

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN THE UDMURT *KURIS'KON* PRAYERS

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Abstract: In Udmurt prayers, the texts have been slow to change in the last century. Although data are not complete, and we have only fractions of data about their evolution after the Revolution and during Soviet times, we know enough to understand that changes were introduced scarcely. In the last decades, especially in the two last decades, many changes have been introduced and the rhythm is increasing. This is the question this paper endeavours to explore, on the basis of a corpus gathered in Bashkortostan, region where the Udmurt ethnic religious practice is still very much alive and even thriving in the second decade of the 21st century.

Keywords: Udmurt prayers, stability, change, war, Udmurtness

The question of sacred texts and their status for Udmurt addresses to their deities has been tackled briefly in a previous article in this same journal (Toulouze, Vladykina 2023: 34–35), as has the more general context of their utterings. Let me now dwell on a particular question in detail and use fresh examples to illustrate this issue, i.e., the question of stability and change throughout history, at least as far as we have documents to rely upon.

Just as a reminder about the general context, in the areas encompassing the north-western districts of Bashkortostan and the Kuyeda district in Perm' kray, there is an Udmurt community (Toulouze, Anisimov 2021) characterised by the contemporary practice of their ancient agrarian cult, which in some villages has never been discontinued. This agrarian cult, thoroughly connected to the agricultural calendar, relies on the existence of sacrificial priests (Toulouze, Niglas 2017, 2021), who ask, with cattle blood sacrifices, for the propitiatory interference of the deities on behalf of the community. Who the addressees of this

cult are is a question that will be debated in another framework, that of the evolution of Udmurt religious thinking from polytheism towards monotheism, which deserves a particular approach. Here I wish to concentrate on the texts of the addresses and reflect on their level of sacredness and of untouchability.

There is very little literature about these texts. The most developed comments before the particular research of our team¹ come from the leading scholar in Udmurt religion, Vladimir Vladynkin (1994): unlike our study, which mainly analyses contemporary texts from one peripheral group, he relies only on texts collected in the 19th century, mainly in northern Udmurtia (Gavrilov 1880; Pervukhin 1888). Vladynkin concentrates on structure analysis (Vladynkin 1994: 106, 107, 297), and dedicates close attention to the artistic style of the texts (Vladynkin 1994: 107, 297–298). Moreover, he presents the Udmurt prayer from the semantic point of view as an illustration of the Udmurt's ideal world (Vladynkin 1994: 298–299, 310–211). One aspect, however, that differs from today's prayers, and which is emphasised by Vladynkin, is Udmurt loyalty to the state (Vladynkin 1994: 305, 306) is the Udmurt request for the ability to pay their taxes. Today this kind of requirement is not present, and there is no mention of the state in prayers. Except in what we shall present at the end of this article, in two prayers about the present war.

Very little has otherwise been written. Most of what we can read about prayers is in ethnomusicological texts. The only data we have from the Soviet period are texts collected by linguists at the beginning of the 1970s. They have been thoroughly commented on by ethnomusicologist Margarita Khrushcheva (2001), who focused on their musical performance as she had access not only to the texts but also to the recordings. But in general, the Soviet period both discouraged religious activities and research on this topic. It is thus, with these few exceptions, a blank period, in which religious practice was not discontinued and was even preserved in some villages, but with a half clandestine status so that generally the elder generations guaranteed transmission. However, this situation changed at the end of the 1980s, when local Udmurt leaders encouraged the revitalisation of their particular form of religious tradition and the collapse of the Soviet Union opened up the religious market.

Today, there are community rituals in almost all the villages, which have their own sacrificial priests (some quite youngish), their own sacred places and their own sacred texts. Here, we focus on this last aspect.

THE PLACE-CENTRED CHARACTER OF THE UDMURT 'RELIGION'

One of the characteristics of these addresses, as well as of folk creation in general, is its variability. Orality allows flexibility, as written culture does not. The Abrahamic religions that shape our religious landscape are all religions of the book. They all rely on sacred scriptures, which allow them to have a fixed dogma, encompassed by the book. This is the main gap between religions of the rite and religions of the book. It is not by happenstance that some Udmurt prayers very directly said “we have no book or Qu’ran” (Sadikov Toulouze 2023: 133). These are actually very recent texts (since 2019). However, the idea is also not so precisely defined in older texts (such as the Qu’ran), but with the reference to a book, using both Russian and Tatar words (*knigamy-kitapmy övöl*: “we have no book (RUS) nor book (TAT)” (Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 74)). This was in a text from 1926, collected in the Kuyeda district of Perm’ kray, so we may assert that this was part of a tradition. The other examples we find in our corpus² are in texts collected since 2013, in the Tatyshly district of Bashkortostan. But in almost all texts, both old and new, there is the idea, expressed by the sacrificial priest, that he is not sure of his text: “Either I say the end at the beginning, or the beginning and the end”. However, the deity (deities) knows what he intends to say, and they will forgive him. I give no precise reference for this sentence, because it is uttered towards the end of practically all the prayers.

So, these prayers are not fixed, as dogma is not fixed. This characteristic of Udmurt religious practice disturbs some of the more educated Udmurts. The influence of Abrahamic religions – here, both Christianity and, most of all, Islam – is perceived in an evolutionistic perspective: the book is a progress, the absence of book marks a primitive religion, not to be taken seriously. The next step should be to transform the Udmurt religion and to make it into “a proper religion”. This is what some prominent Udmurts declared to our research team in 2014, when they sought our support for this project. These were civil servants with high positions in the Tatyshly district administration, who were not particularly connected with the local religious practice but who were sufficiently informed of its features to desire to transform them. They were surprised to find that the scholars were less than appreciative of their endeavours and expressed a respect they did not feel themselves for Udmurt practice as it was. Clearly this project has so far remained a project (Toulouze, Vallikivi 2021).

It is also difficult to imagine how their idea could be implemented in a context in which each sacrificial priest relies on his local traditions: things are made, rules are followed as the ancestors, as the elder had them established, and they differ from place to place. The texts themselves are usually inherited from elder priests, as well as the rules for the ceremonies, both of which vary. Indeed, the transmission was disturbed by the Soviet ideological fight against religion, which was not enough to destroy the practice, but was able to disrupt its smooth functioning. Probably this flexibility was what allowed this practice to resist and to adapt.

The institution of the sacrificial priest is one of those points of stability which guaranteed the maintenance of the cult. The sacrificial priests relied on themselves to ensure the permanence of their task: they chose which priest would follow them and did not depend on any other institution. Some other parts of the cult were also both stable and flexible to make it through difficult times, such as sacred places, which could be moved and changed provided the proper ritual was followed (Sadikov, Toulouze 2024). What about the texts?

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN TEXTS

Here also, the Abrahamic religions are a model in that they have more or less fixed texts for their prayers – more or less, the less being for Protestants, who emphasise spontaneous communication with God, spontaneousness supposedly being a guarantee of sincerity. But even the Protestants rely on the Lord's Prayer, the text of which is fixed.

Probably this understanding, which is dominant around us, explains the feeling of many sacrificial priests that the texts they have received from elder priests are sacred and untouchable. I have often mentioned how in June 2015, during a break in a ceremony, a sacrificial priest, Evgeniy Adullin, asked my opinion: were they allowed to update the text of the prayer with the concerns of today? (Toulouze, Vladykina 2023: 34).

When reflecting on this question and looking for answers in past practice, I cannot omit to note that changes have indeed occurred. Only we have no explicit information about them, and we ignore when they took place and how quickly after the events that triggered them. This ignorance is due to the gap that the Soviet period caused both in research and practice. As nobody investigated the religious field between 1926 and 1980, we have no fieldwork information at all about religious practice, and very few texts on which to rely. So we may identify big

changes connected with societal transformations, but we do not know at what moment exactly they were introduced.

FROM TSARIST TO SOVIET RUSSIA

Some wishes in older prayers are so characteristic that we do not expect them after the Revolution changed the power relations of the whole country. Two words characterise this period: let us see the occurrences of the word for Tsar in Udmurt, *eksej*, and the word *kazna*, meaning state financing. They reveal interesting phenomena.

In general, tsar is mentioned in connection with taxes. The Udmurt ask for help to be able to pay their taxes. Only in one case is military service “to the tsar” mentioned (Pervukhin 1888: 36). The oldest mention³ of the tsar we have in our documentation is from Munkácsy, who recorded it in Mozhga village (Ufa governorate, Birsk Uyezd), now in Yanaul district.

Будэин эксейлы выт тырыны дьэрдэм сёт!	To pay tribute to the Great Tsar, give [us] yourself help!
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 17 (recorded in 1885; published in 1887))

The second mention is very similar to the first: it was recorded by Munkácsy, but now much later, in Esztergom, where he interrogated war prisoners, among whom some were Udmurts.

Будэын эксейёслы быт тырон дыръя ачид зэрдэм сёт, Иммере, Кылчинэ!	At the time of paying tribute to the Great tsar, give [us] help yourself my Inmar Kylchin!
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 137 (1916))

Texts recorded by Munkácsy are interesting as his informants were ordinary peasants, not sacrificial priests, and they prayed in their yard every Friday. Thus, his samples are not exceptional, although they are exceptionally precious because the practice of praying on Fridays in every household is one soon condemned to disappear. And as in the Soviet period fieldwork and research on religion were not welcome, the practice just disappeared at some time, but we ignore the details.

Only in one text, published in 1888, is the tsar mentioned by name:

Дзэчь Государьлы Александръ Александровичълы казна тырымонъ меда сетозъ,	To our good Tsar Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, let him give what we must pay to the state.
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(Pervukhin 1888: 23)

In the late decades of the Soviet period, three Udmurt linguists, Mikhail Atamanov, Valey Kel'makov and Rif Nasibuliin, collected dialect samples. Among these, there were prayers. All of which worked at the beginning of the 1970s.

These are the mentions of the tsar in the samples collected by them, despite the fact that for half a century there hadn't been a tsar in Russia. Yet in these prayers the tsar is ever present: let the praying person's children be good children to the tsar.

Та вордэм нылпи шудбуро луыса, эксейлы зеч нылпи мед луозы, элез мед зеч утыны быгатозы.	So that these children being healthy and happy, would be good children to the tsar and would be able to well defend the country.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 32 (1971)), text recorded by Mikhail Atamanov, Prayer for Bydzh'ynnal, Kalmiary, Kuyeda district.

Badž'im eksejmi kunil gu tjrimon berekette šotša ulšaled ke, muso kılč'ine, täni.	Бадзым эксеймы[лы] куныл гу тырымон берекетдэ сётыса улысалэд ке, Мусо Кылчинэ, тэни.	To fill the armpit of our great tsar, would you give us your wealth, my dear Kylchin, there!
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 80 (1970)), text recorded by Rif Nasibullin.

Бүдзин эксэйёсмылэсь кусказы татулыкёссэ тон ачид возматыса улысалэд ке, Ёумня сяськае, ёугыт Иммаре-Кылчинэ, тэни.	Would you [live] showing yourself harmony among our great tsars, my flower from Yum'ya, my bright Inmar Kylchin, there.
Бүдзин mentionэй ки улын кызмэт карысь, ветлійсь нылпиосмылэсь синазь сайкытлык, пыдазь всякылык, зыр сазылыкзоссэс тон ачид сётыса улысалэд ке, Ёумня сяськае, ёугыт Иммаре-Кылчинэ, тэни.	Would you [live] giving yourself to our children, who serve and walk under the hand of the great tsar clearness in front of their eyes, clear awareness, smoothness in front of their feet, my flower from Yum'ya, my bright Inmar Kylchin, there.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 46 (1971)), Valey Kel'makov, Prayer for Bydzh'innal in the Kula.

In all three cases the tsar is mentioned in a more abstract way than in the cases before, when the connection was with the taxes paid to the state, personified by the emperor. Her the tsar is the abstract person of an absent father, or of a mythical character whose armpit is supposed

to hide lots and lots of wealth, a representative of all power. I should mention in addition the interesting fact of the plural in the first of the last examples, which refers in general to the leaders of all nations.

So let me notice that while in all other prayers of our corpus, collected in the 1990s, mention of the tsar has disappeared, in the earliest records it is still present, and even after fifty years of Soviet power. This reveals how slow adaptation can be.

The last mentions in our corpus come later, in the second decade of the 21st century. The second appears in a prayer, which has been uttered by priest Anatoli Galikhanov at his village's ceremony, in Altayevo, Burayevo district. The priest has clearly been inspired by the first, which is in the text of a prayer for the Elen vös' ceremony. Here both the first and the second fragment are represented. This ceremony had died out presumably in the 1920s and had been revitalised in 2008 (Sadikov 2010). This was, and is still, the ceremony for all the Eastern Udmurt, where representatives of all the districts gather. This particular prayer was uttered in 1993, and the text transmitted to Ranus Sadikov by an elder lady, who had it from Sharifgali Yalalov, both sacrificial priest and local historian. Ranus Sadikov was able to photograph the original text in 2018, but it had been transmitted much earlier. The prayer for Elen vös' is divided into different sections, with different addressees: the first is to Mother Son (sacrifice a goose), the second to the great tsar (also a goose), the third to the universal god (a horse the colour of butter), the fourth to the angel of the clan (a red cow), the fifth to the angel of the livestock (a white ewe) and the sixth to the angel of the earth (a black ewe) (Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 137–138).

In Galikhanov's own prayers, which are abundantly represented in our corpus, the word tsar does not appear. However, he relied on these texts, which had been transmitted to him by his predecessors at the beginning of his function as sacrificial priest. This explains why we find here long disappeared notions, although clearly the origin of the texts is quite old.

Бытын кун эксэйёс мед сётозы ёеч, эркын, каньыл, тупаса улон калыкелы.	Let all the tsars of the country give welfare, freedom, lightness, peace to my people.
Милям эксеймы тынад косэмедъя, эрикедъя мед лэсьтоз вал музъем вылын но инмын кадь ик эрык.	Our tsar, by your order, will make your freedom on all the earth, as well as in the heavens.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 137 (2018))

The revolution ended the tsar's power. There followed long years of Soviet power, characterised – among other things – by deep changes in the organisation of agricultural work.

THE TIME OF THE KOLKHOZ

How deep a trace did the Soviet period leave on the texts of the prayers? I tried to follow up by looking for the word kolkhoz in different texts.

Actually, we find a very small number of mentions, altogether three, of kolkhozes within the texts of *kuris'kon*.

Милям колхозмылы узырмыны ⁴ ,	[Give] that our kolkhoz becomes rich ⁴ ,
Милям төромылы, Робертлы,	To our leader, Robert,
Вань ужасьёслы	To all the workers,
Тазалык сёт, Инмапе!	Give health, my Inmar!

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 85), Asavka, first published in 1992.

Таза мед луозы озьы ик колхоз пудоёсмы но.	Let also our livestock from the kolkhoz be healthy.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 92, 68), Bol'shetuganeyevo Published in 2006 & 2011.

Колхозник понна ми люкасыкыса, со жечъёсыз малпаса, куриськиськом	Gathering, with good thoughts, we pray for the kolkhoz workers.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 52), Vil'gurt, published in 2005.

Clearly the kolkhoz is mentioned as an everyday notion. What is curious, is that at the time when the first mention appears, the kolkhozes are already a phenomenon of the past. But of course, in the texts we have from the Soviet period – exactly three from the 1970s – no mention of the dominant structure is made (but the sample is very limited indeed), while when some mentions are done, the kolkhozes no longer officially exist. But as my fieldwork experience since 2013 reveals, the habits did not disappear, and still today people call the successor enterprises, the cooperatives, kolkhozes informally. So, we see here a significant chronological shift: actually, not only are the prayers slow to change, but also the ordinary language used by the people, which is a phenomenon noticed in different countries.

AND TODAY, WHAT NEW CHANGES ARE REQUIRED?

The last thirty years have brought many changes in the people's lives. And the question of maintaining the texts as they are or changing them has been a concern for the sacrificial priests, as I mentioned in the in-

troduction. Indeed, while many priests reflected and did not dare, one of them directly took the initiative himself. Altayevo's priest, Anatoliy Galikhanov, started like all other priests by reading texts and learning them by heart (AFW, Altayevo, June 2016). This allowed him to learn the language and he started creating new prayers and developing the previous ones. Galikhanov is also a poet, and he exploited these talents in the creation of new prayers. As he is the head of the sacrificial priest's association and is the sacrificial priest of one of the villages that host Elen vös⁴, his prayers are uttered every year in front of all the other sacrificial priests, which encouraged many of them to bring on needed changes, and even to rely on Galikhanov's texts to copy the changes they wished to introduce, under the authority of an elder.

This is the reason why in 2019, one group of Tatyshly sacrificial priests met and decided to change their common text. Let us have a look at the innovations they have made. Some of them are merely stylistic, and here I leave them unattended. Others, on the contrary, are most significant, and illustrate the changes in the people's lives. Let us have a look at the new prayer with the most significant changes (Sadikov Toulouze 2023: 130–133).

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES

Бусыысь итыме ворттон дыръя, пар машинаосын ворттымон берекетьёстэ сётыса мын вал.	When the time comes to transport the harvest to the threshing floor, please give your wealth of (having) a couple of cars.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

CHANGES IN WISHES

There are two main categories of wish: positive and negative – give and protect.

In the positive register a few innovations: the demands for happiness, health, wealth, good weather are the backbone of the *kuris'kon*. But in general what is requested has not changed in this category.

Among the new wishes for the animals, one had been forgotten before:

Тулыс одйген поттыса, сйзбыл доре пыртыку кыкен-куинен доре пыртымон берекетъёстэ сётыса мын вал.	Going alone in spring, when entering home in autumn, please give us the abundance of having them by two or three going back.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 131)

So that livestock would come back from time outdoors pregnant in order to ensure the reproduction.

However, plagues have developed: requests for protection against diseases and insects are traditional. Now the list has increased: in addition to ordinary diseases, there are evil diseases, and here clearly these changes that preceded COVID were most welcome, when COVID came. A serious concern is drug addiction. This problem did not exist before, but now, at school, the children face this problem regularly.

Чер-чуръёслэсь, нымы-кибыюслэсь, алама висёнъёслэсь, наркоманилэсь ачид сакласа мын вал	From illnesses and diseases, maggots and worms, evil illnesses, drug addiction go on yourself protecting [us].
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 130)

Some requests in this spirit are also more poetically expressed:

Гуртъёсы пырись через-чурез, тузонэз сяин, лысвуэз сяин, кыдёке, нюлэс съёры пазыгыса лэзь.	Throw away the illnesses and diseases that enter the villages, like dust, like dew, disintegrate them far away, behind the forest.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

Another plague against which protection is sought is innocent people being put in jail. This is a very common experience, especially for young people going to work in big towns, where they are framed for example for drug selling without protection or family to help them. Corruption infects both Russian justice and jails, so the request in prayers is justified.

But there are more requests for protection.

Сюрес вылын мынон-ветлон дыръя, бэлэ-казалэсь, алама сюреслэсь но авариюслэсь утыса мын вал, мусо Инмаре-Кылчинэ.	When it is time to go on the road, please protect us from troubles and grief, from evil roads, from accidents, my dear Inmar Kylchin.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 131)

Roads are typically bad in the Russia countryside, and accidents happen often. So this has been added.

Protection is also required against war. Probably in 2019 the sacrificial priests started to be afraid of warfare and they express this not abundantly, but clearly.

Шаермес тйрен-пуртэн, пычал тйрлыкэн ожмаськонлэсь уть.	Protect our country from war with an axe and a knife, from fire weapons.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

Protection is also required against other kinds of enemy, but this is nothing new: protection against both evil spirits and evil people, and against witchcraft, which is still today a structuring element in Udmurt village life:

«Сиё-юо» шуисьёслэсь азвесь кенерен котыртыса утыса ул, Инмаре-Кылчинэ.	Protect us from those who say “I’ll eat you”, “I’ll drink you” encircling us with a silver fence, my Inmar Kylchin.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

The request itself is not new, but it is beautifully phrased in this sentence. What is canonical, is the expression “I’ll eat you”, “I’ll drink you”, “I’ll take you”. But the development is reminiscent of Anatoliy Galikhanov’s poetry.

ABOUT CHILDREN

Other parts are entirely new, for example parts concerning the behaviour of children. In other, older, texts, the word children is used differently: the sacrificial priests asked for protection for the children (while usually the term ‘children’ is used for the people themselves, presented as the god’s children):

Ти - но, Инмарэ, Кылдысинэ, Квазьэ, энь аналтэ пинальес-мэ, энь кушты соосты!	You, Inmar, Kyldysin, Kuaz’, do not reject our children, do not abandon them!
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(Pervukhin 1888: 37)

Later, the sacrificial priests wished for the house to be full of children.

Корка тыр ныл пийэн, гид тыр пудо-животэн	With the house full of children, the stables full of livestock,
Улымон бур шуттэ ачит с'от вал тән'и	Please give us yourself the good happiness to live, there,

(Nanyady 1970; Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 75)

Now, the same wish is expressed:

Нылпиосмы корка тыр мед луозы, соослы шуддэ-бурдэ, азинлыктэ, тазалыктэ, сабырлыктэ, байлыктэ, визьдэ сётыса мын.	Let our house be full of children, please [go] giving them, giving them your happiness, your success, your health, your calm, your richness and your intelligence.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

However, in the new prayer, the wishes continue:

Нылпиосмы мед кылзиськозы анай-атайёссылэсь, дано мед карозы пересёсыз, мед утёзы удмуртлыкмес.	Let our children listen to their mother and father, let them respect the elder, let them protect our Udmurtness.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

The wish for obedience from children is a new one, and probably dictated by the reality of life. The Udmurt family has been traditionally united and until the last decades no generation gap was to be felt. However, in last years, the children have not always been keen to pursue the way of life led by their elders and aspire to live in towns or simply look in other places for work. The conflicts within the families have become a concern, and parents do not know how to solve these quarrels. Undoubtedly the gap has even been deepened in the last two years.

Another interesting demand is the following:

Ноку медаз адже соос ултйямеэ, бадзым Инмаре-Кылчинэ.	Let them never see humiliation, my great Inmar Kylchin.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

Here is expressed the old experience of a minority people: the humiliation which the Udmurt very much wish to avoid for their children. Humiliation because of their nationality, because of their language, because of their accent – children have had this experience at school for decades. It was the case certainly also in previous times, but society as a whole except under the guise of the Udmurt community was absent in older prayers. Now, very discreetly, Galikhanov has brought it into

the kuris'kon, and does not hesitate to remind people that the Udmurt are an oppressed community!

UDMURTNES

This is a very important theme in the innovations introduced in 2019 in Tatyshly district, indeed, before the ethnic aspect was totally ignored in Udmurt prayers. One may assume that the reason is that earlier there was no need. All the attendants were Udmurts, and the mere fact of their attendance revealed that Udmurtness was fit and healthy. But in the last decades, Udmurtness is not to be taken for granted. In recent years parents have ceased to speak their language to their children, even in this region. Often, going to live in town means de facto Rus-sification. So today, Udmurt sacrificial priests feel the need to ask the deities to support them also in this field.

Firstly, at the beginning of the prayer, when announcing that the people have gathered, now they give details: “your Udmurt people”.

Тани вань удмурт калыкеныд огкылсинмысь луыса,	There, with all your Udmurt peo- ple being unanimous,
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 130)

So, not only the village people, but also explicitly Udmurts, presented as a people (*kalyk*, in Udmurt) and this is repeated throughout the prayer:

Тани вань удмурт калыкеныд огкылсинмысь луыса, одйг анайлэн- атайлэн нылъёсыз-пиосыз кадь луыса, тынад азяд шыдэн-нянен йыбырттйсько.	There with all your Udmurt peo- ple, being unanimous, being like daughters and sons of one mother and one father, I bend in front of you with soup and bread.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

And then, later, towards the end, the request for welfare is definitely directed towards the Udmurt, which was not formerly specified.

Вань удмурт калыклы жечлыктэ, ваньбурдэ сёт, шудо улондэ вай, Инмаре-Кылчинэ.	Give all the Udmurt people your welfare and your wealth, your happy life, my Inmar Kylchin.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

An important and surprising sentence asks for good reputation so that the “glory” of the Udmurt would be spread all around the world. Indeed, the Udmurt are considered a “small” people, and they are not talked of in the world. But now the Udmurt request that they be known, and in the positive way.

Дунне вылэ удмуртъёслэн ёеч данзы мед вӧлмоз.	Let the glory of the Udmurt spread in the world.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 132)

This is clearly one of Galikhanov's innovations. We find this sentence in his texts uttered by him already in 2009, in a local ceremony:

Удмурт калыкед инмын жуась кизилюос мында мед луоз.	Let the Udmurt people become as many as the stars that twinkle in the sky.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 62)

Later, in the autumn ceremony 2022, he makes a development, with a small change in formulation, by wishing for the multiplication of the Udmurt:

Удмурт калыкед инмын жуась кизилюос мында мед луоз.	Let the Udmurt people become as many as the stars that twinkle in the sky.
Дунне вылэ данзы гинэ мед вӧлмоз.	Let only their good reputation spread in the world.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 39)

Or, the same year, in a text for his village ceremony shared in the social media platform V Kontakte:

Удмурт калыкед инмын жуась кизилюос мында мед луоз.	Let the Udmurt people become as many as the stars that twinkle in the sky.
Дунне вылэ данзы гинэ мед вӧлмоз.	Let only their glory spread in the world.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 105)

While sacrificial priests were able to discover this sentence in Elen vös' from 2013:

Дунне вылэ удмурт калыклэн даныз гинэ мед тэ вӧлмоз,	Let in the world only glory spread about the Udmurt people,
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 140, 141)

And the main wish was for the community itself, and its children:

Нылпиосмы мед кылзиськозы анай-атайёссылэсь, дано мед карозы пересьёсыз, мед утёзы удмуртлыкмес.	Let out children listen to their mother and father, let them respect the elder, let them protect our Udmurtness.
Ноку медаз адёе соос ултйямеэ, бадёым Инмаре-Кылчинэ.	Let them never see humiliation, my great Inmar Kylchin.
Удмурт калык медаз ышты сюлемо лякыт сямзэ.	Let the Udmurt people never loose it sweet modest customs
Медаз чигы солэн чиданэз.	Let its patience never end.
Губырмем тыбырзэ шонертыны мед быгатоз.	Let it be able to straighten its back.
Жадёнэз тодытэк, шумпотыса мед ужалоз, кутскем удыссэ пумозяз мед вуттоз вал, Инмаре-Кылчинэ.	Ignoring fatigue, let it work in joy, let it bring to end what it started, my Inmar Kylchin.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023:132)

This is also a development loaned from a Galikhanov's prayer in 2018, which is in our corpus without having been published anywhere. The only differences are adjectives both defining the Udmurt customs (quiet and modest vs sweet and modest) and the conclusion about work: in one prayer insisting on achieving work started, in Galkhanov's text, that the usefulness of their work is perceived.

<u>Ноку но медаз адёе соос ултйямеэ, Бадёым Инмаре, тани!</u>	Let them never see humiliation, my great Inmar, there!
<u>Удмурт калык медаз ышты шыпыт, лякыт сямзэ.</u>	Let the Udmurt people never lose their quiet, modest character.
<u>Медаз чигы солэн чиданэз.</u>	Let their patience never break.
<u>Жадёнэз тодытэк, шумпотыса мед ужалоз, ужезлэсь файдазэ мед адёоз.</u>	Ignoring fatigue, let them work in joy, let them see the usefulness of their work.

(From A. Galikhanov's prayer notebook, collected by R. Sadikov, 2018)

So, we see here, how the head sacrificial priest has influenced all of his colleagues and has been convincing in all his innovations.

This version of the general prayer was supposed to last long. But things changed in Russia in 2023.

CHANGES INDUCED BY THE WAR

Indeed, war and peace have been important topics in Russia since WWII. It was a central item in the Soviet Union's propaganda, following its population trauma. The Soviet Union asserted a solid demonstrative pacifist stand, both in external and internal politics. Indeed, this declarative standpoint was contradicted by a militaristic spirit widespread in practice. There has been in the population, both in the Soviet Union and subsequent Russia, a generalised fear of war, which certainly explains the taboo on the word at the beginning of the Ukrainian war.

This generalised fear is also reflected in Udmurt prayers, where one of the requests has long been to avoid conflict and armed quarrels. Depending on the prayer, the wish concerns the whole world or their region:

Дунне вылэ лек вакытъёс, амала югдуръёс, ож тйрлыкен жугиськонъёс кутскемен-пурземан куриськом ми Тонэ,	We do pray to You, with in the world the start of increasingly bad times, bad situations, warfare with weapons,
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 38)

Most examples, all of them by Galikhanov, concern the region where the Udmurt live. We have an example in a 2009 prayer by Galikhanov:

Ноку но медаз лу ми палан музьемлы талашонъёс, ож тйрлыкен жугиськонъёс.	Let there never be conflict for land in our region, warfare with weap- ons.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 62)

In yet another formulation:

Шаермес тйрен-пуртэн, пычал тйрлыкен ожмаськонлэсь уть.	Protect our country from warfare with weapons and knives, with fire weapons.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 60)

THE GENERAL PRAYER

With the war in Ukraine, with mobilisation, with news of casualties and dead bodies being sent back, which is becoming a very ordinary experience for many families, the slightly formal wish inserted in previously used prayers became terrifyingly topical.

A typical development is that special prayers have been composed for soldiers, the example we have being from Nizhnebaltachevo in 2022, at the time of the October 28th mobilisation. The sacrificial priest Evgeniy Adullin called it “Prayer dedicated to soldiers”. In this prayer the general request is reduced to the very minimum.

Аслад яратыса сётэм-вордэм бэндэосыдлы шуддэ-бурдэ, кузь гумырьёстэ, тазалыктэ но визьдэ сётыса мын вал, соосыз ачид утыыса ул вал, Мусо Инмаре Кылчинэ, тани.	To your creatures you have your- self given and bred with love please [go] giving them your happiness and welfare, your long century, your health and your intelligence, please [live] protecting them, my dear Inmar Kylchin.
--	--

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 155–156)

All the other parts of the prayer are dedicated to the soldiers.

The introduction does not change from ordinary prayers except for specifying that the ceremony is dedicated to soldiers. What is not ordinary, is the introduction and the emphasis that the request is a “very great one”:

Лек югдур кылдэмен, жугиськон вырземен, пурземен,	An evil situation having arisen, a conflict having moved, having risen,
Йыбырттйськом ми Тыныд туж бадзым куронэн, Бадзым Инмаре Кылчинэ.	We bend to you, with a very great request, my great Inmar Kylchin.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 155)

This shows how seriously the Udmurt take this ceremony: the description of the time and the context, and the “great request”. These words are not at all common in prayers, and this is the only occurrence in all of our corpus.

The first “great request” is protection and guidance for the soldiers. This occupies the first part of the prayer.

УТЫ ТОН МИЛЕСЬТЫМ НЫЛПИОСМЕС, ЮНМАТЫ СООСЛЭСЬ КУЖЫМЗЭС- СЙЛЬВИРЗЭС,	Shield our children, strengthen their force, their energy,
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 155)

The dangers are the bulk of this enumeration:

УТЫ ТОН СООСЫЗ ДЫШМОНЛЭСЬ- ТУШМОНЛЭСЬ,	Shield them from the enemy, from the foe,
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Кырыж сюреслэсь, ултыйясь ужъёслэсь,	from twisted paths, from humiliating tasks,
Вузаськись муртъёслэсь, пленэ сюремлэсь.	From traitorous people, from falling prisoner.
Андан кенерен котыртыса уть соосыз,	Shield them surrounding them with a steel fence
Лобись пулялэсь, пуштылйсь снарядлэсь, тыллэсь но пуртлэсь, вир кисьтонлэсь, малпамтэ шорысь огшоры быронлэсь.	From flying bullets, from exploding projectiles, fire and knives, from bloodshed, from an ordinary unexpected death.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 155)

The means for the protection is a steel fence. The fence is the metaphor for protection against sorcerers or evil spirits – but usually, for Anatoliy Galikhanov, it is a silver fence (for example, Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 25). Silver is known to have powers against supernatural evil forces⁵. But steel is stronger when facing physical threats.

The dangers are both physical and moral. The physical perils are the enemy of course, in general. But also, bad fate: bloodshed, being taken prisoner, and death; but also flying bullets, exploding projectiles, fire, knives. There are also moral dangers: twisted paths, humiliating tasks, and people – traitorous people.

And the guidance is also very important, both physically and morally

Уты тон милесьтым нылпиосмес, юнматы соослэсь кужымзэс- сйльвирзэс,	Shield our children, strengthen their force, their energy,
Возьматы соослы шонерзэ сюрестэ.	Show them the right path,

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 155)

In the second part of this prayer, the focus is the family of the soldier, with the prayer asking the deities to give close family strength and patience. Everything the priest usually asks for the general population, he now asks for them: lightness in work, happiness. What is usually asked in general, is now asked for the period in which they wait for their soldiers:

Гид тыр пудоен, азбар тыр тылобурдоен, чечыен-муэн, жёк выл тыр сиёнэн-юонэн, тыр нянен нылпиосыз возманы шуддэ сётыса ул вал, Бадзым Инмаре Кылчинэ. Оминь!	Please [live] giving your happiness to wait for their children with a stable full of animals, a yard full of birds, on the table full food and drinks, full bread, my great Inmar Kylchin. Amen!
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 156)

The prayer finishes with a general wish, not only for the Udmurt soldiers, but for the whole world:

Вакчи дыр куспын мед быроз ни вал калыккуспо вир кисьтон, малпамтэ шорысь бырон.	In a short time, let the interna- tional bloodshed finish, the unex- pected deaths.
Мед дугдоз ни вал каргам война, Мусо Инмаре Кылчинэ.	Let this damned war stop, my dear Inmar Kylchin.

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 156)

Here, the word used is the Russian word for war, which has an Udmurt equivalent, but is more frequently used. Another interesting point is about how this war is characterised: first it is international, recognising thus the independent character of Ukraine, but more relevant even is the word “damned, which does not appear in any of the other prayers of our corpus, revealing the strength of the protest – and the strength of the emotion expressed by the sacrificial priest.

Finally, some other general wishes: that the Udmurt boys will remain Udmurt and perform well as such, and that the world would be a peaceful place, without troubling sounds and with sunshine.

Удмурт пиослэн данзы мед вёлмоз вал быдэс шаере, медаз ыштэ вал соос удмуртлыксэс, дано мед карозы анай-атайёссэс но пересьёсыз.	Let the glory of the Udmurt boys spread across the whole country, let them not loose their Udmurt- ness, let them honour their moth- ers and fathers and the elders.
Быдэс дунне вылын мед луоз вал эрико но шудбуро улон,	Please, let freedom and happy life be in the whole world.
мед пиштоз вал котьку но шундыед, медаз ышы со тузон но ёын съёры,	Let your sun always shine, let it not disappear behind dust and smoke,

медаз кылйське ни вал пуштылэм но ыбылйськем куараос, Бадӟым, Мусо Инмаре Кылчинэ.	Let the sounds of explosions and shooting not be heard, my great and dear Inmar Kylchin.
--	--

(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 156)

What strikes us as remarkable, is the concern for the whole world, while Udmurt religious practice is not universalist nor has any pretension to be. But at some moments, also in other prayers, the priest expresses concern for the whole world. Here it is particularly insistent. In previous prayers, we had this example from 2008:

Дунне вылэ сёт вань калык куспын эрыкен, тупаса улон, ог-огдэ гажаса- валаса улон.	Give in the world between all the peoples a free life, in peace, mu- tual respect and understanding.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 59)

Or, from a brochure self-published by Galikhanov in 2011,

Вӧлмыты дунне вылэ ог огдэ гажан, огедлы огед юрттон амал гинэ.	Spread over the world only respect for one another, reciprocal help.
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Or, to quote another sacrificial priest, Anatoliy Nasipullin, from Kachak, from a prayer uttered in 2018 for Elen vös’.

Озыы ик быдэс дунне вылын но калыкӥёс куспын тупаса улон мед луоз, жугиськон-война медаз пуроме.	Likewise, let in the whole world the peoples live in peace, without conflict or wars.
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(From Anatoliy Nasipullin’s prayer notebook, collected by Ranus Sadikov, 2018)

Or the very simple phrase form a *kuala* prayer uttered in the 1990s in Aribash

Дунне вылын татулык мед луоз.	Пусть мир во всем мире будет.	Let peace be in the world.
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(Sadikov, Toulouze 2023: 47)

This last prayer was particularly addressed to the soldiers. It is the first case of such a prayer that we have in our corpus.

In the general prayer, the one that is the model for the others about which we have already spoken and which had been amended some years earlier, changed again because of the war. In a ceremony performed in Tatyshly district, on a site by the road to Kyzyl-Yar, in December 2023, the sacrificial priests have added a part directly concerning the war.

The inspiration for it is clear: it is the last commented prayer by Anatoliy Galikhanov that was posted by the author on Vkontakte.

Yet, the local priests had added some sentences to it that are not to be found in Galikhanov's text, and, on the contrary, some parts were not reproduced.

The demands for protection are exactly the same, as shown above, with the priests' addition of "mines" to the explosive projectiles when asking for protection behind a steel fence.

The final wishes have been omitted as well as the most poetic expressions: the list of four sentences above, as well as the previous two sentences, are not in this version. But there is a very important addition:

Кивалтисьёслы визь-ноддэ сётыса мын вал, Инмаре Кылчинэ, мед валалозы вал ог-огзэс,	Please [go] giving to the leaders your wisdom, my Inmar Kylchin, let them understand one another,
мед дугдытозы ни вал вир кисьтонэз, калыккуспо войнаез, огшоры ог- огзэс быдтонэз.	Please let them finish the blood- shed, the international war, the mutual deaths.

(Videorecording during a ceremony in December 2023)

There is in addition, this wish that God would act on the leaders, both to avoid chaos and to finish the war. It is not clearly said, but it suggests that the responsibility is on the leaders. It also suggests that they have lost their wisdom, for the first sentence asks for God to give them his own wisdom. While in the previous text Galikhanov asked God to finish the war, the bloodshed etc., here it is a request directly to the leaders. Which leaders are not specified, so where there is doubt the responsibility can be shifted to the enemy's leaders, although we understand implicitly that the leaders concerned are first of all the leaders of one's own country. Here not only is the war explicitly mentioned using the Russian word, but it is qualified as "international", which at least suggests that Ukraine is not seen as an internal, but as an external enemy. However, this may be wishful thinking, and the war they speak of might be the war against the 'collective West'.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing war, which is producing more and more victims also among the Russian soldiers, has triggered swift innovation in the Udmurt religion.

We have noticed that the earlier changes, induced by the radical changes in the public life of the state, were slow to be introduced, until the first decade of the 21st century.

Clearly the texts are no longer felt to be so sacred that the priests are afraid to touch them. They have certainly been inspired by Anatoli Galikhanov, the most creative priest. Galikhanov is Altayevo's priest and also the chairman of the Association of sacrificial priests. This ensures that he has high status, but it is even more important that he has acquired his authority mainly through his own activity as a sacrificial priest. His example was certainly what defeated the other priests' scruples about changing something in a sacred text.

The tense political situation at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century induced further changes – we shall be ready to record even more changes in the years to come.

NOTES

¹ An international research team gathered for French IUF grant 2017–2023, Interdisciplinary Research on an Animist Minority in European Russia, the Eastern Udmurt: Rituals, Customs and Community Involvement Today.

² The corpus on which this article is built upon has been collected by a research team, more precisely by Ranus Sadikov and Eva Toulouze and was published in Udmurt in 2023. It gathers all the known prayers of the Eastern Udmurt, either published or existing in archives, and finally those collected by our research team over 10 years, both by photographing the papers from which the sacrificial priests read and by recording the prayers within the ceremonies.

³ As far as we know. Some texts from Pervukhin, while published one year later, may have been collected earlier.

⁴ Elen vös' is a ceremony which used before the Revolution to gather all Eastern Udmurt. It was held every year in three alternating villages, Altayevo and Staryy Varyash in Bashkortostan, and Kirga in the Perm kray. It faded away during the Soviet times and was revitalized in 2008. Our team has attended it several times in the last decade (Sadikov 2010).

⁵ Silver is a metaphor used in different ways in the prayers: silver are the teeth of the sacrificed animal, silver are the grains of cultivated cereals, and silver is the gods' water.

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