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## **THE WEDDING NIGHT IN THE WEDDING RITUALS AMONG THE PEOPLES OF DAGESTAN (19<sup>th</sup> – EARLY 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES)**

*Abstract.* Based on the methodology of ethnological research – processing of field ethnographic material, archival material, scientific works of individual authors on family, marriage and family rites – the paper describes and analyzes a quite sensitive and controversial topic in the traditions of the peoples of Dagestan related to the preservation of female virginity before marriage. The concept of interpreting the values of chastity is considered in the complex of rituals, ideas and beliefs among the Dagestani peoples not only through the prism of such an important family and social event as wedding, but also as an independent object, although closely related to it.

Chastity, or the virginity of a girl before marriage is a subject of heated debate in society, since the attitude to it has been transforming from epoch to epoch, from nation to nation. Nonetheless, there is no special study in Dagestan devoted specifically to the rituals associated with the wedding night – the transition of a girl to the status of a woman. The challenge before us is to fill this gap.


The first wedding night of the peoples of Dagestan is associated with an extensive set of rituals, which comprises both ancient and folk beliefs about healthy offspring. The successful conclusion of one of the most important milestones of the human life cycle is starting a family. The happiness of women and their status in society depend on the outcome of this night in Dagestan realities not only of the time under study, but also of today.

The fact of chastity, proved on the wedding night, is still relevant among the vast majority of the peoples of Dagestan at the present time. Accordingly, some traditional ethnographic ritual nuances will undoubtedly be of interest to the general public.

*Keywords:* Dagestan; ritual; wedding; female chastity; wedding night; preventive measures.

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## **ПЕРВАЯ БРАЧНАЯ НОЧЬ В РИТУАЛАХ СВАДЕБНОЙ ОБРЯДНОСТИ НАРОДОВ ДАГЕСТАНА (XIX – НАЧАЛО XX ВЕКА)**

*Аннотация.* В статье на основе методологии этнологических исследований – обработки полевого этнографического материала, архивного наследия, научных работ отдельных авторов по семье, браку и семейной обрядности – описывается и анализируется щепетильная и неоднозначная тема в традициях народов Дагестана, связанная с сохранением непорочности девушки до брака. Концепция интерпретации ценностей целомудрия рассматривается в комплексе ритуалов, представлений и верований дагестанских народов, не только через призму такого важного семейно-общественного мероприятия, как свадьба, но и как самостоятельного объекта, хотя и тесно с ней связанного.

Целомудрие, девственность девушки до замужества – объект горячих споров в обществе, поскольку отношение к нему трансформируется от эпохи к эпохе, от народа к народу. Несмотря на это, в Дагестане нет специального исследования, посвященного именно ритуалам, связанным с первой брачной ночью – переходом девушки в статус женщины. Перед этнографами стоит задача восполнить этот пробел.


С первой брачной ночью у народов Дагестана связан обширный комплекс ритуалов, в котором переплетаются как древнейшие верования, так и народные представления о здоровом потомстве. Благополучное завершение одного из эпохальных событий жизненного цикла человека – создания семьи, а также счастье женщины и ее статус в обществе зависят в дагестанских реалиях, не только исследуемого времени, но и сегодняшнего дня, от исхода этой «ночи».

Факт целомудрия, доказанный в «первую брачную ночь», не потерял актуальности у подавляющего большинства народов Дагестана и в настоящее время. Соответственно, некоторые традиционные этнографические ритуальные нюансы, несомненно, будут интересны не только специалистам.

*Ключевые слова:* Дагестан; ритуал; свадьба; целомудрие девушки; первая брачная ночь; превентивные меры.

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Founding a strong, stable family is the key to the formation of another unit of society, a link that contributes to its development. In this regard, one of the tasks of the Dagestan peoples is to preserve the traditions, customs, rituals associated with starting a family: matchmaking, wedding, first night, preservation and restoration of the cult of virginity. Modern experience shows that conventionality helps to strengthen the family institution, which currently raises certain concerns.

The following Dagestani proverb is associated with the birth of a daughter in the family: “a stone was born for someone else’s wall”. Families in which girls were brought up understood that it was necessary to make enough efforts to shape this “stone” so that it could “fit” into any wall and not look alien in the husband’s family, where the girl went to live after marriage. The first condition for living in her husband’s house was that she had to remain innocent until marriage; and this circumstance still holds its relevance at the present time.

Researchers who have followed in retrospect the significance of virginity in various world cultures, note that it – as a strong confirmation of “not belonging to someone else” – was considered a valuable gift only with the regulation of social relations, when it became important for family men to know whom the child belonged to, so that the right of inheritance was clear. According to researchers, the fashion for “purity” in marriage came to Europe only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>.

The peoples of Dagestan believe that female chastity have two major functions: serving as a pillar of the family foundation, and the genetic transmission of the health and well-being of the family, the people and society as a whole. Perhaps for this reason all the leading religions of the world insist on protecting girls’ purity.

Even in pre-Christian Russia, according to written sources, the first “anti-debauchery” penalty was introduced by Princess Olga in 953 in the form of a “tax” (monetary or material compensation) on girls who married impure. Formerly, the loss of innocence before marriage had not been censured<sup>2</sup>.

The chastity of a girl, proven on the marriage bed, was considered a consequence of proper upbringing. Such a mandatory requirement for the pre-marital innocence of girls was not a local phenomenon, inherent only in the peoples of Dagestan. This fact, with some remarks regarding the more ancient concepts, was also pointed out by a prominent caucasiologist Y.Y. Karpov, who studied the role of the female space across the whole Caucasus [1, p. 138–155]. At the period under study, it was common for the most peoples beyond the regions of the Caucasus to demand a girl to be pure before marriage.

A girl who failed to keep her virginity was considered lecherous, which would only worsen her status in the society and could even be a threat to her personal safety: in some Arab countries, women still face death for an extramarital loss of innocence [2; 3]. A fallen girl became a target for mockery and humiliation. This was expressed differently among different nations and peoples [4, p. 259]. Furthermore, the disgrace

1 What was considered fornication in Russia // <https://suharewa.ru/chto-schitali-bludom-na-rusi/>

2 Silvester. The book of Domostroy. Chapter 21. How to educate children and save them by fear // <https://xn--d1akihbanhj.xn--p1ai/>

was placed not only on her, but on her parents as well, as they were considered guilty of her “sin” and of the gap in her upbringing. This is noted by a number of researchers [5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13].

Domostroy<sup>3</sup> – the written monument of the Russian literature – emphasizes the upbringing of a girl before marriage.

In pre-revolutionary Russia “protection of chastity” was even a matter of state concern [14, p. 271]. In Dagestan, as well as in many other regions of the Caucasus, it is still quite a relevant requirement for a girl to be innocent before marriage. All studies on Dagestan regarding the issues of family and marriage, upon analyzing wedding rituals highlight the aforementioned fact [15, p. 251–254; 16, p. 167–171; 17, p. 171; 18, p. 150–153; 19, 219–221; 20, p. 36–37; 21, p. 120–146; 22, p. 134–135; 23, p. 59–64].

This anatomical feature of the women’s body, which absolutely does not affect their physical appearance, and, moreover, is deeply hidden from the people’s eyes, arouses curiosity and is surrounded by many ideas, myths and a whole set of rites and rituals. It was most likely created by humans to consolidate the transition from group marriage, to eliminate promiscuous sexual relations that existed at the dawn of humanity. It is hard to find any other explanation on the attitude of most peoples around the globe to women’s virginity.

A girl who lost her innocence before marriage was condemned by society and became the target of gossips: some pitied her, some wondered who was responsible for her disgrace, others had their doubts. However, the girl could definitely forget about a successful marriage in her future. In addition, “scary tales” were spread among women, mainly among teenage girls, regarding the failure of remaining virgin before marriage. Such fear-mongering stories could be seen as preventive measures against possible deviant behavior.

Among some Dagestan peoples there are certain beliefs about the loss of virginity and its harmful effects on future children. In particular, they believe that the first child, regardless of who the girl later married, will resemble the one who dishonored her. If a girl had a “bad name”, she was usually married off to a close relative or a widower to cover up the “shame” that could pass from generation to generation on the female line in the form of rebukes. Those around, due to existing at that time beliefs, would then try to figure out by the appearance of the first child of the fallen woman the one “who was her first lover”. One can assume that this was based on ancient beliefs that not only the birth of children, but also the fertility of livestock to some extent was associated with the “socially acceptable” behavior of women. It is worth noting that in some groups of Terek Cossacks, the young couple had to inform the groom’s parents about the loss of girl’s virginity, even if it was the bridegroom’s fault, as it was believed, otherwise “the cattle on the farm will be lacking.”

In this regard, it is appropriate to mention a well-known proverb: “Watch over your clothes while they are new, and over your honor while you are young.” Moreover,

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3 Silvester. The book of Domostroy. Chapter 21. How to educate children and save them by fear // <https://xn--d1akihbanhj.xn--p1ai/>

it is known that innocence and chastity do not harm women's health and, according to popular beliefs, are the "keys" to serene family life.

### **Before the wedding night**

A detailed sign-symbolic system was characteristic for many stages of the Dagestani wedding. It was a complex set of elements that were very diverse in their origin, character, and functions, which made it possible to transmit the uniqueness of ethnic culture precisely through the ritual sphere. First of all, the customs and rituals of the family and life circle. Characterized by conservatism, due to the intimacy of the family and ritual sphere, they are traditionally preserved here, although in a reduced form, longer than in other areas of the social sphere. A significant place in the system of family rites of individual peoples was occupied by customs and rituals of fertility, some of which still exist today.

The first wedding night was no exception. This ritual was the final and most important part of the wedding ceremony. It served as the boundary after which a girl became a woman, and a young man – a real man. In order for this "ritual of transformation" to happen without much agitation and nervousness – the time, when it was believed the newlyweds were particularly susceptible to the influence of evil forces – it was first necessary to conduct a series of protective rituals that had specific instructions and prohibitions. Each ethnic group, of which there are more than forty in Dagestan, had its own perception of the wedding night, with nuances that are characteristic only for this particular group, community, or even a village.

The first wedding night was preceded by the girl's farewell to her family and her departure to the groom's house among some peoples of Dagestan, or to a special place – "other house", where the ceremony was to take place for others. In both cases, the girl left the home with an escort.

A major role in the bride's escort belonged to the woman who accompanied the bride to the groom's house. She was known under different names: *gʷdul*, *kIudiyai gʷdul*, *tsadahʷ yatchIarayi* ("the girl friend", "the elder female friend", "the one that came along" – among the Avars); *tsIikIula aba* ("the mother of brides" – among the Dargins); *abayi kʷatyn* ("the Granny" – among the Kumyks); *yenge* (among the Derbent Azerbaijanis, the Nogais); *naibi*, *yangi* (among the Lezgins, Tsakhurs, Rutuls, Aghuls); *tchIarav shar* ("the close woman" – among the Laks); *shvushvan bab* (among the Tabasarans), etc. Almost everywhere, these main representatives of the bride's family at the wedding had assistants in the house. In some ethnic groups, the bride's escort included two of her aunts, on the father and mother's sides. Thus, the Lezgins of the village Akhty had two yangi – "the left one" and "the right one"; In Ashaga-Zakhit village – the elder and younger ones. In most cases the bride was accompanied to the groom's house by the wife of her maternal uncle or the wife of her older brother. Researchers consider the escort that accompanied the young couple as "one of the forms of protection against the evil forces" in terms of functionality [24, p. 165].

The woman who accompanied the bride was fully responsible for her and was the

only one of the bride's relatives present at the groom's house during the wedding. She would stand beside her, had to protect and take care of the bride and be responsible before her family for observing all the customs that took place in the groom's house concerning the girl – both on her side and the side of the groom. The prominent caucasiologist G.F. Chursin writes about the groomsmen the following: "In most cases, they relentlessly follow the groom and the bride and conduct certain rituals, which have magical power to dispel evil spirits and protect from evil-wishing" [25, p. 124].

#### Departure of the bride to the groom's house

The bride was escorted (or transported) to the groom's house in different peoples in different time: during the day, in the evening, at night, sometimes at midnight. Secretly in some and, on the contrary, loudly with music, accompanied by numerous groomsmen and shooting – in others. Among the Andi people, the bride would be led to the groom's house late at night in the company of two or three women and her mentor.

She concealed the bride with the skirts of her fur coat to hide her presence among the women. Among the Gergebil Avars, the bride was escorted in the daylight. She would purposely walk slowly, as if she forced herself to make step after step. Even today, the Avars say to a slow person: "He is like a Gergebil bride – not in a hurry." The Khvarshins led the bride to the groom's house in the daylight as well; on their way, people would throw eggs at her, sprinkle with ash, pour water, and for these reasons she would be covered with a large mattress carried over her. Since they were afraid of ill-wishers during the moving of the bride to the groom's house, they took various precautions to deceive them. Thus, the Laks had a fake bride in their wedding procession, while the real one, accompanied by one or two friends, took a detour. Sometimes the bride was moved from her father's house by agreement to another house: to the neighbors or relatives, from where she was later picked up by the groom's messengers. To find and pick up the Bezhta bride, the groom's messengers needed to put a lot of effort, since she changed her location several times [17, p. 157]. Others resorted to different tricks, for example, the Lezgins, due to the belief that if you go back by the same route you went for the bride, evil spirits may be waiting for them there to harm the bride, the wedding procession took a different path while returning to the groom's house.

#### **The welcoming of the bride at the groom's house**

The bride was to be met by her mother-in-law at the entrance to the groom's house; if she was absent, then the groom's aunt on the father's side or one of his older relatives, who had a successful life were assigned for that. She was met with a spoonful of honey, which she had to taste upon entering the house. Some peoples of Dagestan provided for additional actions and rituals when meeting the bride. In certain groups of Avars, Dargins, Laks, and Tabasarans, a cup of butter and a bowl of flour were brought to the girl at the entrance. She had to dip her right hand first in oil, then in flour and leave her imprint on the door lintel. Among the Khvarshins,

a sheepskin blanket with a nap – *tsakhzhkha alla* – was placed under the bride's feet; the bride of the Avar village Rugudzha had to step over an upturned fireplace triangle *uhhi*; often at the entrance to the house, small silver coins were thrown at the bride's feet. The showering of the bride at the entrance to the house with flour, rice, raisins, nuts and other well-known symbols of fertility played a major role, since this property was supposed to strengthen, and, at the birth of sons, increase her status in the husband's family. Among the Nogais and the northern Kumyks, along with the showering, a sheepskin was placed under the bride's feet. Walking on sheep's skin "was regarded as flaunting the girl's fertile qualities..." [1, p. 101]. As the result of close ethno-cultural interactions, such a ritual of the bride's entering the house over the sheepskin became popular among the Adygs [26, p. 127], Kabardins [27, p. 179], and the Russian population of the North Caucasus [25, p. 131]. Among the Akhvakhs, the bride, after entering the groom's house, was supposed to sit under the veil of sheep wool, in a separate room or enclosed corner of the room, in a company of her girl friends or an attendant woman.

Of great importance was the protection of the bride against the harmful influence of evil spirits and all sorts of supernatural forces, as well as against people who had a reputation for "evil-wishing". According to popular beliefs, otherwise she could get sick or become infertile. Perhaps for this reason the room, dedicated for the bride, was prepared beforehand with the use of "protective" measures: in a vessel with water three raw eggs were put (apparently, it symbolized the bride, the groom and their future child); on a windowsill, a large stone was placed (the symbol of masculinity and fertility). After entering the room, the bride herself was often put in a corner (sometimes curtained) on a large pillow. Traditionally, the side (the bride or the groom's one) which first put the pillow determined who would be the leader in the family [17, p. 168]. In the Lezgin village of Maza, the bride, upon entering the room assigned to her, had to stand in the corner until her mother-in-law or an elder woman allowed her to sit. She would then make her sit down on a chair or a chest, saying: "Sit down, my dear! This house is yours, the boy is also yours, we have one cow and she is yours." And every time someone entered, the bride had to get up. The Kurin Lezgins, before allowing the bride to sit down, put her on an upturned kneading tub (*chanah*), having placed seven iron hooks beforehand (according to their beliefs, they symbolized seven sons), which were used for fastening ropes when transporting hay on a cart. It is an obvious use of the symbolism of fertility through objects that could simultaneously perform the apotropaic role.

### **Prior to the wedding night**

The meeting of the bride and groom before the event, which was supposed to be the major part of creating a family, took place in its own way in each of the peoples of Dagestan, with numerous nuances (playful, romantic, shocking, in the modern view). The Dargins, Laks, Lezgins and peoples of the Lezgin ethnic group, as well as part of the Avars, had their wedding night in the groom's parents' house. Among the

Turkic-speaking peoples of Dagestan, the groom, along with his close friends, stayed until the meeting in the “other house” (by agreement – with neighbors, relatives), from where he was usually secretly brought to the bride in his house. Most Avars and certain other peoples of the Ando-Didoi ethnic group who had their groom in the “other house”, also had their first or even several wedding nights there.

Among the Andi people, in particular, the groom was secretly led from the “other house” to the bride who was in his house. The bridesmen stayed vigilant to make sure the bride would not be poured with water, and that rags would not be tied to his clothes, which could be done by the women-eyewitnesses of this process. The pouring of the bride with water was likely to originally symbolize the wishing for fertility, since water was seen as life. However, later there was a semantic shift of this rite and such actions in general turned into an element of fun and entertainment for young people.

In case the wedding night was to take place in the “other house”, the bride, sometimes even disguised as a man, or through a window, was secretly escorted to the groom. The first three nights the bride and groom spent in this “other house”, returning early in the morning to the parents’ house of the newlywed man. It was believed that spending the wedding night secretly in the “other house” originated in the ancient times in response to the mischiefs of single young men, who would disturb the newlywed, peeking through windows and funnels, as well as eavesdropping. Such actions, known as “wedding obstruction”, are characteristic of many peoples of the Caucasus and neighbouring regions. It is believed that their main function was to scare off the hostile “evil forces” from the young couple [28, p. 62]. It should be noted that among almost all the peoples of Dagestan, the groom also had a married man appointed by relatives, who was supposed to accompany him everywhere, take care of him, give instructions, but not interfere with bachelor entertainment.

Among the Dargins of the Syurgin district (Urari village) after welcoming the bride in the groom’s house, his single friends brought him to this room and pushed him to the bride; the rite was called “meeting the bride” [17, p. 169]. After that, the groom immediately left, and the female and male youth, which stayed with the bride, performed the rite of sharing a large cheese pie, which had been prepared specifically for this moment in the groom’s house. It was prohibited for the married men to participate in this ritual.

The meeting of the bride and groom was the most important moment. The wedding night was preceded by preparation, which was carried out by a specially assigned woman who accompanied the bride from the parental home mentioned above. It was she who was usually supposed to make the bed for the newlyweds. The wedding bed was made with bed-linen brought by the bride as a dowry. The process was accompanied by certain symbolic actions: starting to make the bed, she would “tie Shaitan” by uttering a special phrase and reciting the *Dua* prayer three times; almost all the peoples of Dagestan used to put a sheathed dagger under the mattress (as a symbol of male dignity). Some peoples (Rutuls, Laks, parts of Avars), while making the wedding bed, would let a boy of 5-6 years enter the room and roll him on the bed.

When preparing the bed for the young couple, the close relatives of the groom



could be present. Among the Chamalal of Gigatli village, any of the men in the room had the right to throw their papakha on the bed, but for this action they had to pay a monetary fine. Papakha often appeared in the marriage rituals. Among the Godoberins, for instance, the bridesmaid threw the man's hat on the wedding bed before letting the groom in.

In some Dargin communities, it was customary to trample the newlyweds' bed: the groomsmen waited for the moment when it was ready, and, ahead of each other, threw themselves on the bed to make a mess until sweets and pies were given to them as a fee from the woman who made the bed.

In the Avar village of Tukita one of the men would lie on the bride's bed, cover himself with a blanket, and put out two dancing puppets in men's and women's clothing. The puppets would then be taken by the woman, who made the bed, and hanged on a nail in the young couple's room. These puppets had to be kept until their son's wedding. Some of the puppets were passed down from generation to generation.

In Avars of Rugudzha village, the bed was made by the mother-in-law. Every woman who had sons, for each of them in advance ordered a white felt "sheet" (*burtina*) the size of a mattress, which she carefully trimmed around with red braid and decorated with beautiful embroidery along the contour. The mother-in-law would then lay the said *burtina* on top of a fabric sheet.

Among the Akhtyn Lezgins, the woman who made the newlyweds' bed, received a reward from the groom or his mother.

Analyzing the ceremony of preparing the wedding bed for the climatic part of the day, it should be noted that the bed becomes a place where certain manipulations with a boy, with an item of men's clothing – a papakha, with a man himself and wedding puppets were performed. All this symbolized the wish for the bride to give birth to a first-born male child, since the birth of a son traditionally raised the status of a family for most peoples of Dagestan.

The meeting of the newlyweds was usually accompanied by a number of excesses, since in the traditions of almost all the peoples of Dagestan it was customary to prevent them from having intercourse on that night.

In the Dargin village of Kunki after bringing the bride to the groom's house, a certain "friend" appeared, in whose house the groom stayed at that time, and started a joking allegorical conversation with women, the duration of which depended on the women's talkativeness and the duration of the comic struggle between the bride and groom's proxies on the newlyweds' bed. The end of the struggle was a signal that it was time to leave the room where the groom should go.

S.S. Gadzhieva suggests that the struggle between the groom and the bride's sides, accompanied by playful actions, was a symbol of two origins – patrilocal and matrilocal settlement [15, p. 238] For example, among the Avars of the Karakh society, the bride had to step on a flintlock gun, two men – a relative of the groom and a relative of the bride – grabbed it and pulled each to themselves. The contest usually ended with the victory of the relative of the groom. The Dargins

did much the same with a carpet. One party pulled it towards the yard, the other – towards the street, until either of them won. If the forces of the both parties turned out to be equal, “then they would fiddle around for an hour without any success. Misfortunes could also happen: the carpet could tear and then the parties would fly aside with terrible force for as much as three sazhen” [29, p. 32].

### **First meeting of the newlyweds**

There is evidence that some peoples of Dagestan used to treat the bride rather harshly at the first intimate encounter. In particular, there is evidence that among the Akhtyn Lezgins, on their wedding night, the groom had to severely beat the bride with a whip<sup>4</sup>. The existence of such a custom among the Lezgins of Miskindzha is also noted by M.S. Rizakhanova [30, p. 136]. Regarding the Lezgins of the Samur valley, B. Ragimova writes that this custom was considered optional [21, p. 37].

In some peoples of Dagestan, harsh treatment towards the bride allegedly sought to set the vector of their future life, where the man would be the “master of the house”. The Dargins of the villages Urakhi, Mulebki, and others had their groom standing behind the door in order to hit the bride on the head, as soon as she crossed the threshold of the wedding room. G.-M. Amirov describes what happened when the bride was brought into the room, while the groom was waiting behind the doors: “As soon as she crosses the threshold, he gives her a good kick, and that is the first act of kindness from her husband-to-be” [29, p. 31]. Regarding the same Dargins, B. Dalgat notes: “When the bride enters the room, the groom usually hid behind the door and hit her three times on the back as a sign of his dominance over her since that moment” [31, p. 98]. In Dargins of the village Mekegi, the meeting of the groom and bride went like this: the groom, hiding behind the door, had to try to bend the wife’s head in front of the whole crowd. The bride would then attempt to avoid that and was ready to get a bump on her forehead as long as she managed to prevent the groom to show his dominance. The rite of “hitting” the bride at the first meeting was common in Karabudakhkent Kumyks, Azerbaijanis, Tabasarans, and parts of the Laks. The Tabasarans would say: “The bride needs to be given a lesson before the wedding veil is removed”. The ritual of taking off the veil from the bride symbolized the turning of a girl into a woman (it is no accident that the Kumyks, if the girl turned out to be impure, said: “The veil has already been blown away of the head”). Among the Laks of the village Shali the aunt, escorting the bride, would search the room to find the groom’s whip and hide it so that he couldn’t use it.

According to popular belief, the rite of “hitting the bride” was supposedly demonstrate obedience of the wife to her husband in their life together. However, researchers believe that this ritual is likely to be considered an echo of the magical “ritual of flagellation”, which was used as a ceremony for purification and redemption, or the “hit with the rod of life”, with a carpogonic (fertility) meaning; as we know, the

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4 Notes of the LSU student Butkevich Bronislav on his participation in the Dagestan ethnographic expedition. 1925 // Scientific archive of the IHAE DFRC RAS. F. 5. Issue 1. File 49. List 17.

fertility customs and rites occupied a major place in the system of family rituals of some peoples, some of which remain to this day [25, p. 177].

According to religious canons, before the intercourse, the bride and groom must follow a number of traditional Sharia rules that lay the foundation for a God-pleasing, serene and prosperous family life. Young people had to make sure that there were no strangers or animals in the room, and also take the Koran out or at least cover it with a cloth. The lights in the room should be dimmed. In mountainous areas, the room was usually lit by a stove, since wedding ceremonies in the old days were carried out in the fall, when it was quite cold at night. Prior to the intimate act, men were recommended to cite the *Dua* prayer.

In most cases, the meeting of newlyweds among most peoples of Dagestan took place according to a scenario that was created on the basis of ancient ideas and beliefs, closely connected to Islam.

Among the Lezgins (the villages of Yaljuh, Ihir, Khnov, Kurakh, Kasumkent, etc.) the ritual of the wedding night proceeded as follows: the groom, upon entering the room, greeted the bride, after which they had to cite the *Dua* together. Then he would step on the bride's foot, put his thumb on her finger, and say: "There are four angels in the four corners, the fingers and toes – they are the witnesses to whether you gave me your word." The bride had to answer: "I gave you my permission." Upon completing this dialogue, the groom ordered her to take off her boots and untie her trousers. Then he would give the bride a boiled egg, which she had to peel. Half of the egg was eaten by the groom, the other half – by the bride. As a rule, the bride obeyed his orders without hesitation, otherwise, according to tradition, the groom had the right to hit her with a whip. The act of sharing the egg can be seen both as the use of a symbol of fertility, vitality, the place of which in the wedding ceremony is well known, as well as the first interaction between the bride and groom, since not all the peoples of Dagestan let the bride and groom communicate freely before the wedding.

The egg appeared everywhere in the wedding ceremony. In particular, the Tabasarans, in addition to the fact that at midnight, prior to coming to the bride, the groom was demanded a ransom for the door handle, during their conversation, the groom had to put the bride to a simple test: she had to peel off the boiled egg without touching the shell with her nails. Then they would eat the egg together. Among the Lezgins of Akhty, by the time the groom, secretly escorted by his groomsmen, arrived, the *yenge* had to prepare a large tray of food ("*soufra*"), with which she met them. The groom and his friends would sit and share the meal, in which neither the bride, nor *yenge* took part. After the dinner, the bride gave them a bundle of food, prepared specially for the groomsmen in order to make them go, leaving the bride and groom alone. They, as a rule, went out, but stayed behind the door and guarded the couple so that no one could disturb them. In some villages (Kudchakh, Kakhoul, Smugul) after the meal, the groomsmen would forcibly, in a joking manner, took the groom to the river for some time and only after that return him to the bride.

In Rutuls, when the groom came to the bride, the ritual of "sharing the bread" would occur: the groom and bride, holding a large round bread, pulled it, trying to

break off the most of it.

In some Dargin communities, a similar ritual would be carried out on the wedding night: the groomsmen brought the newlywed churek with butter on a platter. The bride and groom were supposed to grab the churek ahead of each other. The bridesmaid tried to help the bride to touch the churek first, while the groomsmen prevented it to happen, as they believed that the one who touched the bread first would be the master in the house.

In villages where the wedding was held, on the first intimate night, the single men and women would often cause mischief, sometimes in quite a harsh manner, which can be associated with the tradition of “wedding obstruction”, mentioned above.

Among the Khvarshins, the wedding night was held in a “secret house” (the “secret” part was rather nominal, as keeping something a secret in a small village was difficult). All the single men and women from the village would gather around this house, make noise, dance on the roof, peek through the windows. The groom paid off with specially prepared for this moment boiled eggs, pies; in the village of Inkhokvari – with a hazelnut halva, as nuts with a thin shell grew in abundance there. If the young people thought the groom couldn't handle the bride, his friends climbed onto the roof of the wedding house and conducted the “*kushakha*” rite – they would tie the roof roller with a red belt (piece of the Khvarshin women's clothing) and put it vertically, so that the so-called “sympathetic magic” would come into effect.

Such games of the single youth on the wedding night were common in Dagestan. In some villages, this custom existed until the end of the twentieth century.

Among the Dargins of the villages Duakar, Kischa, Zubanchi, the guests headed home no later than at three in the morning, leaving the groom and bride alone. However, 30-40 minutes after, young people – single men and groom's friends – would climb the flat roof of the *saklya* and dismantle it, pouring water into the chimney, knock on the window. In most of the southern Dargins, the groom had no right to close the door of the wedding room when meeting the bride. In Itsari and Kunki villages, the groomsmen who stood on the porch could even enter the room for a brief moment. If the newlyweds closed the door, they could break in.

Among the Burkun-Dargins, the doors of the room where the wedding night occurred was guarded by two of the groom's friends so that no one could disturb the couple. The friends would wrestle noisily on the porch, throw little objects at each other, shout to the groom to hurry up with his “business”. As soon as the groom left the room, the attending woman would come in, help the bride to dress, clean up; then the older friend came in and, together with the woman (*irk'yani*), engaged in a fight on the bed of the newlyweds, while she tried to take off his hat, which then had to be sent with treats inside it to the men at the *godekan* [22, p. 135].

In the Lak village of Balkhar, early in the morning after the wedding night, the bed of the newlyweds would be tumbled by the groom's friends and even his relatives. In doing so, they had to take off a shoe from the foot and lie there until a ransom of food (pies, boiled meat, bread with boza) was paid. It is worth mentioning that the tradition of tumbling the bed of the newlyweds is quite common, for instance, among the Kakhetis and Khevsurs [32, p. 31].

The Kumyks had the rite of preventing the groom enter the bride's room until he solved a number of riddles. In some cases, these riddles were so complex that the groom had to postpone his visit to the bride till the next night and sent his friend to look for people, even in the neighbouring villages, who could help him with that task. The attending woman asked the riddles in the name of the bride [15, p. 241].

In some Avar villages of the modern Charodinsky district, as well as among the neighboring Laks, there was a custom according to which the groom on the wedding night had to talk to the bride, forcing her to answer questions. It was regarded prestigious if the bride remained silent for as long as possible. As soon as the bride uttered a single word, the groom passed a jar of honey to the attending woman who was waiting outside the door. In the Lak village of Shali, as soon as the bride spoke and the groom "reconciled" with her, the bride would pass the bestman through the groom the key from the chest with treats that he had to share with the groomsmen who stood guard at the door of the room. Sometimes the bestman, having taken the bundle of treats, would come out and dance.

Among the customs associated with the welcoming the bride in the groom's house and their first contact at the marriage bed, a special place among some mountaineers is designated to the competition of the bride and groom, a struggle. According to customs, in some small indigenous peoples of Dagestan (Khvarshins, Bagulals, Chamalals, Tindals), and parts of the Avars (communities of Kudali, Rugudzha, Keger, Kutlab, Gochob, Kakhib, etc.), the bride had to resist the groom and wrestle with him. Certain tricks were used to win this struggle. In Khvarshins, for instance, the groom was searched before being admitted to the bride, fearing that he might have concealed a knife to cut the thick lace of the pants, which was usually tied into several knots. Others dressed the bride in a tightly sewed clothing; rubbed her with lard, to make it easier for the girl to resist. They even shaved the bride's head so that the groom could not grab her by the hair during the struggle. The brides of Kutlab village were specially trained before marriage to become stronger. The bride's mother organized preliminary competitions for her daughter with some young man close to the family and taught her how to fight.

The competition of the bride and groom on the wedding night, later reduced to "flirting", is one of the customs evident by the ethnographic and historical material [33, p. 366] and, according to S. S. Gadzhieva, belongs to the more pronounced wedding antagonism [15, p. 247].

### **Demonstration of chastity**

The proof of the bride's innocence was the culmination of the wedding night. This was an important condition for a girl's serene life in a new family, in a status of a married woman. In each of the peoples of Dagestan, it took different forms. As mentioned above, there were enough eyewitnesses to watch the night go by. In some peoples, the groom left the bride in just 20-30 minutes, as in the Avars of Rugudzha village, where the groom kicked the door, thus letting the "elder female friend" know

that everything was fine. She would then enter the room and took the white felt rug “*burtina*”, which served as a sheet on the wedding bed. The groom’s relatives were waiting for her at the door. The girl who managed to grab “*burtina*” and ran into the circle to dance with the proof of the bride’s innocence, received a gift from the groom’s mother (a piece of cloth). The groom returned to the bride, and the “elder female friend” hurried to the bride’s mother with the message that everything was in order, the daughter was innocent and did not let her father down. For this, she was given a rich gift. After returning to the bride, the “elder female friend” received another gift from the groom’s mother. The bride had to keep a white felt rug decorated with embroidery in her chest. In the morning, the mother-in-law and other close relatives came to the room to congratulate the newlyweds. They brought her gifts, and the bride did the same in return.

The mother-in-law could present the bride with a handkerchief, a cut for a dress, or jewelry. Among the Avars of Rugudzha, for instance, if the wedding night passed well, the mother-in-law put a silver bracelet on the daughter-in-law’s wrist, which she acquired in advance specifically for this occasion. The absence of the bracelet on the bride’s wrist in the morning could be perceived ambiguously by the relatives who arrived to congratulate the newlyweds. Gossip could spread around the village.

Before the wedding night, the Laks prepared bread and boiled mutton leg which the groom had to pass from behind the door immediately after confirming the bride’s innocence as a treat for friends and close relatives who remained in the house. Right after that, on behalf of the “close woman”, a messenger was sent to the girl’s parent’s house, where the close female relatives were also present. From here, across the night streets, with torches and trays of halva, a procession of women went singing to the house of the newlywed couple where they were already expected and welcomed with the usual honors.

Among the Rutuls, the proof of the bride’s chastity was a handkerchief, which was previously sewn with large stitches to the wedding bed. This handkerchief was to be torn off by the groom and passed to his friends, so that they would give it to the woman who accompanied the bride. If the groom was happy with the bride, a messenger was sent to her parents with the “handkerchief of innocence”. The woman who accompanied her was gifted a handkerchief and a cut of cloth for shirts [34, p. 216].

In the village of Khin, a discontinuation of the wedding party with the participation of the groom and his friends at midnight served as a signal that the bride lived up to the parent’s trust.

Among the Aguls, the bride’s chastity was verified by older relatives on the groom’s side. Each of them could approach the newlyweds’ bed and make sure of it. For this purpose, the bed was left untouched for some time.

Among the Tabasarans of some villages, the “handkerchief of innocence” (“*lishan*”) was hung from a mirror that the bride brought as a dowry with the wedding procession (the mirror was usually carried by the woman accompanying the bride). In the village of Horedzh, South Tabasaran, it was customary to hang

the “handkerchief of innocence” on the wall in the morning, opposite the door, for everyone to see. In part of the Tabasarans, after the wedding night, if everything was in order, the bride had to change into a new outfit – this act testified she became a married woman. There was no practice of inquiring about the bride’s virginity among the Dargins of Karbachimakhi, Iraki and Dibgalik villages. In order to avoid disgrace of the bride and her parents, the groom could keep it a secret, and, after a month, explain the reason and divorce. The bride would be deprived of any gifts she received from the groom, and naturally such a hasty divorce couldn’t pass without gossip and speculations.

In Lezgins, the groom in the company of his friends went in to the bride alone, while the friends waited outside. After some time, the groom had to take out the “handkerchief of innocence” and pass it to his friends. In some Lezgins, as well as among Tabasarans, the “handkerchief of innocence” was hung on a mirror, which was brought from the bride’s house by *yenge*, who accompanied the bride to the groom’s house.

In the Lezgin village of Kurush, an old female relative stayed with the newlyweds in the room to verify the bride’s virginity.

Among the Lezgins of Usur, dances in the groom’s house proceeded until the bride’s *yenge* came out with a handkerchief testifying the innocence of the girl, and danced with the bestman.

In the Lezgin village of Kabir, two groom’s men and two of his relatives stayed in the wedding room with the couple. Their responsibility was to hold a large handkerchief over the newlyweds’ bed in the manner of a curtain.

After the wedding night, the groomsmen immediately took the groom away to where he had stayed before, and for several more nights they would bring him to the bride. However, it was not common among everyone: the groom in Kurakh village didn’t leave after the wedding night. In the village of Kutul, after the night, the groom went to the guardian (the master of the “other house”, where he previously stayed), however he would return by the noon either by himself, or by people sent after him from the groom’s house.

In some Lezgin villages, the friends fired several shots as a sign that the wedding night passed well.

This custom once again demonstrates the ethnic diversity of Dagestan: while the Lezgins confirmed the purity of the bride with shots, the Dargins and Southern Kumyks, on the contrary, fired upon the discovery of the bride’s unchastity.

### **Punishment of a newlywed for deviant behavior**

The might-have-been bride was obliged to return all the gifts given by the groom; among the Turkic peoples she also had to return kalym. She could only get her dowry back.

Among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Dagestan (southern Kumyks, Azerbaijanis, Terekemens, Nogais) in case the girl was unchaste, the groom kicked her out through the window, and then the groom’s parents put the bride on a black donkey backwards,

dressed her in black burka, handed the reins to the attending woman and sent her back to parents with disgrace. The disgraced girl, as a rule, did not return home, but hid at the relatives of her mentor, since she would be put to death by her father or brothers [23, p. 63].

Among the Dargins, it was customary to banish the girl in disgrace on the same night, along with her friends and the woman who accompanied her. G. M. Amirov points out: "If the bridegroom found out that the bride's reputation was tainted, he immediately announced it with a pistol shot. Then the parents rushed to take the disgraced daughter home, and the dagger of the father or brother would rarely spare her" [29, p. 32].

In Avars of Rugudzha village, it was common to make the wedding bed on the second floor, in the room with windows overlooking the courtyard (*azbar*) or the street. This supposedly allowed the groom to kick the bride, who had lost her virginity before the wedding, out of the window on the same night. If there was a courtyard in the house, she would fall into the circle of dancers waiting to hear the news from the groom. The girl who did not meet the expectations of the groom and family was taken in haste by the accompanying woman ("big female friend") away from the anger of her parents. They say that once there was a case when the bride left the village at night, and no one saw her again.

In Lezgins, the bride who turned out to be unchaste immediately got divorced and went to her parents' house in disgrace. The relatives decided her fate, and the girl could even be killed.

Among the Terekemens, if the bride was not innocent, she was kicked out of the house with her mentor the second it was revealed. There is a legend that in the distant past, a girl who turned out to be unchaste was cut off her braids, put on a donkey and, throwing a burka over her, sent to her father.

If a Tabasaranian bride was not a virgin, the marriage was immediately dissolved. Then, in the presence of *yenge* and her assistants, the bride was dressed in rags and sent back to her mother in disgrace. In these cases, with the help of a council of 10 respected male relatives, the groom's parents initiated the search for a suitable girl to replace the disgraced and hasty union. In this fashion, the groom's parents tried to avoid the costs on another matchmaking and wedding ceremonies.

It should be noted that in Dagestan, the laws against unchaste girls were rather severe. However, they were not always strictly enforced. As a rule, this happened rarely. If the girl's fault was revealed, it could become a disgrace for the whole family, a rebuke for the men for several generations. The girl's relatives could take her life or banish her from society. The elders of the Jamaat took the initiative of the situation regulators, did everything possible to avoid bloodshed. No one wanted to become an unwitting culprit or just an eyewitness of a possible murder.

Most commonly, everyday life in small communities was dictated by the palliative norms of behavior. For this reason, the groom and his relatives for a certain time tried to hide the fact of "dishonor" of the girl, so as not to disgrace the bride's family, her brothers. After some time, coming up with an unsuspecting reason, they divorced.



In rural societies where everyone knows each other, a hasty divorce can usually draw attention and result in gossip. For this reason, a girl with tainted reputation was married to a relative or widower as soon as possible. All this despite the fact that according to the adats of all Dagestan communities, a bride who turned out to be unchaste after performing *kebin* should immediately be divorced. In particular, the written recorded adats of the peoples of Dagestan point out issues of virginity, considering them in a variety of manifestations and situations, such as:

«§ 180. If the newlywed rejects the husband's request, then the fact of sobriety while performing the intimate act is taken into account. If he was drunk, which is attested by those present at the wedding, then the newlywed woman swears her virginity before marriage, on the grounds that the newlywed in a drunken state may not have felt the rupture of the virgin membrane; as only in a sober state and with greater caution the rupture is noticeable. After this, the husband, if he is not willing to stay with the bride anymore, can give her a divorce with the payment of *kebin* money and everything else that is due to her according to the marriage terms.

§ 181. If the husband was sober, which is confirmed by witnesses, then the bride's denial is not taken into account, and the probability of the husband's allegation, approved by the proper oath, is considered.

§ 183. If the bride before marriage was seen to be involved in romantic relations with another man, and she has not told the groom or the father about it out of shame or fear, and the groom hasn't visited her before, and after the first marital intercourse she is declared unchaste by the husband, the fact of which he can confirm under the proper oath, then such a girl at the request of the husband is returned with her dowry to the relatives and deprived of all rights to receive *kebin-hakka* and other things given to her by the husband before and after the marriage for the reason that the person, with whom she was seen with, might have taken her virginity» [35, p. 211].

In order to avoid such wedding incidents, teenage girls were informed in various ways during their upbringing about what might happen if they lost their virginity before marriage. The description of such harsh measures towards a stumbled girl is a preventive measure against her possible deviant behavior.

## Conclusion

First intimate encounter with the bridegroom, rituals regarding the obtaining of the girl the status of a married woman, the demonstration of innocence of the bride: the ritual hanging of the "handkerchief of innocence" on the mirror on display, the demonstration of felt sheets while dancing, weapon shots and other traditional methods served as the conclusion to wedding ceremonies. Moreover, the wedding cycle consisted of rather a long stage of post-wedding rituals (mutual visiting, exchange of gifts between related families, the first trip of the daughter-in-law to the water spring, etc.), which concluded the ceremonial reception of the daughter-in-law into a new family (and sometimes into a new rural community), and also symbolized the conclusion of a new kinship union between the families of the bride and groom.

Nevertheless, it was the confirmation of virginity on the wedding night that was a necessary condition for accepting her into a new family.

It seems difficult to demonstrate all the variety of rites performed by the peoples of Dagestan on the “first wedding night”, since each ethnic group had its own ritual nuances. It is worth pointing out that the demonstration of proof of the bride’s virginity was addressed mainly to the closest relatives of the bridegroom – to his mother, and then the bride’s mother. However, many peoples of Dagestan considered it necessary to demonstrate this to all the guests at the wedding (hanging a handkerchief or a sheet), and sometimes to the whole village (shooting, etc.).

This is reflected in several aspects of the attitude to the fact of preserving the bride’s virginity before marriage. The first aspect is the popular idea about the significance of virginity in terms of the fate of future children, since it was the birth of healthy offspring (both physically and morally) that ensured the existence of an individual family, a family collective, or a *Jamaat*. These ideas also explained the implacability and cruelty towards a stumbled girl: in a society where traditions were predominant, the main focus was attached to the interests of the said society, the interest of social survival, and not to the personal rights and interests of an individual. As we know, it was the birth of children that was associated with women in the majority of the Caucasian peoples; the responsibility for the absence of children in a couple was most often assigned to the woman. It is no coincidence that the attitude to the preservation of virginity by the groom at the time of marriage was radically different.

The second aspect is a certain transformation of the attitude to this issue, since the innocence of the bride was also associated with the concept of observing the honor of the family, its authority among neighbors and fellow villagers. This concerned both the family of the girl who could not bring her up properly, and the family of the groom, who chose an unworthy contender for the role of the future mother and housewife. Ethnographic material suggests that in the case of announcement of the fact of unchastity, the memory of this incident remained in the people’s minds for many years, and the bride’s bad reputation in this case affected the fate of her brothers and sisters. As the paper points out, the people usually tried to avoid huge scandals to protect their families from gossip and possible bloodshed and feud.

Almost until the 60s of the twentieth century, the rites, customs and beliefs associated with the wedding night had preserved among the peoples of Dagestan almost unchanged.

Nowadays, this ritual component of family and household rites has undergone a serious correction, especially since according to religious canons, the fact of virginity was essential, but the demonstration of a girl’s chastity to the whole village was not recommended and condemned by the clergy. The conclusion of marriage, the wedding, with the accompanying complex of rituals, in which the ritual of the first wedding night occupied a significant place, was a major family and social event. These rituals were composed of folk traditions, ancient pre-monotheistic views and ideas that Islam tried to change but, having failed to completely eradicate them, adapted; the Soviet government periodically declared the struggle with “remnants of the past”. At

present, despite the fact that in Dagestan the canons of “pure Islam” have been being introduced into the rites for the past decades, family rites and most rituals are still practiced, with the exception of demonstrating the chastity of a girl on her wedding night. The wedding ceremony, along with all the complex of rituals, remains relevant primarily due to its social significance. This is also due to the fact that, according to folk traditions, it has not yet become a matter of a close family group in Dagestan. It retains its significance as a way to demonstrate the social prestige of the family, its wealth and the solidarity of the relatives.

*The paper was translated by Magomedkhabib Seferbekov, junior researcher at IHAЕ DFRC RAS (dnc.ran@outlook.com).*

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