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Research article

Outside the borders of one's land: The practice of commemorating the dead who died abroad in Udmurt culture

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Abstract

This article investigates, using the example of Udmurt culture, the rituals and customs connected with people who have died far from their homes, or who have been buried abroad. It emphasizes the importance of commemorating the dead in Udmurt culture, where dying abroad is seen as anomalous and breaks the ties between the dead and his or her homeland. In such cases, in order to restore these ties, the Udmurt have special rituals, including ritual burial, commemorative rites and sacrifices. This article analyses different aspects of commemorative practices, such as the setting of cenotaphs (symbolical graves) and the use of particular commemorative places for those who died far from home, the organization of rituals in different ritual loci, and dates in the folk calendar, as well as addresses to the dead at these times. It shows how these practices reflect a deep concern for the dead, and the attempt to guarantee their souls a quiet transfer into the ancestors' world. Particular attention is paid to those who died in war or have disappeared, and to how ritual practice allows these people to remain in the memory and collective awareness of the community. Based on the long-term fieldwork in the southern districts of the Udmurt Republic as well as in neighboring regions (Republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), the article analyzes the cultural transformation of rituals and their contemporary state, highlighting changes influenced by historical events, such as world wars, and the impact of Orthodox traditions. It aims to introduce new material into academic discourse and primarily serves as a description of cultural processes related to this topic. It offers a fresh perspective on the understudied aspect of the Udmurt ancestor cult and reveals the crucial role of these rituals in maintaining the cultural and spiritual identity of the Udmurt people in a changing world.

KEYWORDS: symbolic burial, commemoration of those who die abroad, ancestor cult, Udmurt

Introduction

The practice of venerating people who have died far from their homeland is significant in many cultures — Udmurt culture is no exception[1] — and often includes key elements for maintaining one's cultural identity and connection with one's ancestors. These rituals are particularly significant in a context in which socio-cultural conditions are continually changing and are influenced by such phenomena as war and migration. Udmurt culture allows us to observe unique forms of perpetuating the memory of those who died far from home because of the deep connection with the homeland in its most sacral meaning.

In world ethnography, there are many important works about ancestor cults and commemoration of the dead. Udmurt researchers, too, emphasize the importance of this practice in order to maintain collective memory and cultural identity (see, e.g. Atamanov & Vladykin, 1985; Vladykin, 1994; Shutova, 2001; 2003; Anisimov, 2017; Sadikov, 2019). When social and political factors induce transformations, such rituals play a significant role in supporting the spiritual connection between generations, which emphasizes their general importance and the relevance for the community.

In the Udmurt tradition, the ancestor cult has a key position: it is a conservative phenomenon that connects, according to mythological understandings, the living with the multiple dead generations of their kin and their community. In this tradition, there are particular relationships with different categories of dead, reflecting a deep respect and concern for them, something that is also reflected in rituals and customs that accompany death and commemoration. This dimension of the ancestor cult has been developed under the influence of the two world wars, which not only actualized, but also allowed, the cultural transformation of the traditional form of worship of the dead into modern forms. According to folk worldview, death outside the home village was seen as something anomalous that alienates a person from their land and ancestors, threatening the soul of the dead person as well as those of their kin. Therefore, for people who have died far away, symbolic cemeteries and graves/cenotaphs are set up, as special sacrificial rites are held in particular loci and at particular times in the folk calendar. These practices include commemorative rites for village people who have died, and who have died and are buried, abroad, as well as ancestors who for different reasons remained in their original regions.

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[1] The Udmurt are a Finno-Ugric people living in Central Russia. They speak Udmurt, a language that belongs to the Permian group of Finno-Ugric languages. Historically, Udmurt society was an agrarian culture, with clear elements of clan structure. According to the All-Russia census of 2020, there are 386,465 Udmurt in Russia. In addition, there are also Udmurt diasporas in the CIS countries and in other countries.

Although these traditions are significant, this aspect of the ancestor cult has not thus far been an object of scientific attention. In this article, I attempt to describe exhaustively this phenomenon, in order to analyze its role and its functioning in Udmurt culture. I will concentrate on revealing its particular features and the current state of the practice of venerating the ancestors in order to understand better its place and meaning today.

In order better to situate the Udmurt material in a comparative and theoretical framework, it is useful to draw on the classic anthropological literature on ritual and death. Arnold van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and Victor Turner (1969) conceptualized rites of passage and the liminal condition of individuals who are "betwixt and between" established social categories. Death, particularly when it occurs outside the homeland, can be seen as one of the most radical liminal states, requiring ritual action to re-integrate the deceased into the community of ancestors. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1982) further emphasized how mortuary rituals are not only about individual loss but about the regeneration of social life. These theoretical perspectives provide a lens through which Udmurt commemorative practices can be analyzed, not merely descriptively, but as ritual mechanisms that negotiate the boundaries of identity, space, and memory.

From a comparative perspective, symbolic burials and cenotaphs are found in many cultural traditions: cenotaphs in Classical Athens (Humphreys, 1980), war memorials in Western Europe after the First World War (Winter, 1995), or post-mortem commemorations in Japan (Kawano, 2010). Placing the Udmurt practices in this broader landscape reveals both their uniqueness, rooted in the deep symbolic value of homeland and soil, and their universality as strategies to overcome the dislocation of death abroad.

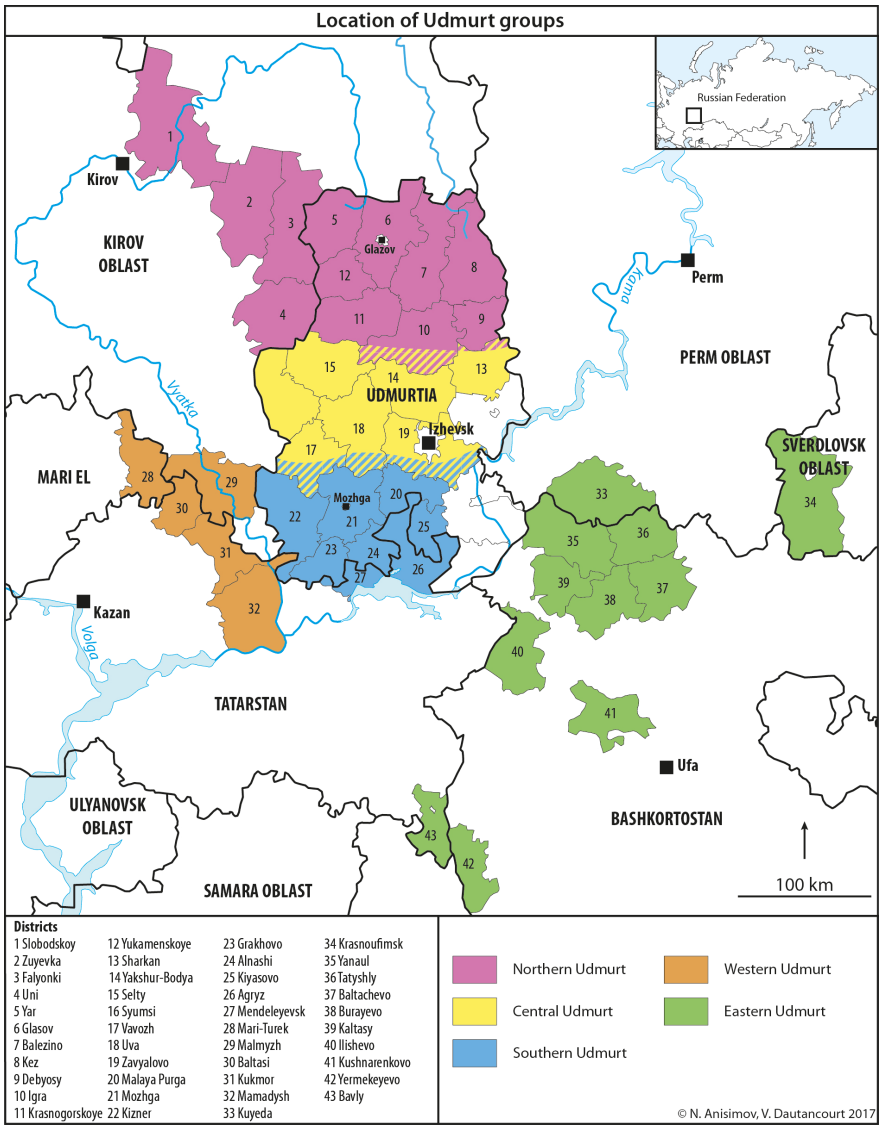
Depending on the conditions of death and the place where it occurred, different notions are used, which show different attitudes towards commemoration and memory. In the Udmurt tradition, people who have died far from home are called *kyre-bure/s'örlo(-on) kulem"es* (deceased abroad/on the side), *kyre-bure byrem"es* (fallen abroad), *palenyn kulem"es/byrem"es* (deceased/fallen far away/off to the side), as well as *aslaz korkaz/gurtaz kulymteos* (deceased not at home/in the village) or *zhugis'kemys' bertymteos* (lit. not returned from battle) and *voynayn kulem"es* (dead in the war). These notions all refer to people who died away from their home places or out of their familiar milieu, emphasizing their alienation from their home space. They also refer to the possibility that those who have died were not given the rites usually organized at the death place, the aim of which is to ensure a successful transition of the soul into the world of the dead. The particular emphasis on those who fell in wars is connected to special memory of war and its

victims. This shows the social and historical significance of those deaths for the community.

We shall now examine different aspects of the commemorative practice for these deaths, based on data in published sources and on the author's fieldwork, both of which were gathered in 2013, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2023 and 2024 by the Southern Udmurt in the districts of Alnashi, Igra, Kiyasovo, Malaya Purga, Mozhga in the Udmurt Republic (here UR), in the Agryz district of the Republic of Tatarstan (here RT) and by the Eastern Udmurt in the districts of Kaltasy, Tatyshly and Yanaul in the Republic of Bashkortostan (here RB). All these regions are subjects of the Russian Federation and are situated in the Volga Federal District of Central Russia.

Figure 1

Map of the settlement of Udmurt ethnographic groups. Authors: Nikolai Anisimov, Vincent Dautancourt, 2017.



Symbolical burials

In Udmurt culture there is the tradition of symbolically burying kin who have died abroad and whose bodies are not buried in the clan cemetery. This ritual has been partly described in several writings (Emelyanov, 1921; Gening, 1963; Atamanov & Vladykin, 1985; Vladykin, 1994; Shutova, 2001, 2003; Sadikov, 2006, 2008, 2019). Today this tradition has been fixed only by the Udmurts west of the Vyatka and by the Eastern Udmurt; in other Udmurt ethnographic groups no data about this custom exist. However, the existence of symbolical burials has been discovered in the Azelino burial grounds. Archaeologists think that these cenotaph graves were meant for kin who had died abroad (Gening, 1963, p. 85). According to Nadezhda Shutova, "...the tradition of conditional burial of a person deceased far away was continued until the end of the 20th century" (Shutova, 2001, pp. 141–142).

Mikhail Atamanov and Vladimir Vladykin share interesting data gathered from the Eastern Udmurt:

> in many non-Christian Udmurt cemeteries we saw "little houses" in the shape of pillars with a roof, set for people who died abroad. Most of them were meant for victims of the First World War, the Civil War, and even more the Great Patriotic War[2]. In some cases, as with the Eastern Udmurt, they have been erected in cemeteries, close to the graves of kin, in others, as in the Transvyatka region (in the villages of Staryy Kanisar, Staraya Yum'ya, in the Kukmor district of Tatarstan), a special place has been dedicated for such "burials" (Atamanov & Vladykin, 1985, p. 138).

As Ranus Sadikov writes, in the tradition of the Eastern Udmurt, "such graves were formerly organized for people fallen during wars or who had disappeared; nowadays, for kin buried far away" (Sadikov, 2019, p. 229).

[2] The Second World War.

Figure 2

Cenotaph. Symbolic burial. Kukmor district, Republic of Tatarstan, Russia. Photo by Vladimir Vladykin, 1973 (Atamanov & Vladykin, 1985, p. 139).

Figure 3

Cenotaph. Symbolic burial. Kasiyarovo village, Buraevsky district, Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia. Photo by Ranus Sadikov, 2020.

Symbolical burials aimed at allowing the soul of the deceased to come back home. According to Udmurt beliefs, even if the body is buried abroad the urt, "the soul, the double of the dead person", will nevertheless come back to its home place. This ritual reflects the deep connection between the dead person and his or her home soil, as well as the importance of maintaining the spiritual connection with the ancestors and the clan locus.

Let us have a look to some descriptions in published sources:

> In Izmaylovo (Bavly district, RT) on the place of the future grave, people spread out a white blanket, as long as the body of the dead. They traced a line with an axe around the blanket. In addition, the Christian part of the population drew or cut into the turf the form of a cross. On the blanket they also put food for the memorial service and on the ground, silver coins. After this ritual, they considered that the land for the dead kin (usually a husband, a father or a brother) had been bought, and that the owner of the land, *Mu-Kylchin*, would not be offended that the grave was empty. By the head of the "buried" person a pillar was erected with a roof, and nearby often they added a small table covered with a tablecloth for the memorial feast. On the pillar, called *korka* ("house", "log house"), they wrote or cut out the name and the surname of the dead person along with his or her birth and death year (Atamanov & Vladykin, 1985, p. 138).
>
> In Kasiyarovo (Burayevo district, RB) people made a cenotaph, and put under it a linden stick (*puppu*), as big as the person and wrapped in white canvas, or merely a towel. The *inty bas'ton* "finding a place" ritual was accompanied by words "*(Nimze veralo), teni inty bas'tis'kom, berty tatchy*" ((*Name of person*), we take a place, come back here). At the head, they erected a memorial pillar (Sadikov, 2006, p. 57; 2019, p. 229).
>
> In Kipchak, (Kuyeda district, Perm kray), (here PK) a case has been recorded according to which a small grave was dug for a man fallen in the war. In it were placed his clothes (a coat, a shirt, trousers) and (bast) shoes, and afterwards he was buried in a small ditch in the cemetery (ibid., pp. 229–230).

In the tradition of other Udmurt groups this custom is probably connected with the practice of taking soil from the burial or the death place to bring it to the grave. The belief is that after those ritual acts, the souls of the dead become united, something that is confirmed later by dreams of the living describing the positive result.

Other examples from the Southern Udmurt tradition are usually connected with the symbolic reburial of soil taken from the grave of the dead.

One respondent from Nizhniy Syryez (Alnashi district, UR) told a curious story (AFM, 2020). In 2015, when she was already quite old, she went to Germany, not knowing the local language, in order to find the place where her father was buried. He had died during the Second World War in a camp (she did not know whether in a concentration camp or in a prison camp). After some adventures (it was difficult to find her father's burial place and to communicate with people), she finally found the place she was looking for. She had taken along soil blessed in church which she scattered by the cross on the mass grave, and then she scattered soil from her vegetable garden, for in her father's last letter, he wrote: "*Adzh'dzh'o na meda shuldyr bakchame?* (Shall I ever see my beautiful garden again?)".

She accompanied her actions with an address:

> *Atay, van' rossiyskoy soldat"es, tani rossiyskoy syuy vai, ize rossiyskoy syuen!* (Father, all you Russian soldiers, sleep quietly under Russian soil!)

Some soil from the mass grave she took back home and scattered it by her mother's grave. Some time later, when she was back home, she dreamed that she was walking home, the gate is open, the door is open, and the house was full of sleeping soldiers. She asked: "Who are you? Are you making fun of me?" Then one of them woke up and addressed her: "My little girl, indeed do you not recognize me? I am your father". Then she ran towards him, but she woke up sharply. She explained, thanks to this dream, that her father and all the soldiers who died abroad had come home (Anisimov & Toulouze, 2021, p. 169).

Dreams that confirm the successful "return" of the dead resonate with the concept of "continuing bonds" in grief psychology (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996), where communication with the deceased is seen not as pathological but as a normal and culturally mediated form of sustaining relationships with the dead. In this sense, Udmurt dream narratives become part of the ritual system of ensuring spiritual homecoming.

In 2013 an analogous case happened to Natalia Yakovlevna Pugacheva, a former member of the Grannies from Buranovo group, from the village Buranovo (Malaya Purga district, UR). While she looked for her father's grave, who had fallen in the Second World War, she went to Voronezh oblast', in Russia, taking soil from her mother's grave and explaining: "For them to live together". On the spot, she buried soil from her mother's grave and took soil from the mass grave where her father was buried. In this process she

also addressed her father and asked him to come back home to her (Vot takoy sluchay..., online).

Another case is connected with a Malaya Purga (UR) woman's *post mortem* wish. Before dying she expressed the wish to be buried in her home village of Dubrovskiy, in Kiyasovo district (UR), although she had not lived there for a long time. However, when she died, her children decided to bury her in the local cemetery in Malaya Purga. The denial of this last wish concerned other kin, who decided to bring soil from her grave to her home village's cemetery. Later, one of the kin had a dream in which the deceased met other dead from her village. Thanks to this the family felt better, and was convinced that they had acted properly (AFM, 2016: Dubrovskiy, Kiyasovo district, UR).

Let us observe, in the context of this last case, that according to Udmurt tradition burying a person from a village, who has not lived there for long, in the village cemetery is seen as objectionable, and is even condemned. This relates to the understanding of "our" and "the other's". If someone has left the home village and lives elsewhere, he or she loses the connection with the home and becomes part of another place, thus acquiring the status of "other". Moreover, according to folk beliefs, to bury such people may bring disturbance to the village: *"gurtly sekyt use"* (lit.: it falls hard on the village) (AFM, 2018: Staraya Sal'ya, Kiyasovo district, UR; Urazgil'dy, Tatyshly district, RB). According to some data, such deceased people may even not be transported through the village; it is better to choose detours to avoid crossing the village. This custom emphasizes again the danger of crossing the border between "one's own" and the "other's", which may have bad consequences for the whole community.

Such symbolic graves (cenotaphs) may be interpreted in light of comparative anthropology: as Humphreys (1980) has shown for Classical Athens and Winter (1995) for post-World War I Europe, cenotaphs mark not only the absence of the body but also the community's effort to re-integrate the dead into collective memory. In the Udmurt case, the use of *korka* or other emic terms highlights the cultural specificity of these "absent burials."

Special commemoration locus

According to the tradition of the Transvyatka Udmurt[3], there are special ritually marked places in the village space dedicated to commemoration rituals for those who died and

[3] This ethnographic Udmurt group lives in a cluster in the Mamadysh, Kukmor and Baltasi districts, RT, as well as on the right shore of Malmyzh district in the Kirov oblast' and in Mari-Turek district of the Mari-El Republic.

are buried far from their village, called *bel'gy, bil'gi*. This term is supposed to be used for the ritual in honor of these deceased. These places are an integral part of the ethnocultural landscape and reveal a particular approach towards this category of deceased. As a rule, they are located on the opposite bank of the river or near a cemetery, which adds special symbolism and status to them.. In some traditions this term covers particular places dedicated to cenotaphs, which emphasizes their particular significance in the context of commemorative rituals.

The commemorative locus of *bel'gy* functions as what Nora (1989) has called a *lieu de mémoire*, a "site of memory" that condenses grief, history, and identity. Its liminal spatial positioning (across rivers, at the forest edge) echoes Turner's (1969) notion of threshold places where ordinary boundaries are suspended and the sacred becomes manifest.

> The term itself has a Turkic origin: Tat. *bil'ge* "mark", "sign", "badge", "emblem", "landmark", "assessment", "sign", "symptom", Bash. *bilge* "sign", Mong. *bəl'ge* "sign", "symbol", Buryat. *bəlga* "sign", "symbol"(Alatyrev, 1988, p. 166).

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the Mamadysh uyezd of the Kazan governorate there was a custom aimed at perpetuating the memory of people who had died abroad. After the death of a relative the inhabitants set a *kurkuyan*, a particular pillar monument or a mark called *bil'gi*, on the place where objects connected with the dead were thrown away. These memorials were particular symbols for the memory and veneration of those who died while traveling or on military service (Emelyanov, 1921, p. 27).

Sometimes, they set small one-legged tables in front of these monuments. At commemoration time, candles were lit and food offerings were laid out, for example chicken, pancakes, and other foods. According to folk beliefs, these pillars were set so that the soul, *urt*, of the deceased could come home to a particular place dedicated to that person (ibid.). In other words, people believed that in those cases, the *urt*/soul of the deceased far away had at home a haven to which it could return. The religious and mythological worldview of the Udmurt sees cemeteries as a kind of abode for the dead, therefore the living kin fulfilled their obligations and set up cenotaph graves so that the dead would feel their connection and not be angry. The setting of such monuments represented a secondary symbolic funeral, while the monument itself (the pillar or the sign) was seen as a replacement for the dead person's soul (Shutova, 2001, p. 208). This custom expressed not only the concern for the ancestors, but also emphasized the deep veneration of the dead person's remembrance and their spiritual homecoming.

Among the Udmurt of Baltasi district (RT) there was the custom of visiting such places, known as *kyre poton* (lit. coming out of the borders), which took place after *Semik* around May 22nd, close to the celebration of Nikolai the Miracle Maker (*Nikola praznik*). In different traditions, the time may vary. For example the inhabitants of Por-Kutesh and Sredniy Kushket villages visited the *Bel'gy* before *Semik* (Shutova, 2015, p. 71, 78). In the village of Malye Lysi (Baltasi district, RT), the *bel'gy* was situated on the other shore of the river, downstream from the village. Usually they set a cross there, which is probably a later Orthodox tradition. The local Udmurts held this ritual after Trinity at *Semyk*, on Sunday evening, after having dealt with the livestock. The participants brought alcoholic beverages and different foods, sat in circle and had a banquet, prayed and remembered the ancestors. In Syr'ya, in the same district, the same term *bel'gy* is used for the place and for the commemoration of the men from the village who died in wars. Here, the place is in the forest by the old "pagan" cemetery, where the locals gather to celebrate *bel'gy* commemorations. They connect the origin of the ritual with a private case of commemoration by some families, which took place by the old cemetery, called *Baymet shay*, and was for their men fallen abroad in 1916 in the First World War. There, in that place, they erected memorial pillars and visited them every year to mourn their dead. Subsequent wars multiplied the number of dead and of individual memorials. Today the wooden pillars have not been preserved, but they have been replaced by a modest monument on which is written "Eternal remembrance of fighting for the FATHERLAND!" The monument was erected in 1975, in honor of the 30th anniversary of victory in the Second World War. Later the ritual became collective.

Every participant took food and drink to offer. A long makeshift table was set in the clearing. During the ritual people say Orthodox prayers in Udmurt before the banquet. It is interesting to note that on that day, children beat one another with branches, which refers to a way of worshiping the memory of ancestors who have died in battle. At the same time, it was customary to rejoice, to sing songs and to dance. After the ceremony circle dances and games started to the sound of the *garmoshka*, the accordion and the *kubyz* (a sort of folk violin). In the 1970s and 1980s enough people gathered in the clearing for five dancing circles, two of them with young people. The feast lasted until late in the evening and faded close to midnight.

All the villagers try to attend *bel'gy*, even those who left to live elsewhere. The locals observe that this ritual is particularly expected, because on that day they may commemorate not only their ancestors, but also chat with fellow villagers whom they have not met

for a long time. *Bel'gy* is seen at the same time as a commemoration of the dead and as a feast to celebrate life (Sapozhnikov, online; Osokin & Avdoshin, 2006, online).

In Karyk-Serma (Baltasi district, RT), the term *bel'gy/bel'gi* is used for the forest close to the cemetery. In one of the clearings in that forest, after the end of commemorative rituals in the cemetery, people gathered for an additional commemoration of those who fell in war abroad. The local Udmurt called the ritual itself "*bel'gy karyny*" (lit. 'to do *bel'gy*'). At that place there was a commemorative banquet, and people sang songs and danced both men's and women's dances. The place was not marked in any way (Shutova, 2015, p. 77).

A legend exists among the Udmurt of this village about the folk etymology, the origin of the name according to which soldiers were sent, in the First and Second World Wars, to Belgium. Not all came back, but the memory remained, and thus the name of the commemoration place became *bel'gy* (ibid.).

In Sizner (Baltasi district, RT), in the *bel'gy* clearing there is an obelisk with a wooden pillar about one meter high, painted in green symbolizing the grave of villager Pyotr Vasil'evich Zhukov. According to Yakim Stepanovich Sapozhnikov, Zhukov was discharged from the army for health reasons after a severe cold that led to tuberculosis. He died in the hospital in Kazan, and was buried in the Arsk cemetery, in other words abroad, far from his home village, not in his clan's cemetery. This cenotaph grave became the place where he is commemorated, in the *bel'gy* clearing, which thus became a particular memory place (Sapozhnikov, online).

In the tradition of the Transvyatka Udmurt, the setting of *bel'gy* became especially frequent after the First World War, the Civil War and, mainly, the Second World War, as noted by the Udmurt scholars Mikhail Atamanov and Vladimir Vladykin (Atamanov & Vladykin, 1985, p. 138). These events probably became catalysts for the strengthening of the ritual, changing *bel'gy* into the place to commemorate those who did not return from war.

In recent years the ritual has been losing its extensive character; in the last 5–10 years only 25 to 50 people have attended. In 2006, while the telefilm *Bel'gy* was being shot by the EV channel TNB (directors Denis Osokin and Georgiy Avdoshin), an innovation was added to the traditional course of the ritual. Before the general ceremonies participants started to sing the song *"Tulkym"yas'ke"* ("It waves")[4] while standing up, which became

[4] The song belongs to the late formation layer. The lyrics were published in various editions and are widely spread in Udmurt song folklore. The author of the lyrics is the Udmurt writer and public figure Ayvo Ivi (Vekshin Ivan Grigorevich, 1892–1963).

an important part of the renewed tradition and gave the celebration a new symbolic meaning. This song, about the tragedy of a father who lost seven sons in the First World War and the Civil War, gradually became an integral part of the celebration. Over time it caught on and is now sung every year as a kind of anthem of the celebration to remind people about the victims of the past and emphasize connection through memory and grief (Sapozhnikov, online).

Tulkym"yas'ke, tulkym"yas'ke Töd'y Kamlen vuez.	They wave, they wave, the waters of the white Kama.
Vu duryn ik, gurez' bamyn, vae puzhym bude.	Right on the shore of the river, on a hill, stands a pine with many branches.
Puzhym ulyn, guzhdor vylyn, odig peres' puke.	Under the pine, on the grass, an old man is sitting.
Peres' puke, tuzh kaygure, kinles' ke no mözme.	The old man sits, he grieves deeply, he misses someone.
Kuddyr, kuddyr so, sultysa, lymshor pala uchke. Lymshor pala uchkylysa, sin"esse tshushe.	Sometimes he stands and looks towards the South; he looks towards the South and he wipes away his tears
Vera, peres', maly bördkod, maly kaygyris'kod?	Tell us, old man, why you weep, why you grieve?
Siz'ym kuzya mynam pie, siz'ym val uzhase.	I had seven sons, seven workers.
Siz'ym pölis' kuatez byriz German ozhmas'kone.	Six of the seven fell in the German War.
Ogez Karpate vuysa, bertiz val chut luysa.	One reached the Carpathian mountains, he would have come back lame.
Bertiz, kun'moy so uliz no, nosh ik ozhe myniz.	He came back, lived three days, and went back to the war."
"Kolchak vyllem tushmon"esyz bydtom" shusa koshkiz.	"We shall eliminate the enemies like Kolchak" he said and went.

Ug bördy mon, ug kaygyry, pie kushtiz shusa.	I shall not weep; I shall not grieve that my son abandoned me,
Pie myniz ozhmas'kone, erkyn ulon ponna.	My son went to war for a free life.
Pie mynüz ozhmas'kone, erkyn ulon ponna.	My son went to war for a free life.
Tulkym"yas'ke, tulkym"yas'ke Töd'y Kamlen vuez.	They wave, they wave, the waters of the white Kama.
Kamlen shortiz parakhod koshke, gord kyshetez töla.	In the middle of the Kama, a boat goes, on it a red flag.
Kamlen shortiz parakhod koshke, gord kyshetez töla.	In the middle of the Kama, a boat goes, on it a red flag.

(Kyrdzh'an…, 2003).

In recent times such places have become more significant as symbols of the eternal remembrance of the fallen. A good example is the village of Sredniy Kushket (Baltasi district, RT). Today, the new *bel'gy* place is situated by the monument to those who fell at the front. It reveals how the tradition is transformed, to correspond better to the reality of the time and to remember those who died fighting for their country. Such transformations reveal the dynamics of change of cultural customs, retaining the deepest meaning of remembrance and respect for those who died abroad.

The practice of commemorating beyond the border of the cemetery

The territory beyond the border of the cemetery has also become a place to commemorate those who died far away from home, confirming the particular status of this category of dead. Traditionally, those who died in an unnatural or premature way were buried outside the cemetery, as well as those from other confessions. Within the funerary and commemorative system, those who died far from their home village occupy a peripheral position in relation to the "sacred center" of the world of the dead, as the cemetery is seen in folk awareness.

This position reflected the understanding of the world beyond, where the dead who are buried outside home occupy a symbolically liminal position between the worlds. The need to hold rituals, sacrifices and verbal addresses outside the cemetery is due to the interaction of the communicative principles with the world of the dead. It is important in this ritual practice that all the words, the prayers and the offerings reach those who

are in another time–space. This ritual action emphasizes the gap between the two worlds, showing how specific actions are required to overcome the division. Thus, the space of the cemetery is as a border between different levels of being, and the periphery beyond the cemetery marks a particular zone for those who died far from home or in tragic circumstances.

Examples of commemorating people who died in these ways are illustrated by different practices. Let us have a look at such cases.

In the village of Lel'vizh (Kukmor district, RT), after visiting the cemetery, the villagers go to a deep ravine to worship those who died far from home. There, they perform food offerings addressed to them (AFM, 2024). The locals call this place *Shaynyuk*, "cemetery ravine", or *vil'ken shay*, "the cemetery of the young brides". According to the elder, it is the former burial place for young brides who had died prematurely for different reasons connected with hard work (Anisimov, 2017, pp. 58–59).

The Udmurts of Orlovka (Dzerzhinskiy district, Krasnoyarskiy kray) had a similar ritual of commemorating outside the borders of the cemetery the people who died unnatural deaths far from their villages. However, according to local Udmurts, this practice disappeared because of the fun-making and criticism from the Russian population: Russians saw this tradition as the wish of the Udmurt to continue "partying", which was probably was the reason for interrupting it:

> Outside the cemetery [they sat]…. those who still had in their bag something from the cemetery, they put it out and they sat and poured it (Pchelovodova & Anisimov, 2021, p. 54); "Then the Russians made fun of us." "Why?" "Well, because it means that they — as they say — commemorate here, and this is not enough for them, they must — they say — commemorate also there, so they sit" (ibid.).

In Dubrovskiy and Staraya Sal'ya (Kiyasovo district, UR) on the days of the calendar commemorations, and when visiting the cemetery on May 9th, they give commemorative offerings to people who died far from their home village outside the cemetery fence (AFM, 2023). In Shardasak-Kib'ya (Alnashi district, UR) there is a particular place by the cemetery fence where the villagers on the above-mentioned days throw offerings from the cemetery or go outside to place the offerings (AFM, 2024). In Kuz'ebayevo (Alnashi district, UR) the commemorative offerings of food and drink *kuyas'kon* are given before leaving the cemetery, at one side of the gate (AFM, 2024).

The villagers from Bol'shiye S'iby (Mozhga district, UR), when visiting the graves of their kin buried in Mozhga (same district), perform by a tree close to the entrance a commemoration of those who died abroad during the Second World War, those who disappeared, miscarried children and those whose graves are not in their home cemetery. Food offerings are placed on a special table and a small ceremony is organized afterwards (AFM, 2024).

Over time, such practices begin to undergo significant transformations, reflecting the dynamics of ritual culture amid social and interethnic interactions. While previously commemoration beyond the cemetery fence was strictly associated with a specific category of the deceased (those who died far from their homeland, under tragic circumstances, or by unnatural death), later traditions show an expansion of the ritual's recipients — now including war victims, those missing without a trace, deceased infants, and those whose graves remain unidentified. Thus, the peripheral zone of the cemetery starts to serve as a symbolic compensatory space, enabling the maintenance of a connection with the "absent dead." However, changes have affected not only the range of recipients but also the perception of the ritual: in some regions, the tradition has been preserved and reinforced through the local sacralization of specific places (ravines, trees, tables at the cemetery entrance), while in others, it has been marginalized and displaced due to the pressure of the dominant cultural environment, as seen in the case of the Udmurts in Krasnoyarskiy kray. Thus, commemoration beyond the cemetery fence reflects not only enduring notions of the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead but also demonstrates the ritual's sensitivity to changes in the social context, where confessional, ethnic, and cultural factors directly influence its preservation or transformation.

The practice of commemorating outside the farm borders

After her brother's tragic demise on the road, and following the advice of an elder villager, a female respondent in Srednie Yuri (Malaya Purga district, UR) started to make commemorative offerings, *kuyas'kon*, at the gatepost on the street side during the spring and autumn commemorations.

> *Kyre-bure, pe, kulemyn no, kapka yubo vyzhye kuyas'kyn kosizy. Kapka s'öry, yubo vyzhye, uram pala. Brate paz'gis'kemyn bere, mon tini otchy potas'ko"* (Abroad, they say, yes, he died. I was ordered to give offerings at the base of the gateposts. Outside the gate, at the base of the gateposts, on the street side. As my brother died [in a car crash], I go out there (AFM, 2023).

Once, says the woman, she forgot to make *kuyas'kon* for her brother. On the same night he came to her in a dream, because he was coming back to the village, and in her dream she acknowledged that she had not given him the commemorative offerings, and she woke up in grieving remorse (ibid.).

In this case, the gate is the symbolic border between one's world and the others', the world of the living and that of the dead. The commemorative actions made by the gate emphasize this border and allow people to maintain their ties with their particular dead kin. This is the place where the communicative channels between the spiritual and the material worlds cross and are fixed. Commemoration behind the gates of the farm is a means of worshiping the memory of the dead, especially someone who left his or her home village or died abroad. It expresses respect and keeps the memory of the deceased, as well as the need to maintain a spiritual connection with them, especially considering that it is customary to commemorate other dead and ancestors in home conditions.

Figure 4

Commemoration of the deceased brother at the gate, at the base of the gatepost. Srednie Yuri village, Malaya Purga district, Udmurt Republic, Russia. Photo by Nikolai Anisimov, 2023.

Particular commemorative rituals in the folk calendar

According to traditional Udmurt culture, the people's souls, if they are rejected from the ancestor's community because their bodies were not buried in the home cemetery, remain without a place to rest. Clearly, the particular commemorations included in folk calendar are specialized and aim to prevent the dead becoming "hostage" dead, who, according to mythological representations, do not find peace and may harm the living. In addition, commemoration of those who died far from home is a way to show respect and veneration of this category of deceased. The ritual allows the connection between the living and the dead villagers to be preserved, which, according to folk belief, stops the dead becoming demonic spirits.

In the villages of Kalashur and Dubrovskiy (Kiyasovo district, UR) there is a particular commemorative sacrificial ritual called *chekan*, which is held by the community in order to commemorate dead villagers who met their demise outside the village and are therefore not buried in the local cemetery, as well as those who committed suicide, and those without living kin. The ritual is included in the ritual calendar and is held in June on leap years.

The ceremony consists of several stages. The preliminary ritual actions include the preparation of commemorative food and the family commemoration on the first morning. The sacrifice includes the slaughtering of a sacrificial animal, usually a bull or a calf, at the place of the ritual which takes place early in the morning before dawn. Previously, before the middle of the 20th century, instead of a bull or calf, a horse was sacrificed, which was slaughtered on the previous evening and the meat prepared during the night. The sacrificial animal was set with its head towards the West or the North, and its blood was either let into the earth, or it was poured at the base of the memorial fir. Participants then prepared the meat porridge and soup, and left the head and the feet for ritual offerings.

In the main part of the ritual, at midday, the population of Kalashur and Dubrovskiy gather at the ritual place with the addition of the women who married into a different village and people from the village living elsewhere. Then, the attendants, with the exception of the children and the unmarried youngsters, give offerings of ritual food and drinks to the dead, called *kuyas'kon*. All stand around a bowl in which they crumble the baked food they brought, add some of the porridge and pour some soup and alcohol while remembering their dead aloud. It is important to observe that all operations with the food are achieved with a hand movement away "from oneself", i.e. turning the hands from the center line towards the exterior, so that requests and the offerings 'ar-

rive' in the world of the dead. Along with food offerings, they light a wax candle, which is set into a lump of bread. Then, they sing a ritual song for commemoration, *kis'ton gur*, "commemorative tune", *chekas'kon gur*, "tune for [the commemoration] *chekan"*. *Chekas'kon gur* is sung to a wedding tune (*syuan gur* and *yarashon gur*) and addresses the souls of the dead with different requests:

Ta setylem zhivotmes kiyady(y) kutele.

Ber kylem no zhivotmes gid tyr, lud tyr karele.

Ber kylem no zhivotmes gid tyr, lud tyr karele.

Oy, dzh'ech ule, dzh'ech ule soyaz(y) no(y) dunne(y)yn,

Ber kylem no sem'yadyly(y) azinlyk no setele.

Ber kylem no sem'yadyly azinlyk no setele.

Ber kylem no nylpily tazalyk no setele,

Gurto gyne kalykly azin'lykse setele.

Gurto gyne kalykmyly azin'lykse setele.

Kiz'ylem no yu-nyan'ly nebyt zorze med setoz,

Kiz'ylem no, oy, yu-nyan'my dzh'ech gyne med udaltoz.

Kiz'ylem no, oy, yu-nyan'my dzh'ech gyne med udaltoz.

Take this offered animal in your hands.

Make the stable full, the field full of the remaining livestock.

Make the stable full, the field full of the remaining livestock.

Oh, live well, live well in your world, beyond there,

Give to your remaining family success.

Give to your remaining family success.

Give to the remaining children health,

Give welfare to your fellow villagers.

Give welfare to our fellow villagers.

Let [Him, i.e. the Lord] give to the sown cereals soft rains,

Let the sown cereals give, oh give, a good harvest.

Let the sown cereals give, oh give, a good harvest.

The performance of these tunes is regulated by the structure of the ritual and accompanies the actions and words of the commemoration. In the contact situation with the world of the dead, the musical and verbal dimensions represent a communicative instrument, a kind of "veiled discourse" that builds up dialogue between the worlds.

Figure 5

Performing ritual songs and commemoration. Kalashur village, Kiyasovsky district, Udmurt Republic, Russia. Photo by Mirella Mazur, 2012.

Figure 6

Sending off the deceased and offering gifts. Kalashur village, Kiyasovsky district, Udmurt Republic, Russia. Photo by Mirella Mazur, 2012.

Then comes the seeing off of the dead. When all the participants have performed the ritual pouring, the commemorative offerings are brought to the sacred tree, the *chekas'kon/chekan/kuyas'kon kyz* "the commemoration fir [of the ritual] for Chekan". This is the place where the living say farewell to the dead until next time. They leave only the head and the feet of the sacrificial animal, they pour a libation from the bowl with the commemorative food and drinks, sing the commemorative tunes once again and remember the dead. They pay particularly attention to how parts of the sacrificial animal are set: the head is set in the direction of the river flow, the front and back legs are set accordingly, i.e. imitating the animal. Thus, they show the soul of the animal the direction to follow, towards the world of the dead. As soon as the farewell is finished, all the participants go back to the clearing where the first part of the ritual was held. The last to go back is an elder man who draws crosses on the path used by the other participants. While doing this, he addresses the dead, persuading them not to follow the living, and to wait until the living themselves come back to commemorate them. The drawing of a border between the two worlds thus concludes the commemorative ceremony.

When they go back to the clearing a feast starts, which turns into festivities and fun. The banquet is formed by separated groups of kin, who sit in circles (Anisimov, 2018, 2021).

In Varkled-Bod'ya (Agryz district, RT) the tradition of commemorating the dead according to the calendar has been preserved, which the local Udmurt call *kuyas'kon kyre byrem"esly* (offerings to the people who die abroad) or *s'örlo byrem"esly kuyas'kon*/*s'örlon kulem"esly kuyas'kon* (offerings to the people dead to the side). This ritual is included in the Spring–Summer feast for the ending of the *Gershyd* field work and lasts almost one week. Every day is dedicated to a particular deity, for example the Supreme god *Inmar* or the God creator of the earth *Mu-Kylchin*. A particular day is allocated to commemorating clan members who have died outside the village (Vladykina & Glukhova, 2011, pp. 84–85).

According to Vladimir Vladykin's data, this ritual was initially meant to commemorate fellow villagers in the former home, as the Varkled-Bod'ya Udmurt migrated from Malaya Bod'ya (Malaya Purga district, UR) (Vladykin, 1994, p. 243). With time, the ritual expanded and came to concern all those who had fallen in wars and outside the borders of the village (Lintop, 2003, p. 145; Lebedeva & Danilova, 2016, p. 61; Sadikov, 2017, pp. 100-101; Mi um veras'ke..., 2023, p. 88).

The ritual takes place across the river, in its lower reaches, below the places of prayer. The participants bring eggs, butter, vegetables, bread, cakes and alcohol. Earlier the kolkhoz allocated a calf or young bull for the ritual; today they sacrifice a hen, a ewe or a ram. It is important not to sacrifice ducks or geese, for they are seen as offerings to the higher gods. The specific feature of this ritual is that while it lasts, people do not pray; they remember the dead with porridge boiled in meat broth. Some of the commemorative food and drinks are used as offerings and they are put at fir roots, fixed there using wax and sometimes stearin candles. In some cases the ritual is held without porridge if no sacrificial animal can be found.

They may utter words to address the dead:

> *Dzh'ech ulon setele, sily karis'kom* (Give us a good life, we honor you). Each family commemorates its kin and offers other participants dishes and homemade spirits they have bought with them (AFM, 2023).

In Bagrash-Bigra (Malaya Purga district, UR) one of my female respondents observed that there is a particular day during the year to honor the people who died or are buried far from home. On that day they must be commemorated, although she could not re-

member the precise day. The local Udmurts do not forget this category of dead, even in calendar or private commemorations, and address them with proper words:

> *Kin' gurte kulemez, anay, atay, kin' kyre-bure kulemyn, ogdes-ogdy uchchale vu virser kuzya* (Who died in the village, mother, father, and who died abroad, look for one another along the river beds (lit. according to the vessels of the waters) (AFM, 2024).

In this case the metaphor of the river and the river bed is not mentioned by chance. In Udmurt mythology and belief, the river is often a symbol of a border, as well as a path between different worlds — the highest, the middle and the lower worlds. To look for one another along the river beds means that the dead my find themselves in different locations of the other world, while the living show them the path to achieve reunion and developing connections through rituals and commemoration.

We received similar information from respondents living in Kuz'ebayevo (Alnashi district, UR). Here, the dead buried far from home are usually commemorated during private ceremonies outdoors, when they see off the souls of the dead in a ritual called *kelis'kon*. At that moment some participants go to one side at a lower position than the other attendants, and perform a particular offering in honor of those who died abroad (AFM, 2024).

In 2020, villagers from Bagrash-Bigra and Orlovo (Malaya Purga district, UR), at the initiative of a village activist, former civil engineer and now sacrificial priest Vladimir Fedoseyevich Botnikov, held a livestock sacrifice dedicated to the people who fell during the Second World War, including those who died abroad.[5] The idea of having a commemorative ritual honoring villagers, according to Vladimir Fedoseyevich, was born long ago:

> Indeed many of them did not even have time to found a family. Who will remember them if we don't? It is our duty. Some left families, wives and children. But even fewer of those are still alive (Kornilov, 2021, p. 71).

The idea corresponded to the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Second World War:

> An odd number of years must pass (see note below), 7 or 5, and the figures corresponded. So we decided to commemorate all our deceased frontline soldiers this year. We visited all the families where kin left for the frontline and did not

[5] A more precise description has been published in Kornilov (2021, pp. 69–80).

come back. We discovered that 8 people in two villages remained who did not yet commemorate their dead this way (ibid.).

In order to hold the ritual in the village, a collection of donations was organized, for which a special box was installed in the local shop. The time of the ceremony coincided with COVID-19 restrictions. However, the formerly given promise did not give the villagers any peace. According to beliefs, the non-fulfilment of a promise entails the wrath of the dead, which may be expressed through disease, the death of livestock and failure in one's business. Therefore, as soon as relatively favorable conditions appeared, they decided to hold the ritual, joining the spring–summer *vös'* ritual, dedicated to the end of the sowing campaign and wishes for good harvest (which could not take place because of the quarantine) with the *yyr-pyd seton* commemorative ritual (lit. the giving of the head and feet [of an animal]). Although this choice did not fully correspond to tradition, there was the obligation to fulfill the promise independently of circumstances. They decided for September 12th. They decided to choose *Bignyuk* as a place, where formerly, according to Vladimir Fedoseyevich, they organised the *cheka vös'* village commemorative ritual, dedicated to all the dead (ibid.).

The offerings allowed the villagers to buy a ram for the *vös'* sacrificial ceremony and a young bull for the *yyr-pyd seton* commemorative sacrifice. The ram was slaughtered on the spot, and the bull in the village. The ram's meat and the head and feet of the bull were boiled in different cauldrons. The sacrificial foods for the *vös'* ceremony were consecrated separately. Together with the traditional scraps, called *chuk*, elder women fixed St George's ribbons to the tree.[6] For comfort, screws were screwed in the trunk of the tree, so that the symbolic offerings could be easily affixed (ibid., 72).

According to fieldwork carried out in 2014, the Udmurts from Malaya Purga district (UR) commemorated this category of dead with the *sirota kis'ton* (lit. commemorations for the orphans) or, under another name, *kyre-bure byrem"eslen kis'tonzy* (lit. commemorations for the people who died abroad), and parents' Saturdays (*roditel'skaya subbota*) on a Saturday before Trinity (*Trochin', Trosin'*). On that day it was customary to walk as much as possible through all the cemeteries where kin are buried. Some were able to visit in one day five or six cemeteries, and those who did not manage visited the remainder on the next day. In Gozhnya, Nizhnie Yuri, Srednie Yuri, Novaya Mon'ya on that day, they commemorated those who died abroad, orphans, those who disappeared without any

[6] St George's ribbons are a symbol used in Russia to honour the memory of fallen soldiers and military traditions. The ribbon is black and orange with three black and two orange stripes. This design is connected with Saint George the Victorious, who is considered the protector of soldiers.

news, those who died on the road, those who had no more living kin to commemorate them, and even in some cases those who committed suicide. As Tatiana Vladykina and Galina Glukhova observe, on that day they commemorate "those who have no more kin, who remained 'orphans' in 'that world'" (Vladykina & Glukhova, 2011, p. 121). In the morning they prepared food that would later be used for commemorative offerings and for the ritual banquet.

In Srednie Yuri, they commented that for these dead, the food offerings are made in front of the cemetery gate, from the outside, as they are buried outside their home cemetery. They address their dead with requests not to be angry and to join the festivities:

> *Vozh"yas'kysa en kyle, muket"esynyz tshosh ti no sie-yue, tshosh, ogin'yn* (Don't remain envying us: with the others come you too, to eat and drink, together, as a group).

Some commemorations took place by the monument to the victims of the Second World War. Here they announced that one of the elder women in the village performed an improvised grieving song addressing those who died during the Second World War far from their village: "*kyrdzh'asa burmeste val*" (she commemorated with a song) (AFM, 2024). In Nizhnie Yuri in 2024 in honor of the inauguration of a commemorative plaque for war children, participants and victims of the Second World War, the village elder Yakov Paramonovich Petrov, assisted by active women from the village, organized a porridge, and invited a sacrificial priest from Malaya Purga. According to Raisa Nikolayevna Troynikova, she used the following words to address the dead during *sirota kis'ton*:

> *Dzh'ech ule soyaz dunneyn. Ti koshkemyn ini, mi beryktyny um bygatis'ke ni. Milemyz dzh'ech voze tayaz dunneyn* (Live well in that world. You have already left [us], we may not bring [you] back. Protect us well in that world) (AFM, 2024).

Moreover, as the Orthodox Church has considerable influence in that district, the Udmurt from Malaya Purga traditionally use Orthodox prayers both in Udmurt and in Russian to address the dead. In Gozhnya, people commented that when they commemorated those who died abroad, they always added a commemorative prayer at the end, so that they would not remain without attention and would not get offended (AFM, 2024). A female respondent from Novaya Mon'ya declared that she addresses the dead with the following words:

> *In'mare, Kuaze, Kylchine! Ali kulem"esly, kyre-bure kulem"esly (soosles' nim"esses veralo)... Ti ponna vösyas'kis'kom, sopal dunneyady dzh'ech ulondy med luoz. Kyre-bure*

> *kulem, sirota nylpios, kin' ti ponna ug vösyas'ky, mi ti ponna vösyas'kis'kom. Miles'-tym verammes ti med kylody. Azyady med usez, dzh'ech med ulody. Kylem"esse sem'yaosyz dzh'ech voze* (My In'mar, my Kuaz', my Kylchin'! Recently deceased, deceased abroad [listing their names]… We pray for you, so that your life in that would be good. Those who died abroad, orphan children, with no one to pray for you, we pray for you. Please listen to our words. [Our offerings] let them stay in front of you [lit. let them fall in front of you], live well. Protect your family well, whom you have left [in this world]) (AFM, 2024: Tamara Petrovna Nikolayeva).

According to the eldest women in the village, the commemorative prayer must always start with the words *"Cheke, peres'esy!"* (We call out, ancestors!) (AFM, 2024: Avgusta Ivanovna Yegorova; Valentina Semyonovna Andreyeva).

In Sep (Igra district, UR) (Northern Udmurt tradition) a female informant declared that she commemorates her father, who fell in the Second World War, on Saint Elijah's day, although she did not elaborate (AFM, 2013).

The commemorative rituals considered here demonstrate significant transformations that reflect historical, social, and external factors. In the *chekan* ritual, for instance, the replacement of the horse (used until the mid-twentieth century) with a bull illustrates adaptation to economic realities: the horse as a prestigious sacrificial animal gave way to more accessible livestock, while retaining its mytho-ritual symbolism. The collective dimension has also shifted from community-wide ceremonies (including those who had migrated) to more selective participation, where gender roles are integrated (women as singers) but youth are excluded for reasons of ritual purity. In the *kuyas'kon kyre byrem"esly* ritual, the original focus on ancestors from the previous homeland (linked to resettlement from Malaya Bod'ya) expanded in the twentieth century to encompass those lost in wars and abroad, reflecting the migration histories and traumatic experiences of the century. Sacrifices were simplified from a calf or bull to a chicken, with porridge offerings becoming optional, highlighting a pragmatic preservation of the ritual's essence — libations to maintain connection with the dead.

Contemporary adaptations reveal even more explicit responses to external events. In 2020, for example, in the villages of Bagrash-Bigra and Orlovo, the *yyr-pyd seton* ritual for the victims of the Second World War was combined with prayers to the *vös'* deities due to COVID-19 restrictions. Although non-traditional, this combination was performed to avoid angering the deceased. The collection of donations and the use of screws to fasten ribbons and St. George symbols reflect a hybridization of traditional rit-

ual with Soviet and Russian memorial culture, transforming the practice into both a strategy of coping with the pandemic and a commemoration of anniversaries such as the 75th Victory Day. This corresponds to Turner's (1969) concept of liminality, where crises (war, quarantine) reactivate rituals as spaces of transformation, balancing tradition and innovation. In the *sirota kis'ton* ritual, the post-Soviet period has seen a marked increase in Orthodox influence: traditional prayers have merged invocations of pagan deities with Christian motifs, beginning with direct appeals to the souls of the dead. Songs at the Second World War memorials and the organization of commemorative meals with priests (e.g. in Nizhnie Yuri, 2024) illustrate the shift toward public rituals that integrate historical memory and counteract the forgetting of orphaned souls.

Taken together, these changes highlight several key tendencies: individualization (personalized appeals to the dead), simplification of sacrifice (from livestock to food, such as from a bull to a chicken with optional porridge), and the resilience of traditions through adaptation to urbanization and global crises. In the northern Udmurt tradition (e.g. in the village of Sep), commemorations on Elijah's Day have survived only fragmentarily, pointing to regional variability and the weakening of practices under the influence of secularization.

Conclusion

In the practices of commemorating people who died abroad, as represented in this article, we tackle deep existential and cultural questions connected with loss and memory. When Udmurts face the demise of their close kin far from their home village, they do not only feel grief; they also attempt to restore the lost connection with the dead through particular rituals. This emphasizes the existential significance of death and its perception as anomalous in cultural practice.

Rituals of worship become key elements that allow the Udmurt to retain their cultural identity. The organization of places and times for commemoration allows the community to strengthen social cohesion, thus shaping collective awareness based on respect for the memory of the dead.

We must particularly follow the adaptation of traditional practices to today's changing conditions. Field research reveals that the Udmurt actively transform commemorative rituals, which is a testimony to the dynamism of cultural practice. Still, in spite of change, the desire to preserve cultural roots and traditions remains.

We must also observe that the memories of conflict victims and of those who went to war remain an important dimension of ethnic awareness. Memorial rituals help to maintain the names and the stories of these people, emphasizing their significance for the general cultural memory of the community.

Thus, the practice of commemorating the dead not only preserves individual remembrance, but also contributes to strengthening Udmurt communities. In this context, memory culture is a key element in allowing cultural identity and support for the community to be kept alive, and to create an atmosphere of solidarity and sharing of loss. Investigating these practices opens new perspectives, reflecting the interaction between the individual and the collective dimensions of the worship of the dead in Udmurt culture.

The ethnographic cases analyzed here demonstrate how Udmurt practices of commemorating those who died abroad transform liminality into continuity. They not only address anomalous death but also ensure cultural cohesion and resilience. In this sense, they can be fruitfully compared to what Pierre Nora (1989) has called *lieux de mémoire* — "sites of memory" — which embody the intersection of individual grief, collective remembrance, and cultural symbolism.

The Udmurt examples also resonate with broader anthropological discussions of memory and death. Paul Connerton (1989) and Jan Assmann (2011) emphasise that ritualized commemoration serves to anchor collective identity across generations, while contemporary grief studies (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996) highlight the role of dreams and "continuing bonds" in sustaining connections with the deceased. Seen from this perspective, the Udmurt case is not only a contribution to Finno-Ugric ethnography but also to the global anthropology of ritual, memory, and vernacular religion.

Field research reveals that the Udmurt actively transform commemorative rituals, which is a testimony to the dynamism of cultural practice. The transformations observed — from symbolic burials of soldiers in the 20th century to rituals adapted during COVID-19 —reveal how ritual systems respond to crises and uncertainty. As Robben (2004) has shown, situations of death and mourning often generate ritual innovations that redefine community boundaries and strengthen resilience. Han (2021) similarly demonstrates how the memory of war and displacement is transmitted across generations, producing new forms of ritualized remembrance. In the case of the Udmurts, such dynamics vividly illustrate processes of cultural transformation (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), where ritual creativity ensures the continuity of identity under changing socio-political condi-

tions. This approach allows us to understand why the study of such practices remains vital for anthropological theory.

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Povzetek

Prispevek raziskuje udmurtske obrede in običaje, povezane z ljudmi, ki so umrli daleč od doma ali so bili pokopani v tujini. Poudarja pomen spominjanja mrtvih v udmurtski kulturi, kjer smrt v tujini velja za nenormalen dogodek, ki pretrga vezi med mrtvim in njegovo domovino. V takih primerih imajo Udmurti posebne obrede, vključno z obrednim pokopom, spominskimi obredi in žrtvovanji, s katerimi skušajo te vezi spet vzpostaviti. Članek analizira različne vidike spominskih praks, kot so postavitev spominskih nagrobnikov (simboličnih grobov), uporaba posebnih spominskih krajev za tiste, ki so umrli daleč od doma, organizacija obredov na različnih obrednih krajih in ob različnih dnevih v ljudskem koledarju, pa tudi nagovori mrtvim v teh časih. Prikaže, kako ti obredi odražajo globoko skrb za mrtve in prizadevanje, da bi njihovim dušam zagotovili miren prehod v svet prednikov. Posebna pozornost je namenjena tistim, ki so umrli v vojni ali izginili, in temu, kako ritualne prakse omogočajo, da ti ljudje ostanejo v spominu in kolektivnem zavedanju skupnosti. Glavnina gradiva za članek je bila zbrana med terenskim delom v letih 2013, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2023 in 2024 v južnih okrožjih Republike Udmurtije ter v sosednjih regijah (republikah Tatarstan in Baškortostan), kjer živijo udmurtske skupnosti. Na podlagi teh podatkov članek analizira kulturno preobrazbo ritualov in njihovo sodobno stanje, pri čemer poudarja spremembe, na katere so vplivali zgodovinski dogodki, kot so svetovne vojne, ter vpliv pravoslavnih tradicij. Članek želi v akademski diskurz vpeljati novo gradivo in služi predvsem kot opis kulturnih procesov, povezanih s to temo. Ponuja svež pogled na premalo raziskan vidik udmurtskega kulta prednikov ter razkriva ključno vlogo teh ritualov pri ohranjanju kulturne in duhovne identitete udmurtskega ljudstva v spreminjajočem se svetu.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: simbolni pogreb, spomin na umrle v tujini, kult prednikov, Udmurt

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