

## WEDDING TRADITIONS IN ANTAKYA AND RECEIVING CONGRATULATION RELATED WITH THE WEDDING CEREMONY

**Bülent ARI**

Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü

### Özet

*Antakya’da tebrik alma geleneği yörede 60-70 yıl öncesine dayanan bir gelenektir. Yörede söz- nişan, düğün, sünnet, asker ve hacı tebrikleri alınmaktadır. Amacımız yörede var olan bu geleneğin yapısını ana hatlarıyla ortaya koymaktır.*

*Bu çalışmanın gerçekleştirme sürecinde basılı kaynaklar yanında ağırlıklı olarak sözlü kaynaklara baş vurulmuştur. Söz konusu çalışmada söz, nişan, sünnet ve düğün tebrikleri üzerinde durulmuş, bu geleneğin öncesinde yörede tebrik almanın nasıl gerçekleştiği; yörede tebrik alma esnasında hangi geleneklerin işletildiği ve bu geleneğin diğer yörelerdeki tebrik alma uygulamalarından hangi yönleriyle farklı olduğu ortaya konulmuş ve bir değerlendirmeye gidilmiştir.*

*Sonuçta yöredeki tebrik alma uygulamasının bir kaç gün ile sınırlı tutulması; nişanlı kız, gelin, ya da sünnet çocuğunun düğün anını gelenlere tekrar yaşatmak amacıyla tören giysilerini tekrar giymesi ve akrabalar ile komşuların üstlendikleri görev ve yardımlaşma şekilleri yönünden diğer yörelerden ayrıldığı tespit edilmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Düğün, Tebrik Alma, Antakya’da Düğün Gelenekleri*

## ANTAKYA’DA DÜĞÜN GELENEKLERİ VE DÜĞÜNLE İLGİLİ TÖRENLERDE TEBRİK ALMA

### Abstract

*Receiving congratulations in Antioch is a tradition that goes back 60-70 years back in the region. In the region, congratulations of engagement, wedding, circumcision, recruitment and pilgrimage are received. Our aim is outlining the structure of this tradition in the region. In addition to the printed resources, mainly oral sources were applied in the process of realization of this study. Congratulations of engagement, circumcision, wedding have been emphasized in the mentioned study, and the ways of receiving congratulations in the region before this tradition, the traditions applied during receiving congratulations, the differences of this tradition from applications of receiving congratulations in other regions have been revealed and an evaluation has been made. As a result, it has been revealed that the ways of receiving congratulations in the region and other regions are different in view of these facts: receiving congratulations is limited to a few days in the region; engaged girl, bride or the boy to be circumcised wear their ceremonial clothes again even after the ceremony in order to keep the ceremony alive, and duties and helping styles that the relatives and the neighbors undertake are different.*

**Key Words:** *Wedding, Receiving Congratulation, Wedding Traditions in Antakya*

### **Introduction**

There are a lot of beliefs, customs and ceremonies on special days such as birth, circumcision, engagement, marriage and visiting pilgrims. On the basis of these applications; there exists the fact of identifying, blessing, celebrating the individual's new position in the transition period on his/her special days, and protecting him/her from the dangers and effects considered to affect the individual during this period.

Receiving congratulations is a tradition that is peculiar to Antioch. In other regions, while there is no special day for the visit after circumcision, engagement, and wedding, there are celebrations called *congratulation day* in Antioch which are organized in a few days after engagement, wedding, circumcision, recruitment and pilgrimage or for a certain period of time after birth (between 7 and 40 days). Receiving congratulations in Antioch can be divided into six categories which are birth, circumcision, engagement, wedding, recruitment and pilgrimage greetings.

In this paper, circumcision ceremony, engagement and wedding greetings will be mainly focused. However, before mentioning about wedding congratulations, congratulations received at other times will briefly be discussed.

### **Receiving Congratulations Apart From Wedding Greetings in Antioch**

It is known that there did not use to be the tradition of receiving congratulations in the region 60 - 70 years ago, but women used to have days of acceptance for congratulations among themselves. It is also said that these acceptances are bound to a calendar. For example; the first Friday of each month . ( K.2 ), ( K.1 ), ( K.3 ), ( K.9 ), ( K.15 ) Additionally, when babies teethe their first tooth, wheat is boiled and the relatives and neighbors are invited for eating it an celebrating the first tooth of the baby. Besides, when a boy becomes 6 months old, the neighbors and relatives are invited. Henna is applied to the child's heel, what is called henna of the half. However, while these acceptances are limited to a few hours, it can last a few days in sending somebody to military service and going on pilgrimage. We can give such kinds of greetings in details in the following way:

### **Birthday Greetings**

A woman's giving birth is very important in Antakya. It is important for a woman to earn respect in the house she goes, to get in the man's good books, to enjoy maternity and to give birth for the permanency of ancestry. Both couples and the elder people give great importance to the incident of birth which helps mothers gain individualism and unity, fathers gain confidence, relatives and ancestors gain strength, and which is the beginning of life ( K.1 ), ( K.4 ), ( K.6 ), ( K.3 ), ( K.9 ).

Day of acceptance for congratulation is determined after a period of time, and that day is announced to relatives and friends. As the belief of "kirk basması" (a term used for the babies who get illness in forty days) is common in Antioch, the women having given birth in forty days and the ones having no child are not invited. Congratulations are received on a pre- determined date. Mevlit (Islamic ceremony) is also offered on those days if desired. During Mevlit, a kind of sherbet or *kaynar* (a kind of drink offered in the house of a new-born baby especially in

Cukurova region) are served. Guests bring gifts (gold, children's clothing ...) for the mother or the child ( K.6 ), ( K.1 ), ( K.7 ). *Kaynar* is prepared by grinding seven kinds of spice and walnut in boiled water with sugar. This is also offered in nearby cities (Adana, Osmaniye ...) after birth ( K.2 ), ( K.7 ). Offering complimentary sherbet and *kaynar* to the guests shows the presence of happiness in the family of the new-born baby ( K.5 , K.3 , K.8 , K.14 , K.15 , K.17 ).

#### **Recruitment Greetings**

In the region being a soldier, doing military service has the same value with being honorable and virtuous person. People have great joy and enthusiasm when military service ends. In some places, ship is sacrificed before soldiers arrive home. Soldiers' relatives and friends visit them for a few days when they return from military service. After completing his military service, the young man is hosted in his own house like a guest, and he does no work during this period.

In some locations, henna is applied for young men returning home after completing their military services. This henna is called "*soldier henna*". This is an activity which is thought to give luck. (Ari, 2010:257).

#### **Pilgrim Greetings**

In the region, the people who are about to go to Mecca for pilgrimage visit their relatives and friends to say goodbye. Then, the people who have been visited give their presents to the pilgrim candidates and see them off. After the pilgrims turn back to their homes, they invite the ones having brought gifts before their departures and their close relatives to dinner. Local dishes of Antakya (Oruk, Kaytaz, kebab, künefe ...) are served during this dinner. In the afternoon and evening of the same day, Mevrit is organised and Turkish delight is served ( K.11 ), ( K.14 ) , ( K.13 ) , ( K.16 ). Afterwards, the pilgrims decide on some dates, and these days are announced to close friends and relatives. Those coming for congratulation can bring pie and cookies with them. Furthermore, the pilgrims offer Zamzam water (a kind of water holy for muslims) and betel nut to the guests. Zamzam water is served in Zamzam set.

Besides, pumpkin dessert with gum mastic which is called pilgrim dessert (hacı tatlısı) is offered to the guests. Zamzam water is drunk in three sips by turning your face to Qibla. If he/she has any wishes, the person drinking this water pray by saying "Allah, grant me to drink this water in its original place ( K.12 , K.13 , K.14 , K.15 , K.17 ). After receiving congratulations, the pilgrims give their presents they have brought from Mecca (skullcaps, prayer beads, betel nut, palm oil, Zamzam water ...) to the ones who previously gave them gifts ( K.11 , K.14 , K.17 ).

#### **Traditions About Circumcision and Marriage in Antakya**

Circumcision Ceremony: Henna night(kına gecesi) is organized a day before circumcision. The next day, people go into the Flag Man's house with drums and

flutes in the afternoon. The Flag Man takes the flag and passes in front of the congregation, and from there they go to the square. They dance halay (a kind of folklore) and enjoy there. One person goes to the middle by shouting "Şaboş şaboş", and everybody gives money to him for the child ( K.15 ), ( K.16 ). After "şaboş" the child is dressed and he wanders around the village and the mosque on the adorned horse. Kirve takes the child into his lap, and in this way the child is circumcised. ( K.15 ), ( K.17 ).

**Kirvelik** : One of the family members' friends is offered to be kirve of the child or the person himself offers to be kirve. In some locations kirve is just thought to be the person who keeps the child on his lap. In some areas belief of kirvelik has changed and its conditions have become more difficult. In Antioch kirve meets a large amount of the costs for circumcision. ( K.2 ), ( K.9 ), ( K.7 ), ( K.17 ).

#### **Traditions About Marriage**

Social status, subsistence level and ethnic differences are among the determining factors for marriage. Although this belief is highly changing in centers like Antakya and Iskenderun, its effect is going on in other districts and rural places. While age of marriage for girls and boys is approximately 20 in the same centers, age of marriage for girls is 15-16 and it is 17-18 for boys in rural areas. If a girl becomes more than 25 and a boy more than 30, they are supposed that they can't marry anymore (Arı, 2011:292 ), ( Arı, 2013:103 ).

#### **Deciding on The Girl to be Married and Asking For The Girl's Family For Marriage**

Generally deciding on the candidate girl to be married is the duty of the boy. Always, the mother and the father speaks on behalf of their girl. This can happen after a deal between the girl and the boy in Antioch and Iskenderun. The girl to get married in Hatay is determined by a blind date. The boy who will get married must complete his military service before marriage or there must be a long time for his recruitment. The boy declares the girl he likes by informing her parents with the help of his relatives. If he does not like any girls, his parents and relatives look for a marriageable girl for him in the neighborhood. Looking for girls in such a way is called "kız görme (seeing girl)". A research is carried out about the liked girl's morals and femininity skills (cooking, cleaning, sewing, knitting, etc.). If the results of the research are positive, the boy's parents, relatives and some respectable individuals go to the girl's house to ask for the girl for marriage on the night of the mutually agreed day. Letting the marriage can be that night, or it can be after a few more meetings. If the marriage is allowed, people there drink coffee and eat dessert, which is a common tradition in Turkish culture. Today, firstly girls and boys agree on their own marriage. Boys and girls have the right to speak. However, they formally ask for the elders' permission (Arı, 2013:103).

#### **Betrothal**

It is held on a mutually agreed date. Some clothes and jewellery are bought for the girl by going to the mall or bazaar, and preparation is done for the engagement after betrothal.

### **Engagement**

Expenses (engagement gifts bought such as clothes, bags, shoes, handkerchiefs, jewellery and so on) are covered by the boy who will get married. In the villages, the engagement ceremonies are arranged on Thursdays or Sundays. Because, it is believed that Thursday brings happiness to the people to get married. The girl is fancied up on engagement day, and the ceremony is held in the girl's house. Tabor, drum and cymbal are played. One of the old people helps the couple wear rings. The girl wears her ring at the ceremony, but the boy's ring is sent to his home.

### **Turkish Bath Off**

Turkish bath is closed (reserved just for a certain amount of people) daytime for the bride, and night for the groom the day before the henna night. Turkish bath session is done with meals and fun. The aim of this Turkish bath is making sure that the bride doesn't have any physical disorders, any bad breath and she is not clumsy before marriage (Ari, 2011:293), (Ari, 2013:104).

### **Women's Henna Night**

A day before the wedding ceremony is called "Henna Night (Kına Gecesi)". It is generally arranged on Friday evenings. Women in both the bride and the groom's families go to the bride's home with various presents. Entertainment is not laid on open places since it is thought to be shame. After all the guests have arrived, relatives of the bride start playing tambourines and cymbals and making the night more enjoyable. People pin a great deal of jewelry on the bride. Relatives or friends of the bride bring the henna tray by dancing until the end of the night. They turn around the bride and put some money in the palm of the bride with henna.

### **Men's Henna Night**

It is held in the evening of the day before wedding. Only the groom's family and people in the village are invited to the night. Groom's henna night is done either with Mevlit (Islamic Ceremony) or musical entertainment in the region. Relatives or friends of the groom bring the tray on which there is henna. When henna is applied, the groom does not wear his jacket, and this means that the groom asks for something (fields, vineyards, gardens, etc.) from his relatives. After the flag man receives his money the groom's father, kirve, uncle and close relatives give presents to the groom. In some regions, the groom's shoes are hidden, and single teenagers try to find them. If they cannot be found, henna is not applied for the groom.

### **Shearing**

After the henna night, a woman goes into the middle and shows the presents brought and declares those who brought them.

### **Wedding Ceremonies**

On the wedding day, a flag is raised on a high place in the girl's house. An onion and a mirror are put on the top of the flag. The teenagers fire and try to shoot these. If somebody can shoot, a present is given to him by the bride's

relatives. Weddings are usually with complimentary meals. Bread and meals with meat are cooked one week before the wedding. Wedding procession play different kinds of games on the way to the bride's house. The groom's mother throws snacks and coins on the bride. A glass bottle is broken when the bride gets off the car (For protecting them from any accidents). Dough is pasted on the door for making the bride faithful to her home. She breaks pomegranate given to her by throwing it to the floor (for having a lot of children). She climbs the jamb of the door and hangs horseshoe after driving a nail for keeping them against the evil eye. The groom's pillow is given to a poor person, and the poor person hits the groom and his relatives with the pillow until receiving tip. They solemnize religious marriage previously. The next day is called as "day of doubt" in İskenderun and Yayladağı. The women go to see the bride with various gifts. The relatives are invited to lunch or dinner. (Ari, 2011:294)

#### **Receiving Congratulations About Wedding Ceremonies**

##### ***Circumcision Greetings***

Circumcision is the strictest and the most common tradition during religious and customary procedures in Antakya as well as in other parts of our country. The family both reaffirms their reputation in the society and experiences their child's happiness ( K.5 ), ( K.8 ), ( K.4 ), ( K.15 ), ( K.16 ).

It is expressed that in previous times, all expenses of the child to be circumcised and circumcision ceremony were covered by kirve in the region, and kirve was supposed to be one member of the family in later times. However, today, being kirve is just a symbolic term. In the region, generally the week after the circumcision ceremony is the week of receiving congratulations. If Mevlit is not arranged during the circumcision ceremony, one is arranged on congratulation day. Furthermore, the child's or children's beds are prepared and decorated for congratulation. The child wears his circumcision clothes and lay on the laced and inlaid bed as he did on circumcision day. Guests bring some presents depending on their financial potentials or their intimacy to the child's family. Gifts brought are placed under the child 's pillow ( K.2 ), ( K.3 ), ( K.9 ), ( K.4 ), ( K.8 ), ( K.15 ).

Additionally, the circumcised child's relatives and kirve bring pie, pastry and dessert with them while going to the congratulation house. These cookies and snacks are placed on a table and served to the guests on an open buffet style.

##### **Betrothal And Engagement Greetings**

Turkish delight or baklava(a kind of Turkish dessert) is served to the bride and groom's relatives, neighbors and friends after betrothal or engagement ceremonies, and it is announced that the ceremonies have been held. While desserts are delivered, congratulation days which have already been determined are announced. Congratulations for the bride's and groom's relatives and friends are separately organized in engagement greetings, or two families agree on a place and date. Generally, are congratulations received on the girl's house. Participants

of the congratulation day for engagement do not take presents with them. However, neighbors and close relatives bring pie, pastry and cookies with them while going to the congratulation. This cookies are placed on a big table and served to the guests on an open buffet style ( K.1 ), ( K.2 ), ( K.3 ), ( K.7 ), ( K.9 ).

Betrothal and engagement congratulations are not as magnificent or formal as wedding greetings. During this greeting, there is no question that the candidate bride sits on a place and does not do any work. She also welcomes the guests, serve them and help them with the housework.

#### **Wedding Greetings**

Nowadays, there are some practical changes about financial culture in traditions and beliefs about marriage. Despite this, there are also traditional parts. However, it is not often possible to see such magnificent wedding ceremonies as in the past in rural areas today perhaps because of economic factors.

Congratulation days are determined depending on the bride, groom and their families in Antakya. It is possible to see those days on wedding invitations. Congratulation dates are on people's will, but they are generally within 3-5 days after the wedding. The bride accepts congratulations on her new home. She wears her white wedding dress again and she adorns herself out. This is repeated during congratulation days (2-3), and bride does not perform any work ( K.1 ), ( K.2 ), ( K.3 ), ( K.4 ), ( K.6 ), ( K.7 ), ( K.8 ).

The bride's dowry is opened and ornamented. Cakes, sweets and jams are prepared. The guests do not only congratulate the bride and her family, but also examine the bride's dowry. As the guests are women, the groom does not stay at home, he leaves home upon meeting the house's needs and only turns home in the evening. Gifts are brought by proximity of the guests in wedding greetings. No guest is accepted except congratulation days. Close relatives and friends send cakes and desserts to the bride's house a few days before the congratulation day.

In the places where traditional customs are going on, the congratulation day is the first day after the wedding. This day is called "doubt day". On that day, the groom goes to kiss his wife's parents' hands. He takes dessert with him. Dessert and sorbet are offered to him. Çiğ köfte (steak tartar a la turca) is prepared. This is called doubt meatball. "Künefe" is served as the dessert ( K.3 ), ( K.9 ), ( K.14 ), ( K.17 ).

The groom is hosted in the girl's family's house that day. On the other side, women go to see the bride with various presents. For this, on the morning of the wedding day, that is doubt day, entertainment facilities are organized in the groom's house or in a large area. In some places, while men and women enjoy separately, in some places this entertainment is only among women.

Bride wears her wedding dress or a new outfit, and she is adorned. Bridesman (a woman newly married or about to marry) sits beside the bride. The bridesman introduces the guests to the bride. The guests give their presents and congratulate the bride. Presents are usually gold or money. The bride

stands up for each person coming even if the guest is five years old. This point shows the importance that the bride gives to the groom's family members. For this, the bridesman guide.

The guests also wear their best clothes, and wear all the jewelry they have. Each guest family brings a tablecloth with them and opens it. Her mother-in-law serves snacks on behalf of fiancées if available. Aim of doing this is to get prayers for others' marriage. Entertainment continues with drums or tambourines. Marriageable girls, fiancées and bride dance. The groom can only come at the end of the entertainment. The bride's house and her dowry are shown to the guests. The bride's mother-in-law delivers the presents such as towels, handkerchief, socks or beads she has on the tray which she is carrying on her head to the neighbors and relatives after receiving other congratulation gifts. This is described as "doubt". ( K.10 ) , ( K12 ) , ( K.14 ) ( K.15 ) , ( K.17 ) .

#### **Conclusion**

Receiving congratulations is a tradition peculiar to Antakya. Receiving congratulations is applied for birth, circumcision, pilgrimage, military service, betrothal, engagement and wedding. Congratulation visits apart from recruitment greetings are arranged on previously determined days. Thus, families don't have to deal with hosting guests on different days. In addition to this, it can be thought that people have the opportunity to share their experience and happiness with their neighbors and relatives with the help of receiving congratulation.

Tradition of receiving congratulations which is considered to exist in the region at least for half a century presents one more opportunity for the ones who cannot take part in betrothal, engagement or wedding ceremonies, and it is tried to keep the ceremony environment alive so that circumcised child, engaged girl and bride wear their ceremony clothes again.

"The day of doubt", the day after the wedding, the groom takes dessert to the bride's family, and this can be regarded as a thank to the bride's family for their marrying their girl as a pure girl.

Receiving congratulations give also a chance to individuals for presenting their gifts, so they can pin jewelry. The groom's mother delivers things such as handkerchief, towel, etc. on a tray, and this can be regarded as an expression of gratitude to the guests coming for congratulation and it can also be thought as an indicator showing that happiness cannot be with material things.

The family's relatives' and guests' welcoming cookies and desserts on congratulation days is a good example of cooperation and sharing happiness. Moreover, showing the bride's house and dowry individually to each guest during congratulation can be interpreted as a factor forcing the society to fulfill the needs of traditions.



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