

# The Ritual Importance of the *Chuk*, a Symbolic Bundle of Thread

**Tatiana Vladykina**

e-mail: [tgvladykina@mail.ru](mailto:tgvladykina@mail.ru)

**Galina Glukhova**

e-mail: [galant@udm.ru](mailto:galant@udm.ru)

**Tatiana Panina**

e-mail: [tipanina@mail.ru](mailto:tipanina@mail.ru)

**Abstract:** The article aims to analyse one of the specific objects of Udmurt traditional culture, *chuk* (in southern dialects) / *tug* (in northern dialects), i.e. red thread/yarn; a bunch or bundle of different coloured threads, fringes, ribbons, shreds; towels, bedspreads, and kerchiefs. The multifunctional nature of the object is revealed in everyday and ritual contexts; it can be of different forms and convey various meanings. Depending on the situation, *chuk* is regarded as a label, a protective charm, a sacrifice gift, or a tangible symbol of a substitute for the human soul.

In everyday situations *chuk* is used in apotropaic magic and folk medicine. For example, red thread/yarn is worn around the ring finger to cure a sty, or it can be worn on an infant's right wrist to protect him or her against the evil eye. A bunch of wool or linen threads is attached to knitted and woven things when their pattern is copied. The custom of marking young animals with brightly coloured strips of material, usually red, has survived to this day.

*Chuk* is an essential attribute in the Udmurt calendar rites of the spring and summer cycles, wedding ceremonies and recruit rites. In calendar rituals *chuk* is recognised as a kind of sacrificial offering or gift. Praising flourishing nature alongside youth and early adulthood, the rites of welcoming spring and summer (*Vöy*, Shrovetide; *Akashkal Byddzh'ynnal*, Easter; *Gersh'yd*, Whitsunday) are regularly marked by the offering of different types of cloth (towels, kerchiefs, head towels for young married women) to mark passage through different stage of life. At different stages of the wedding ceremony (including pre- and post-wedding) the semantics of *chuk* depends on how it correlates with the participants of the ceremony: in regard to the bride *chuk* is definitely recognised as a gift, in regard to the groom's relatives and friends as a way to personify a humorous image of strangers. In recruits' rites *chuk* is hammered into the main ceiling beam of the recruit's house and serves as a material symbol of, or substitute for, the human soul of the recruit, combining the functions of a label, a protective charm and a sacrifice.

**Keywords:** *chuk*: thread/shred/cloth/fabric, *chuk* in calendar rituals, *chuk* in everyday situations and in rituals, *chuk* in family rites, gift, label, protective charm, recruit's *chuk*, sacrifice, traditional culture, Udmurts

## Introduction

Traditional cultures contain things that have special symbolic status. In different life situations, these symbols convey definite information, readable by representatives of the society. One of the interesting attributive symbols in the Udmurt traditional culture is *chuk* (southern dialect), *tug* (northern dialect), red thread/yarn; a brush or bunch of multicoloured threads or bands; also towels, blankets and handkerchiefs.

The polyfunctionality of the subject is present in every day and ritual contexts and has multiple forms and meanings. Depending on the situation it performs the function of a label, an amulet or a substitute for the soul.

## ***Chuk* in apotropaic magic and medicine**

Udmurt women used to sew a brush from threads, with the addition (or not) of beads and naced buttons to the woven end of the married woman's head towel (*chalma*) (see photos 1, 2 and 3), as well as to home-woven carpets, knitted or woven socks and mittens, and the traditional male belt (see photo 4) if the pattern was copied from the *chalma* (see photo 1). Here *chuk* was, it was believed, a form of gratitude and a symbolic-offering, able to protect from the evil eye. According to Udmurt belief, when you transmit something you have made yourself to another person, you may forever lose the skill of making it (*kis'ör*, lit: 'leave for (alien's) hands'), or lose your happiness, your welfare, or your good luck (*del'et*), therefore *chuk* functioned as an amulet (Khristolyubova 1995: 187). It was possible the judge the skill of the craftswoman by the number of brushes on pattern items and by how many copies of her items had been made.

*Chuk* could also be used in local exchange in place of money, for example for vegetables from somebody's kitchen garden. *Chuk* made from multicoloured cloths or bands was pinned to the inside of clothes if lent for a while to relatives or strangers<sup>1</sup>.

Young livestock (sheep, goats, cows) were marked with bright shreds before they were taken to the fields. Here the *chuk* was used to both identify the animals and to provide protection against the evil eye. Protective features were attributed to bright colours, especially red, which had a high symbolic status. That's why even today one can frequently see animal collars with multicoloured shreds; the younger the animal is, the brighter the label is.<sup>2</sup> Red thread/yarn worn on the right wrist was also used to protect babies from the evil eye (*s'inus'em*) (Gerd 1993: 55).

Red shreds or red thread is often mentioned in folk medicine (Panina 2014: 167–168), for example if there were pains in the body, *chuk* was worn on the wrist "in the form of a ring of red threads" (Vereshchagin 2000: 27). Red shred was knotted around on the

wrist as a cure for measles, while a red thread was worn on the ring finger to cure a sty.

## ***Chuk* in calendar rituals**

*Chuk* became a kind of sacred offering/gift as part of ritual and festive culture. Thus, the southern Udmurts celebrate Maslenitsa (*Vöydyr/Masl'encha*, Shrovetide): when young men visited homes, hostesses tied to the distaff shreds of fabric, ribbons and towels, and when young married women visited they tied head towels (*chalma*). In the tradition of the Udmurts beyond the Vyatka river (the territory of the modern Republic of Tatarstan) thus were gifts/presents collected for young married ladies. Young women went from home to home with her distaff top part of and in each home sang a *kubo chuk kuran* (lit: distaff petition) (Munkacsi 1952: 34–35):

*Kubo chuk kule mil'emly, aygay!* Distaff sacrifice /  
*chuk* we need, aigai!

*Kubo chukt'osty evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have a distaff  
sacrifice-*chuk*, aigai:

*Chon'ari votosty d'araloz, aygay!* Your spider web will do, aigai!

*Chon'ari votosty evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have a spider web,  
aigai:

*Kün'küz'a sinysty d'araloz, aygay!* Your three threads will do, aigai!

*Kün'küz'a sinysty evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have three  
threads, aigai:

*Kon'don uks'ody yaraloz, aygay!* Even pocket change will do, aigai!

*Kon'don uks'ody evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have pocket change:

*Cheryk basmady yaraloz, aygay!* a quarter arshin [4 vershoks]  
of chintz will do, aigai!

- Cheryk basmady evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have a quarter arshin, aigai!
- Ok s'umyk arakty d'araloz, aygay!* One shot of vodka will do, aigai!
- Ok s'umyk arakty evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have a shot of vodka, aigai:
- Ok s'umyk sur'yosty yaraloz, aygay!* One small glass of beer will do!
- Ok s'umyk sur'yosty evol ke, aygay:* If you don't have small glass of beer, aigai
- Yshstan kal'yosty yaraloz, aygay!* A belt will do, aigai!
- Oydole potom so korka, aygay,* Let's visit another house, aigai,
- Kuasam no n'an'de s'iyny, aygay!* We're going to eat a pasties, aigai!
- Kuasam n'an'n'osty n'an' kayik, aygay,* Your pasties is [delicious] like bread, aigai,
- Ach'ides vylem lul kaiyik aygay!* And you are so warm-hearted, aigai!
- (Munkácsi 1952: 34–35)

*Chuk* was a significant element in the northern Udmurt *kren'yuon* ritual (lit: feast of horseradish), held on the next day after Maslenitsa (Vladykina, Glukhova 2016: 100). A group of women, walking from house to house, was guided by the “woman’s foreman”, an old man in a birchbark cylinder or conical cap with *chuk* sewn on (Pervukhin 1888: 110) and with a staff in his hand, to which his wife tied a fabric shred, tobacco pouch or kerchief (see photo 5). This man received gifts also called *chuk* in every home (see photo 6).

The *chuk kurany / chacha bichany* (lit: collect *chuk*, i.e. cloths and baby toys) custom, when girls collected cloths, was specific among the northern Udmurts on Great Thursday (*Vel'ikochetverik / Tshukmuncho uy*), and involved various beliefs and rituals based on apotropaic and cleansing types of magic. According to mythological

ideas, at night between Wednesday and Thursday during the Passion week sinister forces (werewolves, wizards, ancestors) have the opportunity to harm people and livestock. From the early morning female teenagers gathered in small groups, wrapped their wrists with red thread and walked from house to house asking for multicoloured woollen threads or shreds. At every home, the hostess tied 'gifts' to the threads the function of which was to keep the girl's family from feeling tired during summer haymaking. Shreds were used to tailor clothes for dolls or make a *zavertka* shred doll. Toys were provided with apotropaic functions that would protect their owners from illnesses and misfortune (Vladykina, Glukhova 2011: 139; also see Popova 2009: 13).

As an obligatory ritual attribute, *chuk* is present during the Easter celebration (*Bydzh'ym nunal* / *Akashka* – lit: Great Day/ festival of spring greeting), which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was celebrated for a whole week in the village of Nizhnyaya Ucha, Mamadysh Uyezd in the Kazan governorate (now the Republic of Tatarstan). On the second day of the *Akashka-d'uon* ritual (spring greeting feast) in the afternoon there were games and outdoor festivities *valen d'umshan*, during which young men rode on horses from house to house accompanied by women playing the Udmurt zyther *krez'*. A few old men accompanied them. On the doorstep of each house they received eggs, pancakes (*tabans*) and egg flatbreads, praying to God: "May [the Lord] protect this home from bad luck, evil, and fire". After the prayer, the host plied the guests with food and drink. Initially it was eaten by the old men who had recited the prayer, then by the young men. During the visits, eggs and towels were gathered as *chuk* from newly married. After the visit, young men and young women rode to the fields and rode around their plots. Then races began, with the gathered towels awarded as prizes for the winners (Munkacsi 1887: 170). Back in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Staraya Sal'ya village, Kiyasovo district, horse races (*puchy-vortton*, lit: 'bud races') were held on the third day of the Easter holiday (*Bydzh'ym nunal*). In the morning, chil-

dren visited young married women and collected *chuk* in the form of towels (*kuz'kyshet*), kerchiefs (*kyshet*) and head towels (*chalma*) to present to the winners (Vladykina, Glukhova 2011: 164–166).

According to modern field documents the farewell ceremony of *Akashka* (*Akashka kel'an*), the first spring holiday in the village Nizhniye Yurashi, Grakhovo district, is marked by young women marching outside the village. They 'see off' the holiday by singing the ritual song, each girl holding a staff with shreds of cloth knotted around it which she obtained when visiting the houses and gathering eggs, cereals, milk and butter to prepare a common meal. Once the holiday is over the pole was either dug into the ground or thrown away (Pchelovodova 2015: 111).

### ***Chuk* in rituals of gender and age socialisation of youth**

The abovementioned examples of gifts in the form of *chuk* given as part of calendar rituals are related to gender and to age-related socialisation of village community members. *Chuk* is presented to young men and girls before their marriage, often by young married women, constituting for the former a gift, for the latter a sacrifice.

*Chuk* as an offering or gift is also part of the autumn *pukis' kuno / kubo voz'mas'* (lit: sitting visitor / 'guarding the distaff') youth ritual in the central regions of Udmurtia (Sharkan and Yakshur-Bod'ya districts). After finishing work in the field a young woman was invited by her god-parents for a get-together. On the appointed day they took her, with one or two of her close friends, 'to guard the distaff'. Usually the 'guest' used to knitted and did other handwork for a month. Afterwards a gift ritual was organised, which turned into a kind of 'inspection' of the prospective bride. The god-parents' relatives visited their place, as well as the woman's parents. At that time, the god-parents prepared a new decorated distaff. The guests, telling jokes and casting spells, tied

and/or put presents onto the distaff (see photo 7). The first were the godparents, then the young woman's parents and then the rest of the guests. After the gift ceremony, the distaff was carefully and tightly wrapped in a piece of cloth and turned into a 'doll'. During the feast, everyone tried to cheat the woman and her friends in order to steal the *chuk*, the distaff with the gifts attached. If they succeeded, the woman had to buy them off with homemade wine. If the 'guards' were considered guilty of stealing the *chuk*, they were asked to sing and dance. At the end of the celebration, the woman was blessed. At home, the presents were unwrapped and handed to the mother. These gifts later became part of the bride's dowry. In general, this type of get-together was apparently a preparation for the wedding ritual. This is also shown by the woman being covered with a kerchief with fringes, a shawl or a simple kerchief before being taken to her godparents for get-togethers. The symbolism of this custom ties in with the marriage offering ritual and the affianced bride being taken to the groom's house<sup>3</sup>.

In the central regions of Udmurtia (the Igra, Debesy and Shar-kan regions) there is still a post-wedding tradition of offering work tools to the young married woman, for example a rake (*mazhes*) or a scythe (*kuso*). Before haymaking starts, the bride's mother visited her relatives with the rake in hand and the relatives would attach *mazhes tug / mazhes chuk*. Decorated tools were taken to the bride and symbolically used on the first day of haymaking.

An interesting example of *chuk* is used at the Udmurt wedding feast (*s'uan*). Afterwards, the bride relatives give *chuk* in the form of clothes to the groom's friends (*s'uanchi*) who put them on over on top of their own clothes, with men wearing women's dresses and wrapping themselves in kerchiefs, while women dress in men's shirts, trousers and hats. Girls present *chuk* to young unmarried men, fastening bow-like bands to their head-dresses. Two or three weeks later the *chuk* is returned to the owners with a gift wrapped

into the clothes (candy, gingerbread, pastry) (Khristolyubova 1995: 187).

*Chuk* also fulfilled the role of gift for deceased parents in the commemorative ritual of *yvr-pyd s'oton* (the giving away of the head and legs (of an animal)). A basket containing bones, small coins and fabric pieces such as dress-like or shirt-like pieces of fabric were taken to the roots of a particular tree (Vladykin 1994: 172).

### ***Chuk/Tug* in the recruit ritual**

*Chuk/Tug* is used as part of the 'seeing off' ceremony that is performed before a young man joins the army. As part of the ceremony, *chuk* was fixed by hammering in a coin into the central beam<sup>4</sup>. A more archaic version, according to 19th century sources, used a striped ring driven into the beam. The recruit would then chip off a piece of wood from the beam and sew it into his bag as an amulet (Bogaevskiy 1888: 49). In the modern tradition *chuk* can consist of various items, depending on local tradition. According to the southern Udmurt, the recruit nails satin ribbons and paper banknotes to the beam<sup>5</sup>, and if he has a girlfriend her handkerchief is added. *Chuk* is nailed or hammered to the beam of the recruit's father's house during the family farewell party. The same ritual of attaching *chuk* to the main ceiling beam is also performed on the eve of departure at the homes of relatives. Attaching *chuk* is accompanied by the singing of a recruit tune (*l'ekrut gur / saldat gur*), which differs in each local tradition. The structure of the texts is punctuated by the motifs of receiving the call-up, being declared fit for service, saying farewell to family and home, and the juxtaposing of peaceful everyday life with the soldier's lot (Zav'yalovo, Malaya Purga, Kiyasovo districts) (Verшинina, Vladykina 2014: 363). In content they are a kind of comment on the ritual:

*Ml'emyz memey marly vor(y)dylem* What did our mother gave birth  
– *mumykorez, oy, duryny,* to us for – oh to forge a beam,  
*Ml'emyz memey marly vor(y)dem* Our mother gave birth to us –  
– *mumykorez duryny.* to forge a beam.

*Mumykorez duryny no* To forge a beam from town to  
*gorodys' gorode, oy, vetlyny,* town, oh, to move,  
*Mumykorez duryny no kuz'* To forge a beam and to tramp  
*s'uresez l'ogany.* along a long road.

*Vayele no, oy, s'otele burchchin* Oh, bring me, oh give me  
*gyne, oy, chuk"yostes,* only, oh, silk *chuks.*  
*Vayele no, oy, s'otele burchchin* Oh, bring me, oh give me  
*gyne chuk"yostes.* only, oh, silk *chuks.*

*Burchchin chukty, oy, övöl ke,* If you don't have a silk *chuk,*  
*derem sep no yaraloz,* a shred from a shirt will do,  
*Burchchin chuk"yosty övöl ke,* If you don't have a silk *chuk,*  
*derem sep no yaraloz.* a shred from a shirt will do.

*Vayele no, oy, s'otele zarn'i* Oh give me your golden  
*gyne, oy, moloddes,* hammer,  
*Vayele no, oy, s'otele zarn'i* Oh give me your hammer that  
*gyne moloddes.* is golden.

*Zarn'iyez ke, oy, övöl uk, chag* If you don't have a golden one,  
*kes'on purt no yaraloz,* a knife-scythe will do,  
*Zarn'iyez ke, oy, övöl ke,* If you don't have a golden one,  
*prostoyez no yaraloz.* a knife-scythe will do.

*Vayele no, oy, s'otele kuasam  
bero, oy, pukondes,  
Vayele no, oy, s'otele kuasam  
bero pukondes.*

Oh, bring me, oh, give me your  
chair oh, with a folding back,  
Oh, bring me, oh, give me your  
chair oh, with a folding back.

*Kuasam beroyez ke(y) övöl,  
prostoyez no, oy, yaraloz,  
Kuasam beroyez ke(y) övöl,  
prostoyez no yaraloz.*

If you don't have a chair with  
a folding back, a plain one will do,  
If you don't have a chair with  
a folding back, a plain one will do.

*Ta chuk"yosme mon shukkis'ko  
til'edly, oy, s'inpel'ly,  
Ta chuk"yosme mon  
shukkis'ko til'edly s'inpel'ly.*

This chuk ribbon I'm nailing  
for you to remember,  
This chuk ribbon I'm nailing  
for you to remember.

*Tuzon ke no, oy, puks'yloz,  
tylyyen shukkysa, oy, voz'ele,  
Tuzon ke no, oy, puks'yloz,  
tylyyen shukkysa voz'ele.*

If it gets dusty, oh, sweep it off  
with a wing,  
If it gets dusty, oh, sweep it off  
with a wing.

*Ta chuk"yosy tshuzhektiz ke,  
"Van'a byrem", oy, shuele,  
Ta chuk"yosy tshuzhektiz ke,  
"Van'a byrem" shuele.*

If this chuk gets yellow, say  
"Vanya has died"  
If this chuk gets yellow, say  
"Vanya has died".

Gozhnya, Malaya Purga district  
(Vershina, Vladykina 2014:  
247–248)

According to the beliefs, the more shreds or ribbons a recruit leaves, the more successful his service will be. In the modern tradition, *chuk* is supposed to be a memento or gift to your native home and to your relatives (*s'inpel'/s'inpel'et*). Its apotropaic function is

directly related to the beam and its protective features: “*Tug – so mummykorly kuz’ym, mummykor med ut’oz n’i shusa shukko*” (*Tug* is a present to the beam, they are nailed for the beam to protect (the soldier)) (FWM 2017<sup>6</sup>). Before leaving home, the recruit once more touches the beam saying: “*Bertonez med adzh’o, dzh’ech s’ures s’ot, ut’ mone*” (May I see my return, give me a good journey, protect me) (FWM 2017, cf. note 6), “*Voz’ma mone, mummykor!*” (Wait for me, beam!) (Khristolyubova 1984: 105). The *chuk/tug* is kept until the soldier returns from the army. Having returned, he visits the houses where he had nailed the *chuk* ribbons and gives present to the hosts, removing the *chuk* himself.

In recruit songs, the main function of *chuk* as an amulet is to become a substitute for the soul of the young man leaving for the army:

<i>Ta shukkylem, oh, chu’yosme</i>	This, oh, my nailed <i>chuk</i> ,
<i>achim berttoz’ voz’ele,</i>	please keep it until I get back,
<i>Achim ke no, oy, bertyli,</i>	If I come back I will rip it off
<i>pin’ynym ishkaltysa bas’tylo(y),</i>	with my teeth,
<i>Achim ke no, oy, bertyli,</i>	If I come back I will rip it off
<i>pin’ynym ishkaltysa bas’tylo(y).</i>	with my teeth.

<i>Tuzon ke no, oy, puks’ylyz,</i>	If it gets dusty, oh, sweep it off
<i>tylyyen tshushsa, oy, voz’ele,</i>	with a wing,
<i>Tuzon ke no, oy, puks’ylyz,</i>	If it gets dusty, oh, sweep it off
<i>tylyyen tshushsa, oy, voz’ele.</i>	with a wing,

<i>Adzh’dzh’emdy ke, oy, potyliz</i>	If you want to see me, pull it
<i>ishkaltysa kushtele,</i>	out and throw down,
<i>Ishkaltysa kushtele no Volga</i>	Pull it out and throw it into
<i>shure kushtele.</i>	the Volga.

The Ritual Importance of the *Chuk*

*Volga shure kushtidy ke, so  
mon dory med lyktoz,  
Volga shure kushtidy ke, so  
mon dory med lyktoz.*

If you throw it into the Volga,  
may it float to me,  
If you throw it to the Volga,  
may it float to me.

Staraya Burozhik'ya, Malaya  
Purga district region (Vershinina,  
Vladykina 2014: 44)

*Ta shukkylem no, oy,  
chuk"yosme asme voz'many,oy,  
shukkis'ko,  
Ta shukkylem no, oy,  
chuk"yosme asme voz'many,oy,  
shukkis'ko.*

This nailed *chuk* I nail to wait  
for me to come back,

This nailed *chuk* I nail to wait  
for me to come back.

*Achim ke no, oy, bertyli, pin'ynym  
ishkaltysa, oy, bas'tylo,  
Achim ke no, oy, bertyli,  
pin'ynym ishkaltysa, oy,  
bas'tylo.*

When I come back, I shall pull  
it down with my teeth,

When I come back, I shall pull  
it down with my teeth,

*Tuzon ke no, oy, puks'yeliz,  
dzh'az'eg tylyyen, oy, shukkele,  
Tuzon ke no, oy, puks'yeliz,  
dzh'az'eg tylyyen, oy, shukkele.*

If it gets dusty, oh, sweep it off  
with a goose's wing,

If it gets dusty, oh, sweep it off  
with a goose's wing,

*Tshuzhektyny, oy, kutskiz ke,  
"pimy mözme", oy, shuody,*

If this *chuk* goes yellow, you  
will say "our son is homesick"

*Tshuzhektyny, oy, kutskiz ke,* If this *chuk* goes yellow, say  
*“pimy mözme”, oy, shuody,* “our son is homesick”

Algancha-Igra, Malaya  
Purga district (Vershina,  
Vladykina 2014: 250)

The nailing process was accompanied by a fortune telling for the recruit. After the amulet was fastened to the beam, the recruit was to throw a knife or a hammer back over his shoulder in such a manner that it didn't fall flat: a knife was to supposed to stick into the floor, and the hammer to stand on its head (*yir yylaz sultyny kule*):

*Tuzh s'ekyt uk, tuzh s'ekyt uk* Oh it's so difficult to climb  
*pukon vyle tubylon,* onto the chair,  
*Eshsho s'ekyt, oy, vylem uk* It's much harder to forge the  
*mumy korez durylon.* beam, it turned out,

*Vaye(y) al'i, s'otele azves' nydo* Oh give me a knife with  
*purttestes,* a silver handle,  
*Vaye(y) al'i, s'otele(y) uk zarn'i* Oh give me a hammer with  
*nydo molottes.* a golden handle.

*Oy s'ekyt uk, tuzh s'ekyt uk* Oh it's so difficult to forge the  
*mumy korez duryny,* beam,  
*Oy s'ekyt uk, tuzh s'ekyt uk* Oh it's so difficult to forge the  
*mumy korez duryny.* beam.  
*Berto meda, ug n'i meda: purte* Shall I come back or not: may  
*yir yylaz med us'oz,* my knife stick into the floor  
(lit: 'fall on its head'),

- Berto meda, ug n'i meda: purte yyr yylaz med us'oz,* Shall I come back or not: may my knife stick into the floor.
- Bertonez ke öy adzh'dzh'y n'i, purte medaz byshkalsky,* If I'm not destined to return home, may my knife not stick into the floor.
- Bertonez ke(y) ug adzh'dzh'y n'i, purte yyr yylaz medaz us'.* If I'm not destined to return home, may my knife not stick into the floor.
- Berto(y) al'i, berto(y) al'i anay-atay yurt'yosam,* I will come back, I will come back to my parent's home,
- Berto(y) al'i, berto(y) al'i anay-atay yurt'yosam.* I will come back, I will come back to my parent's home (my knife stuck into the floor).

Kechevo, Malaya Purga district  
(Vershina, Vladykina 2014: 283)

The *chuk* nailed into the beam in its semantics equals the recruit's actions with a tree. In certain villages, recruits nailed a piece of cloth or a coin into a birch or a fir tree at the sacred places of the village. Thus, the coins might symbolise both a gift to a tree (Shutova 2001: 56; Shutova 2004: 159), and the person's involvement in his native surrounding world, part of it being a tree, which would guard the soldier while he was in a foreign land. The tree, like a *chuk* on a house beam, became a substitute for a person who had left his native land, although the tree version was apparently more archaic. This appears in Udmurt micro toponyms, among which are the names of trees, such as *yyro kyz*, lit: 'fir with a head'; *chyrtyyo kyz*, lit: 'Fir with a neck; *kartuzo kyz*, lit: 'fir with a peak cap'. "During the seeing off, the recruit climbed a fir and cut off a few of the upper branches, stripping the truck. The upper branches were

left and the tree began to look like a human. This was to be done in such a manner that the tree continued to grow. It was believed that if after this ritual the tree withered, this young man would not return, and if the tree did not wither he would return from service” (Vladykina, Kirillova 2017: 238; see also Vladykina 2003: 56–57).<sup>7</sup>

Another version of *chuk* in a recruit’s ritual was gifts from friends and relatives: towels, a tobacco pouch, handkerchiefs, ribbons. Towels were hung around his neck, ribbons and bunches of ribbons were fixed to the clothes or to his hat<sup>8</sup>. The recruit waved with towels during farewell party when well-wishers led him through the village to the outskirts and waved with towels until he was out of sight.

## Conclusions

Analysis of the everyday and ritual uses of various forms of woven item (ribbons, shreds, towels, women’s head towels) or items used in textile craft (thread or a brush made from thread) has allowed us to show *chuk* as a multifunctional attributive symbol in the traditional culture of the Udmurt. Its manifold use is apparently due to overlapping of homonyms. The Udmurt word *chuk* meaning ‘thread/yarn’, ‘brush / bunch of multicolour threads’, ‘fringe’, ‘bands’, ‘shreds’, ‘towels, blankets, kerchiefs’ was borrowed from the Tatar *chuk/tyuk* ‘brush’, ‘cluster’. *Chuk* meaning ‘sacrifice’, from bulgar *chuk* “tzh” (Tarakanov 1981: 49) by its function. As a result of this intermingling, depending on the situation, *chuk* is a mark or amulet, sacrifice or gift, symbol and sign of a soul substitute.

## Informant

Anna Egorovna Lekomtseva, born in 1930, Udmurt, native of the Lonki-Vortsy of Igra district, has lived in Sep village of Igra district since 1951, education 7 classes.

Photo 1. *Chuk* on the embroidered head towel *chalma* (mid-twentieth century, Varzi-Yatchi, Alnashi district, Udmurtia). Photo by Tatiana Panina, 2018 (materials from the fund of the Architectural and Ethnographic open-air museum “Ludorvay”).



Photo 2. *Chuk* on the embroidered head towel *chalma* (early twentieth century, Mozhga, Mozhga district, Udmurtia). Photo by Galina Glukhova, 2017 (materials from the folklore archive of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism, Udmurt university).



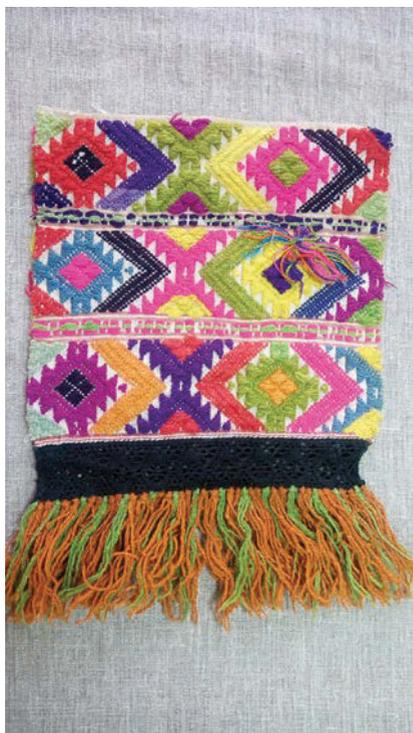


Photo 3. *Chuk* on the woven head towel *chalma* (end of the nineteenth century, Novaya Mon'ya of Sarapul Uyezd, Vyatka Governorate). Photo by Tatiana Panina, 2018 (materials from the fund of the Architectural and Ethnographic open-air museum "Ludorvay").

Photo 4 (below). *Chuk* on traditional dresses (from left to right: linen dress – mid-twentieth century, village of Bal'zashur, Mozhga district, Udmurtia; woolen dress – mid-twentieth century, Buro-Zhik'ya, Malaya Purga district, Udmurtia; linen dress – mid-twentieth century, village of Bob'ya-Ucha, Malaya Purga district, Udmurtia). Photo by Tatiana Panina, 2018 (materials from the fund of the Architectural and Ethnographic open-air museum "Ludorvay")





Photos 5 & 6. *Chuk* on the staff in the reconstructed ritual *kren'yuon* before and after visiting houses (village of Kel'dysh, Sharkan district, Udmurtia). Photo by Galina Glukhova, 2017 (materials from folklore archive of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism, Udmurt university).



Photo 7. *Chuk* on the distaff in the reconstructed ritual *kubo voz'man* (village of Dyrdashur, Sharkan district, Udmurtia). Photo by N. Sharychev, consulted by Galina Glukhova, 2017 (Republican House of Folk Art – House of Youth).



Photo 8. *Chuk* / *chacha* on the distaff – bride's dowry (village of Dyrdashur, Sharkan district, Udmurtia). Photo by Galina Glukhova, 2017 (materials from the folklore archive of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism, Udmurt University).



Photo 9. Recruit's *chuk* (village of Kapustino, Malaya Purga district, Udmurtia). Photo by Galina Glukhova, 2017 (materials from the folklore archive of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism, Udmurt University).



Photo 10. Recruit's *chuk* (village of Varkled-Bod'ya, Agryz district, Tatarstan). Photo by Galina Glukhova, 2017 (materials from the folklore archive of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism, Udmurt University).



Photo 11. *Chuk* nailed to the central beam of a traditional house in the Architectural and Ethnographic open-air museum "Ludorvay". Photo by Tatiana Panina, 2018.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> We thank L. Fedorova, native of Kuz'ebayevo village, Alnashi region, Udmurt Republic, associate professor at the Udmurt State University.
- <sup>2</sup> It's an interesting fact that the Udmurt language preserved the expression *gord chuk dumom no s'iyom* (lit: we'll tie the *chuk* up and eat it) in the meaning of 'draw blood', 'stab', 'slaughter an animal'. The circumlocution was used in order to conceal a situation since it was assumed that livestock, like the surrounding world, understand human speech (Vladykina 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> The distaff could be presented to the bride during the wedding feast or after the wedding as a dowry. In this case *chuk* could be of various forms (see photo 8).
- <sup>4</sup> If there was no beam in the modern house construction, *chuk/tug* is nailed to the upper part of the door or gate (photo 9) frame, or to a wood bar nailed to the ceiling to imitate the beam (photo 10).
- <sup>5</sup> This tradition has found an unexpected expression in a new custom, performed by visitors to the Ludorvay Architectural and Ethnographic open-air museum, who nail *chuk* to the central beam of a traditional house (see photo 12). We express our gratitude to the director of the museum Tatiana Shklyaeva for giving us an opportunity to work with the museum's collection.
- <sup>6</sup> Collected from A. E. Lekomtseva, born in 1930 in Lonki-Vortsy, Igra district, Udmurtia, and living in Sep, same district, by T. I. Panina.
- <sup>7</sup> Customs to break a birch or a fir tree in a recruit's seeing off rites among Russians from Vologda region (Yarygina 2001: 151), recruit's *karsikko* in the Karelian tradition (Konkka 2013: 96–103).
- <sup>8</sup> See the tradition of gift and treatment of presents among Russians from the upper river Kama, in particular, a way to belt oneself with towels and fixing of bands, kerchiefs and towels on a pole (Chernykh 2001: 148–149).

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**Tatiana Vladykina** is (PhD hab) a professor and 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 has covered the range of topics in Udmurt folkloristics, especially mythology, specialising both in genre and in the treatment of the most important topics across genres.

e-mail: [tgvladykina@mail.ru](mailto:tgvladykina@mail.ru)



**Galina Glukhova** (PhD) is an associate professor and director of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism of Udmurt State University and teaches Udmurt literature and folklore. Her main field of interest is related to research on Udmurt and Finno-Ugric folklore, Udmurt traditional culture, and the interaction of Udmurt folklore and literature.

e-mail: galant@udm.ru



**Tatiana Panina** (PhD) is a researcher at the Department of Philological Studies, 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 interested in traditional Udmurt culture, more precisely in folk medicine, incantation tradition and more recently dreams. Panina teaches English at the Izhevsk State Medical Academy.

e-mail: tipanina@mail.ru