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

use the interjection "Oh, my God", the Udmurt use "Oste Inmare", which is a functional equivalent. We cannot ignore however the fact that in the Eastern Udmurt regions it is not rare to here the interjection "Ufalla", which reminds us that Muslims are just around the corner. However, what is further untouched in the polytheistic spirit is the multitude of spirits that populate the earth. People may address them, although in our fieldwork at the beginning of the 21st century we have not found any formal prayer in their honour (spirits of the house, of the sauna, of the barn, of the forest, of the water, of the wind, etc.), while among previous recordings there are very different addressees. Some are benevolent and protective, others may be hostile, others again may be tricksters.

When the sacrificial priest, or, during *mör vös'*, the sacrificial priests, say their prayers, they stand together in a row. Each priest has his prayer. They just happen to interrupt it at the same moments to utter "Omin", bowing. With this word the participants who kneel behind the priest all bow, head touching the earth.

According to tradition, a sacrificial priest receives his prayer from elder priests. They learn it by "stealing it[38]" (Udm. dial: нушканы) (Sadikov 2019: 242): this means that they do not learn it deliberately, but it remains in their memory because they have heard it so often. This is true oral transmission and guarantees the magical power of the prayer. Actually, some of the elder sacrificial priests we have met have received their text in this way, for example Rais Rafikov.

However, this mode of transmission is no more. The Soviet conditions did not allow younger people to attend ceremonies regularly enough for prayer texts to become fixed in their memories.

Today, with the few exceptions that we mentioned, the transmission patterns are different. The older priests have published their prayers, as has Nazip Sadriev and the younger priests rely on these texts. Everywhere prayer texts have been put into writing and are circulated in this format. So while formerly the transmission was fully oral, now the main instrument is writing.

While for some scholars there is a fundamental contradiction between these two methods, we do not think so. Indeed, initially the young priests did read their prayers, relying on written texts. But with experience they will come to memorise the prayers and written texts will in practice be used less and less. So, variation will irresistibly be introduced, despite the

[38] Ranus Sadikov quotes an informant from Bol'shekachakovo (Kaltasy district), who said to him in 2006: "Вӧсь кылэз дышетсконо ӧвӧл, нушкано гыне": 'The words of the prayer are not supposed to be learned, but to be stolen'.

possibility that written transmission would draw the prayer towards fixation. Oral transmission, something of a traditional folklore genre, is bound to remain. We have followed this process by observing Bal'zuga's young priest Fridman throughout the years of our fieldwork, almost since the very beginning of his 'career'. Initially, he dutifully read his printed text, but as the years passed he started feeling more comfortable, and relied less and less on the paper. Now he even allows himself to improvise (FW 2016[39]). Galikhanov acknowledged that he also learnt from paper, but now he freely improvises (FW 2016[40]).

The question of the adaptation of prayer texts to modernity is an important one. Can the inherited texts be changed? Who has the right to do that? This question has concerned the sacrificial priests for some time. Actually, adaptations already took place during the Soviet period with the introduction of notions of kolkhoz welfare and the disappearance of sentences about the tsar's health and welfare, the era itself obliging the adaptations.

Today, the concerns of the villagers have changed. Of course, the main demands remain – health for humans and livestock, fertility, a good harvest, mild rain. But other concerns have appeared: concern for the next generation, tempted by migration, and for the temptations that await them in the wider world, for example drugs, criminality. Some bold sacrificial priests, such as Anatoliy Galikhanov, have added these concerns to the traditional patterns. Others, more conservative, discussed these issues among themselves, as was the case with the Alga group priests, who changed their text in 2019 in order to make it more suitable to the people's concerns. Actually, they borrowed some sentences from Galikhanov's new prayers. Vladimir Galiev, sacrificial priest from the younger generation in Asavka, was disturbed by the absence of explicit gratitude to the Gods in the text of the prayer, so with the consent of the elders he added some sentences at the beginning of the prayer.

Let us have a look to some of these texts, recited in Tatyshly district at various ceremonies. We shall present some earlier texts and some collected by our team from 2013 to 2019.

What does not change is the general content of the requests and the frame in which they are uttered. There is, framing the prayer, a sentence defining the situation: "we have gathered". Actually, this is a well-known opening also used in Christian ceremonies. The prayer is usually concluded by formulas asking for God's indulgence: "we may not say things correctly,

[39] Observation by Nikolai Anisimov at *Tol mör vös'* 9/12/2016, Novye Tatyshly.

[40] Conversation with Anatoliy Galikhanov on 06/06/2016, by Eva Toulouze, Ranus Sadikov, Nikolai Anisimov.

perhaps we have spoken the prayer in the wrong order, we have no book". Several times, during the prayer as well as at the end, the priest asks God to receive the prayer with favour. He also asks God to receive with favour what the people have not asked for, but what they desire: God reads in the mind of each what their wishes are. All comes from God, what he gives is "his" warm rain, "his" happiness, as very clearly expressed by the frequent use of personal suffixes. Within this framework, there are two kinds of demands. On the one hand, the keyword is "give", which is expressed in a very varied number of expressions both grammatically and lexically. The other keyword is "protect", from natural catastrophes (rain, wind), fire, disease, bad people and bad things. The natural catastrophes too come from God: "his" fires, "his" winds. The bad people are generally those who are able to curse in Udmurt: those who threaten to "eat you, to drink you, to take you". This is an obvious reference to the art of witchcraft, which feeds on the energy of its victims.

We present these texts in three languages, Udmurt, Russian and English. For the time being, we present the Udmurt texts in the empiric transcription the sacrificial priests rely upon, and not a scientific dialectological transcription, which we shall attempt to produce later. This transcription is a mix of Udmurt literary language and dialectal features, but does not attempt to be completely precise in the presentation of all peculiarities. The priests themselves know exactly how to pronounce each word, for they preach in their own dialect. The English translation attempts to give a precise account of the Udmurt text.

The films

Filmmaking has been an important component of the fieldwork from the very beginning of our research on the Eastern Udmurt. Most of the filmmaking has concentrated on public prayer ceremonies. Liivo has been the main filmmaker in the research team, but others – Ranus, Nikolai, Laur and Eva – have also greatly contributed to the audio-visual documentation of ritual life. Even Denis Kornilov, a film director from Udmurtia, joined the team twice to help with filming. In addition to the prayer ceremonies, the team also recorded rituals in more intimate contexts in Tatyshly district and elsewhere. We believe that recording public ceremonies and other rituals is justified for several reasons.

First, these ceremonies have a high cultural value that should be shown to the world. Usually, worldviews not associated with world religions are marginalised, even ignored, especially in Orthodox Russia. Even most of the