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# **ABOUT RITUALS OF THE WEDDING CEREMONIALS OF PEOPLE OF THE CENTRAL ASIA**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional wedding ceremonial of both people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan as well as any other nation of the world represents a very difficult ceremonial institute. This institute consists of rituals and customs which reflect religious and social and legal norms of one or another society. Moreover, these ceremonies and customs preserve remains of both the previous stages of development of the human society and its religious thoughts.<sup>1</sup>

Remains of the wedding ceremonial may be divided on two categories: 1) remains of the social norms and institutes (these include ancient artifacts of family-conjugal procedures related to the period of first mother's then father's clan) and 2) remains of the early forms of religion – mainly magic, cult of ancestors and hearth, cult of nature and fertility, cult of natural phenomena, cult of fire etc. Traditional ceremonial is capable of keeping features of different epochs, later this allows to restore its history – this is the peculiar property of the traditional ceremonial (or ritual).

Thus, traditional wedding ceremonial (XIX – early XX) represents complex interlacing of social and religious categories corresponding to different historic epochs and is adjusted to the present level of social development of the nation considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Shternberg L. Y. (1926). "Novie materiali po svad'be," Materiali po svad'be i semeinorodovomu stroyu narodov SSSR, Vol.1, pp. 6-7.

Remains of the wedding ceremonial of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan have been previously mentioned by various researchers (especially those of USSR period). Theoretical background of the issue of the remains of the social institutes may be found in References.<sup>2</sup> In References the more detailed study of the remains of the social institutes can be found. Analysis of the origin of the most customs and ceremonies regarding wedding is found in work performed by Snesarev<sup>3</sup> while Kislyakov<sup>4</sup> studied religious customs concerning wedding ceremonial.

First who tried to differentiate between customs of the wedding ceremonial of different nations was Lobacheva<sup>5</sup> and then this work was continued by Abramzon<sup>6</sup> and Vasil'eva.<sup>7</sup>

### TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES

Comparative study of the wedding ceremonies of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan shows that there are two main groups with typical features. These features of the wedding ceremonies, as it will be shown below, are determined by similar culture-ethnic environment in which they formed. Thus, characteristic features of the wedding ceremonials of these two groups of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan form traditional ceremonies (rituals) which we are interested in.

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<sup>2</sup> Suhareva O. A. (1940). "Svadebnie obryadi Tadjikov goroda Samarkanda i nekotorykh drugih raionov Sredney Azii," Vol.3, pp. 172-176. Abramzon S. M. (1967). "Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel'nih stran," Manuscript, p. 544., pp. 582-591. Vasil'eva G. P. (1954). "Turkmeny-nohurli," Trudy IE, Vol.21, p. 194. Bekmuratova A. T. (1970). "Bit i semya karakalpakov v proshlom i nastoyachem," p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Snesarev G. P. (1969). "Relikti domusulmanskikh verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekskov Horezma," p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Kislyakov N. A. (1959). "Semya i brak u Tadjikov," pp. 181-191.

<sup>5</sup> Lobacheva N. P. "Svadebniy obryad horezmskikh uzbekov," pp. 45-47.

<sup>6</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1967). "Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel'nih stran," Manuscript, p. 544., pp. 582-591.

<sup>7</sup> Vasil'eva G. P. (1968). "O roli etnicheskikh komponentov v slojenii svadebnoy obryadnosti turkmen," History, archeology and ethnography of the Central Asia, pp. 324-333.

One of these traditional ceremonies is related to Turkic-speaking people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan who were mainly occupied with cattle-breeding in past. These are Kazakh, Kyrgyz, semi-nomadic Uzbek people and Kara Kalpak people who were occupied with agriculture.

Another traditional ceremony reflects the features of the wedding ceremonies of the Central Asian people who were occupied mostly with agriculture. These are Iranian-speaking Tajik and Uzbek people who did not know anything about clan division<sup>8</sup> (ancient Iran-language people of the Central Asia played an important role in formation of these tribal divisions). Wedding ceremony of Persian people, who are congeneric to Tajik people, is also characterized by the features of the ceremony described above.

It worth considering here that each of the group of ceremonies mentioned above contains some elements of another group. This is explained by the complexity of the genesis and history of all nations mentioned above as well as by the fact that often both of these groups contained the same ethnic components. Therefore, when considering each traditional ceremony it is necessary to pay attention in order to see where this or another feature prevails.

Customs and ceremonies are the most striking examples of features which allow us to determine the group of traditional ceremony when considering any of wedding ceremonies. That is because customs and ceremonies reflect remnant forms of religious beliefs of ancient times. Attributes of different ceremonies play an important role because they represent forms of culture, mode of life, and economical activity that used to exist.

Sainted rituals of the late religious (Islam particularly) dominating among all people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan do not allow us to determine the group of traditional ceremony. Such sainted rituals have quite abstract character and uniformity among all people mentioned above who practiced this religion; these rituals have nothing to do with cultural and agricultural features and ethnic history of these people.

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<sup>8</sup> Uzbek people of agricultural oasis who did not know anything about clan division (XIX - early XX) were called "sarty" (сарты)

It is well known by people who study family history that marriage had been considered as an extremely important occasion from ancient times by people of all over the world. Wedding had been considered as an important occasion not only in life of an individual person but in the life of the society as a whole (because marriage guaranteed the continuation of the family). Therefore so much attention was paid to a wedding ceremony.

Long before, man was trying to find help by turning to religion actions because he thought these actions could help him to justify his hopes. Wedding ceremony was accompanied by many religious actions which were performed with the only one purpose – to have many descendants, prosperity and peace in family. Other religious actions were performed to protect newly wedded couple from harmful power which (it was believed) was all around.

Preservation of the main idea of the wedding ceremony and insularity of family life resulted in that part of religious actions described above reached our days in more or less modified form. These actions reflect religious beliefs of antiquity. Magic remains of the cult of nature (ritual meaning of fire, water and plants), cult of ancestors are abundantly presented among different customs of the modern wedding ceremony. Demonology and amulets have also reached our days – precaution from evil eye is the most popular of them. But for all of that Muslim ritual plays secondary factor.<sup>9</sup>

In present paper, religious-magic rituals (ceremonies) and beliefs used during wedding ceremonies are considered in respect to their interrelation with ethnic traditions rather than in respect to their genesis. The material presented below shows that religious-magic elements of the wedding ceremonial may serve as a reliable source of information for study of the ethnic genesis.

### **WEDDING CEREMONIAL OF UZBEK PEOPLE**

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<sup>9</sup> Snegarev G. P. (1969). "Relikty domusul'manskih verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Horezma," Moscow, pp. 73-106.

Characteristic features mentioned in Kazakh, Kara Kalpak and Kyrgyz wedding may also be found in the wedding ceremony of Uzbek people who used to have semi-nomadic mode of living with remains of clan division.

There are few sources available which tell about Uzbek wedding ceremonial and its rituals. There are two groups of Uzbek people with their own wedding ceremonial (formed according to their ethno genesis): Uzbek people who are descendants of medieval Turkic people and Uzbek people of “deshtikipchak” group. Wedding ceremony of the second group of Uzbek people does not have songs and dances while the wedding ceremony of the first group is full with song competitions among teenagers (just like wedding ceremony of Kazakh, Kara Kalpak and Kyrgyz people). However, wedding ceremonies of both groups stated above have much in common. And these common features are similar to features of Kazakh and Kara Kalpak wedding ceremonies.

Some groups of Uzbek people, “lokai” group for instance, did not have branchy wedding ceremony which would include *Matching and agreement*. However, these groups of Uzbek people had custom to have feast in the house of fiancé before wedding. People who came to this feast were supposed to bring some money which were supposed to be spent for the future wedding ceremony (presents for a bride and mutton). Also, there was ritual of “teasing of matchmakers” (like in Kazakh wedding ceremonial). Before official wedding, a religious wedding ceremony called “nikoh” was performed. During this ceremony a bride was hidden by girls living in her village – this ceremony reminds the ceremony of Kazakh people called “escape” of a bride. Other groups of Uzbek people had remain of the ceremony called “tartis” which means “lugging”<sup>10</sup> Most groups had custom where a fiancé was supposed to pay bride-money before he saw his wife (this custom is similar to the custom of Kazakh and Kara Kalpak people).

After religious wedding “nikoh” was finished, bridegroom (or fiancé) stayed at home of his bride for 3-4 days, he visited his wife at nights and stayed with his friends during the days (this custom is common among “lokai” group of Uzbek people). This custom may be

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<sup>10</sup> Karmisheva B. H. (1968). Notes of excavations, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

also observed in other groups of Uzbek people.<sup>11</sup> Mother of the bride took part in her transportation to the house of fiancé (in most groups of Uzbek people). All groups of Uzbek people ate mutton during the most ceremonies performed on wedding. Bacon served as a ritual food during the wedding<sup>12</sup> and sheepskin coat served as bedding for a bride.<sup>13</sup>

Many groups of Uzbek people (“lokai”, “durmen”, “nayman”, South Khorezm Uzbek people) had proxy father and proxy mother (like was described in Kazakh, Kara Kalpak and Kyrgyz wedding ceremony).<sup>14</sup>

One of the characteristic features of Uzbek wedding is ritual meaning of the number nine “9”. Other rituals are spreading oil on the forehead of a bride and giving milk to a bride and fiancé. The ritual of the union of a bride with the hearth also exists (when bride was supposed to pour some oil into the fireplace) – this ritual is performed by “lokai” and “nayman” groups of Uzbek people. As in case of other nations Uzbek people also have Islamic features in their wedding ceremonial (a prayer is read).

### WEDDING CEREMONIAL OF KARA KALPAK PEOPLE

Wedding ceremonial of Kara Kalpak people<sup>15</sup> consisted of the following steps:

1. *Matchmaking-agreement.* The most influential men from the family of a fiancé played roles of matchmakers, even though sometimes women were also allowed to participate in matchmaking process. Elders of the village where the bride lived were invited to the ceremony of matchmaking to discuss the details of future wedding (including the

<sup>11</sup> Grebenkin A. D. (1872). “Uzbeki” in collection Russkiy Turkestan, Vol.1, pp. 62-68.

<sup>12</sup> Lobacheva N. P. (1960). “Svadebniy obryad horezmskih uzbekov,” Vol.34, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Borozna N. G. (1969). “Nekotorie cherti tradicionnoy svadebnoy obryadnosti uzbekov-durmenov ujnih raionov Tadjikistana i Uzbekistana,” Soviet Encyclopedia, Vol.2, p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Zadyhina K. L. (1952). “Uzbeki del’ti Amu-Dar’i,” Trudy HAE, Vol.1, Moscow, p. 403.

<sup>15</sup> Bekmuratova A. T. (1970). “Opisanie karakalpakskogo svadebnogo obryada,” Byt i semya karakalpakov v proshlom i nastoyachem, Nukus, pp. 54-78. Atamuratov T. J. (1974). “Izuchenie semeynih obryadov naseleniya Karakalpakii,” Results of field investigations of Academy of Science of USSR, Moscow.

amount of bride-money and the wedding itself). Final agreement was ratified with a prayer, people were offered a meal (fried millet with oil) and presents were given to the family of a bride. Then, parents of a bride and a fiancé gave each other present named “tos” (bacon). This coarse included meat and “baurisak” (slice of dough in form of bacon fried in boiling oil).

2. *Period of “secret” meeting* “kuyeuleu” was opened with a festival called “esik ashar” (which means to open the door). This festival was held in the village of a bride. A fiancé usual came to this festival accompanied by his friends and one or two elders of his village. Before a bride and a fiancé meet each other (meeting was called “tanys”) young people had a party “otyrspa”, then a bride was hidden (like in Kazakh wedding). Later a bride was found and after bride-money was paid she was delivered to the house of her bother’s wife “jenge” (fiancé was waiting in this house for his future wife). After “esik ashar” festival a fiancé was allowed to visit his bride.

3. *Wedding ceremony* consisted of a feast held in the house of a bride, ceremony of transportation of a bride to the house of a fiancé and feast in the house of a fiancé. Before the wedding, relatives and neighbors of the bride and the fiancé gathered together in the house of the bride (“kyna toy”<sup>16</sup>) and fiancé (“oramal toy”<sup>17</sup>) correspondingly to make their contribution to the forthcoming wedding (in the form of money usually).

During the feast held in the house of a bride, a fiancé was supposed to come there (during the journey to her house he had several obstacles from which he was supposed to ransom). Reasons for ransoms and their names were similar to those of Kazakh people.<sup>18</sup> The difference between Kazakh and Kara Kalpak weddings is that during Kara Kalpak wedding ransoms were made only during the wedding ceremony.

Also, during the feast held in the house of a bride, her relatives performed a ritual of “pouring of water” at matchmakers. Men who came

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<sup>16</sup> “kyna” means henna when translated from Kaka Kalpak language

<sup>17</sup> “oramal toy” is translated as “holiday of a shawl”

<sup>18</sup> Bekmuratova A. T. (1970). “Bit i semya karakalpakov v proshlom i nastoyachem,” pp. 71-72.



with a fiancé were poured water on their necks, and then their necks were oiled with either loam or dough.

Muslim wedding ceremony was usually held in the house of the bride's father (before her living for husband's house); however, first night was spent by newly-married in the house of fiancé (as opposed to Kazakh wedding ceremonial).

Before leaving her home, bride made her farewells to her relatives: she was visiting her relatives and friends who presented her dresses and other clothes. Then a bride sang ritual weeping-songs and cried. At the same time ritual was carried out where a bride put on a costume of a young married woman (except "kimeshek"<sup>19</sup>). Just like Kazakh people did, Kara Kalpak people used to invite new son-in-law to eat traditional food – bacon made of mutton. Sometimes this bacon was given to him without knife; he was supposed to get the knife by paying some money.

A bride was transported to the house of a fiancé on a bullock-cart with a horse or a yak yoked into it. She was accompanied with her mother, sister and friends. However, bride's mother was supposed to get off the bullock-cart before arrival to the house of fiancé (in contrast to Kazakh wedding ceremony). Girls and boys as well as women living in the village of a bridegroom were supposed to meet a bride upon her arrival to their village (a proxy mother "murindik ene" was among them). A proxy mother was supposed to put "kimeshek" (or veil) on bride's head to cover her face (to protect from an evil eye), then she was supposed to bring a bride into the house of a fiancé and from that time on she was considered to be second mother for both newly-married (her husband was considered to be a proxy father).

One of rituals that were held upon bride's arrival to the village of her fiancé was "qol qaray" (looking at hands) – when girls meeting a bride were presented rings, wristlets and other adornments. Another ritual held was "cleaning by fire" ("ot atlau"). When entering new home, bride was strewn over with traditional cookies ("shiy bauysak") and dates (this was performed by her mother-in-law). In the doors a bride was supposed to bow down and touch the floor with her forehead, and then her mother-in-law was supposed to spread some oil on bride's forehead. Then a

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<sup>19</sup> Kimeshek – a special blanket which was a part of her dress of a bride (kind of veil)

bride was brought into tent and offered a sit behind a curtain surrounded by girls. She was given either a sheep or a cow-skin to put under her feet and a spindle "urshik". From that time on big wedding ceremony was started in the house of a fiancé (called "ugly toi").

During this big wedding ceremony verse competitions were arranged by girls and boys. A ritual called "bet ochar"<sup>20</sup> (looking at face) was held during which traditional verses of instruction nature "aytim" were read. In the end fried millet with oil was brought by mother-in-law: where first spoon was given to mother-in-law and the second spoon was given to bride. After this ritual, bride was supposed to start housekeeping and serving guests. One of traditional rituals, where the ability of a bride to spin was checked, took place during the wedding ceremony at the house of a fiancé; this ritual was called "urshik iyrtiu".

Horse racings with killing a goat was typical entertainment during the wedding ceremonial of Kara Kalpak people, they were held on different stages of the wedding.

Religious motives in Kara Kalpak wedding are the same as in Kazakh wedding. However, religious-magic customs in Kara Kalpak wedding play more important role. These religious-magic customs were carried out to provide a good relations between newly-married, between bride and the family of fiancé, to guarantee large posterity and protect from an evil eye. These religious-magic customs were: eating of fried millet with oil (to consolidate the unity), strewing with traditional cookies and dates (to provide large posterity and prosperity).<sup>21</sup> "Cleaning by fire" and using of curtains were parts of protection magic. Islam found its place in reading a prayer to consolidate the unity.

### WEDDING CEREMONIAL OF KYRGYZ PEOPLE

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<sup>20</sup> "bet" means face when translated from Kara Kalpak language

<sup>21</sup> Snasarev G. P. (1969). "Relikti domusulmanskih verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Horezma," p. 79.

Wedding ceremonial of Kyrgyz people is not similar to that of Kazakh and Kara Kalpak people.<sup>22</sup> Here we can distinguish two regions: North Kyrgyzia and South Kyrgyzia which is mainly populated by Kyrgyz people of “ichkilik” group. People living in South Kyrgyzia have more archaism features in their wedding ceremonial than people of North Kyrgyzia,<sup>23</sup> they also have more features adopted from Tajik and Uzbek people living in the neighborhood – this is one of the distinctive features of Kyrgyz wedding ceremony. Another distinctive feature is that Kyrgyz wedding ceremony is its similarity to the wedding ceremony of people of South Siberia (Altai, Khakas, some part of Buryat people). Rituals and customs were similar not only in the meaning but also in performance.<sup>24</sup>

Wedding ceremonial of Kyrgyz people consisted of the following steps:

1. Kyrgyz wedding procedure was begun with *Meeting-agreement* (matchmaking), but the final agreement concerning the amount of bride-money and conditions of payment was made conversationally by parents of prospective couple. Final agreement concerning wedding ceremony was ratified with ritual food named “kuyrik boor” (made of sheep’s liver and fat) and presents.<sup>25</sup> Kyrgyz people living on Pamirs ratified the agreement by bowing down to each other.<sup>26</sup> Kyrgyz people had also ritual of wearing breast adornments on a bride during matchmaking ceremony.

Kyrgyz people living on the mountains had ritual called “chachila toy” or “keneshme” during process where the bride-money was discussed (this ritual is similar to Kara Kalpak ritual named “oramal toy” and “kyna toy”. People invited to this ritual were supposed to bring cattle and money which was necessary for bride-money (for parents of fiancé)

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<sup>22</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1967). “Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel’nih stran,” Manuscript, pp. 544-599, 568.

<sup>23</sup> Reference 26, p. 568.

<sup>24</sup> Reference 26, pp. 584, 590.

<sup>25</sup> Zagryajskiy G. (1874). “Kirgizy,” Vol.44.

<sup>26</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1959). “Svadebnie obichai kirgizov Pamira,” Works of the Academy of Science of Tajik SSR, Vol.120, pp. 31-37. Kislyakov N. A. (1969). “Ocherki po istorii sem’i i braka u narodov Sredney Azii b Kazahstana,” p. 115.

and for marriage portion (for parents of bride). Kyrgyz living on Pamirs had feast called “pata toy” after this ritual.<sup>27</sup>

2. *Period of “secret” meeting* between a bride and a fiancé “kuyeulee barau” was common among all Kyrgyz people. First arrival of a fiancé to the village of a bride was celebrated with a complex ritual similar to that performed by Kazakh people (see above).<sup>28</sup> This ritual had specific character in South regions (in some villages it was skipped), and it was held after the bride-money was fully paid.<sup>29</sup> In his first journey to the bride’s house a fiancé was accompanied with his relatives (this included one singer, musician and a witty fellow).

Upon arrival to the village of bride, a fiancé was met by girls and women (relatives of a bride) to whom he was supposed to give supplies for wedding brought by him which consisted of mutton (2-3 trotters, 2 jaws, bacon and 2 livers). Before meeting with his bride, a fiancé was supposed to make presents which had ransoming character (this ritual is similar to those performed by Kaka Kalpak and Kazakh people).<sup>30</sup>

After meeting with his bride, a fiancé was supposed to put on new clothes which were presented by his prospective father-in-law (this ritual has the same meaning with ritual where a bride was supposed to change her cloth).

During first arrival of a fiancé to the village of a bride, teenagers played games “jar korushuv”<sup>31</sup> and “tokmok saluu”.<sup>32</sup> Long before, people used to have horse racing.

3. *Wedding ceremony* “kyz toy”.<sup>33</sup> A bride was brought from her village to the village of her prospective husband; this ritual was called “kyz aluu.” Upon arrival of bride, the great feast was held in the village

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<sup>27</sup> Kislyakov N. A. (1969). “Ocherki po istorii sem’i i braka u narodov Sredney Azii b Kazahstana,” p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1967). “Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel’nih stran,” Manuscript, p. 503

<sup>29</sup> Reference 28, pp. 519-520.

<sup>30</sup> Reference 32, p. 570.

<sup>31</sup> “jar korushuv” is translated as “meeting sweetheart” from Kyrgyz language

<sup>32</sup> “tokmok saluu” is translated as “gripping of a mallet” from Kyrgyz language

<sup>33</sup> “kyz toy” is translated as “girls feast” from Kyrgyz language

of fiancé. Parents of fiancé and his relatives were strewed with flour or splashed over with milk. All guests were given mutton to eat.

Like Kazakh people, Kyrgyz people had their own traditional games held during the wedding ceremony; these games reflected ancient wedding customs and family relationships. Singing competitions were obligatory part of these traditional games. Kyrgyz people had a ritual which was not in the wedding ceremony of both Kazakh and Kara Kalpak people; this ritual (called “opke chabuu”<sup>34</sup>) consisted in following: newly-married were put together (back to back), then covered with a shawl and were gently beaten with lungs of a goat (killed especially for this ritual). People of South Kyrgyzia had wedding ceremony in the house of a bride.

On last day of celebrations, young girls arranged competitions with horses involved; newly-married also took part in these competitions. After all ceremonies were finished, bridegroom was supposed to spend 5-15 days with his bride in the tent presented by parents of the bride (7-8 days they did not come out of the tent). When this tent was set, newly-married threw sheep’s head through the chimney (like Kazakh people did). While staying in this tent, a ritual named “otko kirgizyu”<sup>35</sup> was performed by bridegroom to propitiate clan ancestors (bridegroom poured oil into fire). After this ritual he was allowed to meet her parents.

Before living her house, bride had farewell with her parents and relatives; her hairs was plaited and greased with oil (then hair dress of young woman named “shekule” was put on). When living her home, bride sang ritual farewell songs. During her journey to the house of fiancé, bride was accompanied with her mother and close friends “jenge” (in wedding ceremony of North Kyrgyz people mother did not accompany a bride).

Wedding ceremony in the house of fiancé was less saturated with different rituals compared to the ceremony held in the house of bride (in contrast to Kazakh wedding). This ceremony included ritual named “bet ochar” (looking at face) was performed along with ritual of union of bride with hearth.

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<sup>34</sup> “opke chabuu” is translated as “beating with lungs” from Kyrgyz language

<sup>35</sup> “otko kirgizyu” is translated as “union with fire”

After housekeeping capabilities of a bride were checked, her father in law assigned her a proxy father “okul ata” and a proxy mother “okul ene”. Finally, wedding ceremony was completed by returning of a bride to her home to spend there from one month up to one year (her husband was allowed to visit her during this period).

Religions rituals in the wedding of Kyrgyz people are the same as in wedding of Kazakh people. All rituals where mutton is used are similar to the rituals of South Siberia. Rituals typical for agricultural people play an important role in Kyrgyz wedding ceremony (strewing with flour and pouring milk).<sup>36</sup> The ritual which is not typical for both Kazakh and Kara Kalpak people also exists – custom of beating newly-married with lungs of a goat (to provide prolificacy and protect them from misfortune).<sup>37</sup>

### WEDDING CEREMONIAL OF KAZAKH PEOPLE

Wedding ceremonial of Kazakh people<sup>38</sup> consisted of the following steps:

Matchmaking-agreement – official visit of the matchmakers<sup>39</sup>; this ceremony was held by men with father of the son at the head.<sup>40</sup> During this ceremony they discussed an amount of bride-money. At the end of the ceremony, one white sheep was slaughtered and a prayer was offered; then all people taking part in the matchmaking ceremony were offered wedding ritual food called “tostik”<sup>41</sup> and “kuyrik baur”<sup>42</sup> and wedding presents “kuit” were given. During this step of the wedding ceremonial (which was accompanied with the feast with good cheer and

<sup>36</sup> G. P. (1969). “Relikti domusulmanskih verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Horezma,” pp. 85-86.

<sup>37</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1967). “Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel’nih stran,” Manuscript, p. 563.

<sup>38</sup> Makovesckiy P. E. (1886). “Materialy dlya izucheniya yuridicheskikh obycheev kirgizov,” Vol.1, Omsk, pp. 3, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Before making an official visit, matchmakers used to sent one of them for prior negotiations in order to find out about the possibility of a wedding

<sup>40</sup> Nowadays, mother of the son also takes part in matchmaking procedure

<sup>41</sup> “tostik” – course which is made of sheep bacon

<sup>42</sup> “kuyrik baur” – course which is made of liver and fat-tail lard

traditional entertainments like horse racing, killing of a goat on horses, singing, playing different instruments) one custom named “kuda tartis”<sup>43</sup> worth noting – that is when local women were allowed to tease matchmakers.

*Period of “secret” meeting* of a fiancé and a bride called “orun-kelu” or “orun-baru”,<sup>44</sup> which was opened with a special feast “orun-toy” organized by the father of a bride.<sup>45</sup> The retinue of a fiancé, going for a meeting, included a singer, a joker and a witty fellow. One of the customs maintained during this ceremonial was “escape” of the bride to the neighbor village, where young men and women had competition on singing and people living in one village with the bride had a “joke fighting” for the bride (called “tartis”) with people representing the village of a fiancé. At the end, the bride was carried away on a carpet to the tent of her father and put behind a curtain; a fiancé was also invited to that tent. A custom of union of the bride and a fiancé was performed, when fiancé poured either fat or oil into fireplace for obsecration of ancestors of the house. A fiancé was strewed with the ritual cookies, dried fruits and nuts. Before meeting with the bride, a fiancé was supposed to pay a redemption fee “kade” – in the form of presents, money, cattle or clothes. These presents were given during entire wedding ceremony, but those which are offered before the meeting with the bride had special meaning.

*Wedding* “uzatar toi” consisted of the feast held in the house of a bride, ceremony of transportation of a bride to the house of a fiancé and corresponding feast. There were fewer customs maintained in the house of a fiancé than in the house of a bride. Main ritual games held during the wedding ceremony were similar to those held during step 2 of the wedding – “secret” meeting (e.g. escape of the bride, singing competition etc.), but the sequence of these games was different depending on the region where the wedding was held. New feature here was Muslim ceremony of the wedding where a fiancé was accepted by the father-in-law and a bride had a farewell with her relatives (who were

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<sup>43</sup> “kuda tartis” – is translated as “bothering of matchmakers”

<sup>44</sup> “orun-kelu” or “orun-baru” is translated as “secret arrival”

<sup>45</sup> Ibragimov I. I. (1872). “Russkiy Turkestan,” Moscow, Vol.2, p. 78.

supposed to give her presents). In the beginning of the ceremony of bride transportation, a bride put on a costume of a young married woman and had a farewell with her relatives who sang farewell-songs. Mother of a bride accompanied her to the house of a fiancé.

Upon arrival to the village of the fiancé, a bride was offered a sit in the tent set especially for newly-married (this tent was called "otau") and was a part of a marriage portion. On the 3rd or 4th day a bride was escorted to the tent of her father-in-law to perform a ceremony called "bet ashar" (which means looking at the face). In the tent of the father-in-law, a bride was supposed to bow before a fireplace and pour some oil into it. During the ceremony of "looking at the face" a bride was given presents and this was accompanied by moral song. One of the best friends of a fiancé (who was chosen by a proxy person - "uekil ata") presented bride a horse (sometimes together with a carpet) and a robe. In his turn he was granted with a good present from bride.

The following customs or the characteristic features of Kazakh wedding worth noting: eating of mutton (especially bacon); a young bride was offered to sit on a raw sheep-skin while feast in the tent of the father-in-law; throwing neck bone of a sacrificial sheep through the chimney "changarak" of the tent were newly-married were supposed to live – this ceremony was called "muyn-tastar"<sup>46</sup>. Ritual meaning of number nine ("tok-kuz") and numerous presents are also considered to be characteristic features of Kazakh wedding ceremonial. These are the basic features of Kazakh wedding ceremonial which includes actions of both religious and magic nature performed to provide well-being for newly-married. Islam also finds its place during the wedding ceremony: a prayer was offered to strengthen the union of new couple. However, in Kazakh wedding, customs and rituals connected with religion compose only minority of those customs which have social rather than religious origin.

### WEDDING CEREMONIAL OF TURKMEN PEOPLE

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<sup>46</sup> People used to throw the neck bone through the chimney of the tent because they believed that later the smoke would come out as quickly as the neck bone during the life of the newly-married.



There are several groups of Turkmen people and each group has its own features used for the wedding ceremonial, even though they have something in common. Wedding ceremony of all Turkmen people<sup>47</sup> is characterized by obvious patriarchal<sup>48</sup> features<sup>49</sup> and religious wedding ceremony called “nikoh” and the official wedding ceremony is performed in the house of fiancé only. Remains of matriarchy tendencies are expressed in the ritual of “returning” bride to her house after wedding ceremony is finished (for a while).

Wedding ceremony of Turkmen people is full of rituals represented by items and actions which are partially typical for agricultural people and partially for people engaged with cattle-breeding. In wedding of Turkmen people we may find a mixture of customs and rituals of different cultures which are met during different stages of the wedding ceremonial. Take for example a ritual where newly-married were given syrup and a half of sheep-heart (fried in the coal) – this ritual was performed to provide them sweat life and passion to each other.

Besides, wedding ceremony of Turkmen people contains customs and rituals which can be found neither in “kipchak” nor in “ancient-Iranian” ceremonials.

### **COMPARISON OF WEDDING CEREMONIALS OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE**

Wedding ceremonies stated above have amazing similarities. Wedding ceremonies of people living in the Central Asia and Kazakhstan have the same steps and rituals, the same forms of remains of the family-conjugal relationships of antiquity (period of matriarchy with typical settlement of newly-married), the same correlation between rituals and customs of both social and religious origin and finally these

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<sup>47</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1967). “Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel’nih stran,” Manuscript, p. 561.

<sup>48</sup> Father of fiancé plays main role during the wedding ceremony; this is observed in wedding ceremony of most Turkmen people

<sup>49</sup> Tolstov S. P. (1948). “Drevniy Horezm,” Moscow, p. 284.

wedding ceremonies have the same remains of the early form of religion which is very important for further conclusions (items used in religious ceremonies).

Main steps of the wedding ceremonies of all people are as follows: meeting-agreement (matchmaking), period of "secret" meeting (dating period) when one side pays bride-money and the other side prepares marriage portion and finally wedding itself which is divided into feast in the house of fiancé and the feast in the house of bride (where religious wedding ceremony is performed).

Meeting-agreement is a common act where the possibility of becoming relatives and the value of bride-money were discussed.

Period of "secret" meeting was opened with a special feast which was organized by the father of a bride. This feast consisted of five main stages: 1) date of a bride and a fiancé which was accompanied with different rituals (payment of bride money, strewing with ritual cookies, "cleaning by the fire"), this stage was usually finished with wedding ceremony; 2) ritual of the union of a bride with her new home and giving worshipping ancestors of a bride; 3) stage of ritual games which reflected family-conjugal relationships<sup>50</sup> (all including bride and fiancé took part in these games which were accompanied with competition in singing); 4) feast; 5) stage of traditional games (killing a goat while riding a horse, horse racing with participation of a bride and other games which had ritual meaning).<sup>51</sup> This feast of the wedding was held in the house of father of a bride and may be considered as relict form of a wedding ceremonial of matriarchy period. Kazakh and Kyrgyz people have more complete form of this feast (with all rituals and customs) while Kara Kalpak people have only remains of this feast in their wedding ceremonial<sup>52</sup>. There are now sources available about detail of Uzbek

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<sup>50</sup> Abramzon S. M. (1967). "Kirgizy v ih etnogeneticheskikh i istoriko-kulturnih svyazyah s narodami sopredel'nih stran," Manuscript, p. 561.

<sup>51</sup> Wedding ceremony of Kara Kalpak and Uzbek people has been documented recently while wedding ceremony of Kazakh people was documented at the end of XIX century. Wedding ceremony of modern Kazakh people differs from that one which was held long ago

<sup>52</sup> Wedding ceremony of Kara Kalpak and Uzbek people has been documented recently while wedding ceremony of Kazakh people was documented at the end of XIX century.

wedding ceremonial; except for “karluk” Uzbek people who have feast which concerning engagement, wedding and marriage.<sup>53</sup>

Wedding was usually held in the house of bride (except for Kara Kalpak wedding ceremony which was held in the house of fiancé). During the wedding ceremonial a great feast was organized and many people invited.

Moments regarding religion and beliefs of people are represented by remains of magic actions, cult of hearth, cult of ancestors and Muslim marriage ceremony. Mutton is being main subject of magic actions (and everything that concerns mutton, e.g. liver, fat, meat from different parts, bacon, and skin). Ritual cookies, dried fruits and nuts are on the second position after mutton. It worth noting that religious rituals compose only minority part of all customs performed during the wedding.

Even though all wedding ceremonials stated above have their own features they have uniformity. This allows us to assume that wedding ceremonial had been formed in uniform ethnic-cultural environment with the same level of social development during formation of patriarchal society (when the features of former social and family regime were still strong enough). This resulted in the uniformity of the cultural elements of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan, particularly in the wedding ceremony.

This wedding ceremony is characterized by the remains of archaic forms of family-conjugal relationships – remnant form of group marriage and obvious remains of matriarchy (antenuptial living of newly-married). In all wedding ceremonies the presence of a proxy father and a proxy mother (“jenge”) was obligatory. Meeting-agreement or matchmaking ceremonial represents a single rather than branched procedure. Significant amount of customs are ritual games which reflect former family-conjugal relationships as well as relationships between clans (e.g. “escape of a bride”, “teasing of matchmakers, song competitions between teenagers and others). In wedding ceremonies of all people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan a fiancé was supposed to pay bride-

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Wedding ceremony of modern Kazakh people differs from that one which was held long ago

<sup>53</sup> Shaniyazov K. (1964). “Uzbeki-karluki,” Tashkent, p. 144.

money before meeting his bride for the first time. A bride was usually brought either on a carpet or on a large felt mat to the place where she had a date with her fiancé. A tent named “otau” is typical part of marriage portion of a bride for wedding of all people stated above. Also, in wedding ceremonies of these people, a bride was checked for ability to be a good housekeeper, and in all wedding ceremonies mother of a bride was supposed to accompany her daughter to the house of her prospective son-in-law.

Rituals and customs of wedding ceremonies related to religious beliefs of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan are: ritual of the union of a bride with hearth (new home) and “cleaning by the fire”. Magic rituals performed to provide happiness, honesty, prosperity and good posterity to a new family are quite similar; these are eating of bacon (made of mutton) or a liver (of a sheep) with fat-tail suet. People of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan used sheep for most wedding ceremonies because sheep is primary animal for all people engaged with cattle breeding in this region. Other rituals of magic nature are: using of sheep-skin as bedding for a bride and considering number nine as magic.

Games which are typical for all people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan during the wedding ceremony are horse racing, killing a goat while riding on a horse and horse riding.

## CONCLUSIONS

Consideration of different rituals of the wedding ceremonial of people is evidence of fact that religious-magic actions remain invariable (without drastic changes), while customs which reflect social norms of former epochs change with time. This tendency shows that a wedding ceremony is more sensitive to social changes rather than changes in religious beliefs (probably this is because of religious-magic beliefs have stability and therefore became a part of wedding ceremonial). Religious-magic ritual of wedding ceremonial is more stable when compared to ritual related to social norms and therefore it is of more significance for people engaged with history (it serves as a document which is evidence of genesis of the ceremonial).

Investigation of rituals shows that items related to both agriculture and cattle-breeding have found their use in implementation of these rituals.

People who were engaged with agriculture from the beginning – Tajik and Uzbek people used items which symbolized good posterity (pomegranate, pistachio, wheat, patties with meat filling<sup>54</sup>, boiled eggs<sup>55</sup> etc. Items which had magic meaning and were used to provide well-being, prosperity for newly formed family were different kinds of confectionery, grape juice, honey, sweat tea, sugar, flour, milk, oil, money, mirror and white cloth (“poyandoz”, handkerchief for bride, shirt for fiancé etc.). To protect newly-married from evil power, people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan used to fumigate their houses with rue herb called “ispan”. They also performed ritual called “cleaning by fire” which was described above.

People engaged mainly with cattle-breeding did not use items stated above for performing traditional rituals. In their rituals they used customs and traditions which had specific character of cattle-breeding. Here we can see using of sheep as a subject with sacral properties. Mutton was eaten on various stages of the wedding ceremony (usually it was either bacon or liver with tail fat). Therefore sheep-skin was used as bedding for a bride – because sheep-skin is endowed with sacral power by people engaged with cattle-breeding<sup>56</sup>.

It worth noting that conformity of ritual attributes with economical occupation is typical not only for people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan but also for people of South Siberia<sup>57</sup> (eating sheep-bacon during wedding ceremony), Persian people<sup>58</sup> and people of India<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Patties with meat filling are called “somsa” – this is very famous food among Uzbek and Tajik people even nowadays

<sup>55</sup> It is well known that boiled eggs symbolize fertility

<sup>56</sup> Kara Kalpak people use cow-skin for this purpose because they raise mainly horned cattle (cows)

<sup>57</sup> Efimov A. “Teleutskaya svadba,” Materials concerning wedding ceremony and family-clan system of people of USSR, p. 243.

<sup>58</sup> Galunov R. A. “Srednyaya Persidskaya svadba.”

<sup>59</sup> Lobacheva N. P. (1960). “Svadebniy obryad.”

(strewing newly-married with sweats and coins, fumigation with rue herb, using mirror during wedding ceremony etc.).

Thus, we may conclude that material expression of ritual acts of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan depends on cultural traditions which are based on precedence of either agriculture or cattle-breeding; people who transfer these cultural traditions from generation to generation have deep genetic roots. Altai people along with Kazakh, Kara Kalpak and Kyrgyz people belong to Turkic group of people while Tajik, ancestors of Uzbek people and Persian people belong to Iranian-speaking people. Taking into account similarities in ritual features of ancient Indian people we may assume Indian-Iranian culture commonality. Combination of household type with corresponding mode of life, ideology, religious beliefs and rituals is being the key point in making this conclusion.

Someone may wonder why the wedding ceremonial which was originated under conditions where cattle-breeding had significant influence has so few religious-magic rituals when compared to wedding ceremonial originated under conditions where agriculture had significant influence. The answer to this question may be found if consider the whole set of ancient beliefs (Muslim beliefs in our case) and customs which were mostly preserved in culture of people engaged with cattle-breeding. This will also allow finding out why social life of people engaged with cattle-breeding was so poor for customs and rituals when compared to social life of people engaged with agriculture.

It worth noting that wedding ceremonial was formed in fixed ethnic environment which possessed its own features depending on geographical location, cultural and time factors. This ethnic environment carries these entire factors through all stages of the history. All of this may be seen by the example of Turkmen people. Culture of Turkmen people was similar to that of Kazakh, Kyrgyz and semi-nomadic Uzbek people. Even though Turkmen people were mostly engaged with cattle-breeding in past, their wedding ceremonial differs considerably from wedding ceremonial of these people (therefore it was described last). This happened mainly because of the culture of "oguz" group which had significant influence on ethnogeny of Turkmen people (this culture had different ethnic environment when compared to that of Kazakh and other

groups of people). Thus we may conclude that characteristic features of the wedding ceremonial are formed according to the cultural-ethnic features of people to whom this wedding ceremonial belongs to.

Now, when the criteria according to which we can recognize different features of the wedding ceremonies has been defined, we can distinguish two models of ethnic-cultural ceremonials which are typical for the wedding ceremonies of people of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan. One of them is called "kipchak" model and the second one is called "ancient-Iranian" model. The third "oguz" model also exists, but it is just developing. Further investigation of rituals and gathering more information will allow gaining some insight on other (transition) ceremonials which will be complementary for further definition of ethnic history of the nation according to its wedding ceremonial.

Thus, rituals of religious-magic character are being basic criteria for recognition of differences in wedding ceremonials. These rituals allow us accurately recognize the model which this or another wedding ceremonial belongs to, and it worth noting that specific demonstration of religious-magic practice (e.g. items of religious actions which are used during this practice) is being the most important characteristic rather than the procedure of this practice.

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