

Thus, we see that there is no compulsory configuration for the choice of sacred place. Another interesting feature is that a sacred place is easily replaced by another whenever users feel the need to do so. The reason may just be the comfort of those who perform the ceremony. It is enough to transport the ashes of the former fireplace to the new place and consecrate it with a small ritual.

Sacrificial priests

The sacrificial priest is a key character in the revitalisation of ceremonies. Without him, no ceremony may take place. We have a good example of this, but a sad one. There used to be a particular priest for the Keremet ceremonies, distinct from the ordinary priest for the winter and spring ceremonies, called by the name ‘the warden of Lud’ (Udm: Луд утисъ). Most of them have died without transmitting the text of their prayers or finding themselves successors. Thus, this ceremony is alive in only a very small number of locations, for example Votskaya Osh’ya in the Yanaul district of Bashkortostan, and Kipchak in the Kueda district of Perm kray. The condition for revitalising the collective ceremonies is the existence of priests who know their ‘trade’.

Indeed, in Tatyshly district, probably one of the reasons for the very successful revitalisation effort is the existence of such sacrificial priests, who had long experience and were willing to share it and to train new sacrificial priests.

Priests who were active before the revitalisation wave and ensured continuity existed in both village groups, although, of course, none of those who performed in the first half of the 20th century are still alive. In the Vil’gurt group the charismatic personality of Nazip Sadriev dominates (Sadikov & Danilko 2005; Toulouze & Niglas & Vallikivi & Anisimov 2017). Nazip Sadriev was born in 1930. In childhood he started attending religious ceremonies and was confirmed as a helper after WWII. After the war, however, men were scarce, especially adult men who would accept this role in traditional ceremonies. Nazip Sadriev, who was a horse trader and firefighter, was a strong man, very convinced of his righteousness. He started as a sacrificial priest, alongside his elders, when he was 24. He still remembers how his hands trembled the first time (FWM 2013, 2016²⁵).

²⁵ Conversations with Nazip Sadriev, Liivo Niglas and Ranus Sadikov at the former’s home, Malaya Bal’zuga 11/06/2013; conversation with Nazip Sadriev and Ranus Sadikov, 04/06/2016.

From 1954 to 2012, so for almost 60 years, he stubbornly safeguarded his village ceremony and guided the villagers with an iron fist. He was a resolute opponent to the Communist Party's antireligious policy and had the strength to insist on his standpoint. However, this does not mean that he was hostile to compromise and he initiated some changes in rituals. As he told us, he initiated the practice of mixing meat with the porridge. He had noticed that when offering porridge and boiled meat separately, some people took too much meat and left little for others, and in order to avoid this way of cheating he started to mix the meat with the porridge, which guaranteed a fair amount of meat for everybody. He also decided to move the first prayer, the promise of a sacrifice, called *siz'is'kon*, to a different time slot in the ceremony. It was customary to do a *siz'is'kon* the evening before, and to have the fire slowly burning all night, so that for the ceremony there would not be a new fire, but this required somebody to check the fire all night. Nazip decided that performing *siz'is'kon* on the morning of the main ceremony would have to suffice, probably because of the difficulty of having somebody sacrificing his night to check the fire.

Even more significantly, he chose to give up the three-village ceremony in the Vil'gurt group as it required too much effort both in personal involvement and in money for the tradition to be maintained. He initiated the custom of buying meat in addition to sacrificial animals for the *mör vös'* porridge, and of paying differently for the ewes to be sacrificed depending on their weight. He also allowed women to participate in cleaning cauldrons and the sacrificial animal's innards.

His authority extended not only to his area, but far more widely. He was even invited to Izhevsk to help support the endeavours of activists in Udmurtia who were attempting to revitalise their traditional religious practice. He supported the quest for sacrificial priests in his district and helped train them. Thus, he trained Salim Shakirov in Novye Tatyshly, who had no sacrificial priests among his ancestors but was a respected villager and who became the 'official' sacrificial priest of this important village.

He also trained other priests, for example Anatoliy Galikhanov from Buraevo district, and Rais Rafikov from Novye Tatyshly. But the level and meaning of this training was different. To Salim Shakirov, who had no inheritance to boast of, he had to teach everything. Both Galikhanov and Rafikov however had their own traditions. Rafikov was a priest's son and had inherited his father's prayer in the traditional way, i.e. by listening to it repeatedly. Galikhanov also had his village traditions. Thus, they were equal, and Nazip just deepened their knowledge of Udmurt traditions. Often Nazip Sadriev complained that Rafikov did not express enough gratitude and did not follow his teachings all the way.

As a traditional priest, Sadriev prayed as the elders taught him. He considered this the only right way to practice. He could not accept that other ways, rooted in different local traditions, could be right. For him, as probably for all people deeply connected with their tradition, they were the only ones who were correct, which is certainly not acceptable from the scholarly point of view. Udmurt religious practice is not a dogmatic, fixed tradition. It is very variable, and within the same order of rituals there is an almost infinite number of possibilities. Nazip Sadriev is from this point of view, paradoxally close to those who wish for a standardisation of Udmurt religious practice based only on their understandings (FWM 2017²⁶).

After his 80th birthday, Sadriev understood that he had to give up his position as a sacrificial priest. Certainly, his wife's illness was part of his decision, for he had to stay at home as much as possible. He chose a replacement and trained him. His choice was, regarding tradition, strange: he selected that a young man, Fridman Kabip'anov, merely thirty years old, take over. While Fridman was a married man and a respected member of the village community, both necessary conditions to be a priest, he was supposedly too young for the task because according to ancient rules a sacrificial priest should be a least 40-year-old. But, certainly, Nazip Sadriev remembered his own experience of starting his priesthood at 24 because of the lack of suitable men. He probably felt that this time was not a good one to be dogmatic and that a young man, fully integrated in modern life, would help the village community remain faithful to its traditions, notwithstanding social changes. Thus, Fridman conducted prayers alone for the first time in 2012, a year before we started our fieldwork in Tatyshly district.

Surely, the existence of such an authority was of material importance for the revival of Udmurt religious practice in Tatyshly district. On the one hand, there was nothing to revitalise in Nazip's village as the old man had ensured full continuity. On the other hand, he was able to share his prayer with priests who had none of their own, and to help them take over the task. Therefore, in 2016 Nazip Sadriev received the Estonian Life Tree award, given to an ordinary person who had significantly contributed to the welfare of the Finno-Ugric peoples.

Nazip Sadriev is an impressive personality, and not only at the village level. Probably his strength of character allowed others who had also acted for continuity in the Tatyshly district to be overshadowed, not spectacularly but consistently nevertheless. Bal'zuga was not the only village where ceremonies had continued during the Soviet period.

²⁶ Conversation with Nazip Sadriev and Laur Vallikivi, Ranus Sadikov, Nikolai Anisimov on the threshold of Sadriev's home, Malaya Bal'zyuga, 08/06/2017.

Other sacrificial priests were active in Tatyshly district in the Soviet period. Thus, when Hungarian scholars Gábor Bereczki and László Vikár visited the region in 1974, they were able to record a sacrificial priest in Nizhnebaltachevo called Islam Armanshin.²⁷ He was already an old man at the time, although he recited a prayer that was recorded. Armanshin had younger male kin whom he trained.

In several villages in the Alga group, village ceremonies went on, and so also *mör vös'* and *Bagysh vös'* were maintained. The traditions in the Alga group are strong and have not depended upon Nazip Sadriev to keep them alive. Sadriev, of course, considers that the traditions in the Alga group are wrong. We will examine later what the peculiarities of the Alga group are in their religious practice.

Today Islam Armanshin is dead, but both his grandsons are active sacrificial priests in the Alga group. The first to become active, Vladimir Huzimardanov ('Vladik', b. 1964), is the sacrificial priest of Verhnebaltachevo, while the elder, who started much later, Boris, became the sacrificial priest in Kyzyl'Yar in 2016. Vladik remembered how his grandfather 'sang' prayers, and indeed, in Armanshin's way of uttering the prayer, one could recognise something like singing²⁸. Another man learnt from Armanshin to pray, and gave us a sample of it, but he is not an acting sacrificial priest. This man, Zakyr Adullin, a former teacher now retired, is actually the cousin of the most important sacrificial priest in the area, Evgeni Adullin. Evgeni has the title 'great sacrificial priest', in Udmurt *badzh'ym vös'as'*. He presides over all the important prayer gatherings in the Alga group having learned the prayer from an older sacrificial priest (Sadikov 2020). Evgeni is himself the main bookkeeper for the Rassvet cooperative.

There is another man in this group who is a real keeper of traditions and knows them well. He is not a sacrificial priest, but has huge authority. He is the one who takes care of the practical proceedings, organising the sacrificial animal, the transport, the paraphernalia, the helpers. His function is called *vös' kuz'o*, the master of the ceremony, a new function – at least

²⁷ Curiously, we couldn't find any mention of this meeting in Bereczki's correspondence (Bereczki 1994: 213–219). However, a photo of Armanshin gives us the evidence that, indeed, they met (Vikár & Bereczki 1990, photo section). It is interesting to note that he was selected for the meeting with the Hungarian scholars. Fieldwork then was very different from today. Today we just live in the area and organise our own programme, while our predecessors were fully taken in hand by the Communist Party, which organised their work: they had meetings organised in the culture house or the kolkhoz centre with whoever was considered suitable. Within this framework, they met Armanshin.

²⁸ We have a sample of Armanshin's prayer at <https://vk.com/club80621061>.

we have not identified any analogous role in literature (Sadikov 2020). In the Alga group, this man has enormous authority, not only because of his function, but also because of his personality. He was a former administration leader, so he knows everybody in the district. He is also straightforward and resolute, with the character of a leader of men. His name is Garifulla Garifanov, but everybody calls him Farhulla. While Evgeni Adullin only deals with prayers and the spiritual aspects, Farhulla, by controlling who is called to pray at *mör vös'*, is able to implement a real priest training policy.

The Alga group has a regular group of helpers who are both elder and younger men from different villages. They meet four times a year as a team, both at the *Bagysh vös'* and *mör vös'*, in winter and spring. They now have good experience working together. Farhulla, as we mentioned, is also responsible for deciding who will pray at these ceremonies alongside Evgeni and Vladik, who always lead the prayers; the choice is always made from among other sacrificial priests of the different villages. Once, in December 2013, several of them were ill and so Farhulla made the bold choice of asking two younger helpers, Evgeni Gayniyarov from Alga and Yakov Fazlyev (Yashka) from Verkhnebaltachevo, to step forth and pray with the other, more experienced, sacrificial priests. Clearly, Farhulla was preparing the future. Both younger men were experienced as helpers. But Evgeni, not yet thirty years old, was still not married, and Yashka, a bit older, was a very social and active young man in his village. When we attended in 2018 the ceremony in Yashka's village, he had organised everything – the mowing of the place beforehand, the sacrificial animal, etc – and we learned he had become the head of the village administration.

For some years, there has been a discussion about the need to set up an association of sacrificial priests. The initiator of this idea was Anatoliy Galikhanov, Altaevo village's sacrificial priest, and the idea was supported by the powerful association of the Eastern Udmurt in Izhevsk. It was not approved in the region however, and met with the displeasure of the main local authority, Rinat Gal'amshin. The idea was revived in 2018. Gal'amshin had resigned as head of the national movement for health reasons. His successor, Salim'yan Garifullin, decided the time was ripe and organised a meeting of the area's sacrificial priests in Varyash on June 20th 2018 in which the idea was discussed. It led to a general assembly on January 25th 2019 to which Ranus Sadikov and Eva were invited. Eva was hoping to get to know other priests than those she had met when attending different ceremonies, and she was surprised to notice that the priests attending the meeting were almost all acquaintances. They decided to form an association and to meet in order to coordinate their deeds. They elected Anatoliy

Galikhanov as their leader. A self-invited delegation of sacrificial priests from Izhevsk attended, among them Al'bert Razin²⁹.

The dress codes of the ceremonies

There was historically a dress code for participants as well as for priests at the collective ceremonies. At least the photographs we have from the end of the 19th century (Sadikov, Mäkelä 2009) show that at a collective ceremony all the attendants were dressed in white. True enough, the photos are from another location, but it is not too far from Tatyshly district. They are from the Kaltasy district, and their author is the Finnish ethnographer Yrjö Wichmann. Yet they confirm what earlier literature asserts. Unfortunately, there was no extensive investigation into Tatyshly district before the end of the 20th century.

As the prayers were addressed to the “White God”, the people were all supposed to dress in white and indeed, in everybody’s wardrobe there was an item of holy day dress that answered this aim, a piece of homespun called *short-derem*. There were *short-derems* for males as well as for females. Of course, and regrettably, we have no such visual evidence for the period in between. We know that on the one hand home spinning progressively disappeared from being the sole or even one of the ways of providing clothing. Thus, the existing *short-derems* from the beginning of the 1960s are the last. Moreover, they also disappeared with the demise of their owners, for people used them as mortuary clothes. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, there were only a few samples still used by their owners. Indeed, the old women who owned one used when attending ceremonies (FWM 2016³⁰). So did the very rare priests who had one. The *short-derem* was an ankle-length overcoat in whitish homespun material, with thin vertical stripes and girt with a kind of belt. This belt could also be homespun, as in Udmurtia, but usually in the region under study the sacrificial priests girt themselves with a long, embroidered towel patterned in red or, more rarely, blue³¹. This belt was and still is a central emblematic element of the sacrificial priest’s costume.

²⁹ Who would become unhappily famous some months later, in September 2019, for committing self-immolation in the centre of Izhevsk as an act of protest against the language policy of the Russian federal government.

³⁰ At Nizhnebaltachevo *gurt vös'* we saw ourselves how the elder Anfissa Bamieva wore one, 03/06/2016.

³¹ Vladik Khuzimardanov uses a belt with blue patterns, Alga 14/06/2013, etc.