

## Artículo de investigación

## Проблема динамики культурного ландшафта (на примере функционирования хвойного дерева в свадебной обрядности Ульяновской области)

Dynamics of Cultural Landscape

(As Exemplified by the Functioning of Conifers in Wedding Rites of the Ulyanovsk Region)

Dinámica del paisaje cultural.

(Como lo demuestra el funcionamiento de las coníferas en los ritos matrimoniales de la región de Ulyanovsk)

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**Аннотация**

Актуальность работы обусловлена современной тенденцией междисциплинарных исследований в социогуманитарных науках. В данном случае – это изучение динамики культурного ландшафта, разрабатываемое культурной или гуманитарной географией, этноботаникой, этнологией, фольклористикой, культурологией.

Важную роль в формировании и развитии культурного ландшафта русских сельских поселений играла традиционная культура – в первую очередь ритуалы, свадебные и календарные. Их функционирование происходило в типичных для них природных локусах: лесных массивах, реках, лугах, полях и т.п., а природные объекты: отдельные деревья, дикие и культурные растения, плоды и т.п. – включались в ритуальный процесс, приобретая новый семиотический статус. Помимо символического аспекта взаимодействие традиционной культуры и природы обладало динамическим характером.

**Abstract**

This article is relevant due to the current trend of interdisciplinary research in the sphere of socio-humanistic studies. In this case, it is the study of the dynamic cultural landscape developed by cultural (humanitarian) geography, ethnobotany, ethnology, folkloristics and cultural science. An important role in the formation and development of the cultural landscape of Russian rural settlements was played by traditional culture (primarily, wedding and calendar rites). They functioned in typical natural locations: forests, rivers, meadows, fields, etc., while such natural objects as freestanding trees, wild and cultivated plants, fruits, etc. were included in the ritual process and acquired a new semiotic status. In addition to the symbolic aspect, the interaction of traditional culture and nature had a dynamic character caused by the mutual influence of traditional culture and natural landscape on each other. The article presents the results of the study on the dynamics of the cultural landscape as exemplified by the functioning of conifers in wedding rites of the Ulyanovsk Region. The

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Он был обусловлен как влиянием традиционной культуры на природный ландшафт, так и ландшафта на нее.

В статье представлены результаты исследования особенностей динамики культурного ландшафта на примере функционирования хвойного дерева в свадебной обрядности Ульяновской области. Установлено, что своеобразие этого функционирования связано с ландшафтными особенностями районов и отдельных населенных пунктов Ульяновского Поволжья, а также с изменениями в нем, происшедшими в результате вырубki лесов, сменой типа леса, выращиванием новых лесов. Результатом таких изменений стала смена используемого в свадьбе растительного объекта или закрепление других типов свадебного дерева в зависимости от сезона или независимо от него.

Установлено, что хвойное дерево в свадьбе чаще всего его применяли за день до венчания при посещении дома жениха девушками или родными невесты и гораздо меньше – утром в день венчания на выкупе.

Выявлено, что хвойное дерево в свадьбе – это один из вариантов свадебного дерева, поэтому его прагматика обусловлена прагматикой и семантикой свадебного обряда. Определено, что основными функциями хвойного дерева в свадьбе были *информационная* (информировать о свадьбе или отдельном свадебном обряде), *символическая* (обозначать брак, брачных партнеров, утрату невестой девического статуса, акт coitus'a), *эстетическая и праздничная* (наряжение растения лентами, бусами, разноцветными тряпочками делало его красочным и превращало в символ праздника, а свадебные песни, исполняемые девушками, усиливало этот эффект).

**Ключевые слова:** русская народная свадьба, ритуал, символ, Ульяновское Поволжье, хвойное дерево, динамика, семиотизация.

authors have established that their peculiar functioning is associated with landscape characteristics of certain areas and settlements of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye (the Ulyanovsk Volga region), as well as changes caused by deforestation, the emergence of new forest types and the cultivation of more forests. As a result, the plant used in wedding rites was replaced with a new one, or other types of wedding trees were introduced in the existing traditions depending on the season or regardless of it. Conifers were often used the day before a wedding when the bride's female friends or relatives visited the groom's house, and less often on the wedding day during the dower ceremony. The authors of the article have revealed that conifers are one of the variants of a wedding tree, therefore, their pragmatics are determined by the pragmatics and semantics of the wedding ceremony itself. The main functions of a coniferous tree in weddings were informational (to spread the information about a wedding or a certain wedding rite), symbolic (to designate marriage, marriage partners, loss of the bride's virginity, coitus), aesthetic and festive (to decorate a plant with ribbons, beads and colorful rags to make it colorful and turn it into a symbol of the holiday, while wedding songs performed by girls strengthened this effect).

**Keywords:** traditional Russian wedding, rite, symbol, Ulyanovsk Povolzhye, conifer, dynamics, semiotization.

## Resumen

La relevancia del trabajo se debe a la tendencia actual de la investigación interdisciplinaria en las ciencias sociales y las humanidades. En este caso, se trata de un estudio de las dinámicas del paisaje cultural, desarrollado por la geografía cultural o humanitaria, la etnobotánica, la etnología, los estudios de folklore y los estudios culturales.

La cultura tradicional desempeñó un papel importante en la formación y el desarrollo del paisaje cultural de los asentamientos rurales rusos, principalmente rituales, bodas y calendarios. Su funcionamiento tuvo lugar en loci naturales típicos: bosques, ríos, prados, campos, etc., y objetos naturales: árboles individuales, plantas silvestres y cultivadas, frutas, etc. - Fueron incluidos en el proceso ritual, adquiriendo un nuevo estado semiótico. Además del aspecto simbólico, la interacción de la cultura tradicional y la naturaleza fue

dinámica. Se debió tanto a la influencia de la cultura tradicional en el paisaje natural como al paisaje en ella.

El artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio de las características de la dinámica del paisaje cultural en el ejemplo del funcionamiento de un árbol conífero en la ceremonia de la boda de la región de Ulyanovsk. Se estableció que la peculiaridad de este funcionamiento está relacionada con las características del paisaje de las regiones y los asentamientos individuales de la región del Volga Ulyanovsk, así como con los cambios que se produjeron como resultado de la deforestación, el cambio del tipo de bosque y el cultivo de nuevos bosques. El resultado de tales cambios fue el cambio del objeto vegetal utilizado en la boda o la fijación de otros tipos de árboles de bodas según la estación o independientemente de esta.

Se ha establecido que un árbol de coníferas en una boda se usaba con mayor frecuencia el día anterior a la boda cuando las niñas o los parientes de la novia visitaban la casa del novio y mucho menos, en la mañana del día de la boda para su redención.

Se revela que un árbol de coníferas en una boda es una de las variantes de un árbol de bodas, por lo tanto, su pragmática se debe a la pragmática y la semántica de la ceremonia nupcial. Se determinó que las funciones principales de un árbol de coníferas en una boda eran informativas (para informar sobre una boda o una ceremonia de boda por separado), simbólicas (para designar matrimonio, parejas matrimoniales, pérdida del estado de la novia, acto de coito), estética y festiva (vestir una planta con cintas, cuentas, etc.). los trapos de colores lo hicieron colorido y lo convirtieron en un símbolo de la fiesta, y las canciones de boda realizadas por las niñas intensificaron este efecto).

**Palabras clave:** boda popular rusa, ritual, símbolo, región de Ulyanovsk Volga, árbol de coníferas, dinámica, semiotización.

## Introduction

### Relevance

This research topic is relevant due to its interdisciplinary nature (humanitarian, or cultural, geography, ethnography, botanical resource studies, ethnobotany, folkloristics and cultural studies), which corresponds to modern trends in the field of socio-humanistic studies. One of the topical directions in the research of traditional culture is the study of cultural landscape (Cosgrove, 1978; 1998; Fleming, 1984; Jackson, 1989; Hirsch, 1995; Nassauer, 1995; Hirsch and O'Hanlon, 1995; Kuleshova, 2000; Vedenin and Kuleshova, 2004; Ivanova and Kalutskov, 2006; Svirida, 2007; Kalutskov, 2008; Minca, 2013; UNESCO World Heritage Convention, n. d.). It is defined as the result of the "joint activity of nature and people" (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, n. d.), "a natural-cultural complex created and/or acquired by some community" (Ivanova and Kalutskov, 2006), "a special type of heritage providing the interaction, interpenetration and interdependence of its natural and cultural components" (Vedenin and Kuleshova, 2004: 13).

An important role in the formation and development of the cultural landscape of Russian rural settlements was played by traditional culture (primarily, wedding and calendar rites). Firstly, they functioned in typical natural locations: forests, rivers, meadows, fields, etc., while such natural objects as freestanding trees,

wild and cultivated plants, fruits, etc. were included in the ritual process and acquired a new semiotic status. Secondly, rites are symbolic actions that transform reality and prove that "cultural landscape is created and transformed by human symbolic action", therefore the process of symbolizing the environment is "a means to create social identity and reality" (Rowntree and Conkey, 1980: 459).

The symbolization of natural environment creating cultural landscape is scientifically defined with due regard to the theory of cultural codes (Clotaire, 2006; Shestakov, 2008) which together with cultural texts belong "to the main structures of the symbolic language of culture (paradigmatic and syntagmatic)" (Berezovich 2007, p. 340). Cultural codes convey "meanings significant for culture (and a person as a subject of culture)" (Tolstaya, 2013, p. 109). In traditional culture, a rite understood as text and expressed by a semiotic language represents a complex structure that combines at least "three codes or aspects of a language: verbal (words), real/substantive (objects, things) and actional/effectual (actions). These three languages (codes), generally "words" of a unified semiotic language, can be used as synonyms in rites and customs, as well as some other cultural actions and manifestations, therefore, they are interchangeable and even can be reduced" (Tolstoy, 1995, p. 23).

Besides the symbolic aspect, the interaction of culture and nature has a complex dynamic character since "culture changes landscapes and culture is embodied by landscapes" (Cosgrove, 1978, p. 229). Although these aspects of dynamics are traditionally studied by landscape ecology, according to Cosgrove, "neither has been examined sufficiently to produce cultural principles" (Cosgrove, 1978, p. 229).

It should also be mentioned that landscapes influenced traditional culture, including certain aspects of rites. For instance, V.M. Shchurov characterized dynamic processes in musical art determining the formation of local traditions and emphasized the role of external and internal factors. External factors include differences "in the economic and domestic way of life", the migration of population accompanied by "the merge of Eastern Slavs (later Russians) with other tribes and peoples <...> in some areas, the influence of neighboring folklores on the Russian folk culture" and natural conditions. "Due to various natural environments, songs in steppes should differ from songs in forests; the folk art of severe northern regions cannot be absolutely identical to the folklore of a sunny and warm climate. Peculiar space surrounding singers influences their nature and manner of singing: the voice in the mountains sounds not like in the steppe, the same goes for singing in the forest and open field" (Shchurov, 1986, p. 21).

Nowadays, many scholars regard rites as dynamic phenomena and believe that "rites are constantly changing (they are dynamic in their nature)", "all changes in rites vary between their modifications and transformations" (Langer et al., 2006, p. 1) ("modifications are minor changes that do not affect the identity of any given rite, while transformations can influence it" (Langer et al., 2006, p. 1). For example, T.B. Shchepanskaya noted that "variability is not a symptom of a transforming tradition (i.e. damage or loss), but rather an indicator of its vital relevance" (Shchepanskaya, 2011, p. 60). In the 1930s, P.G. Bogatyrev, an outstanding Russian ethnologist and folklorist, claimed in his article "Magic rites, actions and beliefs of Transcarpathia" that "folk rites, magic actions and their meanings continuously evolve, change, mix and grow depending either on social environment or on the individual's character" (Bogatyrev, 2007, p. 29). P.G. Bogatyrev's scientific work "On the issue of ethnographic geography" highlighted geographical context among significant factors determining the dynamics of traditions (Bogatyrev, 2007, p. 286-287).

While analyzing ritual dynamics, modern scholars also mention the significant role of context understood in a broader sense. In particular, when transferring "some rite from one context to another or, more generally, changing the surrounding context", rites change too. These changes are of the following two types: "changes in their context (due to transfer), and changes in rites (as a response to changes in the context)" (Langer et al., 2006, p. 1). Thus, to study the cultural landscape, it is important to consider how changes in the natural environment (the key context of ritual practices) influenced rites and affected their own dynamics.

### Literature review

The plant-related or vegetative code is particularly significant among cultural codes that are vital for forming the cultural landscape. There are many scientific works concerned with the role of vegetation in the cultural landscape and unique vegetative codes in rites, including a wedding. According to V.A. Kolosova's "The Slavic ethnobotany: Historical review", the study of vegetation in the Russian traditional culture started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and currently covers such scientific fields as lexicology (methods of forming phytonyms), cartography (the analysis of the geographical distribution of phytonyms), semantics (principles of phytonym nominations), folkloristics (the analysis of plant images and plant-related motives), ethnology (functions of plants in traditional rites, medicine, etc.) (Kolosova, 2010, p. 7-30).

The vegetative code in traditional culture was analyzed in scientific works published between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Minkh 1893: 191-192; Avtonomov, 1902, p. 244-288; Potebnya, 1914, p. 159-187; Zelenin, 1933, p. 591-629; Sumtsov, 1996, p. 136-143). At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the largest contribution was made by representatives of N.I. Tolstoy's Moscow ethnolinguistic school (Tolstoy, 1986, p. 39-43; 1995, p. 333-340; Tolstaya, 2008a, p. 338-346; Agapkina 1996, p. 7-22; 1999, p. 60-69; 2010, p. 238-253).

Some scientific works considered the vegetative code in the traditional Eastern Slavic and Russian wedding (Gura, 1999, p. 83-84; 2012, p. 254-279; Usacheva, 1999, p. 446-448; Vinogradova and Usacheva 1999a, p. 156-160; 1999b, p. 364-366; Agapkina, 2012, p. 134-137; Zorin, 2004). S.M. Tolstaya mentioned the significance of the vegetative code and wrote that at certain stages

of rites, it could become the main means of implementing the wedding semantics. Therefore, while examining the vegetative code, scholars simultaneously deepen "their knowledge of properties and characteristics attributed to plants, as well as properties and characteristics attributed to their new signified (for example, characters of the wedding ceremony)" (Tolstaya 2008b, p. 336).

Other scientific works aim to trace the links between the type of vegetation and territories inhabited by one or another ethnic group. Thus, A. Avtonomov believed that "people mostly build their images over something they saw and found remarkable. That is why plants that are more widespread in a certain area are more often used as symbols there" (Avtonomov, 1902, p. 286). Of course, this statement does not correspond to the modern understanding of connections between cultural symbols and natural objects, but the very need to explore these connections is of high importance.

Despite the existing scientific works, there are few studies that consider the vegetative code in the traditional Russian wedding with due regard to the concept of cultural landscape and dynamic processes that took place in traditional culture during territory development.

### **Problem statement**

This article aims to determine the original dynamics of the cultural landscape as exemplified by the functioning of conifers in wedding rites of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye in the period from the 1920s to the 2010s.

The main tasks of the article are as follows: to determine types of conifers and their functions; to identify the unique realization of the vegetative code in the wedding ceremony; to establish links between the functioning of conifers and peculiarities of areas and individual settlements of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye.

The vegetative code in different regions of Russia was implemented through different wild and cultivated plants. The choice of the above-mentioned region can be explained by the fact that this territory has a variety of landscape types and is included in the forest-steppe zone of the Middle Volga. The Russian development of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye began in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and continued through the 18<sup>th</sup> century and partially the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Migrants not only brought their culture to new places, but also found themselves in different landscape conditions, which forced them to adapt in the

economic and cultural sphere. Their vital activity and impact on the environment transformed the local landscape (deforestation, plowing up of meadows and steppes, the creation of new forests, etc.), which also influenced the traditional wedding ceremony and caused its changes.

### **Materials and Methods**

The main research methods are structural-typological, historical-ethnographic and cartographic.

The research material is recorded memories about the Russian traditional wedding stored in the archives of the scientific and educational center "Traditional Culture and Folklore of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye" named after D.N. Sadovnikov (Ilya Ulyanov State Pedagogical University). In total, there were 1,223 wedding records made in 19 districts of the region (out of 21, except for two national districts –Chuvash and Tatar) and 325 villages. These entries reflect wedding traditions of the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as traditions of the 1950s-1960s and the 1970-2010s.

### **Results**

#### **The peculiarity of floral-geographical zones of the Ulyanovsk Region and their main changes**

Multi-year studies of the landscape have demonstrated that the territory of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye can be divided into eight floristic areas according to phytocenotic, soil, historical and modern conditions for the formation of floristic complexes and vegetation (Pchelkin et al., 2002). The north, north-west, west and south-west of the region are covered with forests, the center and northeast areas are represented by the forest-steppe, the south and south-east zones are steppe areas differing in the ratio of floristic complexes and plant species (Figure 1).



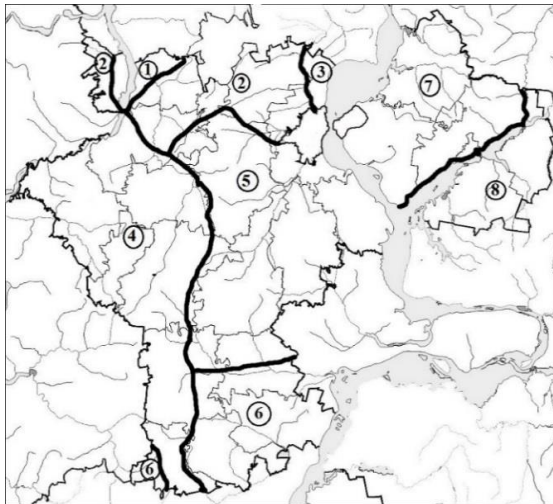


Figure 1. Floristic areas of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye: 1. The northern Sursky forest area; 2. The northern Ulyanovsky steppe area; 3. The north-eastern Privolzhsky forest area; 4. The western Inzensky forest area; 5. The eastern right-bank Sengileevsky forest-steppe area; 6. The southern Syzransky steppe area; 7. The northern left-bank Staromainsky forest-steppe area; 8. The southern left-bank Cheremshansky steppe area.

Povolzhye went through the main changes in its natural ecosystem and landscape during different historical periods with varying degrees of intensity. According to most researchers, its intensive economic development started in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and further accelerated in the period from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day (Blagoveshchenskii et al., 2004; Blagoveshchenskii, 2005; Maslennikov, 2008).

In general, the available information indicates that the massive logging in recent years has led to the deforestation of large territories and the replacement of native pinewoods and broadleaved forests with secondary forests, with small-leaved birch and aspen trees. In addition, deforestation, active grazing, plowing of steppes and former forest areas, as well as reclamation of meadows have developed agricultural landscapes. The areas laying on the middle and lower plateaus of the Volga Upland and areas of the Low Transvolga region (floristic areas 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8) underwent the greatest transformation and suffered from the most negative changes since these territories had black earth and dark gray wooded soil used as arable lands.

Nowadays, 26.3% of the Ulyanovsk Region is covered with forests. The total forest area is 1046.5 thousand hectares, with designated forest lands of 1026.3 thousand hectares. The main

forest-forming species of the Ulyanovsk Region are pine, oak, linden, birch and aspen. Conifers make up 41.7% of the total forest area (according to the data from the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources of the Government of the Ulyanovsk Region as of January 1, 2015). Coniferous woods are forests where pine prevails. Today pine trees are spread over the Ulyanovsk Region. However, they are unevenly distributed: in some areas, it is the dominant species that forms pinewoods (one-species or mixed forests with grass layer), in other zones, it is only an addition to deciduous forests and rarely freestanding trees.

The mass planting of European spruce (*Picea abies* L.) can be found only in the far north-west of the region in the Kuvaisky taiga (the Sursky District).

Therefore, the multidimensional and anthropogenic transformation of ecosystem and landscape, flora and vegetation in Ulyanovsk Povolzhye has led to serious landscape changes, i.e. extensive deforestation and agro-landscape formation.

### The peculiar functioning of conifers in the Russian national wedding rites

The study has shown that the traditional Russian wedding rites existing in Ulyanovsk Povolzhye from the 1920s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> used three types of vegetation at all their stages: coniferous tree (branches of spruce, pine or whole small trees), deciduous tree (birch, birch branch, birch broom), herbaceous plant (bur). There are 45 records made in 30 settlements of ten districts about conifers used as wedding trees (Figure 2).

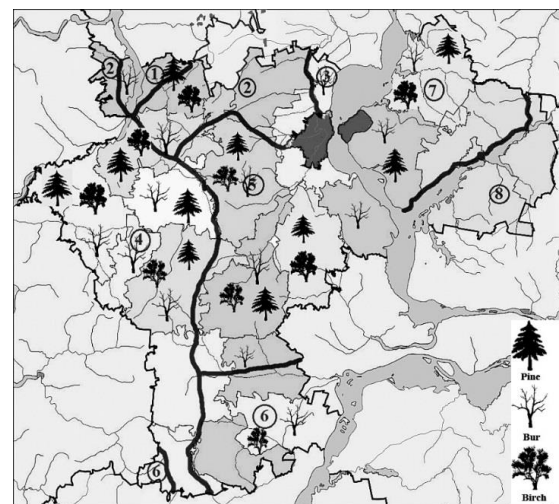


Figure 2. The distribution of three types of wedding trees (spruce/pine, bur, birch) in the

territory of the Ulyanovsk Region with due regard to eight floristic areas.

The results obtained in the study indicate that there is no direct connection between coniferous trees and types of floristic areas. One should take into account that some municipal structures of the Ulyanovsk Region can belong to two fundamentally different floristic areas. Thus, the forest floristic area includes the Inzensky, Veshkaimsky and Baryshsky municipalities; the forest-steppe area comprises the Terengulsky, Kuzovatovsky, Cherdaklinsky and Staromainsky municipal structures; the Mainsky, Karsunsky and Sursky municipalities are simultaneously included into the forest and steppe floristic areas. There can be no conifers in villages of the forest area but these trees can be found in the forest-steppe area. Even neighboring settlements within the same area can have different types of wedding trees. However, landscape features of certain settlements are much more important since they determine the possibility of using two or even three types of vegetation in the wedding ceremony.

All settlements can be divided into two groups: forest and non-forest. This classification is explained by the above-mentioned environmental transformation during the development of this territory by the Russians.

Thus, landscape transformation caused by deforestation, changes in forest types (pinewoods were replaced with deciduous forests) and growing new forests could completely alter the type of vegetation used in the wedding ceremony or introduce a new one along the traditional tree.

For example, inhabitants of the village of Bestuzhevka in the Kuzovatovsky District (the forest-steppe area) used three types of vegetation (pine, bur and birch) in the wedding ceremony.

*(Did they carry something with them?) A flower, a bur decorated with pieces of paper, or a pine. They also used rags and made decorative flowers. (Was it a large pine?) No, small, so they can carry it without any problem. Girls made all the preparations. They were singing while walking <...> [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; T.S. Belova, born in 1915; recorded by M.G. Matlin, Yu.A. Pyrkina].*

*On the eve of the wedding day, a groom was given a broom made from different rags. (When did they bring him a broom?) One day before the wedding. Krasota is a broom made of birch. Right now, there are no such brooms, they simply*

*use a bur and try to decorate it. (Did they dry this broom out?) No, it was green, made of birch [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District, the Ulyanovsk Region; A.P. Starostina, born in 1925; recorded by M.G. Matlin, Yu.A. Pyrkina].*

This variation can be explained by changes in the landscape. The comparison of the maps of 1860 and 1960 demonstrates that pinewoods close to the village (to the north and south) were partially cut down. As a result, the use of pine trees in rites decreased and they were replaced with a bur and a birch.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the reverse process began, i.e. the cultivation of new forests. V.N. Polivanov became a pioneer in the sphere of afforestation in the Simbirsk province. He was a hereditary nobleman, the creator and chairman (together with P.L. Martynov) of the Simbirsk provincial scientific archival commission, a corresponding member of the French and Belgian archeological societies, an honorary member of the Imperial Archaeological Institute. In the 1890s, he founded an arboretum in his Simbirsk estate – Akshuat. In the period between 1882 and 1907, V.N. Polivanov planted 325 acres of pine, larch and spruce on drift sands (Polivanov, 1908).

The comparison of the maps of 1860 and 1960 reveals results of Polivanov's activity, i.e. the emergence of a new coniferous massif near the village of Akshuat, the Baryshsky District.

The analysis of the materials has shown that various types of vegetation used in rites in villages of one region and in a single village can be explained by other reasons.

1. Various vegetation used in rites depending on the distance to the forest.

*During a wedding, a bur was set on a table (since forests were far away, people could not get a pine). It was decorated with ribbons and multicolored pieces of paper [1987; the village of Bolshie Poselki, the Karsunsky District; M.N. Poseryaeva, born in 1914; recorded by I.A. Strueva].*

2. Various vegetation used in rites depending on the season.

Pine is for summer, bur is for winter

*(Did they go to the groom for a broom?) Yeah, they took the broom and soap from the groom on the eve of the wedding day. (What did they bring with them?) They brought a krasota. (What is it?) In summer, a pine was brought from a nearby*

forest for the wedding ceremony. In winter, they decorated a bur. After it dried up, the plant could be covered with papers and flowers of all kinds. With this decoration in hand, we went to the groom. "You will have to water it!" We sat down at the table and he offered us vodka as a treat [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; N.K. Yakovleva, born in 1915; recorded by M.G. Matlin, Yu.A. Pyrkina].

In summer, they decorate a birch tree; in winter, they choose a pine tree

Girls come to dress up the bride and make her "sad" early in the morning. In summer, they decorate a birch tree; in winter, they choose a pine tree. They place it on a stand and put on a table. They paint pieces of paper red, green, yellow and white, cut them and use as tree decorations. Then all the girls, including the bride, gather around the table and start drinking. There is a plate "5 rubles" on the "sad" and a pair of bast shoes. The bride sits at the table dressed up and cries. <...> The groom's friends put on their festive clothes, buy her "sad" as a joke and give a giveaway price for other small things [1980; the village of Krasnaya Reka, the Staromainsky District; A.G. Kirillina, born in 1918; recorded by L.I. Almakaeva].

Spruce is for summer, bur is for winter

On the eve of the wedding day, girls come to the groom without his future wife. She sees them off with lamentations. The girls carry a shirt sewn by the bride and a branch of a spruce tree (a bur in winter). A branch of bur (or spruce) is decorated with ribbons, pieces of paper and candies [1978; the village of Karpaty, the Veshkaimsky District; A.G. Piukov, born in 1907; recorded by M.P. Cherednikova].

3. Various vegetation used regardless of the season and landscape features.

In this case, many respondents mentioned that such variation was common and generally accepted. It can also be a result of participants' creativity or their involvement in some particular situation.

Pine, flower or bur

(Did they carry something with them?) A flower, a bur decorated with pieces of paper, or a pine. They also used rags and made decorative flowers. (Was it a large pine?) No, small, so they can carry it without any problem. Girls made all the preparations. They were singing while walking (...) (Where did they put the bur they brought?) They gave it to the groom. Then people collected all the embellishments and transported

them on horses [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; T.S. Belova, born in 1915; recorded by M.G. Matlin, Yu.A. Pyrkina].

Pine or birch

Girls found a pine or a birch before visiting the groom. They came to the groom's place and dined there [1995; the village of Bezvodovka, the Kuzovatovsky District; E.G. Skvortsova, born in 1923; recorded by N. Trushkina].

Spruce or birch

On the first day, a birch or spruce was taken out of the closet. A birch tree was put on a table in the middle of a shallow pumpkin [1979; the village of Bolshoe Shuvatovo, the Inzensky District; M.T. Spirikina, born in 1901; recorded by T. Korotaeva].

4. There is also a discrepancy between the nomination and the vegetation used in the ceremony, which indirectly indicates a change in the original rite (in the village of Zarechnoye, the Baryshsky District, the rite was called "khodit s sosenkoi" (to carry a pine tree), but in fact it was a bur).

One day before the wedding ceremony, bridesmaids go to the groom with the so-called sosenska. A bur is decorated with ribbons taken from bridesmaids' dresses [1981; the village of Zarechnoye, the Baryshsky District; T.O. Utkina, born in 1903, V.A. Kuzyushina, born in 1905, V.I. Glinova, born in 1920; recorded by L.I. Fadeeva].

#### **Nominations of conifers and their ritual use in the Russian wedding traditions**

While analyzing records on the Russian wedding reflecting traditions of the region in the period from the 1920s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have found 22 records where a coniferous tree is represented by pine and 24 records where it is spruce.

The term "el" has not been found in any record but people living in the village of Akshuat use its dialect variant "yoloshka" (spruce). "Elyshka and yolushka – 1. A small spruce. Novgorod, Pskov, Tver, Smolensk" (SRNG, 8, 1972, p. 350).

Sosna/sosenska/sosyonka (pine)

They arrange pine branches in a kind of a bush, decorate it and go to the groom [1993; the village of Silaevka, the Baryshsky District; A.G. Ovchinnikova, born in 1906; recorded by O. Stepanets, T. Kozlova].



## Yolka/yolochka (spruce)

*After decorating spruce, bridesmaids go to the groom and sing songs [1991; the village of Russkaya Temryazan, the Kuzovatovsky District; V.A. Alekseeva, born in 1924; recorded by E.A. Khardova].*

## Yoloshka (spruce)

*Bridesmaids go for a soap with spruce. <...> A spruce is for getting a soap [1997; the village of Polivanovo, the Baryshsky District; O.A. Filippova, born in 1912; recorded by E.A. Khardova].*

The use of spruce trees in the wedding tradition of this village is explained by V.N. Polivanov's activities. He gave a high status to spruce in the forest plantation of Akshuat (Polivanov 1908: 18).

Inhabitants of some villages simultaneously used the words "yolka" and "sosna" to denote a pine tree. This blend of two different terms is typical of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye and other regions of Russia.

## Yolka i sosna (spruce and pine)

*The bride's matchmaker decorates a small pine once newlyweds arrive. Their mother and father greet them with bread and salt [1979; the village of Korzhevka, the Inzensky District; M.S. Murteeva, born in 1918; recorded by N.I. Gerasimova].*

*They find a suitable spruce tree and decorate it with red ribbons. A matchmaker carries it when newlyweds leave a church [1979; the village of Korzhevka, the Inzensky District; O.YA. Sarantseva, born in 1915; recorded by S.A. Simanova].*

## Krasota (beauty meant as pine)

*They go to a nearby forest, cut down a large pine and decorate it. With a krasota in their hands, they go to the groom's house and take his broom. Then it is time to visit the bride and decorate the pine with ribbons [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; Shabanova, born in 1916; recorded by I.S. Pavlov].*

## Rozan (a branch of pine)

*On the eve of the wedding day, the bride goes to baths. To get the groom's broom, girls and young women take a "rozan" (a branch taken from a pine tree decorated with pieces of papers and rags) with them [1976; the village of Tomby, the Mainy District; A.I. Pankratova, born in 1904; recorded by T. Konnova].*

## Kupal (a spruce broom decorated with candy or rugs)

*On the eve of the wedding day, bridesmaids visit the groom to get a broom and soap. <...> They are met by his friends, well, two of them, while the others decorate a spruce tree with rags and candies (kupal). <...> The bridesmaids return to the bride and massage her in baths with this kupal [1991; the village of Sara, the Sursky District; V.F. Polyakov, born in 1928; recorded by E. Kozhaeva].*

## Sad (decorated spruce or birch)

*Bridesmaids sell a flower or "sad" that stands in front of the bride on a table. In fact, it is decorated spruce or birch. After they sell the bride, they bring the so-called "sad" to the groom's house for the wedding feast [1980; the village of Krasnaya Reka, the Staromainsky District; R.S. Agapova, born in 1928; recorded by V. Arkhipova].*

## Tsvet (flower meant as a young pine)

*Bridesmaids wake up and go to a nearby forest for a young pine tree (tsvet) (Arinina 2009: 12).*

**The role of conifers in the marriage procedure**

Coniferous trees were used from the day before the wedding ceremony to the grand feast, i.e. this element was a part of pre-wedding and wedding rites. Most records describe the functioning of a coniferous tree in the ritual complex that takes place the day before the wedding ceremony and less often in the wedding morning.

1. On the eve of the wedding day when bridesmaids or the bride's relatives visit the groom's house.

*On Saturday (on the eve of the wedding day), bridesmaids go to the groom carrying a small spruce. (...) It is one meter high, not more. It is decorated with elegant cloth. After visiting the groom, they return the spruce to the bride. It is kept for some time and thrown away after the wedding [1994; the village of Akshuat, the Baryshsky District; E.P. Yushina, born in 1915; recorded by M.G. Matlin].*

2. In the wedding morning before the arrival of the wedding procession.

*The next morning after the evening party, bridesmaids go to the groom's house. They bring him the broom that the bride used in baths and a little decorated spruce [1995; the village of Tavolzhanka, the Karsunsky District; A.E. Tokareva, born in 1900; recorded by O.N. Zarodova].*

3. In the wedding morning in the bride's house during wife purchasing.

*Early in the morning, bridesmaids come to dress up the bride and decorate the so-called "sad". They decorate a birch in summer and choose a pine in winter. Then the tree is put on a stand and placed on a table. They paint pieces of paper red, green, yellow and white, cut them and use as tree decorations. Then all the girls, including the bride, gather around the table and start drinking. There is a plate "5 rubles" on the "sad" and a pair of bast shoes [1980; the village of Krasnaya Reka, the Staromainsky District; A.G. Kirillina, born in 1918; recorded by L.I. Almakaeva].*

There are few cases when conifers are used in other rites.

4. The newlyweds' meeting after the wedding ceremony.

*Mother and father greeted me with a decorated spruce tree, while aunts-in-law greeted me with this tree. The small spruce was decorated with ribbons and flowers [1981; the village of Baryshskaya Sloboda, the Sursky District; E.N.; recorded by M.G. Matlin].*

5. In the wedding day during the grand feast.

*On the first day, a birch or spruce was taken out of the closet. A birch tree was put on a table in the middle of a shallow pumpkin [1979; the village of Bolshoe Shuvatovo, the Inzensky District; M.T. Spirkina, born in 1901; recorded by T. Korotaeva].*

### **The pragmatics and semantics of conifers used in a wedding**

We summarized the possible pragmatics of a coniferous tree in the traditional Russian wedding provided by different researchers and the results of analyzing the functioning of conifers in the traditional Russian wedding of the Ulyanovsk Region in order to determine the following basic functions.

I. Informational (to inform and notify about the upcoming wedding or wedding ceremony).

Girls taking part in the wedding ceremony often decorate a coniferous tree, walk or ride around their village and sing festive songs.

*They decorated a pine tree with flowers. They were riding horses, with the pine tree put onto a wood sledge [1992; the village of Bolshaya Mura, the Baryshsky District; A.N. Diyanov, born in 1908; recorded by E.A. Hardova].*

## II. Symbolic

1. To denote marriage and spouses through:

- The modification or transformation of a coniferous tree;
- The transfer of the bride's and groom's symbolic representations, including a coniferous tree, into the space of each marriage partner;
- The use of the spouse's items in the wedding ceremony, including a coniferous tree;
- The exchange, purchase or sale of symbolic gifts, including conifers.

These options exist both separately and in combination with each other.

A coniferous tree is modified or transformed.

It is rarely used as a separate and independent act. The actions performed in the bride's and groom's houses by bridesmaids, the bride's family or the groom's relatives turn a conifer into a variant of a wedding tree, i.e. its semiotic status (a symbol of entering marriage) is articulated.

The modification is often revealed through the decoration of a coniferous tree with multicolored rags, ribbons and beads. These embellishments turn a natural object into the bride's symbol and, particularly, a ritual variant of the "girl's krasota". *They go to a nearby forest, cut down a large pine and decorate it. They bring this krasota to the groom and take a broom from him [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; describes the tradition used in the village of Valuevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; Shabanova, born in 1916; recorded by E.A. Khardova].*

A coniferous tree is transferred from the space of one spouse to the space of the other one.

– A coniferous tree was brought to the groom's house and left there.

*They go to a nearby forest, cut down a large pine and decorate it. Then they bring this krasota to the groom and take a broom from him. They firstly visit the bride and later come to the groom. The pine is decorated with ribbons. It is a pine tree in Valuevka and a bur here (Bestuzhevka). The broom is made of birch leaves. They took the broom from the groom and gave him the pine [1998; the village of Bestuzhevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; describes the tradition used in the village of Valuevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; Shabanova, born in 1916; recorded by E.A. Khardova].*

– A coniferous tree was brought to the groom's house and then returned to the bride's.

*There is a "single" and "married" evening. On the so-called "married" evening bridesmaids go to the groom for gifts. On a "single" evening lads go out with girls. Girls bring a large spruce to the groom's place. They decorate it with beads, ribbons and flowers. They put it on a table, dine there and carry the plant back to the bride. There all the decorations are removed [1995; the village of Studenets, the Kuzovatovsky District; F.P. Slastilova, born in 1912, P.K. Bukina, born in 1920; recorded by M.G. Matlin, O.N. Stepanets].*

A coniferous tree is transferred, exchanged or bought in the house of a marriage partner.

The bride accompanied by her female representatives and the groom accompanied by his male representatives exchange a coniferous tree for some other object. This action is one possible act of gift exchange within the wedding ceremony that aims to unite and bind the marrying parties. Therefore, a coniferous tree (modified or non-modified) received instead of some ritually significant object became the symbol of a marriage partner, and the act of exchange stands for the marriage itself.

*Many people come to a bachelorette party. They cut down a spruce and decorate it. Next, they go to the groom, and he buys this bush [1983; the village of Andreevka, the Kuzovatovsky District; O.P. Ukhanova, born in 1913; recorded by I.I. Poskina].*

A coniferous tree was divided into separate branches and distributed among bridesmaids.

This act with a wedding tree is similar to the action performed with a wedding broom that "symbolizes the wedding itself and is a sign that particular rites, ritual actions, people and objects are a part of it" (Zorin, 2004, p. 120). The separation of the wedding object symbolizing marriage and its distribution among bridesmaids can be interpreted as a contribution to their successful marriage in the future.

*One day before the wedding, girls cut down a pine tree, decorate it with flowers and go to the groom. It was called "s sadow khodit" <...> (Did they leave it with the groom or took it with them?) They usually break the "sad", leave it with the groom, and bid their farewell by waving branches [1995; the village of Malaya Borla, the Kuzovatovsky District; P.I. Manyakina, born in 1903; recorded by M.G. Matlin, P. Averyanov].*

2. To indicate the loss of the bride's virginity.

The action that indicated the bride's defloration was the destruction of her wedding tree.

*On the eve of the wedding day, girls cut down a large pine, and decorate it with flowers and ribbons. If the groom has a brother, he will be given a tobacco pouch as a gift, and his sister will receive a ribbon. The girls are singing while carrying the so-called "sad". <...> They will break the tree and make a broom for the groom to take a steam bath [1995; the village of Malaya Borla, the Kuzovatovsky District; A.S. Kiseleva, born in 1911; recorded by I. Yavkina, T. Kozlova].*

3. To mark the act of coitus.

Like the tradition to break a pot on the second wedding day in the village of Malaya Borla, an identical action was established during the pre-wedding period when bridesmaids visit the groom's house.

*They will put a tree on a table, decorate it with ribbons and finally break it. (Where do they break it?) They put the tree inside a milk jug and break it so fiercely that they can knock out the clay bottom. (What for?) To make sure that the bride is a maiden [1995; the village of Malaya Borla, the Kuzovatovsky District; O.P. Kolotilkina, born in 1921; recorded by M.G. Matlin, P. Averyanov].*

### III. Aesthetic and festive

When a plant is decorated with ribbons, beads, colorful rags or pieces of paper it becomes a colorful symbol of the holiday. Due to this transformation of a coniferous tree, the ritual act (sending gifts from the bride to the groom and his relatives) turned into a vivid spectacle with wedding songs performed by girls on the way to the groom's house and inside.

*On Saturday, bridesmaids go to a nearby forest, find a spruce, bring it home and decorate it with bows made of different pieces of cloth. The bride ties a ribbon bow to the very top of the tree (her gift for the youngest sister-in-law). She also ties handkerchiefs for other sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, makes an embroidered pouch for her father-in-law or future husband. This process is called "devushki idut s sadow" [1989; the village of Malaya Borla, the Kuzovatovsky District; N.A. Mineeva, born in 1928; born in the village of Volynshchina, the Kuzovatovsky District, has been living in the village of Malaya Borla since 1949; recorded by E.F. Karpukhina].*

This new quality and new function formed such nominations of a coniferous tree or its part as "rozan" or even "sad".

*On the eve of the wedding day, the bride goes to baths. To get the groom's broom, girls and young women take a "rozan" (a branch from a pine tree decorated with pieces of papers and rags) with them [1976; the village of Tomby, the Mainsky District; A.I. Pankratova, born in 1904; recorded by T. Konnova].*

*Girls (bridesmaids) sell the flower or the "sad" that stands in front of the bride on the table. The "sad" is a decorated spruce or birch. When they sell the bride, they take these plants to the groom's house for the wedding feast [1980; the village of Krasnaya Reka, the Staromainsky District; R.S. Agapova, born in 1928; recorded by V. Arkhipova].*

### Conclusion

1. After analyzing the functioning of conifers in the wedding ceremony typical of Ulyanovsk Povolzhye, we revealed that some features of this process can be explained by changes in such an important context of the above-mentioned rite as landscape.

2. These transformations can be caused by deforestation (which significantly increased the distance to the nearest pinewood), changing forest types (pinewoods were replaced with deciduous forests) and the cultivation of new forests. We also noticed the interdependence of the vegetation used in the ceremony and the time of year.

3. As a result, the traditional wedding plant was replaced with a new one or complemented with one more item. Some villages even introduced the third type of a wedding tree depending on the season or regardless of it.

4. Possible nominations of conifers used in the wedding ceremony are as follows: sosna/sosenka/sosenochka (pine), elka/elochka/eloshka (spruce), kuval (spruce decorates with candy or rugs), krasota (birch broom), rozan (pine branch decorates with pieces of paper), sad (decorated spruce or birch), idti s sadom, s venikom, khodit s kustom (to carry a coniferous tree).

Inhabitants of some settlements simultaneously use of the words "spruce" and "pine" to denote a wedding tree.

Different nominations of a coniferous tree and the actions performed with it indicate the complex and multidimensional connection of the plant used in the wedding ceremony and the landscape of a particular settlement.

5. Conifers were used throughout the whole ceremony, from the day before the wedding to the wedding feast. However, it was often used the day before the wedding when the bride or her family visited the groom's home before the newlyweds' escort arrived. Conifers were much less common on the wedding day itself when the groom should pay the bride price.

We recorded some cases when coniferous trees were used to welcome the newlyweds after the wedding ceremony and during the wedding feast.

6. Conifers used in the wedding ceremony represent only one variant of a wedding tree, therefore, their pragmatics depend on the pragmatics and semantics of the wedding ceremony in general, and its certain rites in particular.

The main functions of a coniferous tree during the wedding are as follows: informational (to spread the information about a wedding or a certain wedding rite), symbolic (to designate marriage, marriage partners, loss of the bride's virginity, coitus), aesthetic and festive (to decorate a plant with ribbons, beads and colorful rags to make it colorful and turned it into a symbol of the holiday, while wedding songs performed by girls strengthened this effect).

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