

THE WEDDING WATER (*NEKE SUI*) AND THE BLENDING OF ANCESTRAL AND ISLAMIC RITUALS IN THE KAZAKH TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

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Abstract: Today the Kazakh wedding ceremony is a festival following the civil and often Muslim record of the union; it is generally organized in the groom's family with the support of the bride's side and preceded by the exchange of the brideprice and dowry. During the pre-Soviet period, the traditional wedding ceremony was matrilocal, including stages going from matchmaking and premarital rituals culminating in the patriarchal blessing (*bata*) from the bride's father and the Muslim consecration by a mullah (*neke kiyu*). It was followed by the first nuptial night, the morning paying of respects by the newlywed groom to the bride's family and the send-off ritual of the bride. Only after that would begin the patrilocal phase of the marriage, made up of the reception of the bride and the opening of her face (*Betashar*) to the groom's family. The custom in late Islamized regions to hold the religious wedding ceremony (*neke kiyu*) after the nuptial night ending the premarital meetings and the final payment of the brideprice would indicate that in ancient times, the lawful union of the consorts occurred at the performance of the last premarital game *kalindyk tartu*, the bride's capture, when possibly the groom would receive and take away the bride to his village. The use of cultural symbols in the wedding ceremony belonging to both adat and sharia repertoires underlines priority values such as harmony (binary codes of natural opposites), purity (white colour), family strength (arrow) and protection (horse bristle, arrow ribbon). The matrilocal performance of the wedding ceremony is not only conserved in China, Turkey and Iran but also partially preserved inside wedding rituals of the Aral-Caspian region as relics of an intangible cultural heritage deserving protection and the analysis proposed hereby.

Keywords: marriage, matrilocality, wedding water, ethnic symbols, adat and sharia, liminal rites

INTRODUCTION

Like other peoples, Kazakhs fostered a mystical idea about the marriage of two persons into a union. Today, the Kazakh marriage is organized in the village of the groom's father, but in the past, the key rituals of the marriage were staged in the bride's village before being celebrated in that of the groom. The whole process was made up of the following phases: 1– matchmaking and engagement, consisting in the agreement of both sides and the start of the *kalym* (brideprice) transfer by the groom's father. It included 'secret' visits of the groom to the bride and games between the future spouses; 2 – the religious wedding led by the bride's father and a mullah, the nuptial night and the bride's send-off from her village; 3 – the bride's entry into the groom's house, the wedding party in the groom's village (*aul*) and the rite of *betashar* (ceremony of opening the bride's face) – each with an appropriate set of customs (Kartaeva & Kalniyaz 2017: 195–210).

According to all accounts recorded at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, the marriage ceremony took place in the bride's father's village. But, during Soviet times, this ceremony became estranged from its tradition. It is important to identify the factors that contributed to this change and to analyze the matter historically, but we will focus here on this rarely attested wedding ceremony among the Kazakhs who preserve its observance.

The religious wedding called *neke kiyu* (kaz. *neke*, arabic – *nikah*, meaning to gather or add, and kaz. *kiyu*, ceremony) is associated with the spread of Islam, which occurred very differently in Kazakhstan, with ancient roots in the Syrdarya region and more recent diffusion in the central steppes. In fact, because many households of the 19th century did not observe it, the *neke kiyu* has been considered as not forming an organic part of the Kazakh marriage ceremony. Often, after the full payment of the *kalym* and the holding of wedding games, the bride's father would hand over his daughter to his son-in-law without ritual (Kustanaev 1894; Kislyakov 1969: 108). Nevertheless, during the pre-Soviet period the *neke kiyu* became widespread in Kazakhstan and was celebrated in various ways blending Muslim and ancestral cultural elements according to regional or tribal customs.

The purpose of this article is to systematize and analyze the available written sources and oral accounts concerning this wedding ceremony and associated symbols.

1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Most of the historiographical documentation concerning the traditional wedding among Kazakhs consists of information recorded by researchers at the beginning of the 19th-20th centuries. The written data of the first researchers provide accurate information about the Kazakh society of that time, because they were written from visual observation in situ. Here we use as reference the wedding ceremony before its contemporary alteration, i.e. the switch of its occurrence from the bride's village to the groom's house.

Contemporary essays on traditional Kazakh weddings have been the object of short descriptions in collections of written sources (Kazakh halkukun ... 2006) and encyclopedic works concerning Kazakh folklore (Kazaktyn etnografiyalyk... 2017), in scientific compilations on family rituals (Toleubaev 1991), in contemporary thematic books and articles about the Kazakh marriage (Argynbaev 1996; Kislyakov 1969; Katran 2010; Katran 2020; Kartaeva & Kalniyaz 2017) and in reports of ethnographic field surveys, but none of these publications has focused on the importance of water and ancestral symbols in the wedding ritual.

1.1 Written sources

Historical accounts concerning traditional Kazakh weddings dated to the medieval and pre-Russian modern time are almost absent. Scant information can be found in the epic *Korkut Ata* (*Book of Dede Korkut*) ascribed to the Oguz period (8th–10th centuries AD) and in the Turkic dictionary (*Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*) of al-Kashgari (1005–1102 AD).

Here we have collected, analyzed and extracted the first descriptive sources compiled at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries and made up principally of the works of Russian and Kazakh ethnographers (Lazarevskiy 1862; Altynsarin 1870; Ibragimov 1872; P [L. Poltorasskaya] 1878; Alektorov 1888; Zhetpisbaev 1893; Kustanaev 1894; Divaev 1900; Kalmakov 1910; Karuts 1911).

Among other sources are the folk songs left by the Alash party leaders Moldaniyaz Bekimov and Akhmet Baitursinov who wrote and published an ancient version of the “Wedding Song” (Bekimov 1905: 382–392; Baitursynov 1989: 253–254). Some important information can also be found in the historical novel “Abai”, written about the life of the famous Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbayev, which describes the occurrence of Abai's marriage to Dilda in the bride's village, organized by Dilda's father Alshynbai (Auezov 1942: 258–260). Nowadays, although the mullah's wedding ritual has restarted, the “wedding songs” performed by the witnesses are only preserved in the more traditional

southern regions of Kazakhstan. Therefore, there is an urgent need to collect more ethnographic data on such wedding songs and rites for their conservation as a monument of the intangible cultural heritage of Kazakhstan.

These written documents provide crucial information about the presence of pre-Islamic relic symbols, but they do not reveal the meaning of their use. Their multifunctionality or multiplicity in the context of the traditional wedding rituals should be associated with nomadic traditions and regional peculiarities.

1.2 Fieldwork materials

Ethnographic expedition surveys conducted in the Syrdarya and Mangystau regions known as “ethnographic regions”, where the Kazakh tradition is better preserved and where traditional rituals continued secretly during the Soviet era, constitute the main sources of our study. In other parts of Kazakhstan, Islamic marriage ceremonies were not preserved during the Soviet era.

Ethnographic field surveys occurred during various years in the frame of various projects aiming at collecting ethnographic material.

2018–2019: Lower Syrdarya, Kyzylorda oblast: Terenozek district;

2018: East Aral Sea region and Aral Karakum desert, Kyzylorda oblast: Aralsk, Sazdy, Karakum;

2019: West Kazakhstan, Khan Ordasy (Orda);

2019–2020: Mangystau oblast, Aktau;

2019: Turkey, Istanbul, Kazakh emigrants of Zeitunburni.

1.3 Marriage certificates

Certificates of marriage agreements concluded by mullahs are also the basis for evidence of differences in the Kazakh tradition of marriage ceremony. Marriage certificates of mullahs stored in the archives of the reserve-museum “Khan Ordasy” (West Kazakhstan oblast) constitute another source of this article. More than other regions of Kazakhstan, the activities of mosques, madrassas and religious figures such as mullahs, akhuns, ishans were especially developed in the west of the Kazakh lands. The proximity of the Kazakh-Russian borders created a great opportunity for religious dignitaries of the western part of the Kazakh land to study in the influential madrassas in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Kazakh marriage according to the traditional and religious laws (*adat* and *sharia*)

Relying on the first written data and field expedition materials, the marriage process of the Kazakh people took place in the village of the bride's father before the establishment of the Soviet era. This can be explained by the fact that the main purpose of the bride's parents was to bless their daughter. The abovementioned sources recorded that at the time of the marriage ritual, the mullah would ask the bride's father, "Are there are not any obstacles to the marriage? Do you allow it?" Therefore, the marriage was concluded with the gratitude of the bride's father. The bride's father's position in the organization and blessing (*bata*) of the wedding is in fact associated with the ancestral cult, the high role of the father in the Kazakh patriarchal family.

Some basic marriage rules have been observed among the Kazakhs since ancient times. According to these customs, relatives within seven generations are forbidden from marrying. Firstly, this maintained healthy blood; secondly, the matrimonial tie would consolidate the coalition of two separate clans. The heaviest punishment was the people's imprecation. Marriage that broke the seven-generation rule was to be acknowledged as incest *kan aralastirushilik* (*mix of blood*) and was subject to the death penalty. In cases when the concerned families accepted such a marriage, the penalty was limited to a whipping of 90 strokes, which was, anyway, hard to survive. Witnesses of illegal marriage were subject to 30 – 70 strokes, and the mullah who concluded it was to be deprived of his position and whipped 75 to 90 times (Zagryazhski 1876: 172–178; Kartaeva & Dautbekova 2016: 195–196). Although *adat* (the Kazakh law) considers such issues, the actual Kazakh society has no data about marriages within seven generations.

According to tradition, the marriage age for boys was 15 and 16 for girls (Zagryazhski 1876: 151). It happened, though rarely, that the bride was a girl of 13 years. There was a Kazakh saying: "Do not keep salt too long – it will spoil the water; do not keep a girl too long – she will be spoiled by rumors". The marriage age was influenced by social position: the rich married their sons at 12–15 years old, the poorer people later. Nikolai Grodekov wrote about the age of 9–12 in marriages of rich peoples' sons in the Kazali district (Grodekov 1889). According to Khudabay Kustanaev, it was not rare that a girl of 12–15 was an object of matchmaking and marriage (Kustanaev 1894: 22).

Marrying at the age of 12–13 was conditioned by certain circumstances. For example, in difficult years, parents would entrust their children to future co-parents-in-law. Marriage before the age of majority meant keeping both children in the family. The daughter-in-law was always close by and under the control of her mother-in-law; only upon her gradual physical maturation would the young couple actually marry. Early marriages were not popular; girls normally married at the age of 15–17. Mullahs implemented the marriage ritual for those of the full age, according to the traditional law. In ancient times, Kazakhs often found matches for their infant daughters, and this ritual was called *atastiru*. Children themselves, aware of the fact, grew in expectation of the rendezvous with the betrothed.

2.2 The rituals of the wedding process

Among Kazakhs, the wedding union is consecrated by Islamic law although it incorporates many specific ethnic rituals. After the matchmaking initiated by the groom's father, agreement with the bride's father and the following transfer of *Kalyn mal* or *Kalym* (brideprice)¹, the groom would make several visits to the bride's aul (*uryñ baru / uryñ kelu*)²; these are large festive events that can last up to 10 days (Photo 1a). They were about building a firm foundation for close relationships and mutual understanding.

Following the bride's visit festivities, the wedding ritual was held in the bride's father's house. The wedding time had to be appointed by the bride's father upon full payment of *kalyn mal* (brideprice). During the ritual, newlyweds were asked for their consent to marry (Katran 2010).

In ancient times, a mullah was invited by the bride's parents to conduct the wedding ritual. The ritual was held a day prior to the bride's send-off party (*kız uzatu*) and after the traditional ritual games of *kız kashar* (*qız qashar* – girl's walk off) or *tartis* (*tartys* – pulling). Usually, the wedding ceremony took place in the yurt/house of one of the father's rich relatives, especially well equipped for the games (*bolys ui* – the elder's house). In the organization of the ritual games of the *uryñ baru*, the main role is played by the bride's sisters-in-law (*jenge / jengeler*)³. The sisters-in-law were like mentors to the bride; like sisters, they always accompanied her everywhere till she entered the new hearth of the groom's house (Kazaktyn etnografiyalyk ... 2017 t.2: 435; Photo 1b).

According to the written and oral accounts, the *kız kashar* ritual game took place in a yurt located outside the bride's father's house or in a brother's house of the neighboring village. Moreover, often beautifully decorated white yurts were set up outside the village to entertain young people. Carpets were

put on the floor and expensive items hung on the walls. In the morning the bride escaped from her house and went to the wedding yurt accompanied by her sisters-in-law.

The *kız kashar* entertainment started with singing and *aitys* (musical improvisation). While village girls stayed inside the yurt, the boys remained outside. When the bottom part of the yurt was uplifted, girls looking outside started to sing. Songs were performed both individually and in groups and consisted mostly of *aitys*. The guys rewarded the girls with rings and bracelets for their songs (Grodekov 1889: 67; Divaev 1900: 19–20). But if the rhetorical duel was won by the boys, girls would offer them presents. The *kız kashar* game would follow in and outside the yurt until dawn and elderly people would listen to the youth songs in the open.



Photo 1. a) Groom's arrival to the bride's aul after pitching his tent; **b)** Bride's jenge – sisters-in-law visit the groom in his tent (Karuts 1911: 144).

The following entertainment consisted of another ritual game called *kalindik tartu* (*qalyndyq tartu*). The young people of the wedding parties were divided into two groups, one supporting the bride and the other the groom. The first group would hide the bride, instigating a search from the groomsmen. The groom himself did not participate in this contest. After catching the bride, the groom's group would hand her back to her sisters-in-law who would then bring her to the specially erected nuptial yurt to meet shortly with the groom before the wedding ceremony (Altynsarin 1870: 5; Zhetpisbaev 1893).

But in many instances, especially among the richer herders, horse games were held in the afternoon following *kyz kashar* (Divaev 1900: 19; Grodekov 1889: 67–72).

The wedding ceremony occurred in the bride's father's home and witnesses (*kuagerler*) would be present as negotiators between the mullah and the newlyweds. Two male witnesses (some sources indicate three young men as witnesses) representing the groom expressed the formal consent of the future husband to marry the bride. Their words, belonging to the repertory of "wedding songs" (*neke zhyry*) are usually named "marriage speech" (*neke kiar soz*) or "witness words" (*kualik soz*) (Bekimov 1905: 382-392; Baitursynov 1989: 253–254). The rhymes are read aloud rhythmically:

<i>Kua, kua, kuadirmiz,</i>	Witnesses, witnesses it's what we are
<i>Kualikke juredirmiz</i>	Our art is witness-making
<i>Munda halyq qasynda,</i>	Before the whole world
<i>Tanda Haq aldyna</i>	Before the Almighty God
<i>Aq kualigin beredurmiz.</i>	We pass a pure witness.

Or:

<i>Kua, kua, kuadirmiz,</i>	Witnesses, witnesses it's what we are
<i>Kualikke turadyrmyz,</i>	We gather to make a witness,
<i>Bugin tannyn atqanynan</i>	Since today's dawn
<i>Palenshe men tügensheniñ</i>	We witness. These two young
<i>Birin-biri qalaǵanyna</i>	Choosing each other.
<i>kuadirmiz.</i>	

Thus, the approvals were taken first from the bride's father, then from the groom and bride represented by witnesses before passing to the mullah. The Turks in the early days called the witnesses "Arkushi", those who were between the bride and the groom (Mahmut Kashgari 1997: 171).



Photo 2. a) *The “Neke kiu” (Marriage). Prayer reading by the mullah. Artist Eraly Ospanuly; b)* Abilhan Kasteev. *Prayer reading by the mullah. Museum number – KP17223 / 1. Fund collection of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan.*

However, the forms of the religious wedding differed from region to region. The military scientist Fedor Lazarevskiy, who observed the Orenburg Kazakhs, wrote that the groom sits in a separate yurt behind a curtain, invisible to guests,

while the bride with her parents stays in another yurt (Lazarevskiy 1862). According to many accounts, the bride was sitting behind a curtain “shymyldyk” woven from white fabric during the wedding ceremony (Izraztsov 1897: 78; Kislyakov 1969: 111). The mullah selected two smart boys and sent them to the bride’s father with the question: “*Do you agree to give your daughter to such a man?*” On return, the messengers declared the answer aloud and this questioning was held three times. Then the mullah requested the witnesses to ask the bride’s father: “*Have you received kalym in full, are there any obstacles to the marriage?*” Then, to the groom: “*Do you truly desire to marry her?*” The same question was asked of the bride. She might have answered in tears, in which case her parents soothed her by saying: “*Ainalayin (dear), please, agree, it is necessary to have your own family*” and obtained her consent.

The presence of witnesses in the marriage is carried out in accordance with *sharia* requirements. Their function was not only to hear the agreement of the newlyweds, but also to express the agreement from the two parties representing the public (Abildaev 2018: 77).

Only after having conducted this questionnaire would the mullah bring the groom, bride and relatives inside the yurt and proceed to the wedding ritual. At that time, a dish for ritual water was put before them and an arrow with a piece of cloth tied to it was stuck in the ground near the dish. The mullah would then pour water into the dish and cover it with the piece of cloth. Asking Allah to bless the newlyweds, he read the wedding prayer. Then, dipping the bride’s ring in the water, he returned it to her. At that time, he advised the groom to take care of his spouse. Finally, he gave the wedding water to the groom, bride and other present relatives (Lazarevskiy 1862) (Photo 2).

In the Syrdarya – Aral region, the bride would place her silver earrings or rings in the water and cover the dish with a white shawl. The groom would attach the shawl’s end to a wooden pole. After the wedding ritual, the silver was taken from the dish and kept as a marriage souvenir. The water was drunk in the following order: the groom, the bride and finally other assembled people. The witnesses would receive the white shawl. After that, the newlyweds were brought into a yurt specially erected for them and left there alone (AFM. *Unathan Baetov; Kidıralı Toksanbaev*).

N. Kalmakov witnessed this ritual and recorded that a ring and earrings were put into the water by the bride herself, the dish was covered by the shawl and, after having heard the prayer, the silver was taken out and the newlyweds drank the water (Kalmakov 1910: 228).

P. Makovetskii watched this ritual in East Kazakhstan, where the wedding was held prior to the bride’s send-off, before the first nuptial night (*otau salar*) (Makovetskii 1886: 11, 20–21).

In the Mangystau region, the groom's witnesses were first sent to the bride and she answered via girl-friends, because to give consent aloud was inappropriate. After the prayer, the water was drunk first by the mullah, then by the bride, the groom and finally by the relatives, according to elder age succession (Karuts 1889: 106).

Khudabay Kustanaev recorded that in the Syrdarya region, the mullah began the ceremony with these usual words: "*Aumin (amen), aul-akbar*". The bride with her friends were sitting behind the curtain, while the groom with his witnesses and his relatives remained in the middle of the yurt. The mullah would then proceed by enlisting the names of the bride and her parents ("that daughter of this and that") and asked the groom: "*Do you agree to make her your wife?*". The groom replied: "*Yes, I agree, I give my consent*". The same question was asked of the bride, who gave the same answer. Upon each question, the witnesses sang the obligatory "*witness song*", and the mullah read the *khutba* prayer. A wooden dish with coins, rings, and earrings was filled with water when the mullah read his conjuration, and the witnesses gave the water to the newlyweds and people who were present (Kustanaev 1894: 31–32).

Sometimes salt and sugar were added to the wedding water (*neke suy*). Water signifies the purity of the young couple; salt symbolizes damnation in case of infamous deeds; sugar means their agreeable and happy life, and the ring serves as a wedding memory, eternally reminding of the significant event. The groom and the bride had to drink from the same side of the dish to connote their future union. During field study, some informants reported that adding salt and sugar to the wedding water would punish adultery (AFM. Kıdralı Toksanbaev. Urimhan Ayazbaeva. Kosan Auesbaev). Nogaibai Zhetpisbaev also wrote that the last to drink the water was the bride, who took the ring put there by the groom (Zhetpisbaev 1893: 36–37). Aleksandr Alektorov notes that the dish with water was initially placed by the groom's father; then the mullah washed his face and read the prayer, and having received the consents of the newlyweds, he gave them the water to drink three times, before handing it to all the audience present in the yurt. If the water was not sufficient, he sprinkled it around. N. Izraztsov reports that after reading the prayer, the mullah blows on the wedding water, providing it with an illuminating energy (Izraztsov 1897: 78). Some mullahs even placed an arrow in the water to which the hair of the newlywed's horse was tied; other mullahs variously soaked paper with prayers written on it (Alektorov 1888: 11–12; Kazakh halkukun ... 2006: 187).

Under Islamic law, marriage involving a mullah is called *Ak neke* (*white marriage*) (Abildaev 2018: 76–77). The sacred meaning of the word "white marriage" has a high value for a young family, it means that the consorts' ways were rightly opened to their future life.

Patsha kyzyn beredi okyp nekah The king gives his daughter by doing
nekah
Neke qylmaq Doing *nikah*
Paigambar sunneti hak Desires the Prophet
(Kissa Gulzhamila kizdin hikayasi, 2004: 95).

These lines indicate that to marry was a responsibility for a Muslim person. From the end of the 19th century, after the wedding ceremony (*neke kiyu*) the mullah registered the witnesses in a marriage book (Photo 3) with the young couple's agreement.

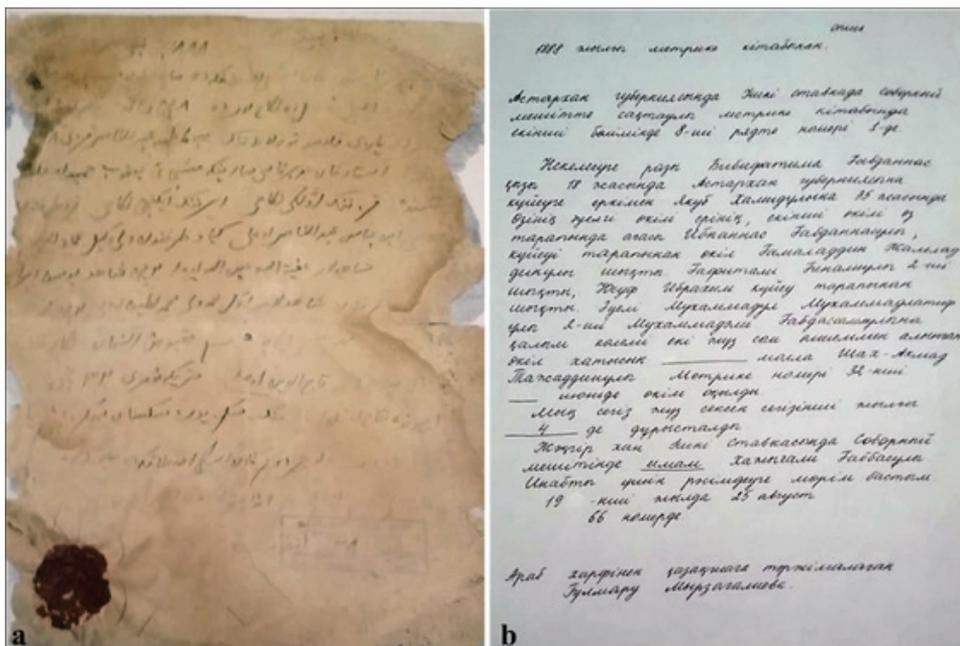


Photo 3. a) Registration by the mullah of a marriage contract in 1888. (Museum number 3789. Written documents Fund of the Reserve – Museum of the “Khan Orda”, West Kazakhstan. **b)** Translation in Cyrillic script of the contract (by Gulmaru Myrzagalieva)⁴.

Typical of Kazakh customs was the fact that the newlyweds, observing etiquette, gave consent in a low voice or just by a facial gesture. The witnesses, knowing the newlyweds' shyness, uttered loudly to the mullah: “She/he agrees”.

After reading the prayer, the mullah advised the groom to observe peace in family life and to take care of his wife. Then, the girl's parents addressed the groom with these words: “We gave a bone (i.e. a person) to serve you, asking to take good care after her, not beating without reason and not scolding without cause”, and addressed the girl: “Daughter, please behave, don't attract damnation

on us” (Grodekov 1889: 70). Although the marriage ceremony was attended by several witnesses, the couple’s public announcement of their marriage, the registration of the couple in the marriage register and the signatures of the witnesses helped to ensure the stability of the marriage.

After the ritual registered by the mullah, the newlyweds were left in a separate yurt – *otau uyi* or white *otau* in the bride’s father’s village. They were brought there by the bride’s sisters-in-law, according to ancient customs.

After the marriage night, the bride’s father officially invited her husband to his home. The groom came in and bowed down to his father-in-law. The bride’s sister-in-law made the ritual of anointing the fire and throwing mutton fat in it. The groom performed the rituals of bowing and pouring the liquid fat into the hearth during his first visit to the bride’s father (Photo 4). This ritual was accompanied by the offering of gifts (silver rings, silk, cotton shawls, beads, etc.) to the bride’s sisters-in-law, called “pouring fire” (*otka kuyar*). After that, the young bride would also pour oil into the fire, a custom still preserved in the Mangystau region (Photo 5).

Our fieldwork research and oral information show that after the *neke kiyu* ceremony, the bride and the sisters-in-law perform the ritual of *korisu* (*to embrace*, accompanied by comforting words and songs), standing for a farewell to the bride (AFM. Kaliya Adilbek. Saadat Pınar.) when she was sent in full attire to the place of her husband, together with his mother and escorting people.



Photo 4. The groom bows in front of relatives of the bride (*Turkestanskiy al'bom. 6 al'bom; Kazaktyn etnografıyalık kategorıyalar, ugymdar men ataularynyn dastyrlı zhyesi, Tom 3, 2017: 392*).



Photo 5. The bride's ritual of pouring oil into a fire. Village Shaiur. Mangystau Ethnographic Expedition. Photo T.Kartaeva.

A lucky wedding day was thought to be a Wednesday or a Thursday at the end of August, before winter migration because, at that time, livestock were fattening in pastures. However, our survey data reveal that summer was rarely a wedding time, but it was rather time to prepare the dowry (*zhasau*)⁵. Tools for weaving carpets and colored fabrics (*alasha*) were put in operation in the summer pastures; reed mats and felt carpets were also manufactured (AFM).

3 DISCUSSION

3.1 The blend of traditional and Islamic customs in the Kazakh wedding

As attested by historical and ethnographic accounts, the wedding ceremony celebrated with water by a mullah was introduced with Islam in Kazakhstan and some regions did not even celebrate it, considering the last games (*qalyndyq tartu*) that ended the period of the groom's visits (*Oryn tartu*) with the full payment of the brideprice as the sealing ceremony. It could be considered that in

remote times the capture of the bride by the groom's side enacted in the *qalyndyq tartu* would have represented the final union of the newlyweds. Kidnapping the bride is a typical exogamic ritual among pastoral societies (McLennan 1865). Reports recorded by N. I. Grodekov, A. Levshin and P. E. Makovetsky indicate that among some Kazakh groups, *uryñ toy* could be considered as a replacement for the wedding ceremony itself.

Another argument revealing the recentness and superficiality of the *neke kiyu* is that it was often performed after the nuptial night: "the indifferent attitude to this rite should probably also explain the fact that often it was performed after all wedding ceremonies, in particular after the wedding night, which, seemingly, should have preceded as an act of legal marriage" (Kislyakov 1969: 111).

3.2 The wedding water

Water as a blessing of the marriage is very widespread among various nationalities around the world (Slavic, Ukrainian, Hindu, Thai...) and the drinking of water by newlyweds at the moment of sealing their union is found in similar forms among other peoples of Central Asia.⁶ The Pashtuns and Jews of Afghanistan, for example, use water during the wedding ceremony almost identically to the Kazakh tradition. Before the marriage covenant, the Pashtuns poured water into a bowl next to a Coran and Jews to a Torah scroll; the bride and groom purified their hands with the water; sugar was put in it so "that the bride and groom would be sweet together" and inside the bowl they placed jewelry for the bride (Tapper 1991: 166).

In Kazakhstan, according to written sources and informant's data, the wedding water was drunk first by the groom, then by the bride, and then by the participants in the marriage ceremony. But in the historical novel "Abai" when Abai and Dilda got married, the participants drank water first, followed by Abai, then Dilda (Auezov 1942: 260).

Also, some written data report that the water was drunk first by the mullah, then by the participants and finally by the newlyweds (Ibragimov 1872: 144; Zhetpisbaev 1893: no 37). Nowadays, the fact that newlyweds drink the wedding water first shows that the order has been altered from its original meaning.

3.3 Characteristics of the Kazakh wedding

More characteristic of the traditional Kazakh wedding are exogamy, matrilocality of the union, long pre-marital acquaintances of the couple during the payment

of the brideprice, the blessing of the bride's father (*bata*), teasing games from the bride's side and the use of specific symbols.

Exogamy

Exogamic obligation by adat is shared by most of the world's pastoral societies according to eugenic knowledge of livestock health and lineage improvement. But exogamy might also be linked to historical circumstances involving a scarcity of women among small disseminated pastoral groups, where men had to seek wives among others, including marriage by capture, and where exogamy became the ruling custom (McLennan 1865). Marriage by capture was and is still very widespread in Kazakhstan as a cheap expedient (robbing), a reaction of the poor to an excessive brideprice or as a rearrangement of love affairs against parents' will (Werner 2004).

Matrilocality and pre-marital rituals

In all Central Asia and Kazakhstan, marriage was sealed in two phases. The first and longest one was the matrilocal stage during the payment of the brideprice, involving acquaintance, engagement and lawful union organized by the bride's father. The second, the shortest, was the festival organized in the groom's family where the bride was revealed (*Betashar*). The importance of the first phase has been considered by many ethnographers as a cultural relic of a previous matrilocal residence of the married couple in ancient societies (Kislyakov 1969: 160). It manifests itself, in the wedding of Kazakhs, Turkmens and other peoples, in various obstacles placed toward the groom and his friends, as well as in ransoms, as survival phenomena associated with the transition from matrilocal to patrilocal marriage (Vostrov 1956).

The matrilocal importance shown in the Central Asian marriage ceremony has been classified in three categories according to proximity to a primitive matrilocal stage: 1 – long matrilocal residence of the newlyweds before and after the marriage ritual (Turkmens, Tajik), 2 – long acquaintance and partial residence of newlyweds before the lawful union (Kazakh), 3 – short visits to the bride's family before sending her off to the groom's family (urban Uzbek) (Kislyakov 1969).

Bata, the bride's father blessing

Although *bata* is a typical Muslim rite (coming from *patikha...*), in the Kazakh context it highlights the importance of the bride's patriarchal support for the union expressed as requisite for the mullah consecration. In Central Asian and Kazakhstan nationalities, the role of ancestral authority in the conjugal union is always played by the blessing of the bride's father (*bata*) and by the prayer of the Mullah representing the religious seal. The bride's side's support toward the couple continued on the occasion of childbirth and in the following rituals bringing children to adulthood (circumcision, puberty, wedding...).

The duel games

The importance of the matriarchal side of the marrying consorts is also expressed in the duels opposing the groom's parties to those of the bride. Teasing words against the groom's matchmakers, repeated hidings of the bride, the necessary 'secrecy' of the groom's visits, word and song competitions between parties are expressions of the reluctance of the matriarchal side to comply with the patriarchal society.

The combination of these rituals with selected key symbols represents the cultural specificity of the Kazakh wedding.

3.4 Key symbols involved in the wedding ceremony

Key (or core) cultural symbols in Kazakh culture are organized according to a traditional cosmogony made of opposite dualities (sky and earth, sun and moon, male-female...). This antagonistic symmetry is well expressed in the powerful symbol of the yurt window (*shanyrak*) made of 4 sides, each representing an orient, a cardinal natural element, a color with an associated value, and enclosed in a circle shape on the background of a blue sky. If the symbol itself represents life and eternity, it summarizes more concretely the concept of family welfare and harmony, and as 'root metaphor' it implicates the idea of family cohesion and lineage continuity (Ortner 1973). Accordingly, the semantics of the wedding rituals is organized according to a code of binary categories: bride-groom, water-fire, phallic-vaginal symbols (like the arrow and bow), mullah - goddess of fire. The importance of this duality is also expressed in the premarital games and singing duels between the groom's and bride's

parties representing liminal rites involving the entrance into conjugal life and the passage from matrilocality to patrilocality (Turner 1969).

Key symbols of the Kazakh culture put on stage during the wedding ceremony highlight the ideas of purity, firmness of the household and the union, and/or they have a propitiative function.

The white colour

In Central Asia, both red and white colors are used in wedding ceremonies. The red color symbolizes fertility (virgin blood of the bride), feminine beauty and magical protection. The white color symbolizes religious priesthood, purity, old age and death. While the red color is more emphasized in settled agrarian cultures (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, India, China), the white color is privileged among the Kazakhs, even if the red color appears second in some parts of the marital dress and headdress (*saukele*) (Photo 6).



Photo 6. a) A bride with her family. Photo by Konstantin De-Lazari. Semipalatinsk region. 1898.; **b)** Bride. XIX c. Photo by S. Dudin. Semipalatinsk region. 1899. (*Kazahi 100 let nazad: istoriya v fotografiyah*. <https://tengrinews.kz/fotoarchive/kazahi-100-let-nazad-istoriya-v-fotografiyah-1127/>.)

The colour white is a symbol of purity, sacred heavenly bodies (Moon, Sun, Stars), and happiness and joy. The word “Ak” (white) was used to depict positive phenomena: happiness, good situation, support and felicity, as in the expressions “*ak bata*” (white blessing), “*ak tilek*” (white wish), “*ak zhol*” (white or augurious way). The color white is associated with all the stages of the wedding rites: White marriage, white scarf, white sugar, white salt, white blessing... It constitutes a national key symbol expressing a cultural priority given to purity over fertility in Kazakh traditional values. The white shawl covering the dish symbolized the purity and innocence of the union. It constituted one of the obligatory attributes of the wedding ritual.



Photo 7. a) The “kol ustatar” (hand touch) custom after marriage. Archival number 2-104264 (Fund collection of the Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents and Sound Recordings); **b)** The “kol ustatar” (hand touch). Artist Eraly Ospanuly.

After the marriage ritual, the bride's sisters-in-law allowed the groom to hold the bride's hair through a shawl after which he received a gift called *held hair* (*shash sipatar*). Then the groom touched the girl's hand with the shawl for which he was offered another gift named *hand touch* (*kol ustatar*) (Photo 7).

The function of the shawl when holding the bride's hair and hands is to warn the groom to be polite before approaching the bride, and to remind him of the strong protective influence of the bride's "sisters-in-law institution".

In the historical novel "Abai", during Abai and Dilda's wedding, Dilda's sisters-in-law wrapped Abai's hand in a silk scarf; Dilda's right hand was touched, and her hair was held through the scarf by Abai (Auezov 1942: 260).

Ishmurat Ibragimov reports that the scarf used for this ritual was hung on a yurt curtain as a remembrance of the union of the newlyweds. The same author also wrote that during the wedding ceremony, silk, semi-silk and cotton shawls were placed around the hearth. It is easy to realize that the author is talking about various types of scarves (Ibragimov 1872: 137). N. Kalmakov notes that the attribute of the scarf at the wedding ceremony had a ritual significance in the wedding process (Kalmakov 1910: 221–228).

Silver

Among the obligatory attributes of the wedding ritual are silver rings and coins. Silver coins and silver rings were placed in the wedding water. Turning marriage water into silver water enhanced the dignity of the union. Silver water was considered very pure and useful for the body. The food of a woman wearing silver was considered clean. Written records and information show that silver rings and silver coins were shared by the participants of the wedding ceremony.

Milk

In the Mangystau region, warm milk was drunk instead of the marriage water. Milk drinking is linked to the desire of both members of the couples to have a prosperous and wealthy future. This rite of milk drinking was kept secret, even during the Soviet era (*AFM. Alkazhan Edilhan*).

Arrow

One important rite of the Kazakh wedding is *zherge sadak ogun shanshu* (piercing with an arrow), *neke suga sadak ogun batyru* (dipping an arrow in the wedding water), meaning the firmness of marriage ties (Lazarevskiy 1862)

In the song of “*Kam Burabekuly Bamsy Barik angimesinin bauany*” (“The story of Kam Burabekuly Bamsy Baryk”) recorded in the book “Korkut Ata” it is said that a married man shoots an arrow and builds a “family house” where the arrow strikes the ground (“Korkut Ata” 1999: 148). And in another song of that epic “*Salor Kazan uinin shabulgani turaly angimenin bauany*” (“The story of the attack on the house of Salor Kazan”) it is reported that when Kazan-bek came to his native land after a battle with the enemy, instead of the house there was an arrow left (“Korkut Ata” 1999: 138). The fact that the family house was built where the arrow hits the ground dates back to the Oghuz period. Similarly, in the 16th century folk legend Kyz Zhibek, a white wedding house for Kyz Zhibek and Tolegen was built where an arrow was shot (“Kyz Zhibek” zhyry, 2009; Photo 8). The arrow was used for building a house and kept inside it during the marriage ceremony connected with the ancestral cult. Therefore, the wedding house used for the ceremony, as the first home of the newlyweds, was the one built by the bride’s father. Also, the sticking of the arrow in the ground is based on the strength and stability of the newly-formed family.



Photo 8. The marriage ceremony “Neke kiyu” in the village of the bride’s father and pricked bow for wedding ritual. Frames from the movie “Kyz Zhibek” (The film “Kyz Zhibek” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mTEYdL5wkU>).

Moreover, the use of a ritual arrow can be explained by fertility and apotropaic magic: the arrow represents masculine potency and protects newlyweds from harmful powers. Many researchers highlight this double aspect in the wedding rites of the Siberian and Central Asian peoples. Among Evenks, Khakassians, Mongols and Buryats, shooting an arrow during matchmaking rituals was widespread. For the first ones, an arrow held by the bride during the wedding ceremony would favor the birth of a child and for the latter, an arrow could even replace the presence of the groom during a wedding celebrated without his presence (Khangalov 1898: 6). The display of an arrow tied with ribbon coming from the bride and a bundle of horsehair from the groom among the Kazakhs has been considered as a protection of the couple and the conjugal power (Toleubaev 1991: 26).

Horse bristle

A. Alektorov described the ritual of dipping an arrow tied with a handful of bristles taken from the horse of both groom and bride into the wedding water. There is a saying among the Kazakh people: “*Aradan su otse de kyl otpeitin tatu*” (“Even if the water passes through the people, the bristle will not pass”). The dipping of an arrow tied with horse’s bristles into the wedding water is a magic rite for the peace of the young couple. Attached horse bristles are connected to the belief in the couple’s consent and their unity, which does not let a hair through. After the wedding, the newlyweds kept the arrow for good luck (Kislyakov 1969: 112).

Cult of the fire

This rite is connected to the cult of ancestors and fire, the symbol of the hearth’s power. The latter cult is more ancient than the former, and initially it was connected to the cult of family gods and hearth patronesses. This is witnessed by the ritual words: “*Ot-ana, Mai-ana, jarylqa*”, i.e., “*Bless and save, Mother-Fire, Mother-Fat*”. Among many Kazakh people, the home hearth is symbolized by the image of *Mother-Fire, Mistress of Fire* or *Beldam of Fire*, to which sacrifices are offered (Grodekov 1889: 65; Altynsarin 1870: 14; Valikhanov 1985: 55; Photo 5).

3.5 Typical Kazakh marriages according to Muslim and ancestral laws.

This blending of Kazakh and Muslim codes is not only present during the wedding ritual but also throughout the conjugal life. Here, we present some basic customs of the Kazakh marital condition.

Marriage process

In the Kazakh traditional laws, marriage differs from the Muslim *sharia* marriage. The former strictly observes the groom's right to choose the bride and his decision is taken into account. A bride can be chosen among any sensible girls, being a Muslim, innocent, able to bring good progeny. In some Muslim countries, this selection is often implemented by relatives and the groom may not even see his bride.

According to *sharia*, during the wedding, the groom provides his future wife with presents (*mahr*, or *kalym*, dower). Its size and cost are negotiated between the parties; before it is transferred to the bride's side, she is entitled to keep away the groom from any intercourse. As per the traditional law, the dowry (*zhasau*) is given by the girl's parents, and more precisely, by her father's clan. Girls from the age of 9–10 years old were engaged in embroidery, helping to create the dowry.

During the Kazakh wedding, the mullah did not ask about the groom's *mahr*, because the *kalym* and its size was negotiated at the matchmaking time by the groom's kin, and this *kalym* was to be spent on the girl's dowry. Therefore, the mullah only asked the girl's father: "*Has kalym been paid in full and are there obstacles to the wedding ceremony?*"

Conditions and number of wives

Sharia permits a man to take four wives. In case of the death of one of them, he may take a fifth or sixth wife. In the Koran it is stipulated: "... there is no sin in marrying two, three, even four women, you like. But if you cannot treat them likewise, then it is better to stay with one, and it is possible to live even with a slave woman. To be satisfied with one woman is the best way to protect yourself from overindulgence" (Sura Nisa: 3) (Koran Karim, 2002: 84).

It happened that Kazakh khans, beks and the rich in general did not follow *sharia*, taking, at their convenience, up to 9 and more wives. War slaves were considered their possessions. During the Kalmyk-Dzungar invasion (17th–18th centuries), victorious Kazakh warriors took Kalmyk girls to their house. One of them was Abylai Khan⁷ who had 12 wives among which the Kalmyks were the most numerous.

The first wife of a rich Kazakh is entitled *baibishe* (*baibishe* – the eldest wife), other wives were all called *tokal* (women following the first wife) (*Kazaktyn etnografiyalyk kategoriyalar, ugymdar men ataularynyn dastyrli zhyesi*, 2017: Tom 5: 397; Altynsarin 1870: 5). Their respective order is indicated: *an older tokal, a middle tokal, the youngest tokal, a young tokal*. The third wife (the middle one) was named *naksuyer* (*naqsúyer*); the youngest (the fourth) was named *akkoltyk* (*aqqoltyq*).

The *tokal*'s property depended on her husband and his *baibishe*. Careful parents avoided giving their daughter as second or third wife to a man whose first wife was still alive. This was also because it entailed that her *kalyn mal* should be more expensive than that of the previous wives. Plural marriage was a common practice among rich families. Each wife enjoyed her own yurt and her own household. The practice of marrying many women was also widely practiced before Islam.

Divorce

According to *sharia*, a wife cannot make any decision without the approval of her husband. If a man has one wife, he spends one night out of four with her. If he has four wives, he spends every night with each of them in sequence. One wife's night cannot be given to another wife. If spouses are negligent in their duties, i.e. a wife does not obey her husband, or neglects her work in the household, then the husband is entitled to miss the rendezvous on the assigned day and can sleep separately. *Sharia* does not permit beating wives. If a husband does not implement his duties, the wife is entitled to demand their fulfilment. According to the regulations of the imam Agzam, disputes between couples are considered by two persons, one representing each side. If the reasons are serious, the judge (*kazi*) starts the divorce procedure according to the principle of *khul'*. By *sharia*, divorce requires its triple declaration by the husband uttering the word *talak* (“*talaq*”). On this point, the Koran stipulates: “A wife subject to *talak* shall wait for a husband during three menstrual cycles. If she believes in Allah and in doomsday, she shall not hide what is in her womb (pregnancy).

If the couple restores a mutual agreement, they can become husband and wife again” (Sura Bakara: 221) (*Koran Karim* 2002: 42). “A repeated *talak* allows for re-joining. If the problem persists, the custom requires a peaceful separation. If both sides became assured of their inability to live together following the laws of Allah, the husband shall keep the property paid for the wife” (Sura Bakara: 229) (*Koran Karim*, 2002: 43). According to the *Sharia*, if the husband declares *talak* three times, then the marriage is cancelled, and the woman can marry another man. If the latter also declares *talak* to her, and in the case where she makes peace with her previous husband, then, by Allah’s laws, she will be approved for re-marriage (Sura Bakara: 230) (*Koran Karim* 2002: 44).

However, according to Kazakh customs, if the relations between spouses worsened, the aul elders (*aksaqal*) intervened, discussed the issue and tried to reconcile the couple in order to avoid divorcing, a rare case among Kazakhs (Katran 2020; AFM). Moreover, the divorce procedure was very complicated. Traditional Kazakh law did not accept a senseless divorce, which would increase the number of orphans and widows among living husbands and fathers. Traditional Kazakh law held that marriage could be broken in the following cases: if the groom testified to the loss of the bride’s chastity because of the action of another man (in this case, the groom informed the bride’s sisters-in-law asking them to talk to her father about his refusal from the bride); if a man was impotent; if a husband was lost for a period of seven years. In the last two cases, the wife could marry another man from the same family. The first case had extremely rare precedents among Kazakhs who believed in the principle of the “40 houses’ ban on a girl” (“*qyzga qyryq uiden tiu*”) and their girls were under constant protection of their mothers and sisters-in-law.

Widowhood

According to *sharia*, a widow observes the *iddah* period lasting four months and ten days, after which she could marry again. *Koran Karim* says: “If among you someone dies, and the wife remains, that woman (according to customs) shall grieve during four months and ten days. Then, if she, keeping decency, starts remembering herself and thinks of her future, that is not your responsibility. If she is pregnant from her deceased husband, she shall wait till the birth” (Sura Bakara: 234) (*Koran Karim* 2002: 45).

The Kazakh traditional law concerning the remarriage of a widow did not conform to the *Sharia*. According to Kazakh customs, a widow must mourn for one year, up to the funeral commemoration of her husband, and after that, she

can only become the wife of her elder or younger brother-in-law (*amengerlik*). The law respects the widow's wish to avoid levirate and cannot force her. If a woman chooses a man of another clan, her children and dowry remain in the previous husband's family.

For Kazakhs, it was critical that a widow "remained within the clan, even if her husband passed away prematurely" in order that orphans didn't suffer from carelessness. Generally, widows followed the levirate regulations to remarry a husband's relative.

When a widow remarries, the above-mentioned premarital rituals were no longer performed (P. 1878: 9). In ancient times, if a man had many wives, all of them were married in the Islamic way, with the participation of the bride's father. However, the preliminary rituals with secret dating and games were not held during the pre-wedding ceremony *urun baru*.

Contemporary evolution and conservation of the Kazakh traditional wedding ritual

The Kazakh wedding ceremony was practiced until the establishment of Soviet rule. The Soviet-era policy banned large herds of private livestock and, simultaneously, the traditional marriage procedures were withdrawn from practice. Despite this power's ban on Islamic wedding canons, the traditional ceremony was secretly practiced in the Syrdarya-Aral region. In the early 20th century, some basic rules of the Kazakh wedding ritual were eliminated, for example, the occurrence of the wedding ceremony in the bride's father's house and the performance of the witnesses' song.

However, the holding of the wedding ceremony (*neke kiyu*) at the girl's house, and the invitation of a mullah by the girl's father are still preserved among the Chinese Kazakhs, Iranian Kazakhs and the Kazakhs in Turkey (AFM. *Kaliya Adilbek. Sydyhan Ulyshai. Saadet Pinar*).

The Kazakh from Turkey Kaliya Adilbek was married at the age of 15 by her parents. Before her parents and some relatives escaped from China chased after by the Chinese army, they organized the wedding rituals of five girls on the same day in order to unify their children. The Uyghur mullah Mohammed Turdykhan did not make the obligatory request of the dower (*mahr*) since the parents were in such troubled times. But the groom promised that he would keep the bride well-nourished for three days (AFM. *Kaliya Adilbek*). During the war or difficult times, at weddings mullahs would not require *mahr* and the bride's father did not ask *kalym*.

Today, in the Turkish Kazakh tradition, as in ancient times, the bride's father prepares the house for the guests and invites a mullah to consecrate the union at his home. The mullah writes down the amount of the bride's *mahr* and gives it to the bride's father as a marriage guarantee. Here, the traditional Kazakh marriage ritual system is tightly connected to the people's beliefs and convictions.

CONCLUSION

Ancestral customs and magic beliefs, like the veneration of ancestors, purity, firmness and fertility constitute the backbone of the Kazakh wedding ritual. The ancestors' cult is the most evident component in these religious-magical wedding rites. It can be seen in the blessing (*bata*) of the bride's father, in the hanging of an arrow near the wedding water and in the pouring of oil into the father-in-law's hearth, all representing the foundation of the household.

The magic role played by the arrow (protection), white colour and water (purity), salt, sugar and silver (cleanness) were fundamental elements of the wedding rituals. They belong to a rich inventory of pre-Islamic beliefs variously ascribed to animism, fetishism, shamanism, tengrianism, the cult of ancestors. Although the traditional Kazakh marriage was celebrated according to Islamic principles, it included many pre-Islamic elements.

These religious-magical cults were at the service of the marriage's main purpose, securing a successful continuation of the family line.

Today, the ancient rituals of the wedding ceremonies such as hanging an arrow, adding sugar and salt to the wedding water, placing silver rings, covering the water bowl with a scarf, wrapping the bride and groom's hands in a white shawl and touching the bride's hair with a scarf are no longer preserved among Kazakhs in Kazakhstan.

Our study identified the atheistic policy of the Soviet era as responsible for the alteration of the marriage process in Kazakhstan. The policy forbade the religious activity of the mullahs, the provision of the brideprice and the performance of the ritual of sending-off the bride. Moreover, circumstantial events, such as the large famines of the thirties under Soviet rule, reduced the ceremony to just a blessing.

Progressively, behaviours were altered, and it became common during the Soviet time for a girl to run away and marry the man she loved.

The organization of the wedding ceremony in the house of the bride's father, who first gives his blessings on the union according to the ancient Kazakh tradition, is still preserved among Kazakhs of Iran, Turkey and partly China.

However, some conservative areas of Kazakhstan like the Mangystau and the Syrdarya regions, where the Muslim marriages went on secretly during the Soviet time, still conserve the performance or the memory of some elements of the ancestral marriage rites. They preserved and still perform the “Wedding songs” (*neke zhyry*), “marriage speech” (*neke kiar soz*) or “witness words” (*kualik soz*) as a regional ethnographic folklore and ritual heritage. Today it is included in the “National list of the intangible cultural heritage of Kazakhstan” under the name “Marriage tradition”, including all the elements of the betrothal and wedding ceremony.

The record and study of these ethnographic data are urgent prerequisites for the preservation of the Kazakh wedding rituals as a monument of the intangible cultural heritage of Kazakhstan.

NOTES

- ¹ *Kalyn mal* (*qalyń mal*) is the number of livestock presented by the groom’s father to the bride’s father as payment (*qalyńdyq* became *kalym*) for the girl. The given *kalym* of animals is used to create the bride’s dowry, clothing, headdress (*saukele*). *Kalym* consists of several parts: 1) *bas zhaksy*, 2) *kara mal*, 3) *toi mal*, 4) “milk fee”, and 5) “camel”. The first includes 20 mares, 2) 21–25 mares, 3) 20–70 mares, 4) 1–7 camels as compensation to the bride’s mother for having raised the daughter, 5) 2 camels to the bride’s father. Notorious rich people gave a lot of livestock. The lyrical epic “Kyz-Zhibek” praises Tolegen’s father for giving a *kalym* of 550 mares for Zhibek. The common people paid the dower according to their capacity.
- ² *Uryn baru / Uryn kelu* (*uryn barý / uryn kelý*) is the groom’s first visit to the bride’s village after the matchmaking. In olden times, a young man wishing to get acquainted with his bride arrives with friends at her village and stops in the outskirts in a temporary tent. The groom’s friends go to see the bride’s sisters-in-law (brother’s wife and cousin’s wife) to announce the groom’s arrival and offer gifts for the good news. The bride’s sisters-in-law pay a return visit to the groom’s tent and agree on the time of the meeting with the bride. Often, a special yurt is erected for this meeting. Games allowing the groom to become familiar with his bride follow one after another with the participation of the sisters-in-law.
- ³ *jenge / jengeler* are the sisters-in-law of the bride consisting generally of her brothers’ wives (brother’s wife and cousin’s wife).
- ⁴ One of the marriage certificates kept in the Khan Orda Museum-Reserve is presented as a marriage registration certificate for Yakub Khamidul and Bibifatima Gabdannasyrkyzy. The marriage was concluded by mullah Shahi-Ahmad Tajeddinuly on June 4, 1888, and the marriage certificate was issued on August 25 of that year. Ibgabas Gabdannasyruly and Gimadaddin Jalaladdinuly acted as witnesses. Such marriage certificates prove that in the traditional Kazakh society, the process of marriage from the public announcement of the mullah were gradually moving to the process of additional confirmation by “documents”.

- ⁵ *Zhasau* (*jasay*) is the dowry given to the bride by her parents. The livestock received as *kalym* did not remain with the bride's father; it returned to the groom's house as household property along with accessories. Livestock was accepted as the *zhasau* fee. *Zhasau* included the yurt interior furniture, interior covers (felt, blankets, seat cushions), a silver saddle with accessories, girls' riding horses, pack camels, carpets, chests and caskets, fabrics, fur coats, coats and gowns, and dishware (Altynsarin 1870: 14–15). The verses in the "Kyz-Zhibek" epos narrate:
"Eighty camels were packed with the dowry
To accompany Kyz-Zhibek...
...Mother prepared the belongings to be carried by nine horses"
"Eighty camels were to carry golden chests...",
– specifying the fact that the bride's dowry was not less valuable than the dower. ("Kyz Zhibek" zhyry, 53 tom, 2009: 101).
- ⁶ The anthropology of things, that is, the existence of various objects during the drinking of marriage water among the peoples of Central Asia is associated with the remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs. (Kislyakov 1969).
- ⁷ *Abylay Khan* (1711–1781) was a Kazakh Khan, a great commander and statesman, the descendant of Jochi Khan (eldest son of Genghis Khan). He had 12 wives and 30 sons. His descendants were the last Kazakh khans Wali and Kenesary. Shokan Valikhanov (1835–1865), a famous scientist and ethnographer, was his fourth-generation descendant (Valikhan, 1 tom. 1998: 49–51). The Russian researcher Fedor Lazarevskii explains that wealthy Kazakhs marry more than four wives outside of the Islamic context, due to the high number of their livestock and the incapacity to manage such a rich household with only four women. In a 19th century study conducted in western Kazakhstan (Bukey Horde), it was recorded from local Kazakh informants that: "a man called Dastan in the Bokei Orda kept 15 wives, having 50 sons; Shabyl Kydyralin had 20 wives and 60 sons" (Lazarevskii 1862; Kazakh halkukun dasturleri men adet-guruptar, Tom 2. 2006: 158–159).

AFM – THE AUTHOR'S FIELD MATERIALS.

LIST OF INFORMANTS

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