?Through my own fieldwork (Salmin, 1993) and research of primary sources, other researchers' works, and theoretical works, I have identified three complexes in Chuvash religious ritual practice: ?(1) village rituals; (2) domestic rituals; and (3) individual rituals.* Village ritual practice consists of rituals performed by a single village, and of rituals performed by a group of villages.Occasional rituals in-clude: "after a quarrel," "gathering teeth," "preparing for a jour-ney," and "protection against an enemy." ?Any indisposition was considered as a possible intervention into the life of humans of spirit-deities or spirits of nature. ?Therefore, a sufferer each time seeks some sort of relation with the spirits, in attempts to avoid or explain any violation of rules. Chuvash magical actions and individual prayers have a practical character even today. Having determined the cause of an illness, ritual leaders advise performing certain actions and addressing certain spirits. Some examples of these rituals and prayers follow. ?Ser tavrash are spirits of earth. If a female curer has established that these are the cause of illness, a prayer is performed, addressing simultaneously ser ashshe (father of the earth) and ser amash (mother of the earth). The ritual is performed at a crossroad. ?Shyvri. Water, in Chuvash belief, is inhabited by malevolent spirits, shyvri (singular, shyv). They may also inhabit inundated meadows. Their negative influence is experienced in the immediate vicinity of water. If rules of correct behavior are violated near some water, the result, inflicted by shyvri, may manifest itself in stammering or a heavy cough (eslek). Knowledgeable elders and curers say that if people are suddenly frightened near some water, fall near water, or get their feet wet, they may be shyvri tytat-- caught by water dwellers. The same can result if someone who is hot and sweaty drinks from a spring in a prostrate position, ?enters water without due preparation, or quarrels near water. Indication of shyvri influence may be a dream of a maira, visualized as a Russian woman. Carefully sought dream consultants say in such cases that the sufferer has been caught by water spirits. In one case, a suffering child was said by a iumas, a curer who analyzes dreams, to have been scared when crossing a stream, and caught by shyvri (Chuvash Gumanitary Institut ar-chive, no. 153, list 82).* ?Apart from shyvri, similar or the same spirits are also named vutash (a being found in water); usal (evil spirit); shyvri shuittan (water devil), or kele (spirit). Not everyone can solve spirit affliction by themselves; they should consult elders. ?The most propitious time for a sacrifice to pacify the shyvri is early morning. One must leave the house when all people are at home and even birds are sleeping in their nests. All actions, such as preparation of sacrificial food, travel to and from the sacrifice site, libations, and feeding, must be done by the victim of shyvri alone, secretly, not seen by anyone, whether people or birds. The sacrifice site is where the sufferer was originally frightened when crossing a stream, or getting wet feet. Sacrifice may include vegetable and animal food, can-dles, and coins. Food may consist of fish heads, birds' claws, eggs (especially of duck), figurines of dough in the form of animals, grains, flour, bread, sugar, and especially kuk khurane, a small round cookie, hollow in the center, where grain, butter, and a little piece of tin are placed. ?No special prescribed prayer text exists; the sufferer simply verbalizes that the sacrifice is given to the water spirit in order to get rid of the illness. Sometimes, having come back home, the worshipper binds some grain or flour in a kerchief, in the hope ?o Kerchief, in the hop ?that such action also will have a curative effect. ?Savrasil. The Chuvash word savrasil means both a whirlwind and the spirit who resides inside a whirlwind. Someone caught in a whirlwind will certainly become ill and die. There are many ideas about the spirits inside

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whirlwinds. For example, columns of dust contain specific dangerous beings. Some depict this spirit ?as an usallosal, an evil spirit, with a very large nose, who is propelled by the whirlwind. Others attribute the wind to a shuttan, or group of shuittan spirits that are closest in Chuvash mythology to the Russian Orthodox devil. ?These concepts vary not so much by locality as by changes in the phantasy of people due to changes in their social circumstances and ways of life. Mythical spirits come to be traded at later stages for more realistic images. Those who believe in the magic of the whirlwind now may explain that a whirlwind is a person who died an unnatural death (by hanging, suicide, drowning ...). Such a victim becomes a horse for a shuittan (devil), or could be misled by a sorcerer (koldun) or a curer (znakhar). ?Sometimes even a girl may be inside a whirlwind, visible if one looks through a knot hole. But one must be very careful because the whirlwind girl may strike and leave you breathless and speechless. Tatar influences may be evident in this interpretation. ?The Chuvash in any case are very much afraid of whirlwinds, because any contact with their impure spirits leads to a serious illness. To avoid contact, one should shout, "Uri, uri, uri: Legs, legs, legs, I see your legs," and this will make the "exposed" spirit change direction.Rituals performed by a group of villages include: pysak uchuk–nor–mally performed once in nine years as a harvest festival of thanksgiving; khat chuk––performed in times of crisis, such as famine; asla kiremet chuke––a usually triennial ritual to pacify gods; Vaium khusa chuke–sacrifices to a legendary ancestor; savarni–Shrovetide; and larma–winter youth festivals.As Sergei S. Arutiunov writes (1989, p. 129), such ceremonies reflect "a kind of syncretism in which it is impossible to divide economic, recreational, ritual, normative and other func–tions. They were merged, inseparable."?on cricia of intes are ?Participants in intervillage rituals probably initially constituted a maternal grouping of settlements that later disintegrated due to historical and demographic conditions.For example, Chuvash villagers of the Shentalinsk district of Samara Oblast are emigres from the modern Mianovsk Oblast, and the population of the latter in turn considers the more northerly territories as their homeland.Indeed, such gatherings could be multiethnic.

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