

Preface

This book was born as a development of the four documentary films on Eastern Udmurt collective prayer ceremonies published by Liivo Niglas in 2019. On the one hand, we felt the need to add extensive comments to the films. The task of the films is not to say all that there is to say on the subject: the aim is not to provide an intellectual understanding of the complexity of ritual, nor to explain its historical context, not even to give a detailed description of the ceremonial process. For that words are much better suited. A film's contribution to the understanding of a ritual is based on its capability to transmit the experiential dimension of the ceremony, to convey the feelings and emotions of participants to the empathetic viewer. With this book, we attempt to concentrate both on the intellectual as well as on the experiential dimension of the Eastern Udmurt public prayer ceremonies: the scientific and analytical aspect with our text; the emotional and sensorial aspect with the films; purely visual information with the photos.

At the same time, we are aware of a shortcoming our publications often have: quite frequently they are not available for the people of whom we speak. Usually, they are published in academic journals that never make it to the villages. Often, they are written in languages our informants do not understand. Villagers complain that they have repeatedly the visit of anthropologists, but they never see any output. We have tried to address this concern and to express in different ways our gratitude for the help bestowed on us by the research subjects. They have a right to know what we tell the world about them. Therefore, this book is not only dedicated to them, but also, very practically, they are its addressees. The text, which has been written in English, is fully translated into Russian, the language most of the Udmurt are fluent in; all the films have subtitles in Russian (as well as in English), so even those Udmurts who have problems following local Eastern Udmurt dialect, can enjoy the films.

Making this book, we have been encouraged by the successful reception of this format. One such publication by Eva Toulouze and Nikolai Anisimov (2020), got good feedback from Udmurt informants: they were grateful to receive it, they found themselves in it and were happy about this. We want to achieve the same result with this book and express in deeds our thankfulness to the great Udmurt community in Bashkortostan.