

## EASTERN UDMURT SACRED PLACES, YESTERDAY AND TODAY\*

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### ABSTRACT

Most Udmurt living in the Bashkortostan Republic and in the Perm' region of the Russian Federation are followers of a traditional ethnic religion. In their spiritual life, a huge place is occupied by sanctuaries and other places in which their ritual practices take place, such as the worship of deities, spirits and ancestors. We can identify different types of such places in this Udmurt regional group: the sanctuary dedicated to the cult of the clan protector deities, groves dedicated to the god Lud, places dedicated to personal and family cults, sacred places of agrarian sacrifices, territories where funerary and commemorative rituals take place, places dedicated to the propitiation of evil spirits. Depending on their social status, the sanctuaries are regional or general and can be related to a family, clan, village, or multiple villages. In this article, which relies on the authors' ethnographic fieldwork and published sources, we analyse the present state of the sacred places. We show that the transformation of cultural patterns has led some types of sanctuary to cease functioning, while others have remained as relics and the places of agrarian sacrifices have undergone an active revitalisation.

**KEYWORDS:** Udmurt • ethnic religion • sanctuary • ritual places • animism

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## INTRODUCTION: WHO ARE THE EASTERN UDMURT?

The Eastern Udmurt, who live in the north-western districts of the Bashkortostan Republic and in the south of Perm' kray (formerly the Birsk uyezd of the Ufa and Osa uyezd of the Perm' governorates), are an Udmurt diaspora group (see Toulouze and Anisimov 2020). They are characterised by a strong Turkic influence, as they live among Turkic communities, which has significant consequences on their lives: on the one hand, they have adopted many features of their neighbour's cultures, such as language, costume, musical taste; on the other hand, they have been protected from pervasive Russian culture, including Orthodox missionisation. Thus, they were never baptised even formally and until the 1930s maintained in full continuity the rituals and customs of their ancestors. This means that keeping their religious identity is today one of the most particular aspects of their identity. Indeed, while in the Udmurt Republic the population has been evangelised in a long penetration process from the formation of the Russian Empire with the occupation of Kazan in 1552 up to the second third of the 18th century, many Udmurt communities, unhappy with the disruption of their lives, migrated eastwards and settled in the Bashkir lands. Their descendants are now known as the Eastern Udmurt. In their agrarian communities – with some exceptions, when some villages have converted to Islam (Sadikov 2019) – the Udmurt ethnic religion has survived, and even, since the beginning of the 21st century, been powerfully revitalised.

With the formation of collective farms and the destruction of the rural community, as well as the atheistic policy of the Soviet state, traditional Udmurt ritual practice suffered significant damage, but was still resilient enough to resist, thanks to the inertia of community traditions and the rural population's conservatism. Indeed, probably the non-Russian environment contributed as well, for Udmurt met with some understanding from local authorities that did not fight manifestations of Udmurt religiosity with utter conviction. Thus, this practice was not totally eradicated, and some rituals, even collective ones, were pursued on a semi-legal basis so that community ceremonies and sacrifices were continued, hidden from the authorities and with a minimal number of participants. Practice that was more private was even less disrupted. Since the 1990s, as atheism ceased to be a crucial point in Russian policy, there has been a powerful revitalisation process of Udmurt ethnic religion (Toulouze et al. 2018a; Toulouze et al. 2018b).

Among the basic elements in this practice, which include the existence of sacrificial priests (Toulouze and Niglas 2017; 2021) and the proceedings of the rituals (Toulouze and Niglas 2014), we shall concentrate here on sacred places and buildings where various ritual practices take place. This article is thus dedicated to the analysis of the present situation of consecrated places of sacrifice and other rituals from a historical perspective. It relies both on published research and on the authors' fieldwork. The latter are the result of yearly expeditions: Ranus Sadikov, who is an Eastern Udmurt tradition-bearer and a scholar of religion, started fieldwork as a student in 1995, and had thus the opportunity to interview elder informants, many of them now deceased. He continues his work today in the framework of the Ufa Research Institute.<sup>1</sup> Eva Toulouze started fieldwork in 2013 and continued with the support of Tartu University, and later led an international project for the study of Eastern Udmurt cult practice between 2017 and 2022 (IUF France)<sup>2</sup>. She had to interrupt fieldwork in 2020 and resumed it in 2022. We have used traditional ethnographic methods such as interviews, observation,

participant observation, site visits, recording (audio, photo and video), as well as drawing sketches, etc. Moreover, the authors have the experience of participating personally in rituals, since 2013 for Toulouze, and since his childhood for Sadikov.

#### RESEARCH ON EASTERN UDMURT RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE PAST

Obviously, we are not the first to investigate this topic. The first period of investigation covers the end of the 18th century, the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, more precisely its first third. We would separate this period into two parts: foreign scholars and Russian investigators. Foreign scholars are mainly Finnish<sup>3</sup> and Hungarian explorers, who were looking into their eastern language kin, mainly in order to gather materials that allowed them to understand the Finno-Ugric proto-language and their own ethnic origins. Alongside the linguistic research, which was their main motivation, they pursued ethnographic research and gathered precious data. The Finns were particularly active, with among others Yrjö Wichmann (1894) and Uno Holmberg-Harva (1911) collecting precious data that we still rely upon. The main Hungarian who was interested in Udmurt material is Bernát Munkácsi, who however did not make it to Eastern Udmurt territory as he was rejected by the Udmurts' neighbours who were afraid that he was a missionary (Sadikov and Minniyakhmetova 2012). In 1916 he interviewed Udmurt prisoners of war in Esztergom camp, north of Budapest, and thus collected precious material for the study of religion.

Among the Russian scholars, the first text was collected by Nikolay Rychkov, an explorer, at the end of the 18th century. Other researchers followed later, in the 20th century. Scholars of religion, such as Arkadiy Emel'yanov, were particularly interested in this diaspora group, whose history was somehow different than the that of the Udmurt living in the core territory. They were able to work still in 1920. After 1917 Russia became closed for foreign exploration, so no fieldwork was possible until the 1990s, with one remarkable exception in linguistics and ethnomusicology in 1970, carried out by Hungarians Gábor Bereczki and László Vikár. Within the Soviet Union's borders, indeed, research was possible and even encouraged, but the range of allowed topics was limited. Especially after the collectivisation campaign, when the whole territory was taken under control by the state, religion became tabooed. Indeed, the practice of religion, even of local religions, was marginalised and discouraged. Religion was also no longer an acceptable topic for research. Thus, there is a real void in the Soviet period. While we have interesting information about some Udmurt villages from 1894, thanks to Wichmann, the next written information concerning religion in the same village is from 2008 (Hafeez 2015; see also Toulouze 2024).

In the 1970s, some linguists from Udmurtia, although not explicitly researching religion, collected and published some prayers (although this had negative consequences for their careers). These texts are precious witnesses of a particular register and have been treated as such. Still, it is curious to notice that this eastern diaspora did not overly inspire even Udmurt researchers to choose it as their research field. This was a kind of reserved terrain for local scholars who spoke the local dialect. Two such Udmurts

appeared, who dedicated themselves to the investigation of the religious field. Both coming from the most traditional Burayevo district, north-western Bashkortostan, Tat'yana Minniyakhmetova and Sadikov focused on this practice. Minniyakhmetova, who defended her doctoral thesis at the University of Tartu (2003), obtained a certain international renown for her research, while Sadikov published mainly in Russian and for the Russian audience. Both developed their fundamental research on the quest of the original forms of religious practice, considering that Soviet policy had led to their degradation, both looking for an ideal pattern.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before we analyse the different types of sacred space, we wish to make two preliminary remarks. The first concerns a feature that might be surprising for many, accustomed to the remarkable stability of the sacred places in the mainstream monotheistic religions that surround us: Udmurt sacred places are somewhat mobile. According to Holmberg-Harva, changing locations of sacred places is an old tradition (Harva 1911: 78) that it is not always connected to serious problems.

The second feature is correlated with the first: once sacred, a place does not lose its sacredness, whatever use it has, even when usual ritual practice has been discontinued and nobody uses it anymore. It continues to be honoured and respected. Indeed, when we analyse rituals that have faded away, we are able to cite examples of how former places of worship are still present in the mental map of the villagers.

## TYPES OF SACRED PLACE

Researchers (Chernykh 2004; Minniyakhmetova 2004; Sadikov 2004; 2019: 63–67; Toulouze and Vallikivi 2021: 225–239) have distinguished different types of sanctuary in the religious practice of the Eastern Udmurt, depending to whom they are dedicated:

- the sanctuary of the clan deities, called *kuala* (both family and clan);
- the sacred groves of the deity Lud, called *keremet* or *lud* (clan and village);
- the sacred places for the agrarian ceremony cycle *vös'as'kon inty* or *kuris'kon inty* (both for village ceremony and for ceremonies for several villages);
- the territories where funerary and commemorative rites are held, *shay*, *kyr kuyan* (village cemeteries and others);
- the places dedicated to personal family cults, *ly kelyan* (village);
- the places dedicated to propitiate evil spirits, *vozho* (village).

Classification might also depend on the social use and on the group that uses them, i.e. family, clan, village community, group of villages, a whole local group, and general loci. In the present day, not all of these types are in use; some are practically forgotten and only the eldest people remember the rituals that were performed in them, while others have experienced a very significant development. Let us examine these types according to their use today, starting from those that are almost forgotten and moving towards the most active.

Some of these places are no longer cult places, although they have been important in former times for the communities. These are the sanctuaries of the clan deities, the only building dedicated to worship for the Udmurt, the *kuala*. In addition, there are other places connected to the cult of the dead, places dedicated to personal family cults *ly kelyan* (village) and some places dedicated to propitiating evil spirits *vozho* (village).

### *The Kuala and the Clan Cult*

The *kuala* has a historical importance for the Udmurt and is “one of the last sacrificial buildings for a cult group of any ethnic religion in Europe” (Siikala 2004: 146). This word is composed of the stem *kua-* meaning ‘house’, ‘dwelling’, which is still active in neologisms as *kunokua* ‘hotel’, and the suffix *-la*, for place names (Atamanov-Egrapi 2020: 70). We can go further, as *ku* means ‘hide’ and thus *kua*<sup>4</sup> can be interpreted as ‘cover with hides’, which may mean that originally this sanctuary was not a log house<sup>5</sup> (Vinogradov 2010: 60–61).

The *kuala* is a small log house, without floor or ceiling, where the clan deity Voshshud, responsible for the well-being of the clan and for its happiness (Tezyakov 1892: 23), was worshipped. In addition of being the deity’s name, the name Voshshud is a variation of the literary Udmurt *vorshud*, which is a very polysemic word. It has its origin in two Udmurt words, *vordyny* ‘to be born’ and *shud* ‘happiness’ (or *shudyny* ‘to give birth’) (Kondrat’eva 2016: 236; Vladykin 1994: 275–276). Beyond being a deity, an anthropomorphic spirit guardian, it also gave its name to different objects and a representation of the spirit was kept in the *kuala*, the place where the figure stood, the sacred box where all sacrificial offerings were kept. It was also the name of the kin group worshipping this deity (Shutova 2012: 416). According to Grigoriy Vereshchagin (1886: 54), the head of the household addressed the deity Vorshud at least 60 times every year on different occasions. The worship was for the entire clan, including separate families.

Thus, there were clan *kualas*, called *badzh’yn kuala* (great *kuala*), and the family *kualas*, called *pokchi kuala* (small *kuala*) (Wichmann 1894: 1, 23; Harva 1911: 7–11). The latter are no longer practiced by the Eastern Udmurt.

By the turn of the 20th century, the Eastern Udmurt had from one to five-six clan sanctuaries, depending on the number of clans represented in the village. The function of clan sanctuary was fulfilled by the building situated in the yard of the elder of the clan, who was responsible for the tasks of the sacrificial priest (*kuala utis* ‘the warden of the *kuala*’) (Harva 1911: 8). In most cases, at least in Udmurtia, the great *kuala* was situated outside the village, in places difficult to access, which Nadezhda Shutova (2001: 93) explains with the need for protection both against evangelisation and against Soviet antireligious policy. This interpretation could explain why the Eastern Udmurt did not have any need to hide, for there were no threats to their religious activity. Today, even where buildings still exist, no *kuala* is open to religious practice, at least in the Eastern Udmurt area.<sup>6</sup>

Over many years of fieldwork, we have identified the existence of these cult buildings in only some villages: Verkhnyaya Barabanovka (Sadikov in 1997) and Nanyady

(Sadikov in 1997 and Toulouze in 2023) in the Yanaul district, Mamady (Sadikov in 2001; Toulouze in 2023) in the Burayevo district and Aribash (Sadikov and Toulouze in 2015) in the Tatyshly district. However, some rites for clan deities have been maintained in some villages. They usually take place on the remains of former *kualas*. In 1997 Sadikov attended the *kualaye pyron* 'entering the *kuala*' ceremony in Votskaya Osh"ya, in the Yanaul district. The ritual was performed on the place where the *kuala* had previously been situated and where some stones from the *kuala* fireplace were preserved. In 2018 Sadikov and Liivo Niglas recorded the *kuala kuris'kon* 'ceremony of the *kuala*' in Altayevo, in Burayevo district. It was performed at the place of the *Kaksya kuala* 'the *kuala* of the Kaksya clan', where some stones from the foundation of the building remained at the corners. According to our informants, a spring ceremony was performed in 2022 at the place of a *kuala* in Urazgil'dy, in Tatyshly district (FM 2022: RS). These are clearly the very last echoes of the *kuala* cult among the Eastern Udmurt: with the demise of the last wardens of the ceremonies, these ceremonies will no longer be performed. There is a particular ritual for closing a *kuala*, *kualaez bydton* 'finishing the *kuala*', where a sacrifice is performed and a prayer said. Such a ritual was performed in the *Chuya kuala* 'the *kuala* of the Chuya clan' in Aribash, after which the building was locked and nobody has entered it since (FM 2015a: RS, ET).

After the destruction or the natural demolition of cult buildings, the places of their location were also seen as sacred and started to be worshipped. While rites are not performed everywhere, the remains of *kualas*, and even the very memory of the places, are still respected. Sometimes the fireplace stones were fenced (as in Mamady in 2023), sometimes trees and flowers were planted (as in Nanyady in 2023). Thus, Sadikov discovered two such places in Staryy Kyzyl"yar in Tatyshly district in 2009. Although no ceremonies are held anymore, the owner of the place honours them and protect them from desecration.

In Kizganbashevo, Baltachevo district, memory has been preserved of three such places, where *kualas* had existed. It is interesting to follow the evolution through the years. In 2000 there were three fenced places: *Shaynurlen kualaez* 'Shaynur's *kuala*', and inside the fence an old willow had grown; *Nizamyttinlen kualaez* 'Nizamyttin's *kuala*', where a fir grows; *Shaykhutdinlen kualaez* 'Shaykhyutdin's *kuala*', where a lilac had grown (FM 2000a: RS). It was clear that the places were cared for. When Sadikov visited the village again in 2008 changes had occurred, with two places being abandoned. The old willow had been hit by lightning, only some parts of the burned trunk were still there, while the fence had disappeared. The second place was also without a fence, but the lilac was then still growing. The sacred place with the fir, as before, was fenced. According to the informants, these places were already fenced when they were children, and until recent times some families performed ceremonies for the 'end of the Great day', *bydzh'ynnal poton*, taking with them beer (*sur*), and bread or pies (FM 2008: RS). In 2016 in the first place nothing remained at all; in the second, the lilac grew on but it was much damaged. The third place, as before, was cared for by one of the inhabitants, a Muslim Tatar woman, who had promised as much (FM 2016a: RS, ET). This example eloquently illustrates the almost total fading of the *kuala* cult among the Eastern Udmurt and how dependent on survivors the memory is.



## Ly Kelyan, Kyr Kuyan

Another place which, even more than the *kuala*, is being forgotten is the *ly kelyan* ‘(the place) where bones were accompanied’ (*ly* ‘bone’, *kelyany* ‘to accompany’, ‘to see off’). These were places where trees grew, on whose branches were hung the limbs and skulls of sacrificed animals. The sacrificial animals were slaughtered in private sacrifices called ‘finishing the victim’, *kyrvonez bydton* (*kyrvoon* or *kurbon* ‘sacrifice’, ‘sacrificial animal’, *bydtyny* ‘to finish’), performed by couples in their declining years (Sadikov 2019: 189–190). Usually there were firs (*ly kelyan kyz* ‘the fir for seeing off the bones’), but there happened also to be leaf trees such as elms (*sirpu*) (Kasiyarovo in the Burayevo district, Kanly in the Kushnarenkovo, Verkhniy Tykhtem in the Kaltasy districts). The bones were tied with bast ropes, and for the skulls people prepared special bridles, the small ones were thrown to the foot of the tree. They were brought in on sledges (this ritual was usually held at the end of autumn) with songs and music. In some villages people brought the sacrificial bones from community sacrifices to the same place, for example in Bayshady in Burayevo district after the ceremony of several villages, called *Badzh’ym vös* ‘Great sacrifice’ (Minniyakhmetova 2000: 53; 2015: 47), and in Asavtamak (in the same district) after the ceremony in the *keremet* (FM 2007: RS). Photos by Holmberg-Harva in 1911 show *ly kuyan* in Staraya Kirga (a fir) in the Osa uyezd and probably in Kaymashabash (a willow or an alder) in the Birska uyezd with tied bones (SKS KA 1911). As the rituals *kyrvonez bydton* no longer take place (the last were probably held in the 1960–1970s), today this type of sacred place has been forgotten. The memory is maintained in micro toponymics and they are remembered as dangerous locations.

Among the Eastern Udmurt, places called *kyr kuyan* (lit. ‘(place where) the bast is ejected’) are also connected with funerary and commemorative rituals. These were the places where material remains of the dead were thrown away: the clothes in which a person died, the chips and shavings of the coffin, the bast used to wash the dead. In Kasiyarovo (Burayevo district) the *kyr kuyan* was situated in a hollow by the river. There, the deceased’s clothes were burned. These places are remembered only by elder informants born in the 1900s.

## Teber Kyr, Vozho

Other rituals have disappeared as well, and their places have been forgotten. In some villages there were special places where people went to propitiate the spirits of diseases. For example, in Staryy Varyazh (Birska uyezd),

every six years the people give a black bull on the site called *teber kyr* ‘beautiful lawn’. There the Votyaks implore the disease spirits of the place, where from their ancestors migrated here, for these spirits not to follow them in their new region, where they live so as not to damage them. (Aptiyev 1891: 1–2)

In Altayevo (Burayevo district) there were two places, *vozh*, situated in thickets in low places, separated for men and women, where the spirits of infectious diseases were given crops as offerings, with words of incantation (FM 2018: RS, ET). Today these places are practically forgotten, no ritual takes place there.

We see that the religious life of the Eastern Udmurt, while being in general better preserved than in other regions, is still very dynamic: many worship sites have lost their place even in people's memory. A good example is given by Bolshekachakovo, visited by Wichmann in 1895. He inventoried many village sacred places, and described them in detail. When Kirsi Mäkelä spent three months in the village in 2008, she attempted to find them. She found some, and was able to identify the places where others were, while others had totally disappeared: trees had been cut at different times, in other places trees had grown, so that the village today doesn't look as it did in Wichmann's photos. While undoubtedly some changes were brought on by the brutal Soviet anti-religious policy, others were probably part of the ordinary evolution of disappearing and emerging. It is only regretful that no intermediate information has come to us for more than one century.

#### FADING PLACES

Some places have been fading, although still in some villages they are part of the landscape, which allow us to see them as not only rooted in the past. The one we shall comment on here is one of the main places of worship in the Udmurt tradition, called either *lud* or *keremet*. Some authors, summarising the different types of Udmurt sacred place, mention two main places, the *kuala*, associated with the cult of Vorshud, and *keremet*, the place where the wild god is worshipped (Shutova 2012: 413). Sirelius (2003) add to this definition the judgmental approach, the first being the "good god", the second, the "bad" one. Actually, both names refer to the deity and to the worship place as well. There are two names for them, a proper Udmurt name, *lud* (which means 'field', but also 'wild nature') and a more international name *keremet*, which reminds us of the Eastern origin of this deity, whose name comes from Arabic and has been adopted by the Turkic peoples wherefrom it has penetrated to the Udmurt, especially in the southern areas (Vladykin 2003: 69).

#### Lud

The places called *lud* or *keremet* are fenced sacred groves where men made propitiatory sacrifices honouring the terrible deity Lud during the *lude pyron* 'entering the *lud*' ceremony (*lud* + *e*, illative; *pyryny* 'to enter'). According to our sources, the ceremonies that took place in them were clearly connected to the clan. Thus, Emel'yanov, relying on materials from Holmberg-Harva, observes that in Staraya Kirga, in the Osa uyezd, there were four *luds*, according to how many clans were living there, known by the names of the clans, for example, *Mozhga lud*, *Zyatsya Lud*, etc. Three clans lived in Kaymashabash (Birsk uyezd); they performed their ceremonies separately in the same *keremet* each with its own rituals (Emel'yanov 1921: 77–78). However, in many villages, the representatives of different clans prayed together.

The sacred groves were territories with mature trees, both conifers and deciduous, or mixed. The informants emphasise one peculiarity of these sacred places – the fact that they were compulsorily fenced (*ken'eramyn*, *putchen kotyrtemyn*), which is also con-



firmed by written sources from the 18th and 19th centuries (Sadikov 2019: 78). As Wichmann notes, there were special rituals and sacrifices when erecting a fence (Sadikov and Mäkela 2009: 244). Today only some fenced groves have been preserved. During our fieldwork we have identified such a grove in Votskaya Osh'ya in the Yanaul district where cult practice was never discontinued, not even in the Soviet period. In 1997, the village's *lud* was a small fenced territory of fir forest. The fence was irregular (a polygon) and in front there was a gate, a vertical picket fence, while the back was made of horizontal boards. Sadikov was able to see this fence when he visited the village in 2000 and 2005. In November 2014, after a snowstorm the fence was damaged, some trees were knocked down, and a new fence was erected, diminishing the area of the sacred plot. It had not changed by June 2015, while when we recorded an autumn ceremony in November 2015, it had been replaced at the front by a metallic fence of corrugated sheets painted green. According to the informants, an entrepreneur born in the village had decided to sponsor such a fence (FM 2015b: RS, ET). To date, the *lud* in Votskaya Osh'ya has been functioning regularly with, in summer and autumn, the *lude pyron* 'entering the *lud*' ceremony taking place. The sacrificial priest, who is different from the 'ordinary' sacrificial priest, and is called *lud utis* 'warden of the Lud', is the only one to enter the fenced space. There is a table and a sacred fireplace, where during the ceremony a fire is lit, but without preparing any food on it.

In 1997 the *lude pyron* ceremony was revitalised in Verkhniy Tykhtem, Kaltasy district. The sacred place, *keremet*, was fenced and birch trees planted (FM 2005: RS). In the 1990s, after some interruption, the *keremet vös*' ceremony started again in Aribash, in the Tatyshly district. Its territory is fenced and inside birch and fir trees grow. Only men are allowed to pray, and each clan in the village (*poska, chuya, tuklya*) has its own sacrificial priest (FM 2015a: RS, ET). This is a curious ceremony. All the features are those of *keremet* worship, but the addressee is not *keremet* but is the supreme god, Inmar. Indeed, this ceremony, in spite of presenting all the features of a traditional *keremet* – it is attended only by men (although Eva was welcomed without any problems), the sacrificial animal is a ram, the ceremony is accompanied by *kuarn'an* 'flatbread' – is the equivalent of a village *gurten vös*' ceremony (see below) (see Toulouze and Niglas 2016).

As in Votskaya Osh'ya, the ceremony in the sacred grove of Kizganbashevo, in the Baltachevo district, has not been discontinued. The ceremony is called *keremete pyron* or *keremet vös*' and takes place in a birch grove, which unlike the other similar places, has never been fenced. Only at the time of the ceremony is a temporary border established with a rope on stakes, and within that space only the sacrificial priest and their helpers enter. There they prepare the ritual porridge, and there the priests utter the prayers. According to our informants, it is prohibited to take the offerings *vyle mychon* 'uplifted' out of this boundary (FM 2000a: RS). This reveals the sacredness of this territory. Within this space, there is a particular birch, on the branches of which the offerings to the spirit of the grove, *Keremet kuz'o*, scarves and towels, are tied. Formerly, there was also a birch with a hollow in which people put sacrificial coins. Today they bury them in a hole in the ground. The *keremet* in Kasiyarovo, Burayevo district, had the very same spatial organisation.

Apparently, when the villages were founded the sanctuaries were located in the forest, as Petr Pallas (1788: 35–36) shows: "They have their *keremets*, in other words, sacrificial places, in fir woods, especially in well situated round places with high firs,

which they fence." Further on, with the economic exploitation of space, the cutting of forests and the extension of pastures, they became islands of trees among the fields. We have identified this kind of *lud* and *keremet* in Shudek in Yanaul district, Shav'yady in the Baltachevo district of Bashkortostan, and in Kipchak, in the Kuyeda district of Perm' kray. This is how the sacred grove of the latter looked in 2002. In 2018, we saw that the grove had practically disappeared among thickets, after the surrounding areas ceased to be used as pasture. The *keremet vös'* ceremonies were revitalised in 1992 in the same place (Chernykh 2021: 278).

As we have seen, at this moment sacred groves function in only some villages. Even where ceremonies do not take place, as in Staryy Varyash (Yanaul district), the remembrance of them and of the places where they took place remains, and this memory is quite precise. As this kind of sanctuary in the Udmurt tradition is one of the most tabooed, they were considered even more dangerous than cemeteries, which explains why they were always fenced. The reason was two-fold: the fence protected the space from accidental desecration, for example by livestock, which could thus not enter the place, but also to protect people and to show them that the place can be dangerous: desecration can bring the wrath of the god upon trespassers.

#### ACTIVE PLACES

Many places that traditionally held *lud* ceremonies no longer have them, mainly because the last 'wardens' have died without transmitting their knowledge. This is the reason why we have classified them among fading traditions. Now we shall dwell on those places that are actively used, and even more actively than ever before, i.e. places dedicated to agrarian ceremonies, and cemeteries.

##### *Places Associated with the Agrarian Cycle*

The name of these places does not allude in any way to the notion of sacredness. Their Udmurt names are utilitarian: *vös'as'kon inty* 'place of sacrifice' and *kuris'kon inty* 'place of ceremony' (shortened *vös'as'konti* or *kuris'konti*), where sacrifices relating to the agrarian calendar cycle are performed. *Vös'* refers to the sacrifice that forms the core of the ceremonies. The sacrificial priest who leads the ceremony is called *vös'as'* or *kuris'kis'* ('the one who prays' from *kuris'kyny* 'to pray'). Indeed, this last part of his title corresponds more precisely to his actions on the spot as the sacrificial priest is the one who says the words. He does not perform the sacrifice himself, this is the task of his assistants.

Apart from the general denomination, each place was named according to the ceremony to be held there. There are different types of ceremony depending on the social group concerned. According to Holmberg-Harva, we know that at the beginning of the 20th century in each yard there was a place for prayer, which "was usually either fenced or somehow distinguished somewhere close to the fence, so that nobody coming by would be able to desecrate it" (Emel'yanov 1921: 70). Probably this sacred location appeared with the disappearance of the family *kuala*.

In this place the head of the household prayed on holidays, “holding in their hands on a white towel, a bowl with pancakes, turning his face towards the south” (ibid.). According to informants, on these *kuris'konti*, the head of the household prayed every Friday with pancakes. Actually, some of the prayers Munkácsi collected from prisoners of war, who were ordinary peasants, were Friday prayers they uttered as heads of their households. Today, the only occasions for praying in the yard are the *bydzh'yinnal* ('great day') ceremony, the *tulys kuris'kon* ('spring ceremony') and the *siz'yl kuris'kon* 'autumn ceremony', or at the time of family events (the birth of a child, a wedding, housewarming, etc.). Usually nothing distinguishes them, but they take place in a clean corner of the yard.

The village *vös'as'kon* or *kuris'kon inty* were the places for those ceremonies that concerned the whole village community independently of one's clan belonging. The inhabitants of a village performed several sacrifices during the year in order to call for luck in their agricultural activities. The most important were the summer *badzh'ym* or *badzh'yn vös'* 'the great ceremony', the *gurten vös'* 'village ceremony' or *guzhem vös'* 'summer ceremony', and the *tol vös'* 'winter ceremony'. All of these names have a particular meaning depending on the village. While in some places *badzh'ym* or *badzh'yn vös'* 'the great ceremony' is a ceremony with different villages, in others one village is enough. These ceremonies function on the grassroots level and require that the researcher know exactly what a name covers in the given village.

The places for such collective ceremonies were not fenced, but all the villagers new about their sacred status. They were kept clean, they were not desecrated and the trees growing there were not cut. Unlike the *keremet*, they were not considered dangerous [*Alama inty övöl so* 'this is not a bad place'] (FM 2016b: RS, ET).

In each village there were three places dedicated to the village ceremony called the *busy vös'* 'ceremony in the field', held for arable soil divided into three wedges depending on crop rotation (winter, spring, fallow). The ceremony generally took place where by rotation rye was sown. There were also villages where every year they performed three ceremonies (*dsh'eg busy vös'* 'ceremony on the rye field', *vales busy vös'* 'ceremony on the winter field', *takyr busy vös'* 'ceremony on the fallow field'). Often such ceremonies were called *pokchi vös'* 'small ceremony' or *uak vös'* 'little ceremony'. “The place for the ceremony at these holidays is either in a field, or on a small lawn at its edge that was never ploughed and is considered as sacred” (Emel'yanov 1921: 140–141). In the Udmurt villages along the River Bystryy Tanyp, the winter ceremonies were performed within the village (*uram vös'* 'street ceremony'). These ceremonies took place in December: in one of the streets fires were lit and animals sacrificed; villagers prayed and cooked porridge, which they ate at home (Sadikov 2017: 587). In other regions people prayed in winter in the same places as in summer.

Today, only a small number of these sacred places still function. For example, in Altayevo, (Burayevo district) every year there is the *badzh'yn vös'*, whose site, according to our informants, has never changed and thus is in its original place, probably chosen when the village was founded. Three days (formerly one week) before, on Friday they organise the *siz'is'kon* 'promise (of a sacrifice)', *pichi vös'* 'small ceremony', *busy vös'*, the *shor busy vös'* 'ceremony on the central field', *Tanyp pal bysy vös'* 'ceremony in the field on the Tanyp side', or the *Vannapal busy vös'* 'ceremony on the higher field'. None of the sacred places is fenced, according to our informants, as there is no obligation in

their tradition to fence them, unlike for the *keremet* (FM 2018: RS, ET). The place for the *badzh'yn vös'* is on the shore of the Bystryy Tanyp, in a picturesque grove, where an old oak grows in whose hollow the villagers put coins when they address personal prayers to the deity, for example in case of disease or when called to the army, etc. During the ceremony, the place where they light fires and where the priests pray is fenced off with poles. Ceremonies were not interrupted in this village during the Soviet period, which explains the maintenance and good condition of the sacred places.

In Malaya Bal'zuga (Tatyshly district), where the tradition of the ceremonies was also never interrupted, there were three *vös'as'kon inty*, all fenced. The ceremonies were organised yearly by rotation depending on where rye was sown. At some moment, probably in the 1960s, the crop rotation system was abandoned. Then one of these places was destroyed because a bridge was built, the other has been abandoned. Today, there is only one sacred place, where the yearly *gurten vös'* ('gurt village') is organised (FM 2016b: RS, ET). The name of this ceremony can also be *gurt vös'*.

Where the ceremonies were discontinued and the practice restarted during the post-Soviet period villages used previous locations as well as also potentially choosing a new place, for example if the old sacred place was too far from the village or if the place had been built up, exploited economically or for any other reason had become unfit for ceremonies, for example had been desecrated. In 2002, in Bayshady (Burayevo district), people started performing *badzh'yn vös'* in a new place close to the village. In order to give it a sacred status, they brought soil from the previous place (Minniyakhmetova 2004: 131–132). In Urazgil'dy (Tatyshly district), the *gurten vös'* takes place in historically the third sacred place, after they ceased to hold it during the Soviet period. In 2019 in Nizhnebaltachevo (Tatyshly district), although they had been praying in the old place for less than ten years, they also changed the place of the village ceremony, putting it closer to the spring (FM 2019: RS, ET). In these cases, as when new *lud* or *kuala* were founded, they take earth or stones from the old fireplace and put them in the new one with prayers in order to “transfer the sacredness” (Toulouze and Vallikivi 2021: 235). In absence of earth or stones from the fireplace, they may take only simple earth.

Some villages, founded in the 1920s, do not have their own sacred places. For example, to date, the villagers from Mayskiy (Tatyshly district) participate in the ceremony *gurten vös'* in their original village, Novye Tatyshly. The same thing happens with villagers from Alga and Dubovka, who gather for *gurten vös'* in the sacred place of Nizhnebaltachevo (Tatyshly district). Actually, for decades the villagers from Kalmiyary (Kuyeda district, Perm' kray) celebrated their ceremonies with their “mother” village, Starokal'miyarovo (Tatyshly district), but in the last decades relations have become more extended.

Today, as with sacrificial priests, in almost all the villages inhabited by the Eastern Udmurt there is a functioning sacred place where the general ceremony of its inhabitants takes place. In most cases, these are the original locations. In the Tatyshly district, a tradition has developed to fence them. It has become “a marker of active religious activity” and symbolically marks the sacred status of the territory (ibid.: 226, 228).

Among the cult places of the agrarian cycle, we must distinguish the sacred places for several villages, where nearby villages, probably inhabited by people coming from one village, held common rituals. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the 20th century, on the site called *vuzh inty* 'old place' the villagers of Staraya Kyrga and Novaya Kyrga

as well as some villagers from Barabanovka, performed a common ceremony, as they previously came from a single village (Harva 1911: 31). Before the 1980s villagers from Urazgil'dy, Novye Tatyshly, Malaya Bal'zuga and Mayskiy had their own common ceremony, *kuin' gurt vös'* 'three villages ceremony', until their sacrificial priest, Nazip Sadriev, decided that the strain on the population and the priests was not worth it: in June, three Fridays were occupied, the villagers had to pay for the sacrificial animals, and he decided to abandon this ceremony. Originally the place where the *Bagysh vös'* 'ceremony on (the place called) Bagysh' takes place was similar (Tatyshly district). Today representatives of almost all villages from the group of villages on the left bank of the River Yug pray there. Only the villagers from Starokal'miyarovo do not participate.

After the villagers have held their own village sacrifice, the villages that form the community called *mer/mör* (Rus. *mir*, the rural community), organise a common ceremony called *mer/mör vös'*. This tradition is alive today in the Tatyshly district. Thus, the villages (Aribash, Yuda, Vyazovka, Urazgil'dy, Mayskiy, Novye Tatyshly, Malaya Bal'zuga) on the right shore of the Yug, have their *mör vös'* in the sacred place near Novye Tatyshly one week after their village ceremony. Before, they were more numerous, for Verkhnie Tatyshly belonged to this group, only after becoming the centre of the district were the ceremonies discontinued, while another village, Nizhnye Tatyshly, was integrated into the district centre. The ceremonies were revitalised in 2015 and now take place regularly and are integrated in this subgroup. The other nine villages on the left bank (Bigineyevo, Tanypovka, Kyzyl'yar, Starokal'miyarovo, Petropavlovka, Verkhnebaltachevo and Nizhnebaltachevo, Alga, Dubovka) have their *mör vös'* at Alga.

The sacred place at Novye Tatyshly is at the same time the place for the village ceremonies. In the first half of June villagers from Novye Tatyshly and Mayskiy have there their *gurt vös'*, and later, the *mör vös'*. Originally, and until the 1930s, the latter was organised in Verkhnie Tatyshly, in the sacred place near the source of the River Tatyshly. When Tatyshly district was organised and the village became its centre, the sacred place was transferred to the pasture between Verkhnie Tatyshly and Urazgil'dy. From there, the sacred place was transferred to Novye Tatyshly on the shore of the River Bol'shaya Bal'zuga (Udm. *Pismen'*), in a hollow where it was difficult to see the praying people. In the post-Soviet period the sacred place was 'lifted' from the hollow. In 1993 it was fenced and a hut built on that territory to store the paraphernalia. In 1994 a *vös' korka*, 'house for sacrifices' was built there (FM 2003: RS). In 2016 the most sacred location was separated with an internal fence, with only the priests and their helpers allowed inside. The *mör vös'* was originally held on the left bank, in Starokal'miyarovo on a high place. In the 1960s, because of persecution, the sacred place was transferred to a lower place. Around the mid-1970s, when a dam was built and the place was flooded, the left bank villagers started meeting in the remote and small village of Alga (FM 2000b: RS).

The new sacred place is dedicated only to the bigger ceremony. It was transferred to this remote corner in order to gain privacy for the rituals. It is also fenced, and there is in addition another internal fence which separates the most sacred part, where only sacrificial priests and their helpers enter. There is also a 'house for sacrifices', *vös' korka*, built in 2007. In these houses, built as ordinary houses, ritual food is distributed in the winter and paraphernalia is kept there. This kind of building (*tarlau korka*) also existed in some big sacred places in the past, it was a place where the sacrificial priests who came to the ceremonies from remote villages could sleep (FM 1997: RS).



There are other sacred places which may be used for wider ceremonies, one by Bol'shekachakovo (Kaltasy district) – where the *badzhyn vös'* (earlier called *mer vös'*) takes place regularly with villagers from neighbouring villages. Apparently, according to tradition, one of them is fenced, the other not (as already shown by Wichmann; see Sadikov and Mäkela 2009: 247). In the same category we must count the non-fenced sacred spaces used for the *Emenlyk* and *Yshtiyak* ceremonies in the Yanaul district.

At the turn 20th century the Eastern Udmurt celebrated an annual common ceremony called *el'en vös'* 'ceremony of the country' (from *el* 'country'). Thus, Ivan Smirnov (1890: 226) notes that the

Votyaks from Birk attend the *el'en vös'* with those from the Osa uyezd from the Perm' governorate. The place of these meetings is chosen in one of the three elder villages of the Birk and the Osa uyezd – Varyash, Altayevo and Karga.

Clearly, in the 1920s this tradition was discontinued and partly forgotten. In 2008 these ceremonies were revitalised in the very same places with the first taking place in Altayevo (Burayevo district). The location was the village sacred place, where the ceremony had probably taken place previously. On the years in which *el'en vös'* takes place in Altayevo, the village *badzh'yn vös'* is not performed. In 2009, *el'en vös'* took place in Staryy Varyash (Yanaul district). The sacred place used there was also the old village place, which was fenced. The *el'en vös'* in Kirga (Kuyeda district) in 2010 was held in a new place, for the old one was situated in a territory planned for building. On the eve a special ritual was performed in order to 'transfer' the sacred place. As Holmberg-Harva notes, the previous place was fenced (Harva 1911: 26) and so the new place was also fenced.

Thus, while each village (with the exception of tiny villages that celebrate their sacrifices with their mother settlement), today has a functioning sacred place that can sometimes be used for bigger ceremonies, where several villages are gathered. Moreover, some sacred places are only used for these wider ceremonies.

## C E M E T E R I E S

Cemeteries (*shay*) are different cult places for honouring the dead, for whom commemorative rituals, called *kuyas'kon*, are regularly performed. The *kuyas'kon* ritual, which exists all over the Udmurt territory, consists in crumbling food over the grave in order to nourish the dead. It is performed for all the rituals connected with the dead, both funerary and commemorative. Commemorative rituals are very important for the Udmurt. There are personal commemorations at three nights, 40 nights and one year after death, and still some years later for the parents. After that the deceased becomes an ancestor and is included in the general *kis'ton* ('libations') commemorations that take place every year both in spring and in autumn. Thus, the dead remain with the living, but in their own, very regulated way.

The tradition required that all burial places had a wood (usually oak) pole at the place of the head (*shay dzh'ubo*), on which originally the *tamga* (family mark) (Udm. *pus*) were marked, carved with an axe, and later the initials of the dead. The Udmurt think that all graves must be marked, because "it is prohibited to bury anybody without a



name", "*nimtek sogyny ug dzh'ara*" (FM 2018: RS, ET). In some subgroups, especially the Udmurts living in Yanaul and Tatyshly districts, there was the custom of nailing a small roof made of two boards, imitating the roof of the buried person's home. In some villages (Asavtamak and Altayevo in the Burayevo, Kizganbashevo in the Baltachevo districts) smaller poles were also put at the feet. By these poles the villagers left a bowl and cup (today also a shot glass) for commemorative libations. In some Eastern Udmurt cemeteries, at the head, near to the pole, the villagers put a small sheet of natural stone, which is clearly an influence of the neighbouring Muslim peoples.

In Starokal'miyarovo cemetery (Tatyshly district), at the head of grave, there is a commemorative small table, *kuyas'kon dzhök* ('table for commemorative offerings'), a wood board with a wooden leg carved from one of the wide sides. It is carved by the men during the *uy puket* ('the night vigil') when after a death the deceased's kin and friends spend the whole night by the coffin. Nobody uses nails, the leg is put in an opening on the board. Lower on the board, they carve with a knife or burn the full name of the deceased and the years of his or her life. This is set on the grave immediately after the backfill. The leg is pushed into the soil so that the small board is at ground level (although in some graves the leg is not fully pushed in, so that the board is higher). On the board, they put a plate and a cup for the commemorative offerings. They may also put coins, or a smoked cigarette, if the deceased smoked. According to informants, these boards rot quickly, making new ones is prohibited (FM 2000b: RS). Elder representations of these small commemorative tables, found in the same village in 1928 by Grinkova, are kept at the Ethnographic Museum of Russia (REM). They are small wood boards circa 20 cm wide; on one side they have a wooden 'leg', also circa 20 cm long, which allows it to be fixed into the earth (REM archive: 12). Small tables on the earth have been preserved at the cemetery in Kalmiyary in Kuyeda district, a village founded by people from Starokal'miyarovo.

In the cemetery in Davlekanovo (Burayevo district) at the head of the graves there are small poles made of thick boards, whose top is in the form of a rhombus. Externally they resemble Chuvash anthropomorphic gravesites. Unfortunately, we have not yet managed to interpret their origin and semantics. We cannot excluded the possibility that they may be seen as echoes of the old Beserman tradition of setting anthropomorphic poles on graves, which have today been kept only in the Islamised Beserman villages (Popova 2011: 241–244).

The graves were fenced (*shayken'er, shaytechan*), but according to some informants, this revealed the person's status: only rich people's graves were fenced. The most archaic are wooden log fences. Constructions on the grave, made of vertical walls of 5–6 logs, i.e. the same size as the grave, were usual in the past among the Udmurt of the River Buy basin. Sometimes on top they put longitudinal beams. Today these fences can be seen only by the oldest graves in Votskaya Osh'ya and Votskaya Urada cemeteries (Yanaul district). The Udmurt of the Tatyshly district had slightly different fences. Here, log houses narrow towards the top, so that the upper crowns were shorter than the others. On the top they set a beam, which imitated a horse head on the ceiling. In Starokal'miyarovo (Tatyshly district) and Kalmiyary (Kuyeda district) these log fences are called *koros* ('loghouse', 'formwork'). There were also fences made from poles or boards. The grave sites were not supposed to be renewed or repaired. Gradually they decayed and were destroyed. So that they would last as long as possible, people endeavoured to build them from hard wood, usually from oak.

As our informants note, one year after a death the Udmurt of Kuyeda district used to put a fence made of logs or boards (*tech'an, ch'etan*) on the grave. In Kipchak, 40 days or one year after the death, when setting a fence they added a pole symbolising the main beam of the deceased house, added scarves or towels, nailed silver coins on the fence or threw them on the grave (FM 2002: RS).

Today, at the head of the grave, they set metal or stone monuments, custom made, and metal fences by the poles. Often the poles can no longer be seen. Probably they decayed and were not replaced. Usually these are set at the 40-day commemoration or one year after the demise.

At the cemetery in Votskaya Osh''ya the bones of the animals sacrificed to the dead in the *ull'an s'oton* 'giving down' ritual hang on the branches of cemetery trees. In this ritual, people give in sacrifice a cow for a woman, and a horse for a man. Today it is difficult to find horses to sacrifice, so they are replaced by an equivalent, for example by two geese. There must be four limbs, therefore two birds are required. The skull and the bones of the limbs are tied to the firs with bast ropes. For the skull, a special bridle is woven from bast (Udm. *nyukto*). This is also done for the skulls of the geese, as we have seen earlier in the case of *ly kelyan* (see above). In the last decades, the bones are put in a plastic bag and hung on a fir branch. This ritual was previously general in most Udmurt villages of the River Buy basin, and is now particularly resilient in Votskaya Osh''ya.

In some cemeteries, on the branches of the trees growing there devices for washing the deceased, called *klasha*, hollowed out from half a tree trunk, were also preserved. In order to protect them from rain, they could put above them a canopy. Where the Udmurt have received the strong influence of Islam, they might keep at the same place the stretchers for the coffin, called *taskak*, made from poles (for example in Asavtamak, Burayevo district, and Shav'yady, Baltachevo district). The Tatyshly Udmurt practice an analogous phenomenon, although they were less influenced by Islam. A new tradition that became widespread recently is to bring to the cemetery small constructions made of logs or boards or corrugated sheets, where the paraphernalia needed to dig graves is kept (shovels, axes, crowbars, etc.), and devices to wash the deceased, etc. In Kasiyarovo, Burayevo district, there is also a notebook where information about the buried persons is written during the ceremony.

Modern cemeteries, as a rule, are fenced, something that probably started in the late Soviet period. Today, the setting of fences is mainly achieved in the framework of the Real Things project (alias Programme for Support of Local Initiative (PPMI)) organised by the United Russia political party. Apart from other actions (for example, road repairs, setting of wells and springs) the villagers who participate often chose these points to improve their village. Thus in 2015 within this project Kasiyarovo cemetery was fenced with a metal fence. The old board fence constructed in the 1980s was already dilapidated.

### *Special Cemeteries*

Apart from ordinary cemeteries there were special burial places for people who had suffered unnatural deaths, as well as for children who died without a name or who were miscarried. They were called *nimtemshay* 'cemetery without a name'. People who

had died on the territory of the community but whose identity was unknown were also buried here. These were usually beggars, who in famine times wandered from village to village seeking food. They could also be buried in the place where they died, and their graves were called *nimtem shay* 'grave without a name', for the name of the buried person was unknown. People from other villages who died in that village were also buried in the *nimtemshay*, for it was prohibited to transport a corpse through the fields as this would damage the harvest. An informant from Kasiyarovo (Burayevo district) reported that in the local cemetery for these people – called *Katkanshay* – at the beginning of the 20th century there was a young man from Vil'gurt (Shav'yady, Baltachevo district) who had come visiting in the village but had died suddenly (FM 1995: RS). Cemeteries of this kind were included in rituals that summoned rain, *saptas'kon* or *vue kuyas'kon* (both 'offerings at the water'). This is particularly common in Burayevo district. In the same village, when rain is scarce, participants in the *vue kuyas'kon* or *zor kuron* ('asking for rain') ritual even now go to the old cemetery *Katkanshay*, where they pour water over themselves, asking the dead for rain, thus confirming the presence of the dead in everyday Udmurt life.

Eastern Udmurt places such as *kyr kuyan* ('bast ejection place') were also connected with funerary and commemorative rituals. In these places the outfit in which someone died was thrown as well as chips and shavings from the coffin and bast from the washing. In Kasiyarovo, Burayevo district, this place was situated in a ravine by the river. There the deceased's clothes were burned. We also have information about the existence of such a place in Bayshady, Burayevo district<sup>7</sup> where the *kyr kuyan* was situated in a place near the cemetery. Only the oldest informants, born between 1900 and 1930, mentioned these places.

While ordinary cemeteries are fenced, the *nimtemshay* often is not. This is the case with the *nimtemshay* in Starokalmiyarovo, which is situated not far from the ordinary village cemetery, and where children were buried until the 1990s.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have endeavoured to present an overview of the sacred places that exist until today at least in the memory of the oldest informants. It attempts to give a spiritual mental map of the Eastern Udmurt. What is particularly impressive in this map is the mobility, the ease with which the Eastern Udmurt adapted to critical circumstances and were able to express their resilience. Sometimes they moved their sacred place some 50 metres so that it would not be visible from the road. That is what Nazip Sadriev did in Bal'zuga, after Communist Party officials disrupted a ceremony. When the situation changed and there was no longer any risk, he brought it back to its original place. The procedure was easy and practical: it was enough to take some ashes or stones from the fireplace and take them to the new place. This is easy to achieve when a transfer is made directly. It is much more complicated when a place has been long abandoned and a new one is started. If no ashes are to be found, just earth is enough.

Moreover, while it seems a truism, it is good to remember that sacred places function as long as the cult functions. We may not think of it, for we are accustomed to cults being fixed and lasting for centuries with only slight adaptations. But the Udmurt ethnic reli-

gion is not a monotheistic dogmatic religion and has no liturgy that would be once and forever set down. The Udmurt ethnic religion is characterised, alongside its resilience, by a fluidity typical to animisms. Those two characteristics are actually organically connected: one is the condition of the other. Udmurt religious practice suffered much during the 20th century, but its core has remained. This adaptability allows followers to select at each historical moment what they prioritise and to keep it, and to let go of what is not a priority. This approach has been followed in the revitalisation process that has been ongoing since the early 1990s. While in the places where religious practice had not been disrupted long and complicated rituals faded, where the practice had been discontinued the ritual was simplified most. If on the one hand traditionalists regret the loss of some aspects that had been relevant, what has been kept is indeed the core.

While many aspects of Eastern Udmurt religious practice have been lost, some others have known a significant revival. What has been a priority for the population are the agrarian rites. These are the rites that touch at the core of the people's life. Although today not all of the population is primarily occupied in agriculture – many are teachers, shop sellers, civil servants – all of them, because of their living in the countryside, have a side occupation as peasants: all have a bit of land, all grow their tomatoes and their potatoes, all have some animals (fewer and fewer cows, but sheep, hens, geese, etc., are still kept). The traditional prayer requests for health, fertility, rain for a good harvest, are still relevant for most people, although life has changed and town customs are penetrating. The agrarian dimension is part of the people's identity, even symbolically.

So the agrarian rites are the first to be born again. They occupied the sacred spaces that were waiting for them. Continuity was warranted in most cases, at least as it relates to sacred spaces. Another place where continuity has been organic is the dwelling of the dead. They are naturally non-mobile, the only changes that occurred are in the abandoning of certain special types of cemetery. Today everyone is buried in the same space, including suicides and unnatural deaths. What is to be noted is that cemeteries, which are visited on specific occasions for commemorations, mainly in spring, are not places that are visited randomly. Our informants agreed to show us, but this was an exceptional case. Graves are not cared for, grass grows without being cut, flowers are not planted. It is a realm separated from the space of the living, and such it must remain. It is not less important for the living, but in a different way.

## NOTES

1 IEI UFITs RAN Institute of ethnological research of the of the UFA research centre, Russian Academy of Sciences.

2 The Institut Universitaire de France is the French state institution that finances research projects.

3 Ethnically they were Finns, although in the 19th century Finns were subjects of the Russian Tsar.

4 *Kua* may also be connected with the Estonian *koda* 'tent' for dwelling.

5 This is most probably a folk interpretation.

6 As strange as it is, considering the state of preservation of traditional religious practice, there is still one great *kuala* open to cult in southern Udmurtia, in the village of Kuzebayev (Alnashi district). Even the *kuala* in Varkled-Bodya (Agryz district, Tatarstan), known for its well preserved traditions, had been closed. However, it has recently been opened for the people from Ludorvay's open air museum so that they could reconstruct a *kuala* on the basis of a real model.

7 Oral information from ethnographer Tat'yana Minniyakhmetova.

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We have the permission of our interlocutors in the field to give their real names.

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FM 2003: RS = Novye Tatyshly Tatyshly district Republic of Bashkortostan, Salim Shakirovich Shakirov, born 1938.

- FM 2005: RS = Verkhniy Tykhtem, Kaltasy district, Republic of Bashkortostan, Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Minniyarov, born 1960.
- FM 2007: RS = Asavtamak Burayevo district Republic of Bashkortostan, Khaibrakhman Idiya-tovich Khalimov, born 1929.
- FM 2008: RS = Kizganbash Baltachevo district Republic of Bashkortostan, Faniya Fazylbakovna Khabibullina, born 1935.
- FM 2015a: RS, ET = Aribash Tatyshly district Republic of Bashkortostan, Liliya Zidiyarovna Garayeva, born 1953.
- FM 2015b: RS, ET = Votskaya Osh'ya Yanaul district Republic of Bashkortostan, Arkadiy Badret-dinovich Urakbayev, born 1943.
- FM 2016a: RS, ET = Kizganbash Baltachevo district Republic of Bashkortostan, Timerkhan Send'yukovich Apsalikov, born 1952.
- FM 2016b: RS, ET = Malaya Bal'zuga, Tatyshly district Republic of Bashkortostan, Nazip Sad-rievich Sadriev, born 1930.
- FM 2018: RS, ET = Altayevo Burayevo district Republic of Bashkortostan, Anatoliy Sharif'yanovich Galikhanov, born 1962.
- FM 2019: RS, ET = Nizhnebaltachevo Tatyshly district Republic of Bashkortostan, Garifulla Gari-fanovich Garifanov, born 1947.
- FM 2022: RS = Urazgil'dy, Tatyshly district Republic of Bashkortostan, Anna Timerzyanovna Bay-dullina, born 1971.

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