

# A Systematic Investigation of Sacred Space in the Kama-Vyatka Region: Udmurt Materials

**Nadezhda Shutova**

e-mail: nad\_shutova@mail.ru

**Abstract:** This article summarises the results of long-term studies of cult places and reconstructions of sacred space at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The studies were carried out by the Udmurt Institute of History Language and Literature, Urals Department of the Russian Academy of Science.

The article starts by reflecting on the meaning of the word ‘sacred’ in Russian and Udmurt. It then explains the main approaches and research methods used when looking at spaces that have become sacred as a result of a particular activity, for example through symbolical domestication and transformation of the environment; or because of the natural, social, cultural and spiritual milieu; or as a particular creative transformation of the hierotopy, including hierophany as the presence of a divine (or mystical) component. In reconstructing the traditional sacred space of the Udmurt, we used systematic, and structural/semiotic methods. The first sees sacred space as a complicated natural, historical and cultural, religious and mythological set, while the second reveals the semantics of these cultural places, objects and rituals. We pay particular attention to the study of structure, of the main indicators and the semantics of the Udmurt traditional space at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We have followed the means of organising sacred landscapes, which assumed the existence of networks of shrines and cult objects, a systematic

organisation of ceremonies and rituals at each of them, and the holding of family and calendar rituals.

We have revealed circles (levels) of sacredness (family, patronymic, conditional clan, village, regional, tribal and territorial), showing how the mythological opposition between sacred and profane is relative within each local area, existing implicitly within the limits of a wider area of sacredness.

We have briefly characterised how extensive study has been of the different types of religious landscape, and the present state of the art.

**Keywords:** approaches and methods of study, levels of sacredness, ritual, sacred space, shrine, structure and semantics of space, traditional, Udmurt

Since the beginning of the 1990<sup>s</sup> the Udmurt Research Institute has organised research on the cult places and shrines of the Udmurt, the Besserman and other peoples who have lived between the Kama and the Vyatka from the Middle Ages onwards. This entailed the investigation of such topics as cultural landscape and sacred space. The output of this research is four monographs and some dozens of articles on the topic (Shutova 2001, 2011, 2012, 2013a; Cult Monuments 2004; Shutova et al. 2009; Popova 2011). Let us highlight the main results of our research.

## The concept of the ‘sacred’

In scientific literature the terms ‘sacred’, ‘sacral’ (in Russian *sakral’nyy*, *svyashchennyy*, from Lat. *sacrum*, Ger. *sakral*) are seen as a concept connected with the idea of God, and as being contrary to the terms ‘profane’, ‘worldly’, ‘secular’ (Bayburin 1993: 183). There are many definitions of the equivalent Russian *sakral’nyy* ‘sacred’. The most complete and detailed meaning of this term was given by E. Levkievskaya: “Sacred is one of the central concepts in archaic worldview and in Christian theology: it is a quality intrinsic to God and the main divine forces (God’s

mother, angels, archangels, saints), and to the sphere in which they live and manifest themselves. In a wider traditional context, it is a quality intrinsic to the cult and worship sites, which are full of religious meanings and charged with peculiar force, characterised by blessing and pureness” (Levkiyevskaya 2009: 534).

In Udmurt, for a long time the word seems to have been *vös'am* (lit: ‘used through prayer’, ‘filed with prayer’, ‘blessed’). This quality is achieved through special ceremonies, rituals, incantations. Another word, a kind of duplication, *dun chylkyt*, meaning ‘very pure’, first appears in T. Borisov’s dictionary (Borisov 1991<sup>1</sup>: 89). It comes from the Udmurt adjective *dun* ‘transparent, clean, valuable’ and the noun ‘price, value, assessment’ (URS 2008: 189–190; Karpova 2013: 171) and *chylkyt* (‘clean, pure’). According to our opinion, the first term *dun* is used both literally and figuratively. The word *chylkyt* characterises cleanness in the physical meaning. In the *Finnish-Udmurt Dictionary* and in the *Udmurt-Finnish Dictionary* some other words meaning sacred are introduced for the first time: *dun-s'ölyktem*, *vös'lyko*, *vös'o-buro* (Maksimov et al. 2008: 115; Maksimov 2013: 536). M. Atamanov used the word *dun-chylkyt* to express the Orthodox concept ‘saint (Godly)’, ‘pure, immaculate’ (Vös'as'kon”yos 2000: 146).

In addition, the Permic peoples used the archaic notion *vozho*, *vozho*, *vezha* from the Proto-Permian word *vęža* ‘sacred, sacral, blessed’ (KESK 1970: 49–50). In the Udmurt traditional calendar, terms with the stem *vozho* expressed transitional periods in the lunar and solar years. Thus, we have for example *invozh* (‘the days of the summer solstice’; *in* ‘sky, celestial’; *vozho* ‘sacred’, ‘transitional’) and *vozhodyr/uyvozh* ‘days of the winter solstice’ (*vozho* ‘sacred’, ‘transitional’; *dyr* ‘time, period’; *uy* ‘night’ or *uypal* ‘north, northern part’) (Pervukhin 1888: 58–60; Vladykina, Glukhova 2011: 33–39). The root *vozho* is also to be found in the name of the family/clan deity of the Slobodskoy Udmurt (Kirov Oblast') *Vozhshud* (in other areas *Vorshud*), who symbolised sacred (ancient/genuine) happiness (luck/fate/sharing) (for more details, cf.: Shutova 2014:

276–282). The term *vezha*, as meaning sacred/sacral appears in Proto-Permic liturgical texts. In Komi, this word is used in its literal meaning ‘sacred, sacral, blessed’ and belong to the Christian semantic field: *vezha va* ‘holy water’, *vezha dyr* ‘Christmas’, *vezha lun* ‘church holiday’, as well as *vezhay* ‘godfather’, *vezhan* ‘godmother’, *vezhapi* ‘godson’, *vezhanyv* ‘goddaughter’ (KESK 1920: 49–50; Limerov 2002: 157–158).

Permic words with the root *vozh*, *vozho*, *vezha*, have meanings related to a precise quality existing in nature, time and space both in material objects and in non-material phenomena but always connected with the cult of dead ancestors. These terms relate to the connection between group or person and another reality, which in the framework of the traditional worldview is divided into two spheres: the lower underground/underwater realm, and the higher, heavenly, realm. This is the origin of the double hypostasis of the Udmurt word *vozho* and Komi word *vezha* and the ambivalence of the sacred transitional time *vozhodyr/vezhadyr*. On the one hand, this is the best time to attract luck and success, to enter into contact with the other, the divine sphere: ceremonies organised in this period were received with more favour and reached their addressee more quickly. On the other hand, this is a transitional time, a dangerous period that requires behaviour rules, prohibitions, and taboos related to the natural environment to be respected. The concepts of *vös'am*, *vös'lyko*, *vös'o-buro*, refer to qualities of things, substances, phenomena that are the result of religious ceremonies. The terms *dun-chylkyt* and *dun-s'ölyktem* reflect the abstract Christian understanding of sacredness, purity, value and virginity; the double form of these concepts strengthens their meaning. Moreover, while the word *dun-s'ölyktem* must be used to express the Christian understanding of innocence or purity, *dun-chylkyt* can be used in a wider context. In many Udmurt areas, people also widely used the Russian loanwords *svyatoy* and *svyashchenny*.

## The main approaches and principles of the research

In reconstructing the Udmurts' traditional sacral space, we used the systematic and the structural-semiotic (semiotic, from Gr. *semeion* 'sign', 'feature' – the science of signs and sign systems) methods. The first looks at space as a complicated natural, historical and cultural, religious and mythological complex, while the second looks at the semantics of cult places, objects and rituals.

Our research, dedicated to the specific features of the sacred space, relies on three fundamental approaches. The first approach presupposes that the sacred space has some peculiar qualities: it encompasses the presence of the divine or of an irrational (mystical) component. The famous scholar of religion Mircea Eliade, who introduced the category of hierophany (Gr. *hieros* 'sacred' and *fanos* 'light, torch', meaning the manifestation of sacredness) to scientific discourse, said: "Each sacred space implies some hierophany, some intrusion of the sacred, with the result that some territory separates from the surrounding cosmic space, deploying qualitatively distinct properties" (Eliade 1959: 164; Eliade 1994: 25).

The second approach imagines sacred space as the result of a particular creative activity intended to symbolically domesticate and transform the surrounding natural, social, cultural and spiritual sphere. According to Siberian ethnographers I. Gemuev and A. Salagaev, "The domestication of natural resources by a group of people was accompanied by its spiritual domestication in forms typical for traditional society" (Gemuev, Salagaev 1986: 189).

The third approach sees the sacred space as the result of creative transformations (following historian of the arts A. Lidov). Researchers have proposed the term hierotopia (Gr. *hieros* 'sacred' and *topos* 'place, space', 'concept', i.e. the process of creating sacred space) for a particular kind of artistic creation and a particular domain of historical research in which scholars reveal and analyse examples of this art: "...the centre of the universe, in the representations of

the bearers of ancient and medieval traditional religion, was a non-material and at the same time a real, an existing space, around which was organised the world of the objects, sounds, smells and other effects” (Lidov 2006: 14; 2012: 12–13).

In recent years the hierotopia approach has been widely implemented and used to analyse the Christian sacred space (the Old Testament, New Testament, Byzantine period) (Hierotopia 2006), the Muslim sacred places in Siberia (Seleznev 2013: 111–119), the city of Tyumen’ (Semenova 2013: 280–283), the space of new religious movements (Seleznev 2014: 282–292) and other cases. According to A. G. Seleznev, this approach “opens additional perspectives in viewing the sacred space by taking into account, as an important factor, the formation of ethnic and cultural identity” (Seleznev 2013: 118).

## **The main means of organising sacred space in the Udmurt tradition**

Acting creatively in order to organise a people-friendly space required the use of two main approaches. The first was the formation of a system of cult monuments of different kinds, their deployment in the surrounding landscape and the installation of their inner structure. This entailed the analysis of indicators such as the types and the diversity of cult places, their social meaning, their sacred status (higher, lower) depending on their position in the system of the traditional world order, which deity the shrine or cult spaces was dedicated to and its topography and interior organisation.

The second approach was the organising of two groups of regular ritual ceremonies. The first group encompassed ceremonies of votive and sacrificial offerings at the sanctuaries – family, patronymic, clan, village, community, tribe and territorial; the second group was family and calendar rites.

In order to study how to design a sacred space to be part of the ritual process one must take into account the following indicators:

1. the form and the date of the ritual;
2. the features of the site and the roles of the participants, their ages and gender composition;
3. ritual paraphernalia (trees, branches from trees, headgear, towels with embroidered ends, a special costume the ritual leader, costumes for participants);
4. the interpersonal skills or particular talents of the priest or organiser of the ceremony;
5. a particular procedure for blessing the food;
6. particular actions including musical accompaniment (zither or violin, the rhythm, the singing), walking in circle, meditation on sacred characters, exclamations, bows, the setting of a fire (a fireplace, sometimes a candle), the ritual offering of a meal and a system of hospitality, the visions that might be the motivation for organising a ceremony;
7. the mystic nature of the outcome of the ceremony, i.e. when the rituals and ceremonies have consequences (a positive or negative effect). People felt the favourable influence of the ceremony;
8. the presence of a divine (irrational) component during the ritual itself.

We must observe that after the performance of a ceremony at the sanctuary, the reconstructed sacred space and time continued in the settlement, for example the blessed food coming from the sanctuary was offered to all those who were not able to attend the ceremony. There was a precise hosting system within each kin group. In several regions, the hosting took place even between large local groups, outlining the living areas of ethno-territorial groups of Udmurt. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century annual purification ceremonies were performed by all Udmurt groups, with the aim of reconstructing a new sacred space and time in order to assure future prosperity.

This happened at the beginning of the new year according to the traditional calendar, during the holiday that was held to welcome spring and start the spring fieldwork (the name depends on the area: *Bydzh'ym nunal* 'the Great Day', *Akashka* 'Akashka', etc.) (for more details, cf.: Lintrop 2002; Minniyakhmetova 2003: 83–152; Shutova 2013b). This feast presents clear agrarian symbols as its aim was to activate the forces of nature and to ensure the fertility of land, livestock and people. These rituals had various productive, purifying and apotropaic functions and contributed to the purification and sacralisation of village cultural space. The feast was characterised by an address to the dead ancestors, to family and clan deities, as well as to territorial divine protectors, calling for their help. There were banquets, and people visited patrilineal kin around the village, moving either up-stream or clockwise in order to bring good luck. Young men rode on horses and performed purification and other rituals (Shutova 2015).

### **The structure and semantics of the Udmurt traditional sacred space**

The Udmurt traditional sacred space is the most thoroughly studied in the region between the Kama and the Vyatka. The sacred space has been reconstructed in around 20 places, in each of which the peculiarities as well as common features in organisation of religious and mythological space have been highlighted. As a rule in the surroundings of each village community in the region, there was a complete system of cult places and sites with different levels of significance. Depending on the social importance and the role of the deities and spirits, there were four basic categories of sites of worship. The first category, known as the small *kuala*, the *mudor kuala*, or the great *kuala*, were situated within the limits of the village or close to them and were dedicated to the protectors of the family or clan. In Udmurt mythological awareness, the clan



sanctuaries were symbols of the familiar, i.e. the domesticated, space. They were inhabited by kin deities and protectors such as *Vorshud*, *Mudor*, *Invu*, who guaranteed prosperity for members of the clan and were responsible for (internal) intergenerational relations as well as (external) relation of the kin group with its close natural environment.

Shrines on the second group were meant for ceremonies carried out for the masters of wild nature, and were connected with the cult of the main landscape elements: forests, higher places, trees, groves, springs, stones, lakes, rivers. The places of worship for the masters of wild nature (*lud/keremet*, *n'ulesmurt*) symbolised space that had not been domesticated by man, and represented the male sphere of activity – hunting, fishing, animal breeding, forest beekeeping, as well as cultivation on slash-and-burn land. The deities of this level, according to the elder Udmurts, were also inhabitants of the middle world and were in a kind of opposition to the divine protectors of family and clan. They were masters of the forests, meadows, bogs and grassland used by the people as pasture, and of hunting land.

Thus, in the Udmurt milieu, there were two main types of cult place (the great *kuala* and the sacred grove *lud*), at which they worshipped two groups of deities (family and clan protectors on the one hand, masters of wild nature on the other). This shows that within the traditional worldview there were representations of the duality of the middle world, of its horizontal articulation according to the principle of domestication, i.e. either domesticated by people, or not. And there is also a clear awareness of the different levels of domestication of marginal, transitional zones between these oppositions in the world of the earth. As an important element of the mytho-ethnic model of the world, *lud*, alias wild nature, appears as a life-giving, an all-creating, all-absorbing principle. This world was a kind of peripheral space in relation to the central domesticated space.

The third category of sacred place is represented by the collective tribal or territorial sanctuaries. We can identify three ways of creating them and, as a consequence, three different kinds of shrine within this type. The first way of designing these sanctuaries is connected with the ulterior development and complexification of the archaic cult of clan protectors (the shrines of Imma created by the Slobodskoy Udmurt). The second way is based on the deification of legendary ancestors who were the founders of the clans (Bulda shrines by southern Udmurt), which undoubtedly means the sanctuary and its deities are male. The third way is the result of an evolution of the ceremonies dedicated to the spirit master of a natural site (the sanctuary of Lek Oshmes in Igra district, Udmurtia, Lyz'i lake in Baltasi district, Tatarstan). Tribal and territorial cult monuments were places dedicated to the worship of powerful gods who became protectors of whole social groups, expressing an awareness of their unity. The distinction between tribal and territorial shrines founded by kin or neighbour religious communities is now progressively disappearing.

The fourth category is monuments intended for funerary, commemorative and propitiatory rituals. The cemetery was seen as a kind of settlement for dead ancestors. Because of how developed the ancestor cult was, these places became sacred places and objects of worship for the living. They regularly host commemorative banquets and there are precise rules for visiting. There are also different places to perform the commemorative ritual called *yrypyd s'oton* (lit: 'offering of the head and legs (of an animal)'); other places, called *bel'gy*, are dedicated to those who have passed away abroad; there are other locations at which people dispose of what remains of the clothes and utensils of the dead, called *kurkuyan* (lit: 'throwing of the plank (on which the dead was washed)') and *kuparkuyan* (lit: 'throwing of the ladle (used to wash the dead)').

The design of each shrine (hierotopy) was carefully planned. Each pre-Christian high ranking sanctuary (*kuala*, *lud*, others) had an organised internal structure: a quadrilateral, or a circle with,

inside, a quadrilateral (for example, the sacred grove of Esymbay *lud* in Novaya Uch'a, Kukmor district, Tatarstan); or a polygonal form or two juxtaposed polyhedra (for example, the sacred grove in Varkled-Bod'ya, in Agryz district, Tatarstan). In the design of the quadrilateral sanctuaries a curve in one line of the rectangular fence alludes to the place where in the early Christian basilicas and in Russian churches the eastern altar would stand (for example great *kuala* sanctuary, and *Bulda* in Varzi-Yatchi, Alnashi district, Udmurtia). There are other markers of sacred space, such as a fireplace with cauldron and paraphernalia, sacred tree or stump, sacred stone/remains of millstone, pit or hollow, pole or board, shelves, table and benches, as well as other interior objects. The space adjacent to the sacred site was usually fenced either artificially or naturally (trees, angle of slope, etc.). In several cases, depending on the level of sacredness of each section, there could be two or three enclosures. Cult sites of a lower rank, connected with commemorative rituals (*kurkuyan*, *yyr-pyd s'oton*, others), were not marked in a man-made way.

Depending on status, two main principles determined sanctuary location, related to local rivers, there was a kind of vertical and horizontal axis in regard of the settlement, which was seen as the centre of the universe, the most domesticated cultural space. Sanctuaries of higher rank, dedicated to more influential deities (family, clan and tribe protectors; masters of forests, meadows and lakes) usually occupied the more elevated places at a location. As a rule, the sacred places were situated upstream from the village, while the cult places connected with funerary and commemorative rites were seen as sacred sites of a lower status, and, traditionally, were located downstream from the village. Cemeteries were usually located at elevated locations outlined by the surrounding landscape. The other group of sacred places, the *yyr-pyd s'oton*, *kurkuyan*, *koparkuyan*, were situated in valleys, in ravines, dips and lower places close to rivers and springs. In the representations of the

people of that time, lower (impure) places were connected with the world of the dead, and of underground and underwater beings.

The local forms and ways of designing the sacred landscape of Udmurt villages reveal a high level of their inhabitants' interconnection with their surrounding natural space. Sacred monuments are adjacent to some particular elements of the landscape. Whole sacred complexes are formed in places where these elements are concentrated (elevation, spring/river, trees/uncommon trees, stones, waterfall, old settlement, etc.), and they were actively used in the ritual practice of the local population. Here, the natural sites themselves functioned as sacral monuments. It was particularly important to take into account their position in regard to the domesticated space of the village (human settlement being a symbol of the middle level of the universe) and the river valley (the river as a symbol of the horizontal and vertical axes of the universe). A network of sacred loci existed not only in the village, but also in each private household.

In general, the traditional Udmurt system for designing spiritual space in a rural location implied the existence of a religious centre, a regional sanctuary, with the main sacred values in the older mother village, a network of smaller villages and, in each of them, a village sacred place as well as a series of clan or patronymic cult sites. Sacred places for the worship of wild nature (*lud*, *n'ulesmurt*, springs, lakes) and dead ancestors were located outside the limits of each village. Furthermore, there were also collective tribal or territorial sacred places, which defined the larger space of kin or territorial groups including from 5 to 70 villages. The traditional system of sacral space used a clearly determined structure, with a centre and a periphery, a rigid inner hierarchy of sacred places and a system of worship and rules for visiting within the region.

## The levels of sacred space

Relying on the deployment system and the diversity of sacred sites and cult centres we can talk about the existence of several levels of sacredness:

- 1) the family level is limited to the boundaries of the house/ household, the core of which is the sacred building (the small *kuala* with a fireplace, the fenced *vös'as'kon inty* space, or the pit, called *vös'as'kon gop*);
- 2) the patronymic sacred space, the centre of which is either in the *Mudor kuala* building (according to the western (trans-Vyatka) Udmurt) or in the sacred grove *Norel' lud* or *Byzho lud* in Staraya Uch'a (according to the Kukmor Udmurt);
- 3) the territory of the wider kin group or clan, centred on the great *kuala* sanctuary of the *Durga* clan (according to the Slobodskoy Udmurt); or on the *Esymbay lud*, which serves several villages (according to the Kukmor Udmurt); or on the *Ven'a* clan (according to the western (trans-Vyatka) Udmurt);
- 4) the village space, including the limits of the settlement, with contiguous sacred places (the great *kuala* sanctuary, the *lud vös'as'kon* sacred grove, the location of the *n'ulesmurt* ceremony, the ground for agrarian ceremonies);
- 5) the sacred place of the community, including the limit of the rural area with 5–10 villages that share a regional sacred place (the *mör vös'* ceremony of the eastern Udmurt; lake Lyz'i of the Kukmor Udmurt);
- 6) the tribe or territorial space encompassing a wide collective group consisting in 10–70 settlements. For the territorial group of the southern Udmurt the sacred places dedicated to *Bulda* played an important role as spiritual centres that helped to consolidate the ethnic group, with the cult of *Bulda* becoming a significant ethnic characteristic. Tribal or territorial sacred

places existed for the Slobodskoy Udmurts and the Votka Udmurts from Uni (whose sacred place was *Inma*), the western Udmurt (sacred place *Kuris'kon* near Nyr'ya), the Glazov Udmurt (sacred place *Gubervös'*), the Kalmez Udmurt (sacred place *Demen / Kalmez vös'*). The collective sacred centres and the cult of powerful gods showed the on-going processes of consolidation and formation of wide ethno-territorial groups of Udmurt. We have found no data about the existence of an all-Udmurt sacred place from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the author would not rule out the possibility of the existence of a big Permian religious centre outside Udmurt areas in the Urals region.

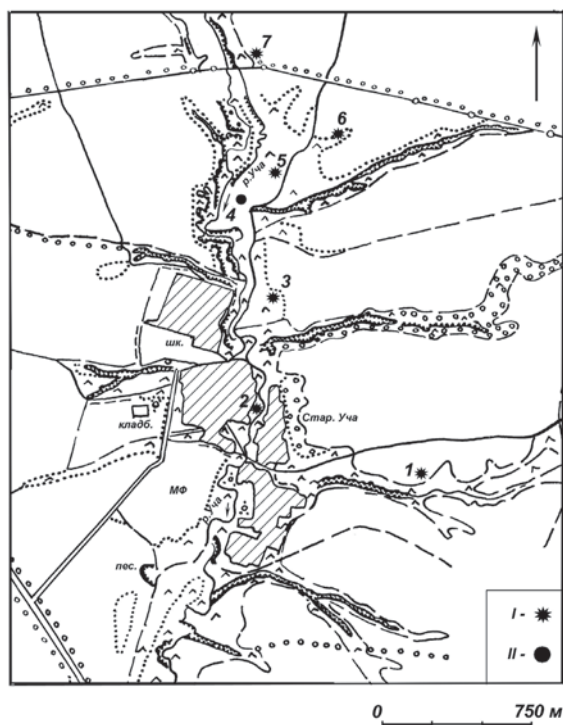


Figure 1. Layout plan of the cult places in the surroundings of Staraya Ucha village: 1) *Meren kuris'kon* shrine; 2) sanctuary *Bydzh'yim kualä*; 3) sacred grove of *Norel lud*; 4) old settlement of *Chetker*; 5) sacred grove of *Byzho lud*; 6) sacred grove of *Gur'yan lud*; 7) sacred grove of *Esymbay lud*.

It is not always possible to categorise precisely sacred places according to the level of their social significance: several transitional forms of sacred place also functioned, and there were evolutions within the categories, for example evolution from a family to a patronymic place, then to a clan place. Therefore, we cannot always identify the level of a sacred space, which in any case can intertwine or overlap one another, vary, change.

We can however highlight that our materials show the relativity of the mythological (semantic) opposition between ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ (Lat. *profanes*, Ger. *Profane* ‘deprived of sacredness’, ‘secular’, ‘unholy’). In traditional society, the entire environment (settlements and natural surroundings) is, to a certain level, spiritually domesticated. The sacred and the profane are intertwined, the profane, implicitly is present at the limits of each greater area of sacredness.

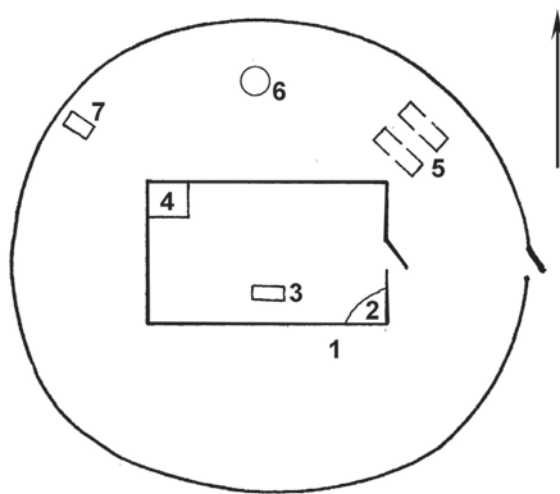


Figure 2. Schematic plan of the *Eymbay lud* shrine. It was prepared according to the sketch by B. Gavrilov (1891: 111–114): 1) sacred building *kuala*, 2) shelf *mudor*, 3) table, 4) wardrobe, 5) benches for sitting, 6) fireplace, 7) place for sacrificing of animals.

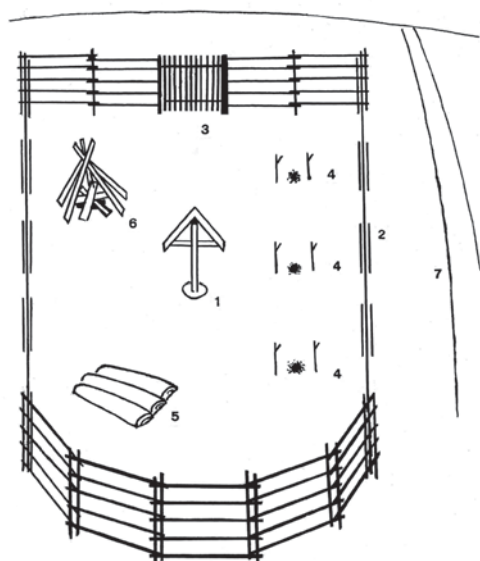


Figure 3. *Bulda* sanctuary in the village of Varzi-Yatchi. Fenced plot with a rounded south side, with a gate on the north side. In the center is a pillar with an icon of the Kazan Mother of God. Nearby there are three fireplaces for hanging cauldrons.

## Who takes care of organisation?

As we see, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural Udmurt society dedicated much attention to the organisation and design of the sacred space. Two categories of persons had sacred knowledge and practiced cult activities. One was sacrificial priests and the wardens of sacred places, as well as their helpers, who led the ritual activities and kept order at the sacred places and buildings. In each village there were more than a dozen stewards taking care of the village's sacred places (sacrificial priests and assistants) depending on the number of sacred places (for more details see Shutova 2010: 130–137). The second category consists in people who had special knowledge and could foretell the future and influence nature, people and livestock. These were the *tuno* 'foreteller', 'wizard', 'prophet', the *kuyas'kis* 'propitiator of evil spirits', the *pel'as'kis* 'healer', the



*vedin/vegin* ‘witch’, etc. People of the older generation were the most active keepers of religious tradition. Furthermore, all the ordinary participants in the ceremonies and rituals contributed to some extent to the formation of the sacred space at the family level as well as at other, higher, circles of sacredness.

## **Types of sacred space**

As we have shown above, the pre-Christian sacred landscape of the Udmurt at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been thoroughly studied. There have been other investigations in the same field, for example the sacred space of the Besserman (Popova 2011); the research of the Mari sacred spaces in Udmurtia has been started (Kapitonov et al. 2014). A reconstruction of the Orthodox religious landscape has been attempted in the “Spasov okrug”,<sup>2</sup> in the former uyezd of Mamadysh, and Belaya Kholunitsa in the former Slobodskoy uyezd of the Vyatka governorate (today Kirov oblast) (Prikazchikova 2004; Shutova 2008). Compared with the traditional religious and mythological space, the Orthodox space seems to be more standardised and unified. Nevertheless, in each location there are peculiarities in the design of the space due to the diversity of temples and chapels, votive crosses, rules of receiving guests and of cross processions (for example, the icon of Edessa on the river Velikaya to the Venerable Simeon Verkhoturkiy, or the journey along the Vyatka with the icon of Nikola-Beryozovskiy).

Traditional Udmurt and Orthodox sacred landscapes have often undergone odd transformations, overlapping one another: they have intermingled and combined with one another because of increasing population density, progressive Christianisation of native ethnic groups, increasing complexification of the ethnic and confessional structure of the population, as well as because of ethno-cultural mutual influence. The intermingling of elements of traditional, Orthodox and Muslim rituals gave rise to significant adjustments

in the features of the cultural landscape. The existence of different forms in the tradition of worship at pre-Christian, Orthodox and Muslim cult sites in an area of intense interethnic contact has led to the formation of a complex, multi-layered, and mosaic-like system of sacred landscapes.

## The present situation

The design of sacred landscape is an ongoing process, even today. Orthodox and Muslim sacred landscapes are permanently reconstructed, as well as the landscapes of other religious confessions. Almost every family, depending on confessional belonging, performs particular consecration or blessing rituals such as prayer, sprinkling holy water, setting icons or other cult objects, crossing oneself, participation in Church services and processions, etc. The reproduction of traditions mainly occurs at family feasts, and religious holidays and events.

Work aimed at reconstructing traditional sacral space is being performed by the eastern Udmurt in Bashkortostan, in a dozen villages in Udmurtia and Tatarstan, for example Kuz'ebayev (Alnashi district, Udmurtia), Varkled-Bod'ya (Agryz district, Tatarstan), Nizhniye Yurashi (Grakhovo district, Udmurtia), Porvay (Igra district, Udmurtia), Karamas-Pel'ga (Kiyasovo district, Udmurtia) and others. Another ongoing project in several administrative regions is the formation of an Udmurt ethnic sacred landscape, with the annual republic celebrations, called *Gerber* in Udmurtia, and *Gyron bydton* in Tatarstan; moreover, the territorial ceremonies *Mör vös'* and *El'en vös'* take place regularly in Bashkortostan and the Perm oblast'. Udmurt cultural NGOs (*Demén*, an Udmurt cultural association, and *Udmurt Ken'esh*, an all-Udmurt association) are trying to create a city sacred space in Izhevsk. Twice a year (on June 12<sup>th</sup> for the *Gerber* celebration and August 2<sup>nd</sup> for Saint Elijah) these groups organise Udmurt events in the Birch Grove,

the city park in the capital. At the same time, the non-baptised Udmurt gather here to perform their ritual ceremonies, which are deeply religiously significant for the organisers and activists. There is a project aimed at building a traditional *kuala* within this grove. For the majority of participants, the events at the Birch Grove are attractive because of their ethnic contents, with these events considered Udmurt folk holidays.



Photo 1. Sacred birch at the tribal/territorial shrine of *Inma*. Northern Udmurts. Informant S. Boltachev. N. Shutova, 1999.



Photo 2. The sacred linden tree with a hollow in *Lud* grove. Kuz'ebayevo village. Informant V. Lavrent'ev. N. Shutova, 2003.



Photo 3. *Bydzh'ym* (Great) *kuala* sanctuary in the village of Varkled-Bod'ya. N. Shutova, 2003.

Photo 4. Sacred shelf *mudor* within *Bydzh'ym* (Great) *kuala* in the village of Varkled-Bod'ya. N. Shutova, 2003.



Photo 5. *Bulda* shrine in a birch grove. 1900\*. Vyatka Province. From the collections of the National Museum of the Udmurt Republic (hereinafter as NMUR). No. HB-2420.





Photo 6. *Bulda* shrine in a birch grove. 1900\*. Vyatka Province. From the collections of NMUR. No. NV-2423/2.



Photo 7. Holy grove before a prayer. The village of Nizhniye Yuri, Malaya Purga District, Votskaya Autonomous Oblast' (hereinafter as VAO). V. Belitser, 1930. From the collections of NMUR. No NV-2429.



Photo 8. Place for sacrifices in the holy grove of *Keremet*. 1930\*. Kykva village, Yakshur-Bod'ya Volost', VAO. From the collections of NMUR. No NV-4794/2.



Photo 9. Sacred spruce at the *Bydzh'ym* (Great) *kuala* sanctuary in the village of Porvay. N. Shutova, 2008.



Photo 10. Goose sacrificed to the master of forests at the *Bydzh'ym* (Great) *kuala* sanctuary in the village of Porvay. N. Shutova, 2008.



Photo 11. Christian attributes at the *Bydzh'ym* (Great) *kuala* sanctuary in the village of Porvay. N. Shutova, 2008.





Photo 12. *Bulda* sanctuary at the village of Kuz'ebayevo.  
V. Kapitonov, 2005.



Photo 13. The village of Novyy Kan'isar. Cemetery for the commemoration  
of people passed away abroad. N. Shutova, 2003.



Photo 14. Holy grove of *Norel' lud* in the village of Staraya Ucha.  
N. Shutova, 2003.



Photo 15. *Mudor kual* sanctuary of Kukmor Udmurts.  
N. Shutova, 2003.



Photo 16. Cult depression of *Vös'as'kon inty* to pray for rain.  
The village of Nyr'ya. N. Shutova, 2003.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Actually Borisov's dictionary was first published in 1931, but because its author became a victim of Stalinist repressions, it was long forgotten (TN).
- <sup>2</sup> The Spasov okrug is a territory along the River Vyatka. The procession moves from Elabuga, carrying an icon of the Saviour (TN).

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**Nadezhda Shutova** (PhD hab) is a leading researcher at the Udmurt Institute for Research in History, Language and Literature (Udmurt Federal Research Centre of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences). She is an archaeologist and an ethnologist investigating traditional folk culture and ethno-territorial groups from the point of view of ritual and religion.

e-mail: nad\_shutova@mail.ru