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CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS AND THEIR FOLK ADAPTATIONS IN THE FUNERAL AND MEMORIAL RITES OF THE LUDIAN KARELIANS

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ABSTRACT
The article* focuses on an analysis of the funeral and memorial rituals of the Ludian Karelians in the context of folk religion. For many years, rites of Orthodox origin were either viewed unilaterally or ignored altogether in ethnographic literature, with the reconstruction of 'pagan' elements being highlighted, which in turn gave rise to the theory of dual faith. According to the results of my research, the funeral and memorial traditions of the Ludians (from the late 19th to the late 20th century) are based on an Orthodox funeral system in which many aspects derived from a Christian basis found new interpretation. For example, the requirement to light candles was explained as lighting the way to the afterlife, the importance of making confession was so that the dying person's sins would not attach to the living, and funeral services were to help the soul of the deceased 'settle', etc. The principal exponents of the funeral rituals, who ensured the successful transition of the soul to the next world, were representatives of the people: women who washed the body of the deceased, and lamenters, but the church priesthood nonetheless played a significant role in conducting the rituals. The priest's participation is apparent at all stages of the funeral ritual, from confession to commemoration. Following the abolition of the institution of the church during the Soviet period, the functions of the priest were assumed by elderly women who knew the prayers and church burial traditions.

KEYWORDS: Karelians • Ludians • funeral and memorial rites • folk religion • Orthodoxy • church rites

According to chronicle sources, Orthodoxy in Karelia became widespread in the 13th century (*Povest' vremennykh let* 1872). For eight centuries, Orthodox ideas and church rituals became ever stronger in the life and culture of the Karelians, at times displacing,

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at others combining with, ethnic folk beliefs in a kind of symbiosis. Nevertheless, for many years, ritualism of church origin as part of the ritual and ceremonial sphere of the Karelians was either assessed one-sidedly by ethnographers and folklorists, or was wholly denied (Fishman 2003: 6). For example, in his works on the spiritual culture of the Karelians, Soviet ethnographer Yugo Surkhasko (1985: 138–139) emphasised their formal attitude to the Orthodox faith, their "atheistic views" and their "most diverse, mainly pre-Christian religious and magical ideas".

However, according to my field observations, a layer of ideas and rituals of Orthodox origin is, on the contrary, quite noticeable in the everyday and ceremonial lives of the Karelians.[1] The strict observance of church rituals and regulations is especially pronounced among just such a little-studied ethnic local group of Karelians as the Ludians. Until now, the religiosity of the Ludians as an integral community has not been the subject of specific academic research.

The Ludian Karelians live in the eastern part of the Olonets Isthmus in the Kondopozhsky, Prionezhsky, Pryazhinsky and Olonetsky Districts of the Republic of Karelia.[2] Until 1922, the Ludian settlements were located within the administrative boundaries of Olonets Governorate in the Munozerskaya, Shuiskaya and Svyatozerskaya Volosts of Petrozavodsk Uyezd and the Vazhinskaya Volost of Olonets Uyezd. These territories are in close proximity to the Russian Orthodox population, with whom the Ludians have centuries-old marital and kinship relations, which was an additional factor in strengthening Orthodoxy as the official religion in the Ludian area.[3]

The article is based upon my experience of studying the folk religion of the Ludian Karelians using the example of funeral and memorial rites, in which church rituals and prescriptions are particularly clearly marked. The choice of funeral rituals as a research topic is no accident, since such rituals are some of the most resistant to change in the field of traditional culture. Residents of the Ludian villages who were born in the 1930s still remember, indeed still practice, many of the so-called 'traditional' elements of the burial and commemoration of the deceased (the washing of the deceased by women, night vigils by the deceased's side, etc.). As a result, the scope of this article covers a fairly lengthy period, from the end of the 19th century until the end of the 20th century.

ISSUES WITH THE STUDY OF KARELIAN RELIGIOSITY

Interest in studying the religious and ceremonial space of the Karelians first emerged in the 19th century, when Finnish folklorists considered Orthodox Karelia one of the regions in which archaic Finnish folk traditions had been preserved, and therefore viewed it as a place where answers to questions regarding the prehistory of the Finnish people could be found (Stark 2002: 11). As evidenced by folklorists and ethnographers who travelled to Karelia in the 19th century, Kalevala metre folk poetry reflected the "ancient beliefs of the Karelians" (Ivanova 2021: 102), and Karelian mythology "penetrated all spheres of life" of the people (ibid.: 103). However, some Finnish researchers (Elias Lönnrot, Axel August Borenius, Into Konrad Inha) noted that many old people considered the recital of runes to be a futile and even sinful activity, after which, at the request of those gathered, they stood for a long time in front of icons atoning for their sins (Ivanova 2021: 102–103).

In Russia, on the other hand, interest in Karelia as a province where pre-Christian superstitions still existed began somewhat later, in the second half of the 19th century. The first Russian travellers and researchers into the culture and everyday life of the Karelian peasantry focused more on the external description of Karelian rituals and statistical data than on the folkloric content of the rituals themselves. One of the reasons for this was the language barrier: Russian researchers did not know the Karelian language, and Karelians did not speak Russian (for more information, see Lavonen and Stepanova 1999; Ivanova 2021).

During the Soviet period, in the second half of the 20th century, a systematic study of the traditional culture of the Karelians by Russian and Karelian scholars began, although their work focused on the search for 'pagan' ritual elements. This was due to the fact that, during the atheistic Soviet period, religious topics were banned in academia, so researchers of that time sought to avoid any Christian rituals that might exist among various peoples.

As we can see, different views on the religiosity of the Karelians existed at the time, views which under the influence of the norms of academic knowledge, and the political demands of the time, first took a tilt in one direction (emphasising the romantic national optics of paganism in Finland from the 19th to the first half of the 20th century), then in the other (ignoring Orthodoxy in the USSR). The researchers' search for 'pagan' traces in the worldview of the people, and the reconstruction of archaic forms in the ritual practice of the peasantry, while at the same time suppressing the Christian foundations of the spiritual life of the people, gave rise to the theory of *dual faith*, the parallel (co-)existence of Christian and pagan elements in the religious system of the community (Gromyko et al. 1993: 60).[4]

The concept of dual faith has emerged from its original research usage into mass usage, indeed even representatives of the church now use it. For example, Metropolitan Konstantin of Petrozavodsk and Karelia (2016: 18), in his article on the history of Orthodoxy in Karelia, writes about the commitment of the majority of the Karelian population to dual faith, and how attempts by civil and church authorities to consolidate the influence of the Orthodox faith in the lives of the indigenous population "did not bring the desired results, at least until the 19th century". According to the anthropologist Sergei Shtyrkov (2006), the boundaries between canonical and popular Christianity, which are inherently neither clear nor permanent, are often demarcated by religious institutions (in this example, a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church), and they deem whatever goes beyond dogmatic Christian teaching to be 'superstition' or 'paganism'.

In anthropology, there are several conceptual notions for understanding the manifestation of religion in everyday life, which differs from the dogma of the 'official' religion, and yet simultaneously interacts with it: folk religion, living religion, vernacular religion, material religion (Lyutayeva 2023: 120). I will use the term folk religion, including in this term the concepts proposed by folklorist Don Yoder (1974: 14): "Folk religion is the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion".

The folk religion of peasant communities includes the interpretation of rituals, sacred texts and characters of biblical history, as well as elements that ultimately go

back to the most ancient religious and mythological concepts. In folk religion (and in the case of the Orthodox Karelians folk Christianity), elements of the 'high' (canonical) religion, selected and reworked by previous generations, are translated into the language of tradition each and every time (Bernshtam 2000: 9; Napol'skikh 2015: 395–396).

Many of the conclusions regarding the religiosity of the Karelians made by previous academics during the Soviet period, and which persist by dint of inertia in Russian society today, require revision. For example, the assertion that the servants of the church in Karelian family rites were assigned "the most minimal roles", which were performed, as a rule, outside the main ritual (Surkhasko 1985: 158) can be explained by the fact that, firstly, the majority of Karelians (and in particular the northern Karelians) were either explicit or secret Old Believers of the Bespopovtsy (priestless) consent; and secondly that there were few churches in the White Sea area of Karelia, and following the spring thaw, priests would make special visits to the villages to conduct a funeral service for the already buried dead. Moreover, most of the clergy in Karelia did not know the Karelian language (Lavonen and Stepanova 1999: 29–30). However, a critical analysis of the research history on Karelian religiosity by previous scholars is a work for a separate article.

RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES, LITERATURE AND SOURCES

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore the Christian components of the funeral and memorial rituals of the Ludians in the context of folk religion, taking a comparative historical approach. In order to achieve this objective, I will 1) highlight the church-derived religious rituals and ideas in the area of the Ludians' funeral rites associated with death, the preparation of the deceased for burial, and subsequent individual commemorations, as well as describing the church attributes used during the ceremony; 2) compare the interpretations of various elements of ritual from the dogmatic literature with the interpretations which they received in the folk environment; 3) analyse the functions of the main exponents of the rituals and their agency connections between the living and the dead; 4) examine separately the state of church rituals and their exponents during the Soviet period.

My research is based upon the systematisation of various sources and literature. In the works of Russian ethnographers and folklorists, the religious and ceremonial sphere of the Ludians was as a rule not differentiated, and was examined against the background of Olonets Karelia culture. The funeral rituals of the Karelians of the Olonets province and the population of the Obonezhiye region in the pre-revolutionary period were described by local historians Mikhail Georgiyevskiy (1890), German Kulikovskiy (1890), and Nikolay Leskov (1894). Materials on the funeral rites of both the Ludians and the Karelians are presented in general terms in the works of Yugo Surkhasko (1985) and Aleksey Konkka (2017; 2019).

The Ludian territory was located far from the border, so the research interest for Finnish scholars was directed more towards the southern border region and Archangel or White Sea (Viena) Karelia (see the book on the customs and beliefs of Archangel Karelia by Samuli Paulaharju, 1924).[5] Laura Stark's seminal work *Peasants, Pilgrims and*

Sacred Promises: Ritual and the Supernatural in Orthodox Karelian Folk Religion (2002) is based on a large range of data from Finnish archives and research by her Finnish predecessors from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, which geographically cover Ladoga Karelia and the western parts of Archangel and Olonets Karelia. Ludian settlements are practically absent from these sources.

When it comes to the study of rituals, the publications of speech samples are of particular importance, as they are the most accurate recordings available of oral messages from respondents with knowledge of the funeral and memorial cycle, as well as the terms specific to the relevant area. A large volume of samples of Ludian speech on the research topic was collated by Pertti Virtaranta in his *Ludian Texts* collections (1964; 1967; 1994). My research into the folk religion of the Ludians involved a number of works on the archaeology and confessional history of Karelia (Ovsyannikov and Kochkurkina 1978; Pul'kin et al. 1999; Ruzhinskaya 2000; Pul'kin 2009), as well as research into Karelian ritual folklore and publications of folklore compositions (Konkka 1992; Pahomov 2012).

Since church-derived rituals among the Karelians were not given due attention by Soviet scholars, for my research I have relied upon works on the folk Orthodox rituals and folk Christianity of Russians and Karelians (Bernshtam 2000; Kremleva 2001). The forms of Christianity practiced by the people are always in dialogue with the church, therefore to describe the church canons and institutional explanation of various aspects of the Orthodox funeral rite, I turned to the church educational literature on the topic, for example, the classic textbook for Orthodox Christians *The Law of God* by archpriest Serafim Slobodskoy (1987), and the instruction on the Orthodox burial rite by Konstantin Slepinin (2006), as well as Orthodox internet sources.

This study draws on both my own field materials (2016, 2021) and those of other researchers (from the second third of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century), which are stored in archives in Petrozavodsk (SA KarRC, AA ILLH) and Helsinki (SKS). These sources, taken as they are from a range of time periods, reveal the dynamics of Ludian rituals over the past century.

LUDIAN FUNERAL RITES: CHURCH VS FOLK

The funeral ritual of the Ludians consisted of the following successive stages: 1) the ritual ablution and dressing of the body; 2) keeping the body in the house; 3) the day of burial; 4) the commemoration ceremonies. The first obligatory action performed after a person's death is the ritual of washing the body. The meaning of this rite was purification, expressed in the lamentations accompanying the process: "it is forbidden to bring the 'dirt of earthly life' into the afterlife" (Surkhasko 1985: 64–65). In Christian dogmatic understanding, the purity of the body symbolises the purity and integrity of the righteous in the Kingdom of God (Slepinin 2006: 9). The Ludians had the same requirements for funeral garments: they must be clean, must never have been worn, and the clothed body was covered with a white shroud, or cerement (*palt'in*) (SA KarRC 1956, F. 1, In. 29, It. 44: 42, 51; 1957, F. 1, In. 29, It 48: 32; SKS Klemola: 18423; AA ILLH 2016: 3844/19; Virtaranta 1967: 107). It is to these customs, perhaps, that we can trace the influence of Christian doctrine and church ritual, according to which the dead are dressed like this

"as a sign that the deceased, at their baptism, vowed to lead a life of purity and piety" (Slobodskoy 1987: 673).

During the ceremony of the body, church attributes were also used. The forehead of the deceased was covered with a chaplet – a strip of paper with the image of the Lord and the saints symbolising the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven in return for the hardships of earthly life (Slepinin 2006: 10). A sheet was placed in the hands of the deceased on which was written the text of an authorising prayer or, as they were popularly called, a 'passport' ("to take the person to the next world"), and a small holy icon, which some removed from the coffin before burial (AA ILLH 2012: 3824/8; 2016: 3841/4; 2021: 4168/13, 4155/17, 4162/19). It is assumed that the tradition of burying the deceased with an icon was widespread in Olonets Karelia in an earlier period. Findings from the excavations of medieval cemeteries in Olonets show that in the 16th and 17th centuries the dead were buried with a crucifix, and sometimes with an icon (Ovsyannikov and Kochkurkina 1978: 95). Ministers of the Orthodox Church today recommend taking the icon out of the coffin before burial, since "icons are painted so that people pray in front of them" *(Mozhno li klast' ikonu)*.

The body was positioned in the room with its head towards the red corner, where the icons stood, with the feet towards the exit (SA KarRC Surkhasko, F. 1, In. 50, It. 4:21; AA ILLH 2016: 3832/16, 3840/9, 3846/17; 2021: 4158/11). Such an arrangement of the deceased in the house was definitely a church tradition, and was known to many Baltic-Finnish and Russian peoples who professed Orthodoxy (Loginov 1993: 145; Vinokurova 2015: 270; Konkka 2017: 224). The Ludians of Mikhailovskoye said about the orientation of the deceased indoors: "Place the head towards God's corner" (*Jumalan sauman pie panda*) (SA KarRC 1956, F. 1, In. 29, It. 44: 15).

The entire funeral process was imbued with the recital of lamentations in Karelian, and the singing (or reading) of prayers in Russian. These lamentations and prayers could be performed as early as the stage of washing the body, or during night vigils beside the body in which relatives and acquaintances of the deceased took part. The importance of participating in these night vigils is reflected in the ideas of the White Sea Karelians, according to which the soul should be met in the "kingdom of heaven" by the souls of the dead with whose bodies you had spent the nights (Paulaharju 1924: 93–94). Among the Ludians, the mythological ideas that after death the soul of the deceased must necessarily be met by their deceased relatives are reflected in the lamentations in which the lamenter addressed the deceased ancestors: "Accept [the soul], white forefathers, and give [him or her] eternal forgiveness" (*Vastadelkad valgedat syndyižed da andagat igäižed proškennaižed*) (Virtaranta 1994: 166).

The most common prayer performed by people at funerals was the "Trisagion": "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us" (SA KarRC 1957, F. 1, In. 29, It. 48: 32; 1957, F. 1, In. 29, It. 49: 82–83) which, according to church regulations, was to be performed when the body was transferred to the temple for the funeral service (Slobodskoy 1987: 674). At the cemetery, during the burial of the body, the Ludians performed the "Trisagion" and the "Eternal Memory" chants (AA ILLH 2016: 3834/37; Virtaranta 1994: 167).

While the deceased was still in the house, their fellow villagers would make a sepulchral eight-pointed cross and a coffin, should deceased not have already prepared these

in advance during his or her lifetime (AA ILLH 2016: 3847/24). It was typical for the Ludians to make glazed window apertures at the head or in the middle of the right wall of the coffin (AA ILLH 2012: 3824/21; 2016: 3834/6; 2021: 4157/22, 4168/13; Leskov 1894: 511). The custom of making these holes, or their symbolic image on the walls of the coffin, was also common among the Karelians of Segozero and Syamozero, as well as among the northern Russian and Finno-Ugric peoples (Mordvins, Komi, Udmurts, Mari) (Konkka and Konkka 1980: 25; Surkhasko 1985: 74; Loginov 2008: 293).

The arrangement of windows in the coffin was associated with a folk adaptation: the coffin (as well as the whole grave) was perceived as the house of the dead. This idea is reflected in Karelian lamentations, where the mourner expresses concern about the creation of such windows so that the deceased can see how their relatives live (Surkhasko 1985: 74–75). We find similar explanations among the villagers of Lizhma: "So that he [the deceased] could see" (AA ILLH 2012: 3824/21), and in Spasskaya Guba: "Why is there no window [in the coffin]? Make a window so that my grandmother can see me, and I can see her" (AA ILLH 2016: 3834/6). In northern Russian villages, the presence of windows in the coffin was explained by the Christian idea of resurrection (Afanas'yeva and Plotnikova 1995: 534).

On the day of the burial, the deceased would be laid in the coffin, and candles lit along its sides (AA ILLH 2016: 3830/17; SKS Laiho: 6725). In accordance with the rules of the Orthodox ritual, the candles should be placed on four sides of the coffin in the shape of a cross (or only at the head). In Orthodox teaching, the candle flame beside the coffin symbolises the hope of the deceased's transition into the realm of light, to a better afterlife (Slepinin 2006: 12). A lamp was lit near the icons (AA ILLH 2016: 3830/17). As prescribed by the church, a burning candle beside the icon expresses "the love of benevolence to those for whom the candle is placed" (*Nastavleniye pravoslavnomu khristianinu*). The northern (or Kondopoga) Ludians called the candles which they held in their hands during the burial of the body "God's candles" (*d'umalan tuohukset*) (Virtaranta 1964: 206). In popular explanations, this church requirement was interpreted as follows: lit candles at funerals are required so that in the next world the deceased can meet their relatives or fellow villagers after their death with a candle in their hand, and are able to light their way to the afterlife (ibid.: 206–207).

The list of individual memorial days for the Ludian could be either complete (funeral day, ninth day, 20th day, 40th day, six months, one year), or incomplete, without the 20th day or the six month commemoration, which is typical of the modern memorial tradition (AA ILLH 2021: 4155/18; Konkka 2017: 222, 224). The establishment of commemoration dates among the Ludian Karelians indicates that it was based on Orthodox tradition, according to which commemorations are held on the third day after death (on the day of the funeral), on the ninth and 40th days, and on the anniversary of the death (Kremleva 2001: 80). Sometimes the church also highlights the 20th day, which, according to Tat'yana Bernshtam (2000: 172–173), can trace its origin back to the 17th century and is rooted in apocrypha.

The Ludians also had an older commemoration period, on the 42nd day, or the sixth week after death – the six-week commemorations (*kuuz'nedölized*) (SA KarRC Surkhasko, F. 1, In. 50, It. 18: 19, 20; SKS Laiho: 6646). The funeral lamentations of the Mikhailovsky Ludians compare the expectation of a six-week wake with six years:

"Instead of six weeks, it [the expectation of a commemoration] will seem to us in length as six years already" (Pahomov 2012: 132). Commemorations in the sixth week were celebrated among other representatives of Karelian groups and Baltic-Finnish peoples: the Vodi, the Izhora, and the northern Veps (Vinokurova 2015: 298). Today, Ludians no longer remember the six-week commemoration period, and commemorations are held universally on the 40th day.

The Church's commemoration dates were set according to Orthodox ideas on the location of the soul after death. According to church teaching, for the first three days after death, the soul stays in the house close to the body, then ascends several times to the ordeals or to the particular judgement of God, where it is shown the beauty of paradise and the horror of hell. The commemorations held on the third, ninth and 40th days are dedicated to these key moments. (Bernshtam 2000: 172) Finally, the anniversary of death is the day of the transition of the human immortal soul "to other conditions of life where there is no place for earthly diseases, sorrows and sighs" (Slobodskoy 1987: 675).

The adaptation among the Ludians of Christian ideas on the location of the soul for the first 40 days was recorded by late 19th century local historians (Kulikovskiy 1890: 53–54; Leskov 1894: 512). It was believed that the soul of the deceased remained among its relatives during this period, 'inspected' its former household, leaving for the next world only after a memorial service (*Litya*) performed on the 40th day. If this service was not performed, then according to popular belief, "the deceased will suffer and disturb the living" (Kulikovskiy 1890: 54). I found similar, albeit truncated, ideas about the soul's stay on earth in archival materials from the first half of the 20th century (SKS Laiho: 6716), as well as among living Ludians: "Until the 40th day, the soul 'wanders'" (AA ILLH 2021: 4155/16). As we can see, in these narratives plots about the Christian ordeals of the soul until the 40th day are absent.

'CHURCH' AND 'FOLK' EXPONENTS OF FUNERAL RITUALS

Unlike White Sea Karelia, there was a developed Christian infrastructure in the region of the Ludian Karelians, particularly among the northern Ludians of Kondopozhsky District. The convenient water and land communication routes that ran through this territory contributed to the active construction of churches and chapels, the centres of Orthodox life (Semenov and Shirlin 1999: 64). It is known that by 1646 at least five parish churches had already been built in northern Ludian territory, and that by the end of the 19th century almost all northern Ludian settlements had their own chapel, with churches located in the larger settlements (*Olonetskaya guberniya* 1879; Zhukov 2003: 58). According to historical sources, along with the Nikonian Church, activity in Old Believer communities was also recorded in this region in the 18th and 19th centuries (Pul'kin et al. 1999: 132; Ruzhinskaya 2000), although their influence on the funeral rites of the Ludians being studied here is difficult to trace in the materials available. Therefore, the Orthodox priest occupied an important role in the religious life of the Ludians.

The priest was the main conduit of Christian traditions among the illiterate peasantry, and demanded strict observance of church canons from the residents of his parish. Notwithstanding this, even the most respected priest did not always manage to get rid of some folk traditions. For example, at the end of the 19th century, ethnographer

Leskov described the curious case of a priest scolding a peasant who had brought his dead child to the funeral service in a coffin made out of two halves of a hollowed-out wooden log, which looked just like any other large log.[6] As a result of this, the priest's wife almost burned the log with the dead baby inside in the stove. Then the priest gave strict instructions to all residents of the settlement to bury children in wooden coffins, but, as the ethnographer noted, "coffins for babies are still made of hollowed out logs to this day" (Leskov 1894: 511).

The priest is also the mediator between ordinary people and the sacred, so it was a mandatory rule for Ludians to perform the sacrament of confession with a priest before death, which would not only ease a person's wellbeing on their deathbed (AA ILLH 2021: 4155/16), but also help them in their posthumous existence. The northern Ludians believed that, when going to the other world, you need to go through 22 points, and that at the first point you were always asked: "Did you repent before you died?" (Virtaranta 1964: 201). If a sinful person died without confessing, then it was believed that the memory of this person was blemished, and in this case they said: "This person should not need have been born in this world", i.e. it was implied that they left their sins to someone in the world of the living (ibid.: 205).

An important act of worship performed by a priest after death is the funeral service for the deceased. Through this Christian rite, the Church accompanies the deceased to the other world, asking God through prayer for forgiveness for their sins and to grant them rest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Slepinin 2006: 24–25). According to popular interpretation, the funeral service will help the soul of the deceased to "settle", and it will not torment the living by appearing to them in dreams (AA ILLH 2016: 3844/19).

The funeral service was usually conducted in a church, where the coffin was taken on the way to the cemetery, but the priest could also be invited to a home funeral service, where he would read prayers at the coffin and sprinkle the body with holy water (AA ILLH 2012: 3830/17, 3846/16; SKS Laiho: 6725; Virtaranta 1964: 209). The priest's duties also included burning incense near a freshly dug grave and in the room where the deceased lay (SA KarRC 1956, F. 1, In. 29, It. 44: 43).

Inviting the priest to a home funeral service could be due to the fact that the village where the deceased was from had its own cemetery and it made no sense to take them to the church (which could be located in another place altogether). According to Surkhasko (1985: 89), the Karelians, unlike the Finns, had cemeteries in every village. This distribution of many cemeteries in the Olonets Province of the 18th century is also noted by the historian Maksim Pul'kin (2009: 43–44). According to a resident of the village of Konchezero who was born in 1938, today more and more absentee funeral services are held either in Petrozavodsk, or in the nearest operating churches and chapels, which have recently been actively reviving (AA ILLH 2016: 3844/19).

One of the important performers of the funeral ritual "from the people" were the women who washed the body and the lamenters. Several elderly women, invited by the relatives of the deceased with "tears and lamentations", were usually involved in the washing of the body (SA KarRC 1957, F. 1, In. 29, It. 49:82; AA ILLH 2021: 4158/11, 4157/20, 4168/13; Leskov 1894: 511). Their participation fitted into the cleansing semantics of the rite: their old age, their social status and, as a rule, their widowhood, meant that according to popular definitions they were 'pure', i.e. not living a sexual life. Widowhood also meant that they had suffered a personal loss, i.e. they had faced death,

so they were allowed to perform the rite. (Olson and Adon'yeva 2017: 338) However, according to later field notes, the Ludians explained this quite rationally as elderly women not being afraid of the dead and not being squeamish about a dead body: "Well, there used to be old women like this in the village… others, you know, are afraid of the dead, or they get squeamish. But these were already so [old]…" (AA ILLH 2016: 3826/29).

An agency connection with the afterlife was also given to the lamenters, whose lamentations were a form of communication between the living and the dead (Konkka 1992: 118). The combination of two agents in one ritual – the priest and the lamenter – can be observed in the writings of late 19th century local historians. In Svyatozero, during a funeral service performed by a priest in a church, women performed the funeral lamentations: "With dishevelled braids, and with their headscarves knocked from their heads, they shout at the top of their lungs, bow down to the local icons, and go to the cemetery with lamentations" (Leskov 1894: 512). During the 40th day commemoration, the priest was met for lunch and escorted by the lamenters and relatives of the deceased with a pillow in their hands, on which, supposedly, the soul of the deceased was sitting (Georgiyevskiy 1890: 229). Leskov (1894: 512) gives a folk explanation for this tradition: "together with the 'popes', the soul of the deceased comes home from the church", so it must be carried on a pillow and placed in the house on the stove.

Sacred agent power for the exorcising of sins could be bestowed not only upon a priest, but also even on a tree. Gallezero resident Stepan Godarev (St'opuoi Huotatine) claimed that if death caught up with someone in the forest, then they should find a tree that was lying on top of another tree and creaking in the wind. They should then throw themselves on their knees in front of this tree, cross themselves, and repent of their sins, as well as carving a cross on the trunk with an axe or a knife. According to popular belief, the wind should blow itself out at this moment, and the tree should begin to sway and creak: in this manner, supposedly, the Lord God himself forgives all our sins (Virtaranta 1964: 202).

Among the White Sea Karelians there were similar ideas about a creaking fallen tree, symbolising the transition to the next world:

> When we saw (and, above all, heard) such a tree in the forest, which, in falling had snagged on another, and it creaked there, this tree – and it always creaks when the wind blows – we had to remove it by hand, remove it from the standing tree. And we couldn't chop it with an axe, we had to remove it by hand so that the other tree stopped suffering. And such deeds helped to build the bridge over the Tuonela River. (Konkka 2019: 196)[7]

Stepan Godarev embellishes his message about confession to a creaking tree with a specific comment that, supposedly, the tree will convey sins to God better than a priest: "Rather than confessing your sins to a bad priest, it is better to go into the forest and tell your [sins] to a creaking tree" (Virtaranta 1964: 202). This commentary disparages somewhat the role of the priest, which may be explained by the spread among the northern Ludians of the Old Believer ideas of the Bespopovtsy (priestless) consent. Information about the existence of an Old Believer community in Gallezero at the end of the 19th century is confirmed by Stepan Godarev himself, according to whom, his grandmother was an Old Believer (*starover*) (Virtaranta 1964: 154, 159).

These notions reflect the syncretic complex which has become established in the funeral rites of the Ludians: on the one hand, beliefs about a tree as a mediator between worlds, and on the other, Christian views about the Almighty, the sacrament of confession, and human sins.

THE STATE OF CHURCH RITUALS DURING THE ATHEISTIC SOVIET PERIOD

The process of the liquidation of the Church as an institution and the political persecution of the clergy began in the 1920s (Pul'kin et al. 1999: 153). However, in spite of the anti-religious policy pursued in the USSR, many Christian precepts and funeral rituals defined by the Orthodox tradition continued to be observed in Ludian villages, for example the tradition of placing the deceased's head towards the red corner, where the icons were located. According to my respondents, icons were preserved in many houses in the second third of the 20th century ("We had an icon, even though my father was the secretary [of the village council]"; AA ILLH 2021: 4158/6), although in the large Ludian settlements such as Spasskaya Guba, icons were no longer kept in the house (AA ILLH 2016: 3847/26).

After the imposition of a ban by the Soviet government on the participation of priests in the administration of rituals, their functions in funeral rites were assumed by the relatives of the deceased. These were usually elderly women who could read Church Slavonic and had knowledge of church rites (SA KarRC 1959, F. 1, In. 29, It. 61: 11–12; AA ILLH 2021: 4189/10). For example, these same women conducted the funeral service for the deceased on their own: "Before taking them from home [i.e., before taking the deceased out of the house], I'll sing for them already. As my parents did, so do I." (AA ILLH 2016: 3845/21)

My field observations confirm that in the second half of the 20th century the funeral tradition was no longer a fixed entity among the Ludian Karelians, and had completely given way to the recital of prayers by such women. The texts of the prayers read by the elderly women during the removal of the coffin or at the graveside could either be canonical (such as the "Trisagion" or the "Prayer for the Dead"), or have a folk reworking (AA ILLH 2012: 3814/19, 3817/25; 2016: 3830/19, 3841/1). For example, in 2016, during an expedition to the Ludians of Kondopozhsky District, I managed to record the following prayer from an elderly woman born in 1937, pronounced before the removal of the deceased:

> God rest the soul of your servant. Omnipresent Lord, may Your mercy descend upon Your departed servant. May the trials to which she was subjected on earth be credited to her. May my prayers help her to soften and shorten the torments that she can still endure as a disembodied spirit. For she left a corruptible body before Your judgement. My God, my Lord, heavenly Father, kindly accept my prayer for the soul of your servant. I believe that Your mercy is great, and this thought is so sweet that I find solace only in it. God bless this soul and put it to rest it with the saints. May eternal memory come with her. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. (AA ILLH 2016: 3841/1)

It seems to me that this prayer has had a kind of 'folk makeover', since I have not found a similar text in the collections of church prayer books.

Elderly relatives of the deceased also fumigated the body and the grave on their own. They made a censer from whatever was to hand, putting coals taken from the stove in the house into a ladle or scoop, and instead of incense they used the remains of a church candle (SA KarRC Surkhasko, F. 1, In. 50, It. 4: 26). In Yurkostrov and Tivdiya, women waved this homemade censer over the body three times while reciting the "Trisagion" (AA ILLH 2021: 4155/17, 4157/21). In general, the Church gives its approval to incense burning by a layperson with a hand censer (*Posledovaniye po iskhode*).

A woman from the village of Deknavolok, who was born in 1931, described the preparation of the grave, which incorporates acts of both folk and Orthodox origin. Before the men went to dig the grave, she would read prayers at the place of the future burial. Once the grave was dug, she would light candles, throw money into the grave, and fumigate it with incense, asking the 'masters' and 'mistresses' of the cemetery (as she called those who were buried there before) to accept a new body (AA ILLH 2016: 3845/21). In the Karelian worldview, the buried dead really did come to be the 'masters' of the cemetery: among the Karelians of Syamozero, the deceased became *moal ižändy* 'the master of the earth' after money was thrown into the grave in order to "buy" the plot of earth from the earth spirit for the dead person (Stark 2002: 54).

CONCLUSION

As we can see, there was a rather noticeable stratum of Orthodox ritual and church requirements for the burial of the deceased in Ludian funeral and memorial rites. This was facilitated by the well-established Christian infrastructure, as well as the proximity and interaction of the Ludian Karelians with the Russian Orthodox population.

The entire funeral process was replete with rituals of Christian origin, and was accompanied by divine services and the recital of prayers (the most common being the "Trisagion"). Church regulations stipulated the use of Christian attributes (the censer, the corolla, the authorising prayer, crosses, candles), as well as the rite of washing the body, placing it with its head towards the icons, and setting the dates of commemoration on the third, ninth, 20th and 40th days after death. Many church rituals and concepts have been adapted and modified in the popular environment. For example, an authorising prayer placed in the hands of the deceased was perceived as a pass ('passport') to the next world; the need to light candles was explained by lighting the way to the afterlife; the importance of making confession was that the dying person "did not shift" their sins onto the living; funeral services were to help the soul of the deceased to "settle" in the afterlife, and so on.

Ludian ideas regarding the posthumous existence of the soul were associated with Christian beliefs, although the notion of the ordeal of the soul in the first 40 days after death was absent. After the 40th day (or, according to more ancient ideas, after six weeks), the soul passed on to the next world, but did not lose its connection with the world of the living. This connection was symbolised by the windows in the coffin, through which the deceased could "observe" the living, and by granting them the status of 'master' or spirit of the cemetery, from whom permission was asked to bury the newly departed.

The success in making an unhindered transition of the soul to the next world largely depended on the main exponents of the Ludian funeral ritual: the women who washed the body of the deceased, the priest, and the lamenters, who, according to the people, were endowed with an agency connection with the other world. Especially noticeable in the ritual was the figure of the priest, who had not only an education and mentoring role in the observance of the Orthodox rituals, but also conducted such important church sacraments and divine services in the church and the space of the house as confession, funeral services and memorial *Litya*s. Frequently, the functions of the exponents were combined into a single ritual, for example, during a funeral service conducted by a priest, lamentations could be performed in which there was also a request to the deceased relatives to grant peace to the soul. The northern Ludians could give the function of an agent in the administration of sins not only to a priest, but also to a creaking tree in the forest, something that can be interpreted as the influence of the Old Believers of the Bespopovtsy (priestless) consent, which persisted in this territory until the 20th century.

The Christian (Orthodox) burial ritual persisted in Soviet period, in spite of the atheistic propaganda and the fierce struggle of the Soviet state against religion. After the elimination of the priesthood in the 1920s, there was a change in the exponents of Ludian funeral and memorial rites, with elderly believers taking on the role of the main ritual specialist. They monitored the performance of the Christian prescriptions in the ritual, recited funeral prayers that had had a folk 'makeover', and fumigated the room and the grave with homemade censers.

It is worth noting that this study is only the first step towards an anthropological study of the folk religion of the Ludian Karelians. At this stage, we see that church rituals and prescriptions formed the basis of the funeral and memorial rites of the Ludians, and at the same time complemented their mythological funeral complex, entering into a symbiosis with folk ideas about the afterlife. This proves once again that the opinion established in Soviet Karelian studies that the bulk of the Karelian people were not religious, and were reluctant to seek help from the church to perform rites during funerals, was the result of the political attitude of that time.

NOTES

1 I made research expeditions to the Ludians (2016, 2021), the Olonets (Livvi) Karelians (2023) and the White Sea Karelians (2021, 2022, 2023).

2 Ludian settlements mentioned in this article are Tivdiya (Tiudii), Yurkostrov (Dyrkänmägi), Konchezero (Kendärv), Spasskaya Guba (Mundärven Laht), Gallezero (Hal'därv), Deknavolok (Dekunniemi) in Kondopozhsky District; Svyatozero (Pyhärv), Lizhma (Lidžmi), Pryazha (Priäžy) in Pryazhinsky District; the villages of Mikhailovskoye (Kuujärv) in Olonetsky District.

3 In 1867, Olonets Province teacher and local historian Konstantin Petrov identified the shared confessional space (i.e. Orthodox Christianity) as the reason for the friendly relations and lack of ethnic conflict between the northern Russians and the Karelians living in Ludian lands (Pashkov 2010: 183).

4 The attitude to this concept in modern anthropology is cautious. Frequently, that which was once considered to be the "legacy of paganism" turned out to be a relatively recent phenomenon that had arisen in the context of Christian culture (Panchenko 2004: 75).

5 It is worth adding that the majority of Finnish research into the Ludians (Ludian studies) was mainly linguistic in character.

6 According to Surkhasko (1985: 74), the burial of babies in wooden blocks is a throwback to the ancient tradition of burying people in hollowed-out logs common to many peoples.

7 In Karelian mythology, there were ideas about the soul of the deceased overcoming various obstacles in order to reach the next world, including the crossing of the Tuonela River. And good deeds performed while alive could help the soul of the deceased to reach the afterlife quickly.

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AA ILLH – Audio archive of the Institute of Linguistics, Literature and History, Karelian Research Centre, Russian Academy of Sciences (Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation):
AA ILLH 2012 = Expedition to Olonetsky and Pryazhinsky Districts of the Republic of Karelia, June 2012. Audio recordings No. 3804–3827. Collector: Irina Yur'yevna Vinokurova.
AA ILLH 2016 = Expedition to Kondopozhsky District of the Republic of Karelia, August 2016. Audio recordings No. 3829–3847. Collector: Sergei Andreevich Minvaleev.
AA ILLH 2021 = Expedition to Kondopozhsky, Prionezhsky, Pryazhinsky and Olonetsky Districts of the Republic of Karelia, June 2021. Audio recordings No. 4151–4180. Collector: Sergei Andreevich Minvaleev.

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