

of the most active writers on the subject being Liliya Garaeva, the Aribash sacrificial priest's wife (Garaeva 2020: 2).

The proceedings of the collective ceremonies

In Tatyshly district, the proceedings of the ceremonies are on the one hand quite similar on a general level, and on the other hand can also be considerably different in detail from one village to another.

We shall firstly comment on the most elaborated ceremonies in the places where continuity has been ensured, and then show in which manner they have been simplified in places where revitalisation later took place, for example where there was an interruption in the performance of these ceremonies. Indeed, this approach relies on the idea that the more complex rituals are the older ones and that in subsequent evolutions and changes some features have been lost, a hypothesis that is confirmed by the data. We know that in some villages there has been full continuity of the ceremonies, at least since the 1940s. In Bal'zuga, Nazip Sadriev had perpetuated and transmitted the rules of the ceremonies of his youth.

Although there are some differences in the process of a ceremony depending on at what level it takes place, the overall structure and the nature of the activities remain the same within a specific tradition. While at the village level there is usually one priest praying and one animal slaughtered, then at the village group and at the regional levels the number of priests depends on how many villages participate and how many animals have been brought for sacrifice. The general rule is that the number of priests must correspond to the number of ewes. Usually fewer helpers and common people participate at the village ceremony than at the ceremony involving a number of villages.

What follows is a description of different phases of the typical process of collective ceremonies. We try to highlight the common features of ritual activities across Tatyshly district as well as the main differences in various traditions of conducting the ceremonies, both within the district and outside of it.

The preparation

The preparation requires many different simultaneous tasks that are quite similar everywhere.

Firstly, the organiser of the ceremony, the *vös' kuz'o*, or the sacrificial priest himself, must ensure that they have the necessary products for the ceremony, which include a ewe, grain, butter; a proper space for the ceremony, wood for the fire, water for cooking.

The ingredients of the porridge are to be gathered from the village. In Tatyshly district this is a general rule. If the wish is that the whole village would profit from the prayer and the sacrifice, then the offerings must come from the whole village. So the grain, the butter and the money to buy the ewe must come from the whole population. If the sacrificial animal is offered by one family, the benefit of the ceremony will go to that family and not to all villagers. This differs from the practice in other places or in other ceremonies, for example in Kizganbashevo, in Baltach district, according to the sacrificial priest they sacrifice as many ewes as the population offers. In 2015 for example, they sacrifice thus 12 ewes (FWM 2016³⁴).

How the collecting of the ingredients is accomplished may vary depending on the village. In Bal'zuga, two teams of teenage boys attend all households in the village collecting grain, butter and money. In other villages those collecting may be older men, as in Novye Tatyshly and Urazgil'dy, or women as in Petropavlovka. According to our informants, everybody participates and nobody ever deliberately refuses.

In Tatyshly district, as in Buraevo district, the rule is to sacrifice an ewe. The sacrificial animal must be a healthy female who has already given birth. This is not so, however, everywhere. In Aribash, in the same district, the sacrificial animal is a ram, for the ceremony follows the rules of the sacred place, which formerly hosted a Keremet ceremony at which only male animals were sacrificed. In Yanaul district, for example at the last of the spring ceremonies (held at the beginning of July) the *Yshtiyak vös'* in Kaymashabash, only rams are sacrificed. The local priest explained to Eva that the sacrifice had to be a male animal whose blood had never been shed (FWM 2019). So there are different rules, responding to different logics, which exist in parallel. Therefore, a clash is inevitable in the common ceremonies such as the *Elen vös'*, where each group acts as they deem fit (see above, FWM 2018). In some cases, other animals may be sacrificed, as happened in December 2016 at the Novye Tatyshly *mör vös'* where there was the possibility to sacrifice a goose for the welfare of all birds. However, if there is no goose this ritual is not compulsory. Nazip Sadriev said he also used to sacrifice a goose, but there is not enough meat in it to make it worthwhile.

³⁴ Information by Timerkhan Apsalikov (born 1952), sacrificial priest, to Eva Toulouze and Ranus Sadikov, 07/06/2016.

The ewe is sold by a different villager each year. It is not seemly to bargain, they accept whatever price the sacrificial priest offers for it. Therefore, the people also offer money, both to those who gather the food from the village households and during the ceremony. In villages of other districts, the rules are different, as is the logic behind them: we already mentioned how many ewes were offered in Kizganbashevo, and we may add oral information about Kaymashabash, which is that in 2019 40 cauldrons were used³⁵. Usually, the price given for a ewe has been around 3,000 roubles, and when Nazip Sadriev led the rituals he paid from 2,500 to 3,000 depending on the weight of the animal. Now the amount is fixed.

The preparation of the sacred place may encompass different activities. If the fence has been damaged, it must be put right. Most commonly, just hay must be cut, as nobody keeps the sacred place in working order between the ceremonies. Usually these operations start during the first prayer, *siz'is'kon*, and are completed in the morning of the ceremony before people start to arrive. The same organisation is implemented in winter in order to guarantee the accessibility of the sacred place. When in December 2013 we attended the *Alga mör vös' siz'is'kon*, we had to cross 300 m of snow reaching to Eva's hips. But next morning tractors had cleared the way for the villagers.

Usually wood has been stocked beforehand at the sacred place, trunks that have to be cut into logs. One or two helpers take care of this during the ceremony. Likewise, lots of water is required: cauldrons have to be cleaned, meat and entrails must be washed, water must boil with the meat and form the broth, and water must be constantly added to compensate for evaporation. So often sacred places are chosen depending on the proximity of a water source. Water is usually brought just before the ceremony starts, and throughout the ceremony.

In the ritual area there is a place where participants may leave offerings, with different traditions applying in different villages. In Balzyuga and Novye Tatyshly the place is clearly marked, but very few people leave towels and other offerings. So there are very few items to distribute among the helpers. It is very different in the Alga group, as we shall see later.

The first prayer, *siz'is'kon*

This is one of the features that in some other districts and in some villages of Tatyshly district have disappeared from the structure of the ceremonies.

³⁵ Oral information from Nikolai Anisimov's fieldwork.

It is a prayer said before the sacrificial activities start. We know that it was formerly performed a day before the proceedings, and this is still the case in the Alga group for the *mör vös'* and *Bagysh vös'* ceremonies both in spring and winter. A small team attends the sacred place the evening before the ceremony, makes a fire and cooks a porridge without meat. When the porridge is ready, the sacrificial priest utters a prayer, which is very similar to the prayers said in the sacrificial ceremony except that it promises a sacrifice. While he prays, the priest holds a bowl with the porridge on a towel and on a birch or a fir branch. The helpers kneel behind the priest during the prayer and afterwards everybody partakes of the porridge. In order not to lose time, this porridge is often made of semolina, as in the Alga group. Then the team puts big chunks of wood that are not perfectly dry onto the fire so that it will last until the next morning's gathering. In the village ceremonies and most of the Vil'gurt group ceremonies the *siz'is'kon* takes place in the morning, before the start of the sacrificial ceremony proper. The grain used for this porridge is then the same and will be used later for the 'main' porridge.

We have witnessed *siz'is'kon* in all the ceremonies of the Alga group that we have attended, and in most of the Vil'gurt group. We were surprised at Urazgil'dy's ceremony to notice that not only was there no such prayer, but neither the people nor the sacrificial priest knew to expect it. The same thing happened in Vyazovka and in Yuda. There was a *siz'is'kon* in Asavka (Baltach district), but the porridge, there, was a flour porridge similar to *béchamelle*. In Kaymashabash (Yanaul district) there was no such prayer either. On the contrary, in Bol'shekachakovo (Kaltasy district) this prayer was performed in an ad hoc ceremony some days before the main ceremony.

In both cases, whether the *siz'is'kon* takes place a day before or on the same day as the main ceremony, the helpers lit fires; in some places, the sacrificial priest himself lights them, as part of his task. Where there is a *siz'is'kon*, a smaller cauldron is but one of them. However, it is important to start fires under the big cauldrons as well because they would be needed very soon. The rule for these ceremonies is that the first ingredient to be poured into the cauldron is salt and only afterwards comes water. We were not able to ascertain the origin of this rule as the main reason given for it is always "so did the elder". This is a rule only sacrificial priests are aware of: in ordinary homes, even when porridge is meant for ritual purposes, the homemakers have not heard of such a rule.

The sacrifice

The sacrifice is actually the first deed of the ceremony proper everywhere, although here too there are differences: while in most places in Tatyshly district the sacrifice is accompanied by a prayer, in some others places, as well as in other districts, it is performed without a prayer. This practice actually scandalises priests accustomed to more elaborated scenarios because for them the idea of taking a life without dedicating it to the Gods is unacceptable. So in places where continuity has been ensured, two helpers hold the ewe down and purify it by sprinkling it with water while the priest prays. Then while one holds the sacrifice, the other cuts its throat with a knife, but through a blade of grass. This is a general way of slaughtering an animal³⁶, even outside the ritual context. The one who cuts the throat recovers in a spoon the first blood to gush out of the wound and throws it into the fire three times.

Depending on the year and the animals provided, there may be a particular sacrifice to the God of the earth (Udm: *Му Кылчин*). The animals dedicated to Mu-Kylchin must be black. They are slaughtered in a slightly different way, for a hole has to be prepared in the earth into which the blood has to be poured, so the ewe is usually slaughtered at the hole. Thereafter everything is similar, except that this meat has to be cooked in a cauldron ad hoc. But once the meat is cooked it may be mixed with the rest of the meat.

Meanwhile the priest, at his praying post, utters the prayer and the other ‘unemployed’ helpers kneel. The priest holds in his hands the bread baked by the owner of the ewe, in which a coin is stuck symbolising, according to the locals, wealth. Later, three pieces of the bread will be thrown into the fire.

In other places such as Urazgil’dy, nothing special happens during the slaughter, which is carried out in the same way as ordinary slaughtering.

In both cases, the ewe is carried to the place where it will be butchered. The priests usually do not participate in the butchering. The helpers work swiftly, they are accustomed to this not so religious activity. They cut chunks of meat, wash them and throw them into a cauldron of boiling water. Traditionally, those butchering the animal took care to cut at the joints with a knife, so that the bones would not be broken (Sadikov 2019: 62). Today the helpers have no scruples in using even an axe to separate the chunks of meat (FWM 2018³⁷). Later, the bones are burned in the fire under the cauldrons.

³⁶ Oral information by Nikolai Anisimov.

³⁷ Conversation with Rais Rafikov at the Vil’gurt *gurt vös*’, 08/06/2018, Eva Toulouze and Ranus Sadikov.

Washing the entrails is usually a woman's task. It is the one thing women are allowed to do. Nazip Sadriev said that women had asked him whether they could participate, and he thought they could be allowed to contribute with this task. In the Vil'gurt *mör vös'*, two elder women arrive at the very beginning and wash the cauldrons. Then some of them will take the entrails and bring them home to clean them, and bring them back ready to be put into the broth. In Bal'zyuga there was no such woman, but in 2014 the ewe owner's son and a priest's helper, Sidor Kamidullin, took care of the entrails. Otherwise they would have been burned. In Urazgil'dy, one younger woman attended right at the beginning and washed the entrails at the spring at the sacred place. In Aribash, the priests's and the helpers' wives took care of this task, washing them in the brook down in the valley. In the Alga group the women's presence is more discreet. At some moment, one woman comes and takes the entrails home and later comes back with the work done. In Asavka, in the Baltach district, the women who take care of the entrails go further downstream and wash them only in a place where the "sacred place could not see it". We'll find the same notion in connection with another requirement. The preparation of the ceremonies is a long task. There may be, or not, a place to go to the toilet. For example, at Novye Tatyshly, at the entrance of the sacred place, there is a small outhouse, although this is the only place where we have seen one. In the other places, everyone finds his or her way to solve the problem. The general condition is that one must go further, so that "the sacred place will not see" this activity. In Aribash Liliya Garaeva led Eva to a place far enough and low enough so that the sacred place, at the top of the hill, was not visible.

Other prayers

After the sacrifice the proceedings diverge, depending upon village tradition.

After the butchering a long moment of inactivity starts while the broth is boiling. It is possible to dedicate the time to counting money, or simply to socialising. In the most elaborated scenarios there have already been two prayers. In the other cases none, and there is still some time before it happens. For the anthropologists this is a good moment to ask the sacrificial priests questions. Some interesting conversations have taken place in this time, as for example in 2015 at the *Bagysh vös'* ceremony a conversation Eva had with the main priests Evgeni and Farhulla about the need to update the prayer and include the new concerns of modernity (FWM 2015). Of course, the helpers always have to ensure that there is enough wood in the fire and enough water for the broth in the cauldron.

This phase can be quite long, depending on the size and the age of the ewe. When the meat is well cooked, the helpers take all the meat out of the broth. Then the team of helpers splits, some of them dealing with the meat, sorting it from the bones, while the others pour grain into the broth.

In the most elaborate scenario, the sacrificial priest has a task once the meat is extracted from the broth: he has to find some parts of the animal's body for the next prayer, which will be said with the meat. The meat chosen is part of the head, the heart, the liver, one right rib and part of one right leg. Of course, it is impossible to recognise in a cauldron a right leg or a right rib from a left one. Therefore, one task of the helpers who put the raw meat into the cauldron is to mark the rib and the leg so that the priest will know for sure that he is putting the right pieces of meat on his plate. Before going to the prayer spot the priest(s) make a circle over the cauldron three times with the dish of meat. Only afterwards do they pray. For that, the helpers who sort the meat and those who stir the porridge interrupt their activities and kneel for the prayer with the meat. Moreover, the helpers who slaughtered the sacrifice stand behind the sacrificial priest touching the tray with the extracted meat. After the prayer, the helpers and the priest eat some of the meat, saying individual prayers, before resuming their tasks. Usually we, the anthropologists, are also given some meat, but only after the helpers have received and eaten their part. In the Alga group, Farhulla had always taken care that our group was well fed, but also that we respected the internal rules of the ceremony.

The sorting of the meat is finished before the porridge is cooked. The sorted meat will be shared between the cauldrons and the bones will be given to the children (for example in Bal'zuga) or to the elder women (for example in Vil'gurt) to gnaw on them. By this time the lay people have started to arrive, initially in small groups, the more in greater numbers when the porridge is close to ready. They bring threads that they leave at the place where the priest prays, and also leave towels, socks, T-shirts as gifts on a pole prepared for this aim. In the Alga group, however, the ritual is more complicated. The participants themselves do not enter the sacred enclosure but remain outside, passing their offerings over the fence to one of the sacrificial priests who says a prayer and puts them on a pole. Indeed, in the Alga group these offerings are much more frequent, so that at the end of the ceremony there are many rewards for the helpers. Meanwhile their main activity is to stir the porridge and regulate its thickness, adding water if needed. It is not a light task physically: the porridge becomes quite thick and to stir it requires more and more strength and so the helpers alternate behind the huge cauldrons.

When the porridge is ready, there is time for the next prayer. Before praying, the priest holds a bowl with the porridge in his hands and makes three circles over the cauldron full of porridge. Of course, all the circles are always clockwise – the reverse movement is for the Udmurt connected with death. By this time all the participants have arrived and are ready to taste the porridge. So, the priest turns to the people, and orders them to kneel. After the prayer, the helpers lift the cauldrons and bring them closer to the participants, who queue in order to get their share.

The distributed portions are not usually individual portions: as a rule, the participants have brought a bowl and as many spoons as there are members of the family. When they have received their share, they eat it in small kin groups. We, the anthropologists, are also considered a kin group and are served together. Actually, many people take some of the consecrated porridge home, so the helpers often have to serve them another portion. But there is still a prayer to go. When everyone has eaten, the priest takes in his hands the box in which people have deposited their pecuniary contribution. He kneels, this time bareheaded, and recites the last prayer, *dzh'uges'*, the prayer for the money, asking the deities to give the people back their offerings “by hundreds and thousands”.

After this the public part of the ceremony is over, and people go home.

The closing

After the lay participants have left, it remains to close the ceremony and restore order. First, some of the helpers clean the cauldrons and put in the rest of the porridge in buckets in order to take it to their villages. The others endeavour to douse the sacrificial fire. In the Vil'gurt group they walk around the fireplace and the embers, and swipe with a birch branch in summer or a fir branch in winter towards the centre of the fireplace. They take three turns around the fireplace and the ceremony is finished. In the Alga group, the closing is slightly different: all the helpers walk in Indian file around the fireplace area three times, making the same swiping movement towards its centre. The sacrificial priest takes advantage of this quieter moment to distribute among the helpers some fabric offerings the participants have brought and some symbolic coins as gratitude for their help.

Usually this is the end. However, in Balzyuga we witnessed a final prayer that we have not seen anywhere else (FWM 2014). Only the helpers and, on this occasion, the anthropologists were present. Everybody stood,

and Fridman prayed for the last time, while the helpers marked his saying “Omin” and bowing. When the prayer was over everyone went to their cars with the paraphernalia.

When the ceremony is over the buckets with the remaining porridge are taken to the village(s) and distributed to a group of helpers who have divided the village among themselves, in order to take the porridge to the villagers who did not attend the ceremony. This process is even more spectacular in the case of the *mör vös'*, where nine or ten villages attend. Clearly the participants are mainly from the village where the ceremony takes place and the closest villages, although most of the villages are represented only by their priests and helpers. So they take home the porridge they prepared – and here it is quite ordinary to see whole cauldrons being lifted into minivans or horse-drawn carts.

The prayers

The prayers are addressed to the main Udmurt God Inmar. Actually, the address is “Inmar-Kylchin”. This address remains slightly mysterious. The second element, *Kylchin*, is the problematic one. In the Udmurt traditional mythology, another important deity, closer to the people than Inmar, who is a character of *deus otiosus*, is called *Kyldys'in*. This God, who provided humans with a golden age, used to walk on earth and be close to the people, until he got angry and retired to the upper spheres. Linguistically speaking, he is the ‘creator’ (in Udmurt *kyldytyny* means ‘to create’). The word *kylchin* may be a contraction of *kyldys'in*. At the same time, it is a word on its own, used to designate the protector, the angel. Vladykin observes that today, in Udmurtia, where Orthodox influence is predominant, “*Inmar-Kylchin* is one of the images of Jesus Christ, in linguistic expression a synonym, often a guardian angel” (Vladykin 1994: 181–183). Thus, the Udmurt prayers, as they are uttered today at Udmurt sacrificial ceremonies, are addressed to this dyad, the elements of which are difficult to separate. Actually, both carry in the prayer the possessive mark: my Inmar, my *Kylchin* (*Inmare, Kylchine*). This address, in spite of its duality, tends to reinforce the perception of a supreme God, and a temptation towards monotheism, which is not surprising as the Udmurt are surrounded by powerful monotheistic religions. This does not mean that plurality has totally disappeared. We have evidence in the fact that in the texts of some of the prayers, alongside the address as *ton* (Udm: ‘thee’, familiar second person singular), at some moments the plural pops in, *ti* (Udm: ‘you’, plural form). It is true that the number of prayers to other deities is today limited. Moreover, as we