

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH204934-947>

Research paper

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DOMOVOY IN THE MYTHOLOGICAL BELIEFS OF DAGESTANI RUSSIANS

Abstract. This study analyzes the ambivalent mythological figure of the *domovoy* in Russian mythology. The analysis draws upon fieldwork and literary sources gathered in the villages of the Kizlyarsky and Tarumovsky districts of Dagestan. Methodological basis of the research employs established historical approaches (chronological, historical-genetic, comparative-historical, structural-diachronic, and retrospective) as well as standard ethnological methods, including surveys and interviews. The study compares and contrasts the *domovoy* figure as understood by Russians of Dagestan with its representation among the broader Russian population, as well as among the peoples of Dagestan, the North Caucasus, and globally. The origin of this mythological image among the Slavs is traced to the decline of the primitive neighboring community, the rise of patriarchy, and the development of households encompassing extended and nuclear families. The *domovoy's* mythological character is rooted in ancestor veneration and hearth-centered rituals. The sources examined in this study suggest the persistence of the *domovoy* from the Middle Ages into the modern era. This persistence indicates that conceptions of the *domovoy* evolved across different historical periods, indirectly reflecting the social, socioeconomic, and cultural transformations among Eastern Slavs. The *domovoy's* ambivalent nature stems from its association with sacred spaces. Its connection to the upper world casts it as a patron of the house and family, while its ties to the underworld manifest in its demonic aspect, capable of harming sleeping individuals. Sacred continuums and chronotopes rendered profane time and space permeable to otherworldly entities. As part of the diverse Great Russian population that settled in the North Caucasus from the latter half of the 16th century onward, and particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Russians of Dagestan perpetuated the mythological figures of their ancestral homelands. The main features of the *domovoy* as understood by Russians of Dagestan align with the broader Russian understanding of this house spirit. This consistency highlights the stability, continuity, and transmission across generations of key figures within Russian mythology. The survival of these mythological beliefs among Russians in Dagestan offers hope for the preservation of their distinct ethnic, religious, and cultural identity in the face of globalization.

Keywords: Russians of Dagestan; pre-Christian beliefs; mythological characters; *domovoy*; contemporary times

For citation: Seferbekov R.I. Domovoy in the mythological beliefs of Dagestani Russians. History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Caucasus. 2024. Vol. 20. N. 4. P. 934-947. doi.org/10.32653/CH204934-947

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ИЗ МИФОЛОГИИ РУССКИХ ДАГЕСТАНА: ДОМОВОЙ

Аннотация: В статье на основе собранного в сёлах Кизлярского и Тарумовского районов Дагестана полевого этнографического материала и литературных источников с использованием общенаучных исторических (хронологический, историко-генегический, сравнительно-исторический, структурно-диахронный, ретроспективный) и специальных методов этнологии (опрос, интервьюирование) даётся анализ (ипостаси, локусы обитания, время появления, способы и формы коммуникации с человеком, патронажные и злокозненные действия, обереги) амбивалентного мифологического персонажа русской мифологии – *домового*. Исследуются сходство и различие *домового* у русских Дагестана и у русских основного этнического массива, а также у народов Дагестана, Северного Кавказа и мира. Зарождение этого мифологического образа у славян относится ко времени распада первобытной соседской общины, установления патриархата, возникновения домохозяйств с их большими и малыми семьями. В основе мифологического персонажа *домовой* лежит почитание умерших предков и культ домашнего очага. Исходя из представленных в статье источников этот образ существовал в средневековое и новое время. Это свидетельствует о том, что представления о *домовом* сформировались в разные исторические эпохи и опосредованно отражают общественные, социально-экономические и культурные процессы, происходившие у восточных славян в различные хронологические периоды. Амбивалентность *домового* объясняется его принадлежностью к сакральным пространствам. Принадлежность *домового* к верхнему миру накладывала на него обязанности патрона дома и семьи, а отношение к преисподней – функции душашего человека во время сна демона. Сакральные континуумы и хронотопы позволяли профанному времени и пространству быть проницаемыми для потусторонних персонажей в наш мир. Будучи частью расселенного на Северном Кавказе начиная со второй половины XVI и особенно в XIX – начале XX в. разнородного великорусского этноса, русские Дагестана воспроизводили на новой территории мифологические образы исконных мест обитания. Основные параметры и характеристики *домового* у русских Дагестана совпадают с мифологическим образом домашнего духа у русских основного этнического массива, что свидетельствует об устойчивости, преемственности и воспроизводстве через историческую память поколений главных персонажей русской мифологии. Дошедшие до нашего времени реликты этого мифологического образа у русских Дагестана вселяют определенную надежду на сохранение их этнической, религиозной и культурной идентичности в эпоху глобализации.

Ключевые слова: русские Дагестана; дохристианские верования; мифологические персонажи; *домовой*; новейшее время

Для цитирования: Сефербеков Р.И. Из мифологии русских Дагестана: домовый // История, археология и этнография Кавказа. 2024. Т. 20. № 4. С. 934-947. doi.org/10.32653/CH204934-947

Introduction

The Russians of Dagestan represent a branch of the Russian diaspora, initially settling in the lower Terek region during the latter half of the 16th century [2, p. 259]. The most intensive growth of this diaspora in Dagestan occurred between the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, driven by the resettlement policies of the Russian government [3, p. 540].

As part of the diverse Great Russian population that settled in Dagestan and the North Caucasus, these communities replicated the daily customs of their original homelands. This cultural continuity extended to their traditional spiritual culture, where remnants of ancient pre-Christian beliefs persisted in mythological stories [4, p. 305].

As researchers noted in this regard, “the religious beliefs of Dagestani Russians constituted a complex and evolving synthesis of ideas and worldviews that varied over time. Folk beliefs centered on mythological creatures of ancient origin. Of primary interest within folk beliefs were the images of mythological creatures dating back to ancient times [1, p. 159], such as werewolves, domovoys, leshys, kikimoras, ghouls, kikimoras, mermaids, devils, and others [3, p. 555].

Numerous Russian researchers have, at various times, explored the traditional spiritual culture of Dagestani Russians, including their religious beliefs. T. Rogozhin’s article [5, pp. 57–67] on the demonology of the Terek Cossacks of Chervlennaya is particularly relevant. Though Chervlennaya now lies within the Chechen Republic, the article’s focus on Terek Cossacks makes it relevant for understanding the Cossack communities still residing in the Republic of Dagestan.

As we know, the traditional mythological characters of the Russians of Dagestan were not the subject of scholarly investigation during the Soviet era. In recent times, this gap has been partially addressed by the research of M.Sh. Rizakhanova, S.A. Luguev, and M.Kh. Mansurov, primarily based on literary sources. A modest contribution to this area of inquiry has also been made by the present authors through the description of the mythological character of the Terek Cossacks – *Lobasta* [6, pp. 47–49].

This study aims to analyze the image and characteristics of the *domovoy*, a mythological figure among the Russian population of Dagestan. This aim entails addressing the following objectives: 1) to analyze the hypostases, time of appearance, dwelling places, and both benevolent and malevolent actions attributed to this mythological figure; 2) to identify similarities and differences in the key features and characteristics of the *domovoy* between Dagestani Russians residing within the ethnocontact zone and the core Russian ethnic group; and 3) to draw comparisons between the characteristics of this mythological figure among Dagestani Russians and analogous figures among other peoples of Dagestan and the North Caucasus.

This article is based on ethnographic field data collected in July–August 2023 across nine villages in the Kizlyarsky (Aleksandriya, Kardonovka, Nekrasovka, and Averyanovka) and Tarumovsky (Tarumovka, Koktyubey, Talovka, Kalinovka, and Novo-Georgievka) districts of Dagestan. The selection of these districts is due to their, along with the city of Kizlyar, constituting the Kizlyarshchina region, an area of concentrated rural Russian settlement within Dagestan. In other regions of the republic, the Russian population resides in a more dispersed pattern, primarily in urban centers.

This study employed general scientific historical and specialized ethnological methods. The chronological method facilitated a systematic examination of this mythological figure, accounting for its diachronic transformations. The historical-genetic method enabled the identification of causal relationships related to the character’s emergence during the decline of primitive society and its subsequent evolution throughout historical development. The comparative-historical method facilitated comparisons of shared and distinct features of the *domovoy* among Dagestani Russians with its counterpart among the core Russian ethnic group, as well as among peoples of Dagestan, the North Caucasus, and globally. The structural-diachronic method allowed for the analysis of essential temporal changes in this mythological figure within the context of a changing historical reality. The retrospective method enabled an analysis of this character by considering temporal changes from the present to antiquity. Data collection in the field involved the use of specialized ethnological methods, specifically surveys and respondent interviews.

It should be noted that recent studies of traditional mythological figures among Dagestani Russians have been incomplete and have lacked the incorporation of field data. This study aims to address this deficiency, thus establishing its scientific novelty. The findings may be utilized in the development of broader works on

the traditional spiritual culture of Russians in Dagestan and the North Caucasus. The research may be of use to historians, ethnologists, religious scholars, cultural scientists, and a wider readership.

General characteristics of domovoy

In ethnographic and reference literature, the domovoy is typically characterized as a “supernatural creature of Eastern Slavic mythology, the spirit and guardian of the house” [7, p. 156; 8, p. 391], “an otherworldly ‘master’ of the human dwelling” [9, p. 52], “a lower spirit associated with ancestor veneration, patron of the house, and keeper of the hearth and family” [10, pp. 201–202]. This figure is referred to as “master” “for demonstrable services” and “grandfather” due to the perceived antiquity of its presence in Rus’ [11, p. 19]. It is commonly held that “the well-being of family life and success in the household are contingent upon it” [5, p. 61]. “Generally, the domovoy is attributed the qualities of an old, obstinate master of the house. It guards and protects the dwelling” [12, p. 413].

F.S. Kapitsa explains the evolving perception of the *domovoy* as follows: “Initially, the deceased ancestor was regarded as the guardian of the house – the founder of the clan, the first owner of the family home. Over time, individual traits diminished, and from an ancestor, the *domovoy* transformed into a guardian spirit of the home” [13, p. 36]. This reveals a clear link between the *domovoy* and ancestor veneration, in which “caring for the souls of the dead is considered a necessary duty for living relatives due to the belief in the patronage of the deceased” [14, p. 163]. V. Propp posited that Russian spring agricultural rites were dedicated to the deceased. Cultivating crops was intertwined with caring for the dead: “Being underground, they were believed to exert influence over the harvest and thus had to be propitiated through expressions of love and respect” [15, p. 33].

S.A. Tokarev attributed the origin of the image of the invisible family patron, personifying its well-being and associated with the image of an ancestor, “to the period when a separate family became an independent social unit following the disintegration of the clan system” [16, p. 97]. He argued that “ancestor veneration reaches its full development only during the patriarchal-clan system,” “as this cult constitutes the veneration of deceased male relatives” [17, pp. 259, 285].

Expanding on Tokarev’s idea, it is pertinent to note that during this period, coinciding with the increasing importance of male labor and the monopolization of nascent private property by men, patriarchy became established [18, pp. 131–133], and a neighboring, territorial, or peasant community emerged [19, p. 110]. This community, representing the basic unit of the social organism within a predominantly class-based society, consisted of households that generally corresponded to either large (extended, complex) or small (elementary, simple) families [20, p. 51].

Ancestor veneration as the patron of the house persisted among the Slavs throughout the Middle Ages. Rybakov observed that excavations of medieval Russian and Polish houses have yielded “small wooden idols, likely representing *domovoy*. These were possibly placed on corner shelves in the ‘red corner’ – a space later occupied by icons. Among the Hutsuls, this small shelf-shrine bore the distinctive name ‘didy,’ meaning ‘ancestors,’ *domovoy*” [21, pp. 234–235]. According to Velimir, “In pagan times, the Russians typically venerated minor household spirits, the principal one being the *domovoy*. For a peasant, veneration of the *domovoy* constituted the paramount pagan cult” [22, p. 76].

Therefore, the emergence of the mythological figure of the house spirit likely dates back to the decline of primitive society, the establishment of patriarchy, and the formation of households comprising large and small families within the context of the neighboring community. Veneration of this figure continued among the Slavs into the Middle Ages.

Domovoy’s characteristics among the Dagestani Russians

According to Eastern Slavic beliefs, the house spirit was typically invisible: “it is impossible to see the *domovoy*: it is beyond human capacity” [11, p. 19], “*domovoy* is invisible, and often takes the form of the owner of the house, alive or dead” [12, p. 413].

Although generally invisible, the *domovoy* was sometimes believed to manifest in other forms. It occasionally appeared in an amorphous form: for instance, some accounts describe encounters with “some kind of huge black shapeless mass” at the foot of a bed, a “creature whose face I could not see,” an entity “sitting with

its back to me" (Novo-Georgievka village), "only its silhouette... visible in the darkness" (Kalinovka village), or "something like smoke [that] flew away behind the door frame" (Tarumovka village).

In other instances, the *domovoy* was reported to appear in zoomorphic form: for example, accounts describe waking up to the sensation of "someone... lying next to me, like a bear," feeling "his short, shorn fur," or noticing that "my slippers began to smell of cat urine, although we didn't have a kitten in the house" (Novo-Georgievka village). Among the core Russian ethnic group, the *domovoy* also "often appeared in the form of various animals, most often a cat, dog, cow, or bull, less often a snake, rat, or frog" [12, p. 413].

In the mythological representations of Dagestani Russians, the *domovoy* most frequently appeared in anthropomorphic form, as evidenced by the gender, appearance, and age attributed to it: it is described as "of the male gender" (Tarumovka, Koktyubey, Talovka, and Alexandria villages), "with round" (Kalinovka village) "red eyes" (Alexandria village); "I felt that there was a man lying with me in my double bed" (Novo-Georgievka village); "I noticed that my house slippers began to smell like a man, although there is no man in my family" (Novo-Georgievka village); "he is an old man with a beard down to the middle of his chest, with long gray shaggy hair" (Averyanovka village); "he is hairy" (Talovka, Kalinovka, and Alexandria villages); "shaggy" (Alexandria village); "shaggy" (Tarumovka village); "woolly" (Koktyubey and Nekrasovka villages); "furry" (Tarumovka village); "covered with wool, cotton wool, [or] down" (Nekrasovka village); "smooth wool" (Tarumovka village); "soft" (Koktyubey village); "warm" (Koktyubey village); and "heavy" (Tarumovka village).

The *domovoy's* furry appearance was considered auspicious: "usually furry, sometimes he appears naked – then he foretells poverty" [12, p. 413]. Among the Terek Cossacks, "a *domovoy* foreshadowing misfortune for a person crushes him, remaining naked; if the *domovoy* foretells fortune, then he is woolly" [5, p. 62].

According to popular belief, the *domovoy* is described as "large" (Tarumovka and Koktyubey villages), "medium" (Tarumovka and Koktyubey villages), or even "small" (Alexandria and Kalinovka villages). He is depicted as wearing "a hat (*kolpak*) and... bast shoes" (Averyanovka village); "dressed in a fur coat" (Nekrasovka village); "he was wearing a short-haired, cropped fur coat" (Novo-Georgievka village); and "he was in sackcloth" (Kalinovka village).

In the majority of *bylychki* (eyewitness accounts of encounters with supernatural beings) and folktales of the Great Russian people, the *domovoy* was also depicted in anthropomorphic form. This is attributed to the belief that "the *domovoy* was usually a deceased ancestor of the family. This is precisely why anthropomorphic features predominate in the image of the *domovoy*" [13, p. 38]. The *domovoy* was commonly represented as "an old man of short stature with a silvery-white beard, large hands, and bare feet" [13, p. 37]; "in the form of a tiny old man with a face covered in white wool" [8, p. 391]; "a small gray-haired old man dressed in a white or red shirt" [22, p. 76]; "a small man in a cap like a fairy-tale gnome" [9, p. 52]; "in the form of an old man with long gray tangled hair and a beard, sometimes without eyebrows" [12, p. 413]; "in the form of a gray-haired old man, dressed in a long white shirt and with his head uncovered"; "he is dressed in a yellow cloth robe and always wears a large shaggy hat"; "the hair on his head and beard is long and matted"; and "this is a small old man, like a stump or a log, but with a large gray beard" [11, p. 21].

Thus, as demonstrated, in the mythological representations of Dagestani Russians, the *domovoy* appeared in amorphous, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic forms. The most frequent depiction was that of an old man with a beard and long, gray, shaggy hair, a portrayal consistent with its appearance in the folklore of the Great Russian people.

Habitat loci. Dagestani Russians believed that "the *domovoy* lives in every house, where he lives in the corner and especially in an old chest" (Koktyubey village); "he hides everywhere in the house" (Tarumovka village); "lives in the attic" (Novo-Georgievka village); "under the bed" (Koktyubey village); "in the corner" (Nekrasovka village); "sits under the stove" (Alexandria village); and "most often – behind the stove or in the corner behind a broom, provided that it stands with the broom down and the handle up" (Averyanovka village).

Therefore, the *domovoy's* dwelling places within the house included the corner, the old chest, the attic, the space under the bed, behind and under the stove, and behind the broom. It is noteworthy that in global mythologies, the chest was considered "a repository of secrets revealed to a select few initiates," and "ancient relics or objects personifying the spirit of ancestors were kept in chests" [23, p. 161]. As noted, one of its dwelling places was the broom, positioned with the handle up and the whisk down. This suggests that the broom "should be used carefully, since it could interfere with the good spirits of the house" [23, p. 102].

Among the core Russian ethnic group, the *domovoy* "lived in the house or in the outbuildings," "in the dark corners of the house," "in the corner behind the stove," and "under the stove" [13, pp. 37, 38]. Its dwelling places included the "attic" and "the basement of the house," and the "stove and the threshold" as well as

“the front corner and the threshold” were considered “places of honor” for it [12, pp. 256, 316, 403]. Further accounts state that “he visits every house and is always hiding in the stove and in the corner under a broom” [5, p. 61]; “lives in the corner behind the stove, where you should not throw garbage” [8, p. 391]; “every hut has its own *domovoy*,” “he lives in the attic” [24, p. 84]; “the *domovoy* lives in different places in the house—under the threshold, under the stove, in the attic, in the closet, in the chimney” [10, p. 201]; and “he lived under the stove, and the stove corner of the house also belonged to him” [22, p. 76]. It is evident that the primary dwelling places of the *domovoy* among Dagestani Russians and the core Russian ethnic group largely coincide.

The *domovoy*'s localization within the stove area (under or behind the stove) is, in our view, not coincidental and is linked to the veneration of the family hearth. According to Zhukovskaya, “in societies with a patriarchal way of life, the keeper of the hearth as a symbol of the home-family-household was a man, and the spirit – the keeper of the hearth (house) – acquired a male appearance (the *domovoy* among the Russians)” [25, p. 148].

Zelenin states that “the prevailing opinion is that the image of the East Slavic *domovoy* combines elements of ancestor veneration and the cult of the hearth, that is, fire. The former are more pronounced. The very location where the *domovoy* resides, most often under the stove, indicates its connection with the hearth and with fire. Residents of the northern Russian provinces usually place the *domovoy* in the cellar, but even there it lives in the corner where the stove is located. It also lives behind the stove, on the stove, [or] under the stove post. Less frequently it lives under the door threshold, under the corner of the house, [or] in the attic near the stovepipe” [12, p. 412].

As previously mentioned, the *domovoy* frequently inhabited the corners of the home, which, in mythopoetic thought, “are distinguished by a special semantic richness” and “are understood as volumetric-spatial loci in which a mythical ‘master’ can appear and act, either patronizing or not patronizing the family residing there” [26, pp. 28, 39].

In the mythologies of the Slavs and other cultures, the chimney's symbolic importance as a spatial conduit is well established. It functioned as an “entrance” from one world to another [27, p. 125] and a passage for movement “to heaven” (solar gates), from the temporal to the eternal, and from the finite to the infinite [28, p. 83].

The door threshold constituted another dwelling place and point of entry for the *domovoy* into the house. Zhukovskaya interprets this as a remnant of a once semantically significant “transitional” ritual: “crossing the border of two worlds, one of which is outside, the other is inside; the first is alien, the second is one's own. The first contains danger” [29, p. 123]. Eliade highlighted that “the threshold and the door directly and specifically indicate a break in space; and this is precisely their important religious significance, since together they are symbols and means of transition” [30, p. 25].

It is important to note that in global mythologies, the threshold personified “the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the external profane to the internal sacred space, [and] entry into a new world. As a boundary symbol, it signified the meeting place of the natural and the supernatural” [28, p. 256].

When describing the *domovoy*'s manifestations and dwelling places among Dagestani Russians in Tarumovka village, the following detail was observed: “something like smoke flew away behind the door frame.” According to Dmitriev, the magical significance of the doorway was widespread among the peoples of the North Caucasus: “the lintel was also revered, often called the ‘upper threshold’” [31, p. 99]. Among the Ossetians, doorways, gates, openings in fences, and window openings were considered permeable boundaries, as they connected internal and external spaces. In rituals and customs, primary attention was given to the doorway, especially to the threshold, which had to be crossed to move from the external to the internal space and vice versa [32, p. 148].

Therefore, the *domovoy*'s dwelling places encompassed both the entire dwelling (given its perceived omnipresence) and specific zones within it: the basement (closet); behind, on, and under the stove, and in the chimney; in the chest; behind the broom; under the door threshold; in the corners; and in the attic.

In our view, the *domovoy*'s habitation within these sacred spaces explains its ambivalence (both benevolent and malevolent aspects). Consequently, the *domovoy* appears on the one hand as a positive figure, a domestic spirit associated with ancestor veneration, the guardian of the house, and the patron of the family; on the other hand, it is characterized negatively, emphasizing its association with malevolent forces – described as “dashing,” “villain,” “not one's own spirit,” “house devil,” and “unclean” [13, p. 37].

Despite the *domovoy*'s association with evil spirits [8, p. 392], it is noteworthy that people generally treated it with sympathy. Maksimov observed this, writing: “The majority of peasants have become so accustomed to them, have reconciled themselves with them, that they do not agree to recognize *domovoi* as devils and

consider them a special separate good breed” [11, p. 19].

Time of appearance. Concerning the time of appearance, informants reported that the *domovoy* “appeared at night” (Kalinovka village), “came at night” (Nekrasovka village), or more specifically, “at midnight, and sometimes at noon” (Alexandria village), and “he appeared only if it was dark in the house and the window shutters were closed” (Koktyubey village). In some cases, he “came in the morning” (Nekrasovka village).

Although the *domovoy* could occasionally appear at noon, it most often appeared at night and was averse to light, as illustrated by the following account: “At night, the *domovoy* often came to me. I was afraid of him and did not know what to say or do. When I turned on the light, he immediately disappeared” (Novo-Georgievka village).

Among the core Russian ethnic group, the *domovoy* also preferred nocturnal appearances. Velimir notes that “conversations with the *domovoy* usually took place in a dream or at night” [22, p. 76], and Maksimov reported that anyone could see it “on a dark night before the second rooster crows” [11, p. 21].

This association with darkness, primarily functioning within the dark hours, aligns the *domovoy* with common characteristics attributed to malevolent entities. This association is based on the binary opposition of light and darkness and the division of the day into specific time intervals. Historically, “with the dawn of day,” people associated “everything good, everything that foreshadows life, harvest, profit, and with the sunset, with the night – everything bad: death, infertility, loss, [and] misfortune” [34, p. 168], as well as “chaos, madness, destruction, [and] return to the intrauterine state of the world” [28, pp. 218, 338].

Among the dark hours, midnight held particular significance. As Laurenkiene points out, “twelve o’clock at night is a transitional moment during which, according to ideas about an archaic holiday, the boundaries between worlds disappeared; therefore, miracles began – phenomena characteristic of the other world” [35, p. 377]. Zelenin also noted that midday and midnight were considered mysterious and critical moments by the Slavs [12, p. 418].

In Muslim and Jewish traditions, midday is considered the hour of revelation, its positive, spiritual meaning deriving from “the absence of shadows at this moment (which symbolize evil),” while “midnight is the hour of spiritual zenith and the moment of initiation (transition from one state to another)” [23, p. 129].

Krinichnaya observed that the passage “there” and “back” opens at sunset and sunrise. This temporal correlation, she argues, is not coincidental: “sunrise, noon, sunset, [and] midnight are those brief moments in the daily cycle when sacred time is interrupted by profane time, which creates the prerequisites for communication between the worlds” [36, p. 88]. Sunset, in her view, held particular importance and mystery – “that is, one of the four moments of the daily cycle when the sacred continuum and the profane chronotope turn out to be mutually permeable both in temporal and spatial parameters” [36, p. 93].

Therefore, we can conclude that sacred continua and chronotopes such as the corners of a home, the threshold and door frame, the stovepipe, the dark hours of the day, midnight, and midday allowed profane time and space to become permeable, facilitating the entry of otherworldly figures into our world.

Communication with the domovoy. Encounters with the *domovoy* were described using the following terms: “I had the feeling that someone was following me around all day long” (Koktyubey village); “I felt that someone was standing next to me” (Kardonovka village); “I communicated with him mentally” (Novo-Georgievka village); “I saw something like smoke that flew away behind the door frame” (Tarumovka village); “stomping, he went to the corner of the room” (Koktyubey village); “he put his hands on me” (Nekrasovka village); “something heavy fell on my feet” (Tarumovka village); and “he sat on my feet or sat down next to me” (Novo-Georgievka village). These accounts suggest that communication with the *domovoy* involved not only telepathic, visual, auditory, and remote interactions, but also direct tactile contact.

Muteness/noise. Informants reported that during contact with a person, the *domovoy* was mostly “silent” (Alexandria, Averyanovka, Nekrasovka, and Kalinovka villages), but sometimes it “knocks” (Averyanovka village); “makes sounds – ‘hu-hu’” (Nekrasovka village); “sighs loudly” (Alexandria and Novo-Georgievka villages); “hisses” (Nekrasovka and Koktyubey villages); and “mumbles” (Koktyubey village). A local belief held that “If the *domovoy* is silent, then it is for the worse, and if he mumbles – for the good” (Koktyubey village). Its appearance served as a warning of potential trouble (Koktyubey village).

Thus, in addition to silence (“muteness in folklore is a sign of belonging to the world of the dead” [37, p. 48]), the *domovoy* manifested itself through noises – knocking, sighs, hissing, muttering, and other sounds. These noises can be interpreted as a form of glossolalia, which in the mythology of the Siberian Turks functioned as “a way of symbolically framing a situation of the type ‘friend or foe’” [38, p. 150].

Among the core Russian ethnic group, the *domovoy* “knocked, breathed heavily and predicted bad things

in a human voice” [9, p. 54]. Accounts also mention “hear[ing] the *domovoy's* voice,” “his quiet crying and dull, restrained groans, his soft and affectionate, and sometimes abruptly short and dull voice in the form of passing answers, when skillful and savvy owners manage to call out and ask him at appropriate times” [11, p. 20]; and that “usually he is not visible, but you can hear him and ask questions; he answered in a rustling voice” [22, p. 76]. Rogozhin recounts an incident purportedly occurring among the Terek Cossacks, “when the head of a *domovoy* stuck out from under the stove, which said in a dull human voice: ‘Give it to me too’” [5, p. 62]. According to our data, articulate speech by the *domovoy* or vocal responses to questions (whether positive or negative) posed by people have not been documented among Dagestani Russians.

Thus, the *domovoy* among the Slavs was most often silent, and silence, along with the impossibility of growth and inversion, was a characteristic sign of the other world [27, p. 119]. In the mythology of the Turks of Siberia, “silence was equated with non-existence” [38, p. 144].

In some cases, the *domovoy* ceased to be mute and produced sounds—knocks, sighs, hisses, mutters, cries, moans—and even spoke and foretold fate.

Numerous researchers report on the *domovoy's* ability to foretell fate. Pomerantseva notes, “In Russian folklore, the *domovoy* strangles in a dream, predicting good or evil” [39, p. 102]. Gordeev similarly writes, “The *domovoy* can strangle a person at night in a dream, and then he must be asked: ‘for better or for worse’” [40, p. 52]. Maksimov states, “Whoever, having woken up, rushes to ask him: ‘For better or for worse?’ – he will answer with a human voice, as if the wind rustles leaves” [11, p. 20]. Rogozhin testifies, “Wanting to find out why the *domovoy* crushes a person, having heard a groan in the room, they ask: ‘for better or for worse?’ If the *domovoy* answers: ‘for worse,’ then there will be a dead person in the family or bad luck on the farm and damage to livestock; if the *domovoy* says: ‘for good,’ then the owner will have unexpected happiness” [5, p. 62].

It is interesting to note that Russians of the North also believed that if, when the *domovoy* “presses” (“pounces”) on the hostess, she manages to ask him “‘for good’ or ‘for bad?’”, he either responds with one of these words or informs her of the upcoming event with a touch of his hairy hand – cold hand foretelling misfortune, and a warm one, conversely, happiness [41, p. 72].

According to A. Golan, the *domovoy's* ability to predict fate also testifies to his connection with the other world: “The god of the underworld was considered prophetic” [42, p. 32]. Thus, the *domovoy's* muteness, as well as the noises and sounds he made, as well as his ability to predict fate, emphasized his belonging to the other world.

Patronage and malevolence. As previously noted, the *domovoy* exhibits ambivalence. Based on the *bylychki*, the *domovoy* was predominantly benevolent, though capable of malevolence. It was regarded as “the master of the house, who protects it and patronizes the family” (Alexandria, Nekrasovka, Tarumovka, Averyanovka, and Novo-Georgievka villages). Beliefs held that the *domovoy* “does no harm to anyone” (Alexandria village), is “kind and likes the owners to be homely, and for order to reign in the house” (Averyanovka village), and “protects cattle” (Averyanovka village). Benevolent actions included alleviating the condition of ill individuals and, in cases of grief, “stroking and pitying, [and] consoling” those afflicted (Koktyubey village).

The *domovoy's* malevolence was manifested by attacking sleeping individuals, immobilizing, crushing, and strangling them. Those who experienced such encounters described their condition using the following terms: “When the *domovoy* fell upon me, I pushed him away with my hands, but I could not cope with him” (Alexandria village); “he fell upon me with all his weight, and I could neither utter a word nor move” (Talovka and Novo-Georgievka villages); “he sat on my legs, immobilized me and strangled me for a long time” (Kalinovka village); “he sat on my chest and strangled me” (Tarumovka village); and “every night he came to one woman and slept with her against her will with her husband nearby” (Kardonovka village).

The *domovoy's* ambivalence is most clearly illustrated in the following account: “Before this, I had never had contact with a *domovoy*. One night I felt his presence. He sat with all his weight on my legs, immobilized me, painfully squeezed my shins and choked me. In the morning I found blue stripes left by him on my shins. Some time after this incident, I gave birth to a long-awaited child, and before that I could not have children for 18 years” (Kardonovka village).

As demonstrated, the *domovoy* both strangled and bruised this woman’s shins, yet following this encounter, she conceived and gave birth.

Dagestani Russians also believed that if, while being attacked and strangled by the *domovoy*, a person could ask the entity, “For better or for worse?”, the *domovoy* would foretell the future (Tarumovka, Koktyubey, and Averyanovka villages) before sliding off and disappearing (Kalinovka village). Some informants specified that the question needed to be posed three times for the *domovoy* to provide a prediction.

In some instances, the *domovoy* did not respond to these questions. One woman recounted that when she asked, “he did not answer anything, but only sighed loudly and disappeared” (Alexandria village). Another described her experience: “I was scared. I wanted to ask him: ‘For better or for worse’(?), but I couldn’t. Finally, I gathered my strength and asked him. He blew on me and disappeared” (Novo-Georgievka village).

In some cases, the appearance of a *domovoy* signaled the need to commemorate the soul of the deceased former owner of the house. One woman who experienced such an event recounted: “One night I woke up because someone was sitting on me. He was so heavy that I could neither inhale, nor exhale, nor move. In my sleep, I saw some huge shapeless mass on the edge of my bed. I guessed that it was a *domovoy* and wanted to ask him: ‘For better or for worse?’, but I couldn’t bring myself to say it, since my son is in the SMO zone in Ukraine, and I was afraid to hear bad things about him. I simply began to read prayers and turned to God: ‘Lord, help me!’ In the end, the *domovoy* let me go and disappeared. When I came to, I remembered that I bought this house from Grandpa Mitya, who had died a long time ago. I lived in this house for 23 years. This incident happened to me on the night of Parental Saturday, and I thought that Uncle Mitya should be remembered. In the morning I went to the church in the village of Tarumovka, where a service was going on at that time, and wrote him down on the list of those who should be remembered, and the priest remembered him. I think that in this way (through the appearance of the *domovoy*) Uncle Mitya’s soul reminded me of itself. The *domovoy* did not bother me anymore” (Novo-Georgievka village).

Informants explained that the *domovoy*’s malevolent actions often occur because new homeowners, upon purchasing and moving into a new residence, do not always invite their *domovoy* to accompany them. This perceived neglect provokes the *domovoy*’s anger and subsequent retaliation against the new occupants. One informant recounted a similar instance: “After moving to a new house, my grandmother had bruises all over her legs. She did not know where they came from and asked the priest at the church for an explanation. The priest explained to her that the bruises on her legs were caused by the *domovoy* (whom the grandmother invited to her new house from the previous one) and the *domovoy* (whom the previous owners did not take with them to the new house). Both *domovoi* pinched the grandmother’s legs to encourage her to take her *domovoy* with them to the new home, since two ‘owners’ in one house do not get along, but fight among themselves” (Novo-Georgievka village).

Zelenin describes a comparable situation: “If he is angry with the owners, then at night he knocks, pinches the sleeping ones, and sometimes even drives people out of the house with his tricks. He breaks dishes, throws out the poker, bricks from the stove, etc. The latter usually happens in cases when new owners move into the house with the old *domovoy*, or when someone out of malice lets a strange *domovoy* into the house” [12, p. 413].

If the previous owners did not invite the *domovoy* to their new residence, and the new owners did not appease it, the *domovoy* could become enraged and attack the homeowner at night, sitting on their chest and strangling them (Averyanovka village).

When purchasing a new house, it was necessary to invite the *domovoy* from the old house to the new one with the following words: “*Domovoy, domovoy, come with me to the new house!*” (Alexandria village). Another version of the invitation upon moving was: “*My master, come with me!*” (Tarumovka village).

Among the core Russian ethnic group, “when moving to a new place, the *domovoy* was specially invited to move with everyone” [13, p. 39]. Zelenin describes a specific ceremony for this purpose: “They move to a new house with fire from the old hearth, with bread or dough in a trough, with a rooster and a cat. They especially invite the *domovoy* to move to the new house. ‘A small loaf of bread with salt is placed in the basement of a new house for the *domovoy*, and a cup of water is put in’” [12, p. 316]. Maksimov also notes that when relocating, it was customary to “go to the old house and bow to beg the *domovoy* to come to the new chambers, where the mistress herself has prepared a treat for him in the basement: a small salted loaf and a cup of vodka” [11, p. 25].

As informants pointed out, “the *domovoy* likes to be treated politely and respectfully, to be appeased with treats. If people neglected these rules, he would take revenge on the owners of the house” (Averyanovka village). Other researchers have also noted this characteristic: “The *domovoy* is generally not angry, but sometimes he gets angry at people and then takes revenge on them” [12, p. 413] – manifested through disappearing objects, the removal of dishes from kitchen cupboards, the pouring of water on beds, and the extinguishing of lit matches [9, p. 54]. Therefore, the *domovoy*’s dual nature (sacred, otherworldly, chthonic, and demonic features) and its association with different spheres of sacred space (upper and lower worlds) determined its ambivalence – it could be both benevolent and malevolent towards humans.

Beliefs linked with the loss of things to the domovoy. It is noteworthy that Dagestani Russians also held

specific beliefs regarding the *domovoy*. For example, the loss of a knife or spoon within the house was attributed to its actions. In such instances, they would say: “*Domovoy, domovoy, let’s play, give it back!*” and the missing item would subsequently reappear. They avoided leaving knives on the table at night “so that the *domovoy* would not take it for himself and use it” (Alexandria village). There was also a belief that the *domovoy* enjoyed taking shiny objects, particularly cutlery (knives, spoons, and forks). If any item was misplaced, they would say: “*Domovoy, domovoy, let’s play and give it back!*” and it would then be unexpectedly located (Averyanovka village).

Appeasement and treats. To prevent the *domovoy* from seeking revenge or causing harm, people “appeased” it (Tarumovka village) and “fed him” (Nekrasovka village) by “putting sweets” (Novo-Georgievka village), “sugar on a saucer” (Talovka village), “leaving sugar, salt, and milk on the table” (Kalinovka village), “bread, milk, cookies, salt, and sugar” (Koktyubey village), and “milk, rye bread, sugar, candies, and sweet porridge with butter” (Averyanovka village). Among the core Russian ethnic group, “the *domovoy* was fed on major holidays: on New Year’s, borscht and porridge were taken to the attic; during the fast before Lent and Christmas – pancakes, a piece of meat, and a cup of milk; on Easter – painted eggs. It was believed that on the day of Ephraim the Syrian (February 10) the *domovoy* had his name day. On this day, he was left with porridge, colored rags, and sheep’s wool” [13, p. 40].

It is important to note that in global mythologies, milk represented “the elixir of life, rebirth, and immortality,” and offering it to someone was “a metaphor for kindness, care, sympathy, abundance, and fertility” [23, p. 104]. Among the Slavs, grain, porridge, pancakes, and baked bread also symbolized fertility in their rituals [43, p. 37].

Therefore, as demonstrated, according to established Eastern Slavic tradition, the *domovoy* was appeased and offered sacred products symbolizing fertility—milk, butter, salt, and sugar—as well as cooked and baked grain and flour dishes.

Intimidation of children by the domovoy and ways to protect against it. Despite the *domovoy*’s beneficial and protective qualities, it was still an object of fear. Children who did not go to bed on time were threatened: “Go to bed, or the *domovoy* will come!” (Talovka village).

The use of the *domovoy* to frighten children specifically in winter, rather than summer, is significant. According to the Russian agricultural calendar, “in January–February, in combination with the cult of the ‘cattle god’ Vlasii, rites of propitiation of the *domovoy*, who ‘must be honored,’ were performed. Rituals of veneration of the *domovoy* coincided with the days of Ephraim the Syrian (January 28) [and] Anna the Prophetess (February 3)” [44, p. 214]. It is relevant to note that among many cultures, memorial rites and the distribution of food to the poor occur “during winter holidays, which emphasize the idea of death and the presence of the dead (in contrast to spring holidays – days of the brightest light, warmth, and prime of life)” [37, pp. 48–49].

Despite the *domovoy*’s benevolent and patronizing qualities, it was still considered a malevolent entity, and to protect against its visits, people “sprinkled holy water under the bed while reading prayers” (Koktyubey village).

As is known, sprinkling with holy water “signifies purification, holiness, and the expulsion of evil forces” [28, p. 224]. In Slavic mythology, the most potent amulets against devils and other malevolent spirits were a pectoral cross and holy water [13, pp. 108–109]. However, Maksimov believed that only the holy cross served as “the only true and completely powerful means against this evil spirit” [11, p. 37].

The Russians of Poshekhonye believed that to prevent the *domovoy* from strangling them, one should not “sleep on your back, near thresholds, or across the floor” [24, pp. 84–85]. These prohibitions, in our view, are linked to the fear of human intrusion into the *domovoy*’s habitat (the threshold), which can be described by binary oppositions: back–front (sleeping on the back), lengthwise–across, right–left (across the floor).

If amulets proved ineffective, individuals driven to desperation by the *domovoy*’s persistent visits would retaliate, sometimes inflicting significant harm. One woman who had repeated encounters described such an incident: “Every day in the morning the *domovoy* would come to me, crush and strangle me. I was sick of all this. One day I grabbed him, carried him out into the yard, and hit him with all my might against a tree trunk. Against the background of the rays of the rising sun, flying splashes of his blood were visible. After this incident, he no longer came to me. Apparently, I killed him” (Nekrasovka village).

Therefore, Christian prayers and holy water served as protective measures against the *domovoy*.

Domovoy among other peoples of the North Caucasus. The image of the *domovoy* existed in the mythologies of other Dagestani peoples [45, pp. 139–144]. Shared features between Eastern Slavic and Dagestani beliefs include its amorphous, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic manifestations, dwelling places, time of

appearance, ambivalence, the act of leaning on and strangling a person in their sleep, and the ability to predict fate. These similarities may be attributed to historical areal contacts [46, p. 79]. It is important to acknowledge the potential imprecision in classifying Dagestani mythological figures who enter a home from the outside to interact with people as *domovoy*, given their less prominent protective roles [47, p. 131].

Household spirits existed in the mythologies of other peoples of the North Caucasus and globally. For example, Ingush beliefs held that “in each house there is a *taram* (*domovoy*) according to the number of married people; *Taram* is a good spirit, but for bad deeds he punishes cattle, children, etc. with death” [48, p. 175]. The Ossetians believed in the existence of *Bynaty-khitsu* – the patron spirit of the house, the *domovoy*, the “master of the place.” He was considered the invisible master of the home, and a holiday was celebrated in his honor on the first Wednesday after the winter solstice [49, p. 72].

Conclusion

Analysis of the *domovoy*'s manifestations, dwelling places, time of appearance, methods and forms of communication with humans, benevolent and malevolent actions, methods of appeasement, and protective measures leads to the following conclusions and generalizations.

The mythological figure of the *domovoy*, originating during the decline of primitive society, the establishment of patriarchy, and the formation of households comprising large and small families within the framework of the neighboring community, is a complex, syncretic, and ambivalent image. It is rooted in ancestor veneration and the cult of the hearth. The *domovoy* appeared in various forms (amorphous, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic), most frequently as an old man with a beard and gray, shaggy hair. Its dwelling places encompassed both the entire home and specific, designated zones within it. This habitation within sacred spaces is, in our view, the basis of its ambivalence (benevolence and malevolence).

The *domovoy* primarily appeared to humans during the dark hours in specific locations. Sacred continua and chronotopes such as the corners of the home, the threshold and door frame, the stovepipe, the dark time of day, midnight, and midday facilitated the permeability of profane time and space, allowing otherworldly figures to enter our world.

Interactions with the *domovoy* involved not only telepathic, visual, auditory, and remote communication but also direct tactile contact. While the *domovoy* was most often silent during these encounters, it sometimes manifested itself through various noises and sounds, which can be interpreted as a form of communication with the supernatural. The *domovoy*'s muteness, the noises and sounds it produced, and its ability to foretell fate further underscore its connection to the other world.

The *domovoy*'s dual nature (encompassing both sacred and demonic features) and its association with different spheres of sacred space (upper and lower worlds) determined its ambivalence, allowing it to be both benevolent and malevolent. To prevent the *domovoy* from causing harm, it was appeased and offered sacred products symbolizing fertility. Christian prayers and holy water acted as protective measures against it.

The primary parameters and characteristics of the *domovoy* among Dagestani Russians align with the beliefs about this figure among the core Russian ethnic group. This consistency indicates the stability, continuity, and intergenerational transmission of key images in Russian mythology through historical memory. Therefore, we can conclude that conceptions of the *domovoy* developed among the Eastern Slavs across various historical periods and indirectly reflect the social, socioeconomic, and cultural processes they experienced. The surviving remnants of this mythological figure among Dagestani Russians offer a degree of hope for the preservation of their ethnic, religious, and cultural identity in the era of globalization.

Acknowledgements. The study was supported by the Russian Science Foundation, project No. 23-28-00208, <https://rscf.ru/project/23-28-00208/>.

Финансирование. Исследование выполнено за счет гранта Российского научного фонда № 23-28-00208, <https://rscf.ru/project/23-28-00208/>.

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Received 11.01.2024

Accepted 01.03.2024

Published 15.12.2024

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Поступила в редакцию 11.01.2024 г.

Принята в печать 01.03.2024 г.

Опубликована 15.12.2024 г.