

## OH, MY PRETTY HAIR

### Belief, Tradition and Image

*Kristi Salve*

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For Jakob Hurt folklore was the "chronicle of the Estonian people" (cf. the article of the same title - Hurt 1989, 31-35), and he considered the song genres of folklore, notably the collection *Vana kannel*, a part of it. No doubt they give us important information about the past. It is also interesting to see how the folklore in the "chronicle" reflects our relations with our relatives and neighbours, to see what are our similarities and differences. However, this information is not explicit. We must work hard before we can establish something as fact - the "history" and "poetry" part of folk songs must be separated. Here we can find guidance from early written sources, ethnographic information written down from people, and the material of other nations, especially that of our kindred peoples.

Unelma Konkka has written an interesting article about Karelian bridal laments where she has taken a closer look on three most significant objects of lamentation (Konkka 1978). The amended Finnish version of the article, originally in Russian, was later published as a chapter of the author's book *Ikuinen ikävä* (Konkka 1985, 165-175). U. Konkka has found parallels to her Karelian information mainly from Ingria, but also from other, more distant kindred peoples, as well as from Russians. The present article tries to examine how the objects pointed out by U. Konkka, namely the bride's name, hair, and freedom (free will, power, choice - Karelian '*valtaset*'), are reflected in Estonian (incl. Setu) and Vepsian wedding folklore. At the same time, I shall try to explain the historical and ethnographic background of the above-mentioned song and lament motifs.

It appears from U. Konkka's works that hair (called *lieminäiset* in Karelian laments) and freedom (*valtaset*) as objects of lamentation are typical to the entire Karelian linguistic area, while name (*nimyset*) is more restricted in its distribution. During the last stages of observance of old wedding customs hair and name were understood as metaphors signifying the maiden's freedom that she would lose through her marriage, whereas the name could itself be a metaphor standing for the metaphor of hair. However, I believe that originally they were not understood metaphorically, but both name and hair were used in their direct meaning.

Still, the loss or change of the (maiden) name is only rarely mentioned in Karelian nuptial laments, and as we have said before, the motif does not occur in all parts of Karelia. According to U. Konkka, any direct reference to the practice of changing names can only be found in verses such as *nimi uusi ris's'itah* (baptised with a new name).

U. Konkka says that the name motif is more common in Izhorian songs, illustrating the statement with the following verses:

*Nimi toine nostetaan,*    Another name is taken  
*papin pantu heitetään*    The one given by the priest is abandoned  
 or  
*Niin imesi muutetaha,*    So your name is changed  
*kuratiksi kutsutaha,*    (you) will be called devil  
*helvetiksi heitetähä.*    nicknamed hell-being

U. Konkka believes that these verses reflect the Karelian system of names, according to which a married woman was called after her husband's name, for example *Iivanan muc'oi* (Iivana's bride), *Miihkali naini* (Miihkali's wife). A maiden was addressed with a combination of her father's name and her own Christian name, such as *Juakon Nasto* (Juako's Nasto), but the Christian name of a married woman could only be used by her parents and the closest relatives. U. Konkka refers to the name-changing ceremony of the Erzian Mordvinians, during which the daughter-in-laws were given names that were commonly used for the first, second, third, etc., daughters-in-law of any family. Mordvinian and Komi laments mention the lamentation over the loss of the "beautiful maiden name" (sometimes personified).

The Mordvinian and Komi parallels are significant, but the presented Izhorian example can hardly be a reflection of the actual change of name. It rather describes the harshness and cruelty of the marital home, where the daughter-in-law has to endure bad treatment and even vituperation. Analogous examples can also be found in Estonia:

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>En kuulen seda nimeda,</i>     | I never hear the name                  |
| <i>mis õli pannud papikene</i>    | that I was given by the priest         |
| Ristind Riia saksakene,           | baptised with by the lord from Riga    |
| <i>kirjutand kirikisanda,</i>     | that was written down by the clergyman |
| <i>Uorad kuulin, tütar vaene,</i> | All I heard, poor girl, was "whores"   |
| <i>uorad kuulin ommikulla,</i>    | "whores" in the morning,               |
| <i>litsid liia valgeella,</i>     | "harlots" in broad daylight,           |
| <i>pardud päiva paisteella.</i>   | "sluts" in the sunshine.               |

H II 3, 617 (189) < Lüg

While these verses state that in the marital home "the name given by the priest" is rejected and abusive names are used instead, our poetical folklore offers enough examples illustrating that neither were the unmarried girls' proper names always used. So a Setu bride laments on the wedding day to her aunt:

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Umalt nimelt minno iks nimitselle-es</i> | I was never named with my proper name |
| <i>kutsu-us papi pantust.</i>               | nor the name that the priest gave me. |
| <i>Kõõ kut'si sa iks kul'l'a tütrest,</i>   | You always named me dear daughter     |
| <i>Mar'a iks sa latsest manitsel'i',</i>    | you admonished "your little berry"    |
| <i>Hõiksi' sa iks hellä nimme pite.</i>     | you called me using pet names.        |

SL II, 1494: 599.

We can infer from the existing information that on the whole territory of Estonia the name "given by the priest," i.e. the Christian name alone or together with the patronymic (in Setu) or family name (over the rest of this country) was used as a universal address. This was the background against which the caressing appellations of the paternal home and the abusive names of the marital home were projected. Among well-known songs contrasting the paternal and marital homes we can also find contrasted addresses used in each of them (song type "Called by Father and Husband", ERIA No. 3104). According to the principle of sharp contrasts, so typical of songs describing the paternal and marital homes, they present such illustrative name paradigms as *hellik 'pet'*, *virveke*

'sproutling', *murumuna*, *kanamuna* (both referring to something small, round, pretty and sweet), etc. on the one hand, and *hoor* 'whore', *lits* 'slut', *hatt* 'bitch', *nahanuustak* 'mop of skin', *õlekubu* 'truss of straw', etc. on the other.

While the Estonian examples given above and the Ingrian ones provided by U. Konkka do not necessarily reflect name magic, it is not altogether absent in Estonian material. Notably in Southeast Estonian songs we can find verses where the name (and often also the honour as its counterpart in the parallel verse) seems to signify an essential physical part of the maiden that she is deprived of when she leaves for her husband's home:

*Viidi üle ninniniidu -* (She) was taken across a meadow of flowers  
*nimi jäi ninniniidu pääle,* her name was left on the meadow of flowers  
*au ainakaare pääle.* her honour on the swath of hay.  
 Tampere 1935: 81-83.

Similarly, in a Setu song the loss of the now married daughter is mourned, as during the harvest time

*olõi' imp põldo põimmah,* there is no girl to harvest the field,  
*lakja välja laapmah.* to rake the wide meadow  
*Neio viit õks jo nime niidü pääle,* The maiden left her name on the meadow  
*var'õ haina vaalu pääle.* her shadow on the ridge of hay.  
*Nimest saai' imp niidü riibjat,* The name won't help to rake the meadow  
*var'öst vaaluajajat.* the shadow (is no good at) hay-raking  
 ERA II 155, 187/8 (53)

It is noteworthy that here the parallel to the name is "shadow". As we know, both the name and the shadow are associated with the early concept of soul.

The idea that when the daughter leaves home she leaves her name behind occurs in other contexts in Setu wedding songs. So, relatives suggest that the bride should try to escape from the wooer and hide herself among bees in the garden, adding that even if she would not be able to evade the bridegroom, at least she should

*uma sa pane nimi uibohe.* put your name into the apple-tree.  
*Ese iks lätt otsma ubinata,* Your father will go to take an apple  
*marja lätt maast säääl võttemahe,* to pick a berry from the ground,  
*sino iks nimme nimitseles,* he will call your name,  
*hellä no nimme helüteles.* cherish the name he used to love.  
 ERA II 26, 259 (4)

we can see below, the *hair* is much more common in this connection, which suggests that here the name is a metaphor for hair, as was the case in Karelia, and thus a metaphor of the second grade. It is also probable that in the latest mentioned Setu song the *name* is an occasional substitute for the much more common *hair*, but one cannot absolutely exclude that the name might have signified the soul, which was understood as a concrete magical entity.

Anyway, it is clear that in Estonian nuptial poetry, like in Karelian, the name is much less frequent than *hair*. One might also add that, as far as can be concluded from the existing information, the name as the object of lamentation is absolutely unknown among Vepsians who, although having no wedding songs in their native language, have a rich stock of nuptial laments.

Among most of the Balto-Finnic peoples the hair motif has a richer and more diverse representation, occurring not only in nuptial songs and laments, but also in ceremonies and rites, and thus providing a solid ground for the interpretation of poetical folklore.

As we know, the Karelians have an especially complicated jargon for laments. In many cases poetical synonyms are substituted for the more ordinary words. Hair is an example of such often reworded concepts. One of the most common synonyms is *lieminäiset* (appearing in different dialectal phonetic variants). The word is also known in the contemporary spoken Karelian dialects, but in different, although semantically related meanings of lamb's wool and baby's hair. It is noteworthy that the same word-stem appears in similar meanings in Estonian dialects, e.g. *leemehius* - down on a baby's head (Räp); *talleliem* - the first fleece sheared from a lamb (Kuu); *leemiku* (with another derivation of the same stem) - lamb's wool? We could add the word *leemekotus* (Se), meaning the temple. Of course, in the latter case there arises the question whether it might not just be metathesis; however, there is another plausible explanation: the hair on the temple is short and fine like down, not unlike *leemehius*. Other and even more piquant associations are found by U. Konkka in the fact that in Mokshan Mordvinian the word *lem* means 'name', the diminutive form being *lemen*. If the Karelian (and Estonian) word is really etymologically cognate with the Mokshan word, this complex should also include the Mari word *lüm* 'name'. A man's name is undeniably connected with the concept of soul, and the complex is comprised on the one hand by the temple as the seat of consciousness, and on the other hand by hair which, like other detaching and regenerating parts of human body, is believed to concentrate vital forces. This would also account for the distant semantic connections between *lieminäised* and *nimysel*, the synonyms of hair in the Karelian laments.

Another poetic equivalent of hair in Karelian laments is the Russian loan-word *kassazet* - little plaits. However, this synonym is not very popular, being used mainly in the southern parts of the region; according to U. Konkka, wearing one's hair in plaits was quite a new custom and never firmly established among Karelians. We could add, by way of comparison with other Balto-Finnic peoples, that in Vepsian nuptial laments *kalliz kassain'e* 'dear little plait' is a very common phrase in the parallel verse as an equivalent for hair in the main verse. In Setu wedding songs we can find the *plait* (*koss*) in the parallel verse as an equivalent of hair:

*Kui iks sa olli neiukene,* While you were a maiden  
*olli sul hius hellane,* you had soft hair  
*olli sul koss kullane.* you had a golden plait  
 SL III: 83.

However, in Setu wedding poetry plaiting one's hair is generally associated with getting married and putting on a wife's headgear, while maidenhood is symbolised by loose hair. The two contrasting meanings conveyed by the image of the plait indicate actual differences between the old and new way of wearing one's hair.

The fact that the hair is so much in the focus of attention in nuptial songs and laments is connected with their ritual importance. In Karelian wedding traditions a significant ritual was hair-combing, accompanied by plaiting and unplaiting the bride's hair. In different regions it was practised either

on the eve of the wedding, before the bridegroom's arrival in the morning of the wedding day, or before capping of the young wife, which in its turn could be performed either in the bride's or the bridegroom's home. The most characteristically Karelian element in the body of traditions concerning hair is, as U. Konkka believes, combing of the bride's hair by all members of her family, relatives and friends. The rite was particularly expressive among Northern Karelians. The bride sat on a block of wood or a chest in the middle of a room and the keener (in Karelia, especially in the northern parts, it was customary that an elderly woman who was competent in the tradition lamented on the behalf of the bride) uttered special verses to invite everybody to comb her hair. In the laments connected with combing there is often the motif of giving the hair (or the plait) to the sister, friend or mother, analogous to the one that we can find in the laments dedicated to the loss of the "white freedom". The motif of giving away one's hair is elucidated by the ethnographic information from the Mordvinians. Namely, they have long observed the custom that the bride should actually give a braid of her hair to her sister or friend.

The rite of successive combing of the bride by her relatives that U. Konkka considers typically Karelian is actually more widely known and can well be considered Balto-Finnic. It was undeniably one of the most impressive moments in the Vepsian wedding customs, until traditional weddings were abandoned fairly abruptly from the early 1930s, the decade that was characterised by closing down of churches, repression of the masses and poverty brought about by the formation of collective farms, to World War II, by which time they had practically disappeared.

The Vepsian bride's hair was combed on the day preceding the wedding, which was "the maiden's eve" (*niidizeht*), after the nuptial bath. The Vepsian bride, who usually said her laments herself, called her parents, brothers and sisters, godparents, relatives and friends, asking them to come and "smooth her silky hair". They did, whereas the attending female persons responded with their lament. The laments connected with combing are the better preserved part of the Vepsian nuptial laments: in the 1970s and 80s they were still remembered by quite many informants, even those who were married without the traditional ceremony and lamentations. Because of their specific content these laments have not easily mixed with those performed in other traditional contexts, as may often happen in the stage of decline of the tradition (Salve 1986, 258/9). A few of the lamentation texts have been published (e.g. Zaitseva-Mullonen 1969), a fair number of sound recorded lamentations can be found at the Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu (e.g. RKM Mgn. II 2972 (4), 978 (10), 3803 (17), etc.).

According to the description of customs attached to the wedding songs section of J. Hurt's *Setukeste laulud*, the bride's hair was combed on the first day of the wedding, when she was arrayed in the chamber or barn of her paternal home.

*In the barn the bride is seated in a chair, and at first her hair is combed. Every female relative present runs three times through her hair with the comb. The combers put money, a few kopecks, into the bride's lap. Her hair is plaited and tied into a "cornet" and a silk scarf is put on her head. (SL II: 480).*

The laments and/or songs accompanying the ceremony (it is very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to distinguish between a Setu song and lamentation on the basis of the poetic text only - q.v. Salve 1994) seem to be missing in Hurt's comprehensive work, but they can be found (either with or without custom descriptions) among the archive material. The following examples have been picked out so that all the basic song and lamentation motifs and the most important variations in these and in the ceremony could be represented. As we can see presently, the texts offer many interesting facts which give rise to questions and even controversies that are by no means easy to settle.

*While the bridal procession has not come in yet, while they are expected. The relatives are setting out. The bride is seated, a rake is laid in her lap, she is combed with a brush.*

*Sui, sui sisarakene, su sorasta hiusta, Comb, comb, sister, your yolk-coloured hair,*

*vahalatva lahutele.* part the wax-coloured hair;  
*No sui - sulle õnnest, sui viläst,* comb - for your luck, comb for crops;  
*no sui su - karja kasumahe,* comb - for your cattle to thrive;  
*no sui - naka on villä vinnumähe,* comb - for the cereals to grow long...

/---/

E StK 22, 141 (9 < Se (1924)

The custom description of the text is too short, it is not clear who were the combers of the bride's hair; moreover, we can only assume that those who combed were the ones who sang the song. On the other hand, the extract of the song states openly the magical meaning of the rite: combing was to secure field and cattle profit for the young wife. The productive magical function is illustrated by a detail of the following example - the bride is sitting on a seed-basket.

*...and then the bride sat on the seed-basket and they began to comb her hair. First she was combed by her godmother who ran the comb three times crosswise through her hair, and after she had done it, she put some money into the bride's lap. In this way the bride was combed by all relatives, and everybody gave her money. During the rite the bride sang:*

*Sugu, tulgõ õks päädä sugima,* Family, come to comb my hair  
*võsa, tulgõ õks harja võtma.* Relatives, come and take the brush  
*Kui olli ma inne neiokõnõ,* when I was still a maiden,  
*kutsu-s õks ma suku sugimahe,* I would never invite my family to comb me  
*võssa kutsu-s harja võtma.* or my relatives to take the brush.  
*Sugigõ õks mul iast ilosahe -* Comb me beautiful for the rest of my life -  
*pandas mul pää palmikohe,* after my hair has been plaited,  
*saa-i õks pääd päävä nätä,* my head will not see the day-light  
*hiust tuulõ helotada."* my hair will not be flowing in the wind.

E 80689/90 < Se

In this text all relatives are mentioned as combers, i.e. unlike in the description published by J. Hurt, there are no gender restrictions. Noteworthy is the statement that the bride actually sang her invitation to her relatives to come and comb her hair. There is no reason to doubt that this poetic text was pronounced with a melody, but was it really a song, or only a lamentation, as among the Karelians and Vepsians?

The following example gives further hints about the question. The note, consisting merely of the poetic text, is titled "The Wedding Song", evidently after the information gained from the performer, and the subtitle determines the situation of performing: "Before the Arrival of the Bridal Procession". However, the address at the beginning of the first verses, "*maamakõnõ*" ('Mother'), specifically belongs to laments rather than songs. Several of the motifs occurring in the text can also be found in nuptial songs, and not only in Setumaa, but in the whole Southeast Estonia, as well as in

the laments of the young wife. At the same time, the motif of combing "*iäst ilosahe*", i.e. so that one is beautiful for the rest of one's life, found in the following as well as in the previous sample, is reminiscent of the Vepsian combing laments.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Mamakõnõ, sur'ast tulõ hiust sugima,</i>        | Mother, come to comb my yolk-coloured hair, |
| <i>mamakõnõ, vaha- tulõ'ks sa -latva lahutama.</i> | Mother, come to part the waxen crown.       |
| <i>Nu'ks nakasõ au astma,</i>                      | Now the honoured one will go,               |
| <i>nu'ks nakasõ leemi liikuma.</i>                 | Now the beloved one will move.              |
| <i>Nõsõ'i iks mu nõrga käe,</i>                    | My weak hands will not rise,                |
| <i>painu'i iks mul partsi sõrmõ.</i>               | My duck- fingers will not bend.             |
| <i>Sui'ks sa iäst ilosahe,</i>                     | Comb me beautiful for my life-time,         |
| <i>kaugust kal'lihe.</i>                           | Beloved from afar.                          |
| <i>Saa'i inämb pääd päiva nätä,</i>                | No more will my head be exposed to the sun  |
| <i>hiust saa'i tuulõ helotõla.</i>                 | my hair will not be flowing in the wind.    |
| <i>Pandas pää'ks jo palmikohe,</i>                 | My head will be plaited                     |
| <i>hius hella nõõrikuhe.</i>                       | My soft hair covered...                     |
| <i>Sui'ks sa iäst ilosahe</i>                      | Comb me beautiful for my life-time,         |
| <i>ja kaugust kal'lihe.</i>                        | and beloved from afar.                      |
| <i>Ristimäkõnõ, sinnu'ks ma painu pallõma,</i>     | Godmother, I bow to you asking              |
| <i>heidä ma hellilõ sõnulõ...</i>                  | in gentle words...                          |

(The address to the godmother, again rather typical of laments, is followed by basically the same verses that were used for the mother). ERA II 126, 171/3 (1) < Rõu, < Se (1936)). According to this text, the first comber is the bride's mother, followed by her godmother. The order could also be different, for example: starting with mother, then father, godfather, godmother and other relatives (E86297 (2)). The latter report once again confirms that among the Setus, like the Vepsians and Karelians, the bride's hair was combed also by her male relatives. Her godmother could also have had the special task of holding the brush (ERA II 175, 754/5 (4)).

If we assume that the two last examples were laments, there arises the question of their manner of performing. A Setu bride performed her lament together with her *podruskid* - 'girl-friends' (or those lamented on her behalf), bowing to the addressee of the lamentation. In a sitting position the bride could not have performed her customary bowing during the combing rite. From the point of view of performance such reports seem to fit better into the picture as state that the girl-friends were asked to come and comb the bride's hair:

*While the bridegroom's party had not come in yet, a table was set in the entrance hall and the bride was seated at the table. On both her hands stood two girls called the "podruskid". The girls sang*

*"Sui iks sorase hiuse, Comb the yolk like hair,*

*vahalatva lahutele..." part the wax coloured crown...*

*Anybody who went past the place had to comb the bride's hair three times and give her money or something for present. On the table there were a brush, a (wife's linen) kerchief and a chaplet.*

E 80633/4 (2)

There have been other reports confirming that the combers were actually invited by the *podruskid* (e.g. ERA II 175, 754/5 (4)).

Like loose hair that was freely "flowing in the wind", the chaplet was another symbol of maidenhood, while the kerchief, to the contrary, indicated matrimony. In the latter example the headgears symbolising the past and future of the bride were placed on the table together with the brush. On other stages of the wedding ceremony these headgears with contrasted symbolism could also be exposed, as is shown by the following report:

*While the newly married couple was sitting at the table, a plate was laid before the bride with a kerchief and a chaplet on it. Then the podrusk had to sing:*

*Kas võtad iks linatse liniku* Will you take the linen kerchief  
*või vahatse vaniku....* or the waxen chaplet...  
 E 80635

A question indicating a similar choice occurs in the song of the *podruskid* to the bride that was sung in connection with the rite of "buying the kerchief" by the bridegroom (SL II, 482/3; SL III, No. 1684, 1685).

The close relationship between the hair and chaplet, due to their similar symbolic meaning, is further confirmed by the following samples where the equivalents in a parallel group are *hair* in the main verse and *chaplet* in the secondary one. However, let us, at this point, not go beyond the ceremony of combing and the accompanying songs.

While in Setumaa combing of the bride had become an autonomous ritual, in the rest of Estonia it belonged to the ritual of putting on the wife's headgear, forming a sort of introductory part of it. Let us take a text from Järvamaa as example - an extract of a long description of wedding customs, interspersed with songs:

*Then they go to cap the bride and the bride's female relatives sing: /---/. Then the best man's wife takes the kerchief off from the bride and sings:*

*Antke arja pead sugeda,* Give me a brush to comb her hair  
*kuldakammi pead kasida.* a golden comb to tidy up her head  
*Ma soen sula juusta,* I am combing charming hair,  
*tasun tanu alusta.* stroking the under the coif  
*Kui ei anna, ei palugi!* If you don't give I won't even ask -  
*See sile silimata,* it's smooth without being smoothed  
*lahke lahotamata.* straight without being parted.

H II 13, 218 < Koe

The following passages describe the ritual capping, which was accompanied by an incantation ("Unusta uni .." - "Forget your sleep"), and so it is not clear whether the hair was actually combed or was it just a song that had outlived the actual custom. However, there are reports from Järvamaa allowing us to state that until the end of the previous century combing of the bride's hair was a vital part of the nuptial traditions. In Peetri parish the bride was capped by the best man's wife who, before performing the rite, combed the bride's hair saying:

*Ma soen sula juusta,* I am combing charming hair  
*Kasin karda lakakesta.* tidying the shiny mane.  
 EÜS IX 922 (1)

This example may reflect the degeneration of the original song into a formula containing a couple of verses that were not sung but just said.

The songs that evidently belonged to the ritual of combing were often written down without any explanation of their ceremonial context. One of the most interesting of them is a song from Northeast Estonia contrasting maidenhood and matrimony through repeated antithetical elements based on the image of hair. The bride is asked to comb (for the last time) her own pretty maiden hair. Relatives are mentioned, although not as combers but as the ones who fetch the comb from a far-off place. Here we can find parallels with motifs describing how the bathing water and bath-whisk were brought. Such motifs in Estonian songs are obviously genetically related to the song of the nuptial bath as it was known among the Votes, Izhorians, Karelians and Finns (Rüütel 1970, 73-80). Since the song is from the parish of Lügánuse, its certain lamentation-like character is not surprising: reports of lamenting and scraps of ancient laments have been registered in the region of Eastern Virumaa. The following sample falls under the category of songs with the function of making one weep, of provoking ritual tears that were needed for the bride's future luck and happiness (Tedre 1986.).

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Soe pääda, neitsikene,</i>     | Comb your hair, maiden                        |
| <i>soe pääda, arja pääda.</i>     | comb your hair, brush your hair               |
| <i>Soe need sulad hiused,</i>     | comb this charming hair                       |
| <i>arja need ane hebemed.</i>     | brush the goose- fluff                        |
| <i>Sugu tõi soa Virusta,</i>      | The family brought the comb from Viru,        |
| <i>isa arja Arjumaalta,</i>       | Father brought the brush from Harjumaa        |
| <i>veli kammi kaugeelta.</i>      | Brother brought the comb from faraway places. |
| <i>Neitsikene noorukene,</i>      | Young maiden                                  |
| <i>kui soad iussiasi,</i>         | While you are combing your hair,              |
| <i>lahuteled lakkajasi</i>        | parting your locks                            |
| <i>kui neid kulla keerdusida,</i> | (it is) like curls of gold                    |
| <i>õnneniidi õigeida.</i>         | straight strings of luck.                     |
| <i>Tulevalla neil ajulla</i>      | In the future times                           |
| <i>soed kui kuusesta kábissa,</i> | you comb as if cones from a spruce,           |
| <i>kadakasta karbenissa.</i>      | the shagginess from a juniper.                |
| <i>Siis need murduid muressa,</i> | Then it will be broken by troubles,           |
| <i>kabu oleja kaovad.</i>         | what the maiden used to have will disappear.  |

H III 1, 679/82 (4)

In the final part of the sample we can see the contrast between a maiden's beautiful hair and a wife's ugly mane. It is a very common and widespread motif, especially in North and West Estonia. There are even more songs that just praise the maiden's hair, whether as the pervading theme of the song or just mentioned in association with another motif. As for their genre, these are either nuptial songs or lyrical songs evolved from the former. By way of example we can point out song types

"Maiden's Hair and Wife's Hair" (SL II, 103) "Maiden's Hair Glows Like the Moon" and "Pretty Hair" (ERIA III, No. 2038 and 2039).

The special importance and symbolic meaning of hair has given rise to several poetic synonyms for *maiden*, metonymous compounds where the main component is *juus* 'hair' (*kenajuus* 'pretty-hair', especially popular *linajuus* 'flaxen-hair', *vahajuus* 'waxen-hair'), *latv* 'crown' (*vahalatv* 'waxen-crown'), *lakk* 'mane' (*kardlakk* 'shiny-mane', *linalakk* 'flaxen-mane') *pea* 'head' (*siidipea* 'silky-head', *vahapea* 'waxen-head', *valgepea* 'white-head'). The poetic synonyms with *pea* as the main component have gone through a double shift of meaning - the head symbolises hair, while hair symbolises the maiden or girl (Peegel 1986, 447/8; 467/8; 480/8). The images with *latv* 'crown' are primarily based on metaphorical identification of the human head with the crown of a tree. If *vahalatv* 'waxen-crown' signifies the maiden's hair, as was the case in the Setu song above, we have a metaphor of the second degree; if it denotes the girl as a whole, it is the metaphor of the third degree.

Now one might ask, what was the reason for paying so much attention to the bride's hair, what made them mourn for their hair in nuptial songs and laments, sing such ardent praise to the beauty of the maiden's hair and elaborate a whole system of images based on hair? The reason was not that hair was covered after marriage, so that it could not be exposed to the sun and flow freely in the wind, as a Setu bride lamented above. Similar - or perhaps only seemingly so - explanations can be found in verses such as:

*Oh küll mütsi tige'et,*      Oh the evil hat  
*pääpaika paganat,*      Damned head cover  
*kes kaot ilusad juuksed.*      That ruined my pretty hair.  
 H II 24, 452 (239)

In view of the long celebrated belief and tradition, according to which a married woman was not to go about bareheaded, the above example could be understood in the way that a wife's headgear covered her beautiful maiden's hair, as if she had never had them. This was probably the way the last singers understood them. Actually the verses reflect a much more ancient custom with its magical background.

U. Konkka has pointed out the verb *katkaella* in Karelian bridal laments; it occurs in combination with the word *kassa*, signifying plaits. Konkka believes correctly that it reflects the ancient custom of cutting off the bride's hair, as it was known among different nations. Although in the Karelian recorded ethnographic material of the past centuries there is no proof of such practice, it finds corroboration from sources of even more distant past. So in his letter written in 1535 Archbishop Makarios of Novgorod has ordered that heathen practices which as he says are observed by the Chuds (Votes) and Izhorians, as well as "in the whole Karelia", should be extirpated. Among other condemned practices he mentions cutting off the (presumably newly married) women's hair (Konkka 1985, 170/1).

From the Balto-Finnic peoples mentioned by Makarios, the custom was the longest preserved by the Votes. 18th-century descriptions of the life, beliefs and traditions of the Votes, written down by Fr. L. Treufurt, L. A. Zeträus and F. Tumansky, have many interesting facts to report about the custom: the hair was cut immediately after the young people were (secretly) engaged, or during the wedding ceremony; it was burned or handed over to the bridegroom who kept it for the rest of their marriage; after the woman's death her hair was put into her coffin. But the Votes were not content with merely

cutting off the hair, they actually shaved the brides' heads with a razor. The action was repeated as soon as hair had grown again. According to some reports it was done until the birth of the first child, according to others continued even after that (Konkka 1985, 171/2).

The custom of cutting off the bride's hair survived until the past century among the Votes. So a 68-year-old informant stated in 1942 that her grandmother's hair had been cut at her wedding (Ariste 1974, 64). The wedding she was speaking about must have taken place sometime in the middle of the 19th century.

There is information about cutting the bride's hair from the Izhorians of Western Ingria whom F. Tumansky in his description has called the "yami". According to Tumansky, the yami have the custom of shaving the young wife's head from the wedding until the birth of her first child (Õpik 1970, 84). This custom is reflected both in the Votian and Izhorian poetic folklore. So an Izhorian nuptial song addressed to the bride says:

*Jo siu hiukses hirtetää,* Your hair is hanged,  
*kassaasi kaotetaa,* your plait lost,  
*liemonöijes leikataa.* your child-hair cut off.

Konkka 1985: 172

As the Votes kept their tradition of cutting the bride's hair for a long time, it is quite normal that the custom should be reflected in their wedding laments. Indeed, there are such verses in the Votian bridal laments, for example: *kult-kudrid maalõõ lõikaatta* (you cut off the golden curls) and *lõikataassa tüttärikkuo kassa / i voli vällää* (the girl's plait is cut / and so is her freedom) (Ariste 1960, 15; 16; Ariste 1974, 66, 67).

Estonians, like their closest kindred peoples, had the custom of cutting off the bride's hair in the past. There is information about it in several 17th-century manuscripts and printed texts. So Reverend H. Göseken of Mihkli parish mentions in his report to the dean:

*"The peasant women of this parish apply a superstitious and indeed almost heathenish custom, whereby they shave the brides' heads quite bald on their wedding nights and will not let them grow their hair even in their matrimony, but with a razor shave their heads bald and smooth every Saturday; and with their brides' cropped hair they are said to perform all kinds of magic. /---/ I have learned from some women, after a serious interview, that after their brides' hair has been cut off, they take it secretly to the sheep-cot and bury in a corner under straw and dung; this is thought to secure sheep profit and issue for the young couple"* (Laugaste 1963, 68-70).

Discussing the hair styles of the Estonian women, I. Manninen mentions the custom of cutting off the bride's hair. Giving examples of such Estonian instances and ample international parallels, he does not neglect the possible explanations of the practice. On the one hand, there is the belief of the power, whether seen as positive or negative, contained in (a woman's) hair; on the other, shaved heads were symbols of subjection (for instance, the slaves' heads were shaved in ancient times). The latter reason is suggested by a note in Thomas Hjärne's Chronicle, written in the second half of the 17th century, but published much later; it refers to the practice of cutting the hair of the abducted women. The same chronicle also mentions that the brides' hair was cut at their traditional wedding. This was performed on the third day of the wedding in the bridegroom's household. As we can see below, there are reports stating otherwise, namely that the hair was cut in the bride's house. Although the latter variant seems more likely for several reasons, the former is also not altogether impossible. The clue is what was the motivation of cutting and for what purposes they planned to use it. For example, Johann Arnold von Brand, the emissary of the Prince Elector of Brandenburg

mentioned in the narrative of his journey to Moscow in 1673 when he stopped at Vastseliina that the bride's hair was cropped before she was sent to bridal bed (consequently, in the bridegroom's home) (Manninen 1927, 13-23). A manuscript dating approximately from the same period, but concerning mainly Saaremaa, contains an interesting note:

*"I have been told by others that women of a certain locale in Livonia have their heads shaved smooth by other women when they get married."* (Blumfeldt, Ränk 1935, 21).

It cannot be excluded that the author of the note took his information from Brand, but it may as well apply to some other place, and it need not necessarily concern Estonians.

The custom was still observed a century after the above-mentioned texts were written. A. W. Hupel writes in the second half of the 18th century that in Kodavere parish the bride's hair was cut in the morning of the wedding day. He says the same about the South Estonians who lived in the present-day Latvian territory (Hupel 1777, 177). Hupel's information testifies to it having taken place in the bride's home. In the parish of Kodavere, which had strong Votian and archaic traits in the popular culture, the custom of cutting the bride's hair was preserved - although reduced to mere imitation - well into the past century. In 1888 the folklore collector V. Kirik sent Dr J.&nbsp;Hurt a lengthy description titled "About the Wedding Ceremonies in the Parish of Kodavere 70 Years Ago." There is an interesting passage concerning the arraying of the bride before leaving her paternal home:

*She sat in the lap of the bride's brother; then they asked the bridegroom for a knife to cut a braid of hair from the bride. The bridegroom gave them his knife, and taking a braid of the bride's hair into her hand, the chief female wedding guest from the bride's side cut three times with the knife, but in a way as not to cut the hair off.*

This was followed by putting on the headgear of a married woman - in Kodavere it was the archaic linen kerchief (Salve, Rüütel 1989, 83). At this point we should add that, according to U. Konkka, cutting the bride's hair was imitated in Russian wedding traditions, notably in the Pskov region (Konkka 1978, 88).

Somewhat different from the complete shaving of the bride, but still functionally related to it, was the custom of cutting off a single braid of hair for magical purposes; this custom was observed in several places over Estonia even longer than the former.

Analogous with the information given already by Göseken is the belief that the bride's hair could help secure cattle profit: *"When the young wife is brought into her new home for the first time, a braid is cut from her hair and taken to the cattle-shed, so that they would have good luck at cattle breeding."* (E 81375).

The following sample illustrates the use of the hair cut from the bride for the purpose of strengthening the marriage on the principle of *pars pro toto*: *"Cut secretly a tuft of hair from your wife's head and put it in an auger hole in the wall; close the hole tightly with a rowan plug, then the young wife is said not to go away from her husband."* (ERA II 142, 50 (231m) < Krk). Analogous magic practices with the purpose of sticking to one's new home have been done with the hair of newly bought animals, which could be cut from their heads (E 4464 (52a) < Vai), backs (Hii 15, 111/2 (16) < Kuu), tails (H II 56, 320 (29) < Pal) or elsewhere. One might consider whether perhaps the primary development could have been livestock magic, which was later transferred to the family tradition; however, it is highly probable that they are parallel developments both of which have originated in the same thought pattern.

Anyway, at this point we should once again stress the attitude to hair as an important part of a human being as illustrated by the previous example; hence the reasoning: if the hair is preserved, their bearer will also remain.

The custom of cutting the bride's hair, preserved for such a long time, even if only through its modifications, has left its imprints in Estonian poetical folklore. It is not explicit: for example, nowhere in the material that has been looked through so far has the verb *lõikama* 'to cut' been used, although it can be found in Votian laments and Izhorian wedding songs. Another remarkable fact is that the poetical texts bearing the remaining figurative traces of the once practised rite are quite strictly concentrated in Southeast Estonia. They indicate that hair was, above all, a symbol of maidenhood, and that it was cut in the bride's paternal home, where they were left for preservation. The latter fact leaves us with the question whether it is not mere poetical fancy, as no direct substantiation has been found in the ethnographic material. At this point it is also noteworthy that magical thought is always concrete: people knew in every individual case what they were striving to achieve or trying to avoid with a specific magical rite. However, in the songs hair is referred to as an object of aimless nostalgic admiration. Let us take an example to make it more concrete. The Setu bride's relatives sang to her as she was about to leave her paternal home:

|                                    |                                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Ezel om illos uibuaid,</i>      | Father has a lovely apple orchard   |
| <i>om iks matal marapuuaid.</i>    | Mother has a berry patch.           |
| <i>Mine iks sa aida uibohe,</i>    | Go to the apple-tree in the orchard |
| <i>verevähe vislapuuhtõ,</i>       | to the blood-red cherry-tree        |
| <i>sinna pane sa hius helläne,</i> | put your soft hair there            |
| <i>pane koss kullane.</i>          | put your golden plait.              |

The next verses explain the purpose of such counsel for the future:

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Kui tul't iks kodo kos'tma,</i>  | When you come to visit your home                |
| <i>ilozahe läät uiboaida,</i>       | you'll go to the lovely apple-orchard,          |
| <i>verevähe vislapuuaida.</i>       | to the blood-red cherryorchard.                 |
| <i>Näet sõs hiust helläst,</i>      | There you'll see your soft hair,                |
| <i>näet kossa kullast.</i>          | you'll see the golden plait.                    |
| <i>Sis saa viil nätä näio illo,</i> | Then you once again feel the mirth of a maiden, |
| <i>saa kaia kabo illo.</i>          | see the mirth of a girl.                        |

SL III: p. 83

Very frequent is the motif of mourning for one's hair in the songs from Võrumaa, whereas their formulation is remarkably uniform. The first sample is a wedding song addressed to the bride. Wedding songs speaking about the hair that is left behind in one's paternal home belong to the type of songs that contain black-and-white opposition between the happiness of girlhood and the troubles and worries of matrimony. Their function is to make one weep.

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Tsidsõkõnõ tsõõrikõnõ,</i> | Sister, sweet                              |
| /---/                         |  |
| <i>suve sa ikõt hiussit,</i>  | For a summer you'll mourn for your hair,   |
| <i>talve vaiglõt vanikut.</i> | For a winter you'll crave for the chaplet. |

*Hius jäi iks esä kodu,*      The hair was left behind at Father's home  
*vanik velle vaja pääle.*      The chaplet on the brother's clothes-rack.  
 EÜS VII, 1254 (62) < Krl

Unlike the Setu songs that speak about the orchard or garden as the place where the hair was kept, in Võrumaa they consistently mention "Father's home, brother's clothes-rack", which indicates that the hair was kept in a house. This is also in accordance with ethnographic information. The following lament-like song (where the last parallel group is an impressive example of lamentation) in fact represents non-ceremonial lyric, but its genetic relationship with wedding songs is obvious:

/---/

*Juus ol'l pikkä niikui pirdu,*      The hair was as long as splinters  
*vanik lagja niikui laud.*      The chaplet as broad as the boards  
*Juus mul jäie ese kodu,*      My hair was left at Father's home  
*vanik velle vaja otsa.*      My chaplet on my brother's clothes-rack  
*Ese jäi manu itkema,*      Father remained there weeping  
*veli manu vahtima,*      Brother stood there gaping  
*sõsar sõrmi murdõma*      Sister twisting her fingers.  
 ERA II 115, 123 (12) < Har

As has been said before, one of the permanent parallels for *hair* has been *chaplet*, and both are contrasted to the *kerchief* - the symbol of matrimony. In a traditional society clothing, including headgears, as well as hair styles had a clear-cut function of a sign, a quality of conveying information of their bearer's ethnicity, social position and marital status. In Southeast Estonian songs there is often the contrast between the *chaplet/hair* (maidenhood) and the *kerchief* (matrimony), which sometimes is complemented by *kaabu* or *kübar* 'hat', signifying the husband - the one who has deprived the woman of her freedom. So the praise of the happiness of girlhood is coupled with complaints that a young wife cannot "dance wherever she wants to", but must ask the "hat's" permission. Through such statements the feelings of lamentation give way to the cursing of boys:

*Oh mu helle hiusta,*      Oh my light hair  
*vahasõta vanikuda,*      My wax-coloured chaplet  
*kiä oll sorrõ sugimata*      That was thick without combing  
*lahe ilma laabimada!*      Smooth without smoothing.  
*Kuri võtku kurja poisi,*      Curse upon wicked boys,  
*hapatagu halva poisi,*      May the bad boys soak in ooze,  
*kiä pand pää paku ala,*      They who put my head under the block,  
*helle hiuse hirre ala.*      My light hair under the rail.  
 H IV 8, 855 (6) < Rõu

The last verses of the sample are closely reminiscent of those used to condemn murder, such as killing of the young wife in the "Song of Toomas", where the black man says to the woman he is about to butcher:

*Panõ sa pää paku pääle,* Put your head on the block  
*hius hellä hirre pääle.* your light hair on the rail.  
 SL I: 188

So, hair-cutting was seen as slaying of maidenhood, and on the grounds of such identification it is clear why hair was one of the most important objects of lamentation, and why lamentation motifs are ever recurrent in bridal dirges. It has even been said, "*as long as I live I will mourn for my hair*" that "*jäid kodo koletama, / velle vakka valetama*" ('*was left behind at home to wither / to bleach in the brother's chest*', H II 24, 450/2 (238) < Krl).

It is evident that the last mentioned songs reflect the practice of cutting the bride's hair as a historical fact. Later, when the custom fell into disuse, songs remained as figurative descriptions of the drastic change in the life of a young woman. Their continuation was no doubt further enhanced by differences in the hair styles of married and unmarried women even after the practice of cutting the hair disappeared. The hair that was put up and covered with a headgear could metaphorically also be seen as "lost".

In the study of poetic folklore the problem is often where should we mark the boundary between the elements that reflect ancient beliefs and customs, and those that have always been produced by fancy and inherent rules of poetics. Getting to know the beliefs and customs related to the bride's hair allows us to conclude that the lamentation motifs - both ours and those of other Balto-Finnic peoples - are connected with, and arise from the former, rather than mere fancy. At the same time, one cannot fail to notice a closeness in the formulation of the Setu lamentation songs and the songs from Võrumaa. On the other hand, it is only natural that the Setu culture should be more closely connected with that of the eastern Balto-Finnic peoples - the Orthodox lamentation traditions, while on the other hand, North-eastern and Eastern Estonia bear a heritage linking them - though not so conspicuously - with Votes and Izhorians.

The hair is only one of the symbols of maidenhood in poetic folklore. It is no doubt worthwhile to examine other symbols against their religious and traditional backgrounds.

*Translated by Kai Vassiljeva*

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