

# To Tatiana

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I spent some time thinking about the warm and heartfelt relations that I have had with Tatiana Vladykina over the decades, regardless of the distance between Estonia and Udmurtia, and our rarely meeting face to face. In short, she is my kindred spirit, a person with similar thoughts walking the same spiritual road.

There is barely an age difference between us, but I have always considered her a wise and more experienced colleague. Perhaps one of the reasons for this was the first time we met. As a third-year student I took part in and helped organise Ingrid Rüütel's Finno-Ugric conference. The conference was held in Tallinn, and one of my tasks was to guide Finno-Ugric guests through the Old Town to meals. All my life, but especially during high school, I had travelled to Tallinn to visit the theatre. Hence, I knew where the theatres, the art museum and some cafes were, and I had explored the Old Town. Suddenly, I was in a situation where I was supposed to walk through the Old Town, leading a number of people who knew Tallinn even better than I did. I was enraptured by all of the presentations and evening recitals, bringing the archaic and unique sounds of the Uralic people to the concert hall in the form of

live music. T. Perevozchikova delivered a talk on Udmurt dialogue incantations at this conference. I felt incredibly nervous, telling her that we have similar incantations of our own. My Russian was broken and ugly and I had no idea how to pronounce many words, never mind speak coherently. As every other person my age, I had learnt Russian from second grade, one or two hours a week for ten years, and had acquired my passive vocabulary from the best of Russian literature. This allowed me to read Russian fiction and Doctor Zhivago, but the urgency of speaking the language became apparent to me thanks to this conference.

Of course, I looked at Tatiana as an experienced scholar with great respect then, and do so today. I was always really glad when, over the years, she sent me books about Udmurtia. The Udmurt published much more than Estonian scholars did, this was and still is remarkable to me.

In 1987, there was a Finno-Ugric conference in Izhevsk (which at the time was called Ustinov for about six months, in memory of a late statesman). Following old conventions, many sections ranging from archaeology to several fields of linguistics, ethnology (ethnography), folkloristics, and literary science were represented, and this brought together participants from many institutes. I remember seeing the collections from the field work archive of the Udmurt Institute, and wondering how my colleagues managed to transliterate and write sheet music from tapes recorded during fieldwork, and still put out publications and write articles. Friendships lasting to this day were forged in the burning heat of Izhevsk.

Our relations developed during meetups at these conferences and joint projects, amidst folklore and as a part of its narrative. Tatiana and an Udmurt delegation came to Tartu in 1990 for a conference dedicated to Oskar Loorits. They represented their own school of thought and spirit. The Babel of scholars in Tartu, meetings and discussions in sections and during breaks, and the following work on publications deepened the friendly relations. In the following years, Tatiana sent some of her students for a visit

funded by the Kindred Peoples' Programme, once as many as three young scholars, among them Galina Glukhova, whom I consider to be my good friend. Ethnomusicologists Marina Hodyreva and Irina Nuriyeva from the Kazan State Conservatory stayed in Tartu for a longer period thanks to scholarships.

Tatiana and I met again on a long winter's night in Finnish Karelia at a working meeting and conference on compiling the *Mythologia Uralica*. As wise as I am today, I can say that the arguments over mythology then affected every participant is evident from their published writings. The starting points were different from the beginning, and many scholars of Uralic languages admitted that neglecting religious life in research for too long and the shortcomings of newer collecting work would become our first stumbling block. The second one formed in discussions before our eyes. The Udmurt had their own school of thought and conventions of connecting newer research to earlier findings, as Tatiana's presentation also stated. Many experienced scholars present had started research on mythology in their own region. But still, I have rarely participated in project meetings where from early on practical plans have been overshadowed by the instantaneous formation of competing schools of thought and teams. Thirdly, the common thoughts we had formed in Karelia interfered with the participants' routine obligations and necessity to earn their living. In addition to the cooperation agreement, we should have signed a petition to different institutions to liberate the participants from other projects for a few years, while still securing their income. We went back to our everyday lives with big ideas.

For decades I have met with project participants from those times, discussed essential issues – mythology carries messages about the mindsets of the past, as well as the context of current cultural phenomena – and admired the fire burning slowly, but surely. We have kept track of what each of us has managed to achieve. Volumes in Russian, and in part in English, have been completed. Tatiana led and still heads the project to produce the

Udmurt delegation's volume on local mythology. It remains to be hoped that together with her talented Udmurt co-workers she will soon present us with a publication on Udmurt mythology. Compared to the 1990s, much more knowledge has been acquired and many problems have found solutions.

On a more personal note, I remember how Tatiana and the Karelian scholars bolted to a pile of snow straight from the sauna, rolled around there and recommended this as a cure for rheumatism. I was cautious. I did not care much for the hot sauna, and the rest seemed like a Medieval test of courage. Bright-eyed, intelligent and happy, involved in research administration and therefore horrifyingly busy – this is how I have seen Tatiana work for decades, no matter in which European or Finno-Ugric country or at which academic forum we have run into each other.

I am sincerely grateful to her for organising the first international summer school for young Finno-Ugric scholars, this was the first of its kind in the whole of Russia, and attributed the specialisation much prestige. I was honoured to join the event as a lecturer, listen to talks by other lecturers and degree students, participate in fieldwork on the culture of the Besserman kindly led by Jelena Popova and others, and visit the holy mountain of Idnakar. Two of us Estonians went to the new missionary church and met the congregation and the pastor, as Udmurtia was changing in many ways. But this is another story.

This one, on the other hand, could not be complete without reminiscing about the endless songs at the event's final banquet. This is one of the soulful parts of Finno-Ugric events – the shared and unique songs we sing together. A small number of them were recorded, and I still listen to them when I'm in a bad mood.

Andres Kuperjanov, Galina Glukhova, I and a few of our colleagues were guests at the home of Tatiana and Vladimir Vladykin, and were amazed by the office they had built in an old granary, the sacred *kuala*, and the ethnographic atmosphere of the traditional auxiliary buildings in the garden of an otherwise modern house.



Summer time at home. Photo A. Kuperjanov 2017.

This was my first time meeting the great Vladykin, of whom I had heard a lot over the years, and whose works I had read. In my student days, I had eagerly listened to stories about a talented scholar, a red-bearded genius, as Yuri Scheykin, the then leading scholar of Siberian studies described him. Vladykin, the most easy-going of people, had turned his life around, given up his career in the capital, and gone to work at the end of the world, somewhere in the periphery. This was so brave!

Even braver is the contribution that these two have left behind in Udmurtia and elsewhere in the world with their scholarly work and their students. I am so glad to have been able to share that road.



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