazip Sadriev, who endeavoured to teach his own son Mingarai. But the latter stubbornly refused to become a sacrificial priest, although he always helped the ceremony organisers and spent the whole day chopping wood during the preparation of the sacrificial porridge. So Nazip had to find someone else.

On the left bank of the Yug River, the ceremonies were performed in most of the places, so the revival was more limited and easier to achieve. Almost everywhere they had already trained sacrificial priests, and the most important of them, Evgeniy Adullin, occupies a leading position in the agricultural enterprise *Rassvet* ('Dawn'), for he is its chief accountant. Here the ceremonies were performed constantly even in the Soviet period. The main role in maintaining the religious traditions is occupied by the local sacrificial priests, for whom it is important to keep alive all the ceremonies related to the site.

### **The role of officials**

It is necessary to emphasise the role of Nazip Sadriev in the revival of the sacrificial ceremonies of the Eastern Udmurt, because the existence of a strong priest contributes to this. Without a priest any kind of revival would have been much more unlikely. However, in the 1990s and later, Nazip was very strongly supported by the officials, leaders at the local level and at the level of the main employer in the district, the agricultural enterprise *Demen*, successor of the local kolkhoz.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, both the agricultural enterprise *Demen*, through its leader Rinat Galyamshin (an Udmurt), and the local administration have started giving active support to the revival of religious rituals. They organised a *Vös' kenesh* (*Вось кенеш*), a religious council, which dealt with the organisation of ceremonies. One of the active participants of the religious revival was the former head of the kolkhoz, Rafik Kamidullin<sup>8</sup>, who published articles on this issue in the local Udmurt paper *Az'lan'* (*Азьлань*). In 1993 the sacred place was fenced in and in 1994 a building was erected, a "house of prayer" (*вось корка*), for the money given by the district and the local administration,

as well as offerings from the population of the villages participating in the Vil'gurt *mör vös'* (Kamidullin 1994). It is a log building, similar to a dwelling house (called *vös' korka* (*бöcb корка*) in Udmurt), which has no ritual function but makes the ceremonies easier and more convenient for the priests, helpers and attendants to conduct, particularly in wintertime. It is important not to mix it up with the *kuala*, the only sacred building in the Udmurt culture, the equivalent of a shrine, which is not used in ritual practice anymore, but retains a high load of sacredness and magical power. These "houses of prayer" are not ritual sacred buildings. They are only meant to increase the comfort of the people both working at and attending the ceremonies, where cult paraphernalia is kept, and where in the wintertime ritual food is distributed.

In 1996 an Udmurt organisation was founded, called the National-Cultural Centre of the Udmurt of Bashkortostan,<sup>9</sup> a kind of national movement assembling the Udmurt from different districts in Bashkortostan, with an office established in Vil'gurt, and after this even more attention was given to the religious events. In the summer of 1998, the chairman of the organisation, the abovementioned Rinat Galyamshin, decided to invite to the *mör vös'* in Vil'gurt representatives of all the Bashkortostan districts with Udmurt communities, as well as guests from the Kuyeda district in the Perm Krai and from Udmurtia. This religious gathering thus achieved a high status at the level of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

Rinat Galyamshin is an extraordinarily strong leader, especially for an Udmurt – the Udmurt having the stereotypical reputation of usually being meek. He has much authority not only within his community, but at the district level at the very least, certainly partly because of the outstanding economic results of the kolkhoz under his leadership. He was also the initiator of the Udmurt National–Historical Centre and held the leader's position until November 2015. Because of the health problems, he was then replaced by Salimyan Garifullin.

Galyamshin had a central role in the revival of the ceremonies in villages where they had faded. He picked up local leaders, whom he knew from the local responsibilities they had taken for years, and asked them to find in the population the descendants of former *vös'as'* and to have them take over these tasks. It is clear that in these villages, the initiative came from "above". But it reflected a real demand of the villagers. For example, in June 2015, with the support of Galyamshin, and of his son Rustem, who was then one of the leaders of *Demen*, the ceremony in Verkhnie Tatyshly, the centre of the district, was revived. The sacred place was situated not far from the old place of the *mör vös'*. Galyamshin had asked a former official, Rif Adisanov, to find a *vös'as'* and he in turn had asked Kabiok Badamshin, an old man from a priest's family, born in Vukogurt in 1932, to officiate. The ceremony had been somehow impro-

vised, and as the organisers did not expect a wide attendance, they had chosen not to risk buying a ewe in June 2016. Yet, the attendance was unexpectedly enthusiastic, so the next year the village ceremony was fully performed, in a sacred place that had meanwhile been properly fenced in and where a small cabin had been built. This shows that the initiative from above is indeed not disconnected with the expectations of the wider population. This is particularly to be stressed as the district centre is not overwhelmingly an Udmurt centre: according to the 2010 census, the Udmurt constitute 13 percent in the village, where the majority of the population is Tatar and Bashkir, amounting to 80 percent (Toulouze & Vallikivi 2015: 19).

On the left bank of the Yug River, the agricultural enterprise *Rassvet* ('Dawn') and especially its former head, Khanif Bamiev, also supported the development of religious practice in the villages through funding and practical help: the sacred place in Alga was fenced in the 1990s, and in 2005–2007 a "ceremony house" was built there.<sup>10</sup> But still we have the impression that here the initiative from above is more limited and less material.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: THE RENEWAL OF THE ACTORS**

### **The sacrificial priests**

In every village, there are sacrificial priests, at least one, but most times two or more. Let us examine the situation in several villages, starting from the ones in which ritual continuity has been maintained.

In **Bal'zyuga**, the old priest appointed, as a replacement, a young man from a priest's family, Fridman Kabipyanyov (born 1978). He is a music teacher. Fridman is married and respected in the village. But he was 32 when he was appointed, and this reminds us that Nazip himself was but 24 when he started, in the post-war context, when there were not enough older men. Thus, Nazip Sadriev has violated a traditional "law" in his choice of a successor. We may just infer that his own experience helped him to overcome a possible taboo, and that he made a choice of adapting to the contemporary world, where a young *vös'as'* may have good possibilities of attracting the younger part of the population.

In **Vil'gurt**, continuity according to the old rules was entirely respected, and it is the only village in the right bank group for which this can be said. One of the sacrificial priests is Rais Rafikov, born in 1948, a retired "mechanic"<sup>11</sup>, whose father was a *vös'as'*. When he was a boy, he attended several sacrifices with his father; he participated in private ceremonies and learnt both the ritual activities and his father's prayers. He started to lead ceremonies relatively late (in

2012), but according to his words, he is currently training his son.<sup>12</sup> The second priest in the village<sup>13</sup> was, until his demise in autumn 2017, Salim Shakirov, born in 1948, a retired clerk, who was appointed on the advice of Galyamshin. He did not come from a family of priests, but was a capable organiser and was respected among the villagers. Both priests shared tasks harmoniously: Rais enthusiastically covered most of the ritual parts, while Salim occupied the function of the “host of the ceremony” (in Udm. *vös' kuz'o* (*вöсь кузё*)), which means that he dealt with organisational and financial questions – gathering money and crops, buying the ewes, etc. After Salim’s death, Rais resumed the traditional rules and appointed a “younger” man (around 60 years old), Zinnat Dautov, a former bus driver, whose father was a sacrificial priest. He is still learning his task.

In other villages revitalisation took different forms. After the demise of the older *vös'as'*, nobody among the younger men took over, and the sacrifices were not performed anymore. Things started to change in the last decade, due to certain impulse and encouragement from the authorities. **Aribash** is an example of a lesser interference by Rinat Galyamshin, although he is from this village and this may have had some indirect impact. There, revitalisation was started by Aleksey Garaev (born in 1947, a retired teacher). However, our field research allows us to suggest that the first impulse came from his wife, Liliya Garaeva, also a former teacher. Liliya herself is from Bigineyevo and was brought up in a more “religious” family compared to most others. As a child, she attended ceremonies with her grandmother and, as a result, she became a good bearer of tradition. She is also an extraordinarily active woman, who feels concerned about community issues and even writes regularly in the local Udmurt-language weekly paper, *Oshmes* (‘Source’).

As animistic ceremonies are a male activity, there is almost no room for women. So Liliya acted through her husband Aleksey. Besides Aleksey, we have seen two other priests: Valeri Shaymukhametov, who attended the ceremony in 2015, and another one who was in poor health at the time. So there are in all three sacrificial priests, as many actually as the Udmurt clans living in the village (named *poska*, *chudya*, *tuklya*).<sup>14</sup> Here the revival took a particular form: while there are two sacred places in the village – one close to the river and the village and the other farther away, on top of a hill – the village ceremony that was revived here is the *keremet vös'*, whose traditions are followed until today – the participants are only men; they sacrifice rams, and pray with flat-breads *kuarn'an'* (“leaf-bread”). Interestingly, the prayer is not uttered loudly.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the sacrificial priest’s wives play an important role in the organisation of the ceremony and in its proceedings: they are present since the very beginning, they cook, they pray on their knees right behind the priest,



and they even dress their husbands. It is the only place in which we have seen women as active and it can only be explained by Liliya's active personality, for the *keremet* ceremony traditionally leaves no place for females. What is also interesting to mention in regard to this ceremony is that the ritual follows the place's original function, it is somehow attached to the place, while the overall function of the ceremony has changed: this ceremony is considered as the village spring ceremony, allowing Aribash to attend, on the following week, the *mör vös'* in Vil'gurt (for more details, see Toulouze & Niglas 2017).

Another example is **Yuda**, where the *vös'as'*, at the moment, is Zakaryan Nigmatyanov (born in 1949, a retired "mechanic"). In his childhood, he was taken to the ceremonies along with adults; some fifteen to twenty years ago, he started praying with his friends at the *mör vös'* in Vil'gurt, and about five years ago, he revived the village ceremony in his village. According to his words, he was asked by the old men of the village to officiate as a *vös'as'*.

The last example we can mention in the Vil'gurt group is **Vukogurt**<sup>16</sup>, where the ceremonies had also been discontinued long ago. Here, Galyamshin's role is also very clear: he contacted Saifudtin Nuriakhmetov, who had been a local leader, and asked him to find a sacrificial priest. The one he suggested was quite young, a worker at the local brickworks.

In the other, the Alga group, family continuity has been preserved. Here, the *vös'as'* are usually descendants of former *vös'as'*, even if they were not able to receive training from their ancestors. In **Nizhnebaltachevo**, the priest is Evgeniy Adullin (born in 1965). Thanks to his excellent knowledge of the profession's technicalities, he is considered as the "senior" priest in the Alga group. He has been chosen as a priest because his grandfather was a priest, although he was not the one to pass on his knowledge to him. He uses Nazip's prayer. His cousin, Zakhar Adullin, a retired teacher, is also well trained in ritual knowledge: he learnt a prayer from an older *vös'as'*, and was able to recite it to us in June 2016, chanting it in a peculiar recitativo: he told us that formerly they prayed differently and he wanted to show us how. But Zakhar does not act as a *vös'as'*, probably because of personal problems (divorce, drinking problems, etc.). There are other experienced *vös'as'* in this group, who learnt their prayers from their grandfathers. One is **Verkhnebaltachevo's** sacrificial priest Vladimir Khazimardanov (born in 1964), whose grandfather Islam was recorded by Hungarian scholars Gábor Bereczki and László Vikár in 1973, and who has been active as a *vös'as'* for twenty years.<sup>17</sup> His elder brother Boris has been lately acting as a sacrificial priest in Kyzlyar.

In **Bigineyevo**, it was Galyamshin's assistant, Tatiana Shaybakova, the then director of the Udmurt Centre, who contacted an active man in the village, Rinat Usmanov, who is half Udmurt and half Bashkir. He was the one

who led us to the present *vös'as'*, Zimnat Shartdinov, born in 1952, a retired tractor driver, who now works as a blacksmith.

We have not attended many village ceremonies in this group: in Nizhne-baltachevo in 2016,<sup>18</sup> with Evgeniy Adullin, whom we have already followed several times,<sup>19</sup> and in Starokalmiyarovo in 2018, where the priests are all relatively young, between 50 and 65 years old, but have not benefitted from continuity with their predecessors. But in this group at the *tol Bagysh vös'* in December 2013 we noticed that some younger helpers were “promoted” to sacrificial priests, in the absence of the older ones who were ill. They prayed with the older sacrificial priests and wore the priest’s costume. How did it happen?

The answer to this question leads us to a new category of actors, which is clearly a product of the revitalisation process.

### ***The vös' kuz'o and the vös' korka utis'***

Today there are new categories of actors, which, according to our sources, did not exist formerly. The first one is the category of the so-called *vös' kuzo* (*вöсб кузö*), “the host / master of the ceremony”, who deals with all the questions of finance and organisation allowing to perform a ceremony. This category exists in both groups of the Tatyshly district, although not everywhere.

Let us start with the left bank group, where, as we have seen, there was no actual need to revive village ceremonies, as none of them had faded. There was also no need to find new sacrificial priests to start afresh.

There emerged a strong personality, Garifulla Garifanov, born in 1947, a retired former chairman of the rural council (soviet), who is ordinarily called Farkhulla. One decade ago, he was asked by the villagers to take care of the ceremonies. He took the initiative to organise the general ceremonies *Bagysh vös'* and *mör vös'*, as well as the village ceremony *gurten vös'*. He leads the fund-raising and gathering of sacrificial animals. As he has enormous authority among the priests, he organises their activities, although he has no ritual functions at all.<sup>20</sup> He is the one who appoints the priests who are supposed to pray at the multiple villages’ ceremonies: in the example above, he is the one who decided to allow Yasha, a young helper from Verhnebaltachevo, and Evgeniy, also a young helper from Alga in his twenties, to pray with the older sacrificial priests. True enough, after this episode, we have never seen them again in the position of *vös'as'*. But we have come to realise that Farkhulla is implementing long-term “human resources policies”, preparing these two young men to step into the position at the demise of an older priest. Thus, in this case, his personal involvement and influence go much further than to organise the buying of sacrificial animals and transportation to the sacred places.

In the right bank group, the function of *vös' kuz'o* is much more developed precisely because of the need to organise the revival of faded ceremonies. In Vil'gurt, in the 1990s, the organiser of the ceremonies was the abovementioned Rafik Kamidullin. Later on, Vil'gurt's second *vös'as'*, the one selected by Galyamshin, Salim Shakirov, acted as an organiser, probably in regard to his abilities and his contacts' network. After his death, the main *vös'as'* Rais took over his tasks. In other villages, the authoritative men who were asked to initiate the revival by looking for potential sacrificial priests continued helping them and organising the ceremonies in which they officiated. Thus, the function of *vös' kuz'o* is one of the consequences of the revitalisation process.

With the building of “ceremony houses” both in Vil'gurt and in Alga there emerged a new category of people connected with the house: the *vös' korka utis'* (Udm. *вöсь корка утись*), the “wardens of the house of prayer”. There used to be such houses called *tarlau korka* at some sacred places in the past, where priests could spend the night when there were big ceremonies far from the villages (Sadikov 2008: 46).

In Alga, there is no particular person responsible for the house and Farkhulla takes care of it as he does of the rest. But in Vil'gurt, this function exists and it is fulfilled by Khabrislam Khabibyanov (born in 1933), whose house happens to be close to the sacred place. His responsibility includes overlooking the territory of the sacred place and “the house of prayer”, the keys to which he keeps. The cauldrons and other items for the practice were often replaced by his wife, who attended the ceremonies and opened the house. As she died in 2015, his daughter has overtaken her parents' responsibilities. In 2018, nevertheless, the old man attended the ceremony in person.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: SACRED PLACES**

As we mentioned earlier, the Eastern Udmurt villages had several sacred places and buildings, with differentiated usages. Nowadays, the ones most often used are those in which the ceremonies we concentrate on in this article take place: they are called “place of ceremony, place of sacrifice” (Udm. *вöсяськон инты* or *вöсяськонтй / куриськон инты* or *куриськонтй*), without any particular reference to the abstract notion of sacredness (Toulouze & Vallikivi 2016: 147). The other places have been abandoned, and they host no rituals. The location of many of them is still preserved in the memory of most of the people who attempt to keep the wholeness of these sites intact as much as possible: people avoid visiting them, using them for ordinary goals, desecrating them. There are many stories circulating about the violation of these places and the dreadful consequences they elicit: it is an interesting issue that deserves more thorough investigation.

The agrarian sacred places share some features: they are usually in a beautiful site and close to a spring or another water body, from which during the ceremonies the helpers take water. In the centre, there is a fireplace where sacred porridge is cooked and where blood and bones are offered and burnt, as well as tables used for placing crops and butter on, and for sorting meat.

In some cases, and not only because of the need for secrecy in the Soviet times as mentioned above, there has been a change in the sacred places: those used nowadays are not always the old ones. For example, if a sacred place is situated far from the village or has been damaged by economic activity, another place may be selected for sacrificial ceremonies, as it has happened in Vukogurt. The first place was situated on a hill in a beautiful landscape, but it was far from the village and without any water nearby; therefore, the sacred place was brought nearer to the village, and it encompasses a spring. The distance from the village is also the reason why roughly one decade ago the sacred place was changed in Nizhnebaltachevo. At the moment it is within the village borders and close to a spring. In order to give the new place its sacredness, a ritual of “transfer” must be accomplished. Therefore, with a prayer asking Inmar not to get angry, they transport coals and stones from the former fireplace. If it is not possible to find the former fireplace, they bring only soil.

A new phenomenon that deserves to be emphasised is the fencing, which characterises the last years. While all the *keremet* places were traditionally fenced in, it was not the case with the other places before the revival. Most of them were not marked at all and today this is still the situation for many of them outside the Tatyshly district. One of the first signs of revival was that the authorities started to pay attention to the sacred places and to fence them. It is one of the manifestations of the new public status of religious practice. So, we may assert that all the agrarian sacred places used in the Tatyshly district have been fenced in today. In this regard, the Tatyshly district has shown a way that, according to our observations, is being followed elsewhere.

This may have partly been connected with the particular status of these places. Even if sacred places (except the *keremet* ones) were not seen as dangerous *per se*, their desecration could have been accompanied by punishment. Therefore, they were not visited on ordinary days and adults explained to children where they were situated, so that the latter would not desecrate them by chance. Fencing protects the place from undesired visits both by humans and by livestock. Outside the Tatyshly district we have heard sacrificial priests emphasising the need for fencing: in Asavka, for example, the sacrificial priest Vladimir mentioned that in his village, where only half of the population is Udmurt, youngsters use the beautiful sacred place as a location for drinking and carousing. This issue was discussed in a round table organised by the

Udmurt Historical-Cultural Centre,<sup>21</sup> the organisation that manages Udmurt cultural life, together with us, with invited sacrificial priests as well as with local leaders, and we all agreed that fencing was necessary everywhere. Some even proposed to put out signs informing about the sacredness of the places.

The sacred places in Vil'gurt and Alga have become places for wider ceremonies, which gives them a particular status, confirmed by the presence on their territory of *vös' korka*, a "prayer house". We have seen no other buildings in the sacred places of the Tatyshly district. These are log houses, built like living houses, where cult paraphernalia is kept, and where in winter ritual food is distributed. In the house in Alga, there is a stove, tapestries donated by the members of the community decorate the wall, and the facade is also decorated with Udmurt ornaments. In Vil'gurt, where there is no stove (but the priest Rais wants to have one built), there are exhibition stands with explanations about the history of the sacred place, of the revitalisation of the ceremonies as well as a paper copy of Nazip Sadriev's "World Tree Award". It was recently carpeted and a tapestry was hung on the wall.

Yet another interesting development should be mentioned. While in both groups the sacred places are fenced in, there was, until 2016, a big difference between sacred places in Alga and Vil'gurt. In Alga as in some other sacred places of the same group (for example in Starokalmiyarovo) there is actually a double fence: within the territory encompassed by the first fence, there is both the prayer house and a space with benches. This space is separated from the most sacred area by another fence, which encircles the sacrificial space. Only religious specialists are allowed on these grounds, especially women are not welcome, and they have to give their offerings to the *vös'as'* over the fence. But we have also seen sacrificial priests from other villages respectfully refrain from entering.<sup>22</sup> Eva is only occasionally allowed inside the fence<sup>23</sup> – or, more precisely, invited inside, although clearly not all the local women are aware of the taboo. In Vil'gurt, on the contrary, no internal fence or any kind of other limitation marked the sacred territory. Eva could move around, be close to the fireplaces and the cauldrons, and even to the place where the sacrificial priests prayed. Other women brought their breads there personally. Yet, by December 2016, things had changed. An internal fence had been built around the area where the fireplaces and the table were situated. The poles to which the participants were supposed to tie the towels they brought as offerings remained outside the fence. The *vös'as'* Rais said that he intended to implement a more severe approach, and to forbid the entrance to any outsider. It is not very probable that there could be any influence from the other bank neighbours. Rais has been connected to rituals since he was a boy and he probably remembers the way things used to be. He is thus taking initiative to increase the feeling

of sacredness through taboo. This is a very interesting trend that deserves to be followed. In 2018 we had the opportunity of testing this new approach. Rais personally invited Eva inside, while as before and as in the Alga group, the cameraman could follow and film within the sacred area. Clearly, for the priests who are now accustomed to our presence, we are not the outsiders the fence is supposed to keep off.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: RITUALS AND PRAYERS**

How much has the revitalisation process affected the ritual itself? Due to lack of available research, we have a limited understanding of all the adaptation processes that rituals went through in the Soviet period. We have remembrances of older participants, who are usually quite confused about the timetable. We shall, in the following chapter, analyse the data available to us.

### **The time of the rituals**

Actually there have been substantial changes in the setting of the moment of the ritual. According to our informant in Aribash, formerly the days of the ceremonies used to be established according to the phases of the moon, and there was a regular order to be followed: the first villages to organise their ceremony were those on the lower course of the river and the order followed the course up the river (Sadikov 2008: 192). Today, none of these rules are followed any more. All the village ceremonies are held on the same day.

### **Ritual costume**

During the ceremony, the priest is identified by a particular costume. This costume has changed throughout time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, as we know from older photographs, the priests wore a white caftan called *shortderem* (Udm. *шортдэрем*), and had wide belts called *kuskertton* (Udm. *кускерттон*). On their head, they wore a white felt bonnet wrapped in a white towel, and they had new bast shoes on (Sadikov 2008: 190). At that time, the *shortderem* was not only the costume of the priests: all the Eastern Udmurt wore this attire to attend religious ceremonies (Sadikov & Mäkelä 2009: 262–263; Sadikov & Hafeez 2010: 96), and this is still remembered by elderly women.<sup>24</sup>

Gradually, over the span of the twentieth century, homespun clothes went out of use and the *shortderem* was seen as a costume for priests. But nowa-

days only few samples of old *shortderem* are preserved: some are still owned by priests, but older women keep them as well.<sup>25</sup> The disappearance of the caftan was also encouraged by the fact that it was part of the burial costume: the older Udmurt who own a *shortderem* ask to be buried in it in order to enter the world beyond dressed as Udmurt. Because of the gradual disappearance of the *shortderem*, they have been replaced, for the sacrificial priests, with white<sup>26</sup> ordinary working or medical smocks. The smocks used for the rituals are not used for anything else. They are washed every year before any new ceremony.

The renewal of the ceremonies allowed the emergence of a new demand for ritual caftans. At the beginning of our systematic fieldwork in June 2013, the priests we saw used either white (or light blue) smocks; only the Vyazovka *vös'as'* had an old *shortderem*. Things started to change very quickly, the same year, in the Alga group. In the autumn of 2013, the Alga group made special costumes from white fabric with vertical stripes, reminding of the *shortderem* in some way, only with much wider stripes (Toulouze 2016: 20). The funding for the fabric and the tailoring was provided by the local agricultural enterprise *Rassvet*. They have a whole collection of smocks, which are used by whoever is in charge of the prayers.

We have to admit that we have interfered in this process, when we presented our friend, the young Bal'zyuga *vös'as'* Fridman, with a contemporary *shortderem* he used in his ceremonies during the last years.

Thus, at the moment, there are four ritual costumes used in parallel in the Tatyshly district: the Soviet-time ordinary white smocks, the old *shortderem*, the new one, and the Alga *ad hoc* costume.

In other regions of the Eastern Udmurt, an analogous phenomenon may be noticed. For example, in the Kuyeda district of the Perm Krai, the local activists tailored white-and-yellow caftans with decorated hems for their priests. One of the most active priests, the initiator of the general ceremony of all the Eastern Udmurt, the *elen vös'*, Anatoli Galikhanov, who lives in Altaevo (district of Buraevo, Bashkortostan), ordered a white smock with red stylised applications.

In other Udmurt villages, as, for example, in Asavka (Baltachevo district, Bashkortostan), as the *shortderem* ceased to be used, the priests used to pray in ordinary jackets,<sup>27</sup> but in the ceremonies they used belt towels, which granted them a sacral status. We have witnessed the same choice of jackets in the Udmurt village of Varkled-Bodya in Tatarstan, but there they had proper belts.

As far as the rest of the costume is concerned, i.e., the belt and the headgear, in Bashkortostan they all use towels instead of belts, except in case the sacrificial priest has been able to afford in Udmurtia a handwoven traditional belt, which he then uses – this is the case of the young Bal'zyuga *vös'as'* Fridman, to whom we offered one woven by a friend in Udmurtia. The priests, who are

supposed to have their heads covered like all the other participants, used to have on their head a headgear swaddled in a white towel; with the exception of Vyazovka's priest, they all wear on their head ordinary factory-made headgear usually in light fabrics, and the whole image seems a bit casual. But it is of the utmost importance that their heads should be covered.

## **Prayer texts**

During the ceremony, there are several moments in which the sacrificial priest recites prayers. Actually, except for the first prayer, the text is always the same, and each priest has one single prayer he operates with.<sup>28</sup> We have not yet come to analyse in depth the texts of the prayers, in order to appreciate to what extent they have been adapted to modernity. Nor do we have a full overview of the changes made in the texts in the Soviet period. We can still mention two conversations: one with Evgeniy Adullin in June 2015, in which he reflected on the need to change the text in order to add wishes that would correspond to the actual situation in the twenty-first century. He doubted whether he was allowed to do that, and the next years will show what his final decision is. The other conversation was with Vladimir, the Asavka younger sacrificial priest, who wished to add to the traditional text words of thanks; his wish was accepted by the older priests and he added these words.

Here we would like to concentrate on considerable changes in the ways ritual texts, called *kuris'kon* (Udm. *куриськон*), have been transmitted from one priest to another in the course of time. Traditionally the rule was that prayers were not taught, they were supposed to be "stolen" from the older priests, and that means that they were learnt *in situ*, while the text was enunciated. This is the reason why the priests took with them children and teenagers as helpers, who thus absorbed their experience and learnt the texts of the prayers by heart. This was the method of transmission of the sacred text. If learnt in another way, the prayer was supposed to lose its magic strength (Sadikov 2011: 112).

Nowadays, there are only a few priests that have "received" their prayer in the traditional way. In the Vil'gurt group, we may mention Nazip Sadriev in Bal'zyuga and Rais Rafikov in Vil'gurt.

Some other priests have written down the texts of older priest's prayers and utter them either by heart or, in most cases, they read them from paper. Today this form of enunciation of a ritual text is accepted as natural, and the priests have also found ways of supporting the paper in front of them with a music stand or a reading desk. Although actually they have by now learned the text by heart, many still keep the text for safety reasons (e.g. Fridman, the young Bal'zyuga sacrificial priest); others, as the three *vös'as'* in Starokalmiyarovo,



argue that it guarantees that they will say the text all together so that it will sound nicely. Usually, they use the texts of their predecessors in the village. Only in cases it has not been possible to retain the local prayer, they use “alien” texts, i.e., texts published in newspapers or written down by priests in other villages. This is the case, for example, with the old Bal’zyuga *vös’as’* Nazip Sadriev’s prayer, which is used by several priests in other villages. For this particular purpose he kept a recorded tape of his way of saying his prayer.<sup>29</sup> Clearly there is a transition from oral tradition to written one.

### **Ritual actions**

A certain transformation has also taken place in the ritual part of the ceremonies. Several rituals have been simplified. Some of the simplifications may originate in adaptations from the Soviet period, some of them in the ongoing process. We will take as a starting point the Alga group rituals, which are the most complex ones we have met as yet. Still we must also take into account that there may have been some local peculiarities which are not explained by adaptation or change.

The first simplification we have noticed is the treatment of the first prayer, called *siz’is’kon* (‘promise’): its goal is to promise Inmar a blood sacrifice. In some places, as in Kachak (Kaltasy district), this prayer has become a bloodless ceremony in itself, performed on two days between the main sacrificial ceremonies.<sup>30</sup> In the Alga group (with the exception of the village ceremonies), the prayer *siz’is’kon* is performed on the previous evening: the priests prepare porridge without meat and allow the sacrifice. The fire must be kept burning all the night, until the beginning of the main part of the ceremony. The right bank Udmurt decided, before the others, to stop performing the *siz’is’kon* on the previous evening, because this meant they had to look after the fire the whole night, to prevent it from going out. So now, the ritual takes place in a simplified form, and the *siz’is’kon* is prayed right before the sacrifice. This is how it is done at the *mör vös’* as well as at the *gurt(en) vös’*.<sup>31</sup> These are the places where continuity is preserved. In other places we have not attended enough village ceremonies, but in Aribash and Vukogurt, the ceremonies start without any kind of previous prayer or promise. We may assert then that this is a new simplification brought about by the process of revival.

A general change in the sacrificial process is that domestic birds are no longer sacrificed. Nazip Sadriev mentioned this change as the one he had brought forth himself. Geese were expensive and did not yield much meat. Clearly, at some undetermined time in the Soviet period, the sacrifice concentrated on ewes. We would not mention this change if there had been no attempts to revert to the

more traditional way. In the Vil'gurt *tol mör vös'* in December 2016, the ritual started with the slaughtering of a goose – in a yard not far from the sacred location, while the bird, because of the difficulty to pluck it in twenty degrees below zero, was plucked in the nearby sauna. This is another of the innovations – or reverting to older traditions – that Rais is implementing in Vil'gurt. But this might require a strong motivation to take root especially in spring: practices concerning geese have been changing in the Udmurt areas of Bashkortostan and people do not keep geese all year round anymore: they take chicks from incubator in spring and slaughter them at the end of the autumn.

Most of the changes are connected to the way of dealing with the sacrificial meat and tend to simplify the team's task.

- After the ewe is slaughtered, it is butchered and non-used parts of it are burnt. In order to ease their work, the helpers usually discard the entrails of the animals, because their cleaning and washing takes much time. This happens most of the time. In the Alga group, we have usually seen it, except in the Nizhnebaltachevo village ceremony, where some women (probably Farkhulla's wife) dealt with the entrails and brought them back cleaned and washed; we saw it also in the Bal'zyuga village ceremony, where one of the helpers, Sidor, refused to discard the entrails and did all the cleaning himself. Also in Vil'gurt *mör vös'* the entrails were kept, because there were women there whose task it was to clean them. Cleaning the entrails is clearly a women's task. Unlike the Alga group, the Vil'gurt group involves women as helpers for this task; this explains the use of the entrails.
- Nowadays, in the butchering of the animal, the meat as well as the bones are chopped with an axe, while formerly it was important to keep the victim's bones intact and the meat was carefully cut at the joints.
- Not only sacrificial meat is cooked in the cauldrons, but also additional meat bought from the local shop in order to get the necessary quantities, although it has not passed through any ritual. This innovation was started by Nazip Sadriev.
- While formerly in all villages sacrificial meat was served separately from the porridge, now it is cut into smaller pieces and mixed with the porridge, both being served together. Local observers comment that this tradition was initiated by Nazip Sadriev, due to the reproaches from the members of the community, who complained they had got too little meat and who noticed that certain members of the community took considerably bigger amounts of meat than the others.

There are also some differences in the Alga and Vil'gurt group rituals. One of them is the way participants present offerings. In the Vil'gurt group there are poles to which they tie the towels or other textile offerings. In the Alga group, all offerings are received by a sacrificial priest, who says a prayer on each of them, usually asking the gift-bearer for what he or she wishes him to ask God. The offerings are very abundant here, while in Vil'gurt there are fewer than a dozen tokens. This difference may or may not be connected with the revitalisation process, but we have no evidence to rely on.

Until now we have emphasised those of the changes that have led to the simplification of the rituals, in a context where the main goal was to revive the ceremonies. Still, in some cases, the attempt to revitalise has led to the revival of very old traditions, which may have been lost elsewhere. We stumbled upon one of these cases in Aribash, where, while reviving the ceremony, Aleksey inserted a feature from his reminiscences: in 2015, in Aribash, we were able to record how, when the ritual porridge was ready, youngsters invited the village people to attend the ceremony. In 2015, two teenagers walked in the central street of the village shouting: "*Vös'e mynele, vös'e!*" (Udm. *Бöсе мынэлэ, вöсе!*; 'Go to the ceremony! To the ceremony!'). At the end of the nineteenth century, Finnish linguist Yrjö Wichmann observed that the village people were called by horsemen in white, who shouted: "*Vös'e mynele ini!*" (Udm. *Бöсе мынэлэ ини!*; 'Go to the ceremony now!') (Sadikov & Hafeez 2015: 147). In Aribash, the tradition was restored; an informer from Aribash remembered the same tradition from her childhood. It may have existed elsewhere as well, but we have no information about it.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: THE PARTICIPANTS**

We must emphasise that participation in a ceremony does not mean presence throughout the whole process. Usually, most of the time, only the sacrificial priest(s) and the helpers are on the spot – and sometimes the researchers. Village people come only when the porridge is ready, in order to share the meal and also take it home. In a wider sense participation starts earlier and finishes later: each household in the village gives crops, butter, and money to ensure the buying of the ewe and the porridge ingredients, and they receive the blessed sacrificial porridge as a final output. The eating of the porridge is a ritual act, and it may be accomplished later on at home.

The information we have about the Soviet time emphasises that the participants were small in number and limited to the aged. But this is not enough to estimate the real level of what could be transmitted inside the families, which

might be higher than we imagine. In the Soviet times, young people obviously did not attend the ceremonies. Anyway, the ceremonies are held on Fridays, i.e., on a working day, which may explain the presence of mostly retired people. Still, only few younger men are able to attend, as many work far from their village. Some informants tell us that it was forbidden for younger people to attend.<sup>32</sup> This may have been – or not – one of the forms of adaptation to the new conditions. What is confirmed by all the sources and informers is that small children were not allowed to participate, for they were considered as not able to keep ritual cleanliness; nowadays people of all ages attend also with small children, and young people of all ages partake and usually seem to be well familiar with the rules: heads must be covered as well as legs/feet and arms. *Vös'as'* and *vös'kuz'o* keep repeating the rules and check that everyone respects them. In Nizhnebaltachevo we saw how adults threatened children, who wore shorts and whose arms were not covered, with the reactions of Farkhulla who later sent them back to get proper clothes.

Rules are not so strict any more concerning the colours people are supposed to wear: informers say that people wore white shirts (*vös' derem*, *вось дерем*) and white caftans (*shortderem*) or at least they were dressed in light tones. The ordinary participants in the ceremony come in their Sunday best; women wear coloured bright dresses, and some of them come dressed in Udmurt fashion. Only the elderly, respecting tradition, try to wear light colours.

Another important rule has been changed in the last decades: formerly, only those were allowed to attend who had the right to do it: in the village ceremonies, the population of the given village participated, in others, the inhabitants of the respective villages, while at the festive events organised after the ceremonies, all the kin gathered from different villages. The presence of outside observers was not desirable.<sup>33</sup> The question of outsiders was probably not topical during the Soviet times, when secrecy was recommended. But this has changed in the last two decades. On the one hand, a ceremony is an event. People from different villages, if they happen to be at a place where there is a ceremony, attend along with their kin. In the cases of the *mör vös'*, the two ceremonies of the Tatyshly district are even scheduled in different weeks, so that the kin may visit on these days. This may suggest a new understanding of the community. Moreover, now outsiders often attend the ceremonies: scholars, journalists, cameramen, etc.<sup>34</sup> And so do we. Until now, we have been well accepted. No calamity has followed our presence, and people have got accustomed to it. Still, we cannot rule out the possibility that at some point the sacrificial priests would wish to have their ceremonies outside the field of observation, thus re-establishing the former rules.

## CONCLUSION

In this overview of the processes of tradition revival undergone by the Eastern Udmurt, we tried to understand what was going on, and what was the starting point from which they began at the end of the 1980s. In some cases, a near complete ritual continuity was guaranteed throughout the Soviet period, when there were strong personalities able to resist all the anti-religious pressures: a near complete continuity does not mean that nothing changed, but that the ceremonies were not discontinued, with due evolutions and adaptations. In other places, the ceremonies have indeed been interrupted. But the revival has taken place everywhere: in the places where ceremonies have always been held, they are more widely attended, and where they are newly re-established, we can see that they respond to the people's expectations.

We have the impression that the age of the settlements has no great impact on the way religious practice has been retained over the years. History, nevertheless, still exerts an impact on the way ceremonies are organised: the Alga group village ceremonies involve villages that are historically connected, the inhabitants of one village having often migrated from the other.

During the revival process, changes in tradition have occurred. If we analyse those processes at the most elementary level, we notice that usually they have led to the simplification of the rules, following a trend that had already been developed in the Soviet times, when sacrificial priests concentrated on what they considered as essential. The more recent the revival, the more simplified the ritual, as we have seen in Vukogurt. If we look at them from a wider perspective, some interesting trends have emerged, which we attempt to pinpoint below.

- We have noticed that there are very concrete and very diverse persons behind the revitalisation of religious practice. All of them have acted out of conviction, either religious or political, and probably a mix of both. We would like to emphasise the role of former political leaders who have set their authority on behalf of religious revival. They were former Soviet leaders,<sup>35</sup> who fully used their local political networks and their influence to get the revival enacted. In some way it shows the vitality and efficiency of the former kolkhoz structure and system. Actually the whole life was structured by these cooperative enterprises: there were several kolkhozes in the Tatyshly district, one covering only Udmurt villages (called Demen), and others in which the Udmurt villages constituted only one part. They were the main employers of the population. While the kolkhozes as such have disappeared, and have been replaced by cooperative enterprises, the names of which have not changed and which are still called kolkhozes by the population, the network they represented still functions as an empowering tool. This is an unexpected discovery.

- At the level of the religious system as a whole, on the one hand, we do not see any tendencies towards actual institutionalisation and centralisation: no attempt has been made to create “a church”, a hierarchy, or even, as we have seen, a centralised organisation. For instance, it has been done in the Mari Republic, where the Mari ethnic religion is officialised at the same level as Russian Orthodoxy (Alybina 2014). There was an attempt to coordinate the sacrificial priests’ action by establishing an association of the *vös’as’*, but until now it has not been achieved.
- On the other hand, several signs show that there is a trend toward some kind of mild fixation of the rules. Several signs do suggest it. One of them is the general fencing, whose function is to separate and distinguish particular areas, to give them a clear meaning. This is particularly interesting in the late evolutions – in the already fenced sacred places (fenced externally) new fences start to be built inside, in order to mark different statuses. Another very interesting development concerns the medium of the prayers. The introduction of written culture is contradictory to the oral transmission of tradition. All world religions have their Holy Writ. The priest in Vukogurt commented to us that as other religions have written texts, why not the Udmurt one, but this sounded as a justification for the paper he was holding in front of his eyes. The Udmurt religion is not moving towards this kind of text, yet texts are being fixated in written form, which may well represent a way of restrained improvisation.
- We want to discuss Anna-Leena Siikala’s conclusion that by turning religious ceremonies into festivals, the Udmurt have found a way to give them relevance in their identity endeavours (Siikala & Ulyashev 2011: 310). We will not comment on the experiences she has analysed in Udmurtia (although they would deserve discussing and updating, for these processes are ongoing), but as far as the Eastern Udmurt are concerned, the festival dimension exists in only one case, which has not been discussed within this article: it is literally “the country” sacrificial ceremony *elen vös’* (see Sadikov 2010), which was recreated in 2008, and which indeed attracted huge media interest. The other village or village group based ceremonies are performed for the internal needs of the communities and, while they may have ethnic consolidation effects, they are not seen by the people concerned as responding to wider interests rather than the welfare of the village itself.

Finally, we must reflect on our own influence on the ongoing processes. In the last years, the Eastern Udmurt, especially the Tatyshly Udmurt, have become used to seeing researchers at their ceremonies – we have, for example,

attended the Vil'gurt *mör vös'* two years in a row and many have shown that they expect us to be there every year. We must be aware that our presence has its own consequences from the point of view of these same processes. We have tried to take it into account in our own practice: for example, we are aware of the formidable tool that video represents. Not only by filming ceremonies, but by leaving the roughly edited material, we may be instruments in the future of several possible scenarios, some we are happy about, some of them dangerous. While we are quite happy if our material helps transmission, and especially oral transmission, we will keenly follow the eventuality of possible standardisation. Therefore, we have planned to attend all the village ceremonies, in order to record every single local experience and to avoid contributing to the impoverishment of tradition. This ethical choice imposes on us a long research programme, for all villages hold their village ceremony on the same day and there are nineteen of them.

Hereafter we propose an account of the possible consequences our action may induce, not only on the bases of our reflexions but also of reactions we have been informed of.

- We already mentioned the unintentional influence our presence had on the Asavka priests, who tried to act according to former tradition, which has long been forgotten in their village. This shows a well-meaning willingness to act according to the old rules of the Udmurt, although it misinterprets our meaning, for we intend to show respect to all forms of practice that have been implemented in different locations. But their approach was different. It reveals a particular understanding of what is right and what is wrong, and emphasises the importance for the people to feel that what they do is rooted in deep historical values, followed by the Udmurt as a whole.
- There are interesting expressions of envy connected with our presence, both outside and inside the Udmurt community. Outside the Udmurt community, our regular presence has kindled envy from the leadership of the district, which is composed of Tatar leaders. Several times the district head Rushan Garaev has expressed irritation that foreign researchers are interested in the Udmurt and not in the Tatar. On the other hand, there is a kind of competition between the villages whose ceremonies we have not attended yet. "Why have they gone there and not visited us? We also have ceremonies," is a sentence that can be heard quite often, and we are always in trouble to decide where we want to film the next ceremonies.
- The other side of the coin is that our presence has been stimulating for both the sacrificial priests and the population. This interest from

outside and the respect the regional culture elicits in the researchers has clearly enhanced their interest in their own cultural values; the sacrificial priests, until now at least, seem happy to be filmed and never put any obstacles to our activity. They welcome us and they are even inclined to ask our opinion on questions that concern them. This was the case when Evgeniy Adullin, reflecting on the inadequacy of the prayer texts for the present challenges, contemplated the possible changes and asked for Eva's advice on this issue.

- This same approach was quite explicit in an experience that part of our team, Eva and Nikolai, had when invited at a round table organised by the historical-cultural centre, which thus gave us the opportunity to explain what we do in our fieldwork and what the perspectives of our investigation are. Some sacrificial priests and some local leaders had been invited, as well as the leader of the national movement, who encouraged us to make proposals and to express our ideas about the contents of the local journal or the problems of the fencing. On the basis of our own experience, we encouraged them to publish information about the religious life of the region, to have a regular column about religion; this advice was followed for two or three months only to be forgotten later on.
- Our influence may also be indirect. When the historical-cultural centre organised an event associating grandmothers and granddaughters in order to focus on culture transmission practices, they deliberately included in the programme a part on religion, because we were attending a ceremony in the same village on the same day. By doing so, they ensured that the grandmothers publicly spoke to their granddaughters about religious practice.
- Another wider impact of our interest concerns the relations between the Udmurt media in Udmurtia and the Eastern Udmurt culture: clearly we do not have a neutral position in this matter. As an Udmurt, one of us, Nikolai, is particularly keen on awakening interest in his research in his country. And he is not the only one. In 2015, Eva concluded an agreement with the Udmurt television: it was about sending a cameraman to the Aribash ceremony, for our own film specialist, Liivo Niglas, could not attend. The ceremony was filmed. But the result of this process is more extensive, because the Udmurt television discovered the richness of the Eastern Udmurt culture. They made a documentary with the material the cameraman brought back, but from this moment on several films have been shot on Eastern Udmurt ceremonies and we have met Udmurt television groups filming at least twice in autumn and winter ceremonies.



- Thus, we are aware that our presence elicits reactions that may influence the process itself in the long run. We attempt to consider it in order to avoid undesirable influences, but must accept that our interest, on reflection, also stimulates interest in others.

What is important here is that the revitalisation is clearly an answer to the population's expectations: more and more ceremonies are being recreated, and the process is not closed.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Ceremony in which all the villages of each group gather, 10 in Vil'gurt, 9 in Alga.

<sup>3</sup> Fieldwork materials of Ranus Sadikov from 2000, Vukogurt, Tatyshly district; Yamiga Sharapova, born in 1934.

<sup>4</sup> They had distinct functions: the *vös'as'* was responsible for the prayers and for the whole ritual process, the *tylas'* looked after the sacrificial fire and threw into it bits of the sacrificial food for the gods, and the *partchas'* were the ones who slaughtered and butchered the sacrificial animals.

<sup>5</sup> We should stress here that participation in the ceremony is not only expressed through personal attendance. People from these villages offer money to buy the sacrificial animal, and they gather crops for the ritual porridge. At the end of the ceremony, the sacrificial priests bring back the porridge with the meat in big cauldrons to each village and they distribute it to the villagers. In the majority of cases, only the sacrificial priests and their assistants – as well as the anthropologists – participate directly in the ceremony itself.

<sup>6</sup> For this achievement, he was bestowed the “World Tree Award” in 2016, an Estonian award given to people who, at grassroots level, were able to help maintain Finno-Ugric cultures.

- <sup>7</sup> He did not, however, visit only the Tatyshly Udmurt, but he was also invited to revitalise ceremonies in other districts of Bashkortostan as well as in Izhevsk, the capital of Udmurtia.
- <sup>8</sup> Older informants have observed that when he was a local leader in the Soviet period, Rafik Kamidullin was one of the most active party officials to fight against any manifestations of religious practice.
- <sup>9</sup> In Russian: Национально-культурный центр удмуртов Башкортостана.
- <sup>10</sup> Fieldwork of Ranus Sadikov and Eva Toulouze in Tatyshly district of the Bashkortostan Republic in 2015; Garifulla Garifanov, born in 1947 (Nizhnebaltachevo).
- <sup>11</sup> This is one of the Soviet positions in the kolkhozes: operator of agricultural machinery.
- <sup>12</sup> Fieldwork interview in June 2016.
- <sup>13</sup> As Vil'gurt is a big village, according to tradition there have always been two sacrificial priests.
- <sup>14</sup> The traditional Udmurt society was divided into clans – kinship groups having the same mythical ancestor. The system is not relevant anymore, but some remembrance of it remains alive, as in this case.
- <sup>15</sup> Although this might be more directly connected with Aleksey's shyness: he acknowledged to us that he still has butterflies when he prays.
- <sup>16</sup> A report about the ceremony in Vukogurt can be found at <http://blog.erm.ee/?p=8708>, last accessed on 21 September 2018.
- <sup>17</sup> Fieldwork interview in June 2015.
- <sup>18</sup> A detailed report about the ceremony in Nizhnebaltachevo can be found at <http://blog.erm.ee/?p=8783>, last accessed on 21 September 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> In June 2013 at the *mör vös'* as well as at an occasional ceremony in Utar Elga; in December 2013 at the *tol Bagysh vös'* and at the *tol mör vös'*, and finally in June 2015 at the *Bagysh vös'*.
- <sup>20</sup> Except in private circumstances: he prays at home in the autumn ceremony (Udm. *Сйзъыл куриськон*), at marriage ceremonies, etc.
- <sup>21</sup> In Russian: Удмуртский историко-культурный центр.
- <sup>22</sup> However, Liivo Niglas was allowed, without any question, to enter the fenced area in order to film the proceedings.
- <sup>23</sup> In one case it was because the hut was inside and the weather was very cold and windy (in December 2013); in other cases, it was to eat the *sizis'kon* porridge.
- <sup>24</sup> In December 2016, we attended an evening in Vil'gurt, dedicated to grandmothers and their granddaughters. One of the grandmothers took from her chest a *shortderem* and put a white scarf on her head, saying: "That's how I pray".
- <sup>25</sup> At the same event, the grandmothers were asked to comment on the content of their chest and we were surprised to discover that several of them contained old *shortderems*.

- <sup>26</sup> White is the colour of the highest god, Inmar, to whom the prayers are addressed.
- <sup>27</sup> Actually in Asavka we witnessed our influence, which was mostly unlooked for: in June 2016, we met the sacrificial priests one day before the ceremony, and Ranus Sadikov mentioned in a conversation the tradition of the *shortderem*. While their local tradition has been to pray in jackets, the following day all the three *vös'as'* were dressed in white, one in an old *shortderem* (actually he did not find any man's *shortderem* and he wore a woman's), the two others in ordinary smocks. In December 2016, at the *tol vös'*, one of the priests wore a jacket, while the other insisted on wearing a white smock.
- <sup>28</sup> Many prayers have been published, many more have been collected and are in archives, usually not transcribed, and we have already recorded several prayers in our materials. We (Ranus Sadikov and Eva Toulouze) are preparing a collection of prayers of the Eastern Udmurt.
- <sup>29</sup> But this seems to have been lost.
- <sup>30</sup> Fieldwork in June 2018.
- <sup>31</sup> A report of Bal'zyuga village ceremony can be found at <http://blog.erm.ee/?p=8542>, last accessed on 21 September 2018.
- <sup>32</sup> Fieldwork interview in Asavka, December 2016.
- <sup>33</sup> This is very eloquently illustrated by Uno Holmberg [Harva], a Finnish scholar of religion, when in 1911, at the time of his expedition, the population of a village explained a natural cataclysm (snow after sowing) during his visit to sacred places (Sadikov & Hafeez 2010: 79). This experience has been widely shared by researchers; for example, Aado Lintrop in Varkled-Bodya (Lintrop 2003: 213).
- <sup>34</sup> During our field research in 2016, our driver reported the words of one of the priests about the attendance of scholars in sacrificial ceremonies: clearly from the ritual point of view their presence was not desirable, but ethically it was not possible to prevent them. However, nobody has said that to the scholars themselves. This does not mean that this kind of discussions would not take place in more intimate settings among the organisers of the rituals.
- <sup>35</sup> Galyamshin had a huge portrait of Lenin in his office when Eva first met him in 2011.

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