

The eastern Udmurt and their worldview at the beginning of the 21st century

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CEREMONIES

Udmurt ceremonies: an introduction¹

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We know that the Mari have been particularly tough in the attempt to preserve their religious world, and they have been able to reach official acceptance to the organisation representing their religion. The Udmurt we have been investigating in the last years, acted differently. In Udmurtia Orthodoxy has reached a considerable influence in society, so that in the republic only some tiny villages and some families have remained non-christened. But it is possible to find a tradition practically not touched at all by Christianity, outside Udmurtia, in regions where the dominant religion is has historically been Islam, and where the Udmurt (and others, Mordvinias, Chuvash, Mari) have sought sanctuary, fleeing forced Evangelisation. This is what happened in the region beyond the Kama, in the Udmurt Bashkortostan villages that are here the focus. Here the Turkic environment has protected the Udmurt from the penetration of Orthodox Christianity, and the Udmurt were able keep and develop their own religious traditions. The big ceremonies were the most visible way to proclame one's religious identity. It was naturally not the only wayn there were, and there are still, more intimate rituals to mark calendar periods and events in the person's and the family's life. So we shall concentrate here on the community ceremonies. Undoubtedly, also here the Soviet power has been able to achieve destruction. As elsewhere in Russia, ceremonies were forbidden or at

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least people were encouraged not to attend, and younger generations were taught in the spirit of atheism and materialism. But the Udmurt's practice was not a centralised one, it was mostly local and there were sacrificial priests who continued their activities discreetly, and transmitted their knowledge. Thus, the general picture in the Bashkortostan villages is quite heterogeneous: in some places, rituals continued in full continuity, in others tradition was interrupted for some years and in others even for decades. A process of homogenisation started at the end of the Soviet era, when everywhere the communities' spiritual needs emerged and everywhere people started to revitalise collective ceremonies even if they did not take place for decades.

Full continuity: examples of uninterrupted practice

Whether tradition was maintained or not, the decisive factor was the strength of the tradition-bearers: we have an excellent example with the elder sacrificial priest of the village of Malaya Bal'zuga, Nazip Sadriev, who received for his persistence the 2016 Estonian award "Life Tree". He started to pray when he was twenty-four, and he performed ceremonies in his village for sixty years, in spite of the Communist Party's pressure and endeavours. He was indeed not the only one who resisted: in the Tat'yshly district of Bashkiria all the Soviet period several villages went on holding their ceremonies.

Today, likewise, in these villages, there are ceremonies performed. They present some characteristic features:

- Their goal is to address the heaven's deities and ask them to propitiate agricultural activities – to give warm rain, health for the people and the livestock, a good harvest.

- This address, although it is performed by ritual specialists (sacrificial priests), unite all the village community: all the villagers offer cereals, butter, and money (especially to buy the sacrificial ewe), which are collected before the ceremony and everybody eats the porridge that represents the output of the ritual.
- In the long hours of preparation, the only persons attending are the sacrificial priest and his helpers (and sometimes also anthropologists...) and prayers are uttered at different times. The population gathers towards the end, when porridge starts to get ready in order to taste it together and attend the last prayers? This is a long and pretty complicated ritual.

New traditions in case of revitalisation

However, in many places there have been shorter or longer interruptions in the religious practice. In many places the sacrificial priests died without leaving behind them any replacement. But after the 1990s the wish emerged everywhere to revitalise the rituals. The initiative could come from the population – for example, in the Burayevo district, in the Kassiyarovo village, where people demanded that the designed replacement for the old priest would continue; but it could also come from the local Udmurt bosses, either the kolkhoze or the district leaders. The pattern was the following: the head of the national movement (the National and cultural centre of the Bashkortostan Udmurt), who knew the active people in the villages, ordered the present or former village head to look for the descendants of the sacrificial priest. When they were found, they were supposed to convince them to start praying, and then to help to fix the ceremony's material aspects

– finding transportation, water and wood supplies, bying the ewe and other practical tasks. They had to find texts for the prayers.

These new ceremonies are characterised by the following features:

- The ritual is very much simplified. There are few prayers: the opening prayer, with which they ask for permission to make a sacrifice, there is only one prayer, in which the priest holds porridge.
- Many traditional taboos are ignored: for example, in the Kaltasy district, women play a considerable role, while elsewhere these ceremonies belong to the male domain. In this district, when the ceremonies were revitalised, there was noone who would have remembered. They had to invent their traditions.
- The best example is the *Elen vös'* "The ceremony for the country", which had been forgotten until it was revitalised in 2008. It has become a big party, where Udmurts from different regions gather.

On the way towards institutionalisation?

At the moment, ceremonies take place in each village differently. Also sacrificial priests dress as each of them finds right: the garb must be white, but the solutions differ. Also the texts differ, the local tradition have each its own. In this situation, there are also who wants to standardise and to unify. Some people say that they must grow order in the present chaos. For the first time in January 2019 sacrificial priests gathered to coordinate their actions and form their own organisation. It will be interesting to follow what they intend to do with it: only get acquainted and coordinate, or unify the rules?

Animist Ceremonies in Bashkortostan: Fieldwork Ethnography²

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present an ethnography of religious ceremonies by the Bashkortostan Udmurt. Our task is solely to describe the main ritual activities as we observed them; we provide very little theoretical framework and cultural meaning with which to understand these rituals. Thus, what follows is a “thin description” (Geertz 1973) of ethnographic reality. We hope it can serve as a starting point for future analyses into different aspects of Udmurt animist ceremonies.

The scholars who have studied these ceremonies (Ranus Sadikov, Tatiana Minniyakhmetova) have a deeply rooted knowledge of their rituals, because they have ‘grown’ within the Bashkortostan Udmurt community, while, as representatives of the Russian school of ethnography, their works are focused on the past, on the attempt to reconstruct what the Udmurt (or any other ethnic) culture was at the last stage before modernity (modernity being considered as introduced by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution). Therefore, they follow the present rituals not *per se*, but as residues of a bygone past in which the religious system was full-fledged.

² This article has been published: Toulouze, Eva; Niglas, Liivo (2014). Udmurt animistic ceremonies in Bashkortostan: fieldwork ethnography. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 8, 1, 111–120.

This is not our perspective. We are interested in ritual as an integral part of contemporary life, with its own logic and role in present-day communities. The peculiar feature of these rituals is that they have basically disappeared in other regions inhabited by the Udmurt. In the Udmurt Republic, or Udmurtia, which is the core territory of Udmurts, there are some geographically limited examples of village ceremonies in the south, in the villages of Kuzebaevo and Varklet Bodya³ (Lintrop 2003), if we do not consider the individual manifestations of traditional religion or worldview. While the Udmurts living in Bashkortostan have been protected from invading Christianity by their Muslim surroundings (which was the reason why they migrated after the 18th century) (Minniyahmetova 1995: 332, Sadikov 2008: 7), their religious practice has evolved with only the minimal exterior constraint, which was shared by the whole of the Soviet Union (Sadikov 2011: 108). Comparison with the Udmurt practices of the Udmurt Republic, which is not the aim of this ethnography, shows that ceremonial life is quite different, and that the main rituals in Bashkortostan are not precisely the same as in the Udmurts' core territory.

We did our fieldwork in Tatyshly district (rayon), in the north of the Republic of Bashkortostan. In our ethnography, we shall concentrate on public collective ritual life, i.e. on ceremonies that are performed at the village level, or associating several villages. There are 19 Udmurt villages in Tatyshly district and they are divided into two ceremonial groups, separated by the river Yuk. Each village group holds ceremonies together, and we shall call them here according to the village where the main ritual takes

³ Technically Varklet Bodya is in Tatarstan, but it is situated some kilometres from Kuzebaevo and is clearly part of the same cultural complex and does not belong to the Udmurt diasporas in Muslim territory.

place. There are nine villages in the Vil'gurt (Novye Tatyshly) group⁴ and ten in the Al'ga group.⁵

The collective rituals are seasonal and take place before the solstice. In June, there is a cycle with village rituals (*gurt vös'*) and rituals associating several villages (*mör vös'*). In the past, between the *gurt vös'* (one-village) and the *mör vös'* (ten-village) rituals, there were three-village rituals (*kuin' gurt vös'*), which have long since disappeared (Sadikov, Danilko 2005: 231). The winter cycle takes place in December and is analogous to the summer one, only the village level is not held any more. The intermediate stage, the winter equivalent of the three-village ritual is still alive in the Al'ga group and is called the *Bagysh vös'*⁶ (Sadikov 2008: 206). Both village groups hold a *mör vös'* in December⁷. In spring the collective rituals of these two groups are held with a difference of one week: first the Vil'gurt *mör vös'*, then the Alga's. In winter, the Vil'gurt *mör vös'* is held one week before the *Bagysh vös'*, and two before the Al'ga *mör vös'*. This is explained as intended to give the opportunity for people to go visiting relatives and attend both ceremonies.

The aim of these sacrificial rituals is to call for divine blessing on the community's activities: to ask for rain in summer, for health and prosperity all the time. The prayers' address is "Oste, Inmare-Kylchyne". It is difficult to decide whether they address one

⁴ Aribash, Yuda, Vyazovka, Urazgyldy, Bal'zyuga, Mayskiy, as well as Verhnye, Nizhnye and Novye Tatyshly (Sadikov 2008: 205).

⁵ Bigineevo, Tanypovka, Kyzyl'yar, Verhnye and Nizhnebaltachevo, Starokal'miyarovo, Al'ga, Dubovka, Petropavlovka, Utar-El'ga (Sadikov 2008: 205-206).

⁶ While according to Sadikov this ceremony concerned only the three villages of Nizhnebaltachevo, Verhnebaltachevo and Kyzyl'yar, our experience is different: it was attended in 2003 by eight villages.

⁷ Actually this is a new tradition at least for the Vil'gurt group: it had been interrupted in the Soviet period (Sadikov 2008: 212).

single god or two, in other words whether Inmar and Kylchin are seen as two separate entities or as two faces of the same one (Sadikov 2008: 7). Inmar is the Udmurt word for God, which is seen as a male figure, a *deus otiosus*, whose interference in human affairs is limited to general benevolence. Kylchin or Kyldysyn is a deity that is much closer to human concerns and is mainly connected with fertility. One or several ewes are sacrificed during its performance and its meat is used for cooking ritual porridge.

The sites where the ceremonies are performed are established sacral areas, which are all surrounded by fences (Sadikov [2008: 46] notes that it is not an old tradition; it has recently taken root in Tatyshly district).

In Vil'gurt, a space has been dedicated to sacral activities at one edge of the village. The local collective farm Demen has built a fence around it. The sacral area also encompasses a prayer house, built in 1993 by the collective farm, where activities connected with the ritual may take place in case of bad weather or of the wish for privacy – for instance money counting.

In Al'ga, the sacral space is also bordered by a fence, but it is more articulated than in Vil'gurt. There are two spaces delimited by fences: a public one, with the 'prayer house', and a more sacral one (where women are not welcomed), where there is an open shed offering participants protection from the wind, rain and snow. The prayer house is smaller than in Vil'gurt, but more compact, and contains a stove, which is quite convenient in the case of winter ceremonies. It was built by the local collective farm, Rassvet. Al'ga is a small village, quite remote. It was chosen as a ceremonial centre in the Soviet period in 1978, as it was wise to have a ceremonial place that would not be

right under the nose of the Communist Party officials, as was the case with the previous sacral area in Starokalmiyar (Sadikov 2008: 205).

The *Bagysh vös'*, which gathered eight villages of the Al'ga group in December 2013 (only Starokalmiyar and Petropavlovka were left out), is held at a site outside the villages along a road (about 150m from it), not far from Kyzyl'yar village. It is a sacral area with a huge fir tree in the middle; the area is encompassed by a fence, and it contains a shed, although there is no house nearby.

An important feature of the sacral areas is that they face towards the south. The place where the priests pray is at the southernmost edge of the area; the prayer house is situated in the north, and the fireplaces in the middle - people turn to the south to pray and for animal sacrifice.

We have attended both village groups' spring *mör vös'* and the two Al'ga group's winter ceremonies. Therefore, we have sufficient materials to describe how these rituals are performed, taking into account the differences connected to place and season.

The participants

The people and the functions involved in the ceremonies are the following:

- The manager of the ceremony (*vös' kuz'o*), who may be a sacrificial priest as in the case of the Vil'gurt group or a 'lay' person as in the A'lga group. He is the organiser of the rituals, and, depending on the person, has more or less control of the organisation of the whole ceremony.

- The sacrificial priest (*vös 'as'*) in the case of the village ceremony, several in the case of a ceremony for multiple villages. The priest is a wholesome member the village community, he must be married and be respected for his impeccable life (for more details, see Toulouze, Niglas, forthcoming). Traditionally, as we know from old photographs, priests had special robes, called *shorderem* (Sadikov 2008: 45, 191; Sadikov, Danilko 2005: 230). This costume has been maintained in only a few cases (we saw one old *shorderem* in Vil'gurt); the other priests, who had no special robe, used for rituals a kind of white work smock like what grocers might use. However, there was a notable change in the Alga group in winter (December 2013): they had ordered through the Rassvet cooperative a set of newly made *shorderem*, not home woven, but very similar to those known from old photos.
- The priest's assistants, two or three men from each village. They are necessary because the ritual is a complex one and there are simultaneous tasks to be dealt with. Among the assistants, there may be some women, whose sole task is to wash the sacrificial animal's entrails.
- The village community: usually only a few members of the village community attend the ceremonies. Usually nobody except the people involved attend the ceremony at its early stages. Towards the end of the ceremony, men and women from the village where it is held, along with visitors, may bring gifts, receive bowls of sacrificial porridge directly from the priests, eat them with their kin on the spot and participate in the last prayer.

Previous preparation activities

The preparation activities that are performed in the days before the actual ritual are important from the point of view of the community: the material input for the ceremony is gathered from the communities. Each household gives crops, butter, and money beforehand. There are different traditions in each village about who is to gather those offerings: in some villages, as in Petropavlovka, women are the ones who go from one house to the other; in other villages, as in Bal'zyuga, it is the task of young boys.

The village sacrificial priest gathers all the offerings. Among them, there may be also different kinds of textile offerings: kerchiefs, socks, T-shirts, etc. They may be given beforehand but may also be brought by the community members to the sacral area at the end of the ritual.

The *vös' kuz'o* must also find the ewe or the ewes (for bigger villages) that shall be sacrificed. Either they buy a ewe from a villager, who will be paid after the ceremony; or they buy, with the money gathered beforehand, a ewe from the collective farm. In the first case, the person who provides the ewe must also give a loaf of home-baked bread, into which a coin is placed.

The opening of the ceremony: the *siz'is'kon*

The *siz'is'kon*⁸ is the opening prayer to each ceremony, today as it was at the beginning of the 20th century (Sadikov 2012: 29). It must be performed before the sacrifices, but the modalities of its performance change depending on local traditions.

In the Al'ga group, the *siz'is'kon* is held the evening before the ceremony. It must be made while there is still natural light, meaning that in winter it is held around 4 PM. When the priest and the organisers, with one or two assistants, arrive, they make a fire and put a cauldron on it, where they pour salt with a short prayer; only after that they add water. This is the way in all ritual actions when preparing porridge. When the water boils, they pour semolina into it and prepare, with salt and butter, semolina porridge. As they explain themselves, it is quicker to cook porridge with semolina than with other cereal.

When the semolina is ready, the priest puts a piece of bread into a bowl, sets it on a towel and either birch (in spring) or fir (in winter) branches; standing in front of the cauldron, he makes three circles above the cauldron with the bowl held in his hands. The *vös' kuz'o*, as soon as the priest is finished making circles with the bowl, throws a spoonful of porridge thrice into the fire.⁹ Then, the priest prays alone turning his face towards south and his back to the assistants, standing in front of the simple wooden bench on the southern edge of the sacral area, what we might call 'an altar bench'. There are branches (birch in spring, fir in winter) 'planted' on the other side of the altar bench. These branches symbolically represent sacred trees and are placed behind the bench even

⁸ From *siz'is'kyny* – 'to promise, to devote, to consecrate'.

⁹ We noticed this action in the winter ceremony, while we had not fixed it in the summer rituals. This does not mean it did not take place: there are several actions taking place at the same time, and it is easy, while concentrating on the priest, to miss some other activities.

if the same kind of trees are growing within the sacred area. There are as many branches as priests officiating during the ceremony. While the priests pray, in the *siz'is'kon* as well as in all the other prayers, the assistants kneel behind them and bow, head down to the earth, when he says "*Omin*". Then, all the attending people (and the anthropologists as well) sit around the table in the house and eat the porridge. Everyone keeps their heads covered. Before taking the first mouthful, men hold the spoon with porridge in front of their mouth and say a short prayer in a low voice. Usually, some porridge remains for the next day.

What is important is that the fire is kept burning for the whole night, so that on the following morning it would be possible to light the other sacral fires from it. This requires some attention: thick logs are placed on the fire, and somebody living nearby has to check the fire once or twice during the night.

In Vil'gurt, the *s'izis'kon* is held early in the morning of the proper day of the ritual. Thus, there is no need to maintain the fire over night. The other fires are kindled nearby. But, unlike in Al'ga, they make the porridge with the same mixed crops as the final porridge, and not with semolina, and they also pray holding a bowl of porridge instead of a bowl with bread. There is also no 'altar bench', rather the priest prays in front of 'planted' branches on the southern edge of the sacral area. The rest of the ceremony is roughly the same.

The sacrificial prayer

There are some activities that must be carried out continuously during ceremonial activities in the sacral area. As the fires must be kept burning, some of the assistants deal

with chopping the wood and adding it to the fires all the time. Another overall task, which may be very demanding is fetching water. In Vil'gurt, horse-carts circulated between the village and the sacral area bringing water. In Al'ga and in the area for the *Bagysh vös'*, there is a spring in the forest nearby; in Al'ga, it is situated less than 100 meters down the steep hill; at the Bagysh area it is some 200 metres away from the sacral area. So men must bring it in huge quantities, because the cauldrons are big (100 litres) and all the participants need to wash their hands and all the cooking utensils.

Each village, represented by a priest and his assistants, has to prepare its own fire for the collective ceremony. Usually, there are as many fires as cauldrons, as many cauldrons as sacrificial animals, and as many ewes as priests praying at the ceremony. The priests are not chosen (by the *vös' kuz'o*) according to which village has provided the ewes, but according to other criteria: for example, in June, the village of Bal'zyuga provided a ewe (but we do not know who paid for it), although its young sacrificial priest was associated as assistant but did not publicly pray.

When the fire is big enough, a cauldron is put onto it. The first act is to pour salt into the cauldron with a prayer, as it was done in the *s'izis'kon*, and only afterwards is water added. At the same time, the assistants prepare the ewes for the sacrifice. The ewes must be healthy and have had lambs at least once previously. They are brought forwards. They are 'cleaned': the assistants sprinkle their heads, bodies and legs with water using small bunches of twigs. The priests take a bowl, hold it on a towel with branches, put on it the bread that will be served with the ewes, and prepare to pray. Each priest stays over his cauldron and makes three circles with the bowl, as in the case of the *s'izis'kon*. While the priests pray, the assistants are working in pairs or threes on the sacrificial animals. In

Alga, three men were dealing with the ewe during the prayer: while one assistant holds it down on the ground, the other slits its throat through the sacred twigs with a knife, and the third collects the animal's blood on a spoon and throws it into the fire. He must do it three times. In the Vil'gurt summer prayer there were only two men; then, the one who holds the knife also holds the spoon. When possible, the ritual slaughtering takes place simultaneously for all the ewes.¹⁰ During the prayer, the attendants not involved in ewe slaughtering behave as before: they kneel and bow every time the priest says "*Omin*". At the end of the prayer, the priests each throw three small pieces of bread into the fire.

The meat prayer

There is then quite a long pause in the ritual activities.

The priests may chat with one another or with other people, while some of the assistants are engaged in skinning and cutting the ewes into pieces. When there are women available, they wash the entrails. When no woman is there, the entrails are not cleaned and will later be thrown into the fire. The assistants mark certain pieces of meat with a string, the ones that the priest will use for prayer. The hides of the sacrificial animals are placed in front of the 'altar bench' (Alga) or on sides of the 'altar line' (Vilgurt).

When they have finished, they bring the meat pieces in buckets to the cauldrons. When there are only white ewes to be sacrificed, their meat may be mixed. When there are also black sheep, the procedure is somewhat different: they must be isolated from the others and their meat is not to be mixed with any other. Actually, black sheep are sacrificed to a

¹⁰ In the *Bagysh vös*, they discovered that knives had been forgotten, and they had but one knife, so the ewes were slaughtered one after the other.

different deity, the earth's deity, *Mu-mumy* (Earth Mother). Therefore, a hole is made in the ground where the black ewe's blood flows as an offering to the earth¹¹ (see Sadikov 2008:37). Its flesh and skin are separated from the others and one cauldron is dedicated to this particular ewe.

The meat is put into the boiling water in the cauldrons. And the company is quite free to smoke cigarettes (outside the sacral area), to drink tea and interact until the meat is cooked. When it is well cooked, so that the meat separates easily from the bones, it is extracted from the cauldrons and put into big bowls. Then, the priests have to fish out the parts of the animal they will need for the prayer: the heart, a piece of the liver, a piece of a lower right-side rib, a piece of the right foreleg, the whole head. The ribs and the legs are duly marked with a string by the assistants who skinned the animals, so that the priest recognises the proper ones for his selection.

When the prayer bowl is ready, the priests rotate the bowl clockwise three times above fire (in Vil'gurt, the priest did it four times, maybe because he had black ewe's meat in his hand); they go to their post behind the 'altar' and pray with the meat, the towel and the branches. Behind their backs, there are the fires with the cauldrons, behind the fires the bowls with the meat and behind the meat some seated assistants. The others kneel, still behind, and behave as is proper during the prayer (see before).

When the prayer is finished, the assistants gather around the priests with the meat and eat the first of the prayer meat. Before eating, the men hold the piece of meat in front of their mouth and say a short prayer in a low voice. If there are guests, they are invited to join after the men have eaten. After this eating moment, two activities will be performed

¹¹ This tradition exists in Udmurtia too (Lintrop 1995: 274).

simultaneously. On the one hand some of the assistants deal with the meat and separate the meat from the bones. The bones are collected in buckets, which are given to the first villagers to attend for them to nibble. On the other hand, there is action around the cauldrons: first, broth from all the cauldrons is mixed by the assistants, who pour it with buckets from one cauldron into the others. Then, crops are also properly mixed and poured into the cauldrons. The same is performed for butter (in Vilgurt, the butter is added at the end). We may interpret this mixing as a community strengthening aspect of the ritual. At this stage, the porridge must be continuously mixed, and assistants are now constantly behind the cauldron stirring with long wooden poles.

Then starts the final stage of the ceremony. People have been arriving throughout the previous stage. In winter, they gather in the house and wait until the porridge is ready, nibbling the bones and interacting. Some people have given beforehand, along with the crops, money and butter, textile offerings and bread. Those who afford to come personally bring them. In Vil'gurt, they just put the offerings in specific places: a horizontal pole for the textiles, a low bench in front of the praying priests for the bread. In Al'ga, the tradition is different: the items are given to a *vös'as'*, who blesses them with some words and hangs them on a rope. If the people cannot afford to attend the ceremony, they give these items beforehand to the *vös'kuz'o*.

When the porridge is ready, the meat is poured into the cauldrons. The assistants (and sometimes the priests as well) stir until they decide the porridge is finally ready. Then, they take the cauldrons from the fire (in Al'ga, the cauldrons are covered with wooden lids in order to prevent cooling) and distribute the porridge to the audience and to the assistants. Before eating, the men (at least the priests) say a short prayer in a low voice

while holding the spoon with porridge in front of their mouth. In winter, the audience is sparser: some village women or children (seldom men) attend the last stage and take porridge back home. In spring, it is a joyful moment when families and kin gather on the grass and eat their porridge together.

The closing of the ceremony

The closing of the ceremony consists of the final prayer and the sweeping of the fireplaces.

In Vilgurt, the last prayer is the prayer over the money offerings. Actually, during the ceremony, a plate or a special box is put out, into which people are encouraged to offer money. The money gathered in the villages has also been counted and gathered at that stage. When most people have eaten, including the priests, it is time for the money prayer. In Vilgurt, this was done by the two most important priests – they were kneeling in front of the money box while saying the prayer. Interestingly, this was the only time during the whole ceremony when the priests took off their hats. The last prayer is followed by quite a big audience, which participates in the prayer – it is quite a big village too! – kneeling and bowing. The very end of the ceremony is quite informal – the two head priests sweep the fireplaces while the audience leaves the ceremonial ground, and the other priests and assistants start washing cooking utensils and packing things.

In Al'ga, there is no communal prayer with money. Priests may pray with money at the request of visitors, who donate money and ask for an individual prayer to protect their family, etc. We witnessed only once the head priest praying with his hat on, while the

other priests and assistants were busy with distributing the porridge and cleaning the cooking utensils. The visitors were eating farther from the sacral area and were not active in the prayer activity. Money was washed before being offered, and an upturned water bottle is nailed nearby, allowing people to pour water on the money (in winter money is washed in snow).

In Al'ga the closing of the ceremony is somewhat different than in Vilgurt. While the priests pray holding the branches in their hand, some of the assistants walk in circles around the fireplaces, on which the bones and the entrails have been piled up to burn, they hold branches in their hands and symbolically sweep the fireplaces. They walk clockwise in a circle thrice, and then join the remaining assistants, who kneel and behave as is proper during the prayer.

The sweeping of the fireplaces marks the end of the ceremony. The last activities are to clean what is to be cleaned – the wooden poles, empty cauldrons, etc. Further on, people get ready to go back to the villages. In summer most attended by car. In winter, horse-carts were the more frequent means of transportation. The cauldrons or buckets full of porridge are packed back onto the carts and the ceremony is closed.

The distribution

The inhabitants of the villages, who have contributed to the ceremony, generally do not attend its performance, and this does not seem to be a problem for them. What is important is that they get their part of the sacral porridge: this is their way to participate.

When the sacrificial priest comes ‘home’, he distributes back to the villagers the output of the ceremony: it is the reverse operation, symmetrical to the one before the ritual.

The villages are divided into areas and the porridge is distributed into each area. So, in all the families, people will eat the sacral porridge, showing their particular attitude towards this meal by covering their heads while eating. As Minniyahmetova (1995: 333) says: “It is believed that magic virtues of the food enter everyone who eats them“.

This is a general description of the collective rituals performed by the Bashkortostan Udmurts in the Tatyshly district. We consider the local differences and the repetitive pattern of these rituals. We consider that attending four such rituals performed by two different groups gives us enough justification to consider that if some action has been performed in the same way every time, we may consider it is canonical.

We have found it extremely interesting to notice the differences between the ritual in two village groups that are very close to one another and that belong to the same wider region. There are other regions in Bashkortostan where the Udmurt dwell and it shall certainly be useful to attend ceremonies in those regions too, in order to achieve a cartography of the rituals that are fully alive today in the countryside.

The ceremony called *keremet* (or *lud*)¹²

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Among the best-known Udmurt religious ceremonies, there is the one called, depending on the regions, *Lud* or *Keremet*. This name, which is present in the whole of the Volga region, had Turkic origins and expresses both the ritual itself, the place, and the deity to whom it is dedicated. It is clearly separated from other ceremonies, for it takes place in a particular place, under the leadership of a particular person and, originally, it is addressed to a particular deity. It even appears in the history of Udmurt literature as the incarnation of Udmurt traditional religious practice: in a famous poem written in a strongly antireligious period, the great Udmurt poet Kuzebaj Gerd (1898-1937) recalls the mysterious atmosphere of the sacred grove:

Синэз вореkjятйсь	Making the eyes shine
Йырез учкыса поромытйсь	Making the head spin while looking
Туж паськыт лудын—	On a very wide meadow -
Бусын,	On a field
Огназ куашетыса,	Alone, rustling,
Оло кулректыса, оли бӧрдыса,	Perhaps suffering, perhaps weeping,
Оло мӧзмыса,	Perhaps regretting
Оло вашкала даурез тодаз вайыса	Perhaps recalling old times,
Оло ас понназ	Perhaps by itself,
Кырзаса,	Singing,
Чылкак огназ	Completely alone,
Керемет сылмэ лулзылэ.	The grove stands and sighs.
Пересь пужымъёслэн	Of the old pines

¹² This article has been published in French and translated by Eva Toulouze: Toulouze, Eva (2017). La cérémonie appelée *keremet* (ou *lud*) chez les Oudmourtes du Bachkortostan. *Études finno-ougriennes*, 48, 277–290

Пöронлы улвайзы куасьмыллям,
Кызёслэн
Моторесь, жыжитесь,
Йырёссы,
Бабылэс йырсиоссы
Пурысь таллям.
Кудйз эшпёсы
Арлыдлы чидатэк
Пограллям,
Музьеме выдаса
Кудйллям, сисьмиллям.
Сыло пересьёс, каллен чашето –
Валантэм выжыкыльтёс вераса
Куашето ...

II
Ортчем,
Вунэм арьёсы,
Вашкала дырьёсы,
Удмуртьёс
Кыће татчы лыктыса
Люкаськозы.
Курадзонзэс вераса
Бөрдозы вал ...
Соку вöсьлэн
Бадзымэсь, пиштйсь
Тылёсыз,
Курадзись калыклэн
Тыл кадь сюлэмез суйсь
Кылёсыз,
Востэм нылтьёслэн кырдзантьёссы
Шур жингыртэм кадь,
Жингырес куараоссы,
Туж кыдёке вöлдйськыса,
Шуккыськыса,
Чукна шунды жужатозь
Кылйськозы вал ...

III
Табере Кереметэз
Вунэтизы,

The branches have dried and darkened,
Of the firs
Handsome and high, et superbes,
The heads,
Their curly hair
Turns grey.
Some friends
Conceding to old age,
Have fallen,
They lied on the ground,
They have died, they are rotting.
The elder stay, conversing softly,
Telling non understandable tales
They rustle...

II
In the past,
In forgottted years,
In ancient times,
The Udmurts
Coming here
Gathered.
Speaking their concerns,
They wept...
Then of the prayer
The big, shining
Flames,
Of the suffering people
Like a flame that burns their heart
The words,
The modest songs of the girls
Like the sound of the river
Their echoing voices
Spreading very far,
Hitting,
In the morning until sunrise
One could hear them yet ...

III
Now the grova
Has been forgotten

Огназэ куштйзы.	Alone, it has been abandoned.
Уноез ,	Many,
Солэсь кышкаса,	Are afraid of him,
Татын периос, убирёс	Here devils, vampires
Каръяско шуыса,	Nest, they say,
Кӧшкеманы кутскызы.	People started to fear.
Огназ	Alone
Уй но нунал Керемет сылэ	Night and day, the grove stands
Куашетыса.	Grumbling
Неноку но быронтэм,	Never finished,
Туж чебересь вашкала выжыкыльёс	The most beautiful ancient tales
Ас понназ	By themselves
Дугдылытэк вераса.	Telling without end.

While Ermakov thinks that this poem had been written by Gerd in 1916 and translated by him into Russian in 1919, Šklyayev is convinced that its writing took all this time (Šklyayev 1982, p. 121). In the Soviet context, this discussion was relevant: was there, or not, a reference to the October Revolution? For us this question has lost its topicality... But this poem, anyhow, followed the poet all his life long: it is one of the texts he sent to Maksim Gor'kiy. It has been found in the latter's archives. I think we may read, between the lines an approach of life that is more fundamental and more structuring than all the ideological justifications we may find.

Each commentator, depending on the periods, presents his/her own vision of the author of Keremet. His Soviet critiques, like Arkadiy Klabukov, since the 1930s and later, emphasised the poet's "regret of the past" (quoted by Ermakov 1987, p. 31). Ermakov sees there an allegory of the Udmurt's history and of the awakening of their awareness (Ermakov 1987, p. 30-31). For Zoya Bogomolova, it reflects the author's difficult quest and expresses "some melancholy while thinking of a long lost past" (Bogomolova 1981, p. 47-48). Uvarov expresses the same idea when he mentions the pain about a heroic past

now lost once and for all” (Uvarov 1982, p. 29). For Domokos, this poem reflects Gerd’s reflexions and his understanding of the past and of the language question:

“Gerd does not attempt to save [these phenomena from the past], he preserves their memory for the upcoming generations” (Domokos 1975, p. 270)

Firstly we must draw attention to the melancholic, mournful atmosphere that dominates this poem. This explains the impression of regret that most critiques have emphasised. For us, what characterises *Keremet*, is the dual dimension of Gerd’s feelings towards Udmurt tradition that is here embodied by the beliefs: he is happy that his people is stepping on the road of progress, but his satisfaction is mixed with nostalgia for a past that is becoming part of heritage. Ideologically, Gerd is undoubtedly, as his time requests, a positivist. He is besotted by progress, as all his writings about school, knowledge, technique, industry reveal. But instinctively, not even formulating it to himself, he has questions, and he acknowledges the possibility of other values. In this he is dangerously modern. And we may understand that he worried his contemporaries.

The end of the poem refers to the desertion of these sacred places. However, even today, in some places, *keremet* rituals are alive and they are held regularly. Even, in some places, they have been regularly held since Soviet times.

On the basis of our fieldwork in Bashkortostan in 2015, we shall present here two examples of these ceremonies in very different contexts. The first example is the case of a ceremony that has known total continuity between the pre-Soviet period and today. We attended the November 2015 edition, and it is the one we shall report here about. The second example is more complex: it happens in the framework of ritual revitalisation, in which when the villagers decided to hold their annual Spring ceremony, they have

whosen to do so in the *Keremet* sacred place, conserving all the characteristics of this ceremony, even if in other villages this ceremony is held in other places and they have lost all related to *keremet*.

November 7th, 2015, Votskaya Oš'ya

In Spring 2015, Eva visited with her colleague from Ufa Ranus Sadikov the village of Votskaya Oš'ya, in the Yanaul district of Bashkortostan to discover what rituals are held there nowadays. We met the sacrificial priest Arkadiy, who welcomed us very kindly. He showed us three locations: the first he called *Lud* it is a grove with high firs, surrounded by a wood fence. He told us that every year they hold here two ceremonies. The next one was to be on November 7th, and he insistedly invited us. November 7th is a Saturday: the other ceremonies take place in general n Fridays, sometimes on Sunday, but never on Saturday. This one takes the opposite stance.

Then he showed us the place where the hold their spring rituals, *busy vös'*, “the prayer on the field”. It was an open space, not fenced, where the sacrificial priest had planted birches so that he would not have to bring there branches every year. Finally, he showed us the graveyard where some ceremonies take place that are not practiced elsewhere: the commemoration of the dead father and the deat mother five years later, by sacrificing respectively a horse and a cow. Actually, today the horse sacrifice has been replaced by the slaughtering of two geese. Still we may see in the graveyard hoses' and cow's skulls

hanging from the trees, as well as bags with the legs of the geese. Actually, this ritual is quite similar to the Southern Udmurt *yyr-pyd-s'oton* (see Anisimov 2012).

We decided to answer the invitation and to go. Eva was aware that *keremet* is an all-male ceremony and she asked the vös'as' whether it would be right for her to attend. She had the experience of the Lud ceremony in the Udmurt village of Kuz'bayevo where women are not welcome. However, she was answered that she would be most welcome and that “they would bring her on the spot with a tractor”. With such a promise, how could she resist...

This is how on November 7th, 2015, we¹³ attended the ceremony *Keremet* in Votskaya Osh'ya which we filmed in video in order to keep memory of the details.

First, we need to clarify that the priest acting for *keremet* is not the same as the one who leads all the other ceremonies. While Arkadiy was very active in all the preparation, he was not at the centre. The particular sacrificial priest for the *keremet* ceremonies is called *lud utis'*, the “warden of Lud”, and here it was Rafik Mikhailovich Kisametov (born 1973) who officiates since 1995, as did his grand-father Sadreddin Ibraev.

The sacrificed animal here is a goose. Unlike what happens with other ceremonies, the animal is not bought from one of the villagers. It is offered by someone. There is always somebody wishing to ensure their well-being and their luck for the following year. If there wouldn't be anybody ready to give a sacrifice, the ceremony would go on without bloodshed.

Arkadiy had the goose. At around ten in the morning, a tractor left from his home, with Arkadiy, his wife Nyura, Rafik and his wife, as well as the paraphernalia needed for the

¹³ Ranus Sadikov, Liivo Niglas and Eva Toulouze.

ritual. The weather was nice, but with a temperature of -7. That meant that roads and fields were hard and that was not difficult, even for ordinary cars, to reach the sacred place.

Between our former visit in June and November, there had been work done. The most used parts of the fence had been renewed and replaced by a metal fence, painted in green.

In the first part, the women, the two wives, dealt with the practical part. They prepared the cauldron and helped lighting a fire. The tractor had brought some water, but the men who came, less than a dozen, went regularly to a river nearby fetching water. On the other side of the grove there was also a spring, but the river was closer and therefore had been chosen. Near the fire there was a teapot and a smaller cauldron, in order to have continuously boiling water and tea for the participants.

Very quickly the goose was slaughtered, by one of the men, while another held it. The blood was gathered in a cup.

Now the women had their main task: cleaning the goose. It had first to be plucked – the feathers were burnt in the fire under the cauldron. The goose had been staying in hot water, which should facilitate the plucking. The fluff was put in a sack, which they would burn later, on a fire meant to heat the participants. When the goose was cleaned and prepared, it was thrown in boiling water as well as part of the offal, which had been cleaned. On the table by the fence, other food accumulated: the goose's blood, but also flatbreads called *kuar-n'an*, the characteristic food for *keremet*. Also, Arkadiy had poured rice in a basin with water. On the same table.

When they had emptied and cleaned the goose, the women's tasks were over. They had nothing more to do and they went home. Let us add that both were elder women and nearly their fertile age was over.

This ceremony, as said, is utterly masculine. Only four women attended: the wives of the sacrificial priests, who were there as helpers, a young journalist of the Udmurt television, and Eva. The latter two women remained until the end of the ceremony, but they were discreet about their presence and there was no reluctance expressed or even shown by the men, and they felt indeed welcome.

Another difference between this ceremony and the others we have attended is the restriction of the access to the fenced space. Before the beginning, while the table within the fenced space was covered with a wax cloth, one of the women entered and corrected its position. But she left at once and no other women ever entered it. Except for the cameramen – Liivo Niglas and a cameraman from the Udmurt television – only Rafik entered. Nobody reacted to the cameramen entering. But no other man penetrated.

Within this closed sacred space there was a table, and in front of it a fire had been lit with embers taken from the main fireplace, outside, and cared for by Rafik.

As it ordinarily happens in sacrificial ceremonies, the moments where nothing happens are long: While the goose is being cleaned and cooked. Arkadiy commented joking that the gas pipes were not far and that to take gas from them would quicken the process...

While nothing happens, some of the men cut wood, which is permanently needed, others fetch water. More important these are moments of conversation between them. They gather around the second fire, which blazes strongly (so strongly that the Udmurt

journalist burned her trousers) and truly heats the atmosphere. Our observations confirm the importance of these moments to strengthen male socialisation.

When the goose is cooked, it is taken out of the broth, put in a basin on the table and covered with a towel. The water in which the rice was is thrown away and the rice is poured in the broth. Now we must wait for it to cook. This process is also different from the other ceremonies we have attended: the quantity of water needed to cook the goose is much less than the one needed for the sheep, and the quantity of rice is also less than usually, as in big sacrificial ceremonies, cereals come by sacks. Cooking rice is physically less hard on the helpers. Indeed, a swich has been cleaned to mix the porridge, but is is very little used. Also, the participants are fewer: no more than thirty men.

During the waiting, cars arrive with new men who join the ones that are already on the spot and interact with them. While the rice cooks, Arkadiy cuts the goose: he sets aside the biggest bones, burns them under the cauldron and cuts the bits of meat. Finally, the rice is declared ready.

The Rafik puts on his *short-derem*, the striped smock of the sacrificial priest and prepares the bowl with which he is going to pray: he pours a ladle of rice, and chooses in the basin the parts of the goose he needs, the head and the legs. He puts the basin on a towel. At the same time most of the men prepare the place where they ere going to kneel. Some for example take from the tractor an old car seat, where finally three men will comfortably kneel. The others form a half-cirle in front of the fence and kneel on spruce branches. Rafik, outside the fence has his back to the audience and prays. He prays silently or more precisely he whispers his prayer so that nobody would hear what he saysin *keremet* ceremonies this is the rule. The text remains secret. The prayer is very

short: Rafik bends thrice, and this is the sign for the audience to put their heads on the ground. During this prayer, Arkadiy slowly poured the blood of the goose into the fire. After the prayer is concluded, Rafit makes a sign to the men to approach the cauldron and pours each one a ladle of rice. The men go back at their places. We won't mix with them, but Arkadiy gives us each a plate with rice. Then Rafik goes to the men with the basin and offers each one meat. At the end, he comes to us, we are a little aside. Arkadiy puts in our rice plate a bit of meat, carefully avoiding giving us bits with bones. Those who have bones throw them into the fire under the cauldron.

Other foods are also circulating. An elder man arrived with his car before the prayer, with a quantity of *taban'* (dough pancakes) and *shangi* (breads covered with mashed potatoes) and distributed them. This person is easy to pick out in the mass: he was dressed in town costume with a town overcoat. Moreover, his attitude and his way of talking to the sacrificial priests revealed that he was accustomed to command and to be obeyed. Without any information about him, it was crystal clear he was one of the "bosses". Later we were told that although he is now retired, he was long the head of the "mobile repair brigade", in charge of roads and transportation in the close town of Yanaul, where he lived although he was from this village. Therefore, he helped to find finances to repara the fence and to change the one around the sacred place before this ceremony. A father of five, he told us that at the family prayer for Easter, *byddzh'ynnal* he prayed himself and that he always went back to the village for religious ceremonies.

Once the rice and the meat eaten, all the attendants went to the tabkle, on the edge of which there was a basin with warm water and a towel. Each person put in a bowl coins, preferably "white" coin, or paper money, after having washed them and put them on the

towel: one must not give one's offering so that coins or paper would be directly in contact with the skin, a piece of fabric is needed to hold it. We also participated, but only after all the men had given their offerings.

We were now close to the end. Rafik, took once more a bowl and a towel, but now there were *kuar-n'an* in the bowl, and he entered the fenced area. He prayed in front of the table, so tht nobody could hear what he said, but all could see whan he bent and imitated him. Then, not leaving the fenced area, the turned towards the entrance and peayed again. Then he wento out and passedni front of all the attendants, so that everyone took a bit of flatbreads. We were not forgotten.

As we could not hear the prayers, we did not know whom they were addressed. Nevertheless, we were told that the addressee was the same god Inmar, to whom are addressed all the other ceremonies. When they eat their first mouthful, all who take part in the ritual and have their head covered, say in their heart of hearts a prayer to Inmar.

The men stand up, finish their plate, and scatter, some on foot, some take their cars. Arkadiy loads the tractor, and they go back, he and Rafik, to the village. The ceremony is now finished indeed.

The Aribash ceremony

As the first reports have shown we started in 2013 documenting Udmurt animist ceremonies in Bashkortostan. In 2013 and 2014 we succeeded in documenting two village ceremonies (Bal'zuga, Urazgil'de) in the same religious subgroup. In 2015, we

decided to concentrate of the village of d'Aribash. Thanks to Anna Baydullina, we¹⁴ had met in 2014 Liliya Garayeva, a very active woman, wife of the village's sacrificial priest, Aleksey, and she had shown us the sacred places. There were two of them in the village: one on the river shore, close to the village, that was not used anymore, and another, in a superbe position, at the top of a hill. We knew that the ceremonies in the village had been interrupted and had started again some years before. Clearly Liliya was at least partly at the initiative. She was born in another village, Bigineevo, in the same district, and in a family very involved in traditional religious practice. She had not been taught all the details of the sacrificial ceremonies (as she was female, while these ceremonies are male domain), but she had attended ceremonies and she felt the need to reproduce them in the village where she now lived. Moreover, her husband had some childhood remembrances of the ritual. We wanted to document how they had revitalised this ceremony in Aribash.

This time, we¹⁵ arrived in Aribash in the morning, and we immediately noticed that she had prepared a huge quantity of flatbreads *kuar-n'an'*. We had never seen in the other places this food, and we knew that *kuar-n'an'* were an integral part of *keremet*. Liliya and her husband Aleksej loaded on their car a cauldron and a tripod. They started, and we followed them, two cars, Ranus Sadikov and Eva, and in the other car a group of the Udmurt television – the cameraman Vasiliy Khokhryakov, the cameraman and the driver) and stopped in front of a house. There we unloaded and waited for a tractor. There was a small gathering, the helpers with their wives, another sacrificial priest with

¹⁴ Liivo Niglas, Laur Vallikivi et and Toulouze.

¹⁵ Ranus Sadikov and Eva Toulouze.

his wife. Along the helpers there were two teenager boys. The the tractor arrived, everybody climbed with the paraphernalia. The tractor stopped twice: they took two rams from village housesteads, one white and one black. The sex of the animals confirmed that we were about to attend a ceremony with at least some central elements of *keremet*.

It had recently rained, and the road was muddy. Therefore, the cars and the tractor could not arrive to the top of the hill. We had to finish on foot, so that the rams, the water, and the wood had to be transported on foot up hill, up to the fence.

At the entrance of the fenced area, immediately the women fixed to the fence a bottle of water upside down, so that the participants would have the possibility of washing first their hands and later money offerings. Then started an intensive moment of work. The place had to be prepared. First, the men had to clean a part of the space that was covered in bushes¹⁶ : the men and the teenagers did this work, and the boys called two other boys for help, these other teenagers were closeby with the village herds¹⁷. At the same time some helpers lighted the fires and put the cauldrons on them. A smaller cauldron was also set aside, clearly to heat tea water and food thr the workers. The women went we two buckets on their shoulders to fetch water at the river, far under the hill. It is a huge effort to transport all that is needed up to the hill, without any proper road, especially wood for the fires and water for the cauldrons. The ones who had the task to observe

¹⁶ Here we must emphasise the transgression of a rule in the *keremet* sacred places: in principle man is not allowed to touch anything living, the greenery this is not to be touched. But in this case, the prohibition was not taken into account.

¹⁷ Indeed, in this region's villages, the practice is that the village community establishes a calendar in which each village dweller at his/her turn, keeps the village herd. It is composed by the cows and the sheep af each household. They are gathered in the morning, led to a pasture, and brought back home in the evening. These two teenagers were downhill with the village herd.

would meanwhile enjoy bread just warm from the oven with butter just churned accompanied by hom made *kvas* Liliya had prepared for her guests.

In addition to Eva there were three women, all elder women past the fertility age, all wives of the men officiating: Liliya, Rima and Taslima. They had all visibly the experience of working together in these ceremonies.

During this time, Liliya's and Aleksey's son, Roman, who the previous year replaced his hospitalised father, sharpened his knife.

What impressed us, in general, in this preparation, is the active role played by the women, more than in other places. When they were in the fenced area, they permanently washed dishes with water from a special cauldron for this aim. This role of women is certainly related to Liliya's personality, who has astarted the revitalisation process in the village. At the same time, Aleksey watched that his wife would keep her activity within acceptable boundaries. We heard him saying to his wife, who reminded him some task "Don't give me orders!".

Then the assistants cut the ram's throats. In both cases, Roman filled the spoon with the first blood and threw it into the fire. He kept the blood of the two rams well separated and poured it into two different fires. The explanation is that the white ram is dedicated to the heavenly god, Inmar; while the black one is dedicated to *My Kylchin*, the deity of the earth. At the same time Aleksey uttered the same prayer. His wife had dressed him with the white smock used as a *short derem*. But while he prayed, only two wmen, the sacrificial priests' wives, knelt behind him, none of the men participated. Aleksey uttered his prayer very low, so that nobody could follow it. We thought in June that this was probably a personal peculiarity of Aleksey's – was he shy? Or did he lack

experience? – now we wonder, after Votskaya Osh'ya' *keremet* (see above), whether it is not another distinctive feature of the *keremet* ceremony.

After that, the men took over the skinning and butchering, and that went quickly. The women took on the washing of the offal. They went down to the river, in order to use running water. This was a long process. The teenagers, meanwhile, brought back water from the river, but also took advantage of the time to swim in a space they had cleaned in order not to be disturbed by floating branches.

The meat and the washed offal, when cooked, were taken off the broth and the cereals, which had been covered with water and cleaned, were poured into the broth to prepare the sacrificial porridge. The cooking took time, because among the cereals there was pearl barley which is the longest to soften. Meanwhile it rained a bit, and time was spent with conversation. At some moment some women felt the need to go to the toilet. Liliya took the initiative and led them quite far from the hill. She knew a place in which the sacred place “would not see” the offensive action. This is a general rule: this kind of business had to be done in a place hidden from the sacred place/

When the meat was ready, Aleksey and the women separated the meat from the bones: they throw the bones into the fire, as well as the testicles and the upper part of the skull, while the lower part had been tied so that the bones would not scatter. The two heads were set apart, so that Aleksey and his colleague would be able to hold them while praying. At the same time, the women prepared in the small cauldron a soup with pasta and meat in order to feed all the staff in the fenced area.

Once the porridge was ready, the group split. The teenagers went back by car to the village and there did something we did not see in other villages, although it is very

traditional activity. Thet walked in the central street and shouted: “*Vös’e mynele!!!*”, which means “Go to the ceremony”. Thus, they informed the village that the porridge was ready and that the ceremony was about to begin. Here what is interesting is that Aleksey remember it from his childhood and that this same activity is mentioned by Finnish ethnographer Yrjö Wichmann in 1895 during the month he spent in another village, Bol’shoy Kachak now in the Kaltasy district, exactly with the same words we have heard in Aribash in 2015 (Sadikov Hafeez 2014??). Clearly this tradition was lost, and it was taken over in this village merely relying on the personal remembrances of the sacrificial priest (who did not know about Wichmann’s observation).

In the fenced area, the waiting went on. Their practice is such that the men arrive in their cars, they park at around 50 metres from the sacred area, they gather, they converse, play cards, socialise. Only men take part in this ceremony, which is but another characteristic feature of *keremet*. No woman is expected; the men bring back home the porridge, which they will share with their families. Everybody waits for the porridge to be ready: the men watch from far away Aleksey, who will give them a sign, when he shall expect them. Meanwhile the women put on a table near the entrance the breads, the pancakes as well as a dish for the coins, preferably “white”.

When Aleksey makes the sign, the gathered men climbed in single file to the fenced area. They had head and arms covered: it was important, according to Liliya, that when they enter, their arms would be covered. After having washed the coins, they put them in the dish, and they put on the table the bread they have brought, before going by the back fence and kneel with the others. Now as before, it was impossible to hear Aleksey’s text, but he only bent once. He probably had in his hand a bowl with the sheep’s head

(selfunderstandably, in these moments, Eva attempts to avoid drawing attention to herself, and does not get close to the sacred actions, especially if it is a male ritual, she trusts her male companions).

Then the porridge was distributed, by the women, and after everybody had ended eating, Aleksey and his companion prayed one last time, now also bowing only once. Afterwards each one took porridge to bring home and left.

Finally, all, men, and women alike, cleaned and tidied the place. Then they loaded all on the tractor and went back to their cars. Liliya and Aleksey put in their own the cauldron where porridge remained: indeed, they were expecting that some persons would come to them to bring back porridge to their families. We saw two neighbours: one of the women was not Udmurt, but she had supported financially the ceremony and explained that there is only one God and it is good for the village that the Udmurt pray him their way.

Thus this village ceremony has its own peculiar features: within the revitalisation process, the couple Liliya-Aleksey decided to integrate into the Spring cycle a ceremony that elsewhere is not part of it. It answers the general features of the *keremet*, takes place in a space traditionally reserved to *keremet*, but it is included in a different series. It seems that place has an agency of its own.

According to Liliya, they intend to revive the ceremonies held in the other space. GThey have been delayed by a trivial occurrence: they never started thinking about it soon enough. Indeed, the practice requires the sacrifice of a goose. But the tradition of keeping geese all the year long has been interrupted. The goslings are bought soon after birth from the incubator, and they are slaughtered in Autumn, and the meat is frozen. So in Spring, when the time comes to sacrifice a goose, there are no adult birds available.

They have decided to keep one family over winter, in order to have a bird to sacrifice in spring. By 2020, the ceremony has already been held, and they have started to alternate the places in Spring.

The Autumn ceremony¹⁸¹⁹

Eva Toulouze

This article concentrates on one ritual of the Eastern Udmurt, the Autumn ceremony (*siz'yl kuris'kon*). This kind of intimate ritual are either personal (event in people's life : death, birth, going to the army, wedding) either determined by the ritual calendar. The autumn ceremony is among the latter. Most of these rituals have a common goal: to guarantee the community or some part of it well being and security. While we could infer from the moment it is held, the autumn ceremony does not express any particular gratitude for the harvest. But it is certainly a rite de passage, a ritual transition from a period to another, from the Summer period to the Winter period (Minnijahmetova 2000, pp. 69–71), from one half-year (*palar*) to the other. The Udmurt calendar is full of these rituals aimed at makin sure the group's prosperity. This particular ritual is performed within the patrilineal group of close kin.

In October 2017, our research group was composed by four persons: Liivo Niglas, me, Nikolai Anisimov and Denis Kornilov, the two latter being Udmurts, but from different

¹⁸ This article has been written with the support of Eesti Teadusagentuur (PUT 590 „Tänapäevane soome-ugri animism: funktsioonid ja sotsiaalne kontekst“, Contemporary finno-ugric animism: functions and social context 2015–2018).

¹⁹ This article has been published in Estonian and translated by Eva Toulouze: Toulouze, Eva (2019). Kaamataguste udmurtide sügispalvused: rituaali etnograafiline kirjeldus välitööde põhjal. *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi aastaraamat*, 102–115.

ethnographic groups, and they do fieldwork in Udmurt. Liivo Niglas and myself, we do not master Udmurt and thus we use in fieldwork Russian. All the locals know Russian, for it is the language in which they have received education, but the level of knowledge varies widely, and many, especially elder female villagers, use Russian little and do not feel comfortable with it (Toulouze 2014; 2017). On the reverse men and younger folks usually speak well. We formed two teams (Toulouze-Kornilov, Anisimov-Niglas), in both of which one filmmaker and one Udmurt language speaker. This allowed us to discover the same ritual in different villages and in different families, and to record these ceremonies.

In this article I give an overview of this ritual, as it takes place in three families in three villages of the Eastern Udmurt. As it is impossible to put into words the whole experience, I just comment upon the elements that, relying on my previous experience seem to me relevant.

Autumn rituals

All the Autumn rituals are performed in a smaller circle of kin. There are two main rituals in this season: the autumn ceremony (*siz'yl kuris'kon*) and the Autumn commemoration of the dead (*siz'yl kis'ton*). The autumn ceremony takes place at the beginning of October. It must be performed before October 14th, so that it does not interfere with the ritual for the dead. The second, the commemoration of the dead, takes place at the beginning of November. In 2017, we decided to attend the first, and here I report about the rituals I attended with Denis Kornilov.

The villages in which we attended these rituals are well-known to us: we have several times been there since 2017, and the people know and expect us. We decided to attend both families from the Alga group and the Vil'gurt group. Very little has been so far written about this ritual, usually in literature it is mentioned, but not analysed. Vladimir Vladyykin, a famous researcher on Udmurt religion just mentions it in his book²⁰ without any comment (1994, pp. 226, 247). Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (2003) does not mention them at all in her thesis (2003), but in a previous book (2000). There are some references to it in Ranus Sadikov's doctoral dissertation: he observes that this ritual is the analogous ritual to the Spring Great Day, corresponding to the Great Day, which is the equivalent of Easter for the Christians (Sadikov 2011, p.209). He insists that it is a family ritual, where only family members are allowed (*idem*, pp.307–308). He describes its proceedings in the Buy Udmurt²¹, where every head of the household prays in his courtyard, and where guests were invited from other villages (*idem*, p.327). According to Uno Holmberg data, at the beginning of the 20th century the Buy Udmurt sacrificed the deity of the earth, *Mu Kylchin*, a black bull (*idem*, p.307). But today, nobody knows anything about that custom. A preliminary investigation allowed us to ascertain that in many places the Autumn ceremony is performed, but not everywhere. For example, an informant from the Ermekeyevo district confirmed us that there it is not performed at all. According to our information, neither is it in the Yanaul district. In the Udmurt village of Asavka, from the Baltachevo district, it is alive, as it is in most villages of the Tatyshly district.

²⁰ The first extensive book about Udmurt religion.

²¹ Buy Udmurtid on üks Kaama-taguste Udmurtide etnograafilisi alarühmi. Nimetatud Buy jõe järgi.

Today, the form of this ritual, at least where we attended, a gathering in one home. We were told that earlier (at an unprecised period); the kin went from house to house, as they do for the Great day (ritual *vös' nerge*) in Varkled-Bodja (Tatarstan) (see Toulouze, Anisimov 2018), but the participants in the ritual know about this only by hearsay, not by their own experience. The gathering in one home as form of the ritual is also mentioned by Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (1996).

The visited families

As said, we attended this ritual in three families. The Garifanovs are the first family Denis Kornilov (with the camera) and Eva visited, in the village of Nizhnebaltachevo. I had already been twice in this family. With he head of the household, Garifulla Garifanov²², called by all Farhulla *agay*²³, I am acquainted since 2013. He is th man who organises both his village's and the Alga group of village's collective ceremonies. Our relations have become more and more warm along the years. In Summer 2016 he invied me and the research group at his place, and thus we became acquainted with his wife Hafıza and with one of his sons, who lives in the Perm' region in Chernishka, a town where many Udmurts, also Russified Udmurts live.

The second family we visited, the Nurtdinovs, live in Urazgil'de (Vikogurt in Udmurt). I was slightly acquainted with the housewife, Madina, because she had participated to singing gatherings in the same village at our colleague Anna Baydullina, who lives in the

²² Here and below, the Turkic influence appears clearly in the onomastics.

²³ Agay is an Udmurt kinship perm, which means both elder brother and uncle. It is also used as a title of respect for an elder man.

same village. But I had never met the head of the household, Saljahudtin Nurtidinov. However they welcomed us. In the two families, the elder generation are retired persons about 70 years old.

The third family, the Samigulovs, were the family where we lived. Irina and Mars Samigulov live in Novyye Tatyshly (Udmurt Vil'gurt) with their younger son, who is still a child. The other three children are grown up and live in different cities (Perm', Izhevsk, Ufa). About the wife, Irina, who is not yet 50, we have a whole article in this collection (see pp.). Her husband is slightly older and teaches driving in the administrative centre. Their family is circa twenty years younger than the previous ones, and they have no close kin in their village. They perform the Autumn ceremony, but as they all work, they do it always hurrying, at the last moment. In all the visited families Udmurt is the communication language within the families. But they all speak also very good Russian, which shows, for the elder people, that before retiring they had a relevant position.

What happens in the Autumn ceremony at the beginning of the 21st century?

Relying on our observations, we may distinguish three stages in the ritual: coming together, praying, and banqueting. Coming together: the ritual takes place at one home, where the close kin gather, pray, eat together the ritual porridge and other foods, and converse. All attempt to attend. This is one of the rituals to consolidate kinship. Praying: the head of the household prays aloud, holding in his hands a bowl of his wife's prepared porridge. Usually he prays not indoors, in the yard or in the veranda. Banqueting: all sit

around the table, wome and men alike have their heads covered, they taste the consecrated porridge and any kind of good things and converse. Let us have a look at each activity more in detail.

Coming together

The Autumn ceremony is a family ritual, but it goes far beyond the boundaries of the family, at leas in the narrow sense of the word. Usually, the guests are the closest circle: the siblings, their spouses and children and their families. Everyone attempt to be present. But when the ceremony happens to by during the week, the children who work far away wannot come. It happened so at the Garifanovis and Nurtdinovs, where the elder generation was there, as well as their sons' wives and the children. But the sons were at work, except those who worked in the willage and coud take some time away from work. The ceremonies were sligfhtly different also, but the two first were closer to one another. There were many guests belonging to different generations. At the Nurtdinovs there were also small grandchildren. The tables were covered with many dishes, and the event took place during the day. In both families the housewives were dressed in folk outfits, nicely decorated. In the kitchen, the porridge was being prepared. Porridge is by the eastern Udmurt, whose society is yet agrarian, the main ritual food, and cooking porridge is the central ritual activity in collective rituals. Porridge is made fraom different cereal, except buckwheat and peas. Buckwheat is excluded because it is dark, while the prayers go to the "white" god. On the other hand, peas are spheric and they reming hail, so their use may provoke hail. Often porridge is cooked with different cereals, also (as in this case) rice of semolina, especially when hurrying. Sometimes

meat is added to the porridge, sometimes it is not. In this case, the housewives filled a sheet-metal basin with porridge without meat but prepared in goose or beef broth. They made a hole in the middle of the rice, which was filled at the Garifanov's house with melted butter, at the Nurtdinov's with oil or a mixture. So, in the centre, was formed a nice circle remembering the sun. At the Samigulovs there was no gathering at all. We may suppose that the ritual was more solemn in previous years, for there were four children in the house, but only one, the youngest, Emil, is there now. The elder generation was absent: Mars' mother and Irina' father lived with the family, but they were visiting kin and friends in other villages. Irina works full time; she prepared the ritual porridge, and her husband came home earlier in order to have a proper ceremony.

Praying

Praying is a male task, and in all the families the men did it. They were dressed however in different ways.

Farhulla agay dressed in the sacrificial priest's garb. Traditionally the sacrificial priest wore a garb called *short-derem*, sewn in homewoven whitish fabric with black vertical stripes. But as it is also a funeral garb, and at some moment no new *short-derem* were made any more, there are fewer and fewer left. In the Tatyshly district, I have seen only two sacrificial priests who use the old original *short-derem*. The others have solved the problem in different ways. Teised on sakraalse riietumise küsimuse lahendamud erinevalt. Often it is replaced by a simple medical or ordinary white smock. In Farkhulla's village, the main sacrificial priest, Evgeniy Adullin, ordered garbs in a

commercial fabric that reminded the one of the traditional *short-derem*, but with wider stripes. There are one dozen or more of these garbs, prepared in Autumn 2013 at the cooperative *Rassvet*²⁴, whose head bookkeeper is the sacrificial priest Adullin. At the collective rituals he organises the does not dress in them, because he does not act there as a sacrificial priest? But in this ritual, he is in the position of the one who officiates, and he wears it. Part of the costume is the belt, which by the Eastern Udmurt is a long, embroidered towel tied at the waist.

Except in one case (when the prayer is about monetary offerings), the sacrificial priest of the praying man's head must be covered. Usually, the headgear is in light colors, like the rest of the outfit. Often the priests use a cap, but Farkhulla covered his head with a hat.

There is not much to say about footgear, they are not different than the ones used in everyday life. But one informant²⁵ argued that it is better that the prayer would be recited in the yard, and in bark shoes, so that the contact with earth would be as close as possible. But it seems nowadays nobody takes this rule seriously.

In the Nurtdinov family the head of the household had no distinctive garb to show status. He just girded his waists with an old, chequered belt, which he fixed with a safety pin. As a headgear, he had a *tyubeteika*. At the Samigulov's, did not put anything special, he just put a white cap on his head.

At the Garifanov's, in the kitchen, Khafiza put the porridge in a basin and covered it with a towel, before ringing it to the table. Her husband took it from the table with the

²⁴ In the Soviet times, the territory was shared among the KolkhozNõukogude ajal oli territoorium jaotatud kolhooside vahel. See jaotus kehtib endiselt, ainult kolhooside asemel on nüüd kooperatiivid. Nimed on jäänud samaks ning rahvasuus nimetatakse neid ikka kolhoosideks.

²⁵ Liliya Garajeva, Aribaši küla, Tatõšlõ rajoon.

towel and went to pray. At the Nurtdinov's the housewife acted similarly: she brought the porridge basin to the table while before, the smaller grandchildren watched in the kitchen how she filled the basin. Irina Samigulova first gave her small son a dish with porridge, and then brought the basin on the table, like the others.

I did not follow them²⁶, but Denis Kornilov filmed the men while they prayed in the three households. Farkhulla agay took, as I said, the basin of porridge with the towel from the table and went to the veranda, where he read the prayer. He read from a paper, and not very fluently, probably because he has not many opportunities to do so. At the end he bowed saying *omin*²⁷, came back to the room where the others waited for him, put the porridge on the table, and tasted it with melted butter, uttering well wishes. At the same time the others pursued their conversations. Then his wife tasted the porridge, and she also said some words, wishing everybody good health. Then all sat down at the table. All had their heads covered. The youngest of the girls was bareheaded, but at that moment she put on her scarf. For religious activities, having one's head covered is compulsory both for men and for women.

At the Nurtdinov's, the head of the household put on his hands a white towel and his wife put the porridge basin on the towel. Most guests were not yet there, only a couple of

²⁶ Although sacrificial ceremonies are a male domain, this has nothing to do with prohibitions. It is more connected to my personal wish not to disrupt the natural environment and that the intimate activity of praying will not be close followed by more than the filmmaker. Moreover, to go out and follow Farkhulla would have required my interrupting the conversation with the women in the family. However I am convinced that even only to be polite, I would have been allowed to be close to the prayer. At the same time, as we have the vidoe recording, I did no loose anything.

²⁷ With this word, which reminds of our *Amen*, are concluded all the prayers and in longer one this word appears often, to finish one part of it. It is accompanied by the sacrificial priest's bowing, and the people praying Sellega kaasneb ohvipapi kummardus, põlvili palvetajate puhul nii sügav, et pea puudutab maad. See sõna esineb nii Piiblis kui ka Koraanis. Käesoleval juhul võib oletada islami mõju.

young men, bareheaded. This meant clearly that for them, the sacred part of the ceremony had not started. The father went to the courtyard to pray. He talked shortly, without reading, apparently improvising, and at the end he made a hardly visible bow. The address in the prayer was to Inmar, who is called “white God”, and who is asked health, good harvest and healthy livestock. His message was not different from the other prayers, but it was much shorter. In all the texts we heard, there were no innovations. For example, nobody prayed for the young people not to fall into narcomania, as we have heard in some places. When Nurtdinov came back, the guests were already behind the table, all with their heads covered, also the children. If at the Garifanov’s the women were all dressed in old-fashioned flower dresses, here the younger women wore more fashionable outfits. The head of the household was first to taste the porridge, wishing aloud health to the children. Afterwards all the others tasted the porridge. His wife came out of the kitchen and ate the porridge, but she did not say anything aloud.

At the Samigulov’s, the head of the household stood up and expressed in Udmurt all the wishes right at the table, then he sat down and tasted the porridge. His speech reminded the wishes expressed during long toasts. He went on speaking while he started eating the pudding, wishing well both to his family and to the whole world.

In the two first stages we may discern a pattern. In the two elder households a model was followed. The younger family celebrated in a less solemn way; but despite the difficulties, they felt the need to hold this ritual. They did not do it because of our presence. They have been celebrating the Autumn ceremony every year.

Banqueting

Banqueting is the final stage of the ritual, which unites all the participants. At the beginning, the porridge has been blessed only by the head of the household, but by eating it all the attendants participate in the ritual and the well-being requested in the prayer extends to them. Those who could not attend would be given porridge, in order to warrant the unity of the kin and to ensure their spiritual presence.

Let us observe that we were immediately invited at the table. I was cautious, because in Varkled Bodya we were warned that the kin had to sit together at the beginning and would welcome outsiders only later.²⁸ Here, they insisted that they have no such rule. I cannot say whether it was said out of politeness, but the surprise I read in the faces of our hosts seem to suggest that they were indeed discovering something new.

The tables were richly laid. In addition to the porridge there were some other compulsory foods, baked by the housewife: *taban'* (dough pancakes), shangi (breads with mashed potatoes), housebread. There were also home preserves (tomato, cabbage, mushroom, cucumber), boiled swede, home butter. In elder families the tables were quite similar. In addition, at the Nurtdinov's there were also fresh tomatoes, boiled beetroot, and goose meat, the one that had given the broth for the porridge. The housewives added sometimes to the porridge butter or oil. At the Garifanov's we talked about the Autumn rituals, they observed that the commemoration of the dead (*siz'yl*

²⁸ I would never have been told that, because I am an outsider and a guest. Nikolai Anisimov on the one hand is an Udmurt and he is also a friend. It was said to him with feelings of shame, clarifying that earlier they did not allow outsiders at all. Probably they did not think at all about scholars, just about ordinary people not belonging to the particular kin. Sometimes welcome rules and other rules may clash.

kis'ton or *dzhuon*) has better resisted everywhere. The table at the Nurtdinov's was quiet; the children ate as silently as the adults.

The hosts spent most of their time standing. There was no place for them planned at the table. The housewives checked that everything would be right on the table. Farkhulla Garifanov at some moment sat also down, Salyakhudtin Nurtdinov stood all the time. For the banquet, Farkhulla took his garb off, but kept the hat. Salyakhudtin kept the towel around his waist and the *tyutedeyka* on his head until the end. Finally, also Khafiza sat near her husband at one end of the table. At the Garifanov' the men were sitting on the right of the housewife, but this could just be by chance; at the Nurtdinov's men and women sat without order. At the Samigulov's Irina has brought all the food immediately, and all sat all the time.

Salyakhudtin Nurtdinov was a funny guy and he offered moonshine around the table. In the Udmurt regions there is a tradition that each housewife makes her own spirits, called in Russian *kumyška* (the strength varies between 20 and 60 degrees, the techniques are varied as well.). it is used as a ritual drink. People bring home commercial vodka only when they have not their own moonshine. Salyakhudtin gave each one a shot and his wife filled them from a teapot. In principle, alcohol must be served clockwise, with the exception of drinking and eating for the dead. At the Nurtdinov's this was not possible, because of the position of the table. When all the shots were full, the father gave his wife a shot and they all drank. The second time, the head of the household filled the shots himself. Kui klaasikesed täis, ulatas peremees ka naisele pitsi ja kõik jõid. Teist korda täitis pitse peremees ise.

At the Garifanov's the women cleared the table. The others sat on the sofa, conversing. Then, tea was brought forth. The women put on the table the samovar, fruit, biscuits, jam and a dish with sausage and cheese. The head of the household shared moonshine: he was the first to drink with his wife and then he offered the others. He insisted that one shot had to be finished. By that time the youngest girl had taken off her scarf. Farkhulla had also discarded his hat.

At the Samigulov's the table was much more modest: in addition to the porridge and the pancakes there were baked goods – shangi and filled breads, as well as honey and sweets. Emil, who had received from the very beginning his porridge, started immediately eating, even before his father came to the table and prayed. For him it was clearly another ordinary meal. His father and mother both prayed, the first more formally, the second at length. Afterwards there was conversation, mainly around the little boy. He had many questions about God. The conversation was bilingual, because as many children, he speaks spontaneously in Russian, although he knows Udmurt well and answers his parents in Udmurt when they ask him questions. There was lemonade and juice to drink, and only later Mars offered vodka, for his wife does not make moonshine. Such are the Autumn ceremonies I attended on the field. The other working group recorded another example of the same ritual. Its permanence depends on the family and on the environment. Where the elder generation is alive and active, many kin meet. Where it is not healthy anymore and life follows more modern patterns (for instance where the housewife works actively outside her home), it has been simplified. The fact that younger women work outside their home as the men limits their opportunities to

organise on ordinary days as great feasts as they were accustomed to. But at least, in the Tatyshly district, this ritual is still alive.

Spring commemorations of the dead by the Eastern Udmurt: tradition and present situation²⁹

Nikolai Anisimov

Included in the calendar ritual cycle, the spring commorations of the Udmurt continue to retains their meaningfulness also in modern life. Today, in the religious practice of the Eastern Udmurt, the commemorative rituals are fully alive and they have not, so far, been fully commented in scientific literature. We find some older sources about rhe funerary rites of the Eastern Udmurt, but in general they are limited to short descriptions and to general observations³⁰. But neverthesess, there has not been yet a full description of the spring commemoration.

Map N°1

²⁹ This article has been published in Russian and translated in English by Eva Toulouze..

¹ ³⁰ See, for example, Makarov 1915; Il'in 1926; Atamanov, Vladykin, 1985; Minniyakhmetova 2000: 215-226; Minniyakhmetova 2000: 34-37; 57-59; 72; Sadikov 2001: 126-133; Chernykh 2002: 42-45; 50; Minniyakhmetova 2001; Minniyakhmetova 2003: 103-112; Sadikov, Hafeez, 2010: 28-29; 39; 42-46; 49; 55-59; 83-84; Lallukka, Minniyakhmetova, Sadikov 2014: 105-112; Sadikov 2017: 173-194; Sadikov 2019: 193-236; Atamanov-Egrapi 2020: 128; 138; 141-142; 150; 154-155; 163-164; 167; 178; 180; 182-183.

In this article, I shall describe the spring commemorations, *tulys kis'ton*, by the Udmurts of the Tatyshly district of the Bashkortostan Republic, relying on fieldwork achieved in 2019 in the villages of Urazgil'dy (Udm. *Vukogurt*), Starokal'miyarovo (Udm. *Kalmiyar*) and Petropavlovka (Udm. *Petyrpavol*). The population of these villages is practically composed only by Udmurts. According to the municipality "Kal'miyar rural council" in 2021, in Starokal'miyarovo there live 342 persons, among whom 339 – Udmurts, 3 – Maris; in Petropavlovka there live 250 persons, among whom 248 – Udmurts, 1 – Mari, 1 – Tatar woman. According to the data of the municipality "Novye Tatyshly rural council" in 2021, there were in Urazgil'dy 384 persons, among them 368 Udmurts, 8 Russians, 5 Bashkirs, 3 Kazakh.

The audiovisual material was recorded in photo, audio and video with previous agreement of the participants. We describe the Spring rituals on the example of two clans (*porod*): in the first case in Urazgil'dy, it took place in three houses, and on the following day people visited the graves of the clan in this village and in the neighbouring one., Novye Tatyshly (Udm. *Vil'gurt*); in the second – the representatives of one clan participated in ritual mutual visiting in Starokal'miyarovo and in Petropavlovka, and attended the cemetery on the following day. Additional interviewing, clarifications and maerial was achieved in 2021 through social networks and WhatsApp.

The ritual scenario we witnessed in 2019 includes preparation, ritual ritual visits to patrilinear kin, asking the spirits of the dead to leave, and on the next day, visit to the cemetery. There are also microlocal peculiarities that shell be mentioned later on. I am convinced that the study of local peculiarities allows to describe the modern state of

tradition, to clarify details of the ritual and to identify what is general and what is original in comparison with other ethnoterritorial traditions.

The time of the ritual. In the Tatyshly Udmurt's tradition it is usual to perform the spring commemoration after the ritual complex connected with *Byzhzh'yinnal* (The great day), more precisely after the ceremony *Byzhzh'yinnal kel'an* "The Great Day's seeing off". Each kin group decides independently when on which day they are going to celebrate *tulys kis'ton*. Tatiana Minniyakhmetova writes about this topic:

...it is allowed to start commemorating one week after seeing off the Great Day. If spring comes early or the Great Day falls late, people try to perform the commemoration within one week before the starting of field tasks. Otherwise, the commemoration days last until three weeks, but they must be over when cuckoos start singing – *kiku s'il'one medaz kyl'y* – "lit: let it not remain to the time when cuckoos cuckoo" (Minniakhmetova 2000, 34).

According to her, the time of the commemoration was tied to the understanding that events honouring the dead must not merge with rituals addressing the higher deities and/or the living: "strictly one week after the seeing off of the bright celebration marking the start of the new year, and before the next extremely important period, the birth of the earth, the reanimation, revitalisation of nature" (idem, 37).

Thus, the time of the spring commemoration of the dead is regulated by the time at which other significant ceremonies take place, by weather conditions, and the peculiarities of agriculture in Udmurt culture.

Preparation.

Everywhere, before performing the spring ceremonies, in each farm, there are preparations: they include a total cleaning of the house and the whole farm, the preparation of some ritual food and needed objects, the commemorative sacrifice, the ritual sauna attendance and a preliminary commemoration of the deceased.

For the commemorative table, some special foods are prepared (see, for example, Anisimov, Glukhova 2020). According to some of my informants before starting preparing the commemorative dishes they address the ancestors with words saying that they prepare food to honour them and ask them for the food to be great. In 2019, in Urazgil'dy, one day before the commemoration they prepared house beer *sur* based on herbal tea (as a rule, oregano, melissa, mint, meadowsweet) and hops, today they may add, *сегодня могут добавить* yeast. The taste of *sur* reminds kvas with a flavour of fragrant herbs. While preparing *sur*, Zoya Menkairovna Riyanova (born 1964) uttered a spell:

E-e-e, med daltoz, med daltoz ch'ukaye dzh'uyny, kis'ton karyny. Shumpotsa dzh'uyny med gozhtoz! Med udaltoz!

E-e-e, let [the beer] succeed, let [the beer] succeed, [so that] tomorrow we may offer drinks, make the commemoration. Let it be written that we shall drink with joy! Let it succeed! (FWM 1: Riyanova).

Among the flour dishes were represented bread, pies with different fillings, *barsak*³¹, *tabans*³². Before baking *tabans*, they utter aloud the goal of the action: “*Tulys kis'ton karsa taba zyn pottis'ko*” (“Doing the spring commemoration, I call for the smell of [hot] pan”) (FWM 4: Baydullina). The first baked food is put on a separate plate and used for the ulterior commemoration, as a sacrifice to the dead. “In this case the expression “*call for the smell of [hot] pan*” is a fixed expression, which refers to the need to appease the dead with baked food (Vladykina, Glukhova 2011: 126; Anisimov, Glukhova 2020: 145). The importance of eliciting the smell of cooking is also connected to the idea that “the souls of the dead feed on food’s smell” (Minniyakhmetova 2001: 94). According both to my informants and to scientific literature, it is a custom to prepare for commemoration products made of unleavened dough, which historically preceded yeast bread (Minniyakhmetova 2000: 37). Now this custom is respected only partly, or not at all. A compulsory food on the commemoration table are boiled hen’s eggs in odd quantity. The blood sacrifice to the ancestors is a hen or a rooster. The choice of these birds as offerings to the dead is explained by the folk understanding that “hens scratch the earth backwards”, which means toward the other world. The sacrifice is done in a peculiar way: The hen or rooster is put with the head towards the west. Before slaughtering, they address the dead:

² ³¹ A loan from Turkic languages *boursak* (Bash. бауырһаҡ; Tat. *bavırsak*). This dish is made from flour, egg, and salt. Small dough sticks are fried.

³ ³² Flatbreads from sour dough, whom people add as gravy flour sauce (*zyrét*), hemp sauce (*kenem zyrét*), hemp cakes (*tyém kenem*).

Tulys kis'tontek, siz'yl kis'tontek kis'ton medam karyte. Taza med karozy.

Let spring commemorations, autumn commemorations not be needed. Let [them] make us healthy (FWM 1: Riyanova).

In Urazgil'dy, the hostess Zoya gathered some blood from the bird in a spoon and threw it on red coal, which she took from the sauna on an iron shovel. It is noteworthy to remark that some blood of the sacrificial animal is also thrown into the fire when an animal (usually an ewe) is sacrificed in the collective ceremonies of the Eastern Udmurt. Probably in folk awareness the fire is a communication channel between the worlds, through which the gods and the ancestors receive the sacrifices made by the people.

On the previous evening, people attend sauna where they invite also their dead. Before heating the sauna, they address the ancestors:

Tulys kis'ton karysa, mun'ch'o estis'kom. Kulemn'oslen az'azy med üs'oz.

Performing the Spring commemoration, we heat the sauna. Let [our] commemoration be received by the ancestors (litt. Let it fall in front of the deceased)" (FWM 5: Shayslamova).

Throwing water on the stones, they remind the ancestors and ask them to take care not to be burned by the hot steam. According to my Petropavlovka informants, the first time they mention their dead by their names, and finish saying: "*Van'dylen no, van'dylen no az'ady med us'os, taza kare*" ("Let it fall in front of all, all [the ancestors], make [us] healthy") (FWM 5: Shayslamova). In Urazgil'dy, I was informed that they address the

souls of the dead when they beat themselves with branches: “*tulys kis'ton karysa mun'ch'o pyris'kom. Az'ady med us'oz, taza kare!*” (“Making the Spring commemorations we bathe in the sauna. Let it fall in front of you, make [us] healthy”) (FWM 4: Baydullina). The last person who comes out of the sauna, leaves water in the bucket and the branches on the bench, throws a last time water on the steaming stones and addresses the dead ancestors: “*Ti no mun'ch'o pyrele!*” (“Do yourselves bathe in the sauna!”) (FWM 5: Shayslamova).

Preparation of the celebration table on the commemoration day

From the very morning, the housewife prepares the commemoration table and puts some food on it. According to my Petropavlovka and Starokal'miyarovo informants, a compulsory food to put on the table on that day is onion. As the world of the dead is a world where all is upside down, onion will be received by the dead as a treat, as a sweet food, and what for us is sweet, as bitter:

As'men tani kel'an nunal lue, sooslen vordis'kon nunal lue: Sooslen tolalte; as'men guzhem. Sooslen van'myz muket. Sooslen kuryt ke, as'melen cheskyt, sooslen cheskyt ke, as'melen kuryt. Soin sugon pono ni kis'ton dyr''ya zhök vyle.

What for us is the day of the funeral, for them it is the birthday. They have winter, we have summer. Everything is different for them. If something is bitter for them, for us it is sweet; if something is sweet for them, for us it is bitter. Therefore at commemoration time we put onion on the table (Petropavlovka; Anisimov, Glukhova 2020, 149).

I must also comment the presentation of the table. In Petropavlovka, the baked pies were put around the table, and they commented that this is the way it was done by their ancestors. In Urazgil'dy, the housewives gave themselves the pies one by one to the participants, or put them on the table in front of them.

Before sitting down, the participants, in odd number, start cleaning the hard-boiled eggs, whose number is also odd, and taking out their shells. According to the informants, in this activity there must be both men and women represented:

Agay murtdzh'os no, apay murdzh'os no kulill'am es'. Soos ponna agay murt no, apay murt no palano, dyr, ini kuregpuzet. Nylkyshno ke kule, nylkyshnoez palato, piosmurt ka kule– piosmurtez, kis'ton ke les'tis'kom.

Both died, women as well as men. [Therefore] for them both must clean the eggs, a man and a woman. If a woman died, they ask a woman to clean the egg; if a man died, they ask a man, when we commemorate (FWM 1: Mentdiyarova).

But, as we have remarked, this rule is not always followed. When they start dealing with these activities, the men put on a headgear, a jacket, in Petropavlovka and Starokal'miyarovo the women put on some outerware.

The cleaned eggs are cut into quarters with the help of a thread, for it is forbidden to use a knife, they think that the dead may be injured:

Purten vandylyny ug yara, potomu chto sooslen, pe, chin'yzy vandis'ke. Vös', pe, luo kulemnyos, as'me chyzhy-vyzhyyos.

We may not cut with a knife, because, they say, their fingers may be injured. It is painful, they say, to the dead, to our [dead] kin (FWM 2: Zidiganova);

Kizy-pydzы medam vandis'ky shusa taz'y karill'am. Peres'yoslen, kulemn'oslen kizy-pydzы medam vandis'ky shusa. Soin taz'y purten karill'amte, soin siz'ys'en karill'am.

We did that in order not to cut hands and feet. In order not to cut the hands and feet to the ancestors, to the dead. That's why you did not it with a knife, but with a thread (FWM 1: Mentdiyarova).

The eggs were cut in different ways: one end of the thread being held by one person while the other is held by the one who cuts; or one holds it with his teeth while the other is in the hand of the person who cuts; either one person manages alone. Usually the egg is cut into four quarters and put on the table on a separate plate.

Здесь РИС. 1.

If nevertheless it is indispensable to use a knife, they address the dead and ask them to be careful: “*Kides-pyddes saklale, oktele!*” (“Be careful with your hands and feet, take them away!”) (FWM 2: Shayslamova). Probably, in this case, the prohibition of use sharp iron objects lies in their semantic and symbolic meaning of an apotropeic (окультуренного) attribute able to injure the invisible present souls of the ancestors. Therefore, according to Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, during Eastern Udmurt

commemorations, “when they eat, they break bread with their hands, and break eggs by hitting one’s forehead with them, clean them and share them into pieces with the help of a thread” (Minniyakhmetova 2000, 35).

Preparation of the commemorative altar

In parallel, they prepare a special place for the commemorative offerings to the ancestors, in form of a particular altar. Usually it is put close to the oven, which appears as a communication channel towards the world beyond. In Petropavlovka, a low chair was put by the oven, on it a pan, at the edge of it, they fixed lit handmade wax candle *s’u^us’*. In some families they prepare themselves handmade wax candles from thread/fabric and wax, called *shäm*³³. According to information given by my informants, formerly people made these candles as many as dead people in the household, or in odd numbers, and they fixed them to a ledge in front of the oven, *üshä*³⁴ and/or on the edge of a pan. They were convinced that on this day it was necessary to call for the smell of a candle “*s’y^us’ zyn pottono*” (FWM 1: Baydullin). Conversations with my informants revealed that this tradition exists or existed not in all families. According to Tatiana Minniyakhmetova this tradition is influenced by Christianity and is not present everywhere, but only in some villages of the Tatyshly and the Baltach districts of Bashkortostan, as well as in the Kuyeda district of the Perm’ krai (Minniyakhmetova 2000, 37). Nowadays, they may also use commercial candles.

³³ From Tatar *shal* “candle”.

³⁴ From Bashkir *uuua* “side ledge on the oven”.

In Starokal'miyarovo the altar was erected in the kitchen near to the washing machine, for there was no oven. The container for offerings in this case was a plate, near a plastic glass there was a candle, and near the candle a plate with eggshells and a plastic glass for drinks. In Urazgil'dy, in the first case there was a low chair close to the oven, they spread out a towel, and put as a container for the offerings a plate, nearby they lit a candle; in the second case they put the chair it near to the oven, at the edge of the table, and in the third, on the stove near to the oven mouth and lit a candle nearby. This place, in the kitchen, is seen as a particular "table" for the invisible dead.

The offerings to the dead.

After having prepared the altar, the housewife or her husband chose a little food from each dish on the commemorative table, and they use it to make offerings to the dead. While they took the food, they tasted it themselves. This action symbolises the common banquet with the dead / ancestors. This is the moment when the participants may remind the food preferences of the deceased kin. One part of the dishes is put in the container for the offerings with a movement of the hand turned outwards (*kis'ö'r karysa /ki s'örlan'*) and verbally, murmuring or addressing the dead to themselves:

Az'azy med us'oz anayoslen- atayoslen. Tuly's kis'tontek, siz'yl kis'tontek kis'ton medam karyte. Taza med ulomy van'my. Az'azy med us'os!

Let it fall in front of the parents (the mothers and the fathers). Let us avoid doing other commemorations than the Spring and the Autumn commemorations. Let us all live healthy. Let it fall in front of them. перед ними пусть упадет/предстанет)! (ПИМА 1: Риянова).

In the same container they pour some of the chicken soup, tea, moonshine and housebeer. In Starokal'miyarovo and Petropavlovka, stewed fruit juice and moonshine were poured in a special glass. In the same container, they put also the boiled head and feet of the hen/rooster. They think also that if the housepeople forget to offer some of the dishes, the dead will let them immediately know: a dish or a drink will fall or be spilled, often more than once. This kind of action by the dead are called in Udmurt *kulemn'os kysko* "the dead pull". According to others, the dead appear in dreams and reproach the living (*kulemn'os satashtyro*) what they forgot to give them, especially if they forgot the dead's beloved dish. They think that the dead eat around their offerings, while the living are in another part of the house, where for them the commemoration table has been set.

Здесь РИС. 2.

The commemorative banquet.

Having achieved the offerings to the dead, the hosts invite the participants to the banquet, which is composed of two stages: at the beginning the dead are remembered and offered food; after which there is a short break; and thereafter everybody drinks tea together. Before sitting at the table, the men cover their heads, put on jackets, and the women put on outerwear or cardigans, sleeveless jackets etc. In Starokal'miyarovo one of the participants only put a scarf on her shoulders. Women and girls had to wear scarves. We must observe that during the banquet or during the ritual called *puktis'kon* (from the verb *puktis'kyny*, *пуктисъкыны* – "to offer, to present"), the dressing of the participants is very important. As the informants say, this is important in order for the

dead to see the living. It is interesting to notice that we find analogous rules in dressing at the time of ceremonies (*kuris'kon*) addressed to the higher deities, especially when the consecrated porridge is served.

While tasting the dishes, each one murmuring or to oneself, remembers the dead:

N'anykay bas'tome. Az'azy med us'oz, van'zylen kulem murtdzh'oslen, anay-atayoslen, van' matys' tugann'oslen. Ogzes no um kel'tis'ke, van'zy og in'tiyn. Dzh'ech med voz'ozy milemyz. Todazy vayemez med todozy. Tode vayis'kom. Voz'mas'kysa medam kyll'e, van'zylen az'azy med us'oz!

Let's take the bread. Let it fall in front of them, [in front of] all the dead, parents, close kin. We do not let anyone [without being remembered], they are all in one place. Let them protect us with goodness. Let them know about our remembering them. We remember. Let them not live waiting [sacrifices], let all [food and drinks] fall in front of them (FWM 1: Mentdiyarova, Riyanova).

According to my informants, it is important to commemorate the dead by name; but as it is difficult to remember everybody, they address general deceased, generalised deceased, with words and expressions.

After a while, the hostesses start to offer moonshine. In Starokal'miyarovo the hostess Indira poured the first shot to herself, and addressed the gods:

Az'azy üs'kytysa, byden stopka vina dzh'uome. Taza med luome, as'mely gumyr''yosses med s'otozy, pudoyos taza med luozy, nylpios tazaes' med luozy, shudoes', küz' gumyro. Az'azy med us'oz!

Dropping in front of them (remembering the ancestors), we shall drink one shot of moonshine. Let us be healthy, let them give us our age (long life), let our livestock be healthy, let the children be healthy, happy, with a long life. Let it fell in front of them! (FWM 2: Shayslamova).

After the hostess drank, then she offered her husband and the other guests. As the couple Shayslamovs from Petropavlovka reminded, once their father offered a little moonshine also to the children, saying that this is one such day, in which one must offer spirits to everybody. Another hostess, Zamfira, from Urazgil'dy, poured moonshine, one shot to herself and to each guest and addressed:

Taza med luome. Egen'chi ar dyroz' milemyz taza med karozy.

Let us be healthy. Up to next year [to the next spring commemoration], let them make us healthy (FWM 1: Khasaniyanova).

Complementing her words, the others continued to address the dead.

After a short commemorative meal, the participants took off their headgear and the outerwear and pursue the banquet. This previous part of the meal was dedicated to honouring the ancestors, now it is for the living. While sitting at the table, the people call to mind different stories connected with the dead kin, sometimes even strange stories.

Some share dreams in which the dead appear. The general atmosphere, in the spring commemorations, is not sad, it is quiet and joyful.

After a while, the participants stand up and quit the table, spreading into the dwelling, conversing on different topics, even singing different songs. In Urazgil'dy, they performed table songs, occasionally changing the tune. Below, some texts of songs performed in this context:

Vozh bad'arlen kuarez pas'kyt,
Tyrme yyrez bin'yiny (u),
Tugann'oslen kyl(y)zy n'ebyt,
Tyr(y)me üy(y)byt pukyny.
Tugann'oslen kyl(y)zy n'ebyt,
Tyr(y)me üy(y)byt pukyny.

The green maple leaf is wide,
Enough to tie it on one's head.
The words of our kin are sweet (soft),
Enough to converse all night
The words of our kin are sweet (soft),
Enough to converse all night

Aramalen shul(y)dyrlykez
L'ömpu säs'ka van' dyr(y)ya.
Korka pushlen shul(y)dyrlykez,
Anay-atay van' dyr(y)ya.
Korka pushlen shul(y)dyrlykez,
Anay-atay van' dyr(y)ya.

The beauty of the grove
When bird cherry blooms.
The joy in the house,
When one has one's mother and father.
The joy in the house,
When one has one's mother and father.

Üzyyasa mon ber(y)tis'ko,
Üzyez dzh'aratis'ko,

I come back from strawberry gathering,
I love strawberry.

So üsyiez dzh'aratem kad',

Tiledyz dzh'aratis'ko.

So üsyiez dzh'aratem kad',

Tiledyz dzh'aratis'ko.

Al(y) dereme odig gyne,

Nüinal dis'ame pote.

Ta dzh'araton tugann'yosme,

Nüinal adzh'dzheme pote.

Ta dzh'araton(y) tugann'yosme,

Nüinal adzh'dzheme pote.

Tchuk(y)na(ya) shun(y)dy zhuzhaloz(y)
shol,

Zhyt(y)ze tolez'(y) zhuzhaloz.

May(y) tolez'yn kuku s'il'yoz,

Soku kytyn ch'idalom

May(y) tolez'yn kuku s'il'yoz,

Soku kytyn ch'ida(ya)lom

Vale puks'I zhad'on(y)tem shol,

Tulup dis'ay kymmon(y)tem.

Tatyn s'iem-d'uemn'osmy

[As much as] I love this strawberry,

My kin, I do love you.

[As much as] I love this strawberry,

My kin, I do love you.

I have only one pink dress,

Every day I want to wear it.

These are my beloved kin,

Every day I want to see them.

These are my beloved kin,

Every day I want to see them.

In the morning the sun rises, right,

In the evening the moon comes out.

In May the cuckoo cuckoos,

Where shall I endure [my grief]?

In May the cuckoo cuckoos,

Where shall I endure [my grief]?

I sat on a horse in order not to tire,

I put on a coat not to freeze.

This our banqueting

Gumyryn no vunon(y)tem.

Tatyn s'iem-d'uemn'osmy

Gumyryn no vunon(y)tem.

I shall not forget it as long as I live.

This our banqueting

I shall not forget it as long as I live.

Oy, orchche ved', orchche ved',

Shul(y)dyr guzhem orchche ved'.

Shul(y)dyr guzhem nosh ik vuoz,

As'me gumyr orchche ved'.

Shul(y)dyr guzhem nosh ik vuoz,

As'me gumyr orchche ved'.

Oy, it passes, the day passes,

The beautiful summer passes.

A beautiful summer will come back

Our life will pass.

A beautiful summer will come back

Our life will pass.

(FWM 1: Badrislamova, Baydullina,
Mentdiyarova, Nuriakhmetova, Riyanova,
Khasaniyanova).

Meanwhile the hostess prepares the table for tea. Before, one of the hosts put on again his headgear, his outerwear, and offers the dead tea, which he pours with the particular movement of the hand, turned towards the exterior. He adds sweet foods from the table to the container with the offerings. After this, the guests are invited to have tea around the table (*kis'ton ch'ay / ch'äy* “commemorative tea”). According to the memories of my informants from Petropavlovka and Starokal'miyarovo, when they were children their parents asked them to drink or at least to taste tea, otherwise it was thought that somebody among the dead might go away unsatisfied. Tatiana Minniyakhmetova observes that this is a late tradition, loaned from the Tatar and the Bashkir, from the

middle of the 20th century, “before, tea was not used as a ritual beverage” (Minniyakhmetova 2000, 37).

Escorting the dead.

At the end of the banquet the guests quit the table and sit in different places in the house. Then, the hostess takes the broom and escorts the dead out of the house. This part of the ritual is called “the seeing off of the dead” *kulemn’osty kel’an / ull’an*. Symbolically, the hostess sweeps the dead away from all the rooms and the corners in the house, and addresses them:

Ran’dzh’ysa medaz koshke. S’ektam, kel’alome ini. Mil’emiz taza med karozy, dorazy med bertozy. Ulos’yos ajbat med luozy. Nylpios tazaes’, shudoes’ med luozy, as’meos no oz’y ik.

Let them not go away wounded. We offered them food, now we escort them out. Let them make us healthy, let they go back home. Let life be good. Let the children be healthy, happy, as well as us. (FWM 2: Shayslamova).

S’iizy-dzh’uizy, med koshkylozy! Med bertylozy, med koshkylozy. Kel’alome. Taza med karozy van’mes. Van’zylen az’az med üs’oz. Taza med karozy milemyz. Bertyle, myne!

They have eaten and drunk, let them go away! Let them go back, met them leave. We escort them. Let them make us all healthy. Let it fall in front of all. Let them make us healthy. Go back, go! (FWM 1: Riyanova).

Myne, potylysa koshke ay tatis'. Tiledyz s'ektay, kis'ton kari, tyrmoz: Bertylysa kyll'e. Tatis' myne, potele. Kötdes tyridy, s'ektam. Myne, bertele.

Go, go out from this place. I gave you food, I performed the commemoration, it's enough. Go back. Go away from here, gou out. You have filled your bellies, we have given you food. Go, return home (FWM 1: Bardislamova).

Здесь РИС. 3.

They sweep from the internal part of the house towards the exit. It is compulsory to sweep under the commemoration table, where the guests sat, so that no inc=visible spirit of any ancestor would not remain there. From each room they gather into the scoop any kind of particles. All is brought out in the farmstead. In Petropavlovka, the hostess brought the scoop beyond the gate, in the street, and threw the dirt out there; in Starokal'miyarovo, she threw it beyond the fence, westwards, while in Urazgil'dy in the first case in the street towards the gate, in the second and the third, in the vegetable garden, westwards. There; the dead ask once again to go back to the house:

Myne bertyle! Dordy ogpalan, as'me doryn en kyll'e n'i!

Go, return [to your place]! Your home is towards there, do not remain more in our place! (FWM 3: Shayslamova).

Dzh'ä, myne, berte!

All right, go, return [to your place]! (FWM 1: Khasaniyanova).

The guests are forbidden to quit the house until the end of the escorting of the dead, they must wait indoors. Otherwise, they think, the trip home will not go well, and accidents may even happen – *s'ures uz dalty*.

In Petropavlovka and Starolka'l'miyarovo, while she came back home after escorting the dead, interesting dialogues happened with her, when the other participants ask her:

Bö'rdysa-a koshkizy? Adzh'id-a?

Did they leave weeping? Did you see it? (FWM 2: Zidiganova);

Ö'z bö'rde-a oti? Kyshe shumpotysa koshkizy, dyr, ay!

Didn't they weep there? How joyfully they went probably didn't they? (FWL 3: Shayslamova).

Yo these questions, the one who did the escort answered:

Ö'z bö'rde, shumpotsa koshkizy. S'iizy-dz'uiz, tyrmiz. Soosly tatym danak künoyashkono evöl n'i kema. Sooslen as'se ponnazy ulossy, mil'am as'me ponna ulos'yosmy.

They did not weep, they went rejoicing. They ate and drank, it was enough. They have not to spend much time here as guests. They have their own life, we have our own life (FWM 2: Shayslamova);

“Siz’yl eshsho bertom ay!”, shüizy.

“In autumn we’ll be back!”, they said (FWM 3: Shayslamova).

In Starokal’miyarovo in the second house the hostess entering the house, informed the others about the departure of the dead:

Kel’am! Ves’ koshkylizy! Ch’utis’ez no, bö’rdis’ez no, pin’alez no, peres’ez no ... Shumpotsa koshkylizy n’i, kis’ton karizy shüsa.

I have seen them off! They are all gone! The lame, the one who wept, the young, the old and ... they went rejoicing, for we had celebrated the commemoration (FWM 3: Shayslamova).

In Urazgil’dy they just informed the ones who waited within the house that the dead had gone and that they were back in the world of the dead.

Taking out the offerings and transmitting them to the sacred mediators

At the same time that the dead are escorted out or directly after it offerings are taken out. The candle that was burning throughout the commemoration is put out. If it does not get extinguished at once, they understand that the dead do not wish to quit the celebration organised in their honour. In this case the hosts ask them insistingly to leave

the house, for the commemoration in that house are over and the living endeavoured by all means to offer them enough food to satiate their hunger and to please them.

In the tradition of the Tatyshly Udmurts the person that takes the offerings out wears the left mitten on the right hand and the right mitten on the left hand according of the rule of mirroring worlds. Here we can identify crossed representations of the cold in the world of the dead and the peril of contact with the lower characters without appropriate protection, which is offered by clothes as a culture object in the contradiction with the natural and non-human aspects. It is remarkable that the use of mittens is also to be met in the funerary ritual: the dead has mittens on his hands, and the persons who wash the body of the deceased wear also mittens, otherwise their hands will freeze (Sadikov 2019, 199).

In Petropavlovka and in Starokal'miyarovo, along with the food offerings, other offerings are given: the eggs' shelles, and water from rinsing the plates used on the commemorative table. All these offerings are poured to the mediators, i.e. the dog, the hens, the roosters and other non-domesticated birds. In Petropavlovka the offerings were brought to the vegetable garden, and poured towards the west, in Starokal'miyarovo they were given to the dog and in Urazgil'dy in two cases to the hends, in one to non-domesticated birds in the vegetable garden, towards the west. In Urazgil'dy, my informants added that one must not give the commemorative offerings to the dog, only to hens and other birds, which differentiates this tradition from the one in other villages I investigated. If the animals and birds eat the offerings given to them, this was a sign they were accepted by the souls of the dead. Furthermore, if dogs squabble about this food, if many crows and jackdaws fly down – this means that in the world beyond, the dead are

happy with the food they were given, that they accept the requests of the living and will grant them (Minniyakhmetova 2000: 36). According to some informants, sometimes these offerings, accompanied by much alcoholic drinks, may cause the dog to sleep a while “as dead”, and this was also a good sign of acceptance of the offerings by the dead.

Здесь РИС. 4.

The offering of moonshine, achieving the commemoration.

After the escorting of the dead and the taking out of the offerings, the hostess once again offered the guests moonshine for the good and successful exit of the dead kin. Taking a shot, each guest formulates some wishes and addresses to the dead and to the god *Immar*:

Tulys, siz'yl kis'tonek, kishton medam karyte ini.

Let us not be compelled to commemorate except the spring and autumn commemorations (FWM 2: Shayslamova).

Taza med luome. Ulos''yos aybat med luozy, nylpios tazaes', shudoes' med luozy. Samyy glavnyez co! Ulos aybat med luoz. Shudoes', viz'moes', küz' gumyroes' med luozy. As'mely no oz'y ik med s'otoz ay Immar babay. Ulem pote es' ay.

Let us be healthy. Let our lives be good, the children healthy and happy. It is the most important! Let the lives be good. [The children] happy, intelligent, long-

lived. Let our granddad Immar⁶³⁵ give this also to us. We wush ro live further. (FWM 2: Shayslamova).

Going to the following house

AS soon as the commemoration in one house was over, the guests and the hosts prepare to go to the next house of a kinperson. IN this ritual visiting there is a strong logic. For commemorations, the visiting tour starts from the dwelling of the kinsman who lives upstream and they go further in the direction of the stream – *ullan'e mynyny / vas'kyny* “to go / to go down to the lowest part”. According to my informants: “*Kis'tonez ule vas'kytysa kel'tono, vyle nusa kel'tono övöl*”. (“the commemorations must be left going dpwn, not coing up”) (FWM 1: Badrislamova). This ritual rule is due to the Udmurt's mythological representations, according to which the highest sacred world is situated upstream, and downstream, or on the other shore, there is the lower world, the world beyond. The channel that joins them, that marks the boundary between the heavenly and the subterranean, subaquatic world, is water under all its manifestations (*vu/va* “water”, *in(')vu* “heavenly water”, *oshmes* “spring, source”, *shur* “river”, *zarev* “sea” etc.), which later started connecting all of the three worlds (Vladykina, Glukhova 2011, 69-70; Anisimov 2017, 37). While they walk in the streets they may perform different songs. In Urazgil'dy, they sang street tunes (*uram küy*):

Ta uram(y)ti kün' pol orchchi,

Күнъ полаз по жыт орччи.

Though this street I have walked thrice,

Thrice in the evening I walked.

³⁵ Dialectal form of the thronym *Inmar*.

<i>Kõt(ы) кырк(ы)жам(ы) вал,</i>	Because of my belly's grief I sang,
<i>Изисъ(ы) мур(ы)тэ сай(ы)камй.</i>	I woke up a person that slept.
<i>Kõt(ы) кырк(ы)жам(ы) кырк(ы)жам(ы) вал,</i>	Because of my belly's grief I sang,
<i>Изисъ(ы) мур(ы)тэ сай(ы)камй.</i>	I woke up a person that slept.
<i>Ashshetelen kalyz(y) vak(y)ch'i,</i>	The rope in my petticoat is short
<i>Bugatom küz'atyny.</i>	We can lengthen it.
<i>Mil'emyz(y) veras'(y) mur(y)t(y)dzh'osyz</i>	The people who slander us
<i>Bugatom(y) küy(y)dyryny.</i>	We may offend them [in response].
<i>Mil'emyz(y) veras'(y) mur(y)t(y)dzh'osyz</i>	The people who slander us
<i>Bugatom(y) küy(y)dyryny.</i>	We may offend them [in response].
<i>Tanyp(y) küz'a pur(y) kosh(y)ke shol(y),</i>	Along the [river] Tanyp a raft floats,
<i>L'ogis'(y)kod(y) ke tarale.</i>	If you step in, it shall break.
<i>Kyr(y)dzh'as'(y)ko ke, la, bör(y)dis'(y)ko</i>	If I weep, if I sing,
<i>ke,</i>	
<i>Van'(y) küyyke tarale.</i>	All my sadnesses pass away.
<i>Kyr(y)dzh'as'(y)ko ke, la, bör(y)dis'(y)ko</i>	If I weep, if I sing,
<i>ke,</i>	
<i>Van'(y) küyyke tarale.</i>	All my sadnesses pass away.

“Dzh’üe” shuo, “dzh’üe” shuo,

Dzh’üönze no dzh’üis’kom.

“Dzh’üe” shuo, “dzh’üe” shuo,

Dzh’üönze no dzh’üis’kom.

Mi ogshory um dzh’üis’ke,

Mi ogshory um dzh’üis’ke,

Kis’ton karsa dzh’üis’kom.

(FWM 1: Badrislamova, Baydullina,

Mentdiyarova, Nuriakhmetova, Riyanova,

Khasanyanova).

“Drink” – they say, “drink” – they say,

And drinking we drink.

“Drink” – they say, “drink” – they say,

And drinking we drink.

We do not only drink,

We do not only drink,

We drink commemorating the dead.

In the following and the other houses, the ritual scenario is repeated.

The day after the commemoration: visit to the graveyard.

In 2019, on the day following the commemoration the members of the clan visited their dead kin at the graveyard. That year, I took part in the visit of the ceremony with my informants of Urazgil’dy, who visited the graveyard of their village and the neighbouring one, Novye Tatyshly, where their kin were also buried.

According to my informants, formerly, when their parents were still alive, the day after the commemoration the members of the clan gathered for yet another “hot soup” *pö’s’ shyd*. On that day, after the banquet they sent away the dead who had spent the night at the houses of their living kin. Today, as the bearers of tradition said themselves, they are too lazy to perform this ritual, perhaps only the elder inhabitants of the village

follow the tradition. Today, the day of the commemoration and of the “hot soup” have been merged.

People go to the cemetery in odd numbers. If the number of persons wishing to go are in even number, one of them takes in his/her hand any object (a stick, a nail, or another object) n

And says: “*taiz mil’am*”. (“this is one of us”). They consider that this person “*ad’amily ch’otlane*” (“is counted as a person”) (FWM 1: Mentdiyarova). According to my informant’s sayings, while visiting the graveyard a person must take along an iron object, supposed to protect him/her against the evil forces – *aste ut’is*’ “one’s protector” (FWM 2: Zidiganova, Shayslamova). They take along also some food and alcoholic drinks to offer to the ancestors.

Entering the graveyard, they address the dead and inform them about their visit so that nobody would be frightened or angered. On the graves of the closest persons they crumble food, throwing it away from them, the hand turned outwards, and in the same way they throw moonshine. At the same time, they eat and drink themselves and offer food and drink to others. Each visitor offers and addresses the dead. I was able to follow how my informants from Urazgil’dy, visiting the graves, stopped by some of them, and talked both to living and to dead persons remembering some cases from the person’s life, sad, rejoicing or even funny stories.

In the visit of the graveyard with the Urazgil’dy Udmurts there was an original action, which deserves to be mentioned; in addition to bringing food offerings to their deads, they went to the top of a hollow part of the cemetery, and they started throwing pieces of food remembering all the rootless deceased and the dead nameless children.

They noted that they called this part of the cemetery “the nameless graveyard”, in Udmurt *n'imtemshay*. This example reveals that in this tradition, the Udmurt of this village, along with their own dead kin, remember also the other rootless and nameless dead, who may remain without food and get angry. According to the Udmurt worldview, the souls of forgotten and non-commemorated dead are able to transform into evil spirits and to harm the living in every possible way. Therefore, during the commemorative ceremonies, the Udmurts attempt to remember all the categories of deceased and to give each one a part of the food offerings.

After having shared the offerings, the visitors prepare to leave. In Urazgil'dy, having passed the gate, the participants to the commemoration wash their hands with a bottle they had taken along. After that they all went to the neighbouring villages' graveyard, in Novye Tatyshly, where they also visited the graves of their dead kin and acquaintances, and then went back home.

The description and analysis of the ceremonies commemorating the dead by the Eastern Udmurt, taking as examples the villages of Starokal'miyarovo, Urazgil'dy and Petropavlovka, showed that this ritual has been well conserved as a whole. In spite of insignificant changes (for example the merging of the ritual “hot soup” *põs' shyd* and the spring commemorations, the fading of the tradition to prepare food from unleavened dough) this ancient ritual lives in harmony along other, sacred and profane” calendar and family rituals. Very clearly and visible, we witness the belief in an existence after death

as well as in the power of the ancestors, who may influence the lives of the living. It is characteristic that while celebrating these general commemorations they do not only ask for favour from the ancestors of their line, but they pay special attention to other categories of deceased, the rootless and nameless. Thus they contribute to a harmonious picture of coexistence of the two worlds, according to folk understanding

An important aspect of this complex ritual is the consolidation of the kin community, for these commemorations are celebrated by each opatrilinear group separately. As Vladimir Vladykin observed: “the commemorative rituals, along with many other functions, guaranteed ideologically the visibility of the clan’s cohesion and unity, the members being connected by blood and kinship ties” (Vladykin 1994, 169). In the celebration in 2019 I pinpointed a peculiar aspect: the participants in the visiting tour were exclusively people of the elder or middle generations, and only in one case, one house in Urazgil’dy, young people (father and son) participated in the banquet. Probably, this is not connected to any limitation rule about age and gender, but with the fact that in those samples, the younger generation has gone from the village and does not live in the same village as the parents. We must remark that in many places now this dimension is disappearing or has already disappeared, as in other Udmurt groups, where these commemorations take place exclusively within single families. More over, as my field materials and my observations reveal, the celebrations by the Eastern Udmurt have conserved representations and mythological views about the communication between the worlds, the preparation of ritual food, the material symbolism, etc.

Thus, this research has confirmed that the spring commemoration (*tulys kis’ton*) indeed is alive in the Eastern Udmurt culture and I was able to present fresh evidence

and new facts thanks to the villagers of Urazgil'dy, Petropavlovka and Starokal'miyarovo.

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Sources and materials

FWM 1 – the author’s fieldwork materials. Expedition to Urazgil'dy, Tatyshly district Bashkortostan Republic. 2019 (informant: V.Sh. Badrislamova, born 1956; T.B. Baydullin, born 1941; A.T. Baydullina, born 1971; F.P.Nuriakhmetova, born 1960; F.M. Mentdiyarova, born 1951; Z.M. Riyanova, 1964; Z.Z. Khasaniyanova, born 1952).

FWM 2 – the author’s fieldwork materials Expedition to Petropavlovka, Tatyshly district Bashkortostan Republic. 2019 (informant F.V. Zidiganova, born 1959; I.S. Shayslamova, 1971).

FWM 3 – the author’s fieldwork materials Expedition to Starokal'miyarovo, Tatyshly district Bashkortostan Republic. 2019 (Informant I.S. Shayslamova, born 1957).

FWM 4 – the author's fieldwork materials. Expedition to Urazgil'dy, Tatyshly district Bashkortostan Republic. 2021 (informant A.T. Baydullina, born 1971).

FWM 5 – the author's fieldwork materials Expedition to Petropavlovka, Tatyshly district Bashkortostan Republic. 2021 г. (Informant I. Shayslamova, born 1971).

Bolshekachakovo: ritual life yesterday and today³⁶

Ева Тулуз

Bol'shekachakovo village (Udm. Badzh'ym Kachak) in the Kaltasy district (Republic of Bashkortostan) presents a great interest for scholars. It is precious because we have detailed information about its ritual life at the end of the 19th century. There are not many villages that have hosted foreign scholars and not only one, but even two! Two Finnish scholars have visited this village at the end of the 19th century: firstly Akseli Heikel in 1884, and ten years later, in 1895, Yrjö Wichmann. The latter spent in the village a whole month, which allowed him to gather language and ethnographic material much more in depth than Heikel, who remained no more than two days.

Regretfully, about religious practice in scientific literature from the 20th century, there is no direct information. It was not recommended at the time to investigate religious issues, and even if somebody, accidentally, gathered information, there is no trace of it. The only data have been collected in the postsoviet time as remembrances of the elder people.

³⁶ This article has been published in Russian : Тулуз, Ева (2020). Большекачаково: ритуальная жизнь вчера и сегодня, и что мы знаем о нем. Бехтерова Л.Н., Поздеев И.Л., Степанова Т.С.. Государственность Удмуртии: историко-культурные практики и стратегии современного развития. Сборник статей по материалам международного научно-практического форума "100-летие государственности Удмуртии: исторические вехи и перспективы развития" Ижевск, (15.октября 2020 г.) (37–59). Ижевск: УдмФИЦ УрО РАН.. (1).

In the postsoviet period, indeed, on the footsteps of Heikel and Wichmann, another Finn researcher focused on this village, Kirsi Mäkelä-Hafeez. In 2008, she spent almost three months in Bol'shekachakovo in order to research the present religious practice in the light of what we know of the past. She also gathered data about the Soviet time and the present revival off some traditional rituals. She also took part in present time ceremonies.

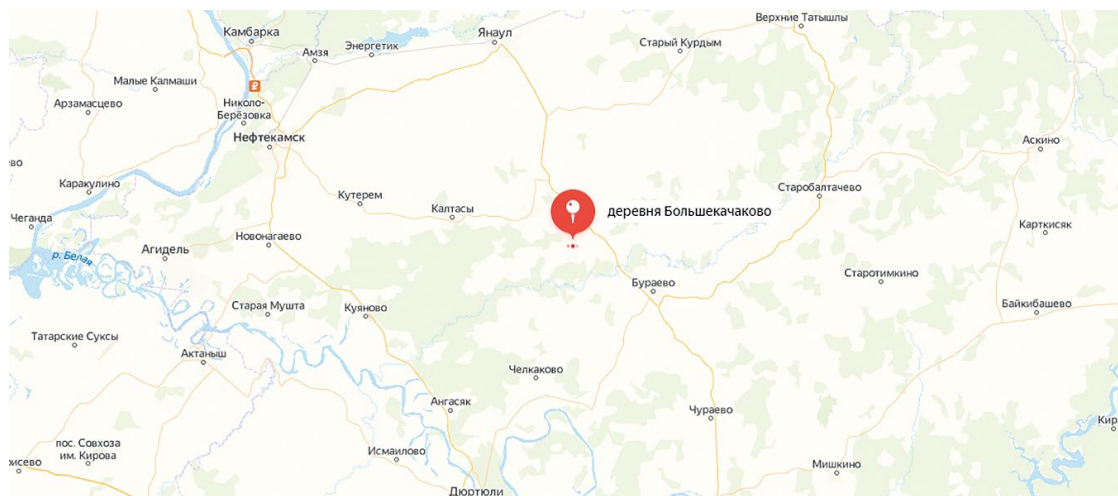
I visited this village myself thrice in 2018 and attended the spring ceremonies.

The aim of this article is to compare on the basis of the information we have and my own fieldwork observations the old and the new ritual life in a particular village. I think that this kind of research is not achieved enough. It allows very precisely to follow the transformations or the continuity of different phenomena. This same appreaoch was the starting point of my article in cooperation with Nikolai Anisimov about Varkled-Bodya's (Agry district Tatarstan) which compares our observations with those of Aado Lintrop who attend these same rituals twenty-three years before [Toulouze, Anisimov 2018]. The richness of such an approach is also well illustrated by the comparison of two booksby British anthropologist Piers Vitebski: *Dialogues with the dead: reflexions on mortality among the Sora of Eastern India* (1993) and *Living without the dead: loss and redemption in the jungle cosmos* (2017). Vitebski lived by the Sora two years in 1970. Then, the region where the Sora live was closed for a long time and foreigners would not access it. When he could go back, he discovered that the shamanistic heritage had been replaced by Baptist Christianity; both worldview and culture had fundamentally changed. The comparison of both experiences is extremely rich.

Bol' shekachakovo: general data

Today this village is in the Kaltasy district of Bashkortostan, and when Wichmann went there, it was part of the Kiebayevo volost of the Birsks Uyezd of the Uga governorate.

The historic data show that this village existed since the end of the 17th century. In 1722-1723, there were 54 Udmurt men. But in 1870 there were already 124 farms and 732 persons, among whom 704 Udmurt [Sadikov, Mäkelä 2009, p. 243]. In 1986 the population was of about 690 [Khristolyubova, Minniyakhmetova, Timirzyanova 1989, p. 85].



Map 1. Bol'shekachakovo's position between the capital of the Udmurt Republic Izhevsk and the capital of the Republic of Bashkortostan Ufa.

The last census informs us that in 2002 the population was 605, in 2008 624 [Hafeez 2015, p. 31], in 2009 615 and in 2010 510. These figures are rather stable, and the regular and gradual decrease is probably connected to rural exodus. According to

Sadikov and Mäkelä, in 2006, two years before Mäkelä expedition, there were in the village 597 inhabitants. These figures give a reliable picture of the number of people living in the village.

According to the elder Finn scholars, all the inhabitants of the village were “pagans”: “All the Votyaks here are purely non-baptised pagans”, writes Y. Wichmann in one of his letters [Wichmann 1987, p. 28]. The few statistic information we have confirms this statement: according to official data, in 1864 there was only one baptised person in the village [Sadikov 2019, p. 276]. Indeed, in 1877 a Ministry school was opened in the village [Садиков 2016, p. 149]. Actually, Heikel was accompanied by a teacher from the school [Hafeez 2015, p. 6]. Heikel was even surprised that all the students were pure pagans, and that the authorities allowed them to remain such [Hafeez 2015, p.33].



Photo 1. Bol'shekachakovo village, view from far away 1894. Photo Y. Wichmann [Sadikov & Hafeez 2009, p. 5; Museovirasto SUK 905, 32]



Photo 2. View of Bol'shekachakovo with the bridge; view from the western part 1894.. Photo Y. Wichmann [Hafeez 2015, p. 5; Museovirasto SUK 905, 36]

It is interesting to have a look at the general views of the village in different photos. We are impressed by the total absence of trees, which is a serious difference with the contemporary appearance of the village.

Bol' shoy Kachak at Wichmann' s time

Wichmann left us his remembrances through his correspondance (published by his daughter: Wichmann I. 1987) and one notebook, discovered, published and commented by Ranus Sadikov and Kirsti Mäkelä Hafeez, опубликовали и прокомментировали

[Sadikov, Mäkelä 2009]. It contains his observations and his materials: vocabulary, local onomastics, proverbs, riddles, songs etc. Part of this materials he published later in his books [Sadikov, Mäkelä 2009, p.242]. Along with this notebook, the authors of the abovementioned article published also interesting photos, which it is useful to comment [Sadikov, Mäkelä 2009, p. 243]. They have been taken at a time, when photograph was not a widespread instrument of documentation, and they are the first photodocuments we have about the Eastern Udmurt [Hafeez 2015, p. 8].

Comparing the religious life in the village with later observations, Y. Wichmann makes the following remarks: at the end of the 19th century, there were much more sacred places (5 collective *kuala*, 2 *lud*, 2 *mör vös'*, 5 other ceremonies, without mentioning the home places), than today (2 places for *Bydzh'yn vös'*); there were much more deities to whom the Udmurt addressed; addresses to deities happened much more often.

Sacred places and deities

These two questions require to be examined together, because each place is dedicated to a particular cult. Yrjö Wichmann photographed some of Bol'shekachakovo's sacred places.

The Kuala

He researched the Udmurt cult buildings called *kuala*. In the village there were two types of *kuala*: the *pokchi kuala*, “small *kuala*”, in every courtyard (according to Wichmann³⁷, with the clan and family deities); there were also in the village *bydzh’ym kuala* “the big/great *kuala*” a sanctuary for the clan at the village level. This last type of cultual building was represented with five *bydzh’ym kuala* in Bol’shekachakovo: four elder, in which prayed the members of one *vorshud*³⁸, which, supposedly started to split in different subgroups; the fifth was a new one, it belonged to the last clan to settle in the village [Hafeez 2015, p. 49]. He made an interesting photo of an Udmurt courtyard, in which we see the house (*korka*), the barn (*kenos*) and the *kuala*.

In another photo, the family gathers in the family *kuala*. These photographs are precious because they witness a phenomenon that did not resist to time. In 2008, according to Kirsi Hafeez’s observations, there were no *kualas* anymore in the village, neither *bydzh’ym* either *pokchi*. Today, the *kuala* is only alive in the memory of the inhabitants of the village, at least the elder generation remembers where they were [Hafeez 2015, p.36, 39]. Mikhail Atamanov confirms that *kualas* were destroyed with collectivisation [Atamanov 2001, p. 7].

Kirsi Hafeez mentions informants according to whom at the collectivisation time, the so-called *kulaks* disassembled the buildings in the courtyards in the centre of the kolkhoz as barns **т. н. кулаков разобрали в колхозный центр на амбары**. In addition, the transformations in social life left also their trace: success in the harvest did not depend

³⁷ Although according to one of Kirsi Hafeez’s informants, there was not a *kuala* in all courtyards. She says that all brothers attended the father’s *kuala*. It is possible, as she observes, that the situation could have changed at the time of Wichmann’s visit.

³⁸ Kin organisations with the same patron.

anymore from the single farms, but from the collective unit, which diminished the need to pray in the family *kuala* [Hafeez 2015, p.51].



Photo 3. An Udmurt courtyard: the dwelling house, the barn, the *kuala*. 1894 Photo Y. Wichmann [Hafeez 2015, p. 43, Sadikov-Hafeez 2009, p.258, SUK 905, p.37]

In the Eastern regions I met this building only once, in Aribashevo, Tatyshly district. Still, even there, although it stood in the courtyard, it was as not in use, it had been closed with a particular ritual. In other places the building has not been there for a long time, but some of them have still a precise influence on the lives of the people, as we shall see in a further article [Toulouze, Vallikivi 2021]. Thus, *kuala* is the first sacred cult place that has lost its status. Probably, even if we discard the influence of the anti-religious campaigns and the effect of the less spectacular but efficient social system, we have the impression that with the evolution of the Udmurt social structure, the clan deities became

the weakest link in the Udmurt pantheon, and their cult faded. They were supplanted by another, smaller, patrilineal kin group [Hafeez 2015, p. 49].

So it apparently happened in Bol'shekachakovo, where now no *kuala* has been maintained. But the memory has not faded. As in many other Udmurt villages, the places where formerly *kualas* were and where their remains may be are still venerated and respected. We met this situation with our colleagues Ranus Sadikov and Nikolai Anisimov in 2016 in Varkled-Bodya village (Agryz district, Tatarstan) [Toulouze, Anisimov 2018]. Several informants of Kirsi Hafeez's remember exactly where they stood, and that they were fenced. Often, for them not to be forgotten, trees have been planted. It was forbidden to make one's business and to pour soiled water [Hafeez 2015, p. 54]. We had a similar experience with Ranus Sadikov in Kirzganbashevo (Baltachevo district, Bashkortostan) in 2016: on the place of a former *kuala*, which was seen as one of the sacred places of the village, we were shown a tree. On a previous photograph by Ranus Sadikov, who had been in the village in 2000, the same place was fenced [Sadikov 2019, p. 327].



Photo 4. An Udmurt courtyard: the *kuala*. 1894 Photo Y. Wichmann [Sadikov-Hafeez 2009, p. 259, SUK 905, 38]

However, according to Kirsi Hafeez, there were yet ritual activities in the courtyard at the beginning of the 21st century, especially in the transition times, which earlier took place in the *kuala* [Hafeez 2015, p. 57]. Wichmann describes in detail also the internal part of the *kuala*, and the general principle of sacrifices [Sadikov Hafeez 2009, p. 245].

Lud

Wichmann also is very interested by the cult of *Lud*. This cult of alien origin exists by the peoples of the Volga region, first by the Mari, but also by the Udmurt.

In the eastern areas there are still places where the sacred places *Lud* are active and there are ceremonies until now (for example, Votskaya Osh'ya, in the Yanaul district of Bashkortostan, or Kipchak, in the Kuyeda district of the Perm' region). In many other

places, however, there are only remembrances of the *Lud* cult places, but the ceremonies are not enacted any more. This is often explained by the fact ritual specialists, who knew the prayers, the rules of the cult died without transmitting their knowledge. One of the reasons may also be that the *kuris'kon*, the prayers for *Lud* were not uttered loudly, and thus nobody could learn them only by listening. On the other hand, even there where there are ceremonies in this place, this does not mean that they are dedicated to the deity of the lower world *Lud/Keremet*. We have the impression that today the place of other deities has been occupied by Inmar and that in the sacred places former dedicated to *Lud*, now the Udmurt pray Inmar.

Lud was considered as a severe deity. He did not appreciate women and did not allow them near him [Shutova 2001, p. 236]. Women started to avoid him [Harva 1914, p. 97]. According to data by Kirsi Hafeez, the grandmother of one informant ordered her granddaughter not to look in the direction of *Lud* [Hafeez 2015, p. 66]. *Lud* was resentful. These places were necessarily fenced, unlike many others that could be fenced or not. [Harva 1914, p. 97]. This is explained by the need to protect the place itself from the interference of animals or unknown people, but also by the need to protect the people themselves from the malice and the resentment of the god.



Photo 5. The small Lud. Bol'shekachakovo. 1894 Photo Y. Wichmann [Hafeez 2015, p.59, Museovirasto SUK 905, 51]



Photo 6. Ceremony in the great Lud in Bol'shekachakovo. 1894 Photo Y. Wichmann [Hafeez 2015, p. 62, Museovirasto SUK 905, 52]

Kirsi Hafeez explains this peculiarity also with the fact that all the other sacred places would be dwelling places for all the other gods, but *Lud kuz'o* “the master of *Lud*” could only dwell in its own grove [Hafeez 2015, p. 61]. In Bol'shekachakovo there were places for the cult of *Lud*. As we see from the photos, ceremonies, according to Wichmann, took place twice a year, in spring and autumn, as well as in critical periods. According to Wichmann, in the small *Lud* prayed twelve heads of households [Sadikov, Hafiz 2009, pp. 243–246], and the great *Lud* hosted only one clan. Only the sacrificial priest, the *Lud utis*, and his helpers entered the fenced space.

Both pictures are interesting. They show sacred places where trees grow. The photo of the Great *Lud* has been taken during a ceremony, the only time Y. Wichmann attended. He said that he was allowed to enter the sacred place and to attend the ceremony because he was taken for an envoy of the tsar.

As the photos of the *kuala*, they are precious because these places, as they were immortalised in the photos, do not exist anymore, and only relying on the photos it would be impossible to identify them. This task was complicated because Kirsi Hafeez's informants explained that during the Second world war trees were cut in the sacred place *Lud*, “in order to heat the school” [Hafeez 2015, p. 25]. Of course, ceremonies were discontinued, although, according to Kirsi Hafeez, during one decade, people continued to frequent these places with their own requests and offerings. The children who in the sixties played in these places, often found coins and remains of previous offerings [Hafeez 2015, p. 26]. Thanks to conversation with the inhabitants of the village, Kirsi Mäkelä Hafeez was able to find, where these places, so important for the life of the village, were situated.

There were many other sacred spots in Bol'shekachakovo, even besides these places. In different natural places people worshipped the masters of nature, the spirits of the domesticated places: They brought offerings to *vumurt*, *n'ulesmurt*, *tölperi*, and also *mudor*. Wichmann describes these places in detail, although he paid them less attention than the *kuala*, *lud* and *mör vös'*. Kirsi Mäkelä Hafeez attempted also to find them in the present form of the village. She succeeded in some cases, in others not. I did not endeavour to find these places, for I focused on the present day. I was especially interested by the big collective ceremonies. And there was one, which had also interested Wichmann as well as later scholars, the *mör vös'*. This is the ceremony that was revitalised in the 21st century.

It takes place every second year, it marks the end of the spring agricultural works, and is performed at the time of the summer solstice. When Wichmann was in the village, it was called *mör vös'*, the ceremony of the *mir*, the village community. This ceremony gathers four villages: Bol'shekachakovo, Malyy Kachak, Kurgak, Kachkinturay – at the end of the 19th century as today. Like the others, this ceremony was discontinued in the 1960s. At Wichmann's time, like today, there were two places for this ceremony. One of these places was totally fenced, and within it there were many big and beautiful oaks. The other place was on a hill, one could see from there the surrounding country; then it was not fenced, although Wichmann commented that I was supposed to be fenced soon.

This photo is very interesting and it must be commented on the basis of what we know about today's ceremonies. Some differences are blindly obvious. Not only the quantity of people attending – much more than today – but also the fact that, with very rare exceptions, all are dressed in white, not only the sacrificial priests, but the ordinary

people as well. Although the photo is not enough focused, we may suppose that all are wearing a *short derem*, the ritual garb not only for the sacrificial priests, but a ritual and festive outfit for all. Today it is rare to meet a *shor derem*, but some are still circulating. They started diminishing when people ceased to weave, probably in the 1960s (Chernykh 2002, p.18].



Photo 7. The place for the mör vös' in Bol'shekachakovo, 1894. Photo Y. Wichmann Юрьё [Hafeez 2015, p. 77, Museovirasto SUK 905, 47]



Photo 8. The ceremony *mör vös'* in Bol'shekachakovo. 1894. Photo Y. Wichmann [Hafeez 2015 p. 80, Museovirasto]

Many *short derem* just disappeared in the graves with their owners, as it is considered as a funerary outfit. Some sacrificial priests have it still for the sacrificial ceremonies, as the priest of Vyazovka, in the Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan. Some elder women wear it still for the ceremonies. But today, with these rare exceptions, the ritual outfit for the lay part of the population is the ordinary festive, or folk outfit. The rule to be in white applies only to priests. The photograph also shows that in the first rows all are men. The women sat behind them, which means that place was organised according to sex. What is also curious, especially taking into account the present rules is that all the men are bareheaded. Today the rules are the reverse: men as well as women must attend the ceremonies with their heads covered.

Wichmann reports that this ceremony lasts four days. We'll come back to this below. Let us only observe that on the second day, two riders, dresses in white, went on horses through the village, heralding that it was time to go to the ceremony. This deserves attention. Wichmann even wrote down the words they said: *vös'e mynele ini!* This sentence in Udmurt is added as a note [Sadikov & Mäkelä 2009, pp. 241–242]. In 2018 in Bol'shekachakovo I did not observe anything similar. But we had an interesting experience in Aribash (Tatyshly district, Bashkortstan) in 2015, at the village ceremony, where we observed exactly the same phenomenon: the young guys walked on foot, but the words were the same. They relied not on Wichmann's observations, but on the childhood's remembrances of the sacrificial priest Aleksey Garayev (Oral information, A. Garayev, 2015). This allows us to understand that this happened not only in Bol'shekachakovo, but in other villages and also in other districts.

The memories gathered by the Finnish researcher confirm that in the great *Lud*, the last ceremonies her informants attended were in 1950. By then the rule had already changed and women were allowed to attend [Hafeez 2015, p. 65].

The 20th century, the Soviet period

Regretfully, after Wichmann, for decades scholars did not visit this village. If some did, research knows nothing about it. Thus, we do not know how the years of the anti-religious campaign passed in this village. We cannot exclude that at some moments, during the Soviet times, scholars were there, but the religious issues were not approved by the authorities and even if someone observed and asked about them, there are no

traces left. And these years are too remote to rely on the informant's memory for such possible marginal episodes.

However indeed the memory of the inhabitants of the village is the only source for this period. They allow to understand what happened. The main drawback is the absence of chronological precision. According to the remembrances of different informants, there were ceremonies until the 1960s, while for others they were discontinued in the 1950s [Hafeez 2015, p. 35]. We must add that remembrances have been mostly gathered by Kirsi Hafeez in 2008 and for a longer period by Ranus Sadikov, who, although he did not live in the village, he visited it several times and met informants. He was not only interested by the religious ceremonies, but also by other aspects of Udmurt traditional culture.

According to informants, in the 1930s on the hill Keremet, where was the *Great Lud*, they founded a public Park of leisure and culture, attempting to give to a place sacred for the people a new, socialist meaning. There children played, all was clean and nice, and *sabantuy* was held there. Apparently, *Lud* was only a part of this Park, but it was fenced and there nobody played. People also did not eat the rowan from the trees, fathers warned their children not to. During the war, the trees were cut because there were only few horses in the village and people had to find wood for heating close to their living places. And, as it happens often in these cases, punishment followed: those who cut the trees, according to the narratives, soon died and their lineage also finished [Hafeez 2015, p. 67–69].

Informants remember how they attended the last ceremonies with their grannies. Some even remember how they played when they were children and found coins in some

places. One lady remembered that her sister fell ill after having taken one such coin. Usually parents did not allow even to touch these coins [Hafeez 2015, p. 70]. The sacred character of these places is well revealed by the fact that no house has been built on these places and even close to them even when new apartments were built in the village [Hafeez 2015, p. 74].

The ceremony *mör vös'* resisted up to the end of the 1950s, probably it was already called *badzh'yn vös'*. To prove this, there are remembrances of informants born in the 1930s who remember that in 1958 the four villages participated and after the ceremony they organised a *sabantuy*. They sacrificed a ram, collected money. The next year there was also a ceremony, where the head of the kolkhoz sacrificed a cow. But “the teacher and the boss of the Party spoke against Inmar” [Hafeez 2015, p. 85]. Those who were children and attended with their grannies remember the corporal actions, like bowing and kneeling.

Kirsi Hafeez presents other interesting data: for example; how people remembered the fading ceremonies in private space, and this was done for decades after the ceremonies had disappeared from public life, every year before haymaking. As with the dead, this was called *vös' bure vayyny* “commemorating the ceremony”. People gathered in private homes and drank tea, remembering the ceremonies they could not perform now. During such “meetings” no alcohol was offered, it was even forbidden, exactly as during ceremonies: they drank tea, ate *taban'*, *shangi*, baked goods. Informants do not use the word *kis'ton* “celebration of the dead”, they say they did it for Inmar. These are the same people who previously attended the ceremonies [Hafeez 2015, p. 86–87].

Some reported that sometimes on the sacred place, one could see a big man in white, whom they called either *kylchin* either *kuz'o*. This figure reminds o Kyldysin, in Udmurt legends.

The revitalisation

The revival of the fading ceremonies started in the 1990s for all the Eastern Udmurt region. The situation in all the villages differed. Much depended on factors out of control, among which human factors: for example, from the personality and the behaviour of the local leaders, from the personality of the local sacrificial priests. In some villages, full continuity was retained, as in Malaya Bal'zuga (Tatyshly district Bashkortostan), where the village ceremonies were never discontinued even during the Soviet time. True enough one year the Party people interrupted the ceremony and knocked over the cauldrons. But the sacrificial priest, stubborn Nazip Sadriev, just changed the place, shifting it 50 metres further, and the ceremony took place the following year like always. But Nazip Sadriev is a strong man, who wilfully opposed the anti-religious campaign [Sadikov, Danilko 2003, Toulouze, Niglas, Vallikivi, Anisimov 2017].

In the Tatyshly district, where the head of the kolkhoz and leader of the National Movement of the Bashkortostan Udmurt, started to encourage religious activity, and acted though activists in the districts to look for descendants of sacrificial priests who would take over the task to lead the ceremonies. One of these activists was Yuriy Menzaripovich Sadyrov, who later became the head of the administration of the Kaltasy district and is an Udmurt, born in Kachkinturay. This revitalisation process took place in

the Kaltasy district at the end of the 1990s [Hafeez 2015, p. 35]. The “new” *Badzh’yn vös’* took place in 2000 [Hafeez 2015, p. 90]. Thus, when Kirsi Hafeez arrived in Bol’shekachakovo on the steps of Wichmann in 2008, the tradition had already been rooted to hold the old *mör vös’* under the name *Badzh’yn vös’*. The name has changed, but the ritual follows the same principles as earlier: once in two years, the abovementioned four villages gather for this ceremony in Bol’shekachakovo, after having promised in each village to give one sacrifice. The next year, the ceremonies take place in each village.

Bol’ shekachakovo in 2008

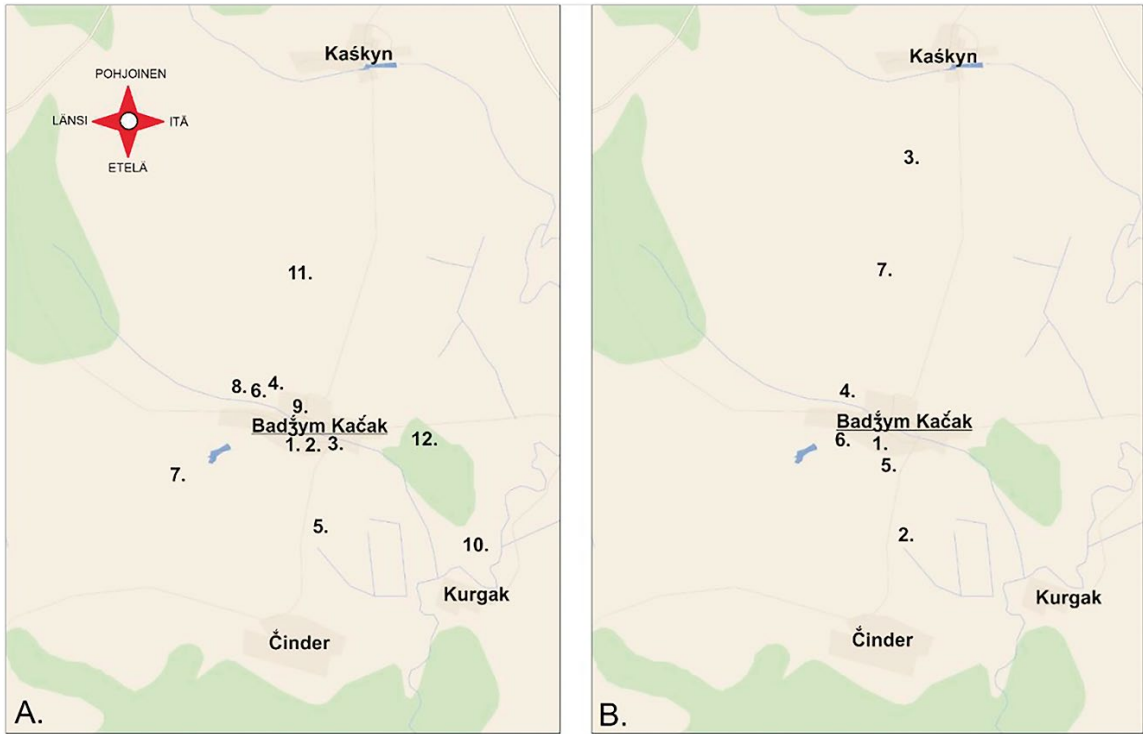


Photo 9. Ranus Sadikov and Kirsi Hafeez. 2008. At the ceremony Elen vös'. From Anatoliy Galikhanov's archive, Altayevo, 2016.

I have already mentioned many results of Kirsi Hafeez's work. It allowed to measure the difference between the seclal landscape in Wichmann's time and today, thank to the memories of her informants. One of the answers of the population to the prossure by the authorities was to reduce the rituals. The only who remained were the private ones, the intimate family and clan rituals. When the revival process started, the attention was concentrated of the old *mör vös'*. This is a classical way of acting in crisis: to concentrate one's energy on less rituals. For example, Nazip Sadriev decided in the 1960s to discontinue the "three village ceremony" (*kuin' gurt vös'*), because he felt that

for the rural population it was too much, too expensive and tho load for the helpers was too much. Another direction is to reduce the number and the diversity of the sacrificial animals, and this is what has happened in Bol'shekachakovo: today, the universal sacrifice is the ewe, and, only in some cases, the goose.

Kirsi Hafeez wrote on the basis of her fieldwork and of Wichmann's data her Master's degree "The meanings of the sacred places in an Udmurt village of the Bashkortostan Republic" [Hafeez 2015]. So she concentrated on sacred places. She composed some interesting maps, here two of them [Hafeez 2015, p. 38]:

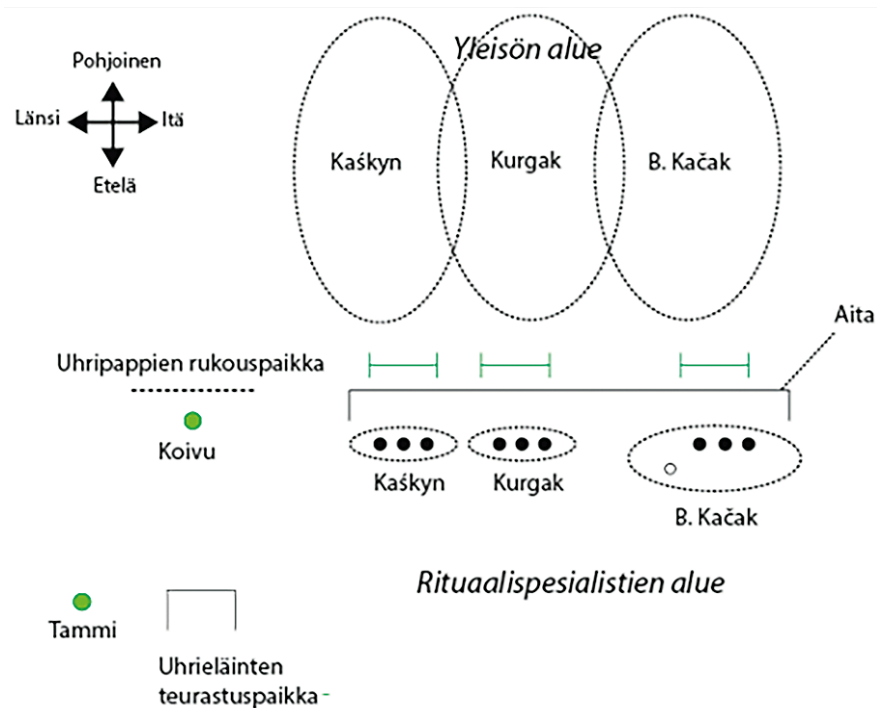


On these maps we find the location of the sacred places in Bol'shekachakovo; first as they had been listed by Wichmann (map A) and those Kirsi Khafeez was able to identify (map B). Here she uses the Udmurt names of the villages: *Kas'kyn* is Kachkinturay, and *Ch'inder* is Malyy Kachak. However, she was not able to identify all the sacred places Wichmann mentioned [Hafeez 2015, p. 38]. Almost all the places in Map B are not used, except the place where *Badzh'yn vös* is performed, N°2 and 3.

While she was in the village, Kirsi Hafeez investigated the present and past sacred places, made interviews with many informants and attended, as Wichmann did, the ceremonies. We may also notice that Kirsi Hafeez was not interested by the sacrificial priests and the prayers, for these issues are not reflected at all in her Master thesis.

The participants in the ceremonies are the same communities that attended in Wichmann's time, the same four villages. In 2008 the ceremony was organised at the end of June. The ritual lasted two days: the first day was dedicated to the promise of the sacrifice (*siz'is'kon*) and the other day, the ceremony proper [Hafeez 2015, p. 92]. Actually in 2008, when Kirsi Hafeez attended, only three villages out of four attended: in Malyy Kachak, they had forgotten on the day before to collect cerealst for the ceremony, therefore they did not participate [Hafeez 2015, p. 91–92].

Below, an interesting drawing on which Kirsi Hafeez shows where the people stood during the ceremony: behind the fenced cauldrons, around which the ritual specialists acted. During the prayer, the sacrificial priests stand in front of the birches and they sacrifice the animals right of the sacred place, closer to the oak.



— = rituaalirakennelma pienistä koivuista

● = keittopata

○ = pienempi *siziškon*-uhrin keittopata (lupausuhri, joka toteutettiin paikassa ennen yleisön saapumista)

Scheme showing the proceedings of Badzh'yn vös' [Hafeez 2015, p.93]

Kirsi Hafeez emphasises a difference with Wichmann's time: people sit with their families, all have their heads covered, not only women. [Hafeez 2015: 93]. Oha She observes – but does not comment upon – that there are women among the ritual specialists, which at Wichmann's time did not happen. She also noticed that dressing in white is no more a general rule and that the sacrificial priests are dressed in white only while they pray [Hafeez 2015, p. 94].



Photo 10. The ceremony Bydzh'yn vös'. 2008 г. Photo Kirsi Hafeez [Hafeez 2015, p.91]

Kirsi Hafeez also investigated other ritual actions, and the sacred places connected with them, and concentrated on them in a chapter. Here, I am focused on the ceremony and I shall compare her remarks with mine.

Bol' shekachakovo in 2018

When, in 2018, I visited first Bol'shekachakovo, I had a long experience of attending ceremonies by the Eastern Udmurt, for it was my fifth year. Therefore, I had already gathered a huge comprative material, and this oriented my observations. I also was focused on the “actors”, without whom there would be no ceremonies, the Udmurt sacrificial priest, the Udmurt *vös'as'*. And as Ranus Sadikov and me are preparing a collection of payers called *kuris'kon*, I paid particular attention to this aspect. I was thrice in Bol'shekachakovo, so I spent three days in the village.

The first time it was the discovery, a pilot expedition with Ranus Sadikov and a local journalist, a doctoral student in Tartu University, Anna Baydullina, who organised a meeting with one of her acquaintances.

We met before the head of the district administration, abovementioned Yuriy Sadyrov in the administrative centre Kaltasy, where we discussed about the revitalisation process in the district. We learnt that the initiative came from the leaders of the National movement. All the ritual specialists in the village, those who acted before the 1960s, had dies and they had not transmitted their prayers to anybody.



Photo 11. The head of the Kaltasy administration, Yuriy Sadyrov. 2018 Photo Eva Toulouze.

We had two meetings in Bol'shekachakovo. The first was with former teacher Sakina Sufiyarova, who now represents the district at the board of the National and cultural centre of the Bashkortostan Udmurt. She received us very kindly, and propose us to meet the local sacrificial priest. We walked through the village to get acquainted with Anatoliy Garifullovich Nasipullin, a former teacher of chemistry. He was a joyful and agreeable man who was happy to show us the sheets where he wrote the prayers that he reads at the ceremony. He told us what sacrificial animals there had been in the previous ceremony and he allowed us to attend the ceremony and to film it.



Photo 12. Eva with Sakina Sufiyarova and her grand-children. 2018. Photo Ranus Sadikov.

The *siz' is' kon*

The second time I came on purpose in order to attend the ritual of promise of a sacrifice. Depending on the village this ritual is either a part of the ceremony, on the eve or at the very beginning, either it does not exist at all, particularly in the places, where this sort of practice was long discontinued.



Φομο 13. *The promise of a sacrifice siz'is'kon. 2018 Photo Eva Toulouze.*

This ritual has been preserved where there is some continuity. In the Tatyshly district, in some places of the Alga group, the *siz'is'kon* takes place in the evening before the ceremony. The ritual specialists light a fire that is supposed to continue to burn until the next morning. In the Vilgurt group, *siz'is'kon* takes place right before the ceremony. In Bol'shekachakovo, we discovered another model – it is a particular ceremony, performed one week or at least some day before the ceremony proper. In 2018 it took place on June 20th. The date of the ceremony had not been set. They were supposed to inform me. I was very much surprised when they told me that it would take place on June 25th, because that year, the general ceremony *Elen vös'* was to take place on June

24th. I commented upon this strange coincidence and the Bol'shekachakovo people was not informed. But in their tradition, *Elen vös'* is supposed to be the last of the ceremonies. So, they quickly changed their plans and put it on June 22nd.

In her Master thesis Kirsi Hafeez observes that unlike in other places, in Bol'shekachakoo the ritual specialists, the assistants, are mostly women. It is right remark and I think this fact is more important than we understand it from the work of the Finnish scholar. In all the Eastern Udmurt's area this is the only place where women play such a central role. This is the first thing I heard about the Kaltasy Udmurt: at the 2013 *Elen vös'*, the only women who cooked porridge and worked in the fences area were these Kaltasy helpers and I remember that for many people, it was extremely unpleasant. Indeed, this is a particular feather indeed, on the spot as well. At the *siz'is'kon*, themain helper, Marina, read the people the previous year's financial report – how they used the money, the offerings of the people. Another woman prepared the porridge (in this ritual, without meat) and distributed it. Others collected money. The one to play was the main sacrificial priest Anatoliy Nasipullin and there was no other.

Bydzh' yn vös'

Wichmann observed that *Bydzh'yn vös'* lasted four days, but he does not mention at all the *siz'is'kon*. Here, if we take into account the day of the promise of a sacrifice, two full days are required. Kirsi Hafeez observes that now the ritual is much shorter. Of course I do agree, but we must just examine the programme. Let us not forget also that we have today much quicker transportation between the villages, which shortens the time for going from a village to another. Wichmann describes: on the first day the people arrive, the hosts pray and sacrifice in their *kualas*, and the ritual specialists slaughter the

sacrificial animals; then the people gather at the Great *kuala* and make again a sacrifice. On the second day, riders in white invite the population to the ceremony, and the ceremony takes place, all the priests say their prayer, the attendants are given broth and meat, afterwards they have horse races and competitions among men. On the third day, there is unmaking and on the fourth everybody goes back home.

We may observe that the structure of the ritual activities does not change. Only the activities were stretched in time. For example, the sacrificial meat was eaten not immediately, but the next day. All the rituals that took place at the *kuala* have disappeared – it concerned two kinds of animals and four kinds of drinks. In 1894 there were a couple of geese, a sheep, a cow, a horse and a ram [Sadikov & Mäkelä 2009, pp. 247–249]. In 2018 the sacrificial animals were eleven sheep, two for each village, and an additional one for Bol'shekachakovo. Thus, both the quantity and the variety of animals has been reduced.



Photo 14. The address to the Gods at the ceremony Bydzh'yn vös'. 2018 Photo Eva Toulouze.

Another difference, in comparison with the 19th century, is that at that time, *Bydzh'yn vös'* was performed every year in a different village, among the four participants, while now it is performed only in the central village, Bol'shekachakovo, once in two years.

The victims are sacrificed by the men-helpers in the morning, while the women prepare the fires and heat the water, in which the meat will cook. Each village has its habits: they bring the needed paraphernalia for the comfort of the helpers. One of the women is always present on the place where the men do the slaughtering. As at

Wichmann's time, the blood is poured in a hole dug in the ground, and the women takes from there a spoonful of blood for each animal to pour into the fire.

The people sit without distinction of sex, families sit together but all have their heads covered. Each village has its own traditional place. The helpers give around the porridge and separately the meat, in different buckets, but only to the people of their village.

The sacrificial priests stay in front of the people in a long row, there are nine of them, two for each village and in addition Anatoliy Nasipullin. There are all in white, but the Bol'shekachakovo and Malyy Kachak sacrificial priests' "traditional" medical smocks are decorated with Udmurt patterns. Until 2018 everybody wore simple white medical smocks, but this year for the first time they used their new decorated garbs. Nasipullin starts reading the prayer. For each village one of the two priests read a prayer, all read from the paper. When Kirsi Hafeez attended this ceremony, the sacrificial priests stood on the side of the audience, by the birches. In 2018, they stood right in front of the audience.

Right after the end of the ritual activities, start the plays for adults and children. The awards are the towels given as offerings. The first play is a game with chopsticks. There are two players and chopsticks are thrown on the ground in two different directions, and the two blindfolded players attempt to recover as many as they can. All competed in this game: small children, teenagers, grannies. There were also other competitions. Wichmann writes that this is a traditional way of finishing a ceremony. But at his time the participants were only men and there were also horse races.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to gather what we know about the ceremonies in Bol'shekachakovo from the observations of A. Heikel and Y. Wichmann up to the contemporary period, taking into account that we have a vacuum in between. This vacuum is not an exception either here or in Russia in general. We may fill it with the memories of our informants, while most of those who participated themselves are not among the living to answer our questions. This is what happened in this village with the ritual specialists. It is particularly important to reflect on the sources used for revitalisation. How did they establish their prayers? They could certainly not rely on Wichmann's texts, who were published in Finnish only in 2009. Kirsi Hafeez's work shows that in 2008 there were still some informants who remembered some of religious practice when they were children. Probably they are also the source for the ceremonies of this group.

In the reconstruction of Bol'shekachakovo's events of religious life, Kirsi Hafeez's work plays a central role. She could interrogate yet such people that were no more there in 2018. Her work has not been published and it exists only in Finnish. It is important to consider her data and to recognise their value. That's what we wanted also to achieve with this article, in which her data have been enriched with those I collected in 2018.

The winter sacrificial ceremonies of the Eastern Udmurt³⁹

Ranus Sadikov

The calendar celebrations by the eastern Udmurt who avoided Evangelisation and live now in the Republic of Bashkortostan and the Perm' region were directly connected with agricultural work and traditional religion. The yearly cycle of the calendar rituals was divided into two half years, the summer and winter ones. The rituals in the one had their equivalents in the other [2. С. 20, 86]. Thus, there are spring and autumn clan ceremonies and commemorations of the dead; there were also summer and winter village, intervillage and regional sacrifices etc. But in comparison with the summer one, the winter cycle was less loaded with rituals, because of the peculiarities of economic activities and of the weather conditions.

The winter sacrificial ceremonies of the Eastern Udmurt, unlike the summer ones, have not been treated by ethnographic literature yet. We find short, but precious data about them in descriptions by N.I. Tezyakov [Tezyakov 1886, pp. 7-9], I.V. Yakovlev [Yakovlev 1903, pp. 186-189] and K. Yakovlev [Yakovlev 1915, p. 264] of the winter

³⁹ This article has been published in Russian and translated by Eva Toulouze. Садиков Р. Р. Зимние моления-жертвоприношения закамских удмуртов: традиции и современное состояние // Вестник Удмуртского университета. Серия история и филология. 2017. Т. 27. № 4. С. 587–592.

sacrificial ceremonies of the Udmurt of the Osa uyezd of the Perm' governorate in the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Among the contemporary scholars, these issues have been touched upon by T. G. Minniyahkmetova [2000, pp. 77-79] and A. V. Chernykh [2002, p. 199]. But the scarcity of the sources did not allow them to examine these ceremonies in detail and to point out their local characteristics.

Our field materials show that the proceedings and the quantity of winter sacrifices varied in different subgroups of the eastern Udmurt. The Tanyp Udmurt who live nowadays in the Udmurt villages of the Kaltasy, Burayevo, Baltachevo and one part of the Yanaul districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan, organised at the winter solstice in every village *uram vös' / tol shor vös' / tol vös'* ('street ceremony /midwinter/winter sacrificial ceremony'). Unfortunately, information about them could only be gathered among informants born in the 1910s and 1920s, who remembered how they were performed in their childhood, and in general were not able to describe these rituals fully. According to them, *uram vös'* took place in winter, in December: at one end of the street people lighted fires and sacrificed animals; they prayed and cooked porridge, which they ate at home. All of the village inhabitants attended the ceremony⁴⁰. No exhaustive information is available about the sacrificial animals. So, for example, in Mamady (Burayevo district) a couple of geese and a couple of ewes were sacrificed, exactly the same as in the summer village ceremony. [2., p. 78]. In Altayevo, in the same district, the *uram vös'* took place with the sacrifice of a foal and only men attended⁴¹. In some place they did

⁴⁰ The author's fieldwork materials (FWM), 1997 RB, Yanaul district, Bud'ya Baryash, Z. N. Gilyazetdinova, born 1924; M. Kh. Sufiyarova, born 1916.

⁴¹ FWM, 2001. RB, Burayevo district, Altayevo, Sh. Sh. Yalalov, born 1928.

had no blood sacrifice, and prayed only with porridge cooked on the spot during the ritual or with food brought from home⁴². Sometimes, after the ceremony, they organised public funmaking, similar to the summer *sabantuy*. The sacrificial priests stuck in front of them branches, or young spruce trunks⁴³. We have no data about possible intervillage or regional ceremonies in winter, which does not mean they did not exist in prior times.

In Bol'shetuganeyevo, Kaltasy district, kin patrilineal groups celebrated midwinter *tolshor*; they ate there the head of big livestock slaughtered in autumn. In addition, they commemorated the dead kin – with *tchöltis'kon* (celebration of the dead)⁴⁴. At the end of the 19th century in Bol'shoy Kachak (Birsk uyezd Ufa governorate) in mid-December they performed *tol-dzh'uon* ('winter party) and prayed in the family *kuala* [4. p. ,154]. We see these traditions as equivalent to the kin ceremonies and commemorations held in spring and autumn. They were probably fragments of an older calendar cycle, already lost by the end of the 19th century.

These words of an informant illustrate eloquently the fading of winter ceremonies in the 20th century: «*Tol vös' uan'. Soye zhugis'konles' az'lo ogpol kuris'kizy. Atkay kuris'kiz. Az'lo otyн chun'y vandilill'am. Kolkhowe pyrem bere chun'y övöl ni inde, shyden gyne, zhuken gyne kuris'kizy. Sobere otyн öz kuris'ke ni. Atkay arly byde tol vös'se öz kel'ty. Kuris'kysa myniz doryn, pedlo potysa. Vös' dis''yosse dis'asa kuris'kow val. Iz'ye kunulaz kqro val. Zhadem beraz dugdiz ini. Mi öm dyshetis'kele*⁴⁵» – There is a winter

⁴² FWM, 1998. RB, Kaltasy district, Malyy Kachak, F. I. Il'bayeva, born 1914; S. P. Pakretdinova, born 1920; FWM, 2001. RB, Burayevo district, Mamady, Z. M. Minniyakhmetova, born 1916.

⁴³ ПМА, 1998 г. РБ, Калтасинский район, д. Тынбахтино, З. У. Уразметова, 1922 г. р.

⁴⁴ ПМА, 2006 г. РБ, Калтасинский район РБ, д. Большетуганеево, Гильмиярова К. Ш., 1925 г. р.

⁴⁵ ПМА, 2006 г. РБ, Балтачевский район, д. Шавьяды, Саяпов Ф. Н., 1926 г. р.

ceremony. We prayed once before the war. My father prayed. Earlier they slaughtered a foal. When we entered the kolkhoz, there were no more foals, we only prayed with soup of porridge. Later they didn't pray there anymore. My father did not leave one single year the winter ceremony. He always prayed at home, in the courtyard. He prayed with his prayer garb. He kept his cap under his armpit. When he tired, he gave up. We did not learn from him.».

By the Tanyp Udmurts, the tradition of the winter ceremony (*tol vös'*) has remained only in Asavka (Baltachevo district). According to elder informants, when they were children, the *tol vös'* was performed in a street of the centre of the village (*shordin*) by a source. On the eve, in the evening, they held a *siz'is'kon*, the promise of a sacrifice. The fire had to be kept burning all the night long. On the next day, they had the ceremony proper. On the place of the sacrifice they stuck spruce branches. Later, the rituals started to be achieved indoors. They cooked either outdoors or indoors (depending on the weather) flour jelly, and they prayed also either indoors or outdoors⁴⁶. The last two years, there were no winter ceremonies, but in December 2016, they held a *tolalte kuris'kon* ('winter ceremony) in the house of the new sacrificial priest, Vladimir Galiev, born 1971, who was convinced that the tradition had to be kept up. On the given day (December 16.), a Friday, the priest's house hosted around 15–20 persons, men and women, elder and younger. They had brought some cups and pancakes. In one corner, on a pole, they had exposed the towels they use every year in their ceremonies. The sacrificial priest cooked a barley porridge, with which they performed one prayer with people on their knees (*kuris'kon*) with three bows (*dzh'ybyrtton*). The head of the ceremony wore a white

⁴⁶ ПМА, 2016 г. РБ, Балтачевский район, д. Асавка, Миннихметов Г. Г., 1941 г. р.

smock, two of his helpers wore a jacket and were girded with ancient towels. All the men had their heads covered. During the prayer they kneeled in the first rows, the women behind them. After the prayer, all sat at the table and ate the porridge, so that men and women sat apart. The men ate the porridge with their heads covered. According to them, in ceremonies or commemorations for the dead, the men must be in hats, the women in svarves and petticoats. All must have long sleeves. If parts of the head or body remain uncovered, the deities and the spirits of the dead do not notice that person. After the banquet, the hosts offered tea with sweets and everyone went back home. Before leaving, the sacrificial priest gave every one the porridge in the cups⁴⁷.

There are more data about the winter ceremonies of the Buy Udmurts (part of the Yanaul district in Bashkortostan, kuyeda district in the Perm' region). Relying on the materials of Finn scholar Yrjö Wichmann, at the beginning of the 20th century, in Kaymashabash (Birsk uyezd) the Udmurt held the *uram vös'*, 'sacrifice in the street': "In autumn, when the ground is covered with snow; in the village street they slaughtered a brown horse, and bring its bones to hand in the *ly kuyan* place⁴⁸. They cook outdoors, women do not participate» [3. p. 60]. As the local teacher I. V. Yakovlev said, the Votiaks from the Osa uyezd of the Perm governorate held in every village a winter ceremony, which took place in the middle of the village outdoors. The sacrificial animal was a foal, bought collectively. On the eve of the sacrifice, the priests made a fire in the middle of the street, and they kept it until the morning. In the morning, they sacrificed the foal and cooked the sacrificial meat. In the evening, when the horse meat is cooked, all the people

⁴⁷ This ceremony was filmed on videocamera (Cameraman Liivo Niglas, Estonia).

⁴⁸ The place where bones of sacrificial animals were brought in certain kinds of sacrifices.

rushed to the place of the sacrifice. The meat is distributed into the bowls. The sacrificial priest, holding a bowl, stands in front of the people with his helpers and recite a prayer, which the people followed by bowing down to the ground. After the prayer, all the participants tasted the meat from the priest's bowl, then the priest went to all the attendants and collected money offerings. All brought the broth home and they ate it with the whole family. The bones of the animal were gathered together in one knot and young people brought it singing in carriages up to a spruce that stood at some distance from the village, where they hung it on one of the branches [9. pp. 186-187].

According to the same author, after the street ceremony, depending on the state of the sledge road, Udmurts from twelve surrounding villages held a regional ceremony in one of the sacred groves. Three days before the ceremony, the sacrificial priests and their helpers gathered, made fires and kept them burning until the sacrifice. They bought with common money two horses, a cow, a goose and a ewe. On the day of the sacrifice, they were slaughtered, their meat was cooked in five cauldrons. People started to come together in the evening, the men; women did not participate. The sacrificial priests gathered with the money they collected, and holding them each prayed on one cauldron: "When he had collected money from some persons, the sacrificial priest ordered the others to kneel and standing near to the cauldron under the spruce, started, with the scarf in his hand, to "pray", which means to ask (benefits) for those you gave" [9. pp. 187-188]. After each bow of the priest, the kneeling men bowed to the earth. Such actions while people conflued, happened by each cauldron several times. When all were gathered, the helpers took out of the cauldrons the cooked heads limbs of the sacrificial animal, and put them in wooden cups. All the people knelt in front of the cauldrons, in

long rows. With the cups in their hands, the sacrificial priests, turned towards midday, recited a long prayer with several bows. While they prayed, helpers started to cook porridge, while other participants ate meat from the head and limbs of the victim. They also ate other meat when it was ready, as well as porridge, which they set for each village by every cauldron in wooden cups. After the banquet the priests said the concluding prayer. After the people dispersed, the priests burned the bones of the sacrificial animals and prayed again. They also prayed separately in this sacrificial ceremony, for the new recruits to the army, while their farewell ritual started soon after it [9. p. 189]. As commented a witness: “a stranger would have a strange impression from this so called *vös*’. The forest, the dark, the fires, the silent crowds – arouse in the souls a heavy, gloomy feeling and the actions themselves take the form of an enigmatic veil” [9. p. 188].

The witness of this winter sacrificial ceremony of the Osa Votyaks at the end of the 19th century was the zemstvo physician N. I. Tezyakov. At the “general ceremony around Michaelmas”, in “the protected grove between the villages of Baraban and Sukhaya Kyrga”, according to him, seven surrounding villages gathered. On the eve of the sacrifice, in the evening, a group of Votyaks came to the grove, dressed in white mantels (*dukes*) in homewoven cloth. They lighted three or four fires, around which sacrificial priests fussed and one could notice sacrificial animals, a calf, a foal and goose, all white. They had been bought on common money, and had been accompanied to the place of the sacrifice by their owners, who played the role of helpers to the priests. Further, the author describes the sacrifice of the foal. The sacrificial priest put on a hat, took on flatbreads a white towel, and, turning towards the East, loudly, in a singing voice, started

shouting his requests to the deities. The others knelt near the fire, bareheaded, and bowed to the earth. While the priest prayed, a helper washed the victim with water and tied its legs. Then the priest took an axe, start praying again, so that “shaytan and wizards would not get to the victim, and prevent them to desecrate the sacred victim” [5. p. 8]. Uttering the words of the prayer, he walked thrice round the cauldron and the foal. He cut some bits he threw into the fire, and then, putting it on the ground, destroyed it with the axe: “the axe remained stuck in the earth during all the time of the sacrifice [5. p. 8]. After this action, the helper slaughtered the sacrificial animal, and gathered its blood in a trough. The first drops were gathered in a spoon and poured into the fire, and scooping up blood from the trough, the nearest trees were sprinkled. While the animal was being skinned, the priest recited again a prayer. In the same way were sacrificed also the other animals. According to Tezyakov, the foal was sent to Inmar, the supreme deity, the calf “to the deity living in the Sun” (*shone mummyly*, to the mother Sun), and the goose to the “Great Angel” (*badzyn-kylchin*) [5. p. 8]. The main ceremony was to take place on the following day, and then several villages would gather, men and women in white. After the ceremony, the bones of the sacrificial animals “were thoroughly gathered, tied with spongy ropes and hanged on the trees, where they would hang until the ropes would rot” [5. p. 9].

Also, according to the teacher K. Yakovlev, the Votyaks of the Osa uyezd had a “Sixth sacrifice, called *uram vys*’, which means “street ceremony”. It takes place in every village some weeks after the field works, in a street; they sacrifice one horse and one goose to In’mar” [10. p. 264].

As we see in the descriptions above at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries the Buy Udmurt's winter sacrificial ceremonies had general configuration and they were compulsory both at the village and at the regional levels. Ethnographic materials collected in 1971 in the Kuyeda district of the Perm' oblast' by an expedition of the Udmurt research institute reveal that the informants had similar representations of the winter ceremonies, although apparently, they did not perform them anymore. They mentioned the existence, in the past, of street ceremonies, as well as of a regional *tol vös'*, which took place in a grove around Baraban and where the inhabitants of several Udmurt villages met [1. Оп. 2-Н. Д. 437. Л. 84, 91, 121; Д. 439. Л. 15, 22, 31]. According to the memory of one informant, at the *tol vös'* "twelve villages prayed every year. There was a sacrificial priest. They wore *short derem*, over it they had a fur coat, but during the ceremony they had to take it off. Women almost did not attend. For three villages, they slaughtered one animal (a calf, a goose), they were mostly white, a goose could be grey, the slaughtering was achieved by the *partchas'*. The sacrificial priest and the *partchas'* lived there in the forest. We went at the farewell to the ceremony (*vös'-kel'an*). They burnt blood in the fire, they burnt also the bones, but the hide was not burnt" [1. Оп. 2-Н. Д. 439. Л. 22]. According to other date, the bones were hung on a tree [1. Оп. 2-Н. Д. 439. Л. 15]. Today's informants are not aware of the details of the winter ceremonies' proceedings, but they know there were both village ceremonies, and general ones, where the surrounding Udmurts gathered⁴⁹ [6. pp. 104-105, 113].

In November 2011 the Kuyeda district udmurts revitalised the *tol vös'*. Now, they perform it every year and gather people from several Udmurt villages of the district. [8.

⁴⁹ FWM, 2002 Perm' oblast', Kuyeda district, Kipchak, E. I. Davletchina, born 1923.

p. 121]. In November 2013, the studio «KAMWA» made a television film called *Tol vös'* – the winter ceremony of the Udmurt (image and editing by N. Kamenskikh) [12].

The Tatyshly Udmurt (Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan) had also both village and regional ceremonies. Moreover, they had also intermediate ceremonies at the intervillage level. Regretfully, sources about ritual life of these Udmurt at the late 19th and early 20th century does not exist. Today, in December and until the day starts to get longer (*nynal vyrzh'emles' az'lo*) four ceremonies take place: the village *tol vös'* in Starokalmiyarovo, the regional ceremonies *mör vös'*⁵⁰ in Novye Tatyshly and Alga, and also the intermediate ceremony *Bagysk vös'*⁵¹ close to Staryy Kyzyl'yar⁵². At the moment there are no other ceremonies, and our informants do not mention any in the past. As they do in summer, the Tatyshly Udmurt hold common sacrificial ceremonies: those who live on the right shore of the Yug, in Novye Tatyshly, those on the left shore, in Alga. At the beginning, the left shore Udmurts had their sacrificial ceremony (now they sacrifice ewes) in the sacred grove by Staryy Kyzyl'yar – *tol bagysk vös'*. Initially three villages prayed there: Nizhne- and Verkhnebaltachevo, and Kyzyl'yar. But along with the revitalisation process, other villages of the left shore joined them. Only the population of Starokalmiyarovo does not participate in this religious event: in summer as in winter,

⁵⁰ *Mör vös'* – Common ceremony with several villages attend, from the same religious group, called *mör* or *mer*, probably from the Russian “*mir*”.

⁵¹ Багышвось – моление получило свое название по местности, где оно проводится – Багыш бусы – ‘поле Багыш’.

⁵² ПМА, 1997 г. РБ, Татышлинский район, д. Бальзюга, Н. С. Садриев, 1930 г. р.

they have their own village ceremonies. One week after Bagysh vös', the participants of all the village on the left shore of the Yug gather for *tol mör vös'* in Al'ga [11. P. 112]⁵³.

In 2016, the *tol mör vös'* in Novye Tatyshly took place on December 9th. According to the words of the sacrificial priests Salim Shakirov (1938-2017) and Rais Rafikov (born 1948), unlike the summer *mör vös'*, the winter one gathers only representatives of three villages: Novye Tatyshly, Malaya Bal'zyuga and Urazgil'dy. Also the population of Maysk attends, because they consider themselves, because of their origins, one community with Novye Tatyshly⁵⁴. But regrettably, Ho, in the last three years (since 2013), people from Urazgil'dy do not attend and they explain this because of the difficulty of holding a ceremony in winter.

Let us describe one ritual. In the same sacred place where the summer rituals take place, the first people arrived when the sun rises, with two white ewes and a white goose. The last was slaughtered with prayers in the farm of the villager it had been bought from as a sacrifice. When the priest who slaughtered the goose came back, the first prayer took place. Two priests prayed towards the south. They hold a loaf of bread on a towel. Unlike the summer ceremonies, in the winter ones the birch branches are replaced by spruce ones. One has been stuck in the snow in front of each priest, other branches were set under their feet, and smaller branches on the towel, under the sacrificial bread. While he recited the prayer, the helpers slaughter the ewes. One spoonful of each sacrifice's blood was poured in the fires. Before slaughtering the ewes, they were symbolically

⁵³ In December 2013 these winter ceremonies, the *tol Bagysh vös'* and *tol mör vös'* were filmed on video (cameraman Liivo Niglas).

⁵⁴ Mayski was founded by people who came from Novye Tatyshly in 1925.

washed with water and smaller struce branches. The meat of each sacrificial animal was boiled in three cauldrons, which means that each had its own fire.

After the meat was cooked, there was a new prayer with three bows. Three priests prayed then. They held in the bowls bits of meat from the right side of the body, as well as the heads and one held the whole goose. The helpers who had slaughtered the ewes stood behind them close to the troughs with the meat. The other participants in the ritual knelt behind them. After the prayer the meat was give to taste to the men who attended, and the bones were burnt in the fire. Porridge was cooked with the cereals gathered from the population. The porridge was later distributed to the people who had gathered, while the remaining porridge was brought back in the cauldrons to be distributed to the inhabitants of the participant villages. Finally, a prayer was performed with the money offered (*dzh'uges*). When the attendant shad left, one of the priests walked thrice around the fire clockwise, while symbolically shoveling the ash to the centre of the fire⁵⁵.

As we see from these descriptions, the proceedings of the winter rituals are analogous to the summer ones. But as the weather conditions are entirely different, there are particular features. The priests attempt to perform these rituals as quickly as possible, and there are less of them. For example, in this ritual where was no *siz'is'kon*, no “promising” a sacrifice. In the day of the sacrifice, the temperature was 22 minus degrees, with a cold wind. In order to heat oneself, the priests and the other participants entered the “prayer house” nearby, which had been built on the sacred place. And the ritual banqueting took also place indoors.

⁵⁵ This sacrifice was also filmed on videocamera (cameraman Liivo Niglas).

There are differences in the text of the winter prayer (*kuris'kon*). At the very beginning it is said that people have gathered from the whole village to attend the winter ceremony: *Oste, muso, dzh'ugyt, töd'y, bur, Immere, Kylchine! Teni gurten ogkyls'inmys' luysa, og anaylen-ataylen nylez-piez kad' luysa, tol vös'ez orchytysa kuris'kom*, “Osto, my dear, bright, good Inmar Kylchin! There, staying unanimeously with the whole village, like daughters and sons of the same mother and father, holding the winter sacrificial ceremony we pray”. In the prayer they ask Inmar for the cereals sown in autumn not to be smothered by the snow cover, that the livestock would reproduce itself: *Siz'yl kiz'em-pal'kkem dzh'uosyz ... lymyen zhokatonedles' ach'id saklasa myn* – “Our cereals sown and spread in autumn ... protect them yourself so that they would not be smothered by the your snow”; *Teni tole pyrym, rol potyny uan' pudoyos vichis'kon luysa, kyken-kuin'en piyasa yzh'yos, skal'yos myry kyl'ytek gyne med ulozy* – “We have entered winter, let the livestock in its winter place become curious and pregnant, let the ewes lamb by two or three, let the cow not be sterile”.

The winter sacrificial ceremonies find equivalents in the summer calendar cycle. In winter, the economic works are at their minimum, wherefore the need for many rituals is not manifest. This also explains both the number of the winter ceremonies and their weak preservation. The winter cycle of sacrificial ceremonies has practically nowhere reached our days fully. Only the Tatyshly Udmurts have retained an almost full cycle. We must also remark that winter collective ceremonies are absent in the traditional culture of the other people of the Volga-Urals region, who have maintained their ethnic belief or some of their elements (the Mari, the Mordvinians, the Chuvash). According to literary sources, they have not even been retained by the Udmurt in their core territory.

Elen vös', the ceremony for the country. A living antiquity in the horizon of Bashkortostan⁵⁶

Ranus Sadikov,

Eva Toulouze

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the religion of the Udmurt of the Ufa governorate flourished: neither Orthodox nor Muslim missionaries achieved any success among them whatsoever. They held many ceremonies and sacrifices, aiming at ensuring their wellbeing and success in agricultural work. They prayed and sacrificed to Inmar and other deities both by families and clans and by whole villages. A group of villages, usually united by common origins, composed the “mer” – in other words the “mir”, agrarian community in Russia, and had common sacrifices called *Mer vös'*. All the Udmurt of the Ufa (in the Birska and Ufa uyezd) and the neighbouring Perm' (Osa uyezd) governorates formed the “el'”, the country or region of the non-baptised Udmurts, and had their own ceremony, the *el'en vös'*, “the ceremony of the country”.

El'en vös' at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries

⁵⁶ The first part of this article was published by Ranus Sadikov in Садиков Ранус Рафикович, «Элен вось – «моление страной» Живая древность на просторах Башкирии», *Вордскем кыл*, № 7, стр. 34–36.

According to the scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this ceremony was the main one, and at the largest scale. For example, Ivan Smirnov commented that the “Birsk Votyaks gather at the *E’len vös’* ceremonies with the ones from Osa in the Perm’ governorates. The place of the gathering is chosen among three (older?) villages of both uyezd – Varyazh, Altayevo and Karge” (Smirnov 1890, p.226). According to K. Yakovlev, “*el’en vös’*” is the “most solemn, for it is considered a feast for all the Votyaks of the Birsk and the Osa uyezds. The place for the sacrifice is on one of three villages: Staro-Varyashevo in the Kyzyl’yar volost of the Birsk uyezd, Altayevo in the Vanysh-Alpautovo volost of the same uyezd, and Sukho-Kyrga of the Bol’she-Gondyr volost of the Osa uyezd. For one summer, the sacrifice takes place only in one of the villages, and in the others, it will take place in the following years” (Yakovlev 1915, p.263). Other scholars, like Yrjö Wichmann, also mention these huge ceremonies in their field observations: “*El’yn vös’* is held annually, in turn in three villages, Old Varyazh, Altayevo and Karga (Kechtaka). All the Birsk Votyaks gather, from 32 villages, even from some not far from Ufa (Sadikov, Mäkelä, 2008, p.50). In 1894, which is the year of Wichmann’s expedition to the Udmurt of the Ufa governorate, *El’en vös’* was held in Old Varyazh: “the feast lasts two days. There are nine sacrificial animals (for each one there is a “priest” from the area), two horses, two cows, a ewe, two rams, two geese” (*ibidem*). K. Yakovlev remarked that *El’en vös’* “surpasses all the other sacrifices both in the number of priests and in the number of sacrificial animals: there are about forty sacrificial priests and nine victims, three horses, two cows, a bull, one ewe and two geese”¹ (Yakovlev 1915, p.263-264). This sacrifice was held in summer, after all the other ceremonies were achieved, the village ceremonies (*Gurten vös’*) and the regional

ones (*Mer vös* '). The Udmurts sacrificed to the Supreme god Inmar, and prayed for the wellbeing of their people and for good of all the world.

In the years of the Soviet power, it became impossible to hold the *El'en vös* '. The tradition of having huge common sacrificial ceremonies seemingly sunk into oblivion. And even the memory of *El'en vös* ' gradually disappeared from the awareness of people.

The revitalisation of *El'en vös* '

But today, the Russian society's *realia* have allowed to revitalise many, often entirely forgotten religious traditions, among them *El'en vös* '. In the post-soviet time, the Bashkortostan Udmurt have started to restore the position of their ancient religion. In the renaissance of the sacrificial ceremonies a central role was played by the National and Cultural centre of the Udmurts of the Bashkortostan Republic, created in 1996. Thanks to its activists and particularly to the endeavours of its leader, R.B. Galyamshin, the tradition of collective ceremonies was restored in practically all the biggest Udmurt settlements in Bashkortostan. The ordinary people support actively and reacted positively to these initiatives.

One of these spectacular revitalisation projects was undoubtedly the rebirth of *Elen vös* '. It had indeed sunk into oblivion, except in the three villages where it took place. On the general background just presented, *Elen vös* ' was revitalised in a somehow different way. As in some other villages of Bashkortostan, the ceremonial tradition had never been really interrupted in Altayevo. There were sacrificial priests and even priests concerned with ensuring the sustainability of religious practice. One family was particularly connected with it, the Galikhanovs. Especially two brothers, born in the late fifties and the beginning of the sixties, the two brothers were both involved in religious

practice. The younger, Anatoliy, remained in the village and became its newest sacrificial priest. His elder brother, Kasim, an architect, became quite famous and settled in Izhevsk. Not only he built successful architectural projects. Moreover, Galikhanov has also achieved quite a good reputation as an artist, who attempts to put in to graphic forms the Udmurt ontology. He has also been quite active in stimulating the project of revitalisation of the ethnic Udmurt religion in the Udmurt capital, having produced plans for an Udmurt sanctuary in the city centre. He is also an active member of the Izhevsk association of the Eastern Udmurt, whose leader, Fljura Chibysheva, is also a forceful and active personality.

The revival of *Elen vös'* is due to these person's initiative. Chibysheva uses to present it as her personal achievement. We doubt it would have been possible without the involvement of the Galikhanov brothers. Especially taking into account the tense relations between Chibysheva and the other forceful personality in the Eastern Udmurt world, the head of the national movement Rinat Galyamshin. Anyhow, this huge event took place in the Udmurts' religious life on June 20th 2008: in Altayevo, of the Burayevo district, *El'en vös'* was revitalised. Representatives of many villages of Bashkortostan gathered.

One year later, on June 28th, 2009, *El'en vös'* was held in Staryj Varyash, in the Yanaul district. Staryi Varyash was one of the three traditional villages that held *Elen vös'*. Thus, the other aspects of tradition were to be followed as well. In this ceremony, not only Udmurts from Bashkortostan participated but, as required by tradition also Udmurts from the Kuyeda district of the Perm' region. In 2010, *El'en vös'* was supposed to be held in Kirga, in the Kuyeda district of the Perm' region. In older times, as

mentioned above, these were the villages where *El'en vös'* took place. Now, as before, the Udmurts, sacrificing their animals in *El'en vös'*, pray God for health, peace, success and well-being and wealth for the Udmurt people.

An association of Udmurt sacrificial priests?

Now, for the first time, the idea of founding an Association of Udmurt sacrificial priests emerged. It was supposed to follow the organisation and holding of sacrificial ceremonies. The first steps were made and in a first meeting, at the head of it was elected the sacrificial priest from Altayevo, Anatoliy Galikhanov. He was already one of the most authoritative sacrificial priests in the whole region, albeit not yet the most prestigious. Indeed, in the 2010s, Nazip Sadriyev from Balzyuga was still active and he trained many new sacrificial priests. However, Galyamshin stepped in. At the time, he argued, was not right. We may assume that his tense relations with Chibysheva, supposedly behind this initiative, did not encourage him to receive this new structure with favour. Ten years would have to follow, and Galyamshin's retirement, for this association to become a reality. Galyamshin's successor, Salim'yan Garifullin, took over and invited the sacrificial priests to meet and found their association. The authors of this article were both invited, as representatives of the scholarly community. And indeed, this time more firmly, Galikhanov was confirmed in his position of head of this association.

What is *El'en vös'*?

It is, as mentioned above, a sacrificial ceremony where people from the Eastern villages and sacrificial priests gather and pray. It is also a huge feast, with coaches coming from as far as Izhevsk. The authors of this article attended three of these ceremonies since it was founded: Ranus Sadikov attended the first, in Altayevo, he was also there in 2013 in Kirga (Perm' region), along with Eva Toulouze and Liivo Niglas, who filmed the ceremony⁵⁷ and Eva Toulouze attended it alone in 2018. Still, in 2018, a young ethnology student from Izhevsk, Evgeni Badretsinov, whose roots are in Altayevo, was doing fieldwork with Eva's team and attended the ceremony in Staryy Varyas with the Altayevo team. Thus, our research team attended this ceremony every five years and in the three locations. Some general remarks with concrete examples.

The locations: the pictures allow to represent efficiently the three locations, which are used not only for *El'en vös'*, but also for the local rituals. In Altayevo it is a beautiful location in a grove, with a fine view over a valley. In Kirga, the place has changed three times, in order to find a practical one. When we attended in 2013, it was in a fenced meadow, close to which a truck with water provided all the needed water, intended for the cooking of the porridge, the washing of the participants hands (Eva was not allowed inside the fence without washing her hands, and having her head covered), drinking and washing the paraphernalia. Moreover, at the end of the ceremony, Galikhanov sprinkled the participants, calling for rain. In Staryy Varyash, the sacred place was not as inspiring as the others: it is contiguous to some industrial objects, which greatly spoil the otherwise harmonious configuration of the place: a slope where the audience seats, which slowly plunges toward a grove, where the slaughtering takes place.

⁵⁷ The rushes were later edited into a film, *El'en vös'*, 2018.

The proceedings, as far as we were able to ascertain, were more scanty than in usual sacrificial ceremonies, we did not ascertain that the „promise of a sacrifice“, usually the first prayer, was uttered, and there was only one main prayer, when all had received their porridge and a conclusive prayer. At least this is what we witnessed in 2013, and which Liivo's film shows.

As it is usual in sacrificial ceremonies, at the very beginning only sacrificial priests and their helpers are present, and the lay people start to flow when the porridge is being cooked. As the photos show, quite numerous crowds attend. While publicly praying, the sacrificial priests address the crowd, especially Galikhanov, who feels his duty to thank but also to instruct the audience of the traditional requirements of attending a sacrificial ceremony.

The structure of the ceremony was the following: the teams arrive from the different villages at different times, they immediately set up a fire and fill the cauldrons with water. Then they go at the back of the sacred place and slaughter their sacrificial animal. Usually each team comes with an animal and one, or several sacrificial priests. Each team represents a district. We have seen representatives of the Burayevo district (Altayevo with Galikhanov's team), the Yanaul district (with Staryy Varyash), the Kuyeda district of Perm region, the Tatyshly district, with both Vil'gurt and Alga subgroup's representatives, and the Kaltasy district, with Bol'shekachakovo representatives). Then all wait until the meat is cooked – it is a moment of interaction. In Kirga, the interaction was internal to the districts, for they sat together, and only sporadically someone from another group joined them for a cup of tea. But in Varyash the interactions were abundant, for all the priests sat together and we spent all the time

with them. When the meat was cooked, as it is usual in sacrificial ceremonies, part of the helpers took it out of the cauldron and sorted it, while the others poured the cereals they had brought along into the broth and mixed the porridge until it was ready. Then each sacrificial priest put some porridge in a bowl and they went all together in front of the people either within (Kirga) or out of the fenced space (Saryy Varyash), and prayed while the audience knelt. Each priest recited his prayer. After the prayer, the porridge was distributed to the audience, each one going to the cauldron of their district, or randomly, for those who did not feel a belonging to one or the other districts. Once the porridge was eaten, the priests gathered and prayed again, after which the ceremony was over and all went home. Sometimes an entertainment programme followed, sometimes not. In Kirga, there was in an adjacent field a concert of Udmurt folklore groups. In Saryy Varyash, there was no further programme.

Tensions in *El'en vös'*

In 2013, our team had just arrived on the field and we had – except Ranus Sadikov – no or just very little experience of the ceremonies. Moreover, the fenced part of the meadow in Kirga was very large and the different local groups that attended, with their sacrificial priests, were sitting in different places, so that their interaction was limited. In Saryy Varyash, the space meant for the priests and their teams was quite narrow, so they were permanently stumbling on each other. The conditions were optimal to observe how the difference of traditions could clash.

They clashed in different ways, and some of the sacrificial priests shared with us their discontent. The first field in which there was a clash, was about the sacrificial animal.

The local team drfagged their sacrificial animal to the slaughtering place while Eva was conversing with Galikhanov, and he observed that the people from Varyash refused to learn that the sacrificial animal was to be a ewe and not a ram. “They never pay attention to that”, he commented. As in the Tatyshly district, where we have mostly done our fieldwork it is indeed the case, Eva was not surprised and surmised that this was not important for the Varyash people. She discovered how deeper the difference was the next year, 2019, when she attended another ceremony in the Yanaul district, in Kaymashabash. There she was non-ambiguously told that in their tradition the sacrificial animal must be a ram, and uch a ram chose blood had never been shed (non-castrated). So there was no neglect of the rules in their choice of the sacrificial animal, there was only another local tradition, which reveals the deep local character of religious practice. Clearly the Staryy Varyash people had not bothered to contradict the authoritative sacrificial priest, and they just continued to do as they deamt right to do.

The second point on which the local traditions clashed was on the slaughtering. Both Galikhanov and the Tatyshly priests were utterly shocked tht there was no prayer while the sheep were slaughtered. It was so disturbing, that while their sacrificial animal was slaughtered, both priests had in the fenced area a short prayer, a kind of miniceremony within the wider one. First Galikhanov prayed, then Rais Rafikov, the Vil’gurt priest, and this time several helpers and other sacrificial priests knelt behind him. Probably many of the others did not even notice these prayers “outside the scenario”, but we could not but observe.

Another clash in traditions was connected with the multiplicity of prayers: Rais Rafikov had prepared meat in his bowl, for he thought that the first prayer would be with meat, as

in his tradition. Only when he saw what the other priests had in their bowl, he quickly added porridge to his bowl. Indeed, as all had started at different moments, the rhythms could be different and Rais assumed that the details of the scenario would fit with his tradition.

Another clash whom we had already felt in Kirga, opposed the Kaltasy district and the others. When Eva attended the Kaltasy district ceremonies, she could not avoid noticing that things were organised in a very particular way: most of the helpers were women, while elsewhere these ceremonies are a male domain, a place for male socialisation where there is no place, or only a tiny one, for women: their only task, usually, in the Tatyshly district, is to wash the offal. They do it discreetly, often taking the intestines home and bringing it back clean to be put directly into the cauldrons. In Kaltasy district on the contrary they are the main helpers of the sacrificial priest, Anatoliy Nasipullin. He argues that the audience is mainly composed by women, how could he refuse them to help him? But for the others this is a shocking stance and many do not appreciate at all to have women, at Elen vös', cooking porridge for the Kaltasy district...

So this ceremony in Staryy Varyash was very illuminating: we already had noticed within a single district, how the ceremonies could vary, depending on the level of revitalisation and of continuity. We witnessed here the same phenomenon on a wider scale. Wa had also noticed how nobody – except the anthropologists – was aware of what was going on by the neighbours. How could they? They had their own tasks and no leisure to look around and to investigate... Our films were for many eye-openers.

Conclusion

It was important to attend these widest ceremonies, in order to understand the level of coordination and standardisation of ritual practice. The meeting of different sacrificial priests, each one bearer of his own tradition and ignoring everyone's else, allow to visualise the different ways the traditional ethnic worship may be concretised. It is the dream of many Udmurt activists, especially civil servants, to unify Udmurt ethnic practice, on the model of world religions around them, Orthodoxy and Islam. They probably feel a sense of inferiority that they have not a unique dogma and that their worship is not unified and does not answer to absolute rules, the same for them. In 2014 and 2017 our team met several times civil servants that wanted to start standardising the religious practices. But as these people were not known by the sacrificial priests and were not active in the field, just had very definite understandings of how things should be, no results are to be observed at the moment.

People are too attached to their rules, to their prayers. The idea that prayers should be the same for all is not a popular one. Or at least it could be, if each one's prayer would be chosen as the one to be performed by all. Thus, Nazip Sadriev would not be against every Eastern Udmurt using his prayer and his rule: what we have to understand is that for each one, his tradition is the only one right. There is no relativism in the traditional ethnic thinking: there are the right ways of doing things and the others are wrong.

We are very sensitive to the richness of the Eastern Udmurt traditions : they are very locally rooted. The civil servants were utterly surprised when they saw the researchers did not approve of their standardisation plans: they were so convinced of the hierarchy of religions, seeing the model of world religions as the highest possible, that they could not imagine that civilised persons like scholars, would not see the world in the same way....



Photo 1. *El'en vös'*, Preparation of the ceremony. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photo 2. *El'en vös'*, Preparation of the ceremony. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photo 3. *El'en vös'*, Udmurt women going to the ceremony. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photo 4. *El'en vös'*, the sacrificial ram. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photo 5. *El'en vös'*. The cooking of the sacrificial food. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photo 4. *El'en vös'*. The priests addressing Supreme Inmar. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photo 7. *El'en vös'*. The sacrificial cauldrons. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.



Photos 8-9. *El'en vös'*. The gathered people kneel for prayer. Altayevo 2008, photo Ranus Sadikov.

Continuity and revitalisation in sacrificial rituals by the Eastern Udmurt⁵⁸

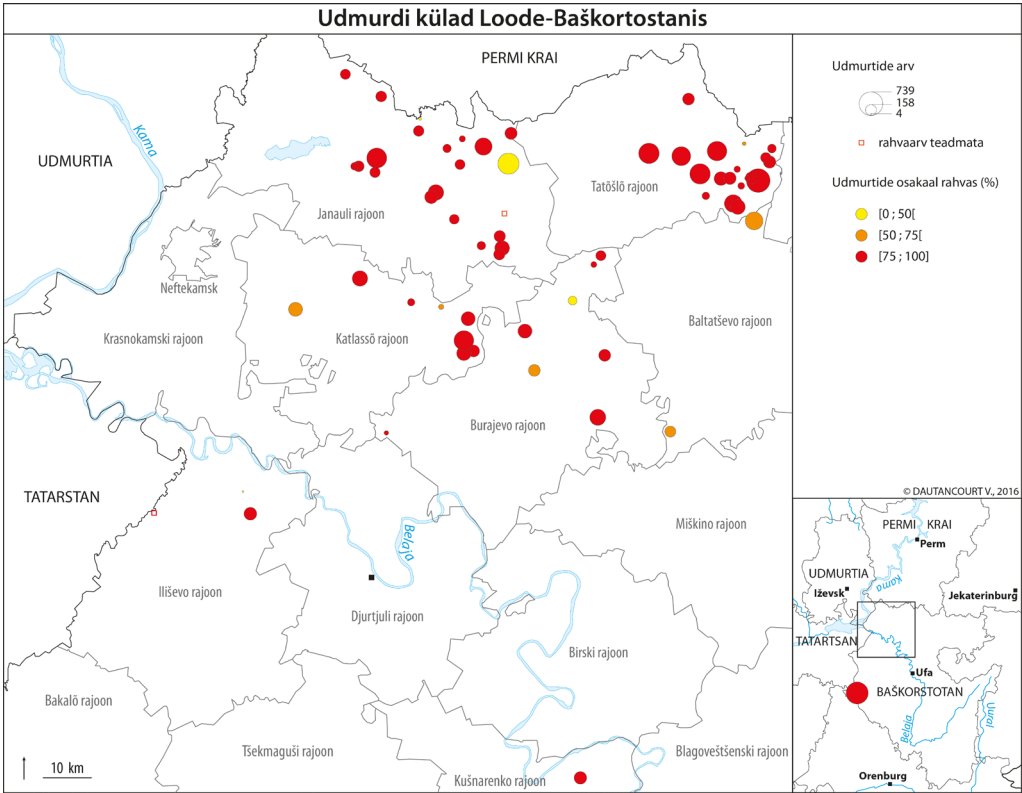
*Eva Toulouze,
Ranus Sadikov,
Laur Vallikivi,
Liivo Niglas,
Nikolai Anisimov*

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the spiritual world of the formerly atheist State faced a spiritual turmoil. Old and new religions occupied the public space and sought for support. Besides all the institutional churches, Russia's "ethnic religions" also started to find a new voice. These religions called in the Russian tradition "pagan" (Rus. *язычники*) had also been persecuted during the soviet times, and in some places, had survived more or less in secrecy. They started to express themselves anew and to look for a place in the new context. The aim of this article is to analyse ongoing processes and to reflect on them. In the ethnic group we are working on there is clearly a religious

⁵⁸ This article has been elaborated within the project PUT590 "Tänapäevane soome-ugri animism: funktsioonid ja sotsiaalne kontekst (1.01.2015–31.12.2018)". It has been published in two instalments: Toulouze, Eva; Sadikov, Ranus; Vallikivi, Laur; Niglas, Liivo; Anisimov, Nikolai (2018). Continuity and revitalisation in sacrificial rituals by the Eastern Udmurt Part I The collective sacrificial rituals by the Bashkortostan Udmurt: rooted in tradition. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 72, 203–218. DOI: [10.7592/FEJF2018.72.udmurt1](https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2018.72.udmurt1). and Toulouze, Eva; Sadikov, Ranus; Vallikivi, Laur; Niglas, Liivo; Anisimov, Nikolai (2018). Continuity and revitalisation in sacrificial rituals by the Eastern Udmurt. Part II Collective Sacrificial Rituals by the Bashkortostan Udmurt: Revitalisation and innovation. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 73, 117–144. DOI: [10.7592/FEJF2018.73.udmurt2](https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2018.73.udmurt2).

revival at the beginning of the 21st century, which is peculiar and complex. We attempt to unravel its proceedings and to interpret its peculiarities in a wider context.

The Udmurt we study, who live in the North-western districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan and in the South of Perm district and are called Eastern Udmurt⁵⁹, have more than any others retained their ancestral religion.



⁵⁹ Or Transkama Udmurt ; in Russian *закамские удмурты*, in Udmurt *камсьӧр удмуртъӧс*.

Throughout history, they have faced permanent attempts of evangelisation and islamisation in the 19th century, but still kept their religious practices, even opposing the Orthodox Udmurt, and calling themselves “true” Udmurt (Udm. *чын удмуртъёс*). Nowadays, they explain their migration to the Bashkir lands with their desire to preserve their original religion (Yagafova *et alii* 2010: 104–108)⁶⁰.

At the beginning of the 20th century, most aspects of life among the Eastern Udmurt were tied to rituals. The Udmurt ethnic religion’s social basis was the rural community, for which the respect for norms and rituals was the condition for prosperity of agricultural work and overall welfare. The Soviet years brought significant changes also to this field: collectivisation disrupted the rural community and the State implemented its antireligious policy, which limited the possibilities of practicing actively and openly one’s religion. The collective ritual activity as a basic element of social practice was diminished, although the private sphere, within the patrilineal clan, resisted better (Sadikov 2011: 21, 42–43). The upholding of the collective sacrificial rites depended very much on the personal initiative of the sacrificial priests, the *vös’as*, the main organisers of the religious events.

In the 1990s, with the transformation of the socio-political situation in the country, a revival started in the religious traditions of the Eastern Udmurt. Different factors influenced this process of revival, as for example the original level of preservation

⁶⁰ However, the reasons for leaving their original villages, on the territory of what is now the Republic of Udmurtia, were manifold (and comparable to those that led the Mari to the same kind of migration, as in Yamurzina 2013: 113–116). The Mari also are still there, outnumbering five times the Udmurt in Bashkortostan.

through transmission by the elder as well as the activity of the sacrificial priest, of the local authorities and of the community itself. The heterogeneity of the process explains the complexity of the subject: here is a whole range of different situations, from total continuity to real revival. We shall illustrate our reflection with the case of the collective sacrificial ceremonies⁶¹ (Toulouze, Niglas 2014) of the eastern Udmurt living in the Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan, for the different initial situations are all represented in the sample; moreover in this region, the collective ceremonies form an entire cycle, actually even two, in Spring and in late Autumn; and it is also the place where the authors have mainly carried out their fieldwork⁶². We will also reflect on the consequences of the ongoing revival and discuss, in our conclusion, whether it leads to major institutionalisation or centralisation, like what happened with the Mari ethnic religion in Mari El.

For this study, we primarily rely on our fieldwork. Indeed, we have almost no written materials to work on as no researcher has visited this region at the time when Udmurt religion in the Bashkir area was not yet a target of major institutional interference, i.e. until the second decade of the 20th century. While Russian, Hungarian⁶³ and Finnish⁶⁴ scholars visited the eastern Udmurt from the end of the 19th

⁶¹ We shall not here detail the proceedings of the ceremonies. Eva Toulouze and Liivo Niglas have published an ethnography about it, which gives necessary details: <http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/176/1>.

⁶² . Since 2013 the authors have made common fieldwork in the framework of the projects DFLKU14509, PUT590 and PUT712 of the Estonian Science foundation.

⁶³ Bernát Munkácsi visited in 1885 the Birsik and Yanaul regions (see Sadikov & Minniyakhmetova 2012, <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zarubezhnye-issledovateli-etnografii-folklor-i-yazyka-zakamskih-udmurtov-istoriograficheskii-ocherk>).

century, none happened to gather materials in this particular area. In order to document the deeper past, we rely on oral information given by elderly persons, born mostly between 1910 and the beginning of the 1930s, who witnessed personally the ritual practice of earlier periods or heard about it from their parents. However, we also rely on the work of two Udmurt scholars. Eastern Udmurt ethnographer Tatiana Minniyakhmetova published the results of her fieldwork, carried out at a time in which there were more elder informers who remembered the pre-Soviet period and thus she provides precious data about the past (Minniakhmetova 2000). Ranus Sadikov has also been doing fieldwork in this region since 1997, focussing on a long term changes giving thus a valuable insight into diachronic processes. Researchers from Udmurtia have occasionally been exploring different aspects of the Udmurt culture in the Eastern groups: some have made fieldwork, as dialectologist Valey Kelmakov, who collected samples in the Tatyshly district (Kelmakov 2006: 271-278), among which interesting information about religion may be found; ethnologist Vladimir Vladykin, who wrote the main general research on Udmurt religion as well as linguist Mikhail Atamanov or ethnographer Lyudmila Khristolyubova, who worked in close cooperation with Tatiana Minniyakhmetova. Still, their research is only occasionally focused on the Eastern Udmurt *per se* and its aim is more to reflect on the Udmurt culture or religion as a whole.

In this paper we mainly explore current processes as we draw on our observations as a team since 2013. We have systematically attended sacrificial ceremonies both in the

⁶⁴ We refer to Yrjö Wichmann (1891-1892), Axel Heikel (1884) and Uno Holmberg-Harva (1911), who carried out fieldwork among the Eastern Udmurt, in the Birska (Heikel, Wichmann, Harva) and Kaltasy (Heikel, Wichmann) regions.

late spring and the late autumn cycles, documenting them thoroughly, and we have been in the field every year, sometimes twice a year. Our team is multi-ethnic, multilingual, and interdisciplinary: part of the team comes from the Institute for Ethnographic Research of the Bashkir Academy of Sciences (Ranus Sadikov), the others are affiliated to the University of Tartu (Eva Toulouze, Liivo Niglas, Laur Vallikivi, Nikolai Anisimov); in the team, there are two Udmurt – one from the neighbouring district of Buraevo in Bashkortostan and one from Southern Udmurtia –, two Estonians and a French researcher; there are three anthropologists, one folklorist (Anisimov) and one ethnographer (Sadikov, as defined in the Russian research tradition). When our Udmurt colleagues participate, mostly the communication during fieldwork takes place in Udmurt and is carried out by them⁶⁵; the non-Russian scholars have relied on Russian (though especially older people are not fully fluent in it). Our fieldwork was based on participant observation (living in the villages and participating in the life of our landlady, meeting her kin and neighbours, but also attending ceremonies, participating in them and visiting sacred places), as well as interviews (with the organisers of the ceremonies, the sacrificial priests as well as ordinary members of the communities). We also used widely audio-visual methods as video recording, audio recordings, and photography. Visual methods allow on the one hand to document, and to fix important ethnographic data, recording directly ritual activities and the oral texts that accompany them. Moreover the

⁶⁵ We have been working on the field : in 2011, pilot one-day visit by Ranus Sadikov and Eva Toulouze ; 2013 June, one month Eva Toulouze, Liivo Niglas and Ranus Sadikov ; 2013 December, Eva Toulouze and Liivo Niglas ; 2014 June Eva Toulouze, Liivo Niglas and Laur Vallikivi ; 2015 June Eva Toulouze and Ranus Sadikov, 2015 November Eva Toulouze, Liivo Niglas and Ranus Sadikov ; 2016 June Eva Toulouze, Nikolay Anisimov and Ranus Sadikov ; 2016 December Eva Toulouze, Liivo Niglas, Nikolay Anisimov and Ranus Sadikov.

camera also records conversations and remarks from the participants; they may comment or discuss the event, which provides interesting insight for research, but also they may exchange casual remarks about other everyday life issues, which are relevant for them and for village life. The camera allows also suggesting dimensions of the ritual experience more difficult to transmit through other media, the sensorial aspect (Niglas 2016). On another level, we can edit the recorded video material, and prepare audio-visual descriptions of each ceremony, which we leave to the religious specialists of different villages and to the local Udmurt cultural centre, giving back to local people means to pass on, if they are willing to, its own tradition.

Firstly we will shortly discuss the notions of continuity and revival in the conditions of the Bashkortostan Udmurt, and try to clarify this confused issue from the perspective of different scholarly traditions.

Continuity and revival: a problematic question by the Bashkortostan Udmurt

As mentioned previously, there has been some fieldwork research on the Eastern Udmurt in earlier time, which gives valuable insights on the situation at the beginning of the 20th century: particularly precious is Uno Holmberg-Harva “The Religion of the Permians” (1914-1915), which is a synthesis of the available data just before the borders were closed and fieldwork became impossible for foreigners, while within the borders there were other priorities. Except for Hungarian scholars Bereczki and Vikár, who nevertheless concentrated on singing culture, no fieldwork was carried out in later years until the fall of the Soviet Union, except by Russian scholars, who though did not much

investigate religion. After 1990 fieldwork has become possible, and some researchers have focused on religion – Anna Leena Siikala and Aado Lintrop on Udmurt religion (Lintrop 2003, Siikala, Ulyashev 2011), Sonja Luehrmann on Mari religion, more precisely on atheism in Mari El (2013). But both researchers have been working in Udmurtia and Mari El, but not in the diaspora, i.e. not in the regions, where religion has been and is still most vital. Therefore their material and their conclusions are quite different from our own. In our conclusion, we shall discuss them in comparison.

Russian ethnography takes as a starting point the period in which traditional (e.g. agrarian) culture is supposed to have reached its peak just before the decline that takes place after the Bolshevik Revolution. One way for us to tackle the issue of this article would be to compare the contemporary phenomena with what we know of this period previous to the external and disrupting interferences. However this is a tricky approach for two reasons: firstly, as mentioned we have no reliable data about the pre-Soviet period in this region; secondly, there have been ongoing processes in-between, which deserve to be taken into account. Another way could be to start from a later point, the period just before the awakening of the 1990s, and to examine what had been retained from the “earlier” tradition, and what had changed by then and how, as well as analyse what the newest initiatives brought forth. This second approach is more interesting, because on the one hand it allows to follow what has happened in roughly one century, and thus to take into account the different local ways to tackle with the pressures from the state as well as the different levels of continuity the villages have been able to retain.

These issues are particularly interesting if we take into account, as a comparison point the situation in Udmurtia, where coercive and thorough evangelisation was

implemented and led part of the population to migrate eastward. There, Christianity has reached almost everywhere, and the Udmurt had no choice left than to integrate the Orthodox Church into their daily lives. This does not mean that they abandoned their own ethnic religion, but they gradually absorbed elements of Christianity that became important in their identity, while retaining practices from their original traditions, that were adapted and changed in different proportions depending on the place and on the families. If only one village – Kuzebaevo in the Alnashi district (see Siikala, Ulyashev 2011) – has been able to avoid Christianisation until the last decades⁶⁶, remains of the “former worldview” are widely part of folk Orthodoxy in Udmurtia. Therefore it is particularly enlightening to study religious practice in the regions where Christianisation did not reach the Udmurt villages, and where, as we argue, the surrounding Islam shielded the Udmurt from the state-supported forceful influences. This is the case both for one village (Varkled-Bodya) in the territory of Tatarstan and of Bashkortostan.

It is very significant that one of the places where ritual continuity has been indeed achieved, the village of Varkled Bodya, is located a few kilometres from the Udmurt territory in the Tatar district of Agryz. It has been thoroughly studied by Estonian scholar Aado Lintrop (Lintrop 2003)⁶⁷; so we chose instead to concentrate on more remote regions, in Bashkortostan. Furthermore, as mentioned, the Tatyshly district of North-Western Bashkortostan has not been investigated in older times. Indeed there are several places in this district where there has been no interruption at all of the collective ceremonies. More the villages were remote and difficult to access, further away from the

⁶⁶ In the last decades there have been some baptisms, both into the Orthodox Church and into Protestant denominations, but this has not significantly affected the identity of the group.

⁶⁷ In English: Lintrop 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008.

Communist Party officials, the easier it was to avoid interference, although this explanation does not suffice to explain all. In other places, at some time, for different reasons, there was an interruption: for example it happened that the older sacrificial priest died and did not always transmit his skills.

In the late period of the Soviet Union and in the first post-soviet years, a period of change and dynamic processes, the antireligious pressure subsided and interest for spiritual matters awakened. Where ceremonies had been performed secretly, they were now openly held, with wider and wider attendance; where they had disappeared, they reappeared. This is the process we are going to study more in detail within the limits of this article, while incidentally referring to what is supposed to be a more ancient state of the tradition.

The Tatyshly Udmurt: a brief history

According to the 2010 All-Russia's census, there are 5399 Udmurt in this region out of some 20 000 in Bashkortostan, which represents 21,5 % of the whole Udmurt population (Natsionalnyy 2013: 35). These Udmurt represent a particular ethno-territorial sub-group of the Eastern Udmurt, with their peculiarities in their ethnic culture and dialect. This subgroup, called Tatyshly or Higher Tanyp (from the name of the river Bystry Tanyp, Udm. *Tanyp* (Танып)), emerged at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. This is the region we are investigating, whose villages' history⁶⁸ is

⁶⁸ The first data are from 1670, referring to the villages of Baltachevo and Kalmyarovo while Tetyshe village (today Verkhnye Tatyshly) is mentioned in 1703 [Asfandiyarov 1994: 35–38]. Other villages are

longer and shorter, but anyhow at least has lasted already almost a century long. Thus these villages have all experienced the Soviet anti-religious policy and it may be interesting to follow the level of preservation of the ethnic religious practice connected to the age of the settlement.

What is directly relevant to our subject is that the Tatyshly Udmurt are divided into two clearly distinct groups, which are called according to their position in regard of the river Yug (Udm. *Ӝык*) the right and left bank groups. They represent two independent religious groups, which organise their own collective ceremonies called *mör vös*⁶⁹: the right bank group organises it in the village of Novye Tatyshly (in Udmurt Vil'gurt, and that's how it will be mentioned hereafter), and the left bank in the village of Alga. The Udmurt themselves, on both the banks, call their own group "(the ones) living on this bank of the Yug (Udm. *Ӝык манальӛс*) and the other one "(the ones) living on the other bank of the Yug" (Udm. *Ӝык тунальӛс*)⁷⁰. The inhabitants of Aribash, however, differ from the others: their origins are connected with the Tanyp sub-group of the Eastern Udmurt, although today they are inserted in the right bank group of the Udmurt⁷¹.

mentioned in 1723 Starokalmiyarovo, Nizhnebaltachevo, Bigineyevo, Saryy Kyzlyar [RGADA Ф. 350. Оп. 2. Д. 3790. Л. 208–247]. Other villages were formed in the following decades and centuries: Aribash (1743), Nizhnee Tatyshly (1768), Urazgildy (beginning of the 19th century), Novye Tatyshly (1849), Malaya Balzyuga (1878), Yuda (1896), Vyazovka (1922), Tanypovka (1924), Mayskiy (1924), Alga (1927) etc. [Zaydullin 1999].

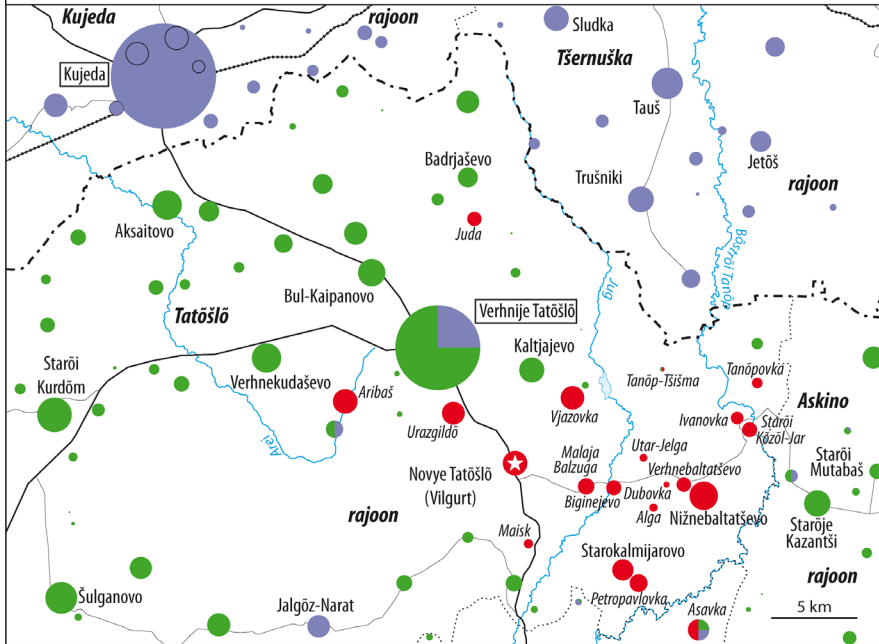
⁶⁹ It is one of the levels of the spring and autumn cycles' ceremonies.

⁷⁰ R. Sadikov's fieldwork materials 2003, Tatyshly district, Vil'gurt, Khabibyanov, Khabrislam Khabibyanovich, born 1933.

⁷¹ According to elderly informers, the right bank collective ceremonies were also attended by the Udmurt of Chikashevo (today Tatarskie Chikashi in the Kueda district of the Perm Krai). Fieldwork materials 2016, , Sadriev Nazip Sadrievich, born 1930 (Malaya Balzyuga).

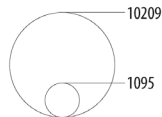
⁷¹ R.R. Sadikov has visited the Tatyshly Udmurt in 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2010.

Tatõšlõ rajooni udmurdid, Baškortostan



- Föderatsiooni subjekti piir
- Ufa** Föderatsiooni subjekti pealinn
- rajooni piir
- Kujeda** rajooni keskus
- Tauš külanõukogu keskus
- Alga udmurdi küla

Rahvaarv (2010)



☆ Baškortostani udmurtide rahva- ja kultuurikeskus

Rahvuslik koosseis

[Kui ühe rahvuse osakaal on suurem kui 80%, pole teisi märgitud]

- baškiirid [enamus antud ala „baškiiridest“ peab end tegelikult tatarlasteks]
- udmurdid
- muu rahvus [venelased, tatarid, marid; või udmurdimid kui nende osakaal on väiksem kui 50%]

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We will now concentrate on the collective ceremonies of both groups of Udmurt, while emphasising occasionally the differences between the groups. These ceremonies are sacrificial events in which whole villages or groups of villages gather in order to pray Inmar, the main god of the Udmurt, to ask for health and fertility for people and livestock, and a good harvest, as well as rain in times of drought. In this overview chapter, we will mention the historical data available, in order to give our contemporary observations some historical depth.

The ceremonies of the Tatyshly Udmurt

Of course, collective ceremonies are not the only manifestations of the traditional worldview of the Eastern Udmurt. There were and are other ceremonies more or less restricted to the private sphere, which means that they were performed within the group of the patrilineal kin; some of them are still performed⁷²⁷³. There are also occasional rituals connected with events in personal lives. We only mention these other rituals to show the richness and diversity of the religious life of the Tatyshly Udmurt, while, as said before, we shall concentrate on the collective sacrificial ceremonies' cycles.

⁷² This is the case of the so-called Great Day (Udm. *Быдӟынал*), the starting of the New Year and corresponds to the Orthodox Easter (Minniyakhmetova 2000: 22). Other ceremonies took place in the clan's sacred building, the *kuala*, which practically does not exist anymore, except in some rare places, like *kualae pyron* (куалае пырон) around Pentecost, in which birch branches were put on the sacred shelf and the old ones were burnt (Fieldwork materials of R. Sadikov: 2000, Garibzanova, Shabrika Nigamatzyanovna, born 1902 in Vil'gurt); 2009, Badredtinova, Farkhana Badredtinovna, born 1928 in Kyzyl'yar). Another family ceremony was the autumn prayer (Udm. *сйӟьыл курыськон*), after the cleaning of the harvest

⁷³ Fieldwork materials of Ranus Sadikov, 2000, the Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan Republic, Maysk, Samysheva Anastasiya Khazimardanovna, born 1924; Fieldwork materials of Ranus Sadikov 2009, Kyzyl'yar, Badredtinova, Farkhana Badredtinovna, born 1928.

Both cycles, in late spring and in late autumn must be concluded before the solstices, and were in the origins, as far as we may know, quite symmetrical. In spring, each village organises the village ceremony, in Udmurt *gurten vös*’ (Udm. *гуртэн вӧсь*). A while later, in the Yug right bank group (called commonly “Vilgurt group”), took place the “ceremony of three villages” *kuin gurt vös*’ (Udm. *куинь гурт вӧсь*), which was attended by the population of Urazgildy (Udm. Vukogurt, as we shall call it hereafter), Vilgurt, Malaya Balzyuga and Maysk (the latter was inhabited in the Soviet period by people coming from Vil’gurt and had not a distinct identity in ritual activities). On the left bank of the Yug, in the so called “Alga group”, there was and there still is an intermediate ceremony, called *bagysh*⁷⁴ *vös*’ (Udm. *багыш вӧсь*). This part of the cycle has been the least stable, as we shall observe hereafter. The last ceremony to be held is the *mör vös* (Udm. *мӧр вӧсь*), in which the nine villages of the right bank of the Yug gather: Aribash, Yuda, Vyazovka, Vukogurt, Malaya Balzyuga, Maysk, Verkhnye and Nizhnee Tatyshly as well as Vil’gurt.⁷⁵ The villages on the left bank have also their collective ceremony *mör vös* that gathered nine villages: Bigineyevo, Tanypovka, Kyzylar, Verkhne and Nizhnebaltachevo, Starokalmiyarovo, Petropavlovka, Alga, Dubovka (as well as, in the past, Novye Kalmiary). In both collective ceremonies, the

⁷⁴ The capital is explained by the understanding of this word: it is supposed to be the name of the owner of the field where the ceremony was held.

⁷⁵ According to Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, the *mör vös* at some undetermined time in the past lasted some days, and sacrificial priests came from all the villages bringing their own sacrificial animals along. On the first day, they prayed the *siziskon*, “promise of a sacrifice”, on the second day, they sacrificed the birds, and on the third the ewes. At the end there was a *sabantuy*, the feast of the ending of the spring agricultural tasks (Minniakhmetova 2000: 57). The name *sabantuy* and the celebration are Turkic, but they have been taken over in the whole region where the Tatar and Bashkir population is dominant.

place has been changed throughout the years. All these ceremonies were organised in the period in which the rye was in flower (Udm. *жэг сюрелакы*).

At the end of autumn there were also winter village ceremonies (Udm. *мол гуртэн вӧсь*) and winter collective ceremonies (*мол мӧр вӧсь*) held before the winter solstice. The villages of the left bank had also the winter *bagysh vös*.

So this is the basic cycle of the ceremonies including whole villages and groups of villages of the Tatyshly district. We shall now comment upon the changes that were brought in the Soviet period, still before the wave of revitalisation of the 1990s began, and in consequence of which the cycle lost some of his symmetry.

We may add that since 2008, for the Tatyshly Udmurt as well as for the other Eastern Udmurt, the cycle is concluded after the solstice by a general ceremony attended in principle by all the villages of the region. It is called *elen vös'* and it is a good example of real revitalisation, for it was lately held in the 1920s

Changes in the Soviet period

Changes induced by the Soviet period were of different nature and scale. Some were just consequences of the developments in agricultural techniques. For example, the rotation of the fields was abandoned. This influenced directly the praying in the spring cycle: the villages had three sacred places, which use was also rotating according to the direction in which the given year the rye field was. So while in former times, they were three sacred places, only one remained active.

But other changes were more concretely connected with soviet policies towards religion. During the Soviet period, it was obviously not allowed to organise these large scale ceremonies openly. The party's and other Soviet institution's functionaries led an active fight in order to eradicate "religious vestiges". Older informants report countless cases when "bosses" popped up at the ceremonies' places when the porridge was ready and knocked over cauldrons, so that the gathered people could only go back home empty-handed. The sacrificial priests were summoned by the police for questioning, and they were submitted to explanatory speeches and to more or less harsh punishing measures. Nevertheless most of them attempted, if only secretly, to keep organising all kinds of ceremonies.

The pressure of secrecy had consequences. If earlier the mass sacrificial ceremonies were held by the biggest villages, now they did them in tiny villages, far from the centres of administration and of the kolkhozes. The dimensions also decreased; the ceremonies were mainly attended by elderly persons. On the left bank the *mör vös* was firstly hold in Starokalmiyarovo, on the top of a hill. In the 1960ies, because of persecutions, the ceremony was transferred to a lower place. However from 1978 on the place was flooded by the building of a dam and the villages gathered for sacrificial ceremonies not far from the small and remote village of Alga⁷⁶. The place for ceremonies was also changed in the right bank group: before the 1930 was held in Verkhnye Tatyshly, close to the source of the river Tatyshly. When the Tatyshly district was founded, in 1935, and the village became its centre, the place changed and the

⁷⁶ Fieldwork materials of Ranus Sadikov, 2000, Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan Republic, Starokalmiyarovo, Kostin Boris Sergeevich, born 1939.

ceremonies were held on a field between Verkhnye Tatyshly and Vukogurt. Afterwards it was transferred to Vil'gurt in a gully close to the shore of the river Bolshaya Balzyuga (Udm. *Писмень*), where it was more difficult to notice that people had gathered⁷⁷. In many villages, former places were abandoned and replaced by more discreet locations, where people's gatherings would not attract any undesired attention. Malaya Balzyuga is from this point of view a good example: the sacred grove used for the ordinary village ceremonies was visible from the main road running along the village. After a disrupting interference from the Party officials, the Balzyuga sacrificial priest Nazip Sadriev decided to move the sacred place just less than fifty metres further, but to a lower place closer to the spring, and which was not visible from the road.

Other changes took place. The atheist upbringing of the younger generations had some consequences and sacrificial priests did not find easily successors to who transmit their skills and their knowledge. A few active sacrificial priests carried a big burden on their shoulders. This led to some adjustments, whose aim was to ease their task. Thus, one of the most authoritative *vös'as'* of the Tatyshly district, the Nazip Sadriev we already mentioned, who is one of our main informers, initiated some changes: one of the most radical was to renounce the right hand three villages' ceremony, in the last period before the revival. Several reasons explain this choice: on the one hand, the priest himself was getting older and older; on the other hand, as he explained himself, the expenses of buying a ewe for this ceremony were becoming unbearable by the community, which has in the same period to afford a lamb for the village ceremony and

⁷⁷ Fieldwork materials of Ranus Sadikov, 2003, Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan Republic, Novye Tatyshly, Shakirov Salim Chalirovich, born 1938.

one for the 10 villages *mör vös'*. There were also changes into the proceedings of the ritual, and we shall develop them further on.

Recent developments: the cycle nowadays

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

- In the right bank group, all the villages including the district centre held their village spring ceremonies and gathered one week later in Vilgurt for the *mör vös'*. The winter *tol mör vös* was held also in Vilgurt, with three villages in attendance (in 2016).
- In the left bank group, all the villages held their village spring ceremonies on the first Friday of June in Nizhnebaltachevo (with Alga), in Verkhnebaltachevo (with Dubrovka), in Kyzylar (with Tanyrovka), in Bigineyevo (with Utar Elga, where it was revived in 2012), and in Starokalmiyarovo (with Petropavlovka). After one week, all these villages – with the exception of Starokalmiyarovo – organise the *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 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 from the population a real involvement: people give crops, butter and money, which allows to buy the ewe; it demands as well hard

physical involvement for the sacrificial priests and the helpers. One week later, all the villages then gathered for the *mör vös'* in Alga. In winter, in December, they hold both the *tol bagysh vös* and *tol mör vös*. Until the last times, no winter village ceremony had been revived, but we heard in December 2016 about a village winter ceremony in Starokalmiyarovo. This is also a point to follow in our forthcoming fieldwork.

So there is, as a result both of Soviet adaptation strategies and post-soviet revival choices, an increasing gap between the Vilgurt and the 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 there were already ceremonies held, with sacrificial priests and confirmed helpers and sacred places functioning. In other places, the memories were still fresh in most of the population, and the sacred places were still there.

These processes were launched in both of the cultural subgroups of the Tatyshly district, as in the whole of the districts with an Udmurt population. But of course they materialised taking into account the group's peculiarities and traditions. The starting point, alias the level of preservation of the rituals in both groups differs: the right bank group, alias the Vil'gurt group, had somewhat simplified the rituals and loosened some

rules, if we compare it to the Alga group (the left bank subgroup), which seems to have retained more complex rituals and more severe rules.

We shall now concentrate on the actors of the revival and try to appreciate their respective roles.

The role of sacrificial priests

The first actors to mention are the sacrificial priests, without whom no revival and no ceremonies could be possible. In the traditional religion of the Eastern Udmurt, the sacrificial priest was a member of the rural community, who had to fulfil a certain requirements: he had to be married, to be respected in the community, to know the rituals and the prayers, and to be over 40⁷⁸. Usually, he 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 *tylas'* (Udm. тылась) and the *partchas'* (Udm. партчась)⁷⁹.

These distinctions are not relevant anymore. There are *vös'as'*, who look after the whole of the ceremony, and they are assisted by helpers, whose work the *vös'as'* organises. From this point of view there has been a change, but for lack of information, we are not able to pinpoint the moment of the change. Sometimes in the speech of Nazip Sadriev the word *partchas'* appears, but without meaning anything else than helper. We

⁷⁸ Fieldwork of Ranus Sadilov, 2000, Tatyshly district, Vukogurt, Sharapova, Yamiga Akhmedshinova born 1934.

⁷⁹ 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. The *partchas'* were the ones that slaughtered and butchered the sacrificial animals

may only suppose that during the Soviet period, when it became more difficult to find people wishing to take over the task of being sacrificial priests, the different tasks melted into one single.

Anyhow the acting sacrificial priests were a significant initiative force to reckon with. We already mentioned several times Nazip Sadriev, and the time has come to introduce him properly, because he has been for a long time the cornerstone of the religious practice in the Vilgurt group, and wider in Bashkortostan. Nazip Sadriev was very young when he started to take relation seriously and to follow 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 (Toulouze, Vallikivi, Niglas, Anisimov 2017). Actually this was a change, for in previous times the sacrificial priests had to be elder men, at least aged 40. But the times were difficult, and there was no choice. He learnt the prayers from the elder priests, listened to them and memorised the texts, which was the traditional way to transmit oral knowledge, which the Eastern Udmurt call “steal” the text. Until 2010, Nazip Sadriev held every year the village ceremony (*gurten vös*) in his own village and was the head priest in the *mör vös* in Vilgurt. Thanks to his efforts, another ceremony was revived, the winter *mör vös*, which had been interrupted 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 4 villages’⁸⁰. He is the one whose perseverance

⁸⁰ We must stress that participation in the ceremony is not only expressed through personal attendance. The population of these villages offers money to by 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

allowed to re-establish ceremonies in all the villages of the right bank of the Yug, for there the village ceremonies were forgotten in several villages – except Vilgurt and Balzyuga⁸¹.

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 himself to different villages and trained the local sacrificial priests⁸².

The question of the appointment of priests and of their training is a serious one. As the informers observed, usually, in former times, the priests themselves prepared their replacement: they detected smart children and they took them to the ceremonies, where they learnt the rituals and the prayers. Probably they attempted to teach their own children; so did Nazip Sadriev, who attempted to teach his own son Mingaray. But the latter refused stubbornly to become a sacrificial priest, although he always helps the ceremony organisers and spend 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, the ceremonies were performed in most places, so the revival process was more limited and easier to achieve. Everywhere they had already trained sacrificial priests, and the most important of them, Evgeniy Adullin, was also in a

big cauldrons to each village and they distribute it to the population. In the majority of cases, only the sacrificial priests and their assistants participate directly in the ceremony itself.

⁸¹ For this achievement, he was bestowed in 2016 the “World’s tree award”, an Estonian award for people who, at grassroots level, were able to help maintaining Finno-Ugric cultures.

⁸² He did not however visit only the Tatyshly Udmurt, he was invited also to revitalise ceremonies in other districts of Bashkortostan. He was also invited to pray in the capital of Udmurtia, Izhevsk.

leading position in the agricultural enterprise Rassvet ('Dawn'), for he is its head bookkeeper. Here the ceremonies were stubbornly maintained in all the villages even in the Soviet period. The main role in the continuity of the religious traditions belongs to the local sacrificial priests, who insisted on the respect of the whole cycle.

The role of officials

It was 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 allowed the whole process to develop. Without a priest any kind of revival would have been much more laborious. Still, he was very efficiently 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 1990ies both the agricultural enterprise "Demen", through its leader Renat Biktimirovich Galyamshin, 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 kolkhoze, Rafik Kamidullin⁸³, who published in the local Udmurt paper *Azlan* (АЗЪЛАНЬ) articles on this issue. In 1993 the sacred place was fenced and in 1994 a building was erected, a "house for prayer" (*vösь корка*), on money given by the district and the local administration, as well as offerings from the population of the villages

⁸³ Older informers observe that when he was a local leader in the Soviet period, Rafik Kamidullin was one of the more active party officials to fight against manifestations of religious practice.

participating in the Vilgurt *mör vös* [Kamidullin 1994]. In 1996 an Udmurt organisation was founded, called the National-historical centre of the Udmurt of Bashkortostan, a kind of national movement gathering the Udmurt from the different districts in Bashkortostan, whose office was established in Vil'gurt, and after this even more attention was given to the religious mass events. In summer 1998, the chairman of the organisation, the abovementioned Rinat Biktimirovich, decided to invite to the *mör vös* in Vilgurt representatives of all the Bashkortostan districts where live Udmurt communities, as well as guests from the Kueda district in the kray of Perm and from Udmurtia. This religious gathering obtained a status at the level of the republic.

Rinat Biktimirovich is an extraordinarily strong leader, especially for an Udmurt – the Udmurt having the stereotypical reputation of being usually meek. But Galyamshin 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 kolkhoze under his leadership. He was also the initiator of the Udmurt National –historical centre and held its leadership until November 2015, when he was replaced by Salimyan Garifulovich Garifullin, who is as devoted to the religious dimension of his activity as his predecessor.

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 for 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 taking over these tasks. It is clear that in these villages, the initiative came from “above”. But it answered a real demand of the villagers. For example, in June 2015, with the support of R.B. Galyamshin, and of his son, who is one

of the leaders of Demen, the ceremony in Verkhnye 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 Rif Adisanov to find a *vös'as'* and he had asked an old man from a priest's family, Kabiok Badamshinovich Badamshin, born in 1932 in Vukogurt, to officiate. The ceremony had been somehow improvised and as the organisers did not expect a wide attendance, they had chosen not to buy a ewe for the sacrifice. Although the information had not spread properly, there were very many participants⁸⁴, and in 2016, the village ceremony was fully performed, in a sacred place that had been in the meanwhile properly fenced. This shows that the initiative from above is not disconnected with the needs of the population. This is particularly to be noticed taking into account that the district centre is not an Udmurt centre: according to the 2010 census, the Udmurt are 13% in the village, where the overwhelming majority of the population is Tatar and Bashkir, by 80 % (Toulouze, Vallikivi 2016: 19).

On the left bank of the Yug, the agricultural enterprise Rassvet ('dawn') and especially its former head, Kh. M. 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 1990ies, and in 2005 – 2007 a "prayer house"⁸⁵ was built there⁸⁶. But still we have the impression that here, the initiative from above is more limited and less material.

⁸⁴ All this information, fieldwork interview, June 2015.

⁸⁵ It is a log building that has no cultural function but makes the ceremonies easier and more comfortable for the priests, helpers and attendants, particularly in winter.

⁸⁶ Fieldwork of Ranus Sadikov and Eva Toulouze, 2015, Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan Republic, , Garifanov Garifulla Garifanovich, born 1947 (Nizhnebaltachevo).

Recent developments: the renewal of the actors

The sacrificial priests

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

In Balzyuga, the old priest appointed as a replacement a young man from a priest's family, Fridman Kabipyanov, born 1978, a music teacher. He is married and respected in the village. But he is not yet 40: he was 30 when he was appointed, and this reminds us that Nazip himself was but 24 when he started, in the afterwar context, when there were not enough 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 adaptation to the contemporary world, where a young *vös'as'* may have good possibilities of attracting a younger part of the population.

In Vilgurt, 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 “mechaniser⁸⁷”, whose father was a *vös'as'*. With his father, when he was a boy, he attended several sacrifices; he participated to private ceremonies and learnt properly both the ritual activities and his father's prayer. He started relatively late to lead ceremonies (in 2012), but according to his words, he is training his son⁸⁸. The second priest in the village⁸⁹ is Salim Shakirov,

⁸⁷ This is one of the Soviet positions in the kolkhozes: a worker who used agricultural technical equipment.

⁸⁸ Fieldwork interview June 2016.

⁸⁹ As Vil'gurt is a big village, there always were, according to tradition, two sacrificial priests.

born 1948, retired clerk, who was appointed on advice by R.B. Galyamshin. He does not come from a family of priests, but is a capable organiser and is respected among the villagers. At the moment both priests share tasks harmoniously: Rais covers enthusiastically most of the ritual parts, while Salim deals with organisation and financial questions: gathering money and crops, buying the ewes etc..

In other villages revitalisation took different forms. After the demise of the elder *vös'as'*, nobody among the younger men took over, and the sacrifices weren't any more performed. Things stated to change in the last decade, more or less with impulse and encouragement from the authorities. Aribash is an example of less 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 1947, retired teacher, while our fieldwork 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 religious family. While a child, she attended ceremonies with her grand-mother, so she is a good bearer of tradition. She is also an extraordinarily active woman, who feels concerned by community issues and even writes regularly in the local Udmurt language weekly paper, *Oshmes*. But animistic ceremonies are a male activity, in which there is almost no room for women. So Liliya acted through her husband Aleksey. Besides Aleksey, there are two other priests, Valeri Shaymukhametov, who attended the ceremony in 2015, and another who was then in bad health, so there are in all three, as many as the Udmurt clans living in the village (*poska*, *chudya*, *tuklya*⁹⁰). Here the

⁹⁰ The traditional Udmurt society was divided into clans, kinship groups having the same mythical ancestor. The system isn't relevant anymore, but some remembrance of it subsides, as in this case.

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 further on the 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 flatbreads *kuarnyany*, while the prayer is not uttered loudly⁹¹. 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 personality, for the *keremet* ceremony doesn't traditionally leave any place to females. What is also interesting to notice 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: the prayers seem to be addressed not to *keremet* but to Inmar⁹², and this ceremony is considered as the village spring ceremony, allowing Aribash to attend, on the following week, the *mör vös* in Vilgurt.

Another example is Yuda, where the *vös'as'*, at the moment, is Zakaryan Nigmatyanov, born 1949, who is a retired “mechaniser”. In his childhood, he was brought along with adults to the ceremonies; some 15-20 years ago, he started praying with his friends at the *mör vös'* in Vilgurt, and about 5 years ago, he revived the village ceremony in his village. According to his words, he was asked by the elder to officiate as a *vös'as'*.

⁹¹ Although this might be more directly connected with Aleksey's shyness: he acknowledged to us that he still has butterflies when he prays.

⁹² The main God of the Udmurt.

The last example we may mention in the Vilgurt group is Vukogurt⁹³, where the ceremonies had also been long interrupted. 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, who is quite a young man, a worker in the local brickworks.

In the other group, 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 1965. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of the profession technicalities, he is considered as the “senior” priest in the Alga group. He has been chosen as a priest because his grand-father was priest, although he was not the one to transmit him his knowledge. He uses Nazip's prayer. His cousin, Zahar 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, even chanting it in a peculiar recitativo: he told us that formerly they prayed differently and he wanted to show us how. But Zahar does not act as a *vös'as'*, probably because of personal problems. There are other experienced *vös'as'* in this group, who learnt their prayers from their grand-fathers. One is Verkhnebaltachevo's sacrificial priest Vladimir Khazimardanov (born 1964), whose grandfather Islam Khazimardanov had been recorded by Hungarian scholars Gábor Bereczki and László Vikár in the 1960s, and who had been praying for 20 years⁹⁴. His elder brother Boris has been lately acting as a sacrificial priest in Kyzylar.

⁹³ A report about the ceremony in Vukogurt can be found at <http://blog.erm.ee/?p=8708>

⁹⁴ Fieldwork interview 2015 June.

In Bigineyevo, it was Galyamshin's assistant, Tatiana Nikolaevna Shaybakova, then the Udmurt centre's director, who contacted an active man in the village, Rinat Usmanov, who is half Udmurt half Bashkir. He was the one who led us to the present *vös'as'*, Zimnat Khusnimardanovich Shartdinov, born in 1952, a retired tractor driver, who is now working as a blacksmith.

We have not attended many village ceremonies in this group – only Nizhnebaltachevo's⁹⁵, where the priest is Evgeniy Adullin, whom we have already followed several times⁹⁶. But we noticed at the *tol bagysh vös'* in December 2013 that some younger helpers were “promoted” sacrificial priests: in the absence of elder ones, who were ill. They prayed with the elder and wore the priest's costume. How did this 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'

There are nowadays 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* (вöсь кызё), “the host of the ceremony”, who deals with all the questions of finance and organisation allowing to perform a ceremony. This category exists nowadays in both groups of the Tatyshly district, although not everywhere.

⁹⁵ A detailed report about the ceremony in Nizhnebaltachevo can be found at <http://blog.erm.ee/?p=8783>

⁹⁶ 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'*.

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 them afresh.

Still there emerged a strong personality, Garifulla Garifullovich Garifanov, born 1947, a retired former chairman of the rural council, who is ordinarily called Farkhulla. One decade ago, he was asked by the villagers to look after ceremonies. He took the initiative of organising the general ceremonies *bagysh vös* and *mör vös*, as well as the village ceremony *gurten vös*. He leads the fund-raising and the gathering of the sacrificial animals. As he has enormous authority among the priests, he organises their activities, although he has no ritual functions at all. 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 very young helper from Alga, to pray with the elder sacrificial priests. True enough, after this episode, we have never seen them again in the position of *vös'as*. But we realise that Farkhulla is implementing a 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 of organising the revival of faded ceremonies. In Vilgurt, the 1990ies, the organiser of the ceremonies was the above-mentioned Rafik Kamidullin. Nowadays, Vil'gurt's "second" *vös'as*, the one selected by Galyamshin, Salim

Shakirov, is acting as an organiser, probably in regard to his abilities and his contacts' network. In other villages, the authoritative men who were asked to initiate the revival by looking for potential sacrificial priests went on helping them and organising the ceremonies in which they officiate. This, the function of *vös' kuz'o* is one of the consequences of the revitalisation process.

With the building of prayer houses both in Vilgurt and in Alga there emerged a new category of persons connected with the house: the *vös' korka utis'* (Udm. *вöсь корка утись*), the “wardens of the house of prayer”. In Alga, there is no particular responsible for the house and Farkhulla cares for it as for the rest. But in Vilgurt, this function exists and it is kept by Khabrislam Khabibyanov, born 1933, whose estate is close to the sacred place. His responsibility includes overlooking the territory of the sacred place and the house of prayer, whose keys he keeps. The cauldrons and other paraphernalia, which are of material value, are kept at his house. Actually, for a long time he was often replaced by his wife, who died in 2015 and his daughter has overtaken his responsibilities.

Recent developments: sacred places

As we mentioned earlier the Eastern Udmurt villages had several sacred places and buildings, with differentiated uses. Nowadays, the most used of them are the sacred places where the ceremonies we concentrate on in this article take place: they are called “place of ceremony, place of sacrifice” (Udm. *вöсьяськон инты* or *вöсьяськонтй / куриьськон инты* or *куриьськонтй*), without any particular reference to the abstract

notion of sacredness (Toulouze, Vallikivi 2016:147). The other places are abandoned, often forgotten and they host no ritual. The location of many of them is still in the memory of most of the population which attempts to keep as far as possible intact the wholeness of these sites: people avoid visiting it, using it for ordinary goals, desecrating them. There are many stories circulating about violation of these places and the dreadful consequences it elicits: 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 a water body, where during the ceremonies the helpers take water. In the centre, there are fireplaces where sacred porridge is cooked and where blood, bones are offered and burnt as well as sacrificial tables.

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 place used nowadays. For example, if the sacred place is situated far from the village or has been damaged by economic activity, another place is selected for sacrificial ceremonies, as it has happened in Vukogurt. The first place was situated on a hill with a very nice landscape, but it was far from the village and without any water nearby; therefore the sacred place was brought nearer to the village by a spring. The distance from the village is also the reason, why the sacred place, roughly one decade age, was changed in Nizhnebalachevo. At the moment it is within the village 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 from the former fireplace coals and stones. If it is not possible to find the former fireplace, they bring only soil.

A new phenomenon which deserves to be emphasised is the fencing, which characterises the last years. While all the *keremet* places were traditionally fenced, it was not the case before the revival with the other places. Most of them were not marked at all and this is the case still nowadays outside the Tatyshly district. One of the first marks of revival was the attention brought by the authorities to the sacred places expressed by their fencing. It is one of the manifestations of the new public status of religious practice. Since, we may assert that all the agrarian sacred places used in the Tatyshly district today have been fenced. 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 were not seen as dangerous *per se*, their desecration could be accompanied by punishment. Therefore, they were not visited in ordinary days and adults explained 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. We have heard outside the Tatyshly district 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 question was discussed in a round table organised by the national-historical centre with us, with invited sacrificial priests as well as with local leaders, and all agreed that fencing was necessary everywhere. Some even proposed to put out boards informing about the sacredness of the places.

The sacred places in Vilgurt and Alga have become places for wider ceremonies, which gives them a particular status, confirmed by the presence on their territory by *vös' korka*, “prayer house”. We have seen no other building in the sacred places of the Tatyshly district. These are log houses, built like the living houses, where cult paraphernalia is kept, and where in winter ritual food is distributed. Within the house in Alga, where there is a stove, tapestries offered by members of the community decorate the wall and the facade is also decorated by Udmurt ornament. In Vilgurt, where there is no stove, there are exhibition stands with explanations about the history of the sacred place, of the revitalisation of the ceremonies as well as a copy of Nazip Sadriev’s Estonian award. There were such houses *tarlau korka* by some sacred places in the past, where priests could spend the night, when there were big ceremonies far from the villages (Sadikov2008: 46).

A last interesting development should be mentioned. While in both groups the sacred places are fenced, there was until 2016 a big difference between Alga’s and Vilgurt’s sacred places. Alga’s had actually a double fence: within the territory encompassed by a 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 a sacrificial space. Into these grounds only religious specialists are allowed, especially women are not welcome, who give their offerings to the *vös'as'* over the fence. But we have also seen sacrificial priests from other villages respectfully refrain from entering⁹⁷. On the contrary, no internal fence or any kind of other limitation marked the sacred

⁹⁷ However Liivo Niglas was allowed without any question to enter the fenced area in order to film the proceedings.

territory in Vilgurt. 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 there their breads personally. Yet, in December 2016, things had changed. An internal fence had been built around the area where the fireplaces and the table are situated. The poles where the participants are supposed to tie the towels they bring as offerings remained outside the fence. The *võs'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 of 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.

Recent developments: rituals and prayers

How much the revitalisation process has affected the contents of the ritual itself? For lack of available research, we have limited understanding of all the adaptation processes that rituals went through in the Soviet times. We have remembrances of elder participants, who are usually quite confused about timetable. We shall in the following chapter to 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 were 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 lower on the river and the order followed the course up the river (Sadikov 2008:192). Nowadays, none of these rules are followed.

Ritual costume

During a ceremony, the priest is identified by a particular costume. This costume has changed throughout time. At the beginning of the 20th century, as we know from older photographs, the priests wore a white “caftan” called *shortderem* (Udm. *шортдэрем*), and had wide belts called *kuskertton* (Udm. *кыскерттон*). On their head, they wore a white felt bonnet wrapped in a white towel, and they wore new bast shoes (Sadikov 2008: 190). Then, the *shortderem* was not only the costume of the priests: all Eastern Udmurt wore this attire to attend religious ceremonies (Sadikov, Mäkelä 2009: 262–263; Sadikov-Hafeez 2010: 96), and this is still remembered by elder women⁹⁸.

Gradually, in the span of the 20th century, homespun clothes went out of use and the *shortderem* was seen as costume for priests. But nowadays few samples of old *shortderem* are preserved: some are still owned by priests, but older women keep them as well⁹⁹. The disappearance of the caftan was also encouraged by the fact it was part of the burial costume: the elder Udmurt who owned a *shortderem*, ask to be buried in it in order to enter the world beyond dressed as Udmurt. Because of the gradual

⁹⁸ In December 2016, we attended in Vilgurt an evening dedicated to grandmas and their granddaughters. One of the grandmothers took from her chest a *shortderem* and put on her head a white scarf saying: “that’s how I pray”.

⁹⁹ At the same event, the grandmas were asked to comment the content of their chest and we were surprised to discover that several of them contained old *shortderems*.

disappearance of the *shortderem*, they have been replaced for the sacrificial priests with white¹⁰⁰ 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 either; only the Vyazovka *vös'as'* had an old *shortderem*. Things started to change very quickly, the same year, in the Alga group. In Autumn 2013, the Alga group made special costumes in white fabric with vertical stripes reminding in some way the *shortderem*, 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.

In other regions of the Eastern Udmurt, an analogous phenomenon may be noticed. For example in the Kueda district of the kray of Perm, the local activists tailored for their priests white-yellow caftans with decorated hems (...). 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

¹⁰⁰ White is the colour of the highest god, Inmar, to which the prayers are addressed.

jackets¹⁰¹, but in the ceremonies they used as a belt towels, which conferred them sacral status. We have witnessed the same choice of the jackets in the Udmurt village of Varkled-Bodya in Tatarstan, but there they had proper belts.

Thus, at the moment, there are three ritual costumes used in parallel in the Tatyshly district: the soviet time ordinary white smocks, the old *shortderem* for who has one, and the Alga uniformed *ad hoc* costume.

As far as the rest of the costume is concerned, they all use towels, except in the case the sacrificial priest has been able to afford a traditional belt, which he then uses – this is the case of the young Balzyuga vös 'as' Fridman Kabipyanov, to whom we offered one woven by a friend in Udmurtia. The priests, who are supposed to have their heads covered as all the other participants, wear on their head ordinary industrial headgear usually in light fabrics and the whole image seems a bit casual. But it is of the utmost importance that their head 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

¹⁰¹ 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 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 the white smock.

priest had one prayer he operates with¹⁰². We have not yet come to analyse in depth the texts of the prayers, in order to appreciate how much they have been adapted to modernity. We also do not have a full overview of the changes brought into texts in the Soviet period. We can still mention a conversation with Evgeniy Adullin in June 2015, where he reflected on the need to change the text in order to add wishes that would correspond to the actual situation in the 21st century. He doubted whether he was allowed to do that, and the next years will show his final decision.

Here we would like to concentrate on the considerable changes in the ways ritual texts, called *kuriskon*, have been transmitted from one priest to the other in time. Traditionally the rule was that prayers were not taught, they were supposed to be “stolen” from the elder priests, and that means that they were learnt in situ, while the text was enunciated. That’s the reason why the priests took along with them children and teenagers as helpers who absorbed thus their experience and learnt the texts of the prayers. 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 Vilgurt group, we may mention Nazip Sadriev and Rais Rafikov in Vilgurt.

Some other priests have written down the texts of older priest’s prayers and utter them by heart, but in most cases they read them from a paper. This form of enunciation

¹⁰² We have not yet come to analyse in depth the texts of the prayers, in order to appreciate how much they have been adapted to modernity. Many prayers have been published, much more have been collected and are in archives, usually not transcribed, and we have already recorded several prayers in our materials. We are preparing (Ranus Sadikov, Eva Toulouze) a collection of prayers of the Eastern Udmurt.

of a magic text is nowadays 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. Usually, they use the texts of their predecessors in the village. Only in cases where there has been no possibility of retaining 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, of the old Balzyuga *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. Clearly there is a transition from oral tradition to written one.

The rituals

Some transformation has also taken place in the ritual part of the ceremonies. Several rituals have been simplified. Some of the simplification may originate in adaptations from the Soviet period, some of them to the ongoing process. We will take as a starting point the Alga group rituals, which are the more complex 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 notice is the treatment of the first prayer, called *siz’is’kon*, “promise”: its goal is to promise Inmar a blood sacrifice. 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 promise the sacrifice. The fire must be kept then going 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 the whole night after the fire, to prevent its 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 Balzyuga *gurt vös'*¹⁰³. These are the places where continuity was preserved. In other places we have not attended enough village ceremonies to be able to document all of them, but in Aribash and Vukogurt, the ceremonies start directly without any kind of previous prayer or promise. We may assert then that this is a new simplification brought by the process of revival.

A general change in the sacrificial process is that birds are no long sacrificed. Nazip Sadriev mentioned this change as one he brought himself forth. Geese were expensive and did not offer much meat. Clearly at some undetermined time in the Soviet period, the sacrifice concentrated on the ewes. We wouldn't mention this change if there were not attempts to come back to the more traditional way. In the Vil'gurt's *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 clean it with twenty degree below zero, was cleaned in the nearby sauna. This is another of the innovations – or coming back to older traditions – Rais is implementing in Vilgurt. But this might require a strong motivation to root especially in spring: practices concerning geese have been changing in the Udmurt areas of Bashkortostan and people do not keep anymore geese around the year: they take chicks from incubator in spring and slaughter them at the end of the autumn.

¹⁰³ A report of Balzyuga's village ceremony can be found at <http://blog.erm.ec/?p=8542>

Most of the changes are connected to the way to deal 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 seen it usually, 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 Balzyuga village ceremony, where one of the helpers, Sidor, refused to discard them and did himself all the cleaning. 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. As unlike the Alga group, the Vilgurt group associates 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 has been started by Nazip Sadriev.

- If formerly, in all villages, sacrificial meat was presented separately from the porridge; while now, it is cut in smaller pieces and mixed with the porridge, both being served together. Local observers comment that this tradition comes from Nazip Sadriev, who listened to the reproaches of the members of the community, who complained they had got too little meat and who noticed that certain members of the community took much bigger amounts of meat than the others.

There are also some differences in the Alga and Vilgurt group rituals. One of them is the way participants present offerings. In the Vilgurt group there are poles where they tie the towels or other fabric offerings themselves. 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 what for he or she wishes him to ask God. The offerings are here very abundant, while in Vilgurt there are less than a dozen tokens. This difference may or may not be connected with the revitalisation process, but we have no evidence to rely on.

While until now we have emphasised those of the changes that have led to 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 remembrances: in 2015, in Aribash, we were able to record how, when the ritual porridge is ready, youngsters invited the population to attend the ceremony. In 2015, two teenagers walked in the central street of the village shouting *Vös'e mynele, vös'e* (Udm. Бӧсе мынэлэ, вӧсе!), “Go to the ceremony! Go!” At the end of the 19th century, the

Finn linguist Yrjö Wichmann observed that the population of the villages was called by horsemen in white, who shouted *Vös'e mynele ini* (Udm. Бӧсе мынэлэ ини!), “Go to the ceremony!” (Sadikov, Hafeez 2015: 147). In Aribash, the tradition was restored; an informer from Aribash remembered from her childhood the same tradition. It may have existed elsewhere as well, but there are no sources about it.

Recent developments: the participants

We must emphasise that participation to a ceremony does not mean presence throughout the whole process. Usually for most of the time, only the sacrificial priest(s) and the helpers are on the spot – and sometimes the researchers. The people come only when the porridge is ready in order to share its eating and to bring it back home. In a wider sense participation starts earlier and finishes later: the village population as a whole give 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 the ritual act, and it may be accomplished at home, later.

Information we have about the Soviet time emphasise that the participants were scarce and limited to the elder persons. But this is not enough to appreciate the real level of what could be transmitted inside the families, which might be higher than we imagine. Anyhow in the soviet times clearly young people did not attend the ceremonies. Anyway, the ceremonies are held on Fridays – i.e. on a working day, which may explain the presence only of retired persons. Some informants tell us that it was forbidden for

younger persons to attend¹⁰⁴. 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, for they were considered as not able to keep ritual cleanness; nowadays people of all ages attend also with small children, and young people of all ages attend 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 all respect them. We saw in Nizhnebaltachevo how adults threatened children, who wore shorts and whose arms were not covered, with the reactions of Farhullah, who later sent them back to wear 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* вöсь дэрем) and white caftans (*shortderem* шортдэрем) or at least they were dressed in light tones. The ordinary participants to the ceremony come in their Sunday best; women wear coloured bright dresses, and some of them come dressed in Udmurt fashion. Only the elder, respecting tradition, try to wear light colours.

Another important rule has been changed in the last decades: formerly, were allowed to attend only those who had the right to it – at the village ceremonies, the population of the given village, in the others, the inhabitants of the concerned villages, while at the festive events organised after the ceremonies, kin gathered from different villages. The presence of outside observers was not desirable¹⁰⁵. Probably the question

¹⁰⁴ Fieldwork interview Asavka December 2016.

¹⁰⁵ This is very eloquently illustrated by U. Holmberg, 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) by his

of outsiders was 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, will attend 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 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.¹⁰⁶. Until now, we have been well accepted. No calamity has followed our presence, and people have got accustomed to our presence. Still, we cannot rule out the possibility that the sacrificial priests will wish at some moment to have their ceremonies out of the field of observation, re-establishing thus older rules.

Conclusion

In this overview of the processes of revival undergone by the Eastern Udmurt, we tried to understand what is going on and the starting point from which they started at the end of the 1980s. In some cases, total continuity was guarantee, when there were strong personalities able to resist all the soviet pressures, and a favourable environment: total 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

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: 212).

¹⁰⁶ During our research in 2016, our chauffeur reported the words of one of the priests about the attendance of scholars in sacrificial ceremonies clearly their presence from the ritual point of view was not desirable, but ethically there is no possibility of preventing them. Naturally nobody says that to the scholars themselves.

indeed been discontinued. 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 not the impression that the age of the settlements has a wide impact on the way religious practice has been retained over the years. The history, nevertheless, has still an impact on the way ceremonies are organised: the Alga group village ceremonies associate 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 a simplification of the rules, following a trend that was already going on in the soviet times, where sacrificial priests concentrated to what they considered as essential. The more recent a revival, the more simplified the ritual, as we have seen in Vukogurt. If we look at them from a wider perspective, there are some interesting trends going on, which we attempt now to pinpoint:

- We notice that behind the revitalisation of religious practice there are very concrete and very diverse persons. 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 the behalf of religious revival. They were late Soviet leaders¹⁰⁷, who used fully their political local networks and their influence to get the revival enacted. In some way it shows the vitality and efficiency of the former kolkhoz's structure and

¹⁰⁷ R.B.Galyamshin had a huge portrait of Lenin in his office when Eva first met him in 2011.

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 were only one part. They were the main employers of the population. While the kolkhozes as such have disappeared, and have been replaced by cooperatives enterprises whose name have not changed and which are still called kolkhoz by the population, the network they represented functions still 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 tendency towards actual institutionalisation and centralisation: no attempt has been made of creating a church, a hierarchy, or even a centralised organisation, as it has been achieved in the Mari state, 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 creating 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 clear meaning. This is particularly interesting in the late evolutions, where already fenced sacred places (fenced externally) start to build fences inside, in order to mark different statuses. Another very interesting development concerns the medium of the prayers. The introduction of written culture is a clear breach into oral tradition. World religions have all their Holy Writ. The priest in

Vukogurt commented to us that other religions have written texts, why not the Udmurt one, but this did sound 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 – but texts are being fixated in a written form, which may well represent a way of restrain improvisation.

- We want to discuss Anna-Leena Siikala's conclusion that in turning religious ceremonies into festivals, the Udmurt have found a way to give them relevance in their identity endeavours (Siikala, Ulyashev 2011: 310). We won't comment about the experiences she analyses in Udmurtia, although they would deserve discussing and updating, for these processes are on-going, 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 "the all-country" sacrificial ceremony *elen vös*, which has been recreated in 2008, and which had indeed attracted huge media interest. Otherwise the other village or village group based ceremonies are made for the internal needs of the communities and, while they may have ethnic consolidation effects, they are not lived as responding to wider interests than the welfare of the village itself.

Finally, we must reflect on our own influence on the on-going processes. In the last years, the Eastern Udmurt, especially the Tatyshly Udmurt, have been accustomed, to see researchers in their ceremonies – we have for example attended twice the Vilgurt *mör vös* and people have shown that they expect us to be there every year. We must be aware that our presence cannot be indifferent 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 the instruments in the future of several possible scenarios, some we are happy of, some of them dangerous. While we shall be quite happy if our material helps transmission, and especially oral transmission, we are disturbed by 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 impoverishment of tradition. This ethical choice sets upon us a long research programme, for all villages hold their village ceremony on the same day and there are 19 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 misinterpreted 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 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 by Tatar leaders. The district head Rushan Garaev has expressed several times 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 yet attended. “Why have they gone there and not visited us? We have also 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 for their own cultural values; the sacrificial priests, until now at least, seem happy to be filmed and never put any obstacle 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, reflected on possible changes and asked for Eva’s advice on this issue;
- This same approach was quite explicit in an experience we had, Eva and Nikolai, when we were invited at a round table organised by the historical-cultural centre, which gave us thus the opportunity of explaining 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 has been followed for two or three month only to be forgotten later.

- 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 at that moment attending to a ceremony in the same village on the same day. By doing so, they ensured that the grandmothers spoke publicly 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 have not on this point a neutral position. As an Udmurt, one of us, Nikolai, is naturally keen to awaken interest in his country for the object of his research. And he is not the only one. In 2015, Eva concluded an agreement with the Udmurt television: it was to send 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 wider, because the Udmurt television discovered the richness of the Eastern Udmurt culture. It 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 on the long term the process itself. We attempt to be aware of it in order to avoid non desirable influences, but must accept that our interest, by reflection, stimulates interest in others too.

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.

This article contains our reflexions by the end of 2016, but things are probably still changing in the next months.

The Eastern Udmurt's culture and religious practice: variability and flexibility of today's religious practice¹⁰⁸

Eva Toulouze and Laur Vallikivi

This study relies on five years regular fieldwork among the Eastern Udmurts of Bashkortostan, on observation and interaction with numerous informants¹⁰⁹, in five districts of this Republic: the Tatyshly, Burayevo, Baltachevo, Yanaul and Kaltasy districts. The authors have attended, together, separately or with other members of a team, numerous ceremonies both at the village level and at the family level. We endeavour here to sum up our observations about fluidity and flexibility of contemporary religious practice.

“Traditional cultures”¹¹⁰ are supposed to be regulated by sets of compulsory rules, of borders whose transgression may either be an ordinary phenomenon or have disruptive consequences (see Arukask 2014). When studying traditional cultures and worldviews,

¹⁰⁸ This article has been published in Russian: the text was a translation from an original in English. Toulouze, Eva; Vallikivi, Laur (2021). Культура и религиозная практика закамских удмуртов: о границе между сакральным и профанным. Ева Тулуз, Елена Попова, Николай Анисимов. Современная удмуртская культура. Том II. (211–266). Tallinn: Tallinna ülikooli kirjastus. DOI: [10.22601/udmurdi-2.2021.08](https://doi.org/10.22601/udmurdi-2.2021.08).

¹⁰⁹ We heartily thank Nikolai Anisimov for sharing with us his own experiences, observations and reflexions on the topic of this article and Ranus Sadikov for answering our questions.

¹¹⁰ We are aware that „traditional culture“ is a poor analytical term as it conveys an image of a bounded and unchanging cultural situation located as if outside of modernity in evolutionary schemes (see Fabian 1983). However, as the Russian term *традиционная культура* is adopted by the local communities, especially by cultural activists, we use this concept as part of local discourse which has considerable impact on local decision making.

is it one of the scholar's main tasks to describe both the rules and their actual (dys)functioning: usual practice provides the necessary flexibility allowing adaptation to concrete life situations. This has become a textbook knowledge in anthropology since the criticisms made against Radcliffe-Brown and other structural-functionalists. Thus, for example, labour division between sexes may be rigorously defined in many traditional cultures, but it is much more flexible in reality than in theory: females may be compelled to accomplish masculine tasks when men are scarce and vice-versa. For example take the example of reindeer herding Nenets who live over a thousand kilometres further north from the Udmurts: despite the concept of ritual impurity of women in fertile age and the consequent restrictive rules in livelihood practices, females act as herders and hunters in families where there are no sons or no husbands even if this requires transgressing certain norms (see Niglas 1999, Vallikivi 2005).

The same observation may apply to the study of religious practice among Eastern Udmurts: it is important to understand what is subject to flexibility and what is not liable to compromise. Often the description of traditional religious practice insists on rules and does not pay sufficient attention to the possible frames of flexibility. This is understandable for two main reasons. The first is that it is easier to get information about the rules: knowledgeable informants will be able to describe rituals setting; much more complicated is to pick from actual practice the cases in which rules are not implemented rigidly. It requires long and regular fieldwork, which is not always possible. Moreover, as severe rules are the sign of a living and functioning tradition, some scholars are biased to present the rules as stricter as they are in practice, in order to present the culture they study as "pure" and "right". It is often the case with some "native" scholars, who often

just emphasise the rigour of the Udmurt rules (for example Minniyakhmetova 2015). They have been influenced by Russian anthropology (or rather “Soviet ethnography”) that has its aim to reconstruct a previous state of traditional culture, in which it supposedly functioned more coherently. As we do not consider the present situation to be a degradation of something that was fuller and more organic before and as we are more interested in what makes sense for the population nowadays, it needs a careful and reflexive “reading” of the sources we have. Moreover we are outsiders: we had to learn all of this practice, both on the basis of discourse and of fieldwork experience. So we cannot exclude that the way in which we have been presented the rules relies on what our interlocutors considered to be proper to emphasise to an outsider and what they deemed was better to keep secret.

We shall rely for this article on on-going fieldwork which started in 2013. In the first years, we have been focusing mainly on collective animist ceremonies, concerning one or more villages, while in the last years we have been documenting also more private rituals and religious practice at the family level.

We shall start by presenting an outlook on the current situation of Udmurt religious practice in Bashkortostan: is it fading or on the contrary are there signs of a powerful revitalisation? Afterwards, we shall concentrate on some sensitive issues showing both rules and their actual functioning: these are the choice of the sacrificial priest, the role of women in collective ceremonies, behaviour towards and in sacred places, the proceedings of the ceremonies etc.

The state of religious practice in 2018

The Eastern Udmurt are particularly interesting from the point of view of religious practice: this group is the result of a long migration process, which started with the integration of the lands inhabited by the Udmurt into the Russian state, achieved in 1552 with the taking of Kazan by Ivan IV. In subsequent intense evangelisation periods, when forceful conversion was imposed on the populations (Udmurt, but also Mari, Mordvin or Chuvash) part of it made the choice of quitting their lands and villages and migrated to more tolerant Muslim areas, particularly in the ones, quite close, inhabited by Tatar and Bashkir. They settled, rented then bought land, and were able to keep their religious practice with little interference from the local authorities. Christianity practically was unknown to the Eastern Udmurt until a very late period. The Muslim environment did actually have some impact on the Udmurt population: some villages collectively went over both to Islam and to Muslim identity: they lost their Udmurt identity and merged with the Tatar population, adopting their language as well (Sadikov 2011b: 371-382).

Of course, they were touched by Soviet anti-religious policy as the whole of the Soviet population, but although practice seriously was reduced by the younger generations, it was not totally discontinued. In some remote villages full continuity could be granted between the pre-Soviet and the post-Soviet period. In others however, particularly in the last decades of the Soviet era, continuity was interrupted and the knowledge disappeared with the older sacrificial priests' demise. There is thus a geography of continuity. We must add that these observations concern the wider collective rituals, held at the village level or joining several villages. A wider stability however is characteristic of rituals at a lesser level – at the family level, although they have also started to fade in some regions.

The end of the Soviet era is characterised by religious revival, here as well as in other regions. Ethnic identity was emphasised also in this domain. The initiative is manifold. It came both from the villagers themselves as from their leadership: Udmurt heads of kolkhozes and village administrations started on the one hand to fence sacred places and to build there ritual buildings, and on the other hand to organise ceremonies in villages where there were held no more – to look for possible sacrificial priests and help them revive their village's tradition.

Clearly the population welcomed these initiatives. Attendance is a clear sign of these ceremonies' needfulness; for instance, in one place a ceremony, which was formerly attended by three villages, is now attended by eight – which means for them readiness to provide more sacrificial animals and to spend more money (Bagysh vös', in the Alga group of the Tatyshly district). In another village (Kasiyarovo in the Burayevo district), the two old sacrificial priests had entrusted continuity to two younger ones, who yet did not organise any ceremonies. After more than one decade, pressure from the villagers compelled one of them to revive the village ceremony.

Nowadays, in most of the Bashkortostan Udmurt villages, collective ceremonies have been revived. Also wider ceremonies are now organised, which were known until the 1920s but disappeared afterwards, as Elen vös', which was re-established in 2008 (Sadikov 2010: 34).

The sacrificial priest

The key character in religious practice is the sacrificial priest, called in Udmurt *vös'as'*. He is the one who leads the ceremonial activities (see for more details Toulouze, Niglas

2017). According to the memories of older people, they were assisted in earlier times¹¹¹ by specialised helpers (one dealing with the fire, another with the meat). Nowadays, he supervises the whole process and he is the one to read the prayers.

In this region, the sacrificial priest was appointed for life¹¹². He chose his successor, who was supposed to be a married man, at least aged 40, preferably from a family in which there were sacrificial priests. Often priests trained their sons to take over after them. This was the traditional rule.

The question of the sacrificial priests is clearly crucial. Without priests, no ceremonies can be held. Now, in Bashkortostan, there is no lack for sacrificial priests. Sometimes there is one but there can be even more in some villages. For example in Kassiyarovo, by the death of the elder *vös 'as'*, he entrusted his spiritual legacy to two younger men, who nevertheless did not carry on religious practice for decades.

In some places, the acting sacrificial priests have been chosen by the elder priest(s), according to tradition. In the Tatyshly district, the sacrificial priests in Verkhnebaltachevo and Kyzyl'yar, brothers Vladimir and Boris Khazimardanov, are married and they have learnt the knowledge from their grand-father, Islam Armashin, who was a sacrificial priest (Vikár, Bereczki 1989, Photographs). The oldest active priest (until 2013) in the district, and in all of Bashkortostan, Nazip Sadriev (see Toulouze, Vallikivi, Niglas, Anisimov 2017), appointed himself some priests in other villages than his own: Rais Rafikov, in Novye Tatyshly, learnt with his father and fulfilled all the

¹¹¹ The chronology is often confused in the accounts of our informants, who often do oppose “before” and “now”. Here we may suppose that in the period where religious ceremonies were prohibited, older, specialised assistants were randomly replaced as they could and the specialisations, disappeared.

¹¹² This is not the case in all the Udmurt regions. In Kuzebayevo, for example, the *vös 'as'* is appointed by the village assembly for a precise period.

traditional requirements. The second priest in the same village, Salim Shakirov (who died in 2017), was not from a priest's family, and he learnt his prayer from Nazip Sadriev, who is from a neighbouring village. However when Salim died, Rais replaced him with Zinnat Zaynurovich Dautov, born in 1957, whose father and grandfather were sacrificial priests.

In other cases, the rule has not been literally followed. This is the case in Nazip Sadriev's own village of Balzyuga (Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan), where the elder sacrificial priest, at the age of 80, after having been a priest for 60 years, chose his successor, a young 30 years old married man, who has sacrificial priests among his ancestors, Fridman Kabipyanov. We must however recall that Nazip himself started being a priest uncommonly early, in the post-war years, when men were scarce and men willing to undertake these functions were still scarcer. So this may explain that he had no problems in appointing a younger man.

In the Tatyshly district, the local leaders were active in looking for potential sacrificial priests. They addressed in every village active men, who had or had had responsibilities at the local level and thus knew quite well their population, to find married men with sacrificial priests among their ancestors. In some places they found – in the villages of Yuda, Bigineevo for example; in Vukogurt they did not and they asked a worker in the local brick factory, Ralif Garaev.

In other districts, traditions had faded, and there weren't, at the beginning of the nineties, any elder who would have remembered for example the texts of old prayers. In Kachak, a village in the Kaltasy district, which had been thoroughly documented at the end of the 19th century by Yrjö Wichmann (Sadikov, Mäkelä, 2009: 247-249), continuity was

totally interrupted. There, as in the other villages of that group (Pichi Kachak, Kachkin Turaj and Kurgak), there is only one sacrificial priest per village, who has been chosen by the population. In Kachak's case, Anatoli Garifullovich is a former teacher, but without religious family traditions. He will be, as his colleagues in the other villages, responsible for his replacement.

So in conclusion we may observe the diversity of the present situation, in which some priests have been appointed according to the traditional rules and others not, but it seems not to affect their legitimacy.

Among other characteristics connected to the priests, we could dwell upon their costume. As the other attendants to sacred rituals, sacrificial priests were dressed in white. Their costume was the *short-derem*, a homespun caftan with narrow vertical stripes. Nowadays, this costume is seldom in use: as it is a mortuary costume, those who have it want to be buried in it. Thus, few have been transmitted. We have seen only one sacrificial priest, in Vyazovka, who has one and uses it in ceremonies. The others have found different kinds of replacements:

- The ordinary white work smock. This was the ordinary replacement already in Soviet times and still is very widespread. Still, in the last years there have been attempts to increase the solemnity of the priest's robe.
- Thus, since autumn 2013, in the Alga group of the Tatyshly district¹¹³ the sacrificial priests wear a white robe with wide stripes, from industrial fabric, which had been

¹¹³ The 19 Udmurt villages in the Tatyshly district are divided, from the point of view of traditional religious ceremonies, in two subgroups, each one on one bank of the river Yuk: the right bank encompasses 9 villages which meet, nowadays, in the small village of Alga; on the left bank there are 10 villages that gather for their *mör vös* 'in Novye Tatyshly (Udm. Vil'gurt).

ordered and financed by the agricultural cooperative *Rassvet*. There are 10-15 of them and the priests in charge use them when needed, both in wider ceremonies and at home.

- One young priest uses nowadays a *short-derem* made of industrial fabrics quite similar to the traditional *short-derem*, whose tailoring follows the traditional forms.
- Other priests have added decorations to their white smock, not attempting to imitate the old model. So Anatoli Galikhanov had ordered his own robe in the Yanaul district, with the addition of a red Udmurt pattern on it (oral information 2016). Other priests have but recently bought industrial decorations, which remind of folk motives and enriched their robe with them (Kachak etc.).

Another element in the dressing, whose symbolic importance is huge, is the belt. Most sacrificial priests in Bashkortostan use embroidered towels, which are tied at the waist. One some of them, with connections to Udmurtia, have managed to receive traditional Udmurt homespun belts.

Thus, at the moment, there are different solutions used in the region, different attempts aimed at distinguishing the sacrificial priest's dressing.

The sacred places configuration

Udmurt sacred places (see Toulouze, Vallikivi 2016) may have different configurations. All the ones we have visited are in a beautiful landscape, not far from a water point – river or source. While the Keremet¹¹⁴ sacred places are usually in a grove, in the others often there are a few trees, but not always.

¹¹⁴ The Keremet/Lud cult is dedicated to a deity that is widely known in all of the Volga region, apparently of Turkic origin; in his honour were organised regular ceremonies, exclusively masculine, led by special sacrificial priests who have a special prayer.

Traditionally, some sacred places were fenced and some not. The ones which are known to have been systematically fenced, are the Keremet/Lud sacred places, which are traditionally fenced, for they are considered to be dangerous. So the fence was a double protection: the place was protected from random desecration and the people were protected from accidentally calling upon themselves the wrath of the deity. The other ceremony places, *vös' inty*, could be fenced or not. Wichmann observes that one of the sacred places in Kachak was fenced, and the other was temporarily marked when ceremonies were held, to avoid the interference of superfluous persons (Hafeez 2015: 79). Many, nevertheless, were not fenced. Still in some cases there are data about fencing especially for the places of big ceremonies and when the place was close to a village and the domestic animals could use it as pasture.

So they still are in many places. But in the places where revitalisation has been particularly active, a new trend has led to systematic fencing. Fencing has become a marker of active religious practice. In the Tatyshly district, where both continuity and revitalisation have been most active, all the sacred places have been fenced. This is a process: Udmurt scholar Ranus Sadikov, who had been studying the Udmurt religious practice since the beginning of the 21st century, has seen this on-going process so that many places have changed since he first visited them (oral information 2018). The local agricultural enterprises have assisted with this task; sometimes, they have also built a hut¹¹⁵ as a further commodity for the ceremonies. This is the case in Novye Tatyshy (in Udm. Vil'gurt; so will it be named below) and in Alga, the places where several villages' ceremonies are being held, as well as at the district capital, Verkhnie Tatyshly. While the

¹¹⁵ Not to be mixed up with the sacred building *kuala* (see below).

Vil'gurt and Alga places are only relatively new – they have been chosen in the 1970s, in order to warrant more privacy for the big ceremonies, the Verkhnie Tatyshly place is quite recent (Toulouze, Sadikov, Vallikivi, Niglas, Anisimov 2018: 213; see also Hafeez 2015:84, Sadikov 2008: 209). In this location the ceremonies have been discontinued and the last place has been occupied by a residential zone. So when it was decided, in 2015, to revitalise the local ceremony, a new place had to be chosen. The main actors in the revitalisation was the family of a legendary politician, now retired, Rinat Galyamshin. His son Rustam found a place close to his house and financed the fencing and the building of the house.

In other districts, the rule is not as commonly followed. In the Burayevo district, Anatoli Galikhanov, a very well-known sacrificial priest, expresses no wish to have his places fenced, referring to the older tradition¹¹⁶. In the Baltachevo district, Vladimir Galiev, sacrificial priest in Asavka, expresses the wish to fence it: his village is half Tatar and not all, especially the young people, know that the beautiful place by the river is an Udmurt sacred place, so many use it to drink and party¹¹⁷. No fence isolates the sacred place in Kizganbashevo (2016). In the Yanaul district, most places are not fenced (2017). In Kachak, in the Kaltasy district one of the sacred places, where the *siz'is'kon*¹¹⁸ is held,

¹¹⁶ oral information, 06 2018

¹¹⁷ oral information, 06 2016

¹¹⁸ *Siz'is'kon* is an Udmurt word meaning promise: this is an opening ceremony, in which the priests offer a porridge without meat and promise a blood sacrifice. It may take place right before the main ceremony, or the evening before, or some days before, with or without the participation of the whole population.

is not fenced while the *badzhyn vös'*¹¹⁹ sacred place is (2018) (see also Hafeez 2015: 125).

Thus fencing a sacred place has acquired in addition to the old functions – protect the places from unintentional desecration and the people of the consequences of such desecration – new symbolic ones, as a marker of the Udmurt sacredness.

But this is not the only ongoing process. In some places, particularly in the Tatyshly district (the Alga religious subgroup), the sacred place is encompassed by a fence; but within the fenced area, there is a second fence identifying a most sacred surface, the one where the priests and their assistants operate and where external persons are not welcome (this phenomenon had been emphasised by Hafeez 2015:123). We discovered this feature the first year we documented the village ceremonies. While in Vil'gurt the sacred place, within the general fence, granted freedom of movement to all – it was possible for anyone to spend time around the cauldrons with the priests and the assistants, the people brought their bread loaves right at the place where the sacrificial priests prayed – in Alga the internal fence gave a hint of greater privacy. While our cameraman, visual anthropologist Liivo Niglas, had no problem in being inside, even the sacrificial priest from another village did not enter, as he had nothing to do there. Similarly, at the sacred place along the Kyzyl'yar road, where there is only one fence, there is no doubt in the interpretation: this is the “internal” fence, so it is not proper to enter without a sound reason. So is it in the other villages of this group, as in Nizhnebaltachevo where there is only one fence and Starokalmiyarovo, where there is a

¹¹⁹ While the *siz'is'kon*, in Kachak, is limited to one village, the *badzhyn vös'* (big ceremony) is a ceremony where all the four villages of a cluster gather.

clear space for the lay attendants who come only for eating the porridge and a space for the sacrificial priests and their assistants actually operating all the time.

When we started our research in 2013, this was a peculiarity on the right bank of the Yuk; however when we attended in 2016 the winter *mör vös'* (several village ceremony) in Vil'gurt, we discovered a huge change in the inner configuration of the place: an inner fence had been built, so that it was now totally similar to Alga sacred space. While we had always endeavoured to behave discreetly and not to disturb the proceedings, we could not avoid wondering, on the basis of remarks and discussions our Udmurt-speaking colleagues had overheard, whether our presence had not been one of the factors triggering this self-defence measure to block the intruders. When, accompanied by Udmurt ethnographer from Bashkortostan Ranus Sadikov, Eva attended in 2018 Vil'gurt' village ceremony, she carefully did not attempt to enter the inner area, as she has always done there, where there is one. But she was surprised to be invited by the sacrificial priest himself to enter it in order to partake of the first prayer's porridge, and to stand near him on one side of the table. Of course, this is a sign of the proverbial Udmurt hospitality but it also showed that our presence did not disturb them as we had feared. Eva¹²⁰ is also sure that her systematic and spontaneous choice not to enter the most sacred area even by foul weather (in a snow tempest by -11° she was invited by one of the sacrificial priests to take refuge in a cabin within the area, but it was their initiative, not hers) arouse their respect.

¹²⁰ Both the authors of this article have a field experience in Siberia, where the peoples of the North, Khanty, Nenets, Yukaghirs, have a very developed gender sensitivity on religious matters.

The idea of a “most sacred” area within the overall sacred place had been emphasised to us by Vladimir Galiev, the Asavka young sacrificial priest, who defined it as the place between the cauldron, the place where the priests pray and a horizontal pole on which embroidered towels were hanging. In this triangle, according to him, only those working on the spot had reasons to dwell. But the borders were virtual and nothing physical marked them.

Thus the existence and the creation of an inner fenced space, a “most sacred” area within the sacred area triggered some new taboos, and some new habits: the bread loaves must be given to a priest or an assistant to be taken to their place in front of the praying priests. In order to allow the attendants to tie their textile offerings, the pole for them has been left outside the fence.

Some activities require some distance from this sacred surface. The women who wash the entrails do it as far as possible from the sacred place: they come to fetch them and go further, to their homes or to a spring, river etc. According to our informants, some actions must be done in places where the sacred place “does not see you”, for example go to the toilets. It is inevitable that during the day spent on the spot there are moments in which people must go to the toilets. In Vil’gurt, there is a toilet at the entrance of the larger sacred space. It is small hut, but it is closed, so the sacred place is not exposed to seeing the deed. Otherwise, the people go further, even quite far away, to be in places hidden from the sacred place. It is as if the place has its own agency and is treated as a sentient being. One sacrificial priest even mentioned that he went early in the morning to the sacred place on the days of the ceremonies to pray to the spirit of the sacred place. The focus of sacrality in these places is the fireplace, as we shall see below. If

something, the fireplace may represent the place as a whole. Its functioning is compulsory during all the ceremony. When the first prayer, the *siz'is'kon*, is held the evening before, as it happens on the Yuk's right bank, the fire must burn without interruption until the next day. When the ritual proceedings are finished and the place is about to be left, the sacrificial priests "close" it with ritual actions, whose form may vary but have the same function. On the Yuk's left bank, the sacrificial priest(s) put out the fires and swipe the area around it with a birch branch. On the right bank, during the last prayer the helpers walk around the fireplaces' area swiping towards the inside of it. After the third round, they join the others, who have been kneeling during the prayer.

Sacred place are not totally fixed: they may change in time (see as a convincing example in another Udmurt area Anisimov 2018: 126-127). Some places have moved closer to villages (See Minniyakhmetova here). Some places have been abandoned and not replaced: for example, when the dominant system in agriculture was rotation, the spring village ceremonies were always on a place close to the rye field, which rotated every year. Thus there were three sacred places. When this system was replaced, only one of them remained active. The others exist still in the awareness of the villagers, but they host no ceremonies any more. We also know that in the Soviet period sacred places could change for visibility reasons: in Balzyuga, the sacred place is visible from the road. After communist officials disrupted once the village ceremony, Nazip Sadriev moved the place some 50 m. from the former one, just to be further from unfriendly glances. For the same reasons, the *mör vös'* in both subgroups of the Tatyshly district were moved to locations that were more discreet: on the right bank, to the small village of Alga and on the left bank to Vil'gurt. All these changes induced a particular

ceremony, allowing transferring sacrality: earth from the fireplace was brought to the new place and, with it, sacrality went over to the new place. Problems might arise when the old place had been long abandoned and it was difficult to find the location of the fireplace. Often the presence of bones helped to identify it, but if it did not help, then mere earth from the former sacred place could replace it.

The behaviour related to and in sacred places

There were and are some rules to respect when in sacred places. These have changed throughout the years. Some part of the population was not expected at the ceremonies: the smaller children, those who were not able to keep the ritual cleanness were not admitted. As it often happens with the informants' memories, the concrete time is not remembered, but it was encompassed in the soviet period, probably between the 1950s and the 1970s, perhaps even earlier. According to some informants from the village of Urazgil'dy (Udm. Vukogurt), even young people, those who were not 40 were not allowed to attend the ceremonies. We have not heard elsewhere of this prohibition. We suppose that, in the Soviet times, younger people just did not attend, both for ideological and for practical reasons: they were the most exposed to the Soviet propaganda institutions (school, army, collective production unities, work institutions in general) and this has certainly caused a lack of motivation towards religious activities. Moreover, the ceremonies were and are held on Fridays, a working day, which does not allow working people to have free time to attend in the middle of the day.

According to our informants, in their youth village and village cluster ceremonies were reserved to the population of those villages. Outsiders were not welcomed. Probably, researchers at the end of the 19th century had to negotiate their attendance of

ceremonies, although their fieldwork notes do not comment on this issue. This, however, has changed. The presence of guests is no longer disapproved of. We were even told that the Tatyshly district big ceremonies, the *mör vös*’, take place in different weeks in order to allow guests to attend both.

While now there is no limitation (anywhere, as far as we have witnessed) about attendance, there are some requirements about the way the people dress and behave.

Both men and women must have head, arms and legs (feet) covered. This rule is more or less followed. The most it is followed where there are strong traditions and strong influent sacrificial priests. In Balzyuga village, everybody dress correctly, even children and teenagers. In Nizhnebaltachevo, we witnessed parents sending their children in shorts back home to dress correctly, threatening them with the organiser’s wrath.

The place where most of rule violations happen is the revitalised *Elen vös*’. It has become a kind of Udmurt festival where many different kinds of persons gather. There, often men and women come bare-headed and tend not to respect these traditional rules. The sacrificial priests complain and every time instruct the audience about the proper way to behave. But probably the culprits are people who have never attended a ceremony and who have never heard such instructions before.

For instance, in 2018 at *Elen vös*’, two women arrived quite early. One of them had no scarf. As they were sitting on a hill in full sunshine, they sought shade in the area where the priests were operating. This was considered as very improper.

Other behaviour limitation concern verbal use (or abuse), as it is prohibited to swear or to use non-polite language; it is also prohibited to show something with your finger.

Sometimes priests complain that people do not stay properly on their knees. They half sit, which is supposed to be against the rules.

Drinking spirits within the sacred area is also taboo. While moonshine is part of traditional Udmurt ritual paraphernalia (Orlov 1999: 197), in this region it does not appear anyhow in the ceremonies. We have assisted only twice to exceptions: in 2014, in Urazgil'dy, after the end of the proceedings, women sat outside the sacred zone and sang. One of them offered all the singers and the other people who had gathered her own moonshine. Then she stepped into the fenced zone, to offer it to us and to other people. She was immediately asked to leave the grounds and not to desecrate them. In 2018, in Starokal'miarovo, where the sacred place has two clearly delimited areas, one of the women who attended wanted to offer Eva moonshine. She asked allowance to the sacrificial priests, who allowed her to pour the drink in the audience area and after the end of all the ritual deeds. But since 2013 these are the only occasions in which alcoholic drinks have been present by religious ceremonies.

The place of women in collective ceremonies

The Udmurt *vös'* ceremonies are meant for the sake of all the population without discrimination¹²¹. All the population is invited to partake the ritual porridge eating. But the making of it is traditionally a male occupation. All the sacrificial priests are men, and this is true of the assistants with the exception we shall develop below. Two tasks may be entrusted to women and so are they in most places: exceptionally the washing of the cauldrons (in Vil'gurt) and most generally the washing of the sacrificial animals'

¹²¹ Unlike the Keremet/Lud ceremonies, which are strongly masculine. Women will eat the porridge the men bring home (*lud vös'* in Votskaya Osh'ya, district of Yanaul; *gurt vös'* in Aribash, district of Tatyshly).

entrails. When there are no women to do that, the inners are just burnt as the rest of the waste (bones etc.). Usually the washing takes place elsewhere, the women just come to the sacred place to take the bowl and to bring it back.

The possible presence of women is an issue where the differences between the different places are keenly felt. The most traditional ceremonies we have attended are the ones of the Alga group (right bank) in the Tatyshly district. Not only there are no women among the assistants, but, and probably for the very same reason, the inner fence is a border not to be crossed: the women bring their offerings and give them to a sacrificial priest, who says a prayer on to each and hang the up inside.

While this is the usual proceeding, we are impressed by the lack of interiorisation of this rule. We have seen in Alga (2013.6) a woman entering without hesitation the sacred area with her scarf for offering, and on 2015 a couple just walking through the area at the sacred place along the Kyzylar road. This reminds us of the decades without any religious practice in the public sphere, which have certainly numbed many reflexes.

This was the most traditional place, where the priests wished to keep things as they had been before; but what happens, when what was before has slipped from memory? We have an interesting example in the Kaltasy district. While we have lots in information about the 19th century, because Yrjö Wichmann spent here in Kachak one month and thoroughly documented the ceremonies of that village, when revitalisation started, there was no one alive who had practiced (oral information by the sacrificial priest). They started almost from scratch. The sacrificial priest, a former teacher, welcomed the help of the village women. While we waited for the people to attend the ceremony, we understood that mainly women were expected. "These ceremonies are a female event",

commented Tolya agay, which was in contradiction with all of our experiences of how it felt to the acting priests. While most of the audience is female, as most of village elder inhabitants are women, the preparation usually is merely a male practice. In Kachak it is different: all the assistants are women and in the *siz'is'kon* ceremony even one of them presented the audience a financial report and stood near Tolya agay while he prayed. Here, women do at the ceremonies what they usually do in everyday life: they clean the cauldron and all the dishes, they prepare the food, they cook it and they distribute it. Within more traditional contexts, all these activities are, in the ceremonial framework, male tasks, except here. This exception is very disturbing for most of the other teams when they are all together at *Elen vös'*.

The attendants of a ceremony used, as we see in photos from the end of the 19th century, to be dressed in white. The men as well as the women wore white *short-derem*, for the ceremonies addressed the white God. This habit has been discontinued. There are several reasons, one of them being, as in the case of sacrificial priests, the practice of using *short derem* as a burial dress, while the production of homespun fabrics and dresses ceased. Now many women attend the ceremonies dressed in the Udmurt costume. But their costume, as usually by the Eastern Udmurt, is in bright colours and not white, except in the case of some elder women, who still use their *short derem*. In the last years, even the practice of dressing in the Udmurt costume is diminishing: many women are dressed in ordinary European dresses or even trousers. While in 2013 in some places around 70% of the women had Udmurt costumes, five years later the women thus dressed are a clear minority.

The prayer text

In the ceremonies, requests are presented to the deity through prayers. We read in literature and hear from our informants that each priest learns his prayer by hearing it from the elder while helping with the ceremony (Sadikov 2008: 192). This way is called “to steal” one prayer and it was supposed to grant its magical power (Anisimov 2017: 153-154). No other way of learning a prayer was acceptable. However, circumstances have changed. This is part of the disruption brought by the Soviet times (Sadikov 2011: 133). Few have learned this way, for younger people remained absent from the ceremonies and they usually came back towards religion later, when they were not young anymore. Still some have learned from their fathers, as Rais or Zinnat in Vil’gurt, as the old priest Nazip, who learned it, as was expected, from the elder. Today, many use the prayer published by Nazip in the weekly Udmurt local journal *Oshmes*, with more or less variations. Others, in places where somebody still remembers the elders’ prayer, use it. Usually nowadays most of the priests rely on paper: written culture has penetrated everywhere and supplanted oral transmission. Thus, it is nowadays common for a priest to read his prayer, and that even happens with experienced authorities, as Evgeni Adullin, in the Alga group. Some rely on a book published in Udmurtia, *The Udmurt Faith (Udmurt oskon)*, for samples of prayers for different situations in life (Vladykin, Vinogradov 2010). Thus, the Aribash sacrificial priest Aleksei Garayev in a housewarming ceremony attended and filmed by members of our research group (Nikolai Anisimov and Liivo Niglas) read the text of the particular prayer right away from the book.

The question of how much they may improvise, or more precisely change the sacred text is a general one and it emerges in different contexts. The same Evgeni Adullin reflected

on this question on June 2015 while conversing with Eva: Should we keep the texts as they are or adapt them to the new times? The answer differs from the priest, but many have integrated new phenomena (the danger of drugs, migration to towns for example). Vladimir, from Asavka asked leave from the elder priests of his village to add at the beginning of the prayer thanks to god: “we ask much, but we do not thank enough!”. While we are reminded in the idea of thanking of a Christian approach, his thanking for natural phenomena evokes Franciscan style.

A thorough analysis of the texts would be required to present the themes and the new formulas. This is a further programme.

The proceedings of the ceremonies

No standardisation has changed so far local practice (for an example of the proceedings in one place, see Toulouze Niglas 2014; see also Toulouze 2016-2017 for detailed accounts of several ceremonies with visual material). How ceremonies are organised depend on different factors: local traditions there where there is continuity, or memory of how ceremonies went before their interruption, and where there is none, much depends on the personal knowledge and understanding of the main actors of the revitalisation process.

We discovered these differences since our first experiences on both shores of the Yuk. While the whole proceeding was very similar, there were some clear differences: the opening prayer was held in the Alga group the previous evening, the textile offerings were treated differently, the closing of the fireplaces were also different, as we formerly mentioned.

However, the next year these differences became even clearer when we were able to compare, within the same Vil'gurt group, Balzyuga and Urazgil'dy (Udm. Vukogurt, further on we shall use this form) village ceremonies. Later, when attending ceremonies in other districts we widened the spectre of possibilities. Let us have a look at the possible variations.

The opening prayer

The opening prayer is called *siz'is'kon* and it promises the deity a sacrifice. We have mentioned that in some places it takes place on the previous evening. It consists of the cooking of porridge without meat, with whom the priest says a prayer. Then the fire has to burn all night so that all the fires may be, on the morning, lit with this one original fire. This has been changed in the village ceremonies almost everywhere in the Tatyshly district, and have been kept only in the Alga group collective ceremonies (*Bagysh vös'* and *mör vös'*). Elsewhere either the *siz'is'kon* takes place right at the gathering of the team on the morning of the ceremony; either it is entirely absent. This is what happened at the ceremony in Vukogurt, where no *siz'is'kon* was held. Another possible formula is what happens in Kachak. The *siz'is'kon* becomes a whole ceremony in its own right. The population attends to eat the porridge without meat some days before the promised sacrifice.

The prayers

How often and how the priests pray during one ceremony also varies between a maximum and a minimum.

The maximum is reached in the Tatyshly district, where in both subgroups a ceremony consists of several prayers. To sum up, after the prayer accompanying the promise, there is a prayer when the helpers slaughter the sacrificial animal, while the priest holds in his

hands a loaf of bread baked by the former owner of the animal. The priests, for every prayer, hold in their hands birch branches, and a towel on which they put whatever is expected in the given prayer. The third prayer is a prayer when the meat is cooked: the priest then holds a selection of cooked parts of the animal. Then, when all the people are gathered, the priests, who in the previous prayers stood, pray once on their knees, bareheaded, with the money gathered from the attendants. In some cases (as in Balzyuga village ceremony) another prayer is said when all the people are gone and the only attendants are the assistants (and the anthropologists...) (cf. Toulouze, Niglas 2014).

The minimum version, as in Vukogurt, in Kachak and certainly in other places, is that the priest prays only once: when the porridge is ready, with a bowl of porridge in his hands.

These differences do not create any problems for – except for the scholars – the people do not, or very rarely, attend the other ceremonies. It becomes still problematic in the case of *Elen vös'*, where different villages meet, with different traditions.

In 2018 Eva attended *Elen vös'* in Varyash (district of Yanaul). There were Udmurts from the other villages that organise in rotation *Elen vös'* (Kirga in the kray of Perm', Altayevo in the district of Burayevo in Bashkortostan), as well as from Kaltasy and Tatyshly. The Tatyshly sacrificial priests as well as Altayevo priest were shocked that their colleagues slaughtered the animals without any prayer. They thus held a small prayer ceremony of their own. First Anatoli Galikhanov, Altayevo's sacrificial priest, prayed twice within the sacred area, while all the others did their own deals. Then Rais, from Vil'gurt, seriously disturbed, was encouraged by Galikhanov to follow his heart. He was not alone: the same Galikhanov and other priests knelt behind him. Galikhanov

meanwhile complained that the Varyash people never take into account that the sacrificial animal must be a ewe and not a male.

The porridge was cooked at different tempos, depending on when the teams arrived on the spot and on when the procedure started for each one. When the general prayer started with the porridge, Rais still had the bowl he had prepared with the meat, for clearly he was waiting for this particular prayer. Therefore, he quickly added in the bowl the porridge and prayed with the others.

In the previous sections, we concentrated on collective ceremonies. They are the most visible, even spectacular manifestation of religious practice by the Eastern Udmurt. Nevertheless, they are not the only ones. We shall reflect now on the private or at least more private sphere, both from the point of view of the space and of the ceremonies.

The private sacred place: the *kuala*

The simple log building called *kua/kuala* is the only ritual building by the Udmurt (for more details cf. Vladykin 1994: 272–273). There are two sorts of *kuala*: family *kuala* (*pokchi kuala*) and clan *kuala* (*bydzhym kuala*). Nowadays, the only *kuala* where ceremonies are performed is the clan *kuala* in Kuzebayevo (the only non-christened village in Udmurtia, district of Alnashi, Southern Udmurtia). The smaller family sanctuary, which existed in the courtyard of every family, is no more in use: either the building has disappeared, either, as in many courtyards in the village of Varkled-Bodya in Tatarstan, it is just there, and is used as a summer kitchen or just a depository. Nevertheless, everywhere, people are well aware of its sacredness.

In the Eastern Udmurt areas as well, *kualas* have mostly disappeared. Ranus Sadikov has seen a *kuala* in Barabanovka (district of Yanaul) (Sadikov 2011b:125); in 2015 he and

Eva saw one in Aribash, district of Tatyshly. It was kept whole in the courtyard but it had been closed and was not to be opened any more. Still the sacredness of the *kuala* or of its remains is still strong and active. Concerning this sacred space in Bashkiria, we have three testimonies.

In 2016, we visited in Altayevo (Burayevo district) the courtyard of an old man, where we saw the remains of the home *kuala*. Only some stones from the fireplace have been preserved, but they are of such importance, that the head of the household, every year, at the spring festivity (*Bydzhynnal*, the Great day, which coincides with the Orthodox Easter) prays on the remains of the *kuala*: he takes from home some wood and burns it near to the stone, while he prays, head covered and girded with a towel, holding in his hands a round bread with butter. Then he returns to the house, cuts the bread, eats of it with butter and gives it to his household and to the guests. In 2018, we recorded this ceremony on video.

In Bigineyevo (Tatyshly district) there are also remains of several *kualas*. In connection to them, we were told the following stories by Liliya Garayeva, who was born in this village and was brought up by her grandmother who was very much in religious practice. The one is actually the story of her family. Her father and her stepmother dismantled the home *kuala* and built a house on the same location. They lived in it for 11 months and then they were struck dead both by lightning on an open space. Liliya was disturbed for many years, until she consulted Nazip Sadriev, who went with her at the place of the former *kuala*, sacrificed a ewe, cooked porridge from the left side of it and prayed. Thus, the now non-existent *kuala* was properly closed and Liliya found peace.

In the same village, a woman, kin to Liliya through her husband, suffered from her eyes. She consulted a healer who told her that the pain was due to the fact that her home *kuala* wasn't functioning anymore, and its remains were covered by metal and stones. The woman went there and cleaned the place, after which her eyes were healed.

These stories show how the *kuala*, long after it ceased to function as a place of religious practice, keeps an agency of its own. The Udmurts believe that it may influence the life of the people connected to it, if they do not consider it properly. Not only the remains of the *kuala* may influence people's lives, but also the remembrance or the mere place of it may act. This shows how sacredness is inherent to place. This is also the reason, why the older ceremony places (*vös' inty*) are not forgotten and even are tabooed by the population. The memory of them is transmitted (Hafeez 2015: 3; 23, 36), the children are not allowed to play there.

Conclusion

The aim of this short article is certainly not to pinpoint mistakes in the following of traditional rules. It is rather to show that violating rules is a rule, at least in a statistical sense. Mistakes or what could be called "mistakes" are a common phenomenon with performative strength. Our aim is to show first of all the variety of means available to practice traditional ethnic religion in a context in which standardisation has not been implemented. Yet? In 2017, there was a surge of the standardisation idea within the Eastern Udmurt organisation. Anatoli Galikhanov had long ago proposed the creation of a Union of the sacrificial priests, in order to coordinate their activities. The leader of the Udmurt National and Cultural centre, Salim Garifulov, took over this idea and appointed an official to prepare the standardisation of cult practices. We were consulted and we

expressed our respect for local practices and traditions against the formalisation desires inspired by world religions. Actually what is behind these attempts is to imitate Islam and Christianity, who have their sets of rules and their common sacred writ. The absence of it has become, under the influence of dominant ideology, a sign of “backwardness”, and many are tempted to take example from the world – successful – religions. While, according to our knowledge, most sacrificial priests are attached to their own traditions – both old and new – and would be reluctant to abandon them to follow a general rule, some sacrificial priests would not be opposed to standardisation, but on the condition that it would generalise their own practice. Thus, Nazip Sadriev told us in 2016 that the others should adopt his prayer, and that it would be a good thing to put order into the presently chaotic practice. Nazip Sadriev, whose practice relies on what he learnt from the elders, consider that his way of acting is the only legitimate. In 2018, a general assembly of the sacrificial priests is expected in December and the proceedings will give a more precise picture of the general understandings.

However, it is with standardisation, the needs for coordination are keenly felt. This year, it was decided that *Elen vös'* could be held earlier than usually, on June 24th. Eva had decided to attend, at the end of the month, other ceremonies as *busy vös'*, in Votskaya Oshya and *Badzhyn vös'* in Kachak. However, she was informed by the local organisers that both would take place on June 24th. She told her informant in Kachak, with whom she was more familiar, that it was the day of *Elen vös'*, which nobody knew. They immediately changed the date, because all the ceremonies were supposed to be done before *Elen vös'*. A coordination of the sacrificial priests would have helped them spreading information and planning according to their wishes.

Thus, the forms sacred places take, the proceedings of the ceremonies, the taboos concerning participation and helping are different and present many variations. Their origin is also diverse. Some differences are very more than one century old. In Tatyshly district both religious groups follow deeply rooted traditions, and even they differ in some details. Other differences are inherent to the revitalisation process and to the failures of collective memory: when there is nobody to remember, how ceremonies were organised and with which prayers, who wish to revive the tradition have to invent. And this is as valuable as the inherited traditions, because it makes sense to the people who practice it. The result is a rich variety of forms.

In pinpointing the differences in practice and the deviations from what was once a rule, we also want to understand what makes sense to today's Udmurt. We have attempted to identify both the practices that are more weakly rooted and which are likely to disappear or to change, and, in contrast, what seems to be the core of the rituals, what carries the main signification and without which the ritual would not be relevant at all. Thus, for the autumn ceremony, it seems that the solemn eating of the porridge is the main element, while one could have thought that the formal prayer by the head of the household could have been the real centre. Thus, also, in the collective ceremonies, when one prayer remains, it is the one connected with the eating of the porridge, in which the essence of the ceremony is embodied.

Комментарии

¹ Most Russian scholars name this practice « paganism » (язычество). We do not, for we find that this term is not neutral. We use the notion « Udmurt religious practice », and, if

se must operatively express ourselves, we connect it with « agrarian religion », with the notion « animism », although we are aware that this term is not ideal and that we must study in more detail the interconnection between the Udmurt religious practice and animism.

² Our gratitude goes to Nikolai Anisimov for having shared with us his personal experience, his observations and his reflections about this topic as well as Ranus Sadikov for his answers to our questions.

³ Firstly, we are convinced that the ritual sphere has its autonomy. Secondly, on the pragmatic level, a concrete analysis of this situation convinces us that these transformations come with their own calendar, which corresponds but partially with the socio-political processes. What undoubtedly gave a fundamental impulse to religious revitalisation is collapse of the Soviet Union, which legally freed the postsoviet space population from fright concerning the possible consequences of religious activity. Although these processes had started long before. It is paradoxal that the existence of strong kolkhozes, which had long been the framework for diverse village community gatherings and strong Udmurt leaders, gave the impulse for the development of religious practice.

⁴ We acknowledge that *traditional culture* *культура* is probably not the best term, for it refers to the idea of a limited and unchanged cultural situation, which in evolutionistic schemes seems to be located outside the boundaries of modernity (see Fabian 1983). However, as this idea is emphasised by local communities, and especially by cultural activists, we use it as part of the local discourse, which has a remarkable influence on decision-making on the spot.

⁵ The question of ideological purism may emerge in the framework of conversations about standardisation, as developed below.

⁶ The connection between religious revitalisation and ethnic activism exists but in this region it is expressed indirectly: as in these ethnically compact regions there is no ethnic tension to be felt, and ethnic strife is not present, the need for ethnic activism is not thoroughly felt. By ethnic activism we understand the activity of an elite in creating an ethnic (in Russian, national) movement (the NKTs – the National and cultural centre of

the Bashkortostan Udmurt) and in the revitalisation of religious practice of the Eastern Udmurt. The leaders were kolkhoze heads, administration leaders. They were members of the Communist Party, but this did not ideologically mean much: the atmosphere in the country had changed, the pressure from repressive organs had weakened. Therefore, they were able to work in the interest of the Udmurt and their cultural values.

⁷ The details of the proceedings of a ceremony are described in detail in Toulouze & Niglas 2014.

⁸ Our informants often opposing “before”, and “now”, are quite confused about chronology. In this case, we may infer that when religious rituals were prohibited, the former specialised assistants were replaced and the specialisation disappeared.

⁹ It is not so in all Udmurt regions. For instance, in Kuzebaev, Alnashi district, Udmurtia, the *vös’as* is appointed by a village assembly for a predetermined period.

¹⁰ All the sacrificial priests worked and lived from their profession. The function of sacrificial priest did not correlate with means of subsistence.

¹¹ We have not enough information about the past to appreciate whether there were everywhere this kind of characters or particularly active personalities in village life.

¹² In literary language *күскертмон*.

¹³ The deity *Keremet* or *Lud*, apparently, is of Turkic origin and is widely spread in all the Volga area. Ceremonies were regularly held in his honour, exclusively male ceremonies, under the leadership of a particular sacrificial priest, who knew particular prayers (Vladykin 1994, pp. 202–203, Shutova 2001, p. 236).

¹⁴ Not to be mixed up with the sanctuary *kuala* (see below).

¹⁵ In translation from Udmurt, *siz’is’kon* means “promise [of a sacrifice]”. This is a ritual that comes before the ceremony, in which the sacrificial priest prays with porridge without meat, and promises the deity to sacrifice an animal. This ritual may take place

directly before the main ceremony, or on the evening the day before, or even some days, with or without the participation of the whole community.

¹⁶ While the *siz'is'kon* held in Bol'shekachakovo is limited to one single village, the *Badzh'yn vös'* "great ceremony" encompasses all three villages in this group.

¹⁷ Ву Под посторонним человеком имеется в виду тот, кто не является жителем деревни. Удмуртская практика достаточно инклюзивна. Никого от священного места не выгоняют, национальность, гражданство или религиозная аффилиция не имеют особого значения. На самом деле, вряд ли кто-то совсем незнакомый может попасть на эти обряды. Авторы всегда просили разрешение у жрецов заранее, чтобы иметь возможность участвовать на молении.

¹⁸ Таким образом поминальное место *йыр-пыд сётон* «дарение головы и ног [животного]» в д. Варклед-Бодья Агрызского района Республика Татарстан было перенесено вниз по течению реки Варклед, поскольку жители деревни обнаружили, что место было выбрано неправильно, выше по течению (ПМА 2017).

¹⁹ За исключением обрядов в честь *Керемета / Луда*, являющихся строго мужскими. В этом случае женщины едят обрядовую кашу, которую мужчины приносят домой (например, *Луд вöсь* «моление Луда / полю» в с. Вотская Ошья Янаульского района, *Гурт вöсь* «деревенское моление» в д. Арибаш Татышлинского района).

²⁰ Здесь мы не включаем в перечисление религиозных практик участие специалистов, имеющих особые сакральные знания, с целью защититься от порчи, или наоборот — кому-то нанести вред. Этой темой надо отдельно заниматься, как начал Николай Анисимов (Анисимов 2019).

²¹ Причины исчезновения именно этого элемента неясны, но можно предположить, что нарушение социальной структуры деревни может, по крайней мере частично, объяснить это: с отъездом жителей в город, в деревни остаются обычно самые пожилые люди, и именно они сохраняют обрядовую практику. Видимо, в деревнях часто нет других мест, где можно продолжать обряд.

The private ceremonies

Religious practice is not limited to big collective ceremonies. While it is difficult to delve into personal approaches of spirituality on the bases of fieldwork – only self-expression may reveal the inner religiosity of a person – other forms of shared practice exist at “lower” levels, such as the family, the extended family. These are the cult of the dead (see Anisimov 2017 and 2019), fundamental for the Udmurt, but also smaller scale propitiatory ceremonies as the celebration of the autumn ceremony (*siz'il kuris'kon*) or the spring festivities (*Bydzynnal*). They are celebrated at home, through gathering of close kin, the cooking of porridge and a prayer by the head of the household. We attended some of them, in households with whom we were already acquainted and where we were welcomed.

Also in this case, there was a range of sophistication degrees, from the very simple and elementary up to a most developed. The simplest was in a family, once numerous (parents, four children and two grandparents), but by 2017 reduced to the very core: the grandparents were elsewhere, and three of the children were gone. Thus only the parents, in their forties-fifties, and the smallest child (then 8 years old) remained (with the anthropologists). Here, what marked the meal as special was the porridge, the fact that everybody's head was covered, and that the father said a few words. The mother added her thoughts. Probably because of our presence, they were said in Russian, as we don't speak Udmurt. The most sophisticated of the rituals were implemented in larger families and by elder people. These were grandparents, with their siblings and their families, their children and their spouses, the grandchildren. In two of these gatherings, the head of the family went outside, in the veranda, and prayed. In one case, he was dressed as a

sacrificial priest, although he does not pray in wider ceremonies. Actually, according to an informant very knowledgeable about tradition, they should have been as close as possible to the earth: not in the building, but outdoors, and possibly with bark shoes, in order to have less interference of non-natural elements. But none of the elder people we have seen perform was aware of this rule.

In both cases, homemade moonshine was offered. In one case, the head of the household distributed the spirits according to the rules, clockwise. In the other, the disposition of the table did not allow free movement around it. But we have noticed that the traditional clockwise order is not always taken nowadays into account. We have witnessed in an ordinary party, a household head pouring alcohol around the table counter clockwise, an order that is supposed to characterise the ceremonies to the dead (see Toulouze 2018).

The keeping or ignoring of this set of rules has very much to do, according to our interpretation, with each person upbringing. Those who grew up in families closer to the communist party and following the official ideology, are more liable to ignore this kind of “superstitions”, while those who were brought up in traditional families, with a strong authority of the elder generation, will have interiorised this kind of semi-automatic gestures. Similarly, town people, under the influence of the dominant Russian culture, will probably give priority to ladies and elder people.

One particular feature of the family and extended family rituals was the visits to all the members of the group. The ritual started in one household, where the head prayed, and then the whole company moved to other households, where they went on celebrating together, and where the head of the household prayed as well. We witnessed the full-fledged practice once, in the village of Varkled-Bodja (Tatarstan) for the spring

celebration (*vös' nerge*) (Toulouze, Anisimov 2018; Anisimov, Toulouze, 2018). We have the impression, based on our fieldwork, that by the Eastern Udmurt this custom is disappearing. Only in one case, in Vyazovka, after the celebration in one household, we moved to the son's house, to continue the ritual. In all other cases, the celebration was limited to one location, as our experience of the spring celebration, at the Great Day (*bydzhynnal*) confirms. However, other data in the near future will confirm or invalidate our hypothesis.

The power of porridge: Udmurt ritual food¹²²

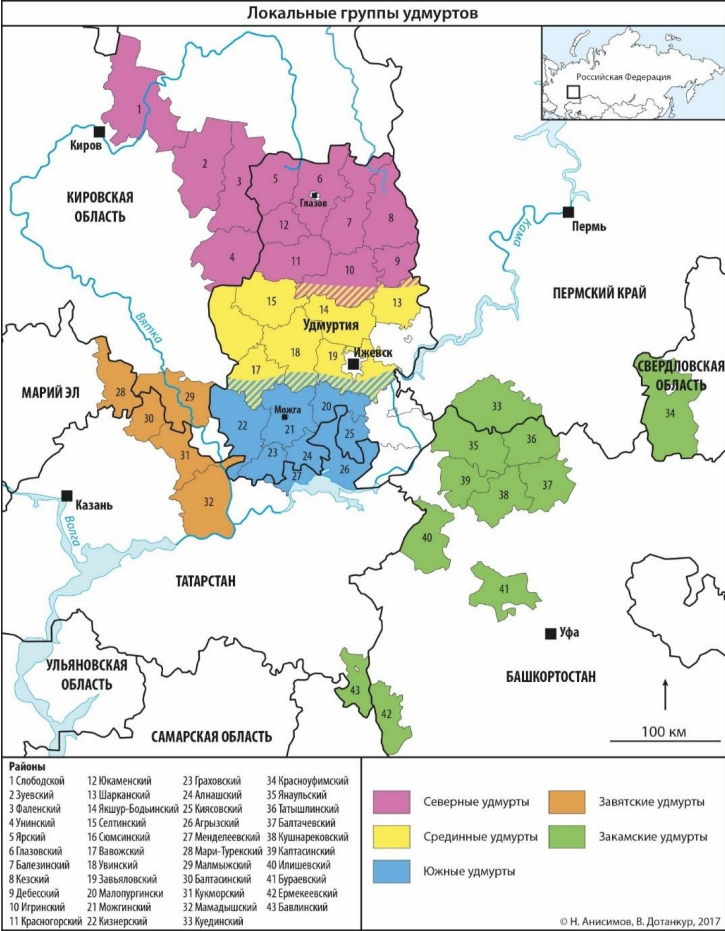
Eva Toulouze

Introduction

The phenomenon I consider in the article, the cooking of porridge (in Udmurt *жык*, *dzh'uk*), is however common to most of the Udmurt (and of the Beserman). I rely on my fieldwork in many Southern Udmurt regions (districts of Zavyalovo, Malaya Purga, Kiyasovo, Alnashi, Agryz and Mendeleevo in Tatarstan), Eastern Udmurt (Bashkortostan, Kueda district in the Perm Kray), and Transvyatka Udmurt (Kukmor in Tatarstan). I have also been in central Udmurtia (Sharkan district) and Northern Udmurtia (Kez district) as well as in the capital Izhevsk. Everywhere, in different contexts, I have been offered porridge. Here, however, I concentrate on the ritual functions of this food, both in private and in public settings [see Popova 2017: 85-96].

¹²² This article has been published in English: Eva Toulouze (2020). The power of porridge: Udmurt ritual food. Традиционная культура, 21, 3, 157–170. DOI: [10.26158/TK.2020.21.3.013](https://doi.org/10.26158/TK.2020.21.3.013).

The article focuses on the ritual function of porridge, and describes how it is used in collective traditional sacrificial ceremonies. Then it comments the different ingredients, both synchronically and diachronically, and finally reflects on different dimension of this sacred food, from its gender peculiarities up to its symbolic values.



[Anisimov 2017: 13]

As is well known, practically all of the Udmurt population in the core territory has been converted to Russian Orthodox Christianity. With one very remarkable exception (the village of Kuzebaevo in the Alnashi district, UR), all villages in Udmurtia have been baptised. But there are regions where Orthodoxy is less pervasive. While in some parts of Tatarstan, such as the Kukmor or Mendeleevo districts, Christianity is well represented, in others the Udmurt are not even baptised, as in the well-known village of Varkled-Bodya (Agryz district), and have kept alive traditional rituals [see Lintrop 2003, Toulouze, Anisimov 2017]. It is even more so further eastward, in Bashkortostan, as well as in the Perm Kray, where the Udmurt have been able to retain their original ethnic religion.

I shall draw upon my experience in different zones of the Udmurt area, and concentrate on public village or regional ceremonies particularly in Bashkortostan, nevertheless without ignoring other regions and smaller scale, more intimate rituals at the family level.

A ritual food

Porridge is an integral part of Udmurt rituals at all levels. It is not surprising that its cooking during sacrificial ceremonies was a target for Soviet anti-religious hostility: in Bashkortostan, sacrificial priests and ordinary villagers alike remember vividly brutal Party intrusion in spring rituals. In the midst of the ceremony, Party officials arrived and knocked over the cauldrons with the porridge, thus finally disrupting the ritual activities [Sadikov 2019: 264].

Village and regional ceremonies

Porridge is at the core of village ceremonies, which are among the most original features of Udmurt religious practice especially in non-Christianised zones. It is the materialisation of the ceremony, the synthetic output of communication with the deities. At regular intervals, the population of some villages – all those that are situated in Bashkortostan and some elsewhere – gathers in order to make a blood sacrifice to the deities. The common procedure is that the population, usually all of the village dwellers (exceptions are rare), give the organisers of the ceremony crops, butter, and money beforehand (as we shall develop below).

With the money, the organisers buy the sacrificial animal. On the day of the ceremony, the sacrificial priest and his assistants gather and go through a certain amount of prayers and deeds, from the slaughtering of the animal to the cooking of the porridge. The population gathers physically when the porridge is ready; they eat together and pray. Every family in the village partakes of the common porridge, both at the ceremony or later at home.

This is the pattern in Bashkortostan. It may be implemented with variations in other places. In Varkled-Bodya, I have attended the initiation ceremonies in spring, in which the central output is also porridge, cooked by the initiated young men both at their initiation ceremony and at the girls'. There are other ritual actions, but the culmination of both rituals is a prayer that only males attend for the boys, and everyone for the girls. The eating of the porridge takes place just after the prayer.

Home ceremonies

There are also regular home ceremonies, usually in connection with calendar holidays, commemorations of the dead or more private events. As far as I have witnessed, porridge has always been at the core of these ceremonies. Not only porridge – there may be other ritual foods – but porridge is always there. At the clan *vös' nerge* ritual in Varkled-Bodya (on the Orthodox Easter day) porridge is the food the head of the family prays with. At the Easter festivities (*badzhynnal*) in Bashkortostan, in the families that still follow traditional rules, porridge is also the food with which the head of the family prays.

So, whatever the nature of the ritual, the level of its religiosity, the involvement of the community, porridge seems always to be a fundamental element of the ritual core. I shall discuss this question in this article.

But first of all, what is this porridge made of? Let us comment upon the main ingredients.

The ingredients of the porridge

By definition, porridge is a food mainly consisting of crops boiled in water.

In Bashkortostan (which is the area I am focussing upon in the next section), it is important for the sacrificial priest that in the cauldron in which the porridge is going to be cooked salt is put firstly, before the water. I have found this implemented only by the sacrificial priests and at the big collective ceremonies. In ordinary households, the women who do the cooking are not aware of this rule and have even never heard of it.

This is nothing to be surprised about, for ceremonial etiquette is not a female field. Moreover, ordinary people do not attend a ceremony from the very beginning.

Figure 1. The pouring of the salt in the cauldron, village ceremony, Verhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June, 07th 2019, photo Laur Vallikivi.

Why this obligation connected to salt? It is very difficult to get answers to our questions. The more frequent is “because the elder did so”. It is reason enough. The sacrificial priests are not particularly interested in why something has to be done, but on how it must be done in order not to make mistakes. Mistakes, as the elder priest Nazip Sadriev emphasises, are dangerous and may ruin any ceremony¹²³.

The ceremonies require lots of water: at the very beginning, to clean tables and cauldrons, as constant hot water for tea and later for cleaning before leaving the place, to fill the cauldrons to cook meat and to replace evaporation, not to speak about the need to wash hands and sacrificial money. So fetching water – as well as cutting wood – is one of the constant activities of helpers during the ceremonies.

Figure 2. Women bringing back water, village ceremony, Aribash, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 5th 2015, photo Eva Toulouze

Figure 3. Sacrificial priest pouring water into the cauldron, promise of a sacrifice, Alga; Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 13th 2013, Photo Ranus Sadikov

During ceremonies, water comes from a nearby source or waterway. Usually sacred places are located near water, and as water will be needed continually during a ceremony, it is good not to have to go very far. In the villages of Balzyuga, Alga, Yuda

¹²³ [<http://komanda-k.ru/node/4921/>]

(Tatyshly district, RB), for example, the spring is very close to the sacred place, in fact just below it. In Urazgil'de, it is even encompassed within the surface of the sacred place. In Novye Tatyshly, although the water point is not far, the custom is to bring water back from the village in a horse cart. In other districts water may be close (Kizganbashevo, Baltachevo district; Asavka, Buraevo district); but in other cases big containers with hundreds of litres are brought to the spot in trucks (Kirga, Kueda district, Krai of Perm'). In Nizhnebaltachevo (Tatyshly district), although the source was close to the sacred place, it was deemed too far and the place was changed in June 2019 for one even closer to the water (Garifulla Garifanov 1947, Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. by ET, LN, LV, NA, RS, EB, 6.2019). Thus, water is an issue. Water from a spring, i.e. natural water, is always preferred.

Figure 3. A water container for Elen vös', Kirga, Kueda district, Perm' Kray, June 30th 2013, photo Eva Toulouze.

Cereals are certainly both physically and symbolically a decisive ingredient in ritual porridge. Physically, because they represent a huge percent of the ingredients used in its preparation; and symbolically, because the cereals represent the population of the village, i.e. the community. All¹²⁴ the households in the village contribute. Each village has its own tradition of gathering cereals. The collectors are either (such as Balzyuga), young teenagers (Bal'zyuga; Kabipyanov, Fridman Vladimirovich, 1982, Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district, RB, 6.2013), women (Petropavlovka) (Nigamatullina Ol'ga, Petropavlovka, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. ET, 6.2015), or older men.

¹²⁴ While it is not possible to argue with total certitude that all the village dwellers always contribute, very few are the villagers who never participate, e.g. one or two elderly women often labelled as witches.

Earlier, very diverse cereals were used (FW 2013). Only two of them were explicitly prohibited: buckwheat, because the colour of the grain is dark and the ceremonies address the white heavenly god – at least, this is the canonical explanation we have been systematically given. Peas are also not welcome because they are spherical and are supposed to call for hail (Sadriev Nazip, 1930, Malaya Bal'zjuga, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. ET, LV, RS, 6.2013). Sometimes, when hail falls after the ceremony, people argue that somebody, in one ceremony, has put peas in the porridge. All other cereals are accepted.

Indeed, at the beginning of the decade all crops were used: wheat, oats, (pearl) barley (the longest to cook), rye, rice¹²⁵. In some places, the opening prayer asking for the allowance of the sacrifice is uttered with semolina porridge, which is easy and quick to cook, and without meat (FW, Alga, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. ET, LN, RS, 6.2013). In the last years, the trend is a reduction of the cereals' variety. Probably barley is substantially reduced, because of the length of cooking (FW Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. ET, LN, RS, 6.2013). While, at big ceremonies, there is still some variety, most homemade ritual porridges I have seen and tasted are made of rice. Rice seems to outnumber the other species.

Figure 5. A recent porridge, made only from rice, Yshtiyak vös', Kaymashabash, Yanaul district, Bashkortostan, July 14th 2019; Photo Eva Toulouze

The main other ingredient deserving mention is butter. While, in some villages, the collectors have ceased to collect butter, in many others it is still an important part of

¹²⁵ Even pasta entered into the porridge. Popova mentions by the Besserman the possible addition of pasta in porridge [2017: 88].

the preparation of the porridge. Big chunks of homemade or bought butter are thrown to melt in the cauldrons, ensuring the porridge's nutritional qualities. The tricky thing about butter is that one portion of damaged butter may spoil a whole cauldron, as in Nizhnebaltachevo in 2016. Trust in the population to give quality products have since decreased.

Figure 6. Butter into the porridge, Bagysh vös', Kyzyl-Yar road, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 12th 2015, Photo Eva Toulouze.

Thus, porridge is the synthesis of a ceremony whose principal activity is to offer the gods a sacrifice (or other offerings). Actually, the porridge is cooked not in water but in broth: the goal of a ceremony is usually to sacrifice an animal and its flesh is thrown into the boiling water in order to make the broth in which the cereals will be cooked.

Porridge without meat

Porridge without meat is a rare ritual food. I have seen it only in only one situation: for the first prayer of a village ceremony, the one called *sizis'kon*, the promise of a sacrificial animal, and asking the deities to accept the offering. As the prayer takes place before the sacrifice, it is logical that no sacrificial meat is part of the ingredients. In my experience, it is composed either of the same crops that will be used later, or, in the Alga group, of semolina. In Asavka they have a peculiar recipe with flour, which turns this particular porridge into something like a white sauce (*béchamel*) (Galiev, Vladimir, 1971, Asavka, Baltachevo district, RB, coll. ET, NA, RS, 6.2016). However, in many places where ceremonies have been discontinued, this particular prayer is now absent from ritual practice.

Figure 7. Porridge without meat, here semolina, at the promise of a sacrifice, village ceremony, Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 03th 016, Photo Eva Toulouze

Meat for broth and porridge

Which meat is used for cooking the broth and then added to the porridge?

Depending on the ceremonies and their goal, the sacrificial animal may differ. There have been, throughout the decades, evolutions in the choice of the sacrificial animal, depending on the breeding system, on the bred animals thus available, and on the forms of husbandry.

Evolutions in animal use

The kolkhoz era

Collectivisation introduced important changes in the choice of the animals used for sacrifice. Big cattle were under state ownership, meaning that there was external control of their use.

As the Soviet power was hostile to religion, the use of state property for “idle” sacrifices became impossible. This also depended of course on the kolkhoz’s management, on the period, on the personality and the nationality of the rulers¹²⁶. This

¹²⁶ We have heard, especially in the last Soviet decades, of kolkhozes giving animals for Udmurt sacrifices, as their ceremonies were supposed to bring rain.

means that cows/bulls or horses was replaced for sacrifices by smaller animals, which, at least in the post-war period, were partly owned by the villagers themselves.

Changes in production

In the first part of the 20th century, horses were bred abundantly, especially in regions also inhabited by the Tatar or Bashkir, who eat horsemeat. Especially in the last decades, horse farms have massively closed. As they are difficult to afford, horses have practically ceased to be sacrificial animals¹²⁷.

There were rituals with big animal sacrifices for the commemoration of dead parents, such as *ulen van'don* in Votskaya Osh'ya, Yanaul district, Bashkortostan, and *yyr-pyd s'oton* in Southern Udmurtia and the Agryz district of Tatarstan. It is easier now to sacrifice a cow in commemoration of one's dead mother, and a bull to honour one's father. However, in rituals where the sacrificial animal was a horse, horses have been replaced by two geese (in order to have four legs, as the legs are part of the ritual) (Urakbaev, Arkadiy, Votskaya Osh'ya, Yanaul district, coll. ET, LN, RS 11.2015). Today, it is also common to buy the needed parts of the animal without proceeding to the ritual slaughtering of the animal. This has started to happen in Udmurtia for *yyr-pyd s'oton*, the “giving of the head and the feet”, for which the family buys the head and the feet of a cow or bull (oral information by NA 2018).

¹²⁷ While Popova mentions horse meat as one of the meats used for broth by the Besserman, I have never seen any ritual porridge with horsemeat and never heard about it either in Bashkortostan or Udmurtia (but I have no experience of Northern Udmurtia) [Popova 2017: 87].

Animal husbandry

Today families do not keep geese year round, they buy chicks in spring from commercial incubators and they feed them during the summer. The fully grown animal is slaughtered in autumn, and its meat frozen. So people do not need to feed geese during the winter. While Udmurt villages in summer look as they always have, with gaggles of geese moving around, the reality behind the appearance has radically changed. Therefore, for rituals taking place in spring there are no available geese to sacrifice. This has led to changes in some of the ceremonies. For example, in Bashkortostan, traditionally in the village spring ceremonies *gurt vös* a goose was sacrificed along with ewes (Sadriev, Nazip, 1930, Malaya Bal'zjuga, Tatyshly district, RB, Coll. ET, LN, LV, 6.2014). This is no longer possible, for when the ceremony is held, there are no adult geese in the villages to sacrifice (Garaeva, Liliya, 1954, Aribash, Tatyshly district, TB, Coll. ET, LN, LV, 6.2014).

Sacrificial meat today

Some animals can never be sacrificial animals:

Pork

For non-specified reasons, pork, while ordinary meat in ordinary cooking is excluded from sacrificial use (as it is by the Besserman [Popova 2017: 87]). This is probably an influence from the Muslim environment, where pork is fully stigmatised. Nevertheless, in some cases the Udmurt may use pork within sacrificial ceremonies: for the initiation rituals in Varkled-Bodya the boys and later the girls gather meat from the villagers. They have two buckets for the meat: one in which they put mutton, goose, duck or beef, which are acceptable ingredients for the porridge with which the sacrificial

priests will pray, and the other for pork and chicken. There are also two cauldrons. The meat not meant to the prayer will go to another cauldron, the porridge of which will go to the ordinary population. (FW, Varkled Bodya, Agryz distric, Republic of Tatarstan, Coll. NA, ET, 4.2017).

Chicken

Chicken are not used for ordinary ceremonies, they are specialised in commemoration of the dead [Anisimov 2017: 208]. The Udmurt say that hens scratch the soil backwards, which symbolically connects them to the world of the dead. Thus, chicken is strictly specialised. Moreover, I have not witnessed any preparation of porridge out of chicken broth, chicken is usually an ingredient for soup.

The most common sacrificial animals are the following:

Sheep

Sheep are the main animal in the biggest ceremonies of the non-baptised Udmurt in Bashkortostan. All the spring ceremonies, as far as I have witnessed, involve the sacrifice of one or more sheep. However, the status of the sheep may vary.

In the places where continuity is ensured, the rule is to sacrifice a ewe. The animal must be healthy and have given birth at least once. While in the places where the ritual proceeds in the most traditional ways this is an absolute rule, it is not followed everywhere. Most places where ceremonies have been revitalised use for the same scope rams (in the Yanaul district of Bashkortostan for example). Nevertheless, even in places where ceremonies have never been discontinued, the priests argue that non-castrated rams are compulsory: the sacrificial animal must have never shed its blood, which clearly may not apply to ewes that have given birth (Kaymashabash, Yanaul district)

(FW, Kaymashabash, Yanaul district, Republic of Bashkortostan, coll. ET, 7.2019). So here we have conflicting rules, seemingly both traditional, from competing local traditions.

Figure 8. Fetching a ewe for sacrifice, village ceremony, Malaya Bal'zuga, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 06th 2014, Photo Eva Toulouze.

Another feature in which traditions differ is the way one gets the sacrificial animals. In the Tatyshly district, ewes are bought from village dwellers. In other places, like Kizganbashevo (Baltachevo district, RB) or in the case of Keremet ceremonies (Votskaya Osh'ya, district of Yanaul, RB) the sacrificial animal is provided free of charge (Apsalikov, Timerhan, 1952, Kizganbashevo, Baltachevo district, RB, coll. ET, RS, 6.2016). Thus, the givers intend to call for the attention and protection of the gods. They have their own reasons to make an offering. In Kizganbashevo, they have had up to 12 ewes to sacrifice. If nobody gives a ewe, the ceremony will go on with the prayers but without meat, but this seems to be an academic debate for the case has not happened yet, according to the sacrificial priest. The Tatyshly priests think on the contrary that it is not healthy for the village to sacrifice offered animals, for then the benefit of the ceremony will go exclusively to those who have presented the animal. In order for the whole village to get an advantage from the ceremony, it must have been bought with money given by the villagers themselves (Sadriev, Nazip, 1930, Malaya Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. ET, RS, 6.2015).

Geese and ducks

These animals belong to some ceremonies in which they are the main sacrificial animals. Geese were sacrificed more often formerly (see above). Now while their meat may be used in the making of porridge, it cannot be used, from winter into summer, for blood sacrifice, for it is already frozen. For the rituals taking place in autumn and winter, some birds may be sacrificed before the general slaughter. This is the case for the Votskaya Osh'ya Keremet ceremony, in which the two geese were sacrificed: the priest slaughtered them, and their wives butchered them (FW, Votskaya Osh'ya, Yanaul district, RB, coll. ET, LN, RS, 11.2015, Toulouze; Niglas 2016). Similarly, for the winter village ceremony in Novye Tatyshly in 2016, the sacrificial priest slaughtered a goose for the health of all the birds in the world (FW, Novye Tatyshly, RB, coll. ET, LN, NA, RS). This sacrifice had not been performed for years. There are other cases of geese being sacrificed, for example for the *kuala*¹²⁸ *kuris'kon/pyron*, still held in Altaevo (Buraevo district, Bashkortostan), although the *kuala* itself no longer exists (FW, Altaevo, Buraevo district, RB, coll. LN, RS, 4.2018).

Beef

Some families have cows or bulls. Some years ago, most families had at least a cow, used for milk. Now many have given up: elder people have no strength left, younger people often have jobs that are too demanding to deal permanently with a cow, especially women. Some still keep a bull for some months, just to ensure meat for the winter (Samigulov, Mars Sabiryanovich, Novye Tatyshly, RB, coll. ET, 8.2019). In these families, beef is the main meat from which ordinary broth for porridge is prepared.

¹²⁸ The sanctuary of the Udmurt, the only building with religious relevance [Vladykin1994: 289].

As mentioned above, there are rituals in which bovines are compulsory, especially the last commemoration for dead parents. This takes place some years after the death of the parent and requires the offering of the head and legs of a cow for the mother, and a horse (or two geese) for the father. This ceremony, *yyr-pyd s'oton*, was also performed in the Southern Udmurt areas during the Soviet period, but it has known a new life in the last decade and is performed more often.

Beef may be used as additional meat in ceremonies. If, in a big ceremony in Bashkortostan, the sacrificial meat is not sufficient, additional beef meat will be put in the cauldrons (Kabipyanov Fridman, 1982, Malaya Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. ET, LN, RS, 6.2013).

The sacrifice

The sacrifice is at the core of a sacrificial ceremony.

The participants in a sacrificial ceremony are mainly the sacrificial priest(s) and the assistants. Formerly, these helpers had well-defined functions: one (the *tylas'*) looked after the fire; another (the *partchas'*) looked after the slaughtering, a third was the so-called sacrificial priest (the *vös'as'*), who uttered the prayers [Sadikov 2019: 241]. Today, the roles are more randomly distributed, except for the sacrificial priest, who leads the ceremony by saying the prayers aloud. The others fulfil all the other necessary tasks.

Two helpers perform the ritual slaughtering. One holds the animal, the other cuts its throat.

Figure 9. The sacrifice in a several village ceremony, *mör vös'* in Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 13th 2014, Photo Laur Vallikivi.

In the most traditional communities, the slaughtering takes place while the priest is saying a prayer. For many, it is unconceivable to slaughter an animal without prayer: the prayer is indeed what distinguishes a sacrifice from ordinary slaughter for meat. However, where the ritual has been reduced to its core, and there is one single prayer, said with the meat porridge, the animal is slaughtered without any prayer. These divergent practices met in 2019 at the common ceremony *Elen vös'*, held that year in Stary Varyash, Yanaul district. Both Anatoli Galikhanov, now the most respected sacrificial priest in Bashkortostan, and the head of the priests' association, from Altaevo (Buray district), and Rais Rafikov, the priest of Novye Tatyshly, were very much disturbed by seeing their colleagues slaughtering without prayer. Spontaneously, Galikhanov started a prayer. Later, he encouraged Rafikov to do the same and he himself knelt behind the older man (FW, Stary Varyash, Yanaul district, RB, coll. ET, 6.2019).

The animal is brought forth. One of the helpers holds him – this is important, for everyone has stories of running to get sheep back. Usually, however, the sheep do not put up a fight, they submit quite meekly to their fate. Meanwhile the other sprays the sacrificial animal with water. He ‘washes’ (symbolically) all of its body. Then they push the animal into a lying position. The helper who cuts its throat does it through a twig of birch (or grass, depending on the place). This is a general practice also in ordinary situations (oral information NA). We have asked for the reasons. One of the alleged reasons is that, thus, the slaughterer hides his “murder”: he just cut a twig! (Fieldwork, Urazgil'de, Tatyshly district, RB, coll. NA, 6.2019).

Washed parts of the animal are thrown into the cauldrons full of boiling water. Ideally, all of the meat is used. The right side must be identified: it is the one that the priest will choose to pray with.

Figure 10. The cauldron full of meat, village ceremony Aribash, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 05th 2015, photo Eva Toulouze

The entrails however may be treated in diverse ways. If there are women available, clean them¹²⁹. If no women are available, the entrails are put into the fire, like other rubbish. After that, a long period of waiting starts until the meat is cooked and tender. It is a quiet moment. The men interact, drink tea, and count the collected money; it is an important moment of male socialisation, while slowly the population, usually elder women, arrives.

When the meat is cooked, the sacrificial priest chooses the parts with which he is going to pray – the vitals (heart, liver), meat from the right part of the animal, part of the head. After the prayer, the priest eats some part of the meat while praying, and shares it with the helpers.

The porridge proper

Now the activities are divided into two parts: one group of helpers sorts the meat, separating it from the bones. They put the bones in a special bucket that they give to the elder women who have attended, and who gnaw the last meat from them. Afterwards the bones go into the fire. The other group of helpers pours the cereals into the broth and as

¹²⁹ They may do it at home or in the stream nearby, downstream so that the sacred place do not see them (FW, Asavka, Baltachevo district, RB, coll. ET, NA, RS, 6.2016).

soon as the porridge is boiling, they mix it so that it won't stick. It will take a while until the crops are well cooked. When the porridge is soft, the other team pours the meat, which is mixed with the cereals; the porridge is then shared among the people attending the ceremony, who eat it on the spot.

Figure 11. Pouring the crop, village ceremony, Verhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 7th 2019; photo Eva Toulouze.

Figure 12. The mixing of the porridge, Bagysh vös', Kyzyl-Yar road, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 12th 215, photo Eva Toulouze.

Figure 12a The sorting of the meat, *mör vös'*, Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 07th 2013, photo Eva Toulouze

This is the way things are done in the Tatyshly district. In other districts, the meat may be served separately from the porridge. Allegedly, this was also the way until not so long ago in Tatyshly district, as elder sacrificial priest Nazip Sadriev told us. But when he discovered that this system gave opportunities to some to grab most of the meat and leave others without it, he changed the system: by mixing porridge and meat he warranted that everybody would have roughly the same amount of meat. In Asavka (Baltachevo district), in Kaymashabash (Yanaul district) meat is also served separately.

Figure 13. The shared porridge before the distribution of the meat, *Mör vös'*, Asavka, Baltachevo district, Bashkortostan, June 09th 2016, Photo Eva Toulouze

There are different traditions for the distribution of the porridge. In some places, the priest calls for the people to enter the sacred place (Aribash, Tatyshly district). In others, the people do not enter the fenced part of the sacred place, but the priest hands them the porridge over the fence (Alga, Vil'gurt). In other cases there isn't an internal

fence and people queue directly in front of the cauldron (Balzyuga, Urazgilde, Vyazovka, etc.); or, yet another possibility, a helper brings the porridge in buckets to the waiting people (Kachak, Kaymashabash). The population attending may stand waiting in circles of kin (Kachak, Kaymashabash), or queue in front of the cauldron, usually with a single container from which all the circle of kin will eat. Before taking the first mouthful, each person prays, usually silently.

Figure 14. The distribution of the porridge, village ceremony, Malaya Balzuga, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 06th 2014 Photo Laur Vallikivi.

Figure 15. The distribution of the porridge, village ceremony, Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 03rd 2016, Photo Eva Toulouze.

This is the rule in most of the Bashkortostan ceremonies, although there may be other models. In Asavka, in Varklet Bodya, the containers are left in a precise spot – in Asavka in front of the pole where towels hang, in Varkel-Bodya under a big fir. When the porridge is ready, the helpers (or the boys preparing the porridge) fill the containers, and each one retrieves his or her own.

At the ceremony, the participants must respect some general rules, for which I have not noticed variations: both men and women have the head covered as well as the arms and legs. Children in shorts are sent back home to dress (FW Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan 2016). Usually¹³⁰ the ceremonies take place on Fridays, which is a working day. So a system is organised to allow everyone to partake. Also at home, the porridge is eaten with covered heads, and with prayers. The

¹³⁰ But not always. Sometimes they may take place on Sunday (Kaymashabash) and in some cases on random days (Asavka) or on fixed days (Varkled-Bodya, Kuzebaevo).

family is supposed to eat it all. If porridge remains, it may not be given to the livestock. It must be given to the dog, which is an animal connected with the world of the ancestors [Vladykin 1994: 168-169].

Figure 16. People eating ritual porridge at the sacred place, *mör vös'*, Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 07th 2013, Photo Ranus Sadikov

Actually, the porridge epitomises the core of the ceremony: it contains the community principle, for it is made of ingredients that come from the community – meat bought with the money offered by the community, crops given by the community, water given by the springs, etc. But at every stage it is dedicated to Inmar through the prayers and the sacrifice. The pre-sacrifice porridge is without meat and it starts the whole procedure. Then comes the sacrifice, marked by a prayer, then the meat after the cooking, after the ‘production’ of broth, with another prayer with meat in the priest’s hands, and then last the prayer with the money given by the participants at the ceremony. Prayers during the porridge cooking strengthen from the very beginning what I understand as the porridge’s magical power. With the more simple ceremonies, the mere fact that the priest prays with the porridge in his hands gives it the same kind of magical power. By absorbing its substance, the community joins in the address to the gods and in the benefit of their protection. Therefore, the main religious deed is here enacted through the eating of the porridge.

Figure 17. One of the prayers, *mör vös'*, Alga, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 14th 2013,

Porridge in smaller rituals

Porridge for home sacrifice is cooked at home, in the kitchen, usually on a gas stove. I have never come across, at smaller calendar rituals, porridge presented with meat inside. Usually the dishes are on the table separately, the meat in separate bowls and the porridge cooked in the broth in other containers. Often it is in a very simple but striking form, similar to what Popova observed of the Beserman (2017: 88): in the middle, there is a hole filled by a yellow fat liquid - fat from the cooking of the meat, butter, or even vegetable oil (Nizhnebaltachevo, Urazgil'dy). The similarity with a symbolic sun is striking. However, some families present the porridge without any design (Vyazovka).

Figure 18. A porridge in a family ceremony, Autumn's ceremony, Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, October 12th 2017, Photo Eva Toulouze.

One of the family ceremonies that requires porridge is certainly the 'autumn ceremony' in Bashkortostan (in Udmurt, *siz'yl kuris'kon*) [see Toulouze 2018]. The family gathers around the table, while the father takes the porridge prepared by his wife on a towel and goes to a place outside the house – a veranda or the courtyard – to pray. Then he comes back to the family, eats a mouthful of porridge and blesses the family, followed by his wife and by the rest of his family (Nizhnebaltachevo, Urazgil'de, Vyazovka). A reduced version of this ritual sees the head of the household saying some words more or less similar to a prayer at the table (Novye Tatyshly).

During the ritual if not at the very beginning, all participants around the table have their heads covered. While elder women commonly use the headscarf, younger ones may not be so accustomed to it, although they still wear one while sitting at the

table. Similarly, some men who had been sitting bareheaded waiting for the food to be ready, take headgear from their pocket when the time has come.

The same principle is respected in the case of the ‘Great Day’ (*badzhynnal*), a ritual marking the beginning of the year and held when Christians celebrate Easter. Nowadays, in Bashkortostan, this ritual is more or less alive, depending on the region. In the Tatyshly district, this is very much the case, although not in the neighbouring district of Yanaul. But the remembrance is still there: in 2018, a public event was held in Banibash, a small village in Yanaul district, in which the ritual was enacted on the stage and porridge was offered to participants after a concert by local folk ensembles. This illustrates the tendency of ritual life to be invested in the stage space.

Something akin to this ceremony is the *vös’ nerge* ritual in Varkled-Bodya [Anisimov, Toulouze 2018]. This family rite has kept many archaic features, like the custom of visiting all the members of the kin group one after another, which is known to have existed everywhere but has now disappeared in most places [Sadikov 2019: 132, 145, 248-9]. All the wives have prepared porridge with geese. In one group, the heads of the households went into the yard and prayed with the porridge. After praying, the head of the household went back to the house, the others stood up, he tasted the porridge, followed by his wife and his children and the other kin gathered around the table.

In another group the head of the household prayed at home. The participants commented that the custom of praying outside is said to have taken place probably during the war, when older men were mobilised and only youngsters remained at home. In a family, a young man, without experience, did not dare pray in front of everybody, and took the porridge into the courtyard, but being shy and insecure, he felt a need to

relieve himself and went to the toilet, leaving the porridge on the floor. When he came back, the hens – others said the dog – had eaten the porridge. Probably this episode led other groups to think that praying in the courtyard, or anyhow outside the house, was a rule (Kirillov Rjurik 1953, Varkled-Bodya, Agryz district, RT, coll. NA, ET, April 2017).

Some synthetic observations

Porridge and gender

Dealing with porridge is a gender-marked action. In general, Udmurt ceremonies are a male activity. Curiously, in the Kaltasy district, the sacrificial priest defines it more as a female activity, as the attendants are mainly females. Indeed, the Kaltasy district is remarkable for allowing lots of space to women: most of the helpers are women and they are present from the very beginning. But this is an exception in the larger picture. In general, women may take charge of two activities: cleaning the cauldrons at the very beginning, and cleaning the entrails of the slaughtered animals.

Figure 19. Women helpers, *Badzhyn vôs'*, Bol'shekachakovo, Kaltasy district, Bashkortostan, June, 22nd 2018, Photo Eva Toulouze

It is interesting that while women in ordinary life are the ones who do the cooking, in ritual matters, the positions are reverse: in Varkled-Bodya the boys prepare the porridge not only at their own initiations, but at the girls' initiations too. While at home, for home rituals, the wives are the ones who cook, in community ceremonies the roles are reversed.

Porridge as symbol of wealth

Popova mentions the Besserman porridge as a “symbol of wealth, multiplication, integrity” [2017: 93]. During my fieldwork, I have not met with such meta comments about porridge. Porridge does not seem to be discussed at the emic level as anything other than an element of the continuity between contemporary practice and what the elders did and how they did it. Nevertheless, neither does Popova present it as being an emic understanding. At the level of etic analysis, I agree with her. My evidence relies on the process on which I commented in the article: I have been intrigued since the beginning by the use of butter in the porridge. One may say that butter always betters the taste and the consistency of food to which it is added. While I may agree intuitively with the general assertion, I find it difficult to consider it relevant in this case. Even without butter, the porridge cooked in meat broth, especially mutton and goose meat, is already very fatty. Is the addition of butter necessary from the point of view of flavour? It is dubious, for the taste of meat is stronger than the addition by butter. Does the consistency change with the addition of butter? It could with porridge made with some other, leaner meat. The only justification I find in the addition of butter is the concentration of rich ingredients, representing indeed symbolically wealth and multiplication.

Figure 20. Porridge with meat, village ceremony, Aribash, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 05th 2015, Photo Eva Toulouze.

Porridge as a symbol of Udmurtiness

As ethnographic material shows, porridge is the central element in many Udmurt rituals. I have examined now its place in rituals, connected to Udmurt traditional beliefs. I could continue with the presence of porridge in mass events: porridge has become a symbol in Udmurt culture that represents Udmurtness and sacredness at the same time. Therefore, it is present not only in rituals, but also in different kinds of Udmurt events, such as village days, village calendar events. Such is the celebration of the end of spring field work, called variously, depending on the regions, *gerber* (Udmurtia), *gyron bydton* (some regions of Southern Udmurtia and Tatarstan) or *sabantuy* (some regions in RT, RB) [Shutova 2020, Sadikov 2020]. These large gatherings have become symbols of Udmurtness, and porridge is always a part of it, more or less in the centre of the activities. As a fundamental food in everyday life as well as in rituals, porridge carries a load of ethnic representation. It is not the only food to bear it, but it is one of them – let us also mention *pel'men* (dumplings), *taban'* (pancakes), *perepech* (filled dough baskets). However, porridge is a particularly powerful case that carries in addition the aspect of sacredness. Thus, in reflecting on porridge, we touch not only a staple but a central symbol in Udmurt representations.

Figure 21. An Udmurt ceremony, village ceremony, Urazgil'dy, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, June 08th 2014, photo Eva Toulouze

Conclusion

In this article, we focused on one distinct sacred food. It is not the only one in the Udmurt tradition, for several different foods play sacred roles in different rituals. But porridge has an enlarged function. It is a ritual food in different contexts, both in general

ceremonies and in home and family rituals. Its preparation has many stable features, but its ingredients have undergone through different changes – in the choice of crops, in the sacrificial meat. But porridge has also an important symbolic function, both as a representation on richness and of Udmurtness, as it used wider than in mere religious ceremonies.

Abbreviations

EB – Evgeni Badredtinov
ET – Eva Toulouze
LN – Liivo Niglas
LV – Laur Vallikivi
MV – Mariya Vyatshina
NA – Nikolai Anisimov
RB – Republic of Bashkortostan
RS – Ranus Sadikov
RT – Republic of Tatarstan
UR – Udmurt Republic

Informants

Garifanov, Garifulla Garifullovich, born 1947, Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan.
Kabipyanov, Fridman Vladimirovich, born 1982, Malaya Bal’zyuga, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan.
Kirillov Rjurik born 1953, Varkled-Bodya, Agryz district, Republic of Tatarstan,
Nigamatullina Ol’ga, Petropavlovka, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan
Rafikov, Rais Rafikovich, born 1948, Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan.
Sadriev Nazip, born 1930, Malaya Bal’zyuga, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan.

Fieldwork: ritual documentation and filming

- July 2011 – Kuzebaevo, Alnashi district, Republic of Udmurtiya – St. Peter's day ceremony (ET)
- June 2013 – Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Mör vös' (ET, LN, RS)
- Alga, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Mör vös'
 - Kirga, Kueda distric, krai of Perm' – Elen vös'
- December 2013 – Kyzyl Yar road, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Tol Bagysh vös' (ET, LN)
- Alga, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Tol Mör vös'
- June 2014 – Bal'zjuga, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös' (ET, LN, LV)
- Urazgil'de, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös'
 - Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Mör vös'
- June 2015 – Aribash, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös' (ET, RS)
- Kyzyl Yar road, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Bagysh vös'
- November 2015 – Votskaya Osh'ya, Yanaul district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Lud vös' (ET, LN, RS)
- June 2016 – Nizhnebaltachevo/Alga, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös' (ET, NA, RS)
- Asavka, Baltachevo district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Mör vös'
- December 2016 – Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Tol Mör vös' (ET, LN, RS)
- April 2017 – Varkled-Bodya, Agryz district, Tatarstan – Eru karon, Shaytan ullyan, Akashka, Vös' Nerge (ET, NA)
- June 2017 – Vyazovka, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös' (ET, NA, LV, RS)
- Verhnie Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös'

- October 2017 - Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Siz’yl kuris’kon (ET, LN, NA, RS)
- Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Siz’yl kuris’kon
 - Vyazovka, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Siz’yl kuris’kon
 - Aribash, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Vyl’ korka pyron
- April 2018 - Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Badzh’ynnal (ET, LN, LV, MV)
- Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – Salam s’iyon
 - Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – vyl’ kenak pyron
 - Altaevo, Buray district, Republic of Bashkortostan – kuala pyron
- June 2018 - Bol’shoy Kachak, Kaltasy district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Badzhyn vös’ (ET)
- Starokalmiyarovo/Petropavlovka, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös’
- June 2019 vös’ (ET)
- Staryj Varyash, Yanaul district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Elen
 - Verhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan - Gurt vös’
 - Nizhnebaltachevo, Tatyshly district, Republic of Bashkortostan – vös’ inty

THE SACRIFICIAL PRIESTS

Tradition and diversity among the Udmurt sacrificial priests ¹³¹

Eva Toulouze

Liivo Niglas

Key words: sacrificial priest, ritual, Udmurt religion, transmission, ethnicity

The Udmurt are a people who speak a Finno-Ugric language in the Volga region. Since 1920 most Udmurt have lived in an administrative region, now a Republic, but there are Udmurt communities in the neighbouring regions, some of them the descendants of migrants who have settled in Muslim areas since the 17th and mostly in the 18th centuries (Minniyakhmetova 1995, 332; Toulouze, Anisimov 2020). Before the arrival of the Russians, and for some time afterwards, the Udmurt practised an agrarian religion based on animism. Although the Udmurt who remained in their core territory had converted to Orthodoxy by 1765, it is particularly interesting to follow the religious situations in areas where ethnic religions were able to persist without interference until the Soviet period. They are still very much alive at the beginning of the 21st century.

As in most traditions, rituals occupy a highly significant place in the Udmurts' lives. The main output of any ceremonial action was (according to ethnographers¹³²) and is still the cooking of a porridge made of lamb broth, crops, and lamb. In some cases, the ceremony

¹³¹ This text has been published in *Current Studies: Udmurt mythology and folklore*. Tartu: ELM scholarly publisher, 2021, pp. 257–308. The text is a revised and extended version of an article published by the authors in the journal *Temenos* (Toulouze, Niglas 2017). This research has been funded by the Estonian Research Council (PUT590, UT PHVKU19913 “Soome-ugrilased multiethnilises ühiskonnas: kohtumine religioonide piiridel”) (Finno-Ugrians in a multiethnic society: Meeting at the border of religions).

¹³² Among others, Pervukhin 1888, Holmberg 1914.

can be performed by the male head of the family, while in others – important calendar feasts and seasonal agricultural turning points – the ritual is to be led by a specialist. The authors' fieldwork assists in ascertaining what still exists, what has disappeared, and what has changed.

While previous research has mainly focused on reconstruction – attempting to ascertain the details of the rituals before modernity – our goal is to focus on the current practice of this peculiar form of worship, and to analyse how the population understands it. We intend to study a key figure in the perpetuation of the tradition, the sacrificial priest, for in the context of urbanisation and rural exodus transmission is a core question. In a wider context the question of the possible use of ethnic religion as an identity marker and the priest's possible role in this must also be considered.

Very few of these practices have resisted the successive efforts of evangelisation and sovietisation in Udmurtia. As Ranus Sadikov, an Udmurt ethnographer who specialises in this region, emphasises, the disruption of the village community by collectivisation has seriously transformed collective life in the countryside (Sadikov 2012, 48), in Udmurtia as well as in the further-flung Turkic regions. There are still places where tradition has shown itself more resilient. One of these is Bashkortostan, where Udmurt peasant communities practise forms of worship as ethnographers described them in the 19th century.

This is easily explained. In Udmurtia the communities had to face evangelisation and then collectivisation, the first imposing a new and enduring way of thinking about oneself in the world, the second revolutionising the way people related to each other in everyday life. In Bashkortostan the first disruptive phase did not take place. The effects

of collectivisation were similar in Bashkortostan as elsewhere: the basis of community life changed, and anti-religious ideology was spread through school, the army, and state institutions, while more or less active repression led to the fading of the Udmurts' traditional mental world. However, the areas they inhabited were totally rural and remote, and they were able to retain much of their religion.

Contemporary scholars have emphasised the persistence of Udmurt rituals in this region: Tatiana Minniyakhmetova and Ranus Sadikov (1973), themselves natives of Northern Bashkortostan, have defended doctoral dissertations and written many studies about them in their current forms, and have described rituals in continuity that have created a corpus, based both on fieldwork and on older literature, whose main emphasis is on the beginning of the 20th century, a period in which tradition was still strong and modernity had not yet penetrated. Nevertheless, external research on these questions is still practically non-existent: although Finnish (Kirsti Mäkela, Seppo Lallukka) and Hungarian researchers (Boglárka Mácsai, Zoltán Nagy) have conducted fieldwork in the region, their findings are still to be published. In the present article we reflect on what we have witnessed, while concentrating on the key role of the sacrificial priest.

Is the Udmurt religion a religion?

As a general introduction, a remark about the name of the Udmurt religion. If we look at what has been published in Udmurtia, among the publications is an important book titled *Udmurt oskon* ("Udmurt faith", Vladykin, Vinogradov 2010), with a choice of texts, comments and photos. The word 'oskon' comes from the Udmurt verb 'to believe' and is clearly a term generalised under the influence of Christianity. Another term used more in

the context of the traditional religion is *vös*’, a word used to refer to a sacrifice, and also to a sacrificial ceremony in general. It is also the name that has been chosen by the Izhevsk activists for their association. The word *vös*’ also provides the basis for many other derivation terms, for example the term for the sacrificial priest, which is the main topic of this article.

The main question we shall now reflect about is the following: is it proper to call what the Udmurt call ‘*Udmurt oskon*’ (‘Udmurt religion’) a religion? We shall not develop this point, but we would like to pinpoint a terminological confusion that is difficult to unravel because of the lack of proper concepts in our toolbox.

The kind of practice we shall study is usually called ‘paganism’ in Russia. The main problem with the term ‘pagan’ lies in the fact that it was originally used in opposition to ‘Christian’; scholars prefer to approach the phenomenon from a more neutral starting point. Moreover, the word ‘pagan’ contains other implicit features that do not fit the fluid and situative object of our study: a developed and fixed mythology; a sophisticated polytheism; and no explicit connection with nature. However, the term has been integrated into the discourse as an objective scientific category.

We could use the term ‘belief’, which is used both in anthropology and folklore studies as opposed to religion as a formalised and dogmatic system; but ‘belief’ is also somewhat problematic, for it implies the conscious act of believing. In spite of what is suggested by Christianity’s dominance, not every ‘belief system’ is based on belief. A ‘credo’ is rather a peculiarity of monotheistic world religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Faith and belief are quite improper concepts in many other systems, where the propositional dimension is not articulated into a rigid system. These notions

have been imposed on the natives by missionaries, who as professionals could only interpret the unfamiliar by using familiar categories: their thinking habits and their languages did not and do not provide them with appropriate tools to understand the realities they discovered. At the same time, these categories have been accepted and interiorised by the natives themselves (Asad 1993): in contact situations, speaking a language that was not theirs, they domesticated the conceptual tools introduced by the ‘other’. They have become weapons: even if they did not fit theoretically, they could still be pragmatically and advantageously used. This is the case with the Udmurt, who have adopted the term *udmurt vera*, which can be directly translated as ‘Udmurt faith’, in contrast to *dzh’uč vera*, ‘Russian faith’ (Orthodox Christianity) and *biger vera* ‘Tatar faith’ (Islam).

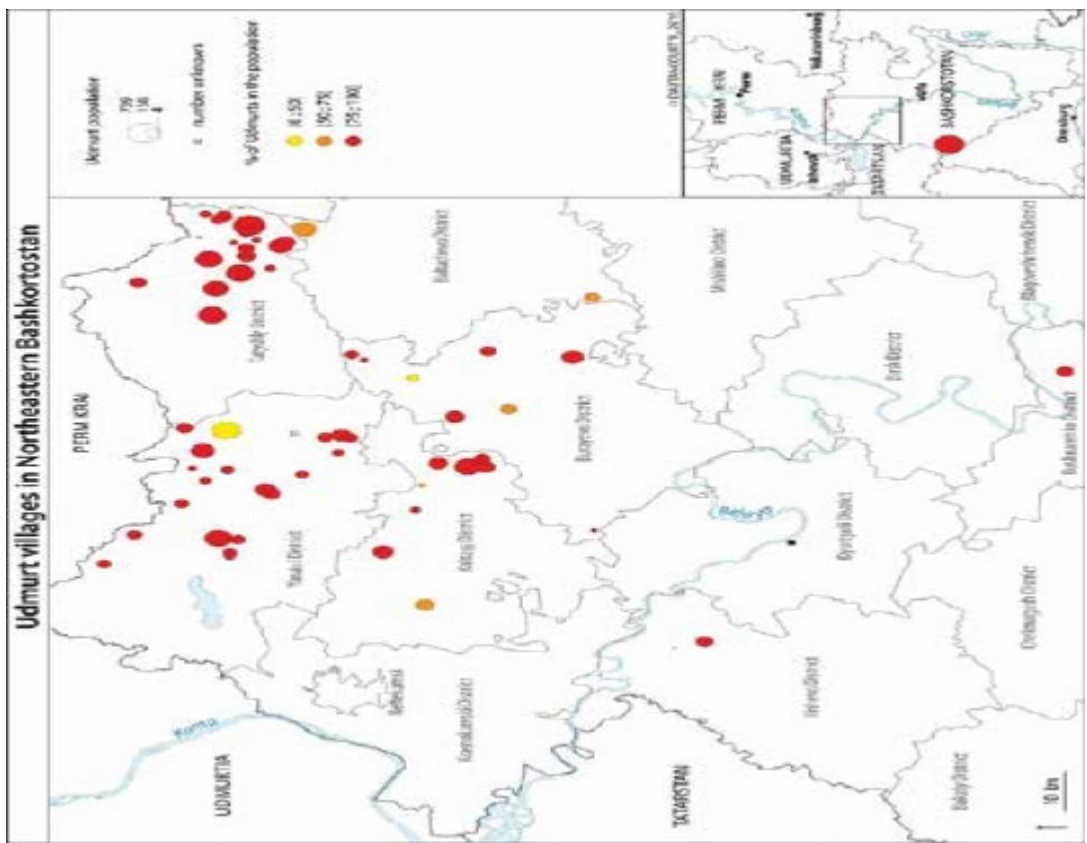
We thus face the challenge of expressing something without the appropriate conceptual tools. We have been tempted by the concept of spirituality, as used by Hann (2007, 387), but even this term is critical and we shall not use it in this article, for the boundary between the spiritual and the profane is somewhat nebulous. Here, moreover, the practice consists in everyday common actions in the countryside – the slaughtering of animals, cooking, and eating, although they are encompassed in a framework that makes them sacred and gives them place, time, performers, words, and gestures. In conclusion, we are forced to compromise and use the unsatisfactory term ‘religion’.

The Udmurt religious world in Bashkortostan at the beginning of the 21st century

In the second decade of the 21st century peasant life in the Udmurt communities of Northern Bashkortostan is still punctuated by religious gatherings. Continuity is clearly felt, as we observed in our fieldwork since June 2013 up to 2020, after which we were not able to do fieldwork due to the corona crisis. We attempted to penetrate the world of Udmurt rituals by attending and filming ceremonies, but also through the mediation of sacrificial priests. We stayed in the Tatyshly *raion*, in Northern Bashkortostan, and worked in several of the area's villages. Being acquainted with specialist literature, we could observe some changes: many ceremonies that once existed have been forgotten. Others have not faded, while some have been revived, and new forms have also been invented. We have thus merged into a single common practice elements with a different historical status. A comparison with Udmurt religious practice in Udmurtia itself may provide further insights.

What we have discovered is a bustling and varied world of Eastern Udmurt religious life, where local traditions are dominant and almost all village have different ceremonies. There are some people, especially among local administration workers, who think that the Udmurt religious ceremonies should be standardised following the example of Christianity and Islam (FWM¹³³ 2014). In our opinion, the variety in ritual practices manifests the richness and the strength of the tradition, and we shall endeavour to show this in this article.

¹³³ Conversations with Salim Garifullin in Verkhniye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan with ET, LV LN and NA.



Map 1. Udmurt villages in Northeastern Bashkortostan.

The traditional religious life of the Eastern Udmurt has been characterised by a complex annual ceremonial cycle. Some ceremonies have been forgotten: the Easter ceremony, the *Badzhym Nunal* (Great Day) festival,¹³⁴ is of very limited importance in

¹³⁴ The Mari have the same kind of holiday, also called the ‘Great Day’ (*kugu keche*), corresponding to the Easter period. Its absence or lesser resilience in Bashkortostan may be connected to the absence of Christianity in the area (there was no church whatsoever in the Tatyshly district until 2018, when an orthodox church was built in its centre, Verkhniye Tatyshly). There are memories of the existence of this holiday, but it has lost its significance: according to our main informant people used to gather and eat

Bashkortostan. The tradition is alive only in particular villages, while in other locations it is reduced to scenic reconstructions (FWM¹³⁵ 2018). These reconstructions are usually organised by the Udmurt ethnic organisation, the NKC (National and Cultural Centre, cf. Toulouze, Anisimov 2020), so that people do not forget ceremonies that are no longer widespread in daily life, but which still live in the memories of the elder generations. Another example is the spring three-village ceremony (FWM¹³⁶ 2014). People remember which villages performed it and with whom, but the tradition is no longer alive in some places, while in other places it has undergone transformation. In general, grass root level ceremonies have been less disrupted by political interference (FWM 2013)¹³⁷. The tradition of the village ceremony (*gurt vös*) at the solstice has never been held without interruption.¹³⁸ The *mör vös*, the following ceremony in the cycle, one or two weeks after the village event, is observed together by eight to ten villages, and has also been quite resilient. A similar joint ceremony, the *tol mör vös*, is also held in winter (FWM¹³⁹2016) and is the only ceremony of the winter cycle that has been preserved, except one village ceremony, the *gurten vös* celebrated in Starokalmiyarovo. In many places, the celebration of joint ceremonies, both in summer and winter, was interrupted

porridge in groups of three or four families; today the celebration is limited to one family, without outsiders, and the head of the family says ritual words over the porridge

¹³⁵ Event in Banibash, Yanaul district Bashkortostan, recorded by ET.

¹³⁶ Recorded from Nazip Sadriev, in Malaya Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district Bashkortostan, by ET, LN, and LV.

¹³⁷ However, people still recall a time when party officials interrupted the ceremony, and the contents of the sacrificial cauldrons were thrown on the floor. This did not affect the practice, however: the inhabitants of the village simply changed the location of the ceremony to more hidden places. Conversations with Nazip Sadriev, Flyura Nuriyeva, in Malaya Bal'zyuga, recorded by ET, LN, RS.

¹³⁸ This is true of the spring cycle. However, in winter it is the village ceremony that has disappeared, while the collective ones are still performed.

¹³⁹ Recorded in Novyye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET, LN, NA, RS.

for some years but was immediately revived when the Soviet Union collapsed. These very public ceremonies are attended by large gatherings, some of the attendants, as our fieldwork reveals, are ‘expatriate’ Udmurt, i.e. Udmurt who live and work outside the compact Udmurt area but who return for the occasion (FWM 2013¹⁴⁰ and 2019¹⁴¹).

In some areas of Bashkortostan, for example Kaltasy district, where Udmurt village and joint ceremonies had been thoroughly documented at the end of the 19th century (Toulouze 2020a), the interruption lasted for decades. When the revitalisation process started, there were no informants left who remembered the ceremonies and the prayers precisely (FWM¹⁴² 2018).

Another ceremony had indeed totally disappeared: the ‘country’ ceremony, *Elen Vös*, where all the Udmurt of Bashkortostan and the Perm region used to gather, was attested to in older literature (Sadikov 2008, 46). It rotated between three villages, Varyash, Kirga, and Altaevo, where its memory had faded (Sadikov 2008, 194): as no data are available after the beginning of the 20th century, we may assert that by the beginning of the Soviet period it was no longer being held. It has now been revived and has been held since 2008 in the three villages that hosted it previously (Sadikov 2010, 34), becoming a very popular event. even attracting people from Izhevsk, the capital city of Udmurtia (FWM 2013¹⁴³ and 2018¹⁴⁴).

¹⁴⁰ Conversation with a woman living in Yekaterinburg, at the *mör vös*’ 2013, Novyye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET.

¹⁴¹ Conversation with an Udmurt dentist living in Krasnodar, Kaymashabash *yshtiyak vös*’, Yanaul district, Bashkortostan, by ET.

¹⁴² Conversation with Anatoliy Nasipullin, Bol’shekachakovo, Kaltasy district, with ET and RS.

¹⁴³ *El’en vös*’, Kirga, Kuyeda district, Perm krai, recorded by ET, LN.

¹⁴⁴ *El’en vös*’, Staryy Varyash, Yanaul district, Bashkortostan, recorded by ET, EB.

Having illustrated and sampled the overall framework with these examples from our fieldwork, we shall focus on one key issue. What is the current situation of the specialised bearers of this tradition, the sacrificial priests?¹⁴⁵ Has their role changed, what is it, who are they, how have they become what they are, and how do they perpetuate themselves? Is this role somehow political? These are the concrete questions we shall attempt to answer.

The central role of the sacrificial priest, the *vös'as'* / *kuris'kis'*¹⁴⁶

In the continuation of a tradition the existence of ‘people who know’ is crucial. In the Udmurt tradition, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the ritual specialists, the *vös'as'*, were responsible for larger ceremonies, while the family head (or the kin’s elder) could pray in everyday life and at family events (Khrushcheva 1995, 197).¹⁴⁷

- Not everybody could perform at public ceremonies. We know of various kinds of priest: the leader of the ceremony, the *vös'as'*, was responsible for the whole ceremony and recited the prayers;
- the *tylas'* was responsible for the fireplace and for throwing whatever was supposed to go there into the fire (pieces of bread, blood, bones, entrails);
- and the *partshas'* was responsible for the sacrificial animals (Sadikov 2008, 191).

¹⁴⁵ We use here the expression introduced by Aado Lintrop (Lintrop 2003).

¹⁴⁶ These two words are synonymous, with a use more or less local. The word *kuris'kis'* comes from the verb ‘to ask’ and its derivate, to pray. The *kuris'kis'* is the one who prays.

¹⁴⁷ This is still the case. Although it is not the focus of this article, let us mention an event that happened during our fieldwork: Tolya, the son of our host’s neighbour was called up, and was to leave on 25th June very early in the morning. The celebration started in the evening, and at about 4 am the father prayed for his son and a ritual porridge was distributed to those who attended. (FWM 2013: recorded from Flyura Nuriyeva, in Malaya Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET and LN).

This task-sharing has now disappeared.¹⁴⁸ We know that until the 1920s the *vös'as'* was elected by the assembly of the family heads,¹⁴⁹ i.e. the village council, called *ken'esh*, but this is no longer the case. However, in 1928 the *Kenesh*¹⁵⁰ became the enemy, the incarnation of the “kulak’s power”. Moreover, especially after the 1930s, all religious specialists were grouped with Orthodox priests, accused of being exploiters of the people and repressed. All the local leaders were accused of being kulaks and eliminated. While no statistics are available, it is likely that many *vös'as'* were victims of repression. However, they had a lower public profile than Orthodox priests: they were peasants like everyone else, and many survived. Thus, after the war, the communities had not been totally deprived of their priests.

The main problem lay elsewhere, however: younger people, trained by Soviet education in the cult of modernity and material progress, seldom followed the spiritual traditions of their elders. From this perspective the 1980s and 1990s were years of decline: the older men who had continued to lead ceremonies died without anybody to replace them. Without a priest, worship might disappear. Even if people wanted to continue, they were not able to do so: ‘[W]e may say that in the 20th century it is only thanks to the *vös'as'*

¹⁴⁸ We heard the word *partshas'* only once, in the mouth of the older *vös'as'*, Nazip, used to mean ‘assistant’. Ranus Sadikov, who has spent years studying the Udmurt religion, reacted to this word, for it was the first time he had himself heard it in current speech.

¹⁴⁹ This is what Khrushcheva asserts (1995, 197). Lintrop argues that, with reference to Udmurtia, in former times the *tuno*, or wizard, used to appoint the fore-prayers; now the vacant places are filled by voting (Lintrop 1995, 271).

¹⁵⁰ The Udmurt word *Ken'esh* was used in the 1920s for the Russian ‘Soviet’, until it became taboo, and the institution was abolished. There is abundant literature on this issue, especially by Galina Nikitina (1993, 1998).

that the tradition of collective ceremonies was preserved. If the priest had no successors, the holding of sacrifices was interrupted' (Sadikov, Danilko 2005, 230-231).

For this reason, we focus on this figure, who is so crucial for the survival of the tradition.

The task of the *vös'as'*

Today the sacrificial priest's task is varied. He is the master of ceremonies of a fairly complicated ritual that includes several simultaneous actions. He therefore has assistants. The tasks formerly undertaken by particular priests are now entrusted to these assistants. However, the priest must ensure that everybody acts according to the rules. We shall describe his tasks in the simplest ceremony, the village one.¹⁵¹ We have chosen to describe Malaya Bal'zuga,¹⁵² because it is a tradition that has never been interrupted. Nazip *agay*¹⁵³, a sacrificial priest for sixty years, who has thoroughly trained his assistants and successor, has continued to conduct it until the 2010s.

Before the event the priest gathers offerings – bread, crops, sacrificial animals, and money, money, given by all the households of the village. All these items are brought to the venue of the ceremony. Every ceremony starts with an opening ritual, the *siz'is'kon*, held on the morning of the main ceremony. Porridge is cooked without meat, and only

¹⁵¹ Our description is based on our observation and video recording of the Balzjuga *gurt vös'* in 2014. (see Niglas 2019b). FWM 2014, recorded by LN, ET, LV.

¹⁵² Although we have also attended other village ceremonies, for example in 2014 (Urazgil'dy: LN, ET, LV), 2015 (Aribash: ET, RS), 2016 (Nizhnebaltachevo ET, RS, NA), 2017 (Vyazovka: LN, RS, LV, NA, ET), 2018 (Starokalmiyarovo ET), and 2019 (Yuda EB and Verhnebaltachevo ET, LN, LV). Some of these ceremonies have been kept quite traditional, while others have either been revived in a more elementary shape (Urazgil'dy) or merged with another form of ceremony, for example the *keremet vös'* (Aribash).

¹⁵³ *Agay* is an honorific title given to older men, meaning in Udmurt 'brother', 'uncle'.

the main priest prays to ask permission to make a sacrifice while holding some porridge in a bowl on a towel and some birch¹⁵⁴ branches. Then all the people¹⁵⁵ eat a spoonful of the ritual porridge. Only then may the preparations for the sacrificial ritual itself start.

During the first prayer two assistants present the sacrificial animal, a lamb. They ‘purify’ it before the sacrifice, sprinkling it with water using a birch branch. Later, they cut the lamb’s throat, also using a sprig of birch, which is cut at the same time as the throat, while another assistant is ready with a spoon to gather the first blood and to throw it into the fire. He repeats this three times. At the same time, the priest utters a prayer, holding bread baked by the former owners of the sacrificial animal. This bread must have a coin pressed inside it. During the prayer the other assistants kneel and bow when the priest says ‘Amin’. Afterwards the sacrificed animal must be skinned and cut into portions.

The priest must then pour salt into the pot. The salt is the first element of the porridge, only then come the other ingredients. While in principle meat should be put into the pot onto the salt, and only then water added, in reality the water is already boiling when the meat is thrown in. At the same time, the grain given by the population must be prepared and the money counted. The meat takes a long time to be cooked. When it is ready, the priest looks for the ritual parts, puts them on a plate,¹⁵⁶ and recites a prayer over the plate, holding it as before on a towel and branches. Meanwhile some of the assistants separate the meat from the bones, giving the audience some bones to clean before throwing them on the fire; the meat is then put back into the pots. At the same time,

¹⁵⁴ The branches used in the ceremonies differ according to the season: in spring-summer, they are birch; in winter, fir. Whenever branches are used, the season determines which tree they are taken from.

¹⁵⁵ Usually, at this stage, only assistants – and anthropologists – are concerned.

¹⁵⁶ Some particular parts of the animal – the heart, the head, the liver, a right rib, and the right fore thigh – have previously been marked and will be used in the next prayer.

other assistants have placed the grain into the broth and look after the porridge: their task is physically hard as they must stir the porridge in the pots with huge wooden poles until it is ready. Finally, the porridge is distributed to the assembled people, and the priest recites the last prayer in gratitude for the money offerings. When the people have gone home, the fireplaces are ‘closed’ by sweeping them with the birch or fir branches, then all the utensils must be cleaned and packed away. The remains of the porridge are brought back to the village and the priest distributes it to those who were unable to attend.

This is a complex ritual with many concomitant activities, and it is the sacrificial priest who is responsible for the whole¹⁵⁷.

The transmission of knowledge and the choice of priest

With the disruption of the rural community in the 1930s, it was clearly impossible to maintain this competence in the framework of the furiously anti-religious collective farm. The formerly elected *vös’as’* continued in secret and were solely responsible for the future.

Nazip Sadriev, born in 1930,¹⁵⁸ and today the region’s most prestigious and famous *vös’as’*, told us how he became a priest: he was in his twenties, and he had long been an assistant.

¹⁵⁷ We have published an ethnography describing the proceedings at an Udmurt ceremony in full (Toulouze, Niglas 2014).

¹⁵⁸ He worked with horses in the local agricultural cooperative, or *kolkhoz*, and never left his village, where he married and had five children (Sadikov, Danilko 2005: 229; Toulouze et al. 2015). He still lives there.



Photo 1. Nazip Sadriev, elder priest of Malaya Bal'zyuga. On the threshold of his home, showing us how the sacrificial priest used to dress, 8 June 2017. Photo Eva Toulouze

One of the *vös'as'* ceased to pray and another died. Then a remaining *vös'as'* told him: 'Now, son, you will pray.' 'The first time, my hands shook. They decided that it was too soon and postponed it. Next year I passed the test, ... although my hands still shook.' (FWM 2013¹⁵⁹) He was thus co-opted by a functioning priest, but he had learnt the prayers beforehand only by listening to them for a long time and incorporating his elder's experience. The problem of transmission is a real concern for Nazip *agay* (Sadikov, Danilko 2005, 232). He is today considered the specialist to consult in the entire Udmurt diaspora, and he is often invited to lead ceremonies (Sadikov, Danilko 2005, p.232). In the last decade he has concentrated on teaching younger people to provide the communities with priests. As is to be expected, the results are mixed. With some, he

¹⁵⁹ Conversation with Nazip Sadriev: ET, LN, and RS.

believes, it has not worked. With others, it has worked weakly, and with others adequately.¹⁶⁰

Several preconditions were to be respected.

The conditions about which Nazip *agay* is strict concern the person of the future *vös 'as'*: as in the past, he must be a married man (Lintrop 2002: 44), as must his assistants. They must all be full members of the community – bachelors are not ‘whole’ and cannot be trusted with such responsibility: ‘The scope of peasant society is to reproduce itself. You cannot be an active member if you have not done all you can to fulfil your aim,’ explains Sadikov. The second personal criterion is that the person must have an impeccable social profile: priests are not supposed to drink; they should not smoke; and they should be good workers, husbands, and fathers.

Although people in the village marry early, it is much more difficult to find men who do not drink and who are motivated for the task. According to our observations the rule not to smoke is not taken seriously nowadays. Some well-respected and experienced *vös 'as'* actually smoke during breaks in the ceremonies, though not inside the sacrificial space (FWM 2013¹⁶¹, 2015¹⁶² and 2016¹⁶³). The choice is still quite limited. Nazip *agay* therefore ignores some other criteria from earlier times in choosing a *vös 'as'*.

For example, one important criterion that should be met, but is often overlooked, is that the priest should have a ‘pedigree’, i.e. he should come from a family of priests so that

¹⁶⁰ Actually, his assessment is based on what he considers to be the only right way to act. However, in parallel to his tradition there are other competing traditions: in the neighbouring area of Alga ceremonies vary in detail, Nazip *agay* considers them erroneous, while for the local priests they correspond to their local traditions. FWM 2013: ET, LN, and RS.

¹⁶¹ Observations at the Alga *mör vös'*, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, December 2013, by ET, LN.

¹⁶² Observations at the *Bagysh vös'*, Kyzyl Yar road, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET, RS.

¹⁶³ Observations at the Nizhnee Baltachevo *gurt vös'*, ET, NA, RS.

there is a sacrificial priest among his ancestors. Therefore, when the revitalisation process started, the local Udmurt leaders looked for people who were kin to former *vös'as'*. Only when no one could be found, or the person did not agree to take over the task of becoming the priest for the village, was the position proposed to people unconnected to families of priests. This is how Salim Shakirov from Novye Tatyshly and Anatoliy Nasipullin in Bol'shoy Kachak became sacrificial priests (see below).

Another important criterion for eligibility of becoming a priest is age. According to ethnographic data only those older than forty can be elected as *vös'as'* (Sadikov 2008, 191). Nazip *agay*, who himself started his career as a *vös'as'* at the age of 24, has not insisted on this age limit. Some years ago, he chose a young man in his late twenties to be his successor in his own village. That is how Fridman Kabipyanyanov became *vös'as'* of the village of Malaya Bal'zyuga. Young men have also become sacrificial priests in other communities. In December 2013, we attended in Tatyshly district a second religious group's winter prayers. In that group, the collective ceremonies are organised by a special 'head of the ceremony' (*vös' kuz'o*), who in this case was not a sacrificial priest. Not only did he organise all practical aspects of the ceremony (finding sacrificial animals, transportation), but he also appointed the priests who prayed at the ceremonies. As some elder men were ill, he appointed two very young helpers who had been attending and assisting in ceremonies for years, Evgeniy Gayniyarov from Alga, in his late twenties (he was not married at the time) and Yakov Fazliyev from Verkhnebaltachevo, who was in his early thirties and used to look after the horses that

carried paraphernalia to the ceremonies. (FWM 2013¹⁶⁴) We interpreted this as a manifestation of a discreet but effective staff policy.

How are the candidates trained?

Training ‘methods’ today very much follow the traditional pedagogical methods of native societies. They do not rely on verbal expression or theoretical knowledge, but on experience and observation (Ingold 2000, Vallikivi 2009). Nazip himself was trained in the natural way, by staying close to sacrificial priests, seeing them performing, and imitating them. He teaches in the same way: the apprentices are close to him and observe what he does. They are then expected to imitate their master.

One of the central aspects of the priest’s work is prayer. Every priest has one prayer, whose core is repeated in every situation, while the introduction and/or the conclusion depend on the aim of the prayer and its place in the ritual. According to tradition the priest had to ‘steal’ a prayer, which meant that he had to learn it naturally, by hearing it without attempting to memorise it (Sadikov 2008, p.192). But very few living priests have learnt their prayers in this way.

Most have learnt them from older people, not orally, but from a written text, or by cutting it from newspapers or journals.¹⁶⁵ For example, the younger Balzyuga *vös’as’* gave us two prayers by copying them on our memory stick from his computer. He had not yet learnt his prayer by heart and read it from a sheet of paper during the ritual

¹⁶⁴ *Alga tol mör vös’* December 2013: ET, LN.

¹⁶⁵ In the 1990s and 2000s prayers were published in the local press.

(FWM 2014¹⁶⁶). Some priests do the same in other villages. Thus, the penetration of written culture can be observed, and it is accepted by Nazip *agay*.

Is the Udmurt prayer thus becoming a written genre? Nothing is less sure, although the written form is the main way that the tradition is transmitted today. It is true that most of the priests now read their prayers during the ceremonies. But it is interesting to follow, for example, Fridman's development as a priest: when we saw him first pray, he read the prayer from a text, but now he has read his prayer so often that he knows it by heart, and even allows himself to improvise. It is exactly what Anatoliy Galikhanov, the authoritative Altayevo sacrificial priest, told us about his experience: he too started by reading, but then when he had mastered the rules of the genre, he composed his prayers himself (FWM 2016¹⁶⁷). In any case the output is oral and this will not change. The written text is only a tool on the way to professionalisation. It helps beginners to memorise long prayers that last for several minutes, but it does not change the nature of the praying process.

Prayers are inevitably witnesses of their times, although there is also a huge dimension of stability. People pray to obtain what they need, and these basic needs do not change fundamentally. The Udmurt ask for health for them and for their animals, for fertility for their land, for a good harvest, for good weather. But some needs may change and priests are concerned about whether they are authorised to change old texts. This was the content of a discussion that the Alga group's main *vös'as'*, Evgeniy Adullin, had with

¹⁶⁶ Malaya Bal'zyuga *gurt vös'*, by ET, LN, LV.

¹⁶⁷ Conversation with A. Galikhanov, Altayevo, Burayevo district, Bashkortostan, ET, NA, RS.

Eva in 2015 (FWM 2015¹⁶⁸). An analysis of collected prayers shows that changes have always been introduced. At the beginning of the 20th century, they prayed that their young people would please the Tsar in order to defend the country,¹⁶⁹ or they asked God to give them the means to pay taxes to the tsar: “When we must pay tribute to the Great Tsar, give [us] yourself help!”¹⁷⁰ Of course, with the new conditions after the revolution this kind of demand no longer made sense. In the Soviet period, they prayed for the kolkhoz to become rich,¹⁷¹ for its livestock to be healthy,¹⁷² for its machine and combine operators to work with joy.¹⁷³ Today, the couple of horses needed to transport grain to the thrashing floor¹⁷⁴, until recently mentioned in prayers, have been replaced by a couple of cars.¹⁷⁵

Other new demands have emerged, reflecting the concerns of contemporary Udmurt society. Today there is a concern for Udmurt identity. In a socio-political context where specific non-Russian identities are under threat, and vernacular languages practically

¹⁶⁸ Conversation at the *Bagysh vös'*, Kyzyl Yar road, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET, RS.

¹⁶⁹ Prayer recorded on June 25 1971 in Kalmiyar (Kuyeda district, Perm' region) by Mikhail Atamanov from former priest Zidiyar Suyushev (b. 1916). NOA UdIIYaL UrO RAN. Manuscripts. Manuscripts. Inventory

2-N. Dossier 439. Sheet 33–34. Clearly, this text is from the informant's remembrances.

¹⁷⁰ Text collected in 1885 by Bernát Munkácsi, in Mozhga, from 'uncle' Apshivyr. Munkácsi 1887: 168; another prayer with the same request was collected by Munkácsi in 1916 in a prisoner's camp in Esztergom, from Muradshin Mardymsha and Dzhandusov Akmadyshe from Urzagil'de. Munkácsi 1952: 111–114.

¹⁷¹ Text collected in Asavka (Baltachevo district) by M. Garifullin in 1992, from Minnigali Ziyangarov (b. 1920) (Garifullin 1992: 456–459).

¹⁷² Text collected in Bolshetuganeevo (Kaltasy district) in 2003 by Yantimir Minlyakhmetov (Sadikov 2011: 125–129).

¹⁷³ Text collected in 2006 by S. Baymetova, student of Bol'shekachakovo high school, from Sabyr Fayzrakhmanov (Sadikov 2011: 129–132).

¹⁷⁴ For example Prayer by Salim Shakirov 2009 (Shakirov 2009).

¹⁷⁵ The 2019 version of the Alga group prayers (Tatyshly district).

eliminated from school, the Udmurt have started identifying themselves in prayer: “all your unanimous Udmurt people”; “let in the world spread the glory of the Udmurt”; “let our children protect our Udmurtness”. We feel here the concern that with newer generations attachment to Udmurt values could diminish. Other concerns are revealed by new prayers: “let our children listen to their mother and father, let them respect the elders”. In former prayers there were no such concerns, but we understand that today’s young Udmurt do not differ from other ordinary young people who are not so keen to follow tradition without thinking. The formidable influence of others is to be felt in the request: “Let the Udmurt people never lose its sweet modest customs”. In other words, let it resist Russian influence. Other prayers ask for protection against drug addiction¹⁷⁶ or for success in the youngsters’ attempts to enter university,¹⁷⁷ etc.

Perpetuation and transmission: some portraits of *vös’as’*

The Udmurt sacrificial priests in Northern Bashkortostan are quite different from one another. Their differences illustrate the variety of the ceremonies and the richness of Eastern Udmurt rituals. We have met many of the priest, but we shall concentrate on only a few whom we have recorded in action and in interview. Although we have been working with Udmurt sacrificial priests in various districts of Northern Bashkortostan,

¹⁷⁶ Text collected in 1994 by journalist A. Grebina from priest Anatoliy Galikhanov (b. 1962), Altayevo (Burayevo district).

¹⁷⁷ Prayer by Anatoliy Galikhanov (b. 1962), Altayevo (Burayevo district), recorded during the *el’en vös’* in 2013 (see Niglas 2019a).

most of the following cases come from Tatyshly district, which has been our main area of fieldwork, although we will move on to those who live in other districts.

Tatyshly district

Today the nineteen Udmurt villages in the compact territory of the Tatyshly district are traditionally divided into two village groups separated by a river, the Yuk. According to the villages where their main joint ceremonies take place, one could be called the Vil'gurt group and the other the Alga group¹⁷⁸. Both groups have their own rituals, which are almost parallel. The villages hold their ceremonies on the same day, with the joint ceremonies held on different days (the Vil'gurt group performs its *mör vös* ' a week before the Alga group's event) to allow people to visit the other ceremony.

The Alga group also performs a slightly more complicated cycle in June and December, because they have not only maintained but developed the principle of the three-village ceremony, with, an eight-village ceremony held one week before the *mör vös* '. Another difference is that in the Alga group the population brings offerings to the ceremony and gives them personally to the *vös'as* ', who receives them with a personal prayer. In Vil'gurt the people put the offerings on a pole themselves.

Thus, the comparison between both *mör vös* ' allows us to identify clear differences in ritual performance¹⁷⁹ (although this is not the aim of this paper). What we wish to

¹⁷⁸ We call it this for the purpose of this article; this is not a recognised name.

¹⁷⁹ The acknowledgement of these peculiarities has led us to a long-term project, which is to record all nineteen village ceremonies, so that we do not involuntarily become the means of standardising the ceremonies according to those we have already recorded and left as DVDs with the sacrificial priests.

emphasise here is the persistence of strongly differing local traditions. We shall only comment on some differences in the role of the *vös'as'*.

Bal'zuga

Malaya Bal'zuga is a small village of 240 inhabitants, homogeneously Udmurt (99%), with two priests. One is Nazip Sadriev, who is now 91 and is retired. After sixty years as a priest he kept his wits and was willing to share his knowledge widely for a long time.

Today, while his prestige is still high, he shows signs of old age and tiredness. He is an old man full of dignity, with intelligent, benevolent and penetrating eyes. He is the primary tradition bearer and is unhappy to see his disciples neglecting some of the rules he has attempted to teach them. He often does not hesitate to formulate opinions concerning them that we would not dare to repeat. Nazip *agay* is a real 'old-timer'. He does not recognise much value in other regional practices of prayer ceremonies. Over the river that flows north of Bal'zuga (400 m from the village), there are villages with slightly different ceremonial practices that resisted for the whole of the Soviet period, but for Nazip they are wrong. He would not disapprove of standardisation of ceremonies, but it would have to happen on his terms (FWM 2017¹⁸⁰).

This reminds us that in traditional society, people are mainly concerned with their own community and are not so much bothered with how others do things. We, the scholars, are interested in comparing different ways of conducting a prayer ceremony, but our informants have very limited knowledge of any other tradition. When we presented our film material to different sacrificial priests, we realised that many of them discovered with interest and curiosity what was happening in neighbouring villages.

¹⁸⁰ Conversation with Nazip Sadriev, in Malaya Bal'zuga by RS, ET, LV, NA.



Photo 2: Fridman Kabipyanov, the young sacrificial priest of Malaya Bal'zuga. Malaya Bal'zyuga, 11 June 2013. Photo Eva Toulouze.

Nazip Sadriev has been the living authority in the region on practicing the Udmurt religion. He was even invited to the capital of Udmurtia, Izhevsk, to share his knowledge with his colleagues there. He claims he has trained all the active priests in the region,¹⁸¹ and approves more or less of them. His last choice, in his own village, has been to train a young man as his successor. This *vös'as'* is a modest, now 39-year-old man, Fridman, whose grandfather was a *vös'as'*. He is of course married, and has a seventeen-year old son. Fridman Kabipyanov is a respected member of the rural community: he drinks very

¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, this assertion is probably only partly justified. At least two of the priests we have interviewed did not mention Nazip *agay* as having played any part in their training: one learnt from his father, the other from his grandfather.

moderately and only occasionally, and he does not smoke; he studied music in Izhevsk and is a trained singer and musician who teaches in the music school of the neighbouring village, Novyye Tatyshly. As we mentioned earlier, initially he read his prayer from a text.

For some in the village, it was a mistake to appoint such a young man, and it diminished the gravity of the ceremony, but most were happy to see a young man take this role.

Now, after ten years of experience, he knows the prayer by heart and leads the ceremony with confidence. He works with a small team of experienced and skilled helpers, who help him to organise and conduct the ceremony. Fridman has started to pray in more conspicuous ceremonies and is able to give advice and pass on his expertise to those interested in Eastern Udmurt ceremonial practices. In 2016 he was invited, as a representative of the ‘pagan’ Finno-Ugrians, to conduct a prayer ceremony at the Finno-Ugric Congress in 2016, in Lahti, Finland.

Vil’Gurt

In Udmurt Vil’gurt means ‘new village’ and it is the Udmurt name of a village called in Russian Noviy Tatyshly, ‘New Tatyshly’, as opposed to ‘Upper Tatyshly’, Verkhniye Tatyshly (the centre of the *raion*). It is a large village of around six hundred inhabitants, and its importance is due to its being the headquarters of the cooperative, the biggest local employer. For many decades the cooperative was led by a charismatic leader, Rinat Galiamsin, who, while he was the *kolkhoz* chairman, created the Udmurt national and cultural centre, which is the equivalent of the local national movement. Later he handed

over the post of leader of the enterprise to his son and concentrated on the revival of Udmurt identity in the region, taking advantage of his authority and connections. He had then to retire due to ailing health (FWM 2015¹⁸²) and passed away in 2020. Thus, Vil'gurt has benefited from the strength of its leader, thanks to whom many necessary facilities have been built in the village, including a new prayer house on the local ceremonial ground.¹⁸³

When we started our fieldwork in Vil'gurt, the local press and in interviews the workers of the cultural centre and local teachers all acknowledge only one *vös'as'* in the village, the retired agricultural worker, Salim Shakirov.

He made handmade artefacts for sale and had a prosperous household (FWM 2011¹⁸⁴). Salim was the 'official' priest to whom foreigners are sent, and who performs in ceremonies as ordered by the cooperative.

He told us that nobody in his family had been a *vös'as'* and that he was chosen because he was a 'virtuous' member of the community.¹⁸⁵ Nazip confirmed that he had chosen and trained him and is not entirely satisfied with the result (FWM 2013¹⁸⁶). When asked about his succession, Salim answered without ambiguity that none of the youngsters was interested.

¹⁸² Congress of the Bashkortostan Udmurt November 2015, by ET, LN, RS.

¹⁸³ He also built a Moshe in the village, although there are only some Muslim individuals. He is quite able to exploit the political context.

¹⁸⁴ Meeting with Salim Shakirov, Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, August 2011, ET, MM.

¹⁸⁵ We do not yet have enough insights into the local society to appreciate the degree of tension that might be connected with being or not being virtuous.

¹⁸⁶ Conversation with Nasip Sadriev, Malaya Bal'zyga, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, ET, LN, RS.



Photo 3. Salim Shakirov, Novyye Tatyshly's sacrificial priest. *Mör vös'*, 7 June 2013. Photo Eva Toulouze.

We were a little surprised to discover when we arrived at the *mör vös'* in June 2013 that Salim was not leading the ceremony, even though he was present. The leading priest, Rais *agay*, was a simple cooperative retired worker from the same village; he led the ceremony very confidently, without hesitation, keeping everything under control. He was the one who prayed the introductory *siz'is'kon* at the opening of the ceremony; in the two following prayers he was accompanied by three other priests (there were four priests, four lambs, and four loaves), among whom was Salim; and the closing prayer was performed by him and Salim. We discovered that the journalists present did not know him at all. He seems to avoid all publicity. However, he has authority, though not unshared, in religious matters. His personality fits the function: he is joyous and quick in

his action and inspires confidence. However, it was Salim who acted as a ‘head of the ceremony’ or *vös’ kuz’o*, and organised the material part of the ceremony. In recent years, especially after Salim’s death in 2019, Rais *agay* has acquired a strong reputation of his own.

Nazip also told us that Rais had learnt his job well, and when he watched the video of the ceremony, he approved of many of the decisions he had taken. Nazip complained, however, that Rais had not thanked him for teaching him. The text of Rais’s prayer also differed considerably from Nazip’s own prayer. We decided to interview Rais, who lives alone with his wife, a Tatar, in a household that seemed more modest than Salim’s (FWM 2013¹⁸⁷).



Photo 4: Rais *agay* (Photo Eva Toulouze, June 2013)

¹⁸⁷ Conversation with Rais Rafikov, Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET, LN, RS.

We learnt that Rais's father was a *vös'as'* and that Rais himself had learnt his prayer properly by standing next to him, according to the old tradition of 'stealing' it. Asked about the transmission to younger generations, he answered that he was training his son. During this interview we could understand part of the tension between him and Nazip: while the latter considered himself the teacher who had given Rais the opportunity to learn the job, Rais placed more importance on what he had learnt from his father; he was attached to his own prayer. The old master is more dogmatic than his pupils, who, in performing ceremonies in slightly different ways, also follow local tradition. We also met other sacrificial priests in the field, although we did not spend as much time with them as with those previously mentioned.

The Alga group

What is important to emphasise is that while the Alga group's people are perhaps less charismatic than Nazip Sadriev, and certainly less spectacular, they also kept ceremonies going during the Soviet period with quite a good transmission rate. In the 1970s they had a strong *vös'as'*, Islam Armanshin. We know about him because Hungarian scholars visiting this area recorded him, as well as Udmurt linguists (Vikár, Bereczki 1989). So we have a couple of recordings, in which we may appreciate what his younger grandson Vladik Khazimardanov, now sacrificial priest in Verkhnebaltachevo, meant when he said that his grandfather "sang" the prayers (FWM¹⁸⁸ 2015). Indeed, he has a chanting intonation when praying. Vladik's elder brother Boris is also a sacrificial priest. He

¹⁸⁸ Conversation at the *Bagysh vös'*, Kyzyl Yar road, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, by ET, RS.

started much later, after 2016, and is the sacrificial priest at the village of Staryy Kyzyl-Yar.

The main *vös'as'* in the Alga group of villages is Evgeniy Adullin, who works as the main bookkeeper of the *Rassvet* cooperative, based in Nizhnebaltachevo, where he lives.



Photo 5. Evgeniy Adullin, Great *vös'as'* of the Alga group.
Nizhnebaltachevo village ceremony, 3 June 2016. Photo Eva Toulouze.

So Evgeniy has a solid legacy on which to rely. He was given the title ‘Great’ sacrificial priest (*badzh'ym vös'as'*) and is the main authority in the Alga group. He is the one who in 2013 ordered, on the behalf of the agricultural enterprise, about two dozen frocks for the sacrificial priests, remembering the traditional costume, today mainly disappeared. Evgeniy can also be called to perform outside ordinary ceremonies, for particular events.

For example, in June 2013 he led a ceremony with a small staff of volunteers in the little village of Utar-Elga that celebrated the ‘Day of the Village’, offering a lamb in order to have a sacrifice.

What is still characteristic of the way the Alga group’s ceremonies are led is that Evgeniy is very efficiently supported by the head of the ceremony, the *vös’ kuz’o*, Farkhulla Garifanov. He is an older man who is not a priest, but seems to be a knowledgeable and practical guardian of tradition. He is a former village head and has clear authority. He materially organises all the ceremonies meaning that Evgeniy has only to perform his own role, which is to pray and to give all the signals connected with the ceremonial activities. Farkhulla prepares background elements such as having the grass cut, having the logs ready to make the fire, making sure the the sacrificial animals are in the right place, etc.



Photo 6. Farkhulla (Garifulla) Garifanov, main organiser of the Alga group. Nizhnebaltachevo, 5 June 2016. Photo Eva Toulouze.

He is also in charge of ‘promoting’ sacrificial priests: if one of the appointed *vös’as’* is absent, he decides who will pray in his stead. There is always someone to fulfil the role of a *vös’ kuz’o*, but in many cases it is the sacrificial priest, as in Bal’zyuga. So, *vös’as’* and *vös’ kuz’o* exercise two distinct functions, although sometimes these are concentrated in the same person, but sometimes shared between two villagers as in the Alga group. Farkhulla is a passionate leader who sees that rules are respected. He orders children who attend ceremonies in shorts to go home and change into proper clothes, or sends away women who enter the sacred space (FWM 2016¹⁸⁹). He knows everybody in the Alga group of villages and is in the best position to identify possible future leaders.

¹⁸⁹ Observations at the Nizhnee Baltachevo *gurt vös’*, ET, NA, RS.

Aribash and Vyazovka

In Tatyshly district there are many other sacrificial priests. An interesting case is that of the village of Aribash, which belongs to the Vil'gurt group. The sacrificial priest of the village is Aleksey Garayev, who has interesting memories of his youth that encouraged him to be active in the ceremonial life of the village. For instance, he remembers an interesting small detail vividly: when the porridge was ready, young men rode into the village calling everybody to the ceremony. This detail was reported at the end of the 19th century by Finnish ethnographer Yrjö Wichmann in the village of Bol'shekachakovo (Sadikov, Mäkelä 2008).



Photo 7. Aleksey Garayev, the sacrificial priest of Aribash, at the village ceremony 5 June 2015. Photo Eva Toulouze.

What distinguishes him from other priests is that an important role in his ceremonial activities is played by his wife Liliya. She is from another village, where she was brought up by a quite traditional grandmother who taught her lots of things about her culture. Liliya is an intellectual who writes in the local Udmurt paper and is the author of many short prose texts (FWM 2014¹⁹⁰). Liliya has been of the utmost importance for Aleksey because of her support and practical help. During the village ceremony, she helps him dress, a detail we have not noticed in any other ceremony (FWM62 2015). The Aribash ceremony also presents another peculiarity in that the place's agency seems to dictate the ritual.



Photo 8. Aleksey Garaev, the sacrificial priest of Aribash and his wife Liliya at the village ceremony 5 June 2015. Photo Eva Toulouze.

¹⁹⁰ Meeting with Lilya Garaeva, Aribash, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, ET, LN, LV.

As the Aribash people have chosen to hold their village ceremony in a former *Lud*, many features of the *Lud*¹⁹¹ cult have been taken on, for example the male character of the ceremony (only rams are sacrificed, only men attend) and the use of flat bread *kuar n'an'*. So we do not know whether this custom of helping her husband dress is also connected to the *Lud* cult, although in the other ceremony of this cult that we attended in Votskaya Osh'ya this kind of act was not noticed.

In Tatyshly district there are other sacrificial priests who have their own peculiarities. For example, the priest in the village of Vyazovka, Filarit Shaymardanov, is the only one in the district to pray in the traditional garment that was formerly worn not only by the priests, but also by all the people, both men and women, who attended the ceremony (FWM¹⁹² 2013). This whitish home-spun *sarafan*-type garment is called *shortderem*. Nazip Sadriev and Filaret are the last to have a *shortderem*, along with some elder women.

¹⁹¹ *Lud* is a sacred grove that is usually fenced. *Lud* or *Keremet* is an Udmurt deity, allegedly of Turkic origin. It was an all-male cult.

¹⁹² *Mör vös'* in Novye Tatyshly. Conversation with Filarit, ET.



Photo 9. Filarit Shaymardanov, Vyazovka's sacrificial priest. Vyazovka village ceremony, 7 June 2017. Photo Eva Toulouze.

This garment's fate is not to be transmitted to the next sacrificial priest, but to be used as a deceased priest's mortuary clothing. Therefore, most *shortderems* have disappeared. As the priests were supposed to be dressed in white they used, throughout the Soviet period, an ordinary white household or medical frock. Only at the beginning of the 21st century did sacrificial priests feel the need for something more solemn, more aesthetic, than ordinary white frocks, and started to add different patterns.

Certainly, Tatyshly district is well-known as the centre of the Udmurt revitalisation process, although this does not mean that there is nothing elsewhere. Some of the most authoritative priests among the Eastern Udmurt are to be found in other districts. We shall now take three examples of priests from three different districts. They are all sacrificial priests who have impressed us with their exceptional personality and local peculiarities of ritual practice.

Baltachevo district

In Baltachevo district there are two Udmurt villages, both very active in their religious practice. Although we have met both sacrificial priests, we have not yet been able to attend Kizganbashevo's ceremonies yet. However, we were able to visit Asavka's priest and his ceremonies several times. Let us focus on him. Vladimir Galiyev is among those whom we may call the 'younger' priests, although he is not exceptionally young, being born in 1971. He is a freelance construction worker, who often has to work far from home in order to feed his family of six children.¹⁹³ Of the priests we have met he is certainly the most concerned with the spiritual dimension of his task. He was appointed by the village elders when the previous priest decided to retire. Vladimir is permanently in touch with both of them. Vladimir was surprised and disturbed when he discovered that the prayers were mainly dedicated to asking the gods for benefits, and that there was never an expression of human gratitude.

¹⁹³ We can also add that among his children, his daughter Viktoriya, after a period as a teenager when she was attracted by all that was Tatar or Russian, is now an inspired activist for Udmurt culture.



Photo 10. Vladimir Galiyev, Asavka's sacrificial priest. At his home, 8 June 2016. Photo Eva Toulouze.

He discussed this with the elders, who agreed to his wish to add some parts at the beginning of the prayer he reads thanking the supreme God Inmar for the Sun, the Moon, the trees, the birds, etc.¹⁹⁴ So, in his discreet ways, Vladimir is also an innovator; in addition to which he is a bright, luminous personality (FWM¹⁹⁵ 2016).

Kaltasy district

The Kaltasy district is particularly interesting, for it reveals the failure of research to follow the rituals through time. The village, today called Bol'shekachakovo, known in

¹⁹⁴ We might here identify a Christian influence, which Vladimir is probably not fully aware of.

¹⁹⁵ Conversation with Vladimir Galiev, Asavka, Baltachevo district, by ET, NA, RS.

literature as Badzh'ym Kachak, was visited in 1884 and 1895 by two Finnish researchers, Aksel Heikel and, more important, Yrjö Wichmann, who spent one full month in the village, describing the contemporary religious life of the village, in which there were many deities and many more ceremonies (Toulouze 2020a).

Thus we know much of how the village lived in 1895, although except Wichmann literature tells us nothing. During the 20th century no scholar visited this village, at least no scholar we know of. Of course, the subjects we are interested in here were not acceptable topics for research in the Soviet period. So we know what happened in the village thanks to the remembrances of the inhabitants, collected by Kirsi Mäkelä in 2008 (Mäkelä-Hafeez 2015).



Photo 11. Anatoliy Nasipullin, Bol'shekachakovo sacrificial priest. At the promise of a sacrifice, *siz'is'kon*. Bol'shekachakovo, 20 June 2018. Photo Eva Toulouze.

We thus know that by the 1960s the traditional ceremonies had disappeared. The places of the cult of *lud* were destroyed and the trees cut during the Second World War, although some sacred places remained intact throughout the Soviet period. At the beginning of the 1990s the ceremonies were revived and they now live their normal lives¹⁹⁶. The present priest of the village, Anatoliy Nasipullin, is a retired schoolteacher (FWM68 2018). Although he does not come from a family of priests, he is highly respected in the village. He is deeply interested in traditional Udmurt culture and sings with great pleasure songs he has collected in his village. The Kaltasy people present some differences in the keeping of tradition in comparison with the other Bashkortostan Udmurt: while in other places the ceremonies are done strictly by men, here women are as active as men. This can be disturbing for other priests, for example when they are praying together with Anatoliy's team at the *el'en vös'*. But Anatoliy finds it normal that women are active as his helpers, for the majority of the people who attend the ceremonies are women. He has not yet memorised his prayer and reads it from a handwritten text.

Burayevo district

There are several Udmurt villages in Burayevo district. In one of them, Kissa (Kasiyarovo) the ceremonies were long discontinued because of the death of the priest in

¹⁹⁶ Conversation with Anatoliy Nasipullin, Bol'shekachakovo, Kaltasy district, Bashkortostan, ET, RS. Later, the same year, several meetings at Bol'shekachakovo ceremonies and at *elen vös'* with ET.

the 1980s. The situation was particularly sad because the old priest had carefully prepared his succession, and chosen two younger men to whom he transmitted his knowledge. But they did not take over the task, and the ceremonies were restarted only 15 years later, under pressure from the local population¹⁹⁷.

There is another village in the district which is also a centre of Udmurt religious activity in Bashkortostan. The peculiarity of Altayevo is that it was one of the three locations where the *el'en vös'* ceremony was organised. It was also the reason, allegedly, why it was revitalised. The population remembered that this ceremony took place.



Photo 12. Anatoliy Galikhanov, Altayevo's sacrificial priest. Altayevo, meeting of the *vös' ken'esh*, a gathering of elder men who decide on ceremonial life, 6 June 2016. Photo Eva Toulouze.

¹⁹⁷ Oral information by Ranus Sadikov.

There is another village in the district which is also a centre of Udmurt religious activity in Bashkortostan. The peculiarity of Altayevo is that it was one of the three locations where the *el'en vös'* ceremony was organised. It was also the reason, allegedly, why it was revitalised. The population remembered that this ceremony took place. One of the most authoritative sacrificial priests among the Eastern Udmurt is Anatoliy Galikhanov. He lives in the village, but his brother, Kasim, is an architect and graphic artist who lives in Izhevsk. Kasim has been most active in the Udmurt capital in revitalising there the Udmurt religion, and had even prepared a project for an Udmurt sanctuary in the city – a project that was finally refused by the authorities (FWM¹⁹⁸ 2019). The idea of revitalising *el'en vös'* was most probably a Galikhanov family initiative. Kasim could mobilise the Izhevsk association of Eastern Udmurt and has the support of his brother.

¹⁹⁸ Conversation with Y. Yagupov, Izhevsk, Udmurtia, ET, NA, LV.



In Altayevo the main ceremonies were almost continuously preserved. Anatoliy mentions that they could have been interrupted for one or two years, but he is sure that the interval between two *vös'* was never three years, because after such a break they would have closed the ceremony¹⁹⁹. During the Soviet period, they had to ask for permission to hold the ceremony and, according to Anatoliy's words, the *kolkhoz* always gave the necessary ewe for sacrifice. They never had problems with Communist Party officials. Anatoliy was elected as a *vös'as'* in 2010 at an ordinary village meeting held in spring to discuss all kinds of practical problems. The previous *vös'as'* decided to give

¹⁹⁹ Meaning they would have performed a special ceremony to declare that the *vös'* would no longer be performed. FWM: Conversation in Altayevo, Burayevo district, Bashkortostan, ET, NA, RS.

over the task to a younger man, and he was proposed. During his training by the former priests, Sharifgali *agay* and Salimyan Mardanov, he also addressed Nazip Sadriev, who was quite happy with him, and found him gracious enough to recognise his teaching and to thank him for it (FWM²⁰⁰ 2013). At the beginning he also read his prayer from paper, but acknowledged that reading is not a proper way of praying. The prayer should come from inside because God does not understand words, words are for people, he says. But God understands the metaphors and the soul of the people. Anatoliy was given a prayer by his predecessor. He later developed it himself, and he has continued to produce prayers of his own.



Screenshots 1 and 2. Anatoliy Galikhanov's social media pages, 2 May 2021. Photo Eva Toulouze.

²⁰⁰ Conversation with Nazip Sadriev, Malaya Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, ET, LN, RS.

The last aspect we wish to emphasise concerning Anatoliy Galikhanov is that he has a particular profile among all the *vös'as'*. He has a vocation to be a public person and has invested in the field of social media. He has his own page on the *Vkontakte* social network, where he shares his texts and his ideas and gives recommendations, telling people what is allowed and what is forbidden according to traditional rules. Thus, he also has a certain influence in educating people, for what he posts is certainly followed and accepted as the word of an authority.

The *vös'as'* as a political leader?

If we examine the Eastern Udmurt situation within the regional context and extend our observations to other Finno-Ugric communities in the region, we can observe that traditional religions are often used as a powerful ethnic marker (Luehrmann 2011, 42; Leete & Shabaev 2010, Alybina 2014, 90-91). This is particularly true of the Mari in Mari El. The Mari are the least Christianised of the Volga Finno-Ugric peoples: their religious identity proved most resistant to forced evangelisation, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union the ethnic Mari religion has been powerfully revived (in 2004 19.4 percent of the Mari considered themselves followers of the Mari religion in more or less syncretistic ways – Sharov 2007, 175). The public discourse around it is thoroughly connected with national identity (Alybina 2014, 91). This is not the case among the Udmurt. In Udmurtia there are only a few villages in which the ethnic religion has been preserved without explicit Christian interference (this does not exclude indirect influences from the general environment, while all over the country there are other

manifestations of syncretism in the people's religious practices), which are seen more as a curiosity than as a lighthouse for Udmurt ethnicity.

Although Mari religion has been institutionalised in Mari El,²⁰¹ with publications, new rituals, and a strong hierarchy including sacrificial priests (Alybina 2014, 92, 98-99), in Bashkortostan the political and identity dimension seems to be reduced to the more or less emotional feelings of particular *vös'as'*, and it never appears in public discourse. Even at the Congress of the Udmurt National Cultural Centre in November 2015,²⁰² no mention was made of religious practice during the entire day the Congress lasted, and few priests attended. Their absence shows the almost total disconnection of religious activities and the Udmurt national movement in this area.

The Bashkortostan ceremonies are not accompanied by any public or personal ideological discourse. While analysis clearly shows that they are probably now the only place where communication in Udmurt is guaranteed (because of the rise in mixed marriages, the minority language may no longer be dominant in the family), and thus might be a strong pillar of Udmurt identity, it does not seem to act as such, at least for now. When asked why these ceremonies are important, both sacrificial priests and the lay population simply emphasise the 'natural' link to what the ancestors did: things have to be done, because it is how they have always been done. When asked what happens if one does not attend the ceremonies, answers are hesitant. People look for examples of misfortunes affecting lazy adherents, and usually find them, but this is a reflection of their desire to please the interviewer. This question does not seem relevant: tradition is

²⁰¹ Officially, Mari Traditional Religion.

²⁰² Where the authors attended.

self-justified by its own existence, without the need to give any foundation through rational arguments.

This is a strength but also a weakness that may in the dangerously near future threaten the very existence of this religious practice. It is a strength because it is an intrinsic part of life that is taken for granted. Even where it is the result of revival or of a recent construction, the aim is to put things right and to re-establish order and balance where there was chaos. No additional meanings are added in the process. This does not mean that the revivers do not intend to enhance ethnic awareness. Usually, the impulse for revival comes from the centre: its *primus motor* is the head of the *kolkhoz* – later of the Udmurt cultural centre – Rinat Galliamshin, who has initiated the building of prayer houses, the fencing of the sacred places (a new feature of the tradition), and even some village prayers. He usually asks a respected older man, somebody active in local politics, to fetch an older sacrificial priest or his sons and tell them to officiate again, even after breaks of years or decades. When people are told by influential personalities to organise ceremonies, they are obedient, and traditions have thus been started everywhere. In some places local activists have taken over and devoted themselves to these activities (e.g. the Garayev couple in Aribash). In others the involvement has been more mechanical, but the response from the population is unanimously positive, and the new ceremonies have quickly taken root and are massively attended.

Considering the importance of collective prayer ceremonies for the Eastern Udmurt, as well as the dangers to their identity in today's world, it is surprising that this religious revival movement has not been tied to an explicit ethnic ideology. However, this might be changing. As demonstrated above, the emergence of the 'Udmurt topic' is clearly

visible in the activities and prayers of Anatoliy Galikhanov, who is the priest of Altayevo village and the man behind the revival of *el'en vös'*, although other sacrificial priests have so far been reluctant to stress an ethnic and political dimension in their ceremonial practices. Only the priests of the Alga group have started using some of the Galikhanov's formulas

in their prayers, although they are, at the moment, the only ones.

The lack of an ideological background supporting and accompanying this activity can be a weakness: if the situation becomes critical, there will be no supporting mental framework to maintain it. The language situation, while still very comforting in terms of minority language use and preservation, is already wavering: young Udmurt couples leaving their home area to look for work in other more industrial regions find themselves in the midst of the Russian population and start speaking Russian to their children, even though Udmurt is their mother tongue. They are not supported by an ethnic ideology that will motivate them to raise their children bilingually or multilingually. We therefore have the impression that the situation is aptly comparable to the position of Animism in the face of Christianity or Islam: it is weak, because of the lack of a strong dogma that can withstand pervasive ideologies.

The reluctance to turn Udmurt religion into something more ideological and dogmatic is manifested in the failed attempts to standardise ceremonial practices in the manner of Christianity and Islam. In 2015, there was an attempt to create a coordinating instance of the sacrificial priests of the Eastern Udmurt by the Association of the Eastern Udmurt in Izhevsk. Ultimately, nothing came of the idea because there was permanent tension

between the leadership of the association and the head of the Udmurt national movement in Bashkortostan.

At the same time, or even a little earlier, Udmurt civil servants working in Tatyshly district administration, emerged with the idea that a standardisation was long overdue. Taking as a model the world religions Islam and Christianity, these administration workers launched a plan according to which the Eastern Udmurt all had to pray using the same text. They did not go very far with their project, which clearly did not receive support from the people concerned that the administration was disconnected from the sacrificial priests and did not themselves attend ceremonies. They also received more than critical opinions from the scholars whom they addressed for advice (FWM²⁰³ 2014). At that time the process was stopped. The attempt to standardise ceremonial practises was resumed later, when the Udmurt leader had changed. The new head of the Udmurt movement in Bashkortostan, took over the initiative and called a meeting of the *vös'as'* in January 2019 (FWM²⁰⁴ 2019). The situation seemed to be ripe and a coordinating association was created. But so far it has not attempted to establish any standards for collective prayer ceremonies. The association of sacrificial priests remains, for the time being, just a coordination forum where priests can discuss their concerns and coordinate the dates of their ceremonies.

Conclusion

²⁰³ Conversations with Salim Garifullin in Verkhniye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan with ET, LV, LN and NA.

²⁰⁴ Novye Tatyshly, Tatyshly district, Bashkortostan, ET.

This short overview is an attempt to decipher the present state of the spiritual world of the Bashkortostan Udmurt, who have been more successful than others in Russia in preserving their old values. Their keeping of their ritual traditions is not led, as our examples show, by a desire to reproduce precisely the ancient practices that have disappeared. Even the most conservative of activists, like Nazip, acknowledge that things change and seek in their own practice to ensure the vitality of the whole system and not to reproduce it mechanically. The differences among *vös'as'*, emphasised also by Lintrop (Lintrop 2002, 54), even on the small scale we chose, reveal real tensions and problems as in all human communities, as well as different ways to be *vös'as'* and to set ceremonial practices. We may therefore argue that the system is vibrant and that its diversity is its strength, and the presence of younger men among those chosen suggests there is a future for these forms of worship.

In conclusion, we have examined here a core problem in the practice of religion: the role of the key figure in its ritual, with his abilities and knowledge, and how this role is being transmitted to younger generations. The *vös'as'* is an entirely ordinary member of the village community, who is respected and considered 'virtuous', and who takes upon himself the organisation of the community's ritual life. The transmission of this role is possible because being a *vös'as'* is something that may be learnt, and does not require, at least today, peculiar features or extraordinary knowledge. It is facilitated by the position of the elders in charge of transmission, who have chosen to encourage young people to act as religious leaders. It seems a reasonable adaptation in a wider social context where youth is increasingly challenging old age for prestige in society. However, unlike in

other nearby regions, their role as leaders is merely religious, and currently has no political implications.

The elders responsible for Udmurt religion in Bashkortostan have chosen the most reasonable path to allow their religion to be preserved. Nevertheless, the challenges are not in practice itself, but in its context. The Udmurt religion is thoroughly connected to rural life, while rural life itself is threatened by modern ways, by a set of values that relegate the rural to the bottom of social prestige: today, even in the remote villages that are involved in these community rituals, the younger generation is computer and town-oriented and shares networks and entertainments with youngsters all over the world. Will they remain in the village, or will they return to marry and become members of the community, allowing it to thrive? Moreover, the traditional structure of village life is being shattered. In some parts of the country this collapse took place two decades ago. But here the collective farms were successful at the end of the Soviet era, and have been replaced by cooperatives that reproduce the previous model quite closely. While these cooperatives have been able for some years to adapt to the market economy and have achieved good productivity, this well-being is seriously threatened. What will happen if the cooperative fails? It will be important to follow the viability of rural life if the chances of this unique religious practice's survival are to be assessed.

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Filmography

- Niglas, L. 2019a. *Elen vös: Kaama-taguste udmurtide ühispalvus* [Elen Vös: Joint Prayer Ceremony of the Eastern Udmurts] (46 min) (Ethnographic Film). F-Seitse.
- Niglas, L. 2019b. *Gurt vös: külalpalvus* [Gurt Vös: Village Prayer Ceremony]. (62 min) (Ethnographic Film). F-Seitse.

The Udmurt sacrificial priest Nazip Sadriyev

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The importance of the sacrificial priest in the maintenance and the transmission of Udmurt spiritual tradition has been demonstrated with the previous article. We would like to continue by developing some portraits of today's sacrificial priests. The first we intend to concentrate on the elder of all the sacrificial priests in Bashkortostan. He is not only the elder in age, but also in authority. We already mentioned him a presented sketched a portrait about him in the previous article. In 2016, he was awarded with an Estonian award, called the Life's tree award, for an ordinary person who has efficiently helped maintain Finno-Ugric cultures. Actually, the authors of this article are those who presented and supported his application, for our contacts in the fiels convinced us that it is indeed his stubbornness and his utter conviction that he had to fight for his truth that allowed to maintain full continuity in situats, the likes of which INhave long disappeared in the rest of Europe, and which many neopagans endeavour to reconstruct. Even in

²⁰⁵ This article has been published with the support of projects PUT590 and PUT712. It article has been published in Estonian: Toulouze, Eva; Vallikivi, Laur; Niglas, Liivo; Anisimov, Nikolai (2017). Udmurdi ohvripapp Nazip Sadrijev. Raudalainen, Taisto-Kalevi (Toim.). Soome-ugri sõlmed 2016 (119–125). Tallinn: Fenno-Ugria.

Udmurtia, this continuity is not to be found, and no sacrificial priest has inherited his task directly from his predecessors. Thus, indeed, Nazip Sadriev received this award, in a public ceremony where we were able to give him the award in front of many people. This homage gives us at the same time the opportunity to recall some pages from the lives of many eastern Udmurts.

The udmurt sacrificial ceremonies in Bashkiria are unique, because here they are not a zealous attempt to reconstruct painfully the past, ut a practice in full continuity that has indeed changed across time and is going yet to change. Albeit the Eastern Udmurt live in close neighbourhood with Muslim Tatars and Bashkirs, they do not oppose sharply their religious world with the others'. At the same time this centuries-long neighbourhood with Islam and in a more modest way, with Christianity, has brought in the need to talk about their own beliefs as something peculiar. IN a time when in the world religions the intolerant wings gather more and more visibility, the Udmurt religion presents particularly tolerant features. As Asavka's sacrificial priest said very naturally; "God is one, his worship comes in different forms".

"Uncle" Nazip, in Udmurt Nasip *agay* has been connected with the Udmurt religion for long years. He was a young man when he started to attend ceremonies as a helper. He fulfil several helper positions, which helped him acquire good knowledge and skills in rituals... By following elder sacrificial priests, he discovered more important roles. Until he was asked to act as a sacrificial priest, which happened in 1954. It was a great honour for a 24 years young man. Remembring this rime, Nazip recalled that he was petrifies when he held for the first time porridge in his hands. But when the provious old men generation died, there was no replacement, for many men did not come back from the

war. So Nazip was indeed very young when he took over this prestige role. In his world, the main authorities were these elder men, whom he reminds continuously in conversations. When he was young, they were the ones who gave prestige and meaning to ritual activities. And when we ask why one or another action has to be made in this way, the answer is usually that the elders did so in that time. In fact, he has himself been “an old man” for a long time, and by a coincidence of facts, much earlier than his predecessors.

Whatever the time and the conditions, Nazip performed his sacrificial ceremonies in general as he had learnt according to the elder priest’s teachings, although they slightly were simplified. This simple kolkhoz horsebreeder and firefighter without education had clear opinions. He was less influenced than most of the villagers, and he kept his confidence and his backbone also when the others were frightened. In the small village society, the representatives of power could not be anonymous. They were permanently there, people drank vodka with them and even quarreled. But Nazip did not drink with them: it was not allowed to a sacrificial priest. His stories from the Soviet times reveal that the authorities had an ambiguous attitude towards the indigenous people’s religion. It could be rough. For example, once the kolkhoz’s chairman came to a ceremony and kicked and knocked down the boiling cauldrons. But there were other examples: some touching as the Party secretary who gave money to the men praying at the sacrificial ceremony to ask for rain, and then thanked the men at the kolkhoz office. Although in this story we do not know to what ethnic group the secretary was, we may infer that he probably was not Russian, but more a Tatar or a Bashkir. There were no Udmurt Party secretaries. On the one hand, there live very few Russians in the region and we also

know that from very old times, the local Turkic Moslems have seen with favour the Udmurt's asking for rain. Their long peaceful coexistence with the Udmurt has led towards a situation where the rituals to warrant rain, fertility and good harvest were interpreted as actions on the behalf of the good of the kolkhoz even if it was not in harmony with the Soviet ideology.

We must however acknowledge that also Nazip adapted. He finally understood that it was not possible to go on behaving like these old men when he was young. The conditions had changed, and materialistic, atheistic ideologies were imposed everywhere. The younger generation who happened to attend school received there and in other state institutions a strong communist brainwashing and they did not care as thoroughly for the older traditions. In Malaya Bal'zuga village where lived only Udmurts, Nazip was able to avoid that the people would discard their ancestors' religious practice thanks to his huge authority. Certainly, some small compromises were made. For example, he changed the sacred place: the ceremonies were not anymore held on the top of a hill but behind it on the slope so that the ritual actions would not be visible from the road connecting the villages. In some places of the Vil'gurt group old men prayed still, but their social basis was shrinking, the attendants were diminishing, and in several places the village ceremonies (*gurt vös'*) ceased to take place. At the same time in the same region, on the other shore of the Yug, in the Alga group, the traditions were even stronger. For example, there they performed not only the village ceremonies but also regularly ceremonies encompassing several villages (*Bagysh vös'* and *mör vös'*). There were also other changes in the proceedings, for example with the end of the ternary agricultural rotation system, the rules of the village ceremony changed as well, for there

was no reason anymore to change sacred place every year, as rye was now grown always on the same place.

The Udmurt sacrificial ceremonies are long and are composed from different activities, that require energy, organisation and money. Nazip, lead the Vil'gurt group's ritual life, adapted some of their practices. Firstly, he renounced in the 1980s of one of the less important ceremonies in the cycle, the "three villages ceremony" (*kuin' gurt vös*'), which concerned the villages of Malaya Bal'zuga, Vil'gurt with Maysk and Urazgil'dy. According to Nazip, to hold it had become unreasonably expensive, because each sacrificial ewe had to be bought and it was not easy to get the needed amount of money. Another important restructuration, according to Nazip, was to change the opening of the ritual from the Thursday evening to the Friday morning, which was the main ritual day. In fact, one had to prepare a porridge without meat in the previous evening and follow that the fire would not go out, so that the next day it would be possible to cook on it the sacrificial porridge. About this topic, we may compare with the Alga group, in which until today the *siz'iskon* is performed on the eve of the ritual, at least for the ceremonies encompassing more than one village. There, the fire is kept going by one of the helpers, who throws big chunks of half-dry wood, which burn slowly. Unlike Nazip, those priests have less changed their rituals (for example, for the *siz'iskon*, they boil semolina instead of a cereal mix).

Perhaps the most important change that Nazim induces is connected with transmission of tradition. He chose his successor, a young man from the village, a music teacher, Fridman Khabibyanov. Nazip argues that once people younger than 40 years old could not become sacrificial priests, and they had to be married and to be "proper" people –

clean, not drinking and respected. In Fridman's choice it was important that he was a proper and respected married man. True enough, as we mentioned before, Nazip, who was also married, was himself even younger when he became sacrificial priest, because there was no choice immediately after the war. In his own way, Fridman represents the first generation after the war against religion.

When Nazip started his activity, written culture had not permeated life as it has now. Actually, he himself was not exceptionally skilled in written culture, he had not even finished the second class. Young Fridman, at the very beginning, recited his prayer from paper and Nazip accepted it. He is aware that it is not possible anymore to learn from hearing, as it was before, "stealing" a prayer. Most of today's sacrificial priests, those we have seen praying, act in this way. But throughout the years, Fridman has become freer and freer, until, now; he knows his texts, and use the paper only to give him confidence. In December 2016 he did not use paper at all and he recited his prayer. Also Anatoliy Galikhanov, the authoritative Altayevo sacrificial priest, commented once that he also used at the beginning printed prayer texts. It seems thus that the penetration of written culture has found its natural place in the Bashkortostan Udmurt rituals. We have now systematically filmed in the local ceremonies and left our material at the local's which may give them the opportunity, through film to learn prayers and thus diversify the way of learning and the folklore process.

Aged 86 when this article was written, this strong old man has not lost his sharpness. He is pretty critical towards today's sacrificial priests. He is aware of his role and required acknowledgement from the younger, as the most experienced sacrificial priest. At the same time, in the neighbouring regions (for example in the Alga group) there are

other tradition-bearer and thus Nazip was not the only one who kept tradition alive. He has stepped in the traces of his teachers, and he expects the same respectful attitude that he had towards them. He has expectations towards the younger men, and he calls their behaviour “ungratefulness”. Thus, he complains about Vil’gurt sacrificial priest Rais, who “did not even thank him”. But if we look at the situation from the point of view of Rais, who talked to us about his life, it is a man, almost 70 years old, who has learned his prayer from his father who was a sacrificial priest, and “stole” it properly. He feels himself equal to Nazip, a colleague, not a disciple, although he has also learnt from him. But Nazip needs attention and this is fully understandable, for he did much so that people from different generations would today consider sacrificial ceremonies as fundamental.

Let us not forget that Nazip is an ordinary man in an ordinary village. As in all villages, not necessarily all think well of him. Gossip, which plays an important role in the village fabric, *Kuulujutud*, *mis on oluline osa ka udmurdi küla sotsiaalses lõimes*, suggest that Nazip had not always been fully correct in money dealings. For one of his obligations as a sacrificial priest is to deal with the money he collects. We choose to mention this piece of gossip, to show that the ordinary petty jealousies and gossips may touch also such a character, like everybody. Nevertheless, “uncle” Nazip is undoubtedly an extraordinary character. First because of his straightforwardness thanks to which he was able to resist, even if resistance did not seem envisageable to others. He was also extraordinary with his stubbornness that allowed him to transmit successfully Udmurt traditions in a domain that not all do see as central today. He may also be seen as rare example of intelligence

that allowed him to adapt to changing circumstances and to keep alive the tradition of asking the deity of heaven for well-being and luck.



Nazip in front of the stable. Year unknown. Photo from Nazip Sadriyev's personal archive.



Nazip Sadriyev with the members of his family. Year unknown. Photo from Nazip Sadriyev's personal archive.



Nazip Sadriyev with his wife looking at old photos. Photo Eva Toulouze, 04.06.2016.



Nazip cooking the sacrificial porridge Year unknown. Photo from Nazip Sadriyev's personal archive.



Nazip at his village ceremony. Photo Laur Vallikivi, 06.06.2014.

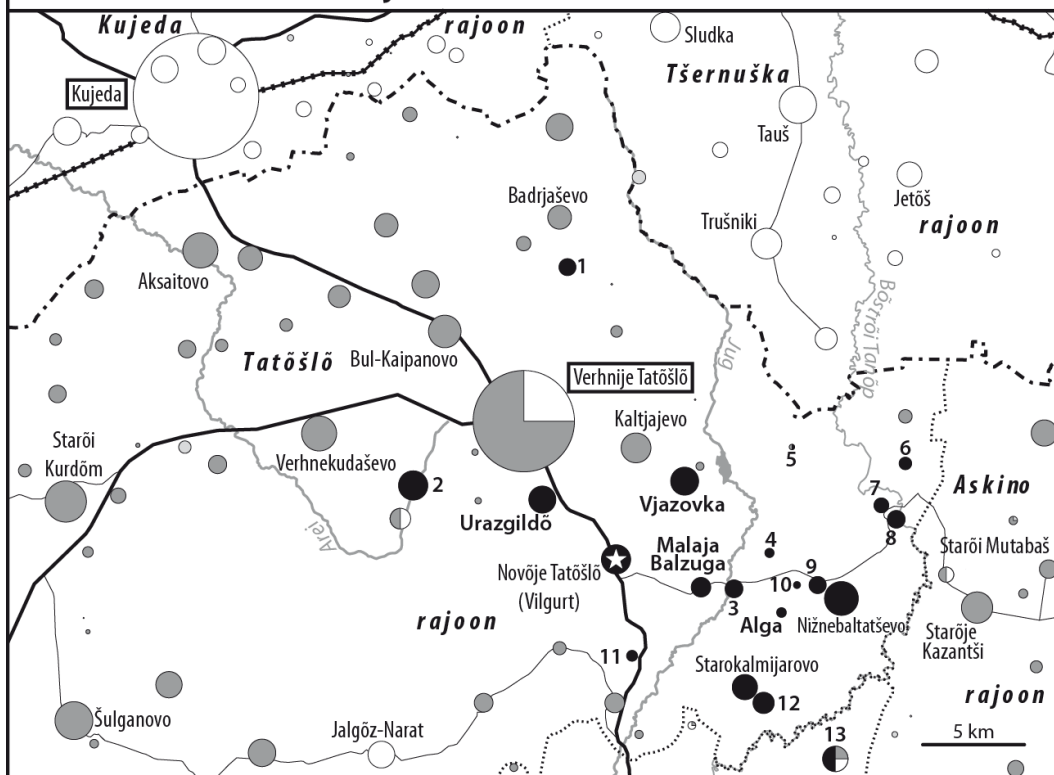


Nazip at his village ceremony with his successor, young sacrificial priest Fridman. Photo Laur Vallikivi, 06.06.2014.



Nazip kneeling at his village ceremony. Photo Laur Vallikivi, 06.06.2014.

Tatõšlõ rajooni udmurdid, Baškortostan



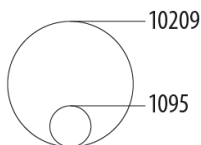
1. Juda 2. Aribaš 3. Biginejevo 4. Utar-Jelga 5. Tanõp-Tšišma 6. Tanõpovka 7. Ivanovka 8. Starõi Kõzõl-Jar 9. Verhnebaltatševo 10. Dubovka 11. Maisk 12. Petropavlovka 13. Asavka



- Föderatsiooni subjekti piir
- Ufa** Föderatsiooni subjekti pealinn
- rajooni piir
- Kujeda** rajooni keskus
- Tauš külanõukogu keskus
- Alga udmurdi küla

- maantee
- kohalik tee
- ++++ raudtee

Rahvaarv (2010)



★ Baškortostani udmurtide rahva- ja kultuurikeskus

Rahvuslik koosseis

[Kui ühe rahvuse osakaal on suurem kui 80%, pole teisi märgitud]

baškiirid [enamus antud ala "baškiiridest" peab end tegelikult tatarlasteks]

● udmurdid

○ muu rahvus [venelased, tatarid, marid; või udmurdid, kui nende osakaal on väiksem kui 50%]

THE PRAYERS

The prayers of the Eastern Udmurt (*kuris'kon*): historiography, traditional forms, present state²⁰⁶.

Ranus Sadikov

Eva Toulouze

Introduction

The Udmurt folk prayers, the *kuris'kon*, are verbal addresses to the deities, uttered during ritual activities in order to achieve some profane aims. The word *kuris'kon* ‘prayer’ – comes from the word *kuron* ‘demand, request, petition’. It has also a synonym, the word *vös'kyl* ‘prayer, from *vös* ‘ceremony, sacrifice’ and *kyl* ‘word’. We find also other terms, like *dzhabaris'kon* – from the dialectal *yalbaryny* ‘implore’ (loanword from Tatar: tat. *yalbary* ‘implore’, ‘plea’). The Udmurt *kuris'kon* are typologically close to the Mari prayers *kumaltysh mut* [Maris 2013, 294], to the Mordvin *oznomat* (Erz.) and *ozondomat* (Moksh.) [Mokshin 1998, 122] and the Chuvash *kělě* [Salmin 2003, 85–95]. In spite of Evangelisation, the Orthodox Udmurts, with some exceptions, continued to perform many older rituals. They have formed a “pagan”-christian syncretic religious and ritual complex [Nikitina 1993, 151–153]. As

²⁰⁶ This article has been published in French and translated in English by Eva Toulouze. Sadikov, Ranus; Toulouze, Eva. (2022). Les prières dites *kuris'kon* chez les Oudmourtes orientaux. Histoire de leur étude, leurs formes traditionnelles et leur pratique contemporaine. *Études finno-ougriennes*, 51-52-53, 67–96.

traditional rituals of the Udmurt “folk” religion answered best the needs of the peasants, the rural community was in charge of controlling rigorously that they were duly performed, and therefore the *kuris'kon* went on widely living. This is confirmed by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the notation of these texts at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries were achieved by Christianised Udmurts²⁰⁷. In the Udmurt culture, they continued to play their original role until the 1930s, when collectivisation of agriculture destroyed the rural communities – the environment in which the agrarian religious rituals and customs lived and were transmitted.

By the Eastern Udmurt, living now in Bashkortostan and in the krai of Perm', who managed to avoid the forces Christianisation, the rituals of the traditional religion have been preserved until today [Садиков 2011b, 5], and this is also true of the traditional prayers, that not only are preserved as sacred texts, but continue to develop, to modernise, and to reflect the modern realities of the Udmurt's life [Sadikov 2011a, 132].

Historiography

In the modern Udmurt studies, the *kuris'kon* have been in some way studied from the folkloristic and ethnographic [Vladykin 1994, 290–312; Sadikov 2011a], from the poetic and artistic [Aytuganova 1986] and from the musicological [Nasibullin, Khrushcheva 1986; Khrushcheva 2001, 21–37] points of view. Having analysed the Udmurt prayers, V.E. Vladykin revealed that they have a strict canonic construction and are formed of three parts: 1) an address to the all hierarchy of deities, who influence

²⁰⁷ Unfortunately, the non-baptised Udmurts of the Ufa and Perm' governorates, with a few exceptions, remained in that period outside the field of attention of the researchers.

man's life, his social and natural environment, 2) the main part, including very diverse requests to the deities, 3) a grateful address to the deities, counting on the future positive response to the desires of the ones how ask. Also, ever prayer contains in its conclusion an apology: the one who prays ask the deities to understand if he omits or mixes up the order of the key words. As Vladykin observes, the *kuris'kon* allowed to reflect all the hopes and wished of the Udmurt peasant, and his representation of the ideal system of the world. They also conserved until today some archaic words and expressions of the Udmurt language [Vladykin 1994, 296–298].

According to L.D. Aytuganova, formally the Udmurty *kuris'kon* belong to recitative poetry, which is the most ancient form of poetic text organisation. The recitative performance of the *kuris'kon* is close to singing and is a transition form from speech to singing [Aytuganova 1986, 43, 51]. The particular rhythmic organisation of these texts, which encompass a significant amount of words with two components, “the expressive shade of complicated words serves as an ornament in the intonation flow of the *kuris'kon*” and this peculiarity is, apparently, the result of the endeavour to achieve full emotionality in addressing the deities. The rhythm emerges also with the repetition of similar phtrases and syntactical constructions” [Aytuganova 1992, 27–28].

M.G. Khrushcheva achieved a deep musicological analysis of the *kuris'kon*. She observes that these prayers are uttered loudly in a recitative, scanded form: “the *kuris'kon*'s recitation is a transitional stage from speech to a real melodic intonation” [Khrushcheva 2001, 36]. The rhythmic form of the prayers is built aaccording to a scheme where verbal formulas alter the sacrificial priest's improvisations. They are subdivided into sections bounded by particular forms and exclamations “amen”, while

the sections are divided into stanzas. The poetic structure of these motifs is based on the repetition of verbal formulas, the use of double words, of epithets and metaphores. The musicologist writes that “the artistic gift of the vös’as’ [the sacrificial priest who utters the prayer N.A.] was material by improvisation”. The person chosen to be a sacrificial priest, in addition to other merits, was supposed to master the orator’s art, therefore this form relied mostly on the priest’s creativity [Khrushcheva 2001, 36].

Also, according to the folklorist T. G. Vladykina, the ritual incantations, *kuris’kon/vös’kyl* achieve masterly perfection uttered by the sacrificial priests [Vladykina, 1998]. The musicologist I.M. Nurieva comments that the modern *kuris’kon* “have a particular intonation of psalmody singing while the text is uttered quite rapidly” [Nurieva 2015, 13].

In R. Sadikov’s article, the author achieves a chronological and historical analysis of the *kuris’kon*, showing that with the change in the way of life and economic activity these magic texts are also changed. This is particularly clear in the prayers recorded in the Soviet times [Sadikov 2011a, 132]. Here, we attempt to generalise the data we have about historiography and the history of publication of the *kuris’kon* as well as the study of their peculiarities at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, in the Soviet period and the contemporary times by the Eastern Udmurt. As we have observed, among them they are still functioning while in the other ethnolocal Udmurt groups the traditional prayers are practically lost.

History of collection and publication

The first fragment sample of Udmurt prayer was recorded in the 18th century by Russian traveller N.P. Rychkov [Rychkov 1770, 158]. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century a significant corpus of Udmurt traditional prayers had been collected. Records of these folklore texts in the original language and in Russian translation (sometimes only in Russian) have been achieved and published by B. Gavrilov [Gavrilov 1880], G. Vereshchagin [Vereshchagin, 1886; 1889], N. Pervukhin [Pervukhin, 1888], J. Vasilyev [Vasilyev 1906] and others. Precious samples of traditional prayers have been recorded in latin alphabet and published with translations in Finnish, Hungarian and German by T. Aminoff [Aminoff 1886], Bernát Munkácsi [Munkácsi 1887; Volksbräuche 1952] and Y. Wichmann [Wichmann 1893, 1901]. Practically all these samples had been collected among the baptised Udmurts of the Vyatka and Kazan governorates. The 35 *kuris'kon* recorded by Bernát Munkácsi and the 64 analogous texts recorded by Yrjö Wichmann, noted in an extraordinary precise latin phonetic transcription are among the most precious in the Udmurt folklore [Kel'makov 2011, 199, 212].

In the 1920s, the notation and publication of *kuris'kon* was pursued by local researchers: S.T. Perevoshchikov [Perevoshchikov 1926], S. Zhuykov [Zhuykov 1927] and others. In the following years, it became impossible to investigate religious traditions, therefore the following records, on magnet tapes, were achieved only in the 1970s by linguists R.Sh. Nasibullin and V.K. Kel'makov in the Bashkir ASSR, and published by M.G. Khrushcheva [Nasibullin, Khrushcheva 1986; Khrushcheva 2001, 113–138], according to whom these records became a “kind of sensation” in Udmurt folkloristics [Khrushcheva 2001, 26]. In the 1990s and 2000s many records appeared,

made by journalists and local historians (and published in papers and journals). A significant part of these texts has been recorded by the Eastern Udmurts. Unfortunately up to now, there is no academic publication of a full corpus of Udmurt traditional prayers. In 2010, V.E. Vladykin and S.N. Vinogradov have published a vulgarisation collection of *kuris'kon*, with many texts belonging to this folklore genre [Udmurt oskon 2010].

History of collection and publication by the Eastern Udmurt

The first fragment of *kuris'kon* of the Eastern Udmurt (a request to the Sun goddess *Shundy Mummy*) was recorded by a participant of the academic expedition of N.P. Rychkov in 1770, when he visited the Votyak villages of the River Bystryy Tanyp in the Ufa province of the Orenburg governorate, more precisely by the village called Biksyä (today Bikzyanovo in the Burayevo district of Bashkortostan Republic). The Udmurt text was recorded in a ritual situation: it was uttered during a “general feast” dedicated to the Sun goddess, a ceremony organised with wheat bread and oat porridge on the day of “holy Easter”. According to the author, “having chosen on the field or in the forest a clean place, everybody gathers at dawn, both men and women; the elder of their company takes into his hands a bread and a bowl full of porridge: the all fall on their knees, and wathing at the sun utter: Shundu mumo, burmata inviy burkar’ burmata; which means Mother Sun, save our children from diseases. While uttering this *prayer* [*italics ours – auth.*] they bend with their faces to the earth, and afterwards, straightening, they all eat together the sacrificial food” [Rychkov 1770, 158]. Thus, we have here the first description of an Udmurt ceremony during which prayers, *kuris'kon* –

are uttered. The text of the prayer, as literated into contemporary Udmurt²⁰⁸, means: “Mother Sun, heal [us], do not kill, be good, heal” [Pozdeyev 1976, 117].

The academic notation of the texts of Eastern Udmurt *kuris'kon* have been made at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. In 1885 the Hungarian linguist Bernát Munkácsi recorded in Mozhga, Birs'k uyezd, Uga governorate from the old man Apsyvyr the beginning of a prayer uttered by a head of household. His text in latin transcription and translation into Hungarian has been published in Budapest in 1897 [Munkácsi 1887, 168]. If the first time he met “pagan” Udmurts the Hungarian scholar did not succeed in investigating them and collect material²⁰⁹, during WWI he was able to collect from Udmurt prisoners of war from the Ufa and Perm' governorates kept in Austro-Hungarian camps, rich folklore material, among which three *kuris'kon* [Sadikov, Minniyakhmetova 2012, 52, Egorov, Zagrebin 2018, 70–73]. But regrettably, Munkácsi was not able before his death to publish his collection: the texts with the latin transcription and translation into German were published thanks to his disciple David Fokos-Fuchs only in 1952 in Helsinki [Volksbräuche 1952]. The prayer texts²¹⁰ [Volksbräuche 1952, 110–114] he collected are excellent samples of oral folklore tradition, recorded from skillful performers. They all prayers heads of the household performed in the weekly during the family ceremony in the courtyard with the very first pancakes baked in the morning of the sacred day, i.e. Friday.

²⁰⁸ In contemporaru Udmurt, Rychkov's prayer may be literated *Шунды мумы, бурмыты, эн ви, бур кар, бурмыты*.

²⁰⁹ For more details, see: Munkácsi 1892, 105; Sadikov, Minniyakhmetova 2012, 52.

²¹⁰ *Vös'kyl* 'prayer', *arnya nunal dzh'abarlis'kon* 'Friday prayer' from Sabyrzyan Mukhayarov, from Staryy Varyazh, *arnya nunal vös'as'kon* 'Friday prayer' from Mardymshi Muradshin, from Urazgil'dy and Akhmadshi Dzhangusov from Novyj Kalmiyar Birs'k uyezd Ufa governorate.

Small fragments of the prayers but her Udmurts of the Birska and Osa uyezds, respectively from the Ufa and the Perm' governorates, were recorded by the Finnish researcher Yrjö Wichmann (1894) [Wichmann 1954, 40–41] and Uno Holmberg (1911) [Sadikov, Hafeez 2010, 38–40] during their fieldwork. They are fragments of addresses to the deity *Lud* and the kin deities *voshshud*.

In 1926, the Udmurt linguist S Zhuykov recorded in Bol'shoy Gondyr (Sarapulskiy okrug, Ural oblast'), from Gil'miyar Gil'mitdinov, two *kuris'kon*, later published in the journal *Ken'esh* in 1927 [Zhuykov 1927, 71–72].

The following records, for well-known ideological reasons, were achieved only in the 1970s by Udmurt linguists Rif Nasibullin, Valej Kel'makov and Mikhail Atamanov. We must observe that the first two researchers recorded the *kuris'kon* on magnetic tapes, which allowed for the first time specialists of different disciplines to study them. As study of religious texts was not approved of, for a long time these records were not included in scientific circulation. One of them, recorded by R. Nasibullin (1970, Andreyevka, Yanaul district of the Bashkir ASSR, from Minsharap Faridonov born 1893) was published with musical notation in 1986 [Nasibullin, Khrushcheva 1986, 233–239]. The second one recorded by the same researcher (1970, Nyanyady Yanaul district of the Bashkir ASSR from Sharitdin Khisamutdinov born 1895), was also noted, but published only in 2001 [Khrushcheva 2001, 113–121]. They are prayers uttered by sacrificial priests in village ceremonies.

Valej Kel'makov's text, recorded in 1971 from the sacrificial priest Islamshi Armanshin from Nizhniy Baltach in the Tat'yshly district of BASSR, is the prayer he uttered in a ritual in the sacred building *kuala* of the clan *Dzh'umya*, is at this day not yet

transcribed either published. The magnetic tape is stored in the phonogram archive of the Udmurt research Institute²¹¹ and a digitalised version has been included in an almanac dedicated to the Eastern Udmurt [Zakamskie 2011] and published on the Internet [Summer ceremony]. A prayer for the *Bydzh'ynnal* (Great Day) and an ordinary *kuris'kon* were recorded by Mikhail Atamanov in 1971 in Kalmiyar, Kuyed district Perm' oblast' from two villagers, the sacrificial priest Zidniyar Suyushev and Mitrey Kamidullin, and his manuscript is stored in the Scientific archive of the same Udmurt Institute [Atamanov 1971, 33–34, 43].

Some excellent texts of *kuris'kon* were published in the 1990. Among them, the records by L. Mukayeva (from Nizhnebaltachevo Tatyshly district RB) [Mukayeva 1992] And A. Grebina (Altayevo, Burayevo district RB) [Grebina 1994]. One of the first videorecords of a sacrificial ceremony was achieved in 1998²¹². The camera captured the prayers by Vyazovka (Tatyshly district, RB) Kabib'yan Tukhtakiev, born 1931. This videomaterial was published on the Internet [Summer ceremony].

The Bashkortostan Udmurt paper, *Oshmes*, has paid serious attention to *kuris'kon* publication, they were published in several issues. These Udmurt prayers were written by specialists, researchers, local historians, journalists and often presented by sacrificial priests themselves [Udmurt vös'kyl 2000; Baydullina 2002; Vös'kyl'yos 2002; Yalalov 2003; Shakirov 2009]. Among them, the most interesting are the prayers recorded from the sacrificial priests from Bal'zyuga, Nazip Sadriev, and from Novye Tatyshly, Salim

²¹¹ УДИИЯЛ УДМФИЦ УрО РАН

²¹² The videorecording was made by Igor' Demin, a miner, driver of an excavator on the section "Mezhdurechenskiy" in the Kemerovo oblast', who had come in summer to Vyazovka (Tatyshly district of RB) visiting his wife's family.

Shakirov, which reveal that until today they have kept their canonic aspect. Qualitatively, they have nothing to envy the older records from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Many samples of Udmurt traditional prayers gathered during fieldwork have been published by ethnographers Tatiana Minniyakhmetova [Minniakhmetova 2000; 2003] and Ranus Sadikov [Sadikov 2011a; 2011b]. A great number of contemporary prayer texts has been recorded on video during fieldwork by researchers of Tartu University along with the authors of this article, in their work about the religious tradition of the Eastern Udmurt in 2013 – 2017 (cameramen Liivo Niglas, Ranus Sadikov, Nikolai Anisimov, Laur Vallikivi, Eva Toulouze). The classical type of *kuris'kon* is represented by the records from Novye Tatyshky sacrificial priest Rais Rafikov. The corpus gathered by several generations of researchers allow to follow evolution, to observe the development of canonic samples from the 19th century up to the second decade of the 21st century, including those uttered in the Soviet period and those widespread today.

The performer

The folk prayers *kuris'kon* are one of the main elements of the traditional religious system of the Eastern Udmurt. Through them, they express their requests to the deities and spirits. They are uttered both by individuals, as by head of households, by clan and community sacrificial priests, and they transmit the requests and the wishes of people, families, clans, rural communities to the Supreme god *Inmar*, his helper *Kylchin*, the deity of the earth *My-Kylchin*, the spirit of the sacred grove *Lud*, the clan deities *voshshud* etc. Naturally, depending on who asks and who is asked, the content of the

kuris'kon may vary. They are recited in sacrificial ceremonies (*vös'as'kon*) or in ordinary ceremonies without blood sacrifices (*kuris'kon*). They vary from simple exclamations, individually uttered, to short forms when prayers are said by heads of households, up to long recitatives by sacrificial priests, that may last up to half an hour or more.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Eastern Udmurt's lives were permeated by all possible sacrifices and ceremonies, and each of them was accompanied by prayers. The common ceremonies of the agrarian cycle (village and intervillage ceremonies) were led by elective sacrificial priests, the *vös'as' / kuris'kis'*. The first may be translated as “sacrificator”, the second as “prayer utterer”. Their duty was to utter the prayers and to lead the ritual process. The sacrificial priests were elected at the rural assembly and the candidates were due to fulfil some conditions: they had to be married, respected in society, they had to be over 40, acquainted with the ritual proceedings and knowing the prayers. Usually they fulfilled their tasks until their death, after which a new priest was elected. They performed the sacrifices to Inmar and other high deities. The cult of *Lud* – the spirit of the clan sacred grove *keremet* under the leadership of the *Lud ut'is'* ‘the warden of *Lud*’: they led private or clan propitiatory sacrifices. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries the cult of *Keremet* in general, lose its clan character and acquires general rural features. The cult of the clan deities was led by *kuala ut'is'* ‘the warden of the *kuala*’, i.e.. the sanctuary of the clan, where clan ceremonies and sacrifices were held. In the two last cases the transmission of the task was hereditary [Sadikov 2008, 57, 75, 190]. In the family ceremonies the master was the head of the household, the elder man in the family. “This function lasted as long as the

master's life, the condition being (along with being the head of the family and the conservation of physical and mental abilities) the existence of a living wife, as the foundation of his participation in the primary and basic social relation, the conjugal one" [Napol'skikh 2015, 414]. The head of households performed the Friday ceremony, the ceremonies and sacrifices in case of family celebrations (birth, marriage, moving house etc.), as well as the rituals in the family *kuala*, whose character was defined by the calendar. In the Soviet years, when the heads of households lost their religious skills, the ceremonies in honour of family celebrations were led by the village sacrificial priest.

Among the Eastern Udmurt, there was a peculiar understanding of the *kuris'kon*. People were convinced that the text was not supposed to be simply learned, had to be "stolen" to the elder sacrificial priests, i.e. one had to learn them during the ceremonies, by listening repeatedly to the words²¹³: "One must not learn a prayer, one must steal it. In order to train them, [the sacrificial priests] took along a small child. Through listening, gradually, he learned the text. One must not just learn it". Thus, there was a particular method of transmission of the sacred text. Any other way of getting it lacked magic force. Also the *kuris'kon* were transmitted from mouth to mouth to the following generations. The same method was used to transmit other magic texts. For example, if a person had learned any incantation or verbal formulas, as well as the accompanying ritual, from the elder, who knew

²¹³ *Vös' kylez dyshetskono övöl, nushkano gyne. Soe dyshetyny pich'l nunyez vöazy bas'to. So kall'en pel'az ponyşq dyshe. Ogshory dyshetskyyny ug dzh'ara*" RS's fieldwork, 2006; Kaltasy district, RB; Bolshoy Kachak. Urakbayeva; G.U., born 1932:

all them selves and practiced it, it was said that “I speak words stolen from the elder”²¹⁴. This sentence, *per se*, strengthened the sacred quality of the uttered incantation.

The *kuris'kon* are uttered standing, facing south, holding in his hands bread of a bowl with other sacrificial offerings (meat with broth, porridge, coins), dressed in white, necessarily with a headgear and girded with a towel. In case there is no special ritual garb, the sacrificial priests wear a blazer and gird themselves. The Udmurts of the Tatyshly district of RB utter some prayers kneeling and bare-headed, especially the grateful prayer about sacrificial coins. (dzh'uges'). In Asavka (Baltachevo district) all the prayers are said kneeling.

The *kuris'kon* in traditional culture

As said, the *kuris'kon* express the main requests and wished of the people praying, and they reveal the axiology of the Udmurt peasant, his ain life values. In the late 19th and the early 20th century; the Udmurt were an agricultural population, therefore in their prayers the main requests concern success and luck in peasant work. The Birska and Osa uyezds Udmurt's economy relied on farming and animal breeding. In their requests the Udmurt peasants express the wish to have a good wheat harvest and an abundant reproduction of livestock, as these were the conditions of the welfare of his family.

As the analysis of the prayer text shows, the priority in it is success in agricultural activities. The Udmurt ask for divine help at each stage of this hard work with unpredictable results: “When we go our plowing give lightness to [our] shoulders”, “ous sown and

²¹⁴ *Peres'yosles' lushkasa kel'tem kyl'yosty veras'ko*. RS's fieldwork, 2016. Baltachevo district; RB; Asavka. Galieva Z.V., born 1974.

widespread cereals grow them with thirty straws, with silver grains”, “When I reap with a sickle, standing on my allotment, give me health”, “When we tie the sheaves, give us the happiness of going, putting sheaf by sheaf”, “When we go stooking, give us the happiness of going, putting mop by mop”, “When we bring to the threshing area, give us the happiness to go on a couple of harnessed horses”, “Give us the happiness to live having old ricks on the top of which grow willows, orch, to live with twelve ricks”, “When we must bring the grinded cereals to the cage, give us the happiness to live with cages full of cereals”²¹⁵ [Sadikov 2011a, 115–116] etc. The penultimate stanza shows that the Udmurt, like other agrarian communities, the measure of wealth was the number of ricks with not grinded cereals. The more, the richest was considered the owner. They even asked: “Allow all my sown and widespread cereals to mature like strawberries”, “Protect yourself from hard rains, from winds and fires”, “When we go plowing and sowing, make healthy those with mane and tail”, meaning the working horses. In his prayers the Udmurt asks also for contribution of the deities to animal breeding (*pudo vordon*): “Give us the happiness to live with bread, full of livestock, with a milking cow, with sheeps and goats for fleecing”, “Make yourself my milking cow milky and buttery, my sheep and goat for fleecing mossy and hairy” [Sadikov 2011a, 115–116].

Along with economic requests the *kuris’kon* expressed the wish to live in wealth (“Give us the happiness to live with chest full of wealth, to walk with pockets full of wealth”) and health (“Give us the happiness to live in health, sacrificing”), they prayed to be protected from enemies and diseases (“Protect us from the foe who says “I’ll eat you”,

²¹⁵ Here and later, the examples are translations of excerpts of the prayer recorded by B. Munkácsi from the prisoners of war Mardymshi Muradshin and Akhmadshi Szhandusov from the Birsk uyezd of the Ufa governorate [Volksbräuche 1952, 111–114].

protect us from the foe who says “I’ll take you”, protect us from infectious and contagious diseases”) etc. Some phrases are indicators of their times: for example, when people addresses God for help to pay taxes to the great Tsar: “Then the time comes to pay taxes to the Great Tsar, help us yourself” [Sadikov 2011a, 117].

The texts from the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries, according to their titles and their contents, were recorded from heads of households, who performed them in their yards each Friday. This seems to show how widely they were spread in the Udmurt society at the time, for from their correct and timely performance depended the welfare of each family. Therefore, each diligent farmer, probably, endeavoured to recite at the right time his prayer in order to be listened to by the gods and that they allowed him to be successful in his work.

In the Soviet times

The traditional Udmurt way of life was destroyed in the 1930s. The kolkhozes replaced the individual farms. These fundamental transformations could not avoid to be reflected on the *kuris’kon*. The head of the household, who had no property anymore, had no need to organise ceremonies and to ask for a rich harvest. Under the ideological pressure of the atheist state the very environment in which the *kuris’kon* were used was destroyed: gradually performing religious ceremonies ceased to be a priority for most of the population. Moreover, the idea spread in the common awareness that this was a sign of backwardness and it was even possible to be punished for it. The *kuris’kon* now only survived among the sacrificial priests in those villages where collective sacrifices were still performed. Gradually also the tradition of transmitting texts from mouth to mouth degraded for young people did

not attend the rituals as well. And among the ordinary people with time they also were forgotten.

The social and economic changes were also reflected in the *kuris'kon* of the Soviet times. If at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries the Udmurts asked in the prayers Inmar and Kylchin to give a rich cereal harvest, in order to bring it back to the granary in order to feed their families, and to pay taxes to the Great Tsar, in the new texts their aim was to reap successfully a rich harvest in the kolkhoze bins and give some of it to the state. “these cereals give us to harvest them well and to have it in the barn and to give it to the state”²¹⁶ [Sadikov 2011a, 130]. If earlier they asked for health and fertility to the animals in one’s yard, now they prayed for the health of the kolkhoze livestock: “Let also be healthy the kolkhoze livestock. And let the animals to the people and in the barns be healthy. Let people be able to prepare them fodder”²¹⁷ [Sadikov 2011a, 126, 128]. Thus, the *kuris'kon* reflect the everyday life and professional activities of the Udmurts in the kolkhozes. It is clear from the context of the prayers that the ones who address the gods are old people. They ask for health for the young - (their children), who work selflessly in the kolkhoze fields. This shows explicitly the degradation of tradition: the young people do not pray any more; they do not attend the rituals and do not follow the customs of their ancestors. There is a reason why in a prayer в одной people ask that “they would listen to what the elder say”.

The texts themselves have undergone transformation. Although they preserved their composition in three parts (address to the deities, requests and gratitude), they are very different from the classical *kuris'kon* from the point of view of their general and lexical

²¹⁶ Ta dzh'u n'an'ez umoj oktyisa-kaltysa ambare pyrtyny tilas'kom i gosudarstvolu no tyris'kon syotyny.

²¹⁷ Tazamed luozы oz'y ik kolkhoz pudoyosmy no. Oz'y ik kalyklen no gid'yosy taza med luozы. Soyosly pudi s'iyon das'any med bugatozy.

contents. First, they are improvisations by the sacrificial priests, and conserved only a small part of the canonic verbal formulas. Second, the lexical content has undergone a great transformation. Old expressions and words, among them the double words, which permeated all the fabric of the old *kuris'kon* have disappeared. Everyday life words emerge and new words, loan words that reflect the new realities of life: car, kolkhoze, army, serve, state, machanisator, combine, etc. Third, many prayers lost their former expressivity, poetic contents and the characteristic rhythm of older texts [Sadikov 2011a, 132].

The *kuris'kon* today

In the postsoviet times, an active revitalisation process of collective ceremonies and sacrifices started among the Eastern Udmurt. This led to a wave of interest towards prayers. Fortunately, in rhz 1990, when this movement started, the living tradition of performing *kuris'kon* still existed. But at that time there were only rare sacrificial priests mastering the art of reciting prayers. Let us mention here Minnigali Ziyangarov, born 1920 from Asavka (Baltachevo district), Habib'yan Tuktakiev, born 1931 (from Vyazovka, Tatyshly district), Nazip Sadriev, born 1930 r.p. (from Bal'zyuga, Tatyshly district), Rais Rafikov, born 1948 (from Nove Tatyshly, Tatyshly district). The “new” sacrificial priests record the *kuris'kon* from the elder and use them in their cult practice: they learn them and utter them by hert, but in most cases, read them from paper. Today, this form of performance of the sacred text is seen as natural, the priests have also found special equipment to support the paper [Sadikov, Toulouze, 106]. Some of today's sacrificial priests use in their religious activity texts gleaned in the Udmurt paper, *Oshmes*, which published them actively, or in other publications. If in some villages the tradition of having sacrificial priests was interrupted, in

the revitalisation process they ask sacrificial priests from other villages. For example, in 2014 the sacrificial ceremony in Kassiyarovo (Burayevo district) was revitalised and the organisers asked for help the *vös'as'* from Kaymashabash (Yanaul district), who taught them the main rituals and offered his prayer. This prayer was later reproduced by Ramay Nigamatshin born 1939, although he had the record of the *kuris'kon* left by his predecessor. It had been written down by the old village *vös'as'* Timergali Nuriev (1905 – 1992) before his death and transmitted to R. Nigamatshin with the request to continue his task. But after revitalisation, this text was not used. However, in 2017, the new sacrificial priest, Rival' Farkhutdinov, elected after the death of the previous one, reestablished “historical justice”: relying on records, he used both the prayer from Kaymashabash and the local one. This example shows how the new way, the written one, of transmitting sacred texts functions. All this, according to us, reveals the transition from oral tradition to written one, the bookish tradition²¹⁸. Although, of course, the traditional canon was oral, as the *kuris'kon* themselves emphasise: “In our hands we have no sacrificial book, perhaps I start from the end, perhaps from the beginning”²¹⁹. With the loss of the tradition of transmitting the prayer from mouth to mouth, the performance manner also changed. Only very few *vös'as'* recite them, the majority say them in the ordinary mannes, but attempt to read expressively and loudly²²⁰.

²¹⁸ It is therefore not surprising that Udmurts interested in their religion ask researchers or journalist for their published works on traditional religion.

²¹⁹ *Милям киямы курбон китап евол, олло азьлозэ берло вераськом, олло берлозэ азьло верасько*. Ranus Sadikov's fieldwork, 2016. Tatyshly district RB, NOvye Tatyshly, Rais Rafikov, born 1948.

²²⁰ We must observe that the loud uttering is not today the only way of performing prayers. In Varkled-Bod'ya (Agryz district, Tatarstan), where the tradition of collective sacrificial ceremonies has also been preserved, the *vös'as'* only speak to themselves: “*Osto, In'mare shuy'sa kuris'ko. Az'lo shara verallyam; ali as'sa ponna gine*” – “I pray saying ‘Oste, my In'mar’. Eatlier thay uttered it loudly, nonow we only speak mentally” (Ranus Sadikov' fieldwork 2016. Kirillov R.N., born 1953). This is also the way *kuris'kon* are said in Kuzebaev (Alnashi district, Udmurtia). Among the Eastern Udmurt this form of

Also, the contents of the texts has changed. Some priests also rethink older texts and add elements that reflect today's realities. Therefore, these new *kuris'kon* are the result of the sacrificial priest's creativity, who, nevertheless attempt to put their ideas in a canonic form. One of them may be called a great improvisator: Anatoliy Galikhanov from Altayevo (Burayevo district) asks for example: "Let in all the country the honourable reputation of the Udmurt people spread"; "Give us the intelligence to live with the neighbouring peoples in peace and harmony", "Let in our country never be quarrels for land and warfare"; "Give our born children health, happiness, good reputation, success. Protect them from bad people, mistaken paths, drugs and alcohol". The following open the Eastern Udmurts' economic concerns: "Let our livestock reproduce fully. Let our sheep lamb triplets, let our cows be milky and buttery, let our vegetable gardens and orchards be full of fruits, let the bees be born with honey. Let there be enough for us to live and sell"²²¹. Rural Udmurts understand well these words, as most of their welfare depends on their backyard production. As Vladimir Galiev, the young Asavka priest, born 1971 said, in his prayers he not only asks Inmar something, but he thanks him for the given prosperity.

Thus, the contemporary materials reveal that the traditional prayers so on living, as one of the main components of the Eastern Udmurt's religious practice. They reflect contemporary reality and the rural population's way of life.

saying *kuris'kon* has been recorded only in Votskaya Osh'a (Yanaul district) The local "warden of *Lud'*", at the sacrificial ceremony in the sacred grove in 2015 did not utter the prayer loudly, he just spoke to himself with an imperceptible voice. In conversation, he acknowledged that "The people must not hear the prayer" (R. Sadikov's fieldwork, 2015. Kisametov, R.N., born 1973).

²²¹ *Pudo-zhivotmy tyr med yloz. Yzh''yosmy kuin'en med vayozy, skal''yosmy yolo-vöyo med luozy, bakch'a-sad''yosmy yemyshen, mushen med udaltozy. S'ïny no vuzany no med okmoz no vuzany no med okmoz.* S. Sadikov's fieldwork, 2016. Altayevo, Burayevo district, RB. Galikhanov A.Sh., born 1962.

How do Udmurts address their God(s)? Observation about the language of traditional prayers-incantations.

Eva Toulouze
Tatiana Vladykina

Introduction

Although the majority of Udmurts has been converted, and forcefully, to Orthodoxy mostly during the 18th century (Luppov 1999 [1899], Kappeler 1982, Zahidullin 1997), the traditional Udmurt religion did not disappear. On the one hand, depending on the actual pressure of the new religion, the older practice in many places merged with the newest and led to still existing syncretism; on the other hand, some villages, unwilling to live in the new imposed conditions, migrated into tolerant regions. These regions were situated eastwards and were inhabited by Muslims. There, they settled, rented and finally bought land (, Makarov 1915, Nikitina 2016, Toulouze, Anisimov 2020). In the new conditions, they continued their own religious practice, and so did them through history until today. This means that today there is a widespread practice of traditional ceremonies, which are naturally accompanied by addresses to the deities. According to our interpretation, these addresses are in fact a subdivision of the category of incantations, i.e. magic words.

Eva Toulouze have been investigating this religious practice, with an international research group (local Udmurt colleagues, Udmurts from Udmurtia, Estonians) for several years, and one of the project's goals is to study in depth the magic words of the

Udmurt ceremonies, and to publicise them. In this presentation, we will concentrate on some linguistic peculiarities of these prayers-incantations.

Traditionally, the magic strength of the text was thoroughly connected with the way of transmitting it. The apprentice sacrificial priest had to attend ceremonies, and to listen to the addresses to the deities, until the text was engraved in his memory and his process was called “to steal a prayer”. The informants were very clear: the text should not be learnt, it had to remain by itself in the head of the praying priest: “the text of the sacrifice must not be learnt, only stolen. For him to learn [a priest] took with him a child. The latter, putting it in his ear, learnt. One must not just learn” (Sadikov 2019: 242²²²). However, this transmission method does not function anymore. In the Soviet times, the younger boys could not attend ceremonies, whose day, Friday, was a working day or a school day. So the opportunities of acquiring a prayer were limited. So when the time came, at the end of the 1980s, when the State policy ceased to be hostile to religious ceremonies, the elder sacrificial priests published their prayers and the transmission format became written. And so is it now.

Still, we do not think the difference is so significant. While the instrument for learning has indeed changed, the learning is nevertheless happening. The younger sacrificial priests rely on written text during ceremonies to feel comfortable. However, reading is but a different way to memorise the text. After some time, they become familiar with the text; with its stylistic peculiarities, and they become more and more independent from the paper. And when they achieve it, they may start to improvise, to change the order of the formulas, and even to add new items. This last aspect has triggered some discussions

²²² From the author’s fieldwork in 2006.

among the priests themselves. The need to include new requests and new concerns has long been felt. In a conversation with Evgeniy Adullin, one of the most important sacrificial priests of the Tatyshly district, and with the organiser of his collective ceremonies, Farhulla Garifanov, this concern emerged (FWM 2015): are they allowed to add something to the prayer text? They even asked Eva, who was participating to their conversation...

Actually, this genre has been sensitive to changes in the general context and has reflected them all along: older texts asked the deities to help pay taxes to the tsar, or requested success for their kolkhoz. Of course, we have no idea how when these changes were made and with which procedure – probably when the time did not allow the previous text to be convincingly uttered. But as during the soviet times these questions were not investigated, we have no clue.

They solved the question four years later: the sacrificial priests of their group of villages met and updated the text of their prayer, including excerpts of another priest's prayer, Anatoliy Galikhanov. Galikhanov, the most prestigious of the new generation of priests, started also by reading his text. But now he composes newer and newer texts, and he is quite bold in his innovations. While usually the people are aware only of their own tradition, and do not know what their neighbours do, new conditions have shattered their isolation: in 2008, the general ceremony of the Eastern Udmurt, *Elen vös'*, which had been forgotten since the 1920s except in the three villages where it rotated, has been successfully revitalised. Once a year, the active sacrificial priests meet and pray together in Kirga (Kuyeda district of the Perm kray), Staryy Varyash (Yanaul district of Bashkortostan) and Altaevo (Buray district of Bashkortostan). There, each of the

sacrificial priests (one per district) utters his prayer, so that everybody hears it. So have the Tatyshly priest had the opportunity to hear Galikhanov's text and its innovations. Generally, in a collective ceremony, at least in the Tatyshly district, all the priests utter their prayers together, so that the texts are not easily identified and even heard, except when the leading priest interrupts the text to utter "Omin'", the equivalent of "Amen", all say the word and bow. We have seen the same system as in Elen vös' at Bol'shekachakovo's *Badzh 'yn vös'*, where representatives of four villages gather.

In Asavka village, the sacrificial priest Vladimir Galiev, who has also inherited his prayer through paper, was disturbed that it presented a great deal of requests, without insisting on thanks. He proposed some changes to his village's elder, who accepted them.

Another event that shattered the isolation was the publishing of our recordings in 2019. We had been for some years recording ceremonies and finally we delivered a DVD cassette with four edited reflecting ceremonies attended by the same team and we gave them to both the teams concerned and other sacrificial priests and helpers. So they discovered what their neighbours were up to.

In spite of innovations, our collection of prayers-incantations reveal that much has remained quite stable, formulas, metaphors, linguistic means of expression. In this article, we will concentrate on some of them, which reveal on the one hand the way Udmurts think and on the other hand, the aesthetic dimension of the formulas. We hope that the abundance of examples will reveal the richness and diversification of these addresses to the deities.

We may add a remark about another possible evolution, which may explain subtle changes in perceptions and approaches: although magic has not disappeared at all from the Udmurt rural landscape, we may suppose that at the beginning of the 20th century, magic thinking is not unchallenged in the Udmurt worldview. What was certainly at the beginning of the 20th century and even later on, until the middle of the century, magic words and closer to the genre of the incantation, may have been evolving. Today they may be felt exclusively as a genre closer to prayer, as in other religions, Orthodoxy or Islam, where the magic dimension has been overthrown by mere address to the deity. This comment is an element of debate in the ongoing friendly discussion between the authors, who have used publicly the term incantation, and Ranus Sadikov, who insists on their being merely prayers (Sadikov 2011, Sadikov Toulouze 2019). We suppose that the reason for this difference in interpretation may be explained by these thoughts.

There is another remark we have to introduce before entering the proper matter. In the title, we have included an alternative plural. Why? It is well known that animistic agrarian religions are not monotheistic. They have a pantheon, to which we must add an infinity of different powerful beings, spirits, which permeate the natural environment. This is a general statement, and indeed, it corresponds to recent research in folkloristics (i.e. Vladykina 2021). Nevertheless, the Udmurt are surrounded by monotheistic religions, both Christianity and Islam and these have influenced their way of thinking. Thus, in the addresses we call prayers-incantations, the main addressee is « Inmar-Kylchin ». This phrase has two elements, and both are theonyms: Inmar is the supreme god, god of the highest spheres, and is also, translated into Udmurt, the name of the Christian god. Kylchin is more complicated to analyse. Clearly, it is a contracted form of

another god's name, Kyldys'in, who in Udmurt mythology was particularly close to humans. At the same time, this word is the same that is used, mostly in a Christian context, for « angel ». While reading these texts, we have the feeling that they are mostly addressed to one person: the address uses the second person singular, *ton* in Udmurt, and only very seldom *ti*, the plural form. So we have the impression that *kylchin* is like an avatar of Inmar. We shall not decide whether two gods are addressed or only one, which explains the alternative left in the title.

We decided to draw attention in this article, towards the characteristic features in the language peculiar to these incantations, some of them even intriguing. The first is a review of the verbs used to ask benefits, the second is about the use of possessive suffixes in the requests and finally the extremely varied syntactic forms of the verbal syntagms. We must observe that the language used is of course dialectal Udmurt. In Bashkortostan, the Udmurt speak peripheral southern Udmurt subdialects. Therefore, there will be lexical and phonetical differences with Udmurt standard language, which may explain some particular and unknown forms.

Lexical comment: a review of the verbs used to ask benefits

The main verbs:

The main verbs are the ones meaning “give” and “protect”:

s'otyny “to give”

saklany “to protect”

While those verbs are very frequent, and we shall meet them all along this article in different examples, they are not the only ones: some other verbs are also quite frequent, as they are frequent in general language.

The first is **bas'tyny**, “to take, to hold”.

<i>Burd ylad karysa bas'ty</i>	Making under your wing, take (us)
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<i>Kabyl karysa bas'ty</i>	blessing (it) take [the sacrifice]
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But the context in which this verb mainly appears is the expression

This expression appears in practically all the prayers, sometimes repeatedly.

In the two examples above, we find another important verb, which is also used for asking something, the verb **karyny** “to make”. The idea here is to transform something into some other thing, or at least to ensure some quality to what is requested:

<i>Ulonetz dzh'ech kar</i>	Make our life good
<i>Busy tyros achid kar</i>	make yourself the field full
<i>Dzhuon vuosses, s'ion turym"yosses cheskyt kar</i>	make the drinking water, the eating herbs tasty
<i>Taza achid kar</i>	make (us) yourself healthy

Other verbs

Of course these verbs do not complete the list of the possible verbs used for asking, and many verbs are very concrete and appropriate to particular requests:

- **voz'many** “to pasture”

<i>pudoosty dzhech vozhma</i>	pasture well The livestock
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- **kis'matyny** “to mature”, “to allow maturing”

<i>yumes kis'maty</i>	Let our cereals mature
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- *Vordis'kytyny* “to give birth”, “to allow to be born”

<i>vordis'konoosse shudo burdo</i> <i>vordis'kyty</i>	To those who are supposed to be born, give the happiness to be born
<i>Viz'mynyz vodris'kyty val</i>	with intelligence let them be born

- *daltytyny* “to ripen”

<i>Kiz'em-palkem dzhuosyz zarni</i> <i>vyzhyen vyzhyyatysa daltyty</i>	let the cereals we have sown and widespread with golden roots ripen
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- *Beryktyny* “to return”, “to give back”

<i>Ponem zhuges'zes s'uen-s'ursen</i> <i>berikyty val</i>	the offerings put by them, give them back by hundreds and thousands
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There are also two other verbs, two very common verbs which are used in a special sense, with an almost non semantic meaning, almost as auxiliary verbs allowing to form fixed expressions in gerundive clauses, which are very frequent in ordinary Udmurt: they are the verbs **ulyny** “to live”, and **mynyni** “to go”. A third verb may appear, but seldom, in the same position, **kyll'yny** “to lie”. These forms appear in constructions we shall comment later.

Achid az'inlyk'yoste s'otysa ul	Yourself giving a future live = give (us) a future
S'ekyt töl-zoryosydles' saklasa ul val	From heavy winds and rains protecting us live = protect us from...

Actually, in ordinary Udmurt there are such constructions, less complicated, which are not connected with requests:

Mözmysa ug uly	I did not live being sad
Shundy pishtisa ule	the sun lives shining

However, this does not seem to be the case with the verb **mynyny** “to go”:

Shunyt ki vylad bas’tysa myn	On your warm hand taking (us) go
Mil’es’tym vuttymteosyz achid vuttysa myn,	What we could not achieve, yourself being able to go = do yourself what we were not able to do (for lack of time)
Pel’pum kapchilyk”yoste s’otysa myn val,	to our shoulders giving lightness go.
S’ekyt töl-zoryosydles’ saklasa ul val	From heavy winds and rains protecting us live = protect us from...

Here we are quite far from the direct meaning of the verb “to go”.

Syntactic comment: a review of the constructions used with these verbs

Moreover, there is an uncommon syntactic richness in the constructions used to ask for benefits, from the simplest to the more complex.

Simple imperative

In ordinary life, a requirement is expressed by the simple use of the imperative. Udmurt is not a language that has developed a complex system of polite alternatives. Clearly the simple imperative is not as brutal as it is for example in French. We are not surprised thence to find the imperative in the addresses to the deities: **vay** «give», **s’ot** «give», **sakla** «protect»

tazalyk s’ot	give health
n’an’mes s’ot	give (us) our bread
n’ebyt inty s’oty	give (us) a soft place
yözorles’ sakla	protect (us, the harvest) from hail

kalykly shudo ulyny s'ot	give the people to live happily
mil'am kolkhozmyly uzylmyly s'ot	give our kolkhoz to become rich
n'an' budetyly milemly kuzhym s'ot	give us strength to rise bread

Here we must comment about the absence, in most cases, of a pronoun or a complement indicating the beneficiary of the gifts. In some cases, a dative noun or pronoun specify, but usually it seems not necessary to the Udmurt praying priest. In other cases, the pronoun is redundant and is clearly there for euphonic or prosody reasons.

Softened imperative

However, there are means to soften the possible brutality of the imperative form. In general, there are particles allowing to alleviate brutality: *vay-ay*, *vay-ka*. There are, especially the second, close to the Russian use.

However, much more idiomatic and polite is to add to the imperative form the particle *val*. We call it a particle, because there are other homonymous forms that should not be mixed up with this one. The form *val* can be : 1. A substantive, meaning « horse ». 2. A verbal form, meaning « was ». Clearly, it is neither. It is a semantic instrument transforming the imperative in a kind of optative. It does not change the meaning of the verb, but its pragmatics: *vay val /s'ot val*, *ud-a s'oty* “would you not give?”

It is difficult to give an equivalent in English. English more polite expressions encompass conditional forms, which will have equivalents much closer to them than *val*. Here, in order to show this softening particle, we just add « please ».

Some examples:

mar ke malpazy, soe s'ot val	whatever they think, (please) give it
s'in az' saz'yoste s'ot val	(please) give clearness in front of (our/the)

	eyes.
tyledles'-puedles' sakla val	from fires, from conflagrations (please) protect (us)
pejmyt korkaedles', zhk'yyo kortedles' sakla val	from dark houses, from iron chains (please) protect (us)
s'iyo shuis', bas'to shuis', kas murt'yosles' sakla val	from evil people who say "I'll eat you", "I'll take you", (please) protect (us).
alama cher'yosles' sakla val	from evil diseases (please) protect (us).
Kiyad-pydad bas'ty val	(please) take (us, our prayers) in your hand and feet

All of these forms are widespread.

The expression of invitation: let ... (be)

Med + FUT

This is not a very common construction in prayers, but in our corpus we have found it several times and with several different verbs.

pudoos taza lusa med ulozy	Let our livestock live being healthy
vył' luono ken'yoslen shumpotysa ulonzy med luoz	Let our future new daughters-in-law have a joyful life (a life rejoicing)
dz'es' kalyk'yosly med luozy	Let there be for good people.

Among them two combinations are more frequent: with the existence verb, for example in the two abovementioned examples. Another, more interesting verb, is very often used, the verb meaning « writing », ГОЖТЫНЫ. The combination МЕД ГОЖТОЗ, «let it be written, prescribed» is frequent enough, showing thus the relevance for Udmurts of fate, predestination:

shumpotysa kuris'kyny med gozhtoz	Let it be written that we shall pray with
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	joy
anaenyž-ataenyž tazalyken, tatulyken ulyny med gožhtoz	Let it be written that one shall live with one's mother and father in health and harmony
oktyny kaltany med gožhtoz	Let it be written that we shall reap and harvest
Kuz'yli kad' kyl'l'yny med gožhtoz	Let it be written that we shall live like ants
Tyloburdoos kad' chirdysa kyl'l'yny med gožhtoz	Let it be written that we shall live singing like birds
N'an'ykayyos daltysa, dzh'uen kyl'l'yny med gožhtoz	Let it be written that we shall live growing little breads, with cereals
Tazalyken-baylyken shumpotysa kyl'l'yny med gožhtoz	Let it be written that we shall live in health and wealth, rejoicing

We may notice that in almost all these examples the verb expressing the wish is *kyl'l'yny* **кыльльыны**, which is a dialectal form for the verb meaning «to remain, to stay», which fundamentally expresses the prolonged being.

The conditional

But the most widespread construction is undoubtedly the use of the conditional phrase. We must observe that these constructions imply the use of the conditional conjunction “if”, **ке**. Usually its position is at the end of the phrase. Here however statistically it occupies mostly the place before the verb, which means the penultimate place in the phrase.

It is particularly used with the verb «to give», **сётыны**, on the one hand, and with the verb «to protect» **сакланы / чакланы**. Let us discover some examples firstly with «to give»:

chumol'yo vözy chumol'yo ke s'otysaled	would you give (us) heap near heap
shunyt-n'ebyt zor''yoste ke s'otysaled	would you give (us) warm and soft rains
kapchi ez'el''yost ke s'otysaled	would you give (us) light fates / deaths
tyr tolez' kad' tazalykde ke s'otysaled	would you give (us) your health like a full moon
Tyr shundy kad' baylykde ke s'otysaled	would you give (us) your wealth like a full sun
tulys vu kad' tazalyk ke s'otysaled	would you give (us) health like spring water
tazalykde -baylykde s'otysalyd ke	would you give (us) your health and your wealth
sekyt cher''yoste ke öy s'otysaled	would you not give (us) heavy diseases
dyshmon''yosly erik ke öy s'otysaled	would you not give freedom to our enemies

And, with the verb « to protect »:

ulis'-vetlis' s'ekyt zor''yosydles' saklasaled ke	would you protect The one who lives and the one who goes from your heavy rains.
n'ukedles'-gopedles' ke saklasaled	would you protect (us) from your pits and your hollows
l'ek zor''yosydles' ke saklasaled	would you protect (us) from your bad rains
s'ekyt zor''yosles' saklasalyd ke	would you protect (us) from heavy rains
“s'iyo” shuis'les', “bas'to” shuis'les'ke saklasaled	would you protect (us) from those who say “I'll eat (you)”, “I'll take (you)”
pejmyt korkaosles' ke saklasaled	would you protect (us) from dark houses
dzh'ylo purt''yosles' ke saklasaled	would you protect (us) from sharp knives

However, while the most widespread examples are with the two abovementioned verbs, it is to be found also with other verbs, firstly with the verb « to do, to make » but also with semantically very diverse verbs, illustrating the diversity of the demands to the deities:

vyle dis'ano ke karysaled	would you make (us) (something) to put on
kytkon dzh'yro ke karysaled	would you make the harness sharp
vordono tyloburdoosyz taza voz'ysalyd ke	would you grow the birds to be grown healthy
Kiz'em-pal'kkem n'an'akayyosyz dzh'es'kin ke kis'matysaled	Our sowed and beaten little breads well would you mature
Kon'don-dzh'uges'mes s'uen-s'ursen ke beryktysaled	our money and sacrificial alms would you by hundreds and thousands give (us) back
Uan' bendeoste ogkad' adzh'ysaled ke	All your people, equally would you look
Koshkis'se shumpotyssa ke kelyasaled	the one who goes away with joy would you see off
Pyris'se shumpotyssa ke pumitasaled	the one who enters with joy would you receive

In addition, the conditional mode is also used in formulas that are more complex. They use some verbs as auxiliaries, and complete them with gerund forms, which are very widely used in Udmurt in a multiplicity of contexts. Let us have a look, starting from the verbs used as auxiliaries, the first being “to live”, **улыны:**

Vordono ad'amiošte tazalyken, baylyken vordysa ulysalyd ke	Would you live growing the people to be grown in health and wealth
dyshmon''yosles' chaklasa ulysalyd ke	Would you live protecting us from (our) enemies
S'ekyt zor''yosles' chaklasa ulysalyd ke	Would you live protecting (us) from heavy rains
kiz'em-pal'kkem yuosyz udal'tytysa ulysalyd ke	Would you live reaping the sowed and beaten cereals
“s'iyο” shuis', “yuo” shuis', “bas'to” shuis' dyshmon''yosles' chaklasa ulysalyd ke	Would you live protecting (us) from enemies who say « I'll eat (you)», « I'll drink (you) », « I'll

Another verb, which occupies often this auxiliary position, is the verb “to go”,

МЫНЫНЫ:

Pel’pum kapchilyk”yoste ach’id s’otsa ke mynsaled	Would you go giving yourself lightness to (our) shoulders
N’ebyt zor”yoste ach’id s’otsa ke mynsaled	Would you go giving yourself soft rains
Musho vuen ulny ach’id s’otsa ke mynsaled	Would you go giving yourself to live with honeyed water
Azbar tyr tchözh-dzh’azh’egen gurlashysa ulon s’otsa ke mynsalyd,	Would you go giving a life with a full yard of cooing ducks and geese
Kökyyn sabi kyl’l’e, kökyyn sabi kad’ ulyny s’otsa ke mynsaled	The child lies in his cradle, would you go giving (us) to live like a lying child in its cradle
Yshtek chesk”t vuoste turymn’oste ach’id s’otsa ke mynsaled	Would you go giving yourself your tasty water and herbs
Kyryn vetlis’ pudooslen pyd ulazy shynyt, n’ebyt turyn”yos dzhuzhasa mynsalzy ke	Under the feet of the livestock, which goes out soft herbs would they go growing
Kyl dzh’angyshon”yosles’ ach’id saklasa ke mynsaled	Would you go protecting (us) yourself from mistakes of the tongue
S’ekyt che”yosles’ saklasa mynsaled ke	Would you go protecting (us) from heavy diseases

Complex conditional phrases

As with imperative, the conditional sentences may also be completed with the form **ВАЛ**, which turns the demand into a softer request and expresses the deepest respect towards the deity. As in the case of the imperative we conditionally translate it with “please”:

Uapum vuon dyr”ya dzh’ech malpan”yosty	When the time comes to go, would you
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dzh'ech kalykedly s'otysa ulysaled ke val ²²³	please live giving good thoughts to good people.
kyre-lude potysa uzhan nunal'yoste s'otysa ulysaled ke val	Going outdoors to the field, would you please live giving (us) working days
Kuzpalenyz tatulyk ulon'yoste s'otysa ulysaled ke val	would you please live giving lives of harmony with the couple
Az'lapalan uzhan nunal'yosyn kapchilykde s'otysa ulysaled ke val	would you please live giving your lightness in the working days to come

Morphological comment: interesting use of possessive suffixes

While studying and translating our corpus, we stumbled upon an interesting phenomenon, which is not reflected in any literature neither in existing translations into Russian.

Udmurt is partly an agglutinative language, as Finnish and Hungarian, which expresses possession through a suffix paradigm. While expressing indeed possession, the possessive suffixes may be used for other semantic uses, often, for example, for expressing definitude, as Udmurt is a language that has no articles.

But here, the use of the second person suffix cannot be confused with the wish to present something as determined. Or more precisely, it adds a definite aspect indeed, but in identifying the gift in relatingng it to God. God gives, or acts on something that belongs to him. Actually, in the previous sentences, we had already some samples of this use, which is reflected in our translation:

²²³ Similar sentences are found also with different verbal constructions: the simple conditional (Uapum vuon dyr"ya dzh'ech malpan'yosty dzh'ech kalykedly s'otysa ulysaled ke) or the softened imperative (Uapum vuon dyr"ya dzh'ech malpan'yosty dzh'ech kalykedly s'ot val).

S'ekyt töl-zor"yosy d les' saklasa ul val	protect us from your heavy winds and rains ...
Shumpotysalmy, shud d e-bur d e s'otsa myn val	we would rejoice, if you would give us your happiness and joy

We may thus understand that, in the addresses to God / to the deities, his will is the central element, and all which is concerned with the requests, belongs to him and is subject to his will, both the good (for people) and the bad, the illnesses, the sorrows. We think that it is a small sign that reveals a whole worldview and opens the understanding of the power of the highest forces.

Let us examine other examples, to confirm this use, starting from the request of good things:

Tazalykde s'otysa kyl'l'y val	would you lie giving us your health
S'iyny-yuyny shydde-n'an'de s'ot	give (us) your happiness and bread to eat and drink
Kapch'ilykde s'otysa ulysaled ke val	would you live giving (us) your lightness
Chechyen-muen ulyny shudde-burde s'otysalyd ke	to live with honey and mead your happiness and joy would you give (us)
Tazalyk no shudde-burde s'ot	Health and your your happiness and joy give(us)

But God is also the source of other phenomena, unpleasant for mankind. The Udmurt ask their god protection for those bad things he is at the origin of. Which allows us to understand that man is not at the centre of god's intentions, he is much wider and man is not his main concern. Therefore man has to ask help against God's own creation.

Cher d e-chur d e vu ullan' pottysa lez'ysaled ke	Would you send our illnesses and diseases downriver
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“S’iyo” shuis’edles’ “bas’to” shuis’edles’ sakla	Protect (us) from your one who says “I’ll eat (you)”, “I’ll take (you)”
S’ekyt zor”yosy d les’ ke saklasaled	From your heavy rains would you protect (us)
Töledles’-periedles’ sakla val	Please protect (us) from your wind, your whirlwind
Nymyredles’-kibiedles’ sakla val	Please protect (us) from your worms and insects
Tyledles’-puedles’ sakla val	Please protect (us) from your fires and conflagrations

As a conclusion

The Udmurt prayers have maintained a rich level of linguistic expression. The aim of this article was to start a reflexion on this peculiar language, which is strongly codified, so that even today’s productions are inserted in its pattern. We have identifies different levels of peculiarities: first the lexical level, concentrating on verbs, which reveal what is the main aim of the Udmurts’ today’s addresses to their deities. There are certainly other peculiarities on which we could have insisted, the metaphors and comparisons, which we shall certainly explore further on. We have also concentrated on the richness of the syntactical expression of the Udmurts’ requests, which use very diverse structures existing in the language. Finally, we have developed the beginning of a reflexion on the use of the possessive suffixes in an unusual way, which explains that it has been ignored within the Russian translations until now proposed.

SACRED PLACES

The sacred places of the Bashkortostan Udmurt²²⁴

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This article is based on fieldwork made since 2013 with the cooperation of several colleagues – Estonian anthropologists Liivo Niglas and Laur Vallikivi, Udmurt ethnographer Ranus Sadikov and Udmurt folklorist Nikolay Anisimov – in Udmurt villages in Bashkortostan studying the villages' religious practice and the collective ceremonies. We have thus visited different villages in the Tatyshly, Yanaul, Buraevo and Baltachevo rayons of northern Bashkortostan. I sum up our reflections about sacred spaces and sacred places.²

Of course, much has been written about sacred places in the regions inhabited by the Eastern Udmurt (Chernykh 2004, Sadikov 2004, Minniakhmetova 2004, etc.). However, my focus differs from that adopted by the Russian ethnographers in its perspective: while they all start from a historical point of view, and review the places and ceremonies that existed, I am not interested in treating the contemporary Udmurt as living within a degraded culture, compared to its height at the beginning of the 20th century. I am interested in a synchronic approach, in which I view the culture the Udmurt are living in at the beginning of the 21st century as a whole, and try to find out the points that make sense for them. I do not refuse to turn to history, but treat it as something people

²²⁴ This article has been published in English : Toulouze ,Eva; Vallikivi, Laur (2016). The Sacred places of the Bashkortostan Udmurt. Ежегодник финно-угорских исследований, 10 (3), 146–155.

remember and must relate to. Moreover, from a general point of view, I think that the choice of the beginning of the 20th century, while perfectly understandable as a milestone before very quick and substantial changes, is nevertheless arbitrary, because qualitatively it does not differ from the others before and after it: it was only a moment in a dynamic continuity, that may be examined in diachrony as well as in synchrony, as all the previous and following moments. So I take 2015 as the fixed point of my observation and view the state of the Eastern Udmurt's sacred places as it is today.

About the notion of sacred place

Let us have a look at the terms used. While scientific literature in Russian uses the term “svyashchennoye mesto”, literally “sacred place”, in Udmurt all that I find is “vösyaskon inty”, literally, place where a ceremony takes place (Sadikov 2008). So I shall not dwell on the notion of ‘sacredness’, for the Udmurt do not emphasise it, rather they focus on the function of the place.

As Udmurt scholar Tatyana Minniakhmetova observes, talking about the Bashkortostan Udmurt (and using in the Hungarian translation, the notion of sacred place): “in this region the sacred places may be found on arable lands, in the forest, on fields, on fallow lands or near them, on the riverside, in the garden, in the vegetable garden, in the yard or in the house” (Minniahmetova 2015: 43). Because of the character of our fieldwork, which has been focused on village ceremonies and not on private forms of worship, I shall not here take into consideration the more intimate places – which does not mean that they do not exist or that they are not significant for the Udmurt at the moment –, I will concentrate on the locations of the collective prayers.

Today, that means outdoor locations, because there are no sacral buildings functioning as such. However, they existed in the past, and I will mention what remains of them in the memory and in the practice of the Udmurt today.

The Udmurt sacral building: the *kuala*

Although in Bashkortostan religious activities have been pretty well maintained, no *kuala* is at the moment used as a sacred building. Despite this, we know that the simple building called the *kuala* was used in two configurations. Apart from the family *kuala*, in the yard of the house²²⁵, there was the big *kuala*, a building used for clan ceremonies, as the one that still exists and functions in Kuzebaevo (Alnashi rayon, Republic of Udmurtia), where the *bydžym kuala* clan gathers for example on July 12th, St Peter's day, for a sacrificial ceremony. This kind of ceremony no longer exists in Bashkortostan.

There are still some traces of the *kuala* in the memory of older people. For example, Lidiya Garaeva, whose grandfather was a *vös'as'* in Bigineevo, remembers the Bigineevo *kuala*, and this memory even has concrete consequences in her deeds. She grew up with her grandmother and learned a lot from her about sacral issues. She remembers that in Bigineevo there was a *kuala* for the clan:

²²⁵ While I have not heard in Udmurtia of any one remaining, I had the possibility in June 2016 of visiting some still being used as domestic buildings in last four households in Varkled Bodya (in the Republic of Tatarstan, but a few kilometres from the Udmurt border).

- We had a *kuala*, it was separated, it was a small house.
- You mean, a village *kuala*?
- Yes, a village *kuala*. People went there with... how do you call it, their genealogical tree, so, all our kin, they all met there. On my father's line, yes, it seems so, the people who met were all kin on my father's side. (Lidiya, June 2014)

And she continues:

- My father and my stepmother were hit by lightning. They died together, side by side, at the same moment, they had gone haymaking and they were on their way back. Before they died, they had disassembled the *kuala* and they had been told not to touch the logs, until the soil had been transferred to another place. And then, the same year, it happened, so no new *kuala* was built. The house was sold, my parents died, the girls married. Only the year before the last I closed the *kuala*. Because it did not function any more. I closed it; we sacrificed a lamb. I gathered everybody, those who attended this *kuala*. And then we prayed and we said that the *kuala* does not function any more. So that God would not require us to pray there. If I wouldn't have done it, I would have had remorse, because I was there as a young girl. It was my responsibility. Therefore I did it. (Lidiya, June 2014)

So this *kuala*, or the remembrance of it, of the logs that were the only thing remaining of it some decades ago, still makes sense for a 60-year-old woman who was a little girl when the *kuala* was demolished. She felt responsibility: if not properly closed, the place

becomes dangerous. She had proof of it, on the example of a woman in the same village, who had a *kuala* in her own yard. The *kuala* had been demolished long ago and metal was accumulated on the spot where it had been. At some moment she went blind. She asked a fortune teller, who told her about the *kuala*: she cleaned the place and was able to regain her sight.

There were also private *kuala* that were used as the family sanctuary. Actually none functions, neither in Udmurtia, where none has been conserved, nor in Bashkortostan, where we have information about some of them. While they have not been actively used in worship for decades, their sacral character is still well acknowledged by their owners. I'll introduce some examples of how the attitude towards these buildings is still very much one of respect and fright.

In our fieldwork we have stumbled on three examples I shall develop here.

The first is in the village that Lidya married into, Aribash (Tatyshly rayon), where the population is 92% Udmurt. There was a *kuala* in the yard of one of the inhabitants. The *kuala* was symbolically closed with a ceremony, and the building was also physically closed. It is no longer used, neither for religious goals nor as a summer kitchen. But it is possible to have a look at it from the outside.

The second example is in the village of Altaevo (Buray rayon). There was a *kuala* in the yard of a village dweller. Ranus Sadikov writes in his fieldwork notes:

“We visited the dwelling of Haziametov, Galiahmat Galiahmatovič (born 1935). There are in his garden the rest of the foundations (a stone) of a *kuala* (*kaksya kuala*). He prays there twice every year in spring for *Bydzhynal* and in autumn at the autumn prayer

ceremony (*siz'yl kuris'kon*). Then he holds in his hands a loaf of bread and brings also coal from his oven”.

Here we have an example of a *kuala* that no longer exists, but which is still a fully active sacred place, with its very discreet remains maintaining all of the sacred character of the building.

The third example is interesting because it shows at the same time remembrance and oblivion: in Kizganbashevo (Baltachevo rayon) there were three *kuala*; in 2000 they were all surrounded by fences. In 2016 only the third of them, a place where a fir tree has grown, is still encompassed by a fence. The other fences have rotted and have not been replaced, although the remembrance of it is alive at least for the local sacrificial priest who showed us these places. The fir tree is well looked after by a Tatar woman; the sacrificial priest told us that she started to neglect it and this was followed by several catastrophes in her life, so she decided to mend her ways.

The sacred places where ceremonies are held

Ceremonies are held in practically all the villages of the Bashkortostan Udmurt. As I have developed elsewhere (Toulouze 2016), in many places the traditional ceremonies lasted throughout the Soviet period, while in others they faded in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in those places where the tradition was not forgotten, and during the 1990s or early 2000s, there was a revitalisation, either at the initiative of the local population and/or with the help and support of the local authorities. In the choice of the locations, both continuity and rupture may be emphasised.

Continuity in the choice of location

Usually, except in the cases mentioned below, when there was a serious reason for moving, the new places chosen were among the traditional ones. I use the word “among” because earlier there were different places used for spring ceremonies: when fields were managed on three-year rotation, until the 1950s, every year the spring ceremony was held on the sacred place near to the field where rye was growing. Today the changes in agricultural management have induced change and the villages have one place for this ceremony. Usually these are located in beautiful spots, although they are all very different from one another. Some are high on a hill (Aribash), others down on lower ground (Uraz-Gylde), some are close to the road (the one on the Kyzylar road for the Alga group Bagysh vös’); others are quite far from it (Alga). It is important to have nearby a source of water, for water is always needed: thus some are close to streams (Juda, Kizganbashevo, Altaevo), and some to springs (Asavka, Uraz-Gilde, Balzyuga, Nizhnebaltachevo).

Some elements of rupture in the choice of location

Apart from the changes in agricultural management, which induced the desertion of some sacred places (which are still remembered at least by the sacrificial priests), there were other elements of rupture.

One circumstance that led to a change of sacred place was the Communist Party’s anti-religious policy. In some villages, the sacred place was quite visible and exposed. For

example in Balzyuga, it can be clearly seen from the road. This allowed the Party officials, at least once, to interfere and disrupt the ceremonies, and so the place was just transferred to a more discreet spot – in the case of Balzyuga, some 30 meters further, in a lower location. Visibility was also the reason why the biggest ceremonies, in the case of the two religious groups of the Tatyshly Udmurt, where either nine or ten villages gathered, were moved to more discreet locations: the villages of the southern side of the River Yuk used to gather in the regional centre, and subsequently moved to a smaller village, Vilgurt. On the other side of the Yuk, the 10-village ceremony was held in a beautiful place in Starokalmiyarovo. One inhabitant of Starokalmiyarovo comments: “Formerly, the *mör vös* was held on the top of our village hill. During the sacrifices, the party officials from the rayon dispersed the people who attended. As on the top everything was visible, the location of the ceremony was transferred to a place below in the 1960s. And from there, it was transferred in 1978 to Alga, where nobody sees that there is ceremony” (Sadikov 2011, p.339). Alga is indeed a tiny village (70 inhabitants). In all of these cases, the transfer was achieved with a ceremony: soil and ashes from the former place were brought to the new one.

Another example is the regional centre, Upper Tatyshly (Verhnye Tatyshly), which, unlike the other villages, is far from being an Udmurt location: of around 6700 inhabitants²²⁶, only 13% are Udmurt. Actually, when the biggest ceremony was transferred to Vilgurt, the centre also ceased to hold the local ceremony. The place where they were held, was filled with new constructions. Another place was quite remote. When they decided in 2015 to hold a local ceremony again, the organisers found a

²²⁶ All the data about the villages come from the 2010 census. Cf. Toulouze, Vallikivi 2015.

brand-new location, whose advantage was that it was located in front of the building where one of the local leaders had his apartment: practically he was the one to provide the land. The first attempt was quite timid. No sacrifice took place, but the response by the local Udmurt was astonishing. So the second year, they built a fence and held a proper ceremony with the sacrifice of a lamb.

New trends

One important new trend, as illustrated by the previous example, is the recent custom to surround sacred places with a wood fence. Traditionally only *keremet* places were fenced as they were considered dangerous (Sadikov 2008: 215). Now all the sacred places tend to be protected by fences. While the traditional fence had one main goal – to protect against potential trespassers – today the fence has two functions: the first is to mark this space as special and to impose the recognition of it on everybody; the second is to protect the place from vandalism by the non-Udmurt population. In June 2016, the young Asavka sacrificial priest Vladimir complained that the sacred place is used by non-Udmurt youngsters as a place to drink. In a round table I attended with the local authorities and the national movement's leaders, all participants emphasised the need for fencing and no one commented on the infringement of tradition. It is clear that this change is connected with changes in society: knowledge about sacred places is no longer widely shared, the population is no longer totally homogenous and making visible the places important to the Udmurt population has become a question of identity.

Fences have usually been built with the help of the local authorities – at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s the local kolkhoze, which soon became an agricultural

production cooperative, was usually very active. This is the case in the Tatyshly rayon: south of the River Yuk, the villages worked for Demen, the Udmurt enterprise which, in Vilgurt, not only built a fence, but also a prayer house. This is not to be mistaken for a *kuala*: the house is only for comfort and presents no sacred features. It is, in the case of Vilgurt, a small exhibition room, with information about the ceremonies and local history, and a table where special guests may be asked to eat and to talk; the sacrificial priests and their assistants can comfortably count money there and keep warm in the winter ceremony (*tol vös*), when outdoors the temperature is close to -30. Exactly the same approach was taken by the kolkhoze on the other side of the Yuk, the Tatar-Udmurt enterprise Rassvet, the main accountant for which, Evgenij Adullin, is also the main sacrificial priest of the religious group. But in other places the main financer may also be some high-ranking Udmurt, as in Votskaya Oshya.

Other places connected with ceremonies: *keremet* or *lud*

For the Bashkortostan Udmurt, local traditions are very important and may differ significantly from one another. In several villages, probably once in all villages, there was another cult, which was not in competition but completed the ceremonies in spring and winter. It is the ceremony called *keremet* or *lud*. Actually these words designate both the ceremony and the place where it is held.

As I mentioned, these locations were supposed to be dangerous and were fenced already in old times. The previously mentioned spring and winter ceremonies and *keremet* are separated as locations and they have different priests. There is usually a special

sacrificial priest for *keremet* ceremonies. In some places this lineage is known to have disappeared because of the death of a particular priest who had no successors. One of the other differences between this ceremony and the others is that *keremet/lud* is a highly masculine ritual activity – the sacrificed animals are usually male, and only males are admitted (although there may be exceptions).

Usually the *keremet* is a grove. It has become traditional today that Keremet places as in Votskaya Oshya or Kizganbashevo are well protected by high trees. The first is a textbook example: inside the fence, which only the officiating priest is allowed to enter, there is a table. Everyone attending gathers behind the fence.

One interesting case of confusion is the case of Aribash's spring ceremony. This is held at the same time as the other villages' spring ceremonies, and afterwards Aribash participates to the *mör vös*. But unlike all the other ceremonies, Aribash's spring ceremony follows all the rules of the *keremet* ceremony: the place is the sacred place of *keremet*, the sacrificed animals are male, the women prepare flat bread, which is a speciality for *keremet*, and the participants from the village are all men. In the process of revitalisation, the two ceremonies have clearly been mixed up.

Other sacred places: places connected with the dead

In Udmurt spiritual culture, death and the dead occupy a significant place. The two worlds are both separated and connected. The ancestors are remembered regularly and there are special ceremonies both on the family level and on a more collective level. The

dead ancestors have an enormous influence on the life of the living: they must be fed, and propitiated lest they send disease, crop failure or catastrophe (Anisimov 2012: 25).

Some places are particularly connected with the dead.

One of these is of course the ‘contact place’, the graveyard (*shay*). This a special place, the doorway, the place where the dead dwell. I have had no opportunity to follow a burial, so I shall not dwell on this point. However, although graveyards are not a place to visit without a reason, I have visited a couple of graveyards: our landlady showed us (at our asking) the Balzyuga village graveyard. I also went a second time to the graveyard to honour some acquaintances who had passed away in the meantime. In addition, in other villages we have been shown a couple of ‘interesting’ graveyards, and the presence of the ethnographer seems to be reason enough indeed.

Usually graveyards are wooded places that are fenced. They have a gate that opens to visitors: to cross it is a significant act, which must be accompanied by a prayer, and people are supposed to enter and leave from the same portal. Cleaning a grave is not reason enough: graveyards are not taken care of from this point of view. Herbs grow, both between the graves and in the grave territory (usually each grave is surrounded by a metal fence).

When visiting a graveyard, whatever the reason, one has to bring offerings to share between multiple graves – bread, pancakes, chocolates, eggs, spirits; one throws these offerings onto the graves, either silently or while speaking to the deceased. The graveyard is also a place where commemoration rituals are performed, for example the obligatory visits on the 6th, 7th, and 40th days after the funeral, the anniversaries, and others. For example in Votskaya Oshya, a graveyard we have visited even twice,

offerings are made one year after one's parents' passing – a cow for one's mother, two geese for one's father (traditionally it was a horse); the skulls and the bag with the bones are hung in the tree. Here this ritual is called *ullan s'oton*, in other places it is called *jyr-pyd s'oton*, although its place is not always the graveyard²²⁷.

Different levels of sacredness?

Some places seem to have a strength of their own. Thus Anatoli Galikhanov, Altaevo's sacrificial priest, who is quite well known and authoritative, commented when he showed us in June 2016 the location of the main ceremony. It had started to bucket down, the rain was very violent and we jumped out of the car: Galikhanov insisted that this was a very strong place that was often hit by lightning, so we had a glimpse, but we did not linger.

The question above emerged during my fieldwork in Varklet Bodja (Tatarstan) in June 2016, when young sacrificial priest Oleg Mikhailov showed us (Ranus Sadikov and myself) the former place where *jyr-pyd s'oton*²²⁸ was performed (until they became aware that this place was upriver, while according to the rules it is supposed to be downriver). In this place it is still possible to see the skulls hanging from the trees, and the soil is covered with bones and moss. Oleg asked Ranus: "Is this considered a sacred place? It is certainly not as sacred as the place where it is performed now"...

²²⁷ As in Varkled Bodja (Republic of Tatarstan), where there are different locations in which this ritual has been performed. But this is outside the borders of the Bashkortostan Udmurt.

²²⁸ For more details about this very interesting ritual, see Anisimov 2012.

I have no answer to his question. But on the basis of my fieldwork, I certainly have the impression that some places are more loaded with sacredness than others. More precisely, some spots within the sacred places are more sacred than others, they are something like the core of sacredness.

This is physically also expressed in the villages north of the Yug, those that take part in the *mör vös'* in Alga. This space is articulated in quite a sophisticated way. Actually there is a first fenced unit, which is quite large and is also divided into two parts. One is an external space, which includes the house, where anyone can stay, while the other part is where the sacrificial priest and his assistants perform. The message transmitted by this geography is that nobody external is admitted within this space, where the only people allowed are those who have something to do there. Actually, this included our cameraman, who was completely free in his movements. By following the activities I understood that women were not admitted in this central part and I refrained from entering it, although some local women were not shy of doing so. They were sent back, but not too harshly. This spatial articulation contrasts with the practice of the villages south of the Yug, where the space is not internally articulated and where you have the impression that no place is more sacred than any other, and that there is no place where I would feel uncomfortable to stay: around the cauldrons, or behind the place where the priests pray, women had free admittance.

In Asavka, where there was no internal spatial articulation, the sacrificial priest tried to explain that there was a central triangle that was particularly sacred, between the cauldrons, the place where the priests prayed and a horizontal pole on which the towels hung. His explanation was convincing from the intuitive point of view, but he got mixed

up with the details by trying to say that nobody could stay there and try to do something unless that person was included in the team... But I retain the feeling that this was a place with special strength.

Behavioural patterns

Sacredness has consequences on how people are expected to behave. What is the situation today? What are the expectations? Are people aware of the rules?

Probably rules were much more rigorous in the times when traditional culture and values ruled society unchallenged (see Minniyahmetova 2015). Then they were transmitted and all the population was aware of them.

The sacrificial priests and their assistants usually try to inform the people of how they are supposed to behave. The remarks above of local women entering the sacred space shows that many are not aware of the most subtle reasons. We must not forget that eighty years of atheist education have left their imprint on most people, not only limiting their knowledge but also dulling their sensitivity.

The rules that priests try to have people respect are mainly connected with clothing. Traditionally there were wider rules, about being dressed in white for example. But even today there are some basics: in a sacred place neither men nor women are supposed to be bare-headed: men must have a hat, a cap or any kind of headgear and women are supposed to wear scarfs, which they usually do in villages, although not in a town environment. No part of the body is supposed to be bared: men and boys as well as women and girls are not supposed to wear shorts – legs and arms must be covered.

During our last field trip, in the village ceremony of Nizhnebaltachevo, some young boys arrived in shorts and were quickly sent home by the adults, who threatened them with the main organiser, Farhullah, who is quite severe. In this case, the whole community took upon itself the role of the educator. But often priests complain that people no longer know how to behave: Galikhanov voiced complaints about women coming to ceremonies without headgear and barefoot... (June 2013, June 2016). But clearly he, as well as his colleagues, feel quite powerless in front of the abysmal ignorance he has to face.

Conclusion

Sacred spaces are very much present in the modern life of the Bashkortostan Udmurt, for the whole population usually attend the local ceremonies; while there are usually some reluctant people in a village, enquiries show that everybody gives crops for the ceremonies and receives the sacrificial gruel, so all have at least some connection with the sacred. During the Soviet period, when religious activities were more clandestine and probably mainly concerned the older segment of the population, people were certainly more aware of sacredness, were more sensitive to the border between the profane and the sacred.

Today the sacred has penetrated everybody's lives and has become commonplace in the Udmurt microcosm. The situation is not so clear in other environments, where everything about the Udmurt forms of religiousness is ignored. That's why the Udmurt are at present trying to identify clearly what is sacred and what is profane and to make it

visible: a single grove may not be enough to inform those outside the Udmurt community about the sacred character of a place. Fencing it may give a hint: private property is fenced, but also some spaces that are usually recognised as deserving respect, such as graveyards.

Probably a deeper enquire should be made in order to understand what the understanding of sacredness is in the contemporary Bashkortostan Udmurt population. This would require longer interviews but could be quite informative about the perception of the relation between particular places and the feeling of sacredness, as well as completing the vision we have at the moment, which is very much based on observation and not on emic perception.

FILMING

Toulouze, Niglas: Filming an Udmurt village ceremony in Bashkortostan²²⁹

Eva Toulouze

Liivo Niglas

In this short article we intend to comment upon the process of filming an Udmurt village ceremony in North-Western Bashkortostan. We shall start by giving some basic information about the abovementioned ceremony and its background and finish by reflexion on filming and editing choices that resulted in the one-hour ethnographic film *Gurt Vös: a Village Ceremony* (Niglas 2019).

We have been doing fieldwork in North-Western Bashkortostan Udmurt villages since 2013, filming sacrificial ceremonies at village, village group and regional level. We have started this project being aware that the cultural peculiarities of these villages are not sufficiently documented neither studied in an international perspective, while they certainly deserve it.

²²⁹ This article has been published in English Toulouze, Eva; Niglas Liivo (2019). Filming Udmurt ceremonies in Bashkortostan. In: М.П. Безенова (отв. ред.), Л.Н.Бехтерева, И.Л. Поздеев, А.В.Камитова, А.М. Субботина, О.В.Титова, Т.С.Степанова, Л.А.Дмитриева (Ed.). Финно-угорский мир в полиэтническом пространстве России: культурное наследие и новые вызовы. Сборник статей по материалам VI Всероссийской научной конференции финно-угроведов (Ижевск, 4-7 июня 2019 г.) (539–544). Ижевск: Издательство Анны Зелениной.

The formation of the group of the Eastern Udmurt

The Udmurt are a people characterised by its Finno-Ugric language, whose core territory lies 400 km. east of the Volga. Since its formation, the Northern part of the Udmurt inhabited territory was encompassed in a political structure long called the “Vyatka Lands”²³⁰, a kind of buffer State between Moscow and the Khanate of Kazan [Гришуккина 1994: 26]. It was incorporated into the Moscow state in 1489 [Riasanovsky 1998 : 117]. The other part of the Udmurt core territory remained within the Kazan Khanate until the Russians’ taking of Kazan in 1552, and with the subsequent transformation of the Moscow state into an empire, which encompassed different ethnic territories and groups as well as different religious practices. In both cases, the change of ruling power induced considerable changes for the indigenous population. On the one hand, the tax load was hugely increased, as the Russian officials received no salary, their income depended on the local population’s taxation. On the other hand, the incorporation into the Russian State of huge territories inhabited by non-Christians required integration policies, among whom evangelisation was one of the more interfering with the population’s life. The Udmurt had their own agrar religion, with a main God, a multitude of deities and spirits, strong ancestors’ worship and sacrifices in order to ensure the deities’ favour and propitious harvest, but without a strong dogma to face the Christian doctrine. Evangelisation started with the constitution of the Empire, but it was not a consequent policy until the beginning of the 18th century, when Peter the Great started its anti-pagan campaigns. These were not particularly efficient until the 1740ies, when

²³⁰ Vyatka’s old name was Hlynov, in the Soviet times it was called Kirov and went later back to Vyatka.

systematic measures were taken to baptise the non-Christian peoples of the Volga forcibly. This policy addressed particularly the animistic ethnic religions, that were easier to tackle than Islam.

This is the historical context in which whole villages, not only of Udmurt, but of other peoples as well – Mordvins, Chuvash, and particularly Mari [Jamurzina 2013: 115-118] – left their home and fled East, deep into Muslim territories [Sadikov 2010: 34-35]. They rented and later acquired land, payed taxes, and lived according to their traditions, without any forceful external interference. While during the following centuries, some Udmurt villages were converted to Islam and adopted Tatar as their language, this conversion was clearly not imposed by violence [Sadikov 2011]. The other were protected from Christian missionaries by the Muslim environment [Minniyakhmetova 1995: 332; Sadikov 2008:7]. Even until 2016, in the Tatyshly district (rayon), there was no Orthodox Church, while according to the 2010 census there are no more than 2,5% Russians. True enough, in 2016 the Orthodox Church started a campaign to build a church in the regional centre, and had put out in all the village shops a box for offerings. This has not been particularly successful, but the church was eventually built in late 2017.

During the Soviet period, antireligious policy was not different in Bashkortostan than in other Soviet regions [Sadikov 2011a: 108], but the small villages were spared the excesses. While the attitude towards religious practice depended very much on the concrete local leaders, it was always possible for the villagers to perform their ceremonies coverly. Therefore the Udmurt religious practice has been preserved until now, in some villages without any interruption, in others with there have been some

years or even decades without religious activity, but since the 1990 they have been revitalised.

The Tatyshly Udmurt and their religious practice

The Tatyshly Udmurt form a cluster of 19 villages both sides of the River Yug. These are widely homogeneous Udmurt villages. Only in two of them the Udmurt population represents less than 90%, in Novye Tatyshly (Udm. Vilgurt, 82%) and Vyazovka (87%). In these villages Udmurt is the language of everyday life communication as well at home or at work [Toulouze 2013].

The Yug represents a real border for local Udmurt, from the economic point of view as well as from the religious one: the enterprises that in the Soviet times were kolkhozes were different on the different sides of the River, on the East the Udmurt villages were associated in the cooperative Demen, which is still operating, although with another status; on the other side, the Udmurt villages work with Tatar villages in the cooperative Rassvet. On one side there are 9 villages, and 10 on the other. But the Yug also separates two religious groups, which coordinate their activities but hold them apart. We shall call them, as the population does, according to the location of their central ceremony – the Vilgurt and the Alga groups.

Here, the religious activities are concentrated on the period preceding the solstices: the most intense time is before the summer solstice²³¹. The two groups decide together the Friday on which they will hold the village ceremony, usually at the

²³¹ A more detailed ethnography has been published in Toulouze, Niglas 2014.

beginning of June. All the village ceremonies are held on the same day²³². Historically the village ceremony was only the first stage of a whole system. It was followed by a ceremony called *kuin gurt vös'*, the ceremony of the three villages [Sadikov, Danilko 2005: 231]. In both groups it was held one week after the village ceremonies. Its fate has evolved differently. East of the Yug, in the Vilgurt group, the sacrificial priest, Nazip Sadriev, decided at the end of the 1950ies that it would be better to spare forces in order to hold properly the other ceremonies, and gave up. In the Alga group, on the contrary, this ceremony has grown. It is called *Bagysh vös'* and is held in a particular location along the road leading to Kyzyl'yar, which is not connected to any village in particular; in 2013 it was attended by 7 villages, in 2015 already by 8 of them. This is the intermediate level. One week after the *gurt vös'* or *Bagysh vös'* both groups gather for their group ceremony, the *mör vös'*, which concerns all the villages and is held in Vilgurt (one week before the other, as the intermediate level has disappeared) and in Alga. There is also a ceremony at regional level in summer - in the end of June hundreds of people from all over the territory of Eastern Udmurt gather for *elen vös*. This ceremony, literally called the ceremony of the land, is rotating annually between three villages, Kirga (in the kray of Perm'), Altaevo (in the district of Buraevo, Bashkortostan) and Varyash (in the district of Yanaul, Bashkortostan). The continuity of this large ceremony was interrupted after the 1920s and it was remembered only in the villages where it had been rotating. The

²³² There may be exceptions, but the other day may only be the following Sunday. It happened so in 2014, when Uraz Gildy decided to hold the village ceremony on the Sunday to allow us to film it (it had been asked by an inhabitant of the village, not by us!); in 2016, the recently revitalised ceremony in the district centre of Verkhniye Tatyshly was also held on Sunday.

ceremony was re-established in 2008. The Udmurt of the Tatyshly district are faithful participants and they contribute a sacrificial sheep every year.

The winter cycle is much more limited: the village ceremonies have almost disappeared in both groups: only in the Alga group the Starokalmiyarovo village has starting some years ago holding a village winter ceremony. Nevertheless, the three collective winter ceremonies, the Alga group's *tol bagysh vös'* and *tol mör vös'* as well as the Vilgurt group's *tol mör vös'*, have been maintained.

The ceremonies are carried on by sacrificial priests and organised by “the master of the ceremony”, *vös' kuz'o*. These two functions may or may not coincide. Each village has one sacrificial priest or more. They are appointed by the elder priest, who chooses his successors: the priest must be a married man with virtuous reputation, if possible, with priests among his forefathers. In tradition, these priests were elder men, not younger than 40. But nowadays the choice often falls on younger men (see Toulouze, Niglas 2017). The function of *vös' kuz'o* may have existed formerly, but it has acquired an important function with the revitalisation process, for often they were the ones who initiated the whole process through looking for a priest.

What happens in these ceremonies? While there are some significant differences between both groups, the core of the ceremonies is the same. Its goal is to propitiate the deities through prayers and a sacrifice and to ask for prosperity, harmony, good harvest, reproduction of the livestock, fertility and health for the village community and their output is a porridge cooked with the broth from the sacrificial animal, the crops and butter collected from the population, and to which the meat of the sacrificial animal is

finally added²³³. In these ceremonies usually the sacrificial animal is a ewe, there can be either one or more of them. Finally, the village population gather on the ritual ground and the people eat the porridge together.

The Balzyuga village ceremony – *gurt vös*

There are different reasons why we chose in this article to focus on a village ceremony in the village of Balzyuga.²³⁴ It is a village with 291 inhabitants, 99% of them Udmurt (that means that one or two spouses are Tatars). It is characterised by determined continuity. It is the living place of one of the most authoritative sacrificial priests in Bashkortostan, Nazip Sadriev, born 1930. He has an experience of 60 years as a sacrificial priest, and has kept organising prayer ceremonies during the whole of the Soviet period, teaching younger priests and transmitting this particular tradition to other generations [Sadikov, Danilko 2005: 232]. He received in 2016 for his life work the Estonian Fenno-Ugria foundation award “World Tree” for grassroots activity in order to maintain Finno-Ugric traditions. He decided in 2010 to retire and transmitted his responsibilities to a younger sacrificial priest he had trained himself: Fridman Kabipjanov is the local music teacher and he was 30 at that time. He was married and had fathered a son; he doesn’t drink and is respected in the village. So this was an

²³³ Formerly the meat was served separately from the porridge, but according to Nazip Sadriev people took advantage and stole meat. Therefore he decided to put the meat directly into the porridge.

²³⁴ The first ceremonies we filmed in Tatyshly district were *mör vös* in Vilgurt and *elen vös* in Kirga.

interesting situation, with a younger sacrificial priest, an older authority and behind a long history of continuity.

Moreover Balzyuga is the village where we have been living since the beginning of our fieldwork, which means that we are well known by the population. We are also quite close to Fridman and to his family. So we decided to film his village ceremony. Hereafter we describe the procedures during the ceremony and we comment upon the main actors of it.

Indeed, Fridman is not alone in the ceremony: he is assisted by a team. In some places, as well as in the biggest ceremonies, there may be some elder women assisting, whose task is then exclusively to clean the cauldrons and the innards of the sacrificial ewe. But it was not the case in Balzyuga. The core team, formed by Fayzy (Faizelkhan Mukhametzyanov) and Shurik (Alexandr Minnigaraev), always accompanies Fridman in all ceremonies he attends. Both are peasants, in their late fifties, and have a much longer experience than Fridman, who relies heavily on them. During the village ceremony, the team is completed by Sidor, who is a somehow younger peasant, and Mengaray. Mengaray is the only son of Nazip Sadriev, who would have liked for him to become his successor; but Mengaray refused categorically. He though attends every single ceremony helping as much as he can with different tasks – in 2014, he was there, cutting wood, with his grand-son, illustrating one kind of transmission form.

Actually the Udmurt ceremonies are complex activities in which there is always need for help. As the main activity is cooking, there must be enough wood for feeding the fires for several hours; there is permanent need for water – water for cleaning, for drinking, for the broth, for tea – that the assistants bring from a spring nearby. Moreover,

the space has to be cleaned (it has not been used for one year), as well as the cauldrons. The ewe has to be butchered, and dispatched into distinct parts; when it is cooked, the meat has to be sorted out; the porridge has to be permanently mixed, until it is ready; it has to be served to the population and finally all the paraphernalia has to be cleaned. So the assistants are permanently doing something and there are often different separate actions running in parallel.

The priest is responsible for the right proceedings and for the prayers. There are several prayers in a village ceremony. Most of them are performed in the following way: the sacrificial priest stays in front of a birch branch stuck into the soil, with his costume, holding different items. He reads the prayer three or four times interrupting the text to say “Omin” while bending down. The others are on their knees, and when the priest bends down and says “Omin”, they bend down so that their head touch the soil. The first prayer is made with a bowl of porridge without meat and is meant to ask allowance for the sacrifice. The second one is made with a round loaf of homemade bread given by the owner of the ewe whose throat is being cut by helpers during the prayer. A coin is thrust in the bread, to symbolise, according to the locals, wealth. The third prayer is made with a bowl containing some particular pieces of meat (the heart, the liver, part of the head, a right rib, a part of the right thigh). The other prayers are performed in a slightly different way: the fourth is the prayer on the money offered. The priest is bareheaded and on his knees, while the audience is in the same position as in the other prayers. We have seen a final prayer performed only in Balzyuga: it is performed at the end, only for the assistants. Then the priest stays as in the first prayers, but the assistants also stay and bend forward when Fridman says “Omin”.

There is no audience at the beginning: the only present are the priest and his assistants (and the anthropologists...). The villagers arrive one by one at some moment, usually while the meat is being cooked, so that there are already persons kneeling for the third prayer. This time Nazip Sadriev was one of the first to arrive and he participated as an assistant to all the ceremony. Among the participants there were people of all ages, but all were well trained about how to behave in a sacred place.

Filming a village ceremony

When we decided to document the Udmurt sacrificial ceremonies, we knew from the start that we would not direct participants' behaviour nor ask them to re-enact their actions for the camera. Our aim was to capture the event as it occurred in reality, with all its spontaneity and intensity. This obliged us to make certain choices, both of the style of filmmaking and of the size of the film crew. We also knew that it will not be an easy task to achieve and that we have to face a few challenges in the course of filming the ceremony.

The choice of the observational style instead of more directed approach in filmmaking was not a difficult one to make. As a rule, Liivo Niglas, who was the filmmaker of the project, films alone: he is usually the director, the cameraman and the sound recordist, as well as the editor of his films. He believes that working alone gives the necessary spontaneity for making right decisions while observing ongoing, often unpredictable events with the video camera. As a filmmaker, Liivo tries to harness the potential that is inherent in the real life behaviour of the film characters, including their spontaneous reactions to the presence of a camera. He employs observation as the main

strategy both in filming and editing. Observational filmmaking attempts, through the use of the camera and the editing of the film, to observe lived life with a minimum of intervention but doing it rather from a close distance than from afar. The aim is not to achieve some kind of objective description of reality but an emotionally and sensorially engaged meeting between the filmmaker (and thus the audience) and the film subjects. Instead of filming with a tripod that makes implementation of spontaneous decisions clumsy, observation filmmaker uses hand-held camera in order to be able to follow the film subjects closely and without delay. The utilization of long takes and few cuts in the editing process helps to respect the temporal and spatial aspects of the filmed events. The absence of interviews, voice-over commentary, and music scores provides viewers with the impression of witnessing firsthand the experiences of the subjects and encourages the audience to form their own ideas and interpretations. The observational approach has been extensively used in ethnographic filmmaking. As American film theorist Bill Nichols points out, it “affords the viewer an opportunity to look in on and overhear something of the lived experience of others, to gain some sense of the distinct rhythms of everyday life, to see the colors, shapes, and spatial relationship among people and their possessions, to hear the intonation, inflection, and accents that give a spoken language its ‘grain’ and that distinguish one native speaker from the another” (1991: 42). Critics of the observational approach in ethnographic film have accused practitioners of trying to pretend that the camera was not there or that the filming was not part of the filmed experience (for discussion see MacDougall 1998; Young 1975). We did not hide the presence and the influence of the filmmakers: there are moments in

the final film where film subjects are addressing the cameraman, and a few times the other members of the research team are visible in the shot.

The choice of the observational approach brought along certain challenges for us. The first remark concerns the context. When we attended the Balzyuga ceremony, we already had been around several times: it was the third opportunity we had for filming a ceremony. In 2013, we had already filmed Fridman participating in two ceremonies (*mör vös* in Vilgurt and *elen vös* in Kirga), though not in a position of a praying priest but as a helper. Therefore, on the one hand, the people were accustomed to see us around, so that we had the feeling that our presence did not disrupt anything from their ordinary routine. But on the other hand, Fridman was now the very centre of camera's attention and we were concerned whether it was not too much pressure for him: as we had witnessed, Fridman was a very camera conscious person and there was possibility that being filmed might interfere with his performance as a *vös'as*. Insisting on participant-observation in our filmmaking it was very important to us to focus on the spontaneous and the immediately meaningful with an attempt to capture the emotions and intentions of the moment. If the main protagonist would have acted with stiffness and without spontaneity, our aim of documenting and representing a living event would have been problematic. To our great relief, Friedman went on carrying out his sacrificial priest's duties with ease and natural elegance demonstrating that he had overcome his camera consciousness and that he felt comfortable in the position of a sacrificial priest.

The second challenge we knew we were going to face during shooting derived from the very nature of the sacrificial ceremony – the multiplicity of parallel activities obliges the cameraman to make choices about what kind of filmic approach to use for

capturing the essence of the ritual. The alternative is either to try to cover totally the action, trying to give a distant, objective, etic account of the ritual, or to make choices rooted in the filmmaker's own sensitivity and to give an account that is partial, subjective and engaged in the action. We chose the second approach, because we believe it provides a more accurate description of the event: it not only enables the viewer to see the ongoing activities from the close distance, but also gives the filmmaker more freedom to attempt to transmit the sensorial dimensions of the ritual. For us, the transmission of sensorial aspects of rituals is important as it helps the viewer to reflect on the corporeal and emotional experience of the persons attending the ceremony. The sensorial aspect of filmmaking helps the spectator catching the atmosphere of the ceremony and what it means to be physically engaged in ritual practises, be it porridge making, sheep skinning or kneeling and praying. The audio-visual image not only conveys visual information of the recorded activity, but also its aural and even tacit qualities (see Pink 2006, MacDougall 1998, 2006). Therefore, the camera is almost always in the midst of sacrificial priest and his helpers, observing the embodied knowledge of ritual practises expressed in facial expressions and body movements. The film is also revealing the overall sensorial environment of the ritual by exploring the visual, aural, tacit and olfactory aspects of the porridge-making: the fires with crackling sound, close-ups of the steaming porridge in the caldrons, omnipresent smoke getting into the throat of sacrificial priest, hands crumbling the hot lamb meat - all these images convey the sensorial experience of the film characters. But in order to capture all this, the cameraman had to be close to the action and therefore miss to film some other parallel activities that could have been noticed when filming the ritual from a distance.

One of those missed activities was the throwing of the sacrificial blood into fire by men who slaughtered the sheep.

Missing some details of ritual practise is the price one has to pay when making a film in an observation style and refusing to ask participant to repeat their actions. This brings us to another challenge we acknowledged before we started to record the ritual. By the time we filmed the *gurt vös* in Balzyuga Liivo was already familiar with the ritual. He had documented a few Udmurt sacrificial ceremonies in a previous year in the Tatyshly district. This familiarity was both comforting and disturbing. It allowed the filmmaker to have expectations, and to be ready for what was supposed to come. But there was also the reverse effect: having expectations could lull the cameraman's attention – important, unexpected, actions could happen without the filmmaker being able to recognize the significance of these because he was waiting for something else. Halting the ongoing ritual process and asking Fridman or his helpers to repeat their action would have helped us to document the ritual more accurately but the viewers would have lost the feeling of witnessing a lived experience that is sensorial, spontaneous and subjective.

Our biggest challenge in filming in observation style was the problem of the language. None of the team was skilled in Udmurt, while the Fridman's team conversed exclusively in Udmurt. This presented undoubtedly difficulties in the filming. As the praying was clearly separated from the rest of the action, we knew that we will not have difficulties to distinguish prayers from the flow of verbal information. But we also knew that the lack of language skills can be a great obstacle for us to achieve our goal to document the ceremony as a lived experience: we could not follow ordinary

conversations and small talk, in which people often touch on important issues and express their values and attitudes. All we could do, was to film spontaneous conversations as much as possible and get them translated later, so we could include some of it in the final film. Our strategy worked out quite well. There are a couple of longer conversations that reveal some of the issues that are important in the context of today's ritual activities in the region. For example, the conversation between Friedman and Nazip Sadriev explains the historical context of village ceremonies: Nazip informs Friedman that when he was young there were not one but three sacrificial places in the village, and that the choice of site was tied to the locations of the village's rye field that year. In another longer conversations, men discuss the matter of dressing properly for the ceremony, linking the usage of white clothes to the concept of cleanness. Including those conversations in the final film, does not add so much to the understanding of the meaning of ritual practises, more important is that it helps viewers to see the ceremony as a place for passing the ritual knowledge to the next generations and for negotiating concepts of proper sacral behaviour. Similarly, the main function of small talk (greetings, enquiries about the health, jokes, etc) in the film is not to provide specific information about the ongoing activities, rather it is to emphasize the social aspects of these ceremonies – it enables to show the ceremony as an social event where new relationships are formed and old ones reinforced, where the social capital of the individuals is acquired and where the social unity of the village is maintained. Both the longer conversations and small talk provide the viewer of the film with social context of the ceremony and show how the sacred is interwoven with the mundane, reminding us

that the sacrificial ritual is as much about the living people as it is about the gods and greater universe.

We hope that filming and editing choices we took to make *Gurt Vös: a village ceremony*, have led to a film that reproduces the experience we had while observing, filming and participating in the ceremony: Fridman and his helpers are working as an experienced team, they are well harmonised together and each one knows what to do; the main sounds are connected with the men's activities: the crackling of the fire, the axe chopping wood, the team's quiet conversations interrupted now and then with Fridman's clear voice reciting prayers; the steaming caldrons filled with bubbling porridge sending the smell of grouts, mutton and butter to the sky with the help of the smoke from the fires; the ceremony goes on smoothly, without a hitch, between high trees, expressing the utter harmony between the praying community and the envioning nature.

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