

## Summary

The main objective of this dissertation *Life Cycle Rituals (Birth and Death) of the Polish Community in Vershina, Siberia in the Conditions of Multiculturalism* was to provide a comprehensive analysis of rituals related to birth and death among the Poles living in the village of Vershina in Siberia (Irkutsk Oblast), in the multiethnic and multireligious context in which they function. Based on field materials, including folk texts, biographical documents, interviews, video and photo documentation, the key elements of birth and funeral rituals characteristic of the Vershina community were identified and described. At the same time, an attempt was made to determine the directions and conditions of transformation of these ritual practices at different historical stages.

The structure of the birth ritual in this work is interpreted extensively and covers the period from the moment of conception of the child to the completion of its first year of life. This approach allowed me to account for biological, social and cultural aspects of expecting a child, childbirth, early infancy, and initiation of the newborn into the socio-cultural environment. The structure of the funeral rite encompasses the entire attendant socio-cultural context: the process of dying, the moment of death, rituals of preparation for the funeral, farewells, funerals and commemorative practices (frequent and calendar commemorations). This methodology enabled an examination of not only the physiological and legal aspects of death, but also the ways of understanding and experiencing it in the community. In order to analyze the life cycle rites in this study, we distinguished three chronological periods: the time from the founding of the village of Vershina (since 1910), which were compared with similar rites that existed in the territory of historical Poland, the Soviet period, and the post-Soviet period (from the 1990s to the present). This division allowed me to trace the transformations of ritual practice depending on the socio-political and cultural changes in the region.

This doctoral dissertation uses an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing several research areas, in particular folklore studies, literary studies, and cultural anthropology. Findings from ethnolinguistics, cultural history, and religious studies were also used to support the research, with particular emphasis on the Catholic, Orthodox, and shamanistic



traditions. Such a broad methodological approach allows for a comprehensive approach to the issue under study and for its multifaceted nature.

Folklore material is considered a key carrier of collective memory and local identity, reflecting not only elements of traditional worldviews but also community responses to historical changes, migration processes and cultural contacts, which is why the study is based on oral folklore texts recorded primarily during my ethnographic fieldwork in Vershina, the neighbouring villages that make up Vershina – Nashata, Honzoy, Todobol and the neighbouring separate village of Dunday. During the collection of material, I conducted 61 interviews with people born between 1929 and 2004. Most of them are descendants of Polish settlers in the village of Vershina, but I conducted several interviews among Russian residents of the village of Vershina (Nashata, Honzoy and Todobol) and among the community of Sharaldai Buryats living in the village of Dunday. Four interviews were of an expert nature and were conducted with representatives of religious communities. Two – with Catholic priests, one of whom is an active clergyman serving in the church in the village of Vershina, and the other – a former parish priest of this church, who had been serving since the early 1990s. The other two interviews were conducted with an Orthodox priest and a shaman practicing among the Sharaldai Buryats, which allowed me to comparatively understand the religious and ritual systems of various traditions in the communities I studied. The recordings were made mainly in the Vershina dialect (a Lesser Polish dialect with Russian influences), which is why a significant part of the corpus required linguistic analysis and translation with subsequent interpretation in the cultural context.

In the first chapter, *Theoretical Aspects of the Study*, the choice of the topic was explained, and the subjects and goal of the study, as well as their purposes and necessary tasks to achieve them, were designated. The current state of research in the field of Vershina rituals was also discussed. The theoretical and methodological foundations of the study, its empirical basis and scientific innovation, theoretical and practical significance of the study results were presented. This section also included an overview of the most important works in the field of life cycle rituals, which were used in this work. The foundational sources of the study were designated, culminating in an introduction to the issue of life cycle rituals.

The content of the second chapter, entitled *Historical background of local communities*, consists of two sections, each of which is devoted to the analysis of the historical and cultural context of one of the studied ethno-local groups. The first section focuses on the historical development, cultural characteristics and social organization of



the inhabitants of Vershina. The second one is devoted to the analysis of the traditional culture and history of the Sharaldai Buryats – one of the subgroups of the Buryats inhabiting the studied region – with whom the Vershina community has coexisted since the foundation of the village.

The third chapter, entitled *Customs and Rituals Related to Childbirth*, consists of five subchapters that systematically discuss the main stages and ritual practices accompanying the birth of a child in the local communities studied. The first subchapter is devoted to beliefs related to pregnancy and practices aimed at protecting the pregnant woman and her unborn child. In the second subchapter, I analyze the course of childbirth and various forms of obstetric care. The third subchapter covers the postpartum period, with particular emphasis on protective and curative actions taken towards the mother and the newborn. The inclusion of the child in the socio-cultural community, with particular emphasis on baptismal rites, is discussed in the fourth subchapter. The chapter ends with a fifth section devoted to traditional naming practices. It presents the functions of names in the communities studied, the principles for their selection, symbolism, and connections to religious and cultural contexts.

Chapter Four, entitled *Funeral and Memorial Customs and Rituals*, consists of four sections, each of which examines key elements of traditional funeral rites and practices of commemorating the deceased in the communities studied. The first subsection is devoted to the Vershina cemetery, its spatial organization and symbolism, as well as to Buryat family cemeteries, which reflect ethnic, confessional, and cultural diversity in people's perception of the burial site. The second subsection focuses on rituals performed before the day of the funeral, including the preparation of the body of the deceased, farewell rites, and practices ensuring the soul's transition to the otherworld. Activities undertaken on the day of the funeral, including the structure of the ritual, its participants, and the symbolism of farewell to the deceased, are analyzed in the third subsection. The fourth and final subsection is devoted to commemorative practices, both those carried out immediately after the funeral and in the longer term. It discusses calendar celebrations, individual forms of remembrance of the deceased, and the transformation of traditional forms of commemoration in the contemporary context.

The conclusion includes a summary of the most important conclusions from each section, and an attempt is made to indicate possible activities that the Vershinians community can undertake in order to preserve Polish rituals in a foreign environment. Considerations regarding the scope of Russian and Buryat influences and the future fate of the Polish enclave are also presented.

29 maja 2025  
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