

## VEGETATION IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF ULYANOVSK REGION (CALENDAR RITUAL OF SPRING CYCLE SEMIK)\*

Mikhail G. Matlin, Andrey V. Maslennikov, Daniil A. Frolov,  
Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University named after I. N.  
Ulyanov, Ulyanovsk, Russian Federation

**Abstract:** *The significance of this study is indicated by the modern tendency of conducting cross-disciplinary studies in the sphere of traditional folk culture, in particular, its interaction with the surrounding natural environment. This interaction results in a new feature called the cultural landscape. Leading investigative methods-structural-typological, historical-ethnographic and cartographic, allow to make a complex observation of the specified problem. The article presents results of the analysis of vegetation functioning peculiarities in the cultural landscape of Ulyanovsk region (calendar ritual of spring cycle Semik). Conducted research is the first scientific study of a similar cross-disciplinary type in Russian science about traditional culture and folklore, dedicated to the analysis of vegetation functioning peculiarities in the cultural landscape of Ulyanovsk Volga region. Obtained results and used methods can be applied to the research of this feature of traditional culture in different regions of Russia and other East Slavic ethnic groups.*

**Keywords:** calendar, Ulyanovsk Volga Region, ritual Semik, cultural landscape, Kumleniye.

One of the latest area of research in research of traditional culture today is the study of cultural space,<sup>1</sup> or the cultural landscape, which is defined as a result of “mutual activities of nature and humans”<sup>2</sup>, as a “special type of heritage that ensures interaction, interpenetration and interdependence between natural and cultural components of heritage”<sup>3</sup>.

This corresponds with the modern orientation of cross-disciplinary studies in the humanities. An important and productive area of research is study of calendar rituals, because in them ritualistic human activity was preconditioned by peculiarities of their natural environment, and also

---

\* Acknowledgement: The study was conducted with the financial support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, assignment number 34.6993.2017/БЧ.

<sup>1</sup> I.I. Svirida, “Space and culture: aspects of research”, in *Slavic Studies*, 2003, no. 4, p. 14-23.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, “The World Heritage Convention”, 1992. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/477>.

<sup>3</sup> Y.A. Vedenin, M.E. Kuleshova, *Cultural landscapes as a category of heritage*, Heritage Institute, Saint Petersburg, 2004.

included household and ritual items, as well as wild plants, shrubs, trees, endowing them with the new semiotic status<sup>4</sup>.

Leading investigative methods – structural-typological, historical-ethnographic and cartographic, allow to make a complex observation of the specified problem. The article presents results of the analysis of vegetation functioning peculiarities in the cultural landscape of Ulyanovsk region using Russian calendar ritual of spring cycle Semik as an example.

In relation to our problem Ulyanovsk Volga region is an interesting object of research, representing the forest-steppe zone of Middle Volga region, being populated by Russians starting in the early 17th century, continuing in the 18th century and partly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Settlers not only brought their culture to new places, but also found themselves in different terrain, which caused adaptive behavior not only in domestic but in a cultural sphere too. As a result of their impact on the natural environment a transformation of vegetation cover was underway (deforestation, meadow exploitation, new forestland etcetera).

The strongest impact of domestic exploitation of the region was visible starting from 10th century and was rising from the 17th century up to modern times<sup>5</sup>.

Meaningful changes in natural terrain of Simbirsk Governorate became evident in the late 18th century. “Academic Lepyokhin, who documented his journey through Transvolga region in 1768-1769, directly states: “Large timber is close to a total depletion, only little forest outliers with areas of newly sprouted woods are visible”<sup>6</sup>.

Consequently, since then forest clearance caused territory deforestation, and on larger areas – a transition from primary pine, pine-broad-leaved forests and oak forests to secondary forests, where small-leaved birch and aspen forests began to dominate.

---

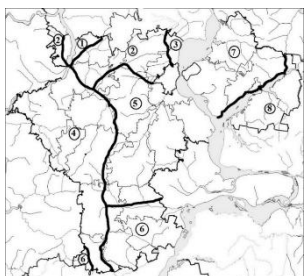
<sup>4</sup> A.K. Bayburin, *Ritual in traditional culture: structural-semantic analysis of East Slavic rites*, Nauka, Saint Petersburg, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> V.V. Blagoveshchensky, *Vegetation of Privolzhsky Upland in relation to its history and rational use*, Ulyanovsk State University, Ulyanovsk, 2005; V.V. Blagoveshchensky, A.V. Maslennikov, L.A. Maslennikova, N.S. Rakov, S.V. Saksonov, M.V. Shustov, “Main directions of research and protection of flora and vegetation of the central part of Privolzhsky Upland”, in *Materials of International Conference “Russian Natural Heritage: Research, Control, Protection”*, January 1-2, 2004, Institute of Ecology of the Volga River Basin RAS, Tolyatti, 2004, p. 30-32; A.V. Maslennikov, *Flora of calcium landscapes of Privolzhsky Upland*, Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University, Ulyanovsk, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> V.A. Nikonov, “History of reclamation of middle Volga Region in materials of toponymy”, in *Historical Geography. Geographic Issues: 50th Collection*, Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Geograficheskoy Literaturi, Moscow, 1960, p. 172-194.

Such multi-faceted anthropogenic conversion of ecosystems and landscapes, a transformation of flora and vegetation cover of Ulyanovsk Volga region had an impact in traditional culture and folklore, spawning its various transformations. Most indicative of this was a ritual Semik, which played a huge role in a cultural reclamation of natural space by rural society.

Multi-year research of flora and vegetation cover has shown that in Ulyanovsk Volga region examining floral, phytocoenotic, pedologic, historical and modern conditions of floral complexes and vegetation allows to distinguish 8 floral zones<sup>7</sup>. North, north-west, west and south-west of the region are occupied by forest zones, center and north-east are occupied by forest-steppe zones, south and south-east are occupied by steppe zones (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Floral Zones of Ulyanovsk Volga Region: 1. North Sursky Forest Zone; 2. North Ulyanovsk Steppe Zone; 3. Volga North-East Undorsky Forest Zone; 4. West Inzensky Forest Zone; 5. East Right-Bank Sengileyevsky Forest-Steppe Zone; 6. South Syzransky Steppe Zone; 7. North Left-Bank Staromaynsky Forest-Steppe Zone; 8. South Left-Bank Cheremshansky Steppe Zone.

### Literature review

Today there are a great number of studies dedicated to the cultural landscape<sup>8</sup>. When researching it scientists propose taking into account

<sup>7</sup> Y.A. Pchelkin, *Botanic-geographic analysis of flora in Ulyanovsk Region*, Saratov State University, Saratov, 1974; Y.A. Pchelkin, N.S. Rakov, A.V. Maslennikov, "Floral zoning of Ulyanovsk Region", in *Bulletin "Samarskaya Luka"*, 2002, no. 12, p. 275-280.

<sup>8</sup> K. Fleming, *Cultural landscape: a theoretical perspective*, 1978. Available at: <https://ru.scribd.com/document/287728971/Cultural-Landscape-a-Theoretical-Perpsective>; D. Cosgrove, "Place, landscape and dialectics of cultural geography", *Canadian Geographer*, 1978, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 66-72; C. Minca, "The cultural geographies of landscape", in *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin*, 2013, vol. 62, no. 1, p. 47-62; E. Hirsch, "Introduction landscape: between place and space", in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 1-30; J.I. Nassauer, "Culture and changing landscape structure", in *Landscape Ecology*, 1995, vol. 10, no. 4, p. 229-237; A.A. Ivanova, V. Kalutskov, "Concept of cultural landscape in folklore research and representation", in *Cultural Ecology*, 2006, no. 2, p. 10-23; A.A. Ivanova, "Folklore as a form of representation and interpretation of a cultural landscape. Russian cultural landscapes and a stable development", in *Fourth Issue of the Works of the Seminar "Cultural Landscape"*, MSU Faculty of Geography, Moscow, 2009, p. 39-45; V.N. Kalutskov,

external and internal factors. External factors include “differences in natural environment (steppe and forest, severe wind and warm south, mountains and open fields); various historical circumstances (the nature of migration processes, ethnic homogeneity in some regions and live contacts, inter-ethnic influence in others); domestic practices (that is differences in domestic-cultural typology)”, while internal factors “are associated with artistic activities of the bearers of folklore culture”<sup>9</sup>. An important matter is the fact that historical succession in regions which were based on tribal community differs from the late-secondary regions, formed “relatively late in time and as due to migration of non-homogeneous population” because “in new regions traditions brought from “mother countries” were not only supported and expanded, but also new traditions were created”<sup>10</sup>.

This feature of how traditional culture functions in space and time some researchers call “the ritual dynamics”. There are two types of ritual alterations accompanying it: “in the context (as a result of the transfer) and in the rituals themselves”<sup>11</sup>. The second type is internal dynamics of rituals themselves, where “the creativity of the participants who may introduce alterations” plays a major role.

T.B. Shchepanskaya noted that “inconstancy is considered not a symptom of transformation (meaning: ‘corruption’, loss) of tradition, but rather an indicator of its living significance”<sup>12</sup>.

A distinctive role in the formation of cultural space was reserved for vegetation. Its place and functions in the cultural landscape, a distinctness of vegetational code in rituals, including calendar, have been a topic of scientific explorations for a long time. To this day they comprise such areas of research as lexicological (formation methods of phytonyms), cartographic (analysis of geographic spread of phytonyms), semantic

---

*Landscape of cultural geography*, Noviy Khronograf, Moscow, 1998; M.E. Kuleshova, “Cultural landscapes: general perspectives, assessment approaches”, in *Ecological Problems of Preserving Historical and Cultural Heritage*, Heritage Institute, Moscow, 2000, p. 37-52; Y.A. Vedenin, M.E. Kuleshova, *Cultural landscapes as a category of heritage*, Heritage Institute, Saint Petersburg, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> B.N. Putilov, *Folklore and folk tradition*, Nauka, Saint Petersburg, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> J.O. Sulyagina, “Current trends of process of labor migration in the Russian megalopolises”, in *Materials of the Afanasiev Readings*, 2016, vol. 3, no. 16, p. 6-11.

<sup>11</sup> R. Langer, D. Lüddeckens, K. Radde, J. Snoek, “Transfer of ritual”, in *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 2006, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 1-10.

<sup>12</sup> T.B. Shchepanskaya, “Rusty net: to the question of transformation and variation of traditional culture”, in *Folklore and Ethnography: For the Ninetieth Anniversary of K.V. Chistov’s Birthday: Collection of Scientific Articles*, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography RAS, Saint Petersburg, 2011, p. 48-61.

(nomination principles of phytonyms), folkloristic (analysis of vegetational images and motives), ethnological (functions of plants in traditional rituals, folk medicine etcetera)<sup>13</sup>. These aspects of the topic of our concern were studied by Russian scientists<sup>14</sup>, including representatives of Moscow ethnolinguistic school,<sup>15</sup> Belorussian<sup>16</sup> and Serbian<sup>17</sup>.

Analysis of the Russian calendar ritual Semik and its central component – kumleniye, are showcased in the following works<sup>18</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> V.A. Kolosova, "Slavic ethnobotany: historic outline", in *Ethnobotany: plants in language and culture*, Nauka: Saint Petersburg, 2010, p. 7-30.

<sup>14</sup> A.N. Minkh, "Burdock in folk rites and songs", in *Ethnographic Survey*, 1983, no. 2, p. 191-192; Y.A. Avtanomov, "Symbolism of herbs in great Russian songs", in *The Ministry of National Education Journal. Part 344*, Typography V.S. Balasheva and Co, Saint Petersburg, 1902; N.F. Sumtsov, *Symbolism of Slavic rituals: selected works*, "Vostochnaya literatura" publisher, Moscow, 1996; A.A. Potebnya, *Various symbols in Slavic folk poetry*, M.V. Potebnya Edition, Kharkiv, 1914; D.K. Zelenin, "Totemic cult of trees in Russians and Belorussian", in *The Academy of Sciences of the USSR Bulletin: Department of Social Sciences*, 1933, no. 6, p. 591-629; V.Y. Propp, *Russian agrarian celebrations*, Azbuka, Saint Petersburg, 1995; I. Shved, "Image of spruce in Belorussian folklore worldview (in common Slavic context)", in *Ethnobotany: Plants in Language and Culture*, Nauka, Saint Petersburg, 2010, p. 362-369; V.K. Sokolova, *Spring-summer calendar rituals of Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians, 19th – early 20th century*, Nauka, Moscow, 1979; A.V. Chasovnikova, *Christian images of plant life in folk culture. Toothwort. Adam's Head. Holy verbena*, Indrik, Moscow, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> S.M. Tolstaya, "Person lives as grass grows", in *Word Domain. Lexical Semantics in Common Slavic Perspective*, Indrik: Moscow, 2008, p. 338-346; N.I. Tolstoy, "Male" and "female" trees and days in Slavic folk beliefs", in *Language and Folk Culture. Sketches about Slavic Mythology and Ethnolinguistics*. Indrik: Moscow, 1995, p. 333-340; N.I. Tolstoy, "Daughter-in-law turned into a tree on a field", in *Slavic and Balkan Folklore*. Nauka: Moscow, 1986, p. 39-43; T.A. Agapkina, *Mythopoetic foundation of Slavic folk calendar. Spring-summer cycle*, Indrik, Moscow, 2002; T.A. Agapkina, "Symbolism of tree in traditional Slavic culture: aspen (experience of systematic description)", in *Codes of Slavic Cultures*, 1996, no. 1, p. 7-22; T.A. Agapkina, "Symbolism of tree in traditional Slavic culture: rowan", in *Ethnobotany: plants in language and culture*, Nauka, Saint Petersburg, 2010, p. 238-253; T.A. Agapkina, "Tree", in *Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary: in 5 Volumes. Vol. 2*, International relations, Moscow, 1999, p. 60-70; V.V. Usacheva, "Plants", in *Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary: in 5 Volumes. Vol. 4*, International relations, Moscow, 2009, p. 406-412; L.N. Vinogradova, "Flowery name of the mermaid: Slavic beliefs about the blooming of flowers", in *Ethnolinguistic and Ethnocultural History of Eastern Europe*, Indrik, Moscow, 1995, p. 231-259; V. Kolosova, "Herbs", *Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary: in 5 Volumes. Vol. 5*, International relations, Moscow, 2012, p. 303-307.

<sup>16</sup> I. Shved, "Image of spruce in Belorussian folklore worldview (in common Slavic context)", in *Ethnobotany: Plants in Language and Culture*, Nauka, Saint Petersburg, 2010, p. 362-369.

<sup>17</sup> Z. Karanović, J. Jokić, *Plants and herbs in traditional Serbian culture: handbook of folk botany*, Serbian folklorist association, Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Y.V. Anichkov, *Spring ritual song on the West and of Slavs. Part 1. From rites to songs*, Imperial Academy of Sciences Press, Saint Petersburg, 1903; V. Y. Propp, *Russian agrarian*

Some studies attempted to trace connections between types of vegetation and peculiarities of floral-geographic regions occupied by certain ethnic groups<sup>19</sup>. However, there is still little research done into vegetation in calendar rituals in the context of the cultural landscapes while taking into consideration transformations that occurred during settlement on new territories.

## Materials and methods

The purpose of this work is to analyze place and role of vegetation in the cultural landscape of Ulyanovsk Volga region using Russian calendar ritual of spring cycle Semik as an example.

Main objectives of the study: to determine the types of ritual Semik and its central rite – kumleniye; to establish connections between derived types and terrain features of specific settlements in Ulyanovsk Volga region and creative activities of ritual's participants. Main investigative methods are structural-typological, historical-ethnographic and cartographic.

---

*celebrations*, Azbuka, Saint Petersburg, 1995; V. K. Sokolova, *Spring-summer calendar rituals of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, 19th – early 20th century*, Nauka, Moscow, 1979; D.K. Zelenin, “Totemic cult of trees in Russians and Belarusian”, in *The Academy of Sciences of the USSR Bulletin: Department of Social Sciences*, 1933, no. 6, p. 591-629; D.K. Zelenin, “Totem-trees in legends of European nations”, in *Works of the Institute of Anthropology, Archaeology and Ethnography*, 1935, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 52-72; T.A. Agapkina, “Kumleniye”, in *Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary: in 5 Volumes. Vol. 3*, International relations, Moscow, 2004, p. 42-46; T.A. Agapkina, *Mythopoetic foundation of Slavic folk calendar. Spring-summer cycle*, Indrik, Moscow, 2002; T.A. Agapkina, “Semik”, *Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary: in 5 Volumes. Vol. 4*, International relations, Moscow, 2009, p. 612-613; B.N. Putilov, *Traditional rituals and ritual folklore of Russians in the Volga Region*, Nauka, Leningrad, 1985; M.P. Cherednikova, “Semik”, *Traditional Culture of Ulyanovsk Prisyrye: Ethnodialect Dictionary: in 2 Volumes. Vol. 2*, Indrik, Moscow, 2012, p. 500-503; E.N. Eleonskaya, *Baptism and funeral of a cuckoo in Tula and Kaluga Governorates. Fable, spell and sorcery in Russia*, Indrik, Moscow, 1994; D.K. Zelenin, *Selected works. Outline of Russian mythology: victims of unnatural death and mermaids*, Indrik, Moscow, 1995; A.N. Veselovsky, “Hetaerism, brotherhood and croneyism in kupala rites”, in *The Ministry of National Education Journal. Part 291*, Typography V.S. Balasheva and Co: Saint Petersburg, 1894, p. 287-318; M.M. Gromyko, “Spring cycle of Russian traditional youth's recreation (customs of weaving wreaths and kumlenie in nineteenth century)”, in *Cultural-Social Processes of Russians in Siberia of 18th – Early 20th Century*, Nauka, Novosibirsk, 1985, p. 117-121.

<sup>19</sup> Y.A. Avtanomov, “Symbolism of herbs in great Russian songs”, in *The Ministry of National Education Journal. Part 344*, Typography V.S. Balasheva and Co, Saint Petersburg, 1902.

Study materials – stories-recollections of Ulyanovsk countryside inhabitants about calendar rituals (most records were written by women whose dates of birth range from 1900 to 1920, therefore reflects traditions of the 1920 -1930s).

## Results and discussion

Semik is defined as “the middle episode” of “an intricate Pentecost holiday”, as a component of Semik-Pentecost complex<sup>20</sup>.

Kumleniye was included as a “component of a two-part structure of Pentecost holiday in general”, having formed as a result of contamination of “Russian Pentecost customs (establishing/attiring of the calendar symbol – ‘tree’ or ‘bird’) and kumleniye”<sup>21</sup>.

Based on existing descriptions of rituals and considering certain properties of Semik in Ulyanovsk region, we will specify the most important of its features.

First, within the territory of Ulyanovsk region, this ritual had such naming variants: Semik, Lyuli, Lelyo, Polelyo.

Second, invariant of the ritual included the following elements:

- Preparation of ritual meals;
- A (concealed) travel to the place where the ritual would be performed;
- twining a bindweed or placing a wreath on a bindweed;
- Making wreaths out of birch branches;
- Kumleniye (exchange of ritual items, kissing, uttering of ritual verbal formulas);
- Mutual feast with brought meals;
- Swinging on birch branches;
- Dressing birches or other trees;
- Moving towards a basin;
- Making wreaths out of flowers;
- Throwing wreaths into the water and divination by its flow;
- A repeated visit to the place of kumleniye on the day of Pentecost;
- Untwining of wreaths;
- Making a straw doll.

---

<sup>20</sup> V.K. Sokolova, *Spring-summer calendar rituals of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, 19th – early 20th century*, Nauka, Moscow, 1979.

<sup>21</sup> T.A. Agapkina, *Mythopoetic foundation of Slavic folk calendar. Spring-summer cycle*, Indrik, Moscow, 2002.

## **Variants of ritual Kumleniye caused by the place of occurrence**

### **1. Kumleniye that occurred in forests**

“Before Pentecost at Thursday people would go into the forest for kumleniye. They would bring pancakes and eggs. They would twine wreaths and hang them on the trees. They would sit facing each other and say: ‘Kuma, give me an egg. Kuma, give me a pancake. Let’s be kumas, kuma, let’s be kumas’” (Gordeyeva, born in 1913, Rokotushka village of Novospassky district; Krupennikova Y.G., 1985).

### **2. Kumleniye that occurred in rye fields**

“Before Pentecost at Thursday we would go to twine rye wreath. We would gather eggs and pancakes in baskets and go with my best friend to twine wreaths. We would come to a field, twine a wreath that resembled gates. We would exchange eggs through these gates: ‘Kuma, let’s be kumas and never quarrel!’ My eggs and pancakes were hers, and hers – mine.” (Levanova A.V., born 1908, Arkhangelskoye village of Sursky district; Simanova S.A., 1981).

### **3. Kumleniye that occurred in such locus, where both a rye field and a birch grove are situated**

“Before Pentecost at Thursday only girls would twine wreaths. They would dress in various ways: some as boys, and some as nobles. They would go there, where the grove grows. Each one would bring kostnyaks (cakes with potatoes) and an egg. They would twine their wreaths into birches. They would sit in a circle and eat kostnyaks and eggs” (Savina A.I., born 1916, Shemursha village of Kuzovatovsky district; Popova and Tsukhlov A., 1993).

## **Variants caused by the changes in the context of rituals**

Because natural terrain of Ulyanovsk region is notable for its terrain diversity, thereby separate villages, even if they are situated in close proximity to each other, can differ significantly, the content and structure of Semik also differs inside the outlined groups.

First of all, we will distinguish the variants caused by changes in the context of the rituals.

*Changes in wreath-twining and divination caused by terrain features*



1. Absence of rivers, ponds near the village.

There was no divination by wreaths:

“(From what did you twine wreaths?) From tea, some from flowers, some from birches. But most made them from flowers, tea. (Did you go to the water?) We had no water near us” (Merzlyakova V.M., born 1913, Troitsky Sungur village of Novospassky district; Averyanov P., Trushkina N., 1993).

Some villages had changed the way of existence and interpretation of this act.

Wreaths were thrown into the well, the goal of the divination was to determine would your husband be a drunkard or not.

“Wreaths were made by Pentecost day... These wreaths would be thrown into the well. We would gather twigs... Go to the forest, These wreaths would be thrown into the well. If the wreath sinks the husband would be a drunkard. If it doesn't sink and floats above, then a husband would not be a drunkard” (Bogdanova A.M., born 1938, Kuzovatovo village of Kuzovatovsky district; Trushkina N.P., Ferapontov I.E., 1996).

Wreaths were thrown over the hedge, the goal was to determine the quality of a harvest.

“Girls would go to the hedge to read fortunes. There was no river nearby, so they would throw them over the hedge. If you throw it over – all would be well, if (Abrosimova E.S., born 1911, Nova Lava village of Novospassky district; Odarchenko O., 1994).

2. The absence of forests

Wreaths were twined from grass:

“On Semik day we would go to the mounds. We would search for grass and twine wreaths. On Pentecost day we would untwine them. We would go to the meadows” (Suponina D.F., born 1907, Zhdamirovo village of Sursky district, Simanova S., 1981).

Wreaths were twined from rye:

“Semik was before Pentecost on Thursday. <...> We would go for a walk, twine wreaths. In the rye field we would twine them and sing: ‘Pentecost on the street and on our backs’” (Belova T.S., born 1915, Bestuzhevka village of Kuzovatovsky district; Matlin M.G., 1998).

Wreaths were twined near a single tree:

“On Semik day girls would twine wreaths. <...> They would go downhill, where the willow grows. We would come close, hang our kerchiefs on it, circle around that willow and sing: ‘Wreaths, wreaths, twine yourselves, kuma and kum will be kums’”. We would move, circle a few times and sit down. We would eat our food and go home” (Chugunova

A.Y., born 1904, Chirikovo village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrova A.A., 1983).

Wreaths were twined from flowers only:

“We baked eggs. Each chipped in two eggs and a cup of milk. Either mine or her mother baked eggs for us. We went uphill. We twined our wreaths from yellow flowers. We went to eat eggs there, in the garden” (Fedotova K.A., born 1909, Tsyrovka village of Sursky district; Matlin M.G., Babkin V.C., Golikova N.A., 1981).

*Changes caused by internal dynamics of rituals themselves*

1. Variation of place and components of the ritual

On part of a village went to birch woods, another – to meadows:

“Those who live there, near the mountain, they twined from birch twigs. They didn’t go to the meadows, they twined their wreaths from birch twigs. They twine them there, it’s called among us the ‘twining mountain’. We go to the meadows, while they go to this mountain on the Pentecost day to twine wreaths” (Turchanova M.I., born 1926, Chumakino village of Inzensky district; Sleptsova I.S., 2002).

Wreaths were twined on a mountain, and eggs were eaten in the garden:

“We baked eggs in one of the girl’s garden and ate them. Sang songs. There were only girls. Girls went to a mountain to untwine wreaths that they twined on Thursday before Pentecost. Wreaths were made from birch” (Makarova A.Y., born 1916, Staroye Tomyshevo village of Novospassky district; Yavkina I., 1994).

2. Variation of time when the ritual or its components were performed

Kumleniye was performed on Pentecost day:

“We went (on Pentecost day) in the forest, everyone went – old and young, sang songs of spring – ‘Early, early it has snowed’. Wreaths were twined from birch, flowers, and everyone went to the river and threw their wreaths into the river. Birches were decorated with cloths, we sat around them. All brought eggs and pancakes into the wood. One girl took all the eggs and pancakes, and handed around two of each, then kumleniye occurred, during which people became kums approximately for one week. We threw a birch into the river” (Kosyreva P.S., born 1906, Lesnoye Matyunino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrentyeva, 1983).

Wreaths were twined on Ascension day, and later untwined on Pentecost:

“On Ascension day we used to twine wreaths. Wreaths were twined on birches, and on Pentecost day we checked: a withered wreath meant a

future marriage” (Dubrovina P.M., born 1913, Studenets village of Kuzovatovsky district; Matlin, 1995).

Wreaths were twined on Pentecost day and checked on the Day of the Holy Spirit:

“On Pentecost we twined wreaths. We would go to the woods and twined wreaths with some grass. We would hang it on the tree, and on the Day of the Holy Spirit we would check on it. Finding it had not fallen from where you hanged it meant you would get married that year. Those who found it had fallen would not be married that year” (Drakova K.S., born 1907, Shemursha village of Kuzovatovsky district; Zudina, 1993).

### 3. Expanding the circle of participants in the ritual

Women of any age could participate in the ritual:

“On Pentecost day we twined wreaths, and everyone took part in throwing them in the river, be they married, old or young” (Yanina M.N., born 1926, Aksaur village of Inzensky district; Matlin M.G., 2001).

Men participated in the ritual:

“Sometimes a birch tree was brought in the backyard, and we would decorate it with ribbons, colored paper, and after that we would go across the village singing songs. Each would bake a pancake, boil some eggs and come to where boys had set up benches from birch trees. We would sit down, collect all the eggs in a bag or some hat. We would take two of them: mine was red, yours was white, and so we became kums. Your pair could have been a boy or a girl. (Kamayeva Y.S., born 1920, Lesnoye Matyukino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Krivonogova M., 1996).

### 4. Variations of ways of kumleniye

Kissing through the wreath hanging on the tree in pairs:

“We would twine small wreaths on a hackberry tree and kiss through it in pairs. We made only a single wreath” (Sokolova V.F., born 1909, Poretsoyevskoye village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrova A., 1983).

Kissing through the wreath held in hands:

“In spring <...> on Pentecost week at Thursday girls would go to twine wreath to the birch trees. When the Pentecost day comes we would go to untwine them. Kumleniye: I would be given an egg and a pancake, and you would be given the same, after we exchanged them – you would be kuma to me. <...> And of how we teared wreaths: ‘Kuma, you are kuma to me’ – we would kiss through that wreath” (Melnikova A.T., born 1916, Lesnoye Matyukino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Kochelayevskaya V., 1996).

Kissing through the wreath and without it:

“Everyone would come on Lyuli. They would bring boiled eggs. One would gather them in some hat or what they else they had. They would mix all the eggs, everyone had their egg marked. Of how we would become kumas: it depended on who would get whose egg. We would pull them out in pairs. We would know who is whose kum. They would called so for fun. They would kiss through the wreath and without it too” (Shepelyova N.N., born 1932, Lesnoye Matyukino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Matlin M.G., 1996).

Utterance of ritual formulas without kissing:

“Before Pentecost at Thursday we would go to the woods to become kumas. We would bring pancakes and eggs with us. We would twine wreaths and hang them on branches. We would sit facing each other and say: “Kuma, give me an egg. Kuma, give me a pancake. Let’s be kumas, kuma, Let’s be kumas” (Gordeyeva Z.I., born 1913, Rokotushka village of Novospassky district; Krupennikova Y.G., 1985).

Exchange of ritual food through the wreath-“gates” without kissing:

“We would come to the field, twine a wreath resembling gates. We would exchange with each other through the gates: “Kuma, let’s be kumas, and never quarrel!” My eggs and pancakes were hers (friend’s), and hers – mine.” (Levanova A.V., born 1908, Arkhangelskoye village of Sursky district; Simanova S.A. 1981).

Exchange of ritual food (eggs), throwing them over a birch tree:

“Girls and boys would bring eggs from home and throw these eggs over a birch. Those young people whose eggs would end up together from then on would be called kum and kuma if they are a boy and a girl, or kumas if they are girls” (Chaplan M.N., born 1911, Lesnoye Matyukino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrentyeva A., 1983).

Mutual feast without kissing and exchange of food:

“Before Pentecost we would go up the mountain. We would make a table on the ground, every girl put her eggs on it. This holiday was called Lilyo. We would sing a song: ‘Lilyo, lilyo, tomorrow is Pentecost’” (Gorelova Y.Y., born 1920, Sadovoye village of Novospassky district; Plyut I., 1993).

Twining of wreaths without exchange of food and kissing:

“At Thursday we would go to twine wreaths. I would go too, even though I was already married. We would go, twine wreaths into a birch, and on Pentecost day we would go to untwine them” (Frantseva A.P., born 1931, Komarovka village of Novospassky district; Lobanova O., Mozina Y., Shubina S., 1993).

*Changes in the ritual that could have originated from transferring elements of other rituals*

Rite of Farewell to spring is insufficiently described and studied by ethnographers and folklore specialists. Many researchers agree that it was prominent “primarily in Upper and Middle Volga region”<sup>22</sup> and was a variation of the rite of Farewell to mermaids<sup>23</sup>. This celebration was dedicated to Zagovenye (the last day before fast)<sup>24</sup>.

We should examine those elements in Semik that can be caused by the influence of another ritual in grater detail.

#### 1. Dressing

Dressing in “high” clothes:

“Celebration would begin at morning, we would go across the village to a mountain, and from the mountain to a small pine wood, there was a small hump, and downhill from it was a hackberry tree. We were 13-14 years old. Girls would dress as noble’s wife, noble’s daughter, those who were younger – as noble’s children (they had ordinary dresses)” (Sokolova V.F., born 1909, Poretzkoye village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrova A., 1983).

Compare: “On Zagovenye to celebrate Farewell to spring everyone would array oneself. There were ‘suitors’ and ‘noble’s daughters’, they all would jest with each other <...>. Everyone would dress, sing a spring song ‘In the forge’” (Yerastova T.P., born 1917, Prolomikha village of Inzensky district; Sleptsova I.S., 2002).

Dressing in clothes resembling a carnival character:

“We would go to twine wreaths in the forest on Thursday. We twined wreaths from different flowers. <...> We would dress in all kinds of ways. I loved to array myself. I would wear trousers, man’s shirt, take an accordion and would circle the village” (Goryachova M.P., born 1910, Matveyevka village of Staromaynsky district; Chimbirtseva I., 1988).

Compare: “In summer all would dress. We would make farewell with spring. <...> We would dress in various manner: some were “soldiers”, some wore old woman’s clobber, and some dressed as ‘boys’. <...> They were unrecognizable in their make up” (Grachova M.F., born

---

<sup>22</sup> T.A. Agapkina, *Mythopoetic foundation of Slavic folk calendar. Spring-summer cycle*, Indrik, Moscow, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> V.K. Sokolova, *Spring-summer calendar rituals of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, 19th – early 20th century*, Nauka, Moscow, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> K.Y. Korepova, T.I. Belous, “Rites of “Farewell to Spring” in a modern countryside (in materials of Gorky region)”, in *Soviet Ethnography*, 1985, no. 4, p. 88-95; M. P. Cherednikova, “Semik”, *Traditional Culture of Ulyanovsk Prisureye: Ethnodialect Dictionary: in 2 Volumes. Vol. 2*, Indrik, Moscow, 2012, p. 500-503.

1930, Bolshaya Kandarat village of Karsunsky district; Sleptsova I.S., 2006).

2. Going round the village with a decorated vegetation

Burdock:

“Old burdock was decorated with paper, paper flowers, paperboard. We would sing a song, for example “A trail on a mountain”. <...> We would go around with a burdock wreath. <...> Burdock resembled a New Year’s tree. There were several groups led by a fine fellow at the front. He would sing and dance” (Skobeva A.G., born 1913, Poretskoye village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrentyeva A., 1983).

Birch:

“At two o'clock afternoon we would cut down a birch, twine wreaths. We would decorate this birch with ribbons. And in the evening we celebrated, and everyone gathered: young, old, children. They would wear all white. Wreaths that were twined in the morning would be hanged on a birch in the evening. And they circled around the village with it. <...> Late at night everyone would go to the river to sink the birch with the wreaths” (Chaplan M.N., born 1911, Lesnoye Matyukino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrentyeva A., 1983).

Compare: “We made farewells to spring. We decorated a birch with ribbons and candies. We would circle the village and later bring it to the forest for it to wither” (Zakharova P.I., born 1922, Bezdovodka village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lobanova O., 1995).

Pine tree:

On Semik at Thursday we would twine wreaths and decorate a pine tree with cloths” (Razina K.K., born 1914, Bezdovodka village of Kuzovatovsky district; Ryabova S., 1995).

Compare: “We made farewells to spring. We decorated a spruce with cloths” (Nikulushina M.M., born 1912, Krasnye Gory village of Sursky district; Simanova S.A., 1981).

*Making a straw doll and using it in the ritual*

A straw doll was made and used on Semik:

“On Thursday (before Pentecost) we would make a dummy out of straw sheaf. We would place a stick in place of hands, dress it in a dress, a jacket and a neckpiece. We would hold the doll by its hands and go beyond the village. Only the girls would lead it to a birch. They would grip and sing songs, eat eggs and pancakes. They would sing ‘Under the birch, under the curly’. <...> Then they would remove the clothes from the doll

and return to the village” (Rogoleva P.V., born 1911, Zhedrino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Lavrova A.A., 1983).

A straw doll was made on Semik and used on Pentecost:

“Before Pentecost on Thursday we would go to twine wreaths from rye. <...> And after we would twine them we would make the doll. We would take a sheaf and dress it in trousers, shirt and hat. We chose what was flatter... And with frayed edges. The doll would be placed for three days in the yard, where later we would hold the wake.

On Sunday we would dress as priests and deacons and sing:

‘With saints he lays to rest,  
What a great man he was:  
With hands and with legs,  
And with a pig’s head!’

We would dress as oldwives and weep. The oldwives would be led by the hands. We would bring ‘the departed’ on the field, untwine our wreaths and touse the sheaf... And would return back with an accordion. The wake for the doll was held with fried eggs.” (Levanova A.V., born 1908, Arkhangel'skoye village of Sursky district; Simanova S.A., 1981).

Compare: “On ‘mermaids’ week we would make our farewell to spring. ‘Make your farewell to spring, they say! Farewell to spring!’ We dressed ‘Andryushka’, this spring we held the wake at night. Others were saying: ‘Bring more straw’. We stuffed it, made a person, his trousers and shirt were stuffed, later we burned it on the bank of Sura river. We made him a face, and an old, old cap or a hat. Most were making a cap” (Zayeva A.E., born 1927, Savalyeva A.E., born 1938, Novosursk village of Inzensky district; Sleptsova I.S., 2002).

Making of a birch and a doll:

“On Lyuli we would dress a doll before Pentecost. We would cut down a birch and carry it with us into a ravine or anywhere else, and the doll would also be carried, and a song would be sung: ‘Under the birch, under the curly, there is a girl, she watches the birch’” (Markina T.P., born 1916, Zhedrino village of Kuzovatovsky district; Volgina, E., Khardova, O., 1996).

Compare: “Children would be making dolls out of straw. On the week of Farewell to spring it would be buried in the field, pulled to pieces and tossed away. Girls would sing and dance in a ring<sup>25</sup>. They would decorate a birch with ribbons, flowers and dance around it” (Pryakhina

---

<sup>25</sup> E.L. Hasanov, V.D. Panachev, V.P. Starostin, A.G. Pudov, “Innovative approach to the research of some characteristics of choir scenes as culturology issue”, in *Astra Salvensis*, 2018, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 749-759.

A.P., born 1916, Lugovoy village of Karsunsky district; Zarodova O., 1995).

The suggestion that these elements of Semik ritual originated from the rite of Farewell to spring in this case has a hypothetical nature, which is partly supported by the materials of 19th century, where all aforementioned elements, including usage of a birch, are recorded solely in the rite of Farewell to spring, and not in Semik (Matlin 2012).

*Fixation of the memory about the ritual in the toponym of the place, where it was performed*

1. Semishnaya mountain in Kotyakovo village of Karsunsky district.
2. Semishnaya mountain in Potma village.
3. Vyanoshnaya mountain in Chumakino village of Inzensky district:

The research of place and role of vegetation in the cultural landscape of Ulyanovsk Volga region using Russian calendar ritual of spring cycle Semik has established that the ritual had other variants of names: Semik, Lyuli, Lelyo, Polelyo.

It has been determined that invariant of the ritual included such elements as preparation of ritual food; a (concealed) travel to the place where the ritual would be performed; twining the birch or hanging wreaths on the birch; making wreaths out of birch branches; kumleniye (exchange of ritual items, kissing, uttering of ritual verbal formulas); divination on wreaths; making a straw doll and its symbolical burial, decorating a birch or any other tree.

It has been established that the ritual of kumleniye consists of two groups depending on the place of performance – in a forest or in a rye field, and there is also a transitional variant, where all actions happen in a birch grove near a rye field.

Inside each group some variations of the ritual existed. They were determined by the diversity of some of its elements (wreath-twining and divination), which were caused by terrain features: presence/absence of rivers, pond and/or woods near a village. Other variants were caused by internal dynamic of the ritual itself: variation of place and/or time when it was performed, inclusion of other sex and age groups (girls, boys, married women etcetera), different manner of kumleniye, transferring into this ritual the elements of the rite of Farewell to spring: dressing, circling the village with a dressed vegetation (burdock, birch, pine), making of a straw doll and its symbolical burial. It is evident that the memory about the ritual has been secured and preserved in the toponyms of the places where the ritual was held.



The conducted study is the first scientific works of a cross-disciplinary type in Russian science about traditional culture and folklore, dedicated to the analysis of vegetation functioning peculiarities in the cultural landscape of Ulyanovsk Volga region. Obtained results and used methods can be applied to study this phenomenon of traditional culture in other regions of Russian and East-Slavic nations.