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A WEDDING CEREMONY IN THE TRANS-KHAZAR TURCOMANS*

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During my stay in Iran in the years of 1969 and 1970, I traveled to various parts of the country. When I went to see the Trans-Khazar Turcomans between August 11 and August 14, 1969, I witnessed a wedding of the Turcomans in Gonbad-e Qabus, which is the biggest settlement of the region and also a historical city. A Turcoman teacher from the Teke tribe, named Kurban, whom I met there, gave me information about their wedding ceremonies. Account below is based on his descriptions.

Although rituals of wedding ceremonies differ from tribe to tribe, they are actually all alike. Among the Tekes it is like this:

When a family decides to marry off their son, they send some mutton with someone to the house of the girl they plan to take as bride. This is called '*doş (dosh)*' in native language and it is the beginning of kinship ties. Because, if the bride's family is willing to this marriage, they accept the meat; if they are not, they send it back. When this matter is agreed upon, both parties decide on a date to come together. On the decided day they meet and discuss the terms. They call this discussion '*duz danışmak (danışmak)*', and it is indeed done just to come together. Because since times immemorial the terms has been carried out according to the traditions and customary norms of the tribe they belong, only some requests, depend on the financial conditions of families, are made. During the gathering a wedding date is determined. After that families say "we become '*guda bolduğ (boldugh)*', meaning 'in-laws', with so-and-so".

* İsmail Aka, "Hazar Ötesi Türkmenlerinde Bir Düğün Merasimi", *Türk Kültürü*, Cilt XVIII, Sayı 207-208, 1980, 108-110.

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The Trans-Khazar Turcomans today constitute two large groups, namely Caferbay and Atabay. The people of Caferbay, the night before the wedding, with the influence of the Azerbaijani Turks, play the accordion and play games. The case of the Tekes is slightly different, since they play Turcoman music and dance. If the wedding coincides with cold weather, festivities are done in big 'alaçıklar (alachıklar)' - tents, and guests are welcomed with tea and some sort of bun called 'gatlama', which is buttery and sweet.

On the wedding day, around 9.00-10.00 a train of cars and horses, while the group is continuously blowing whistles, playing horns and singing, takes off to the bride's house. The bride is locked up in a room in her house and there are women who guard the door. People who come to the door, cannot enter the room without giving the women money or small gifts, and after they take the bride, they return to the groom's house. Kids greet them traditionally by throwing eggs, onions and potatoes.

The moment the bride gets out of a car (or dismounts a horse) that she has been brought with and sets foot on the ground, someone from the groom's family throws flour on her. Because in their opinion flour symbolizes god's blessing and abundance, thus they make a wish that the bride brings fortune and fertility to the groom's house. Then the bride starts to walk with women, one at each side of hers. She hesitates at the door and later enters stepping her right foot, meanwhile people present all together says 'dvetli gelin bolsun' (shall the bride to be rich). In a room young girls gather around the bride. In the afternoon at about 14.00, all guests are summoned to dinner table to eat Turcoman's famous rice pilaf 'çektirme (chektirme)'.

After that the wrestling starts. Those present form a circle with a wide space in the middle and elders gather in one side of the circle. Someone with a deep voice cries out for famous wrestlers of the area and lads who want to test their strength. Wrestling continues till evening. When the night falls, *imam* along with some elders and relatives of the bride and groom are invited to nuptials. In the meantime the groom's mother offers sherbet to the guests. Everyone drinks the sherbet, including the young and the old, but especially the lads who wish a day like this also granted to them. During the nuptials, a woman from the groom's family, quickly and continuously opens and closes a sharp scissors. Two other women also stand beside her in order to help. The reason for this ritual is; if an envious enemy of theirs ties a knot in a thread, it is

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believed that the bride and groom cannot be able to answer the questions of consent, but with this ritual the threads are believed to be cut.

The bride and groom are still in separate places, *imam* sends two people first to the bride. They recite a verse from the Quran and ask her who she has chose as her proxy. The bride gives someone's name from her family and loudly repeats that name three times. After people present hears this and two other people take the groom's proxy, *imam* marries them.

When the official wedding ceremony is completed, distinctive traditions start. Friends of the groom, fasten a belt around his waist, which is very difficult to undo, since they tied one within other so that the ends would not be visible. Then they bring him to the bride. Here the bride tries to unfasten the waistband. Some can easily fasten it, ones who cannot, leave it undone or cut it with scissors. After the knot is untied, one of the groom's friend give him a whip which he has secretly carried. The groom takes and brandishes it over his head. With that people in the room who are mostly young girls run away and empty the room.

The bride and groom sit facing each other and hold hands. An elderly woman cover their faces with a veil, hit each of them with the fist and say these:

*Ah-göh geydirme,
Arpa çörek idirme,
Ağızla kapdırma,
Toynakla depdirme,
Sağ elin sarı yağda bolsun,
Sol elin souk unda bolsun.¹*

After saying this the elderly woman goes out and the bride and groom enter the bridal room which has been prapered for them.

¹ Approximately can be translated as: Not to be robbed ah-göh (ak-gök?) / Not to be fed with barley bun / Not to be touched by an evil eye / Not to be kicked by a hoof / Your right hand to be in butter / Your left hand to be in cold flour.