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Research paper

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MODERN LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS OF THE RUSSIANS OF THE KIZLYAR REGION: TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Abstract. The article explores the traditional and contemporary life-cycle rites of ethnic Russians in the Kizlyar region of Dagestan. It employs general scientific and specialized historical and ethnological methods, supplemented by ethnographic fieldwork conducted in villages across the Kizlyar and Tarumovsky districts. These rites were significantly reshaped by globalization and the sociocultural shifts that occurred between the second half of the 1980s and the first quarter of the 21st century. Initially, some of these processes detrimentally affected the economic activities and family life of ethnic Russians in Dagestan, resulting in a decline in their overall standard of living. However, the subsequent economic stabilization of the 2000s positively impacted both their economic and family spheres. This stabilization particularly fostered the widespread expansion of the wedding industry, which, in turn, led to a shortening of the duration and stages of the wedding ceremony and the loss of some traditional elements. Furthermore, Christianity has exerted a profound influence on these life-cycle rites, an influence evident across all their constituent elements. The influence of globalization is evident in several contemporary practices, such as the use of digital devices and social media for young men and women to meet, the increasingly common organization of professional photo sessions during the wedding procession, and the growing popularity of the "Tooth Fairy" ritual associated with the loss of a child's first tooth. Despite these global influences, traditional Slavic rituals remain integral to the family and everyday life-cycle rites of Russians in the Kizlyar region. These traditions are evident in the structured stages and specific content of the wedding ceremony, the composition of its participants, and in measures dedicated to preserving the life and health of both mother and child. Furthermore, a significant layer of beliefs and customs, including remnants of oneiromancy (divination by dreams) and ancestor worship, persists. A study of the life-cycle rituals among Dagestan's rural Russian population thus reveals the successful preservation of a substantial portion of their traditional culture. This enduring heritage plays a crucial role in maintaining their ethnic, national, cultural, and religious identity in the face of widespread globalization.

Keywords: Dagestan Russians; Kizlyar region; life-cycle rituals; sociocultural processes; globalization.

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Исследовательская статья

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СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ОБРЯДЫ ЖИЗНЕННОГО ЦИКЛА РУССКИХ КИЗЛЯРЩИНЫ: ТРАДИЦИИ И ИННОВАЦИИ

Аннотация. В статье на основе общенаучных и специальных исторических и этнологических методов, а также собранного в селениях Кизлярского и Тарумовского районов Дагестана полевого этнографического материала, исследуются традиционные и современные обряды жизненного цикла у русских Кизлярщины. Большое влияние на них оказали глобализация и социокультурные процессы второй половины 80-х гг. XX в. – первой четверти XXI в. Некоторые из этих процессов негативно отразились на хозяйственных занятиях и семейном быте русских Дагестана и привели к падению их жизненного уровня. Стабилизация экономической жизни в 2000-е гг. благотворно отразилась на хозяйстве и семейном быте дагестанских русских. Она, в частности, привела к широкому распространению свадебной индустрии, что отразилось на сокращении сроков и этапов свадебного обряда, утере некоторых его традиционных элементов. Большое влияние на обряды жизненного цикла оказала христианская религия, которая ощущается во всех его элементах. Влияние глобализации ощущается в способах знакомства части юношей и девушек через гаджеты в социальных сетях, организации фотосессии по пути следования свадебного кортежа к месту свадьбы, популярности сказочного персонажа Зубная фея в связанных с выпадением первого молочного зуба обрядах. Несмотря на влияние глобализации, в семейно-бытовых обрядах русских Кизлярщины сохранились традиционные славянские ритуалы, которые проявляются в этапах и содержании свадебного обряда, составе его участников; в мерах, направленных на сохранение жизни и здоровья матери и её ребёнка; в остатках значительного пласта связанных с онейромантией и культом предков верованиях и обычаях. Изучение обрядов жизненного цикла сельского русского населения Дагестана показало, что они сумели сберечь значительный пласт своей традиционной культуры, что представляется важным в сохранении их этнической, национальной, культурной и религиозной идентичности в эпоху глобализации.

Ключевые слова: русские Дагестана; Кизлярщина; обряды жизненного цикла; социокультурные процессы; глобализация

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Introduction

Life-cycle rituals constitute a complex of rituals and customs associated with the pivotal moments of birth, marriage, and death. They have been variously interpreted by scholars: V. Turner famously termed them "life-changing" rites, as they accompany "turning-point" events that fundamentally alter an individual's established order of existence [1, p. 233]. S.A. Madyukova classified them as "transitional rites" [2, p. 117], while Mircea Eliade viewed them as an "initiation into a new sociocultural space" [3, p. 115].

The primary purpose of this article is to describe the traditional and emergent elements present in the contemporary family and everyday rituals of Russians in the Kizlyar region. The objective of this study is to examine the transformative influence of several factors on the elements of these rituals in the Kizlyar Russian ethnic contact zone. The chronological framework of this study mainly covers the late Soviet period and the modern era, though some contextual excursions into the pre-revolutionary period are also included.

The traditional family and everyday rituals of Dagestani Russians have previously been a subject of study by Russian ethnologists specializing in the Caucasus, notably M.Sh. Rizakhanova [4, pp. 91–123] and S.A. Luguev and M.Kh. Mansurov [5, pp. 548–552]. This current work builds upon that foundation, also drawing on our previous contribution to the study of the modern family and everyday rituals of Dagestan's urban Russian population [6, pp. 232–252].

It should be noted that a comprehensive study utilizing historical and ethnological methods to examine modern life-cycle rituals among ethnic Russians in the Kizlyar and Tarumovsky districts of Dagestan throughout the Soviet and modern periods has not yet been undertaken. Our present, smaller-scale study aims to fill this specific gap, which constitutes its scientific novelty.

This article is fundamentally based on ethnographic fieldwork gathered during the summers of 2023 and 2024. The fieldwork was conducted in the following villages: Alexandria, Averyanovka, Kardonovka, and Krasny Vostok in the Kizlyar district, and Talovka, Kalinovka, Koktyubey, and Novo-Georgievka in the Tarumovsky district of Dagestan. This gathered fieldwork is being introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

The methodology employed in writing this article integrated general scientific and specialized methods of history and ethnology. The specific historical methods applied include:

Comparative-Historical Method: This allowed for the comparison of common and specific features between the traditional and emergent life-cycle rites of the Kizlyar region Russians, helping to identify the changes that have occurred and the dynamics of subsequent developments.

Historical-Genetic Method: This facilitated the establishment of cause-and-effect relationships underlying the transformations of elements within Russian family life throughout its historical development.

Historical-Systemic Method: This was used to study the life-cycle rites of Dagestani Russians – both past and present – as a holistic historical system. This was achieved by relating them to the family and everyday rites of the main Russian ethnic group (genesis) and those of the local lowland and mountain populations (morphology).

Retrospective Method: This enabled a focused examination of the history of Slavic family rituals to determine the reasons for the preservation or eventual loss of specific customs and rites.

Ethnological Method: field research, including both participant and detached observation, cross-cultural analysis, the study of relics, and the use of surveys and interviews with respondents.

The research materials generated by this study may prove useful to professionals in the ministries and departments of the Republic of Dagestan for implementing republican and federal programs focused on developing the traditional ethnic culture of Russians in Dagestan. Furthermore, these findings can serve as a resource for writing monographs and articles on the modern history and ethnography of Dagestani Russians.

Wedding rituals

Wedding rituals stand as one of the most persistent components of family life, serving as a reflection of traditions shaped across diverse historical eras [7, p. 10]. A wedding ceremony is not merely a single ritual act but a comprehensive complex of customs and rites performed by the family and kinship groups of the bride and groom upon their marriage [8, p. 36].

The establishment of a marital relationship begins with the meeting of young men and women, which, if successful, provides the foundation for starting a family. During the Soviet period, these initial meetings typically occurred at dances in social clubs, or through relationships forged during school, university studies, or professional internships.

In recent decades, however, while meetings still happen during studies at university or at work, an increasing number of young people connect through digital devices and social media.

When it comes to partner selection, Russian young men often prioritize marrying girls from their own village. This preference is encapsulated in a local saying, recorded in Talovka village: "In your own village, you'll get a half-fool; in a foreign village, you'll get a complete fool." Similar proverbs existed among other Dagestani Russians, such as: "You don't drink water off the wife's face — she just needs to know how to bake pies." [9, p. 198].

Young men and women intending to marry were traditionally expected to possess certain desirable qualities. A woman was valued for being beautiful, modest, hardworking, and respectful of her elders. A man was expected to have housing, a higher education, a profession, or a stable job, and crucially, the ability to support a family.

Marriage ages show some variation across villages: in the village of Averyanovka, men generally marry after the age of 25, and women between 21 and 23. In the village of Koktyubey, men marry earlier, at 20-24, and women at 19-21. In the village of Krasny Voskhod, men tend to marry between 26 and 30, and women at 20-22.

Historically and currently, interethnic marriages remain common in the villages of the Kizlyar and Tarumovsky districts.

If the initial meeting is successful and the match is approved by the respective family councils, the two parties begin preparations for the matchmaking and the wedding ceremony.

The traditional Russian wedding ritual in Dagestan historically consisted of a complex series of elements: betrothal, matchmaking (*svatovstvo*), the bride-viewing, the handshake (*rukobitie*), the week, the bathhouse ritual, the morning rites of the wedding day, the meeting of the wedding train (procession), the wedding celebration itself, the post-wedding rites at the groom's house, and the ritual actions of the second day [4, pp. 91–104]. Many of these elements, however, were lost during the Soviet and modern eras.

Pre-wedding ceremonies among the Russians of the Kizlyar region traditionally begin with matchmaking. Once a young man's choice of bride has been approved by his family council, his close relatives begin preparations for the matchmaking visit.

At the chosen girl's parents' home, the matchmakers are received and offered treats. The matchmakers formally state the purpose of their visit. The girl's parents then inquire about her desire to marry the young man. If she consents, the matchmakers and the girl's parents agree upon a tentative wedding date.

In the village of Alexandria, the young man, accompanied by his father, mother, and godparents, visits the girl's home. They carry with them a *karavai* placed on an embroidered towel, along with wine and sweets. Upon entering, they announce their intentions to the girl's parents with a formulaic phrase: "Your rose has blossomed, we are looking for a heifer, and we have a calf. You have a dove, we have a male dove." The guests are then seated and treated to a feast. Following this, the young man and woman are placed side-by-side and asked to confirm their consent to the marriage. If both agree, and their respective parents also consent, the girl cuts the *karavai* into four pieces: the first piece to the groom's mother, the second to his father, and the remaining two pieces to her own parents. A ring is then put on the bride's finger. After the parents confirm the wedding date, both parties share the wine that the groom's family brought.

A week after the matchmaking, on Thursday, the bride's parents visited the groom's parents' home, a ritual known as "to the threshold" in Averyanovka village or "to the viewing" in Krasny Voskhod village. They brought gifts for the groom, and on this day, the two families finalized the wedding date and determined the number of guests to be invited.

On Saturday, the groom's family would visit the bride's home to collect her dowry. In the late Soviet era, a dowry typically included an antique chest, a wardrobe, a sideboard, a dressing table, a metal bedstead, a bedspread with lace frills (Krasny Voskhod), and sometimes even livestock like a heifer and piglets (Kalinovka). In the modern day, the dowry more commonly consists of dishes, furniture, and bedding.

The period between matchmaking and the wedding could last from several months to a full year. Russians traditionally hold weddings in late summer or early autumn. In the past, there was a strong preference for marrying on Krasnaya Gorka – the first Sunday after Easter – which was believed to guarantee a happy family

life. Among the Eastern Slavs, this day was considered a "maiden's holiday," a time when grooms chose brides, matchmaking occurred, and weddings were celebrated [10, p. 223].

Following the pre-wedding ceremonies, the families begin their preparations for the wedding itself. Over the last thirty years, a typical Russian wedding in the region hosts between 50 and 150 guests. This represents an increase from the Soviet era, where, as in the village of Alexandria, the number was typically up to 50. Today, wealthy families, such as those in Novo-Georgievka, may invite up to 300 guests. In the village of Krasny Voskhod, however, the scale has remained consistent, with weddings historically and currently hosting between 150 and 200 guests.

Until the early 1990s, it was customary for both the bride and groom to hold separate bachelor and bachelorette parties on the eve of the wedding. Today, in some villages like Alexandria, only the bachelorette party, known as *vechorki*, continues to be observed at the bride's home.

For the wedding ceremony, the groom attire consists of a dark suit, a white shirt, and black shoes. He is accompanied by a best man, who is often distinguished by a flower in his buttonhole. The bride traditionally wears a wreath made of artificial wax flowers, with a veil attached to it. A dedicated wedding dress is purchased for the occasion and is afterward preserved in the home of the newlyweds.

On the morning of the wedding day, a cortege of prestigious foreign cars gathers at the groom's house. During the Soviet era and into the 1990s, the bride was typically collected in a Volga car adorned with balloons and colorful ribbons, often featuring a doll on the hood. Until the early 1990s, in the villages of Talovka and Novo-Georgievka, horse-drawn carriages were used, accompanied by village youth and an accordion player.

In the village of Averyanovka, a significant ritual occurs before the bride is given to the groom and his retinue. Her parents bless her with "bread and salt" and an icon. During this blessing, the bride kneels on a sheepskin coat that has been spread on the floor, turned wool-side out – a symbol of abundance among the Caucasian peoples [11, pp. 58–59].

For the past two decades, it has become customary for the bride and groom to take photographs at various locations along the procession route. For example, in the village of Kalinovka, newlyweds take souvenir photos in the Kizlyar city park, as well as in the village of Razdolye and at the 17th junction in Nikolaevka, known for its beautiful grove and alleys.

In the village of Krasny Voskhod, the wedding procession circles the city of Kizlyar with horns blaring, stopping for photo sessions at key sites. These include the city square near the Lenin monument and the park featuring the P.I. Bagration memorial and the monument to General V.Ya. Levashov.

Upon the arrival of the newlyweds' procession at the groom's parents' house, a bonfire is lit before the gate. In the village of Alexandria, the bride and groom are required to jump over this flame, a practice interpreted as a form of "ritual purification" [12, p. 336].

The groom's parents greet the couple at the gate, holding an embroidered towel with a *karavai* ("bread and salt") and an icon. After this welcome, the newlyweds are invited to the wedding feast. As they enter the wedding tent, they are showered with hops, rice, candy, and coins.

Historically, weddings spanned several days, often beginning on a Thursday ("a day dedicated to Perun" [13, pp. 47, 221], and concluding on Sunday. The official marriage registration at the registry office occurs either on the wedding day itself, as in Krasny Voskhod village, or the following day, as in Talovka village. The church wedding, or *venchanie*, is attended by the newlyweds, their friends, and witnesses. It is held on the second day of the festivities in Kalinovka village, or on a Saturday or Sunday in Krasny Voskhod village.

In the village of Koktyubey, the bride's parents blessed their daughter for marriage on a Friday, holding a *karavai* and an icon. The newlyweds then proceeded to the registry office to officially register their marriage. A feast known as "*na garnoy*" was held at the groom's house, during which a ritual of "breaking the chicken" took place, involving the consumption of boiled chicken. The guests drank wine and ate viburnum berries ("*zakusit kalinu*"), a practice intended to "reduce the bitterness in the relationship between the newlyweds." This ritual draws on the symbolism of the viburnum, an attribute of the Slavic goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, Lada [13, pp. 66–67]. Closer to midnight, the newlyweds departed for their wedding night. The following morning, the bride's wreath was ceremoniously removed and replaced with a headscarf, signifying her new status as a married woman.

A different sequence was observed in the village of Averyanovka, where the wedding celebration was held at the bride's house on Friday and at the groom's house on Saturday. On this second day, a ritual known as "looking for the heifer" took place. The bride's parents and matchmakers went to the groom's house, where

they were met by the groom's relatives, friends, and mummers ("gypsies"), or women and men swapping clothes. The groom's parents would hide the bride, and her parents had to search the entire house and yard for her. Upon finding their daughter, they asked, "Have you been treated well in this house?" Once she affirmed that she had, both families sat down to feast together. Afterwards, the entire party went to the "mother-in-law's for pancakes." At both the wedding and this subsequent gathering, guests shouted "Gorko!" and, after toasting the health and happiness of the newlyweds, would smash their glasses on the floor – a custom performed "for luck."

On Sunday, the tradition of "*na poklony*" ("for greetings") was observed. In the villages of Koktyubey and Novo-Georgievka, close relatives from both families gathered at the groom's house for a celebration accompanied by an accordion. It was customary to "let the festivities continue until morning." A fire of wood and dry reeds was lit in the groom's yard, and wedding guests jumped over it. The celebration concluded by dousing the fire with water (Koktyubey).

In Krasny Voskhod village, the wedding's first day was hosted at the groom's house. Guests presented the newlyweds with "*dary*" ("gifts") of money, dishes, and bed linens. Three obligatory toasts were made to the health of the couple. The celebration featured songs, ditties, and dancing to music from a tape recorder, accordion, and button accordion.

The morning after the wedding night involved a ritual verification of the bride's chastity. The matchmaker would ask the groom, "Is this your bride or someone else's? Should I tie red ribbons to the guests?" (Alexandria); "Was the bride honest?" (Krasny Voskhod). If the groom confirmed her virtue, the matchmaker, after the bride entered the main room, would smash a plate and a pumpkin on the floor. The bride would then kiss her mother-in-law, who would congratulate her and present her with an apron – a symbol that the bride was now the rightful mistress of the household (Alexandria). The ceremony concluded with the groom performing the ritual of "breaking the chicken." He tore the legs from a boiled chicken and presented them to his mother and mother-in-law, while giving the neck and head to his father and father-in-law. In Krasny Voskhod village, this act was accompanied by the groom thanking the bride's parents for her chastity.

On the second day of the wedding in Talovka, Kalinovka, and Novo-Georgievka, mummers – "bears" – would go "to look for a heifer" and subsequently "to the mother-in-law for pancakes." The mummers often pretended to be drunk (Novo-Georgievka). That same day, the village youth would steal and hide the bride and groom, seating the mummers in their place at the wedding table. To secure the couple's return, the youth would demand a ransom of drinks and snacks from the matchmakers and best men. After the ransom was paid, the bride and groom returned to the celebration, and the mummers were sent away (Novo-Georgievka).

On the second day of the wedding in Alexandria, the bride's relatives visited the groom's house, where they were received as guests and treated to a feast. Following this, a branch from a fruit tree – a symbolic analogue of the "world tree" [14, pp. 398–406] – was decorated with ribbons and sweets. The party then processed with this decorated branch through the entire village to the bride's house, where the festivities resumed. At the height of the celebration, a participant would proclaim, "The goose doesn't fit in the stove," signaling a collection of money for the purchase of the "goose." Everyone contributed to this collection, which was used to buy additional drinks and snacks.

In Koktyubey, the second day involved an evening visit to the mother-in-law's for the "first pancakes," followed by a return trip the next morning for the "second pancakes." The groom attended his "mother-in-law's pancakes" bearing a red apple, a symbol of fertility and eternal youth [15, p. 116]. At the bride's parents' home, the groom's party was received as guests and treated to a meal. While the groom's side sat at the table, the bride remained standing. The fare consisted of pancakes with honey, wine, and tea. After sampling the food, the guests departed.

In Alexandria, the third day of the wedding features the custom of "rinsing the spoons": wooden spoons tied with ribbons are dipped into a glass of wine and then passed around among the guests. The third day also involves a visit to the mother-in-law's, though the name of the event varies by locality. It is known as "for pancakes" in Kalinovka, "for pies" in Koktyubey, "to gather chickens" in Talovka, and "to catch chickens" in Krasny Voskhod. In Averyanovka and Kalinovka, the ritual is called "to shoot chickens." Here, mummers ("Gypsies"), accompanied by village youth and an accordion player, would wander through the village to catch chickens. These birds (symbols of fertility [16, p. 241]) were slaughtered, and the following day the bride used them to prepare a noodle soup.

Until 2016, weddings in Novo-Georgievka were held under tents in household courtyards or at the village community center. Tableware for the wedding feast was gathered from neighbors. Guests were seated at long

wooden tables on benches. A rug was affixed to the back of the newlyweds' chairs, featuring a cotton-wool inscription wishing "Happiness to the newlyweds!" alongside two crossed wedding rings.

It is noteworthy that until the 2000s, Russian weddings in the Kizlyar region featured mummers – women dressing as men and vice versa (*ritual transvestism*), as well as performers portraying "bears," "gypsies," and "drunks." In our view, the first two characters are the most archaic. The ritual of cross-dressing is also found among the mountain peoples of Dagestan, such as the Dargins-Tsudakhars [17, p. 15]. In world mythology, ritual transvestism symbolizes a "return to the original chaos," where wearing the clothing of the opposite sex signifies a symbolic return to the womb [18, p. 331]. The choice of the "bear" mask, representing an animal revered by the Slavs [19, pp. 128–130], is linked to fertility magic [20, p. 75; 21, p. 191]. Thus, the mummers at a wedding can be interpreted both as personifications of animals once revered and as priests of a fertility cult [22, p. 252].

For the past 10-12 years, weddings in the Kizlyar region have shifted to banquet halls, cafes, and restaurants in the city of Kizlyar and the village of Tarumovka. Where celebrations once lasted for several days, they are now often condensed into a single half-day. This compression of the wedding's timeline and the elimination of its distinct stages have stripped the occasion of its former unique charm and unbridled joy.

A professional, paid toastmaster is now typically hired to officiate the proceedings. This role was traditionally filled by a close, eloquent family friend. In Averyanovka and Krasny Voskhod, the groom's matchmaker once served as the toastmaster, whereas today a hired host commands a fee of approximately 10,000 rubles.

Musicians are now usually brought in from Kizlyar or the Armenian village of Karabagly. The instrumentation has also modernized; while musicians once played the Ionica polyphonic synthesizer, accordion, and drums, they now rely exclusively on electronic instruments.

Until the late 1990s, Russian weddings featured a repertoire of ritual, incantatory, praise, reproach, game, and lyrical songs, performed to the accompaniment of an accordion or bayan. This traditional music has been largely replaced by popular songs from contemporary Russian performers. The dances at weddings remain a mix of Russian folk dances, waltzes, tangos, lezginka, and shalakho.

If the last son in a family was marrying, signaling no further weddings were expected, a custom known as "driving a stake" was observed until the early 2000s in many Russian villages of the Kizlyar region. This ritual was referred to as "driving a wedge" in Koktyubey and "driving a chop" in Talovka. As the stake was driven into the ground before the house's gate, water or wine was poured over it, splashing the house and the parents. This act was performed with specific intentions: "to keep the marriage strong" and "to prevent return" (Averyanovka); "to keep the family strong" (Koktyubey); "to keep the young couple together" (Talovka); "to stay wherever you go" (Krasny Voskhod); and "to keep the chicks from returning to their nest" (Novo-Georgievka).

Until the early 1990s, another custom known as "tying stocks" was practiced. Women would tie up single men with stocks – two boards bound with a red ribbon – who would then have to pay a ransom in money or drinks to be released (Talovka, Koktyubey). In Alexandria, a variation of this practice occurs during Maslenitsa, where a piece of a board is attached to the newlyweds' clothing with a handkerchief. In return, the couple is expected to "set the table," providing drinks and treats.

Among the Kuban Cossacks, the practice of "tying the stocks" served as a form of public shaming for young men and women who had failed to marry within the past year [23, pp. 173–174]. S.A. Tokarev classified such customs of ridiculing unmarried individuals as erotic rituals, explaining them by the rural community's vested interest in increasing its population [24, p. 102].

Thus, a study of the wedding rituals of the Russians in the Kizlyar region reveals a complex fusion of traditional Slavic, Christian, and contemporary elements. Prior to the advent of the modern "wedding industry," these communities preserved the fundamental structure of a traditional Russian wedding, including its specific timing, sequential stages, participant roles, selection of traditional dishes and drinks, and its unique musical, song, and dance repertoire. The consistent presence of mummers is a key feature, with the ritual transvestism found among them – a practice also observed among the mountain peoples of Dagestan – being of particular note. Furthermore, the magic of fertility is clearly manifested in the numerous rituals and customs that accompany the wedding ceremony.

Numerous elements of rivalry between the bride's and groom's family groups, preserved during matchmaking and the wedding itself, are relics of ancient marriage forms and patterns of spousal locality.

The ritual donning of an apron or headscarf by the bride after the wedding night demonstrates, through these specific attributes, her change in status from a girl to a married woman and the new mistress of the household.

Among the newer elements of the Russian wedding is the practice of young people meeting through gadgets and social media. The rise in the age of marriage, compared to the Soviet period, is linked to evolving life attitudes, priorities, and perceptions of quality of life among modern youth. The composition of the dowry has become largely standardized, and the custom of holding photo sessions along the procession route to the wedding venue has emerged. In an era marked by the global transformation of family and marriage institutions, the value placed on the bride's chastity remains a significant attribute of family values for the Russians of the Kizlyar region.

Rites surrounding the birth of a child

Childbirth rites held significant importance within the life cycle rituals of the Russians of the Kizlyar region. The health of the expectant mother and her unborn child was a primary concern, governed by numerous taboos. A pregnant woman was forbidden from visiting a cemetery, as it was feared "the dead might harm her, causing a miscarriage and infertility" (Averyanovka, Talovka). She was prohibited from cutting or dyeing her hair, lest "the child be born with birthmarks and hairless" (Averyanovka). Other prohibitions included petting or kicking cats and dogs – "so the child would not be born with fur on its body" (Averyanovka, Krasny Voskhod) – and stealing knives or scissors, which was believed to cause the child to be "born circumcised" (Kalinovka). From pregnancy until a year after giving birth, women were forbidden to knit, sew, or cut anything on Sundays and church holidays, as "this could harm the child" (Koktyubey). If sewing was unavoidable, the woman had to hold the thread in her teeth "so as not to sew up the child's memory" (Krasny Voskhod).

Like other peoples of the North Caucasus, the Russians of Dagestan strongly desired the birth of a son, who was seen as the successor to the family line, the bearer of the family name, and a future helper to his father.

To celebrate the discharge of a newborn and mother from the maternity hospital, a celebration is held known as "*na kopytki*" (Alexandria, Averyanovka) or "*obmyvat kopytki*" (Krasny Voskhod, Kalinovka). The event is attended by close relatives, neighbors, and family friends, who present the child with gifts such as money, toys, and baby clothes. The stroller and crib are traditionally given by the baby's grandmothers.

Soon after the child's arrival home, a naming ceremony is conducted. This ritual "is the first official stage of the child's socialization – not only at the family level, but also at the level of society as a whole" [25, p. 202].

In Averyanovka and Krasny Voskhod, the child is named forty days after birth during baptism at Orthodox churches in Kizlyar, Bryansk, or Novy Biryuzyak. In Alexandria, infants are baptized one to two weeks after birth in churches in Kraynovka or Kizlyar, while in Kalinovka, the ceremony takes place at the church in Tarumovka.

For the past decade, newborns have been given exclusively Christian names.

For the first forty days after birth, the child is kept secluded; strangers are not permitted near the infant, who is hidden from view for fear of the evil eye. Following this period, "birthday ceremonies" are held where close relatives, godparents, and neighbors visit to "look at the child" and bring gifts.

Various protective measures are employed to shield the child from the evil eye. A pin is attached to its clothing, which is sometimes worn inside-out, and an Orthodox cross is placed around its neck. If a child becomes restless and whiny, it is interpreted as having been jinxed (Kardonovka). Countermeasures include washing the baby with baptismal water (Kalinovka) or having the mother wipe the child's face with the hem of her dress (Krasny Voskhod).

A common prohibition dictates that a child should not be shown in a mirror until their first birthday, as it is believed this will cause them to "not speak in time" (Koktyubey), become "fearful and whiny" (Alexandria), or be "restless and sleep poorly" (Krasny Voskhod).

To correct a reversed sleep schedule, where a child sleeps during the day and is awake at night, a specific ritual is performed. The child is brought to an open chicken coop or inside it while reciting incantations such as, "Chickens, take away my daytime sleep, give me nighttime sleep!" (Alexandria) or "Day to day, night to night!" (Averyanovka).

Special customs governed the emergence and loss of a child's first baby teeth. To encourage teething, a spoon was rubbed and tapped on the child's gums, a practice known as "*na zubok*" (tooth-tapping) in Alexandria and Krasny Voskhod, and "*tsokat lozhkoi*" (spoon-tapping) in Koktyubey. Upon the appearance of the first tooth,

the child's parents and grandparents would present them with a silver spoon, though "a wooden one was also acceptable" (Koktyubey).

Until the late 1990s, specific rituals accompanied the loss of a first baby tooth. In Koktyubey, the tooth was thrown behind the stove with the words, "Take the bad one, give me the bone one!" Elsewhere, the tooth was thrown over the roof while standing with one's back to the house (Krasny Voskhod), or tossed onto it with various incantations: "I throw a bone one, let it grow into gold!" (Alexandria, Kardonovka); "Little mouse, you have a bone tooth, give me a gold one!" (Krasny Voskhod, Kalinovka); "Take the bone one, give me a steel one!" (Talovka); "Little mouse, you have a tooth, make soup out of it! Give you a milk one, and give us a new bone tooth, as strong as oak!" (Averyanovka).

Since the late 1990s, the custom for a lost baby tooth has shifted. Instead of being thrown behind the stove or onto the roof, the tooth is now placed under the child's pillow. Overnight, the "Tooth Fairy" visits, and in the morning the child finds 500-1000 rubles left in exchange for the tooth.

The ritual cutting of a child's first, or "uterine," hair is a practice shared among the peoples of Dagestan, often timed to coincide with the 40th day after birth [26, p. 202]. The specific customs, however, vary by locality. In Alexandria, the local Orthodox priest performs the haircut during baptism; a lock of the cut hair is then rolled in wax and dropped into the baptismal font. On the child's first birthday, the head is shaved completely, and the hair is wrapped in a cloth and hidden under the roof "so that the hag [crow] doesn't make a nest out of it."

In Kalinovka, the uterine hair is shaved on the 40th day after birth. The shaved hair, along with the preserved umbilical cord and the identification tag from the maternity hospital, is kept in a box (Krasny Voskhod). In Averyanovka, Kardonovka, Koktyubey, and Talovka, the hair is cut on the child's first birthday. The hair and the maternity hospital tag are then stored in a secret place within the home. In Talovka, these items – the shaved hair, the umbilical cord, and even the mother's wedding dress – are kept in the cradle under the mattress, a practice believed to protect the baby from epilepsy.

A baby's first, or "uterine," nails are not cut with scissors; instead, the mother bites them off with her teeth. It is believed that failing to do so could cause the child to "become a thief" [12, p. 330].

To aid a child in learning to walk, a ritual is performed to sever the invisible fetters believed to bind its legs. Using a knife (Alexandria) or scissors, a symbolic cutting motion is made crosswise between the child's legs, a practice known as "*cutting the fetters*" [12, p. 330]. This ritual of "untying the fetters on a child's legs" was widespread throughout the North Caucasus [27, p. 72].

In some villages (Tarumovka, Talovka, Kalinovka), it is customary to celebrate a child's birthday every month until they reach one year of age.

Thus, the childbirth rites of the Russians of the Kizlyar region are also syncretic, representing a synthesis of old and new customs. Archaic elements include taboos for protecting the health of the mother and child and the use of amulets. Particularly notable are the traditional rites associated with key developmental milestones: naming, baptism, the emergence and loss of the first teeth, the first haircut, the trimming of the first nails, the first steps, and the celebration of monthly birthdays – all of which are linked to the magic of names and first occurrences. The influence of globalization is evident in the recent adoption of the Tooth Fairy, a figure from Western European folklore, into local modern practice.

Funerary rites and customs

The Slavic funeral rite encompassed a diverse complex of actions: cleansing the deceased, preparing the body for burial, the funeral itself, and subsequent commemorations. This ritual complex served a dual purpose: to facilitate the deceased's passage into the world of the dead and to help the bereaved cope with their loss [28, pp. 190, 192].

Guided by an Eastern Slavic culture of death that perceived "the world of the dead as parallel to the world of the living" [29, p. 262], the Russians of Dagestan observed numerous signs believed to foretell a person's impending death or serious illness. Many of these omens were associated with dreams [30, p. 196], reflecting a tradition of *oneiromancy*.

In Alexandria, specific dream symbols held distinct meanings: a live fish signified imminent illness, eggs foretold an unexpected guest, blood indicated a visit from blood relatives, and a dead person predicted rain. If a deceased person called out or asked for something in the dream, it was an omen of death. To prevent a bad dream from coming true, it was customary to tell no one about it. If one had a nightmare in the morning, the recommended practice was to look out the window and recite the incantation, "Wherever the night goes, there goes the dream," followed by Christian prayers.

In Talovka, a dream where a deceased close relative took you by the hand and led you away was interpreted as a sign of one's own death.

In Kalinovka, dreaming of a lost, bleeding tooth was an omen of a blood relative's death. Other signs, such as an itchy nose, visions of dirty water, or a naked person in a dream, also signified a dead person. A dream in which a deceased person invited you to accompany them was considered a dire omen, and one was strictly forbidden to answer if called in a dream.

In Krasny Vostok, specific dreams were interpreted as omens: flies foreshadowed a deceased person; losing a front tooth painfully and with blood foretold the death of a close relative, while simply losing a tooth signaled the death of an acquaintance; dirty water predicted gossip; and fish symbolized pregnancy. A dream in which a deceased relative led you away was a particularly bad omen. The dreamer was forbidden to follow or answer the call and was instead instructed to tell the apparition, "Go away!"

It is noteworthy that a prohibition against responding to a deceased person who calls one's name in a dream is found among many of the world's peoples [31, p. 76].

External physical signs also indicated the imminent death of a person who had been gravely ill for a long time. These included a suddenly sharpened nose (Talovka), a pale complexion (Krasny Vostok), and cold extremities (Kalinovka).

Further omens were associated with the moment of death itself. If a person died with their eyes open, it was believed that "there will be more deaths in this house." To prevent this, the eyes of the deceased were closed and coins were placed upon them.

Immediately after a person's death, in accordance with a custom widespread among the Eastern Slavs [32, p. 112], all mirrors in the house are covered. These "windows to the other world" [28, p. 191] are veiled "so that the departed soul, wandering between worlds, would not be reflected in them," as this reflection could lead to further deaths in the household (Averyanovka). The coverings are removed on the 40th day after the death.

A central belief holds that the soul of the deceased remains in the house for 40 days before departing for heaven. During this period, a glass of water or wine, topped with a piece of bread and salt, is placed in the room where the deceased lay, as "there is a belief that the soul drinks this water" [12, p. 344]. On the 40th day, the water is poured out (Alexandria) and the bread is crumbled and fed to the birds (Krasny Vostok).

Before the deceased is dressed and placed in the coffin, the body is washed. This task is performed by individuals of the same sex as the deceased. The water used for washing is disposed of in a place untouched by human feet, such as behind the toilet (Koktyubey), under an old tree (Krasny Vostok, Alexandria), or under the steps of a wooden porch (Averyanovka). It must never be poured onto a road, as it was believed this "would bring death to those who step on it" (Alexandria). Those who performed the washing are given new towels, cloth, headscarves, and soap, and are also invited to the commemorative feast on the 9th and 40th days.

A deceased woman is dressed in a dress, underwear, stockings, a headscarf, and slippers, while a man is attired in a shirt, suit, socks, and a cap, which is placed at the head of the coffin. This practice stems from the belief "that in the afterlife, a person appears in the very clothes in which he died" [12, p. 344]. The bed upon which the deceased lay is burned. Their personal belongings are distributed among relatives, neighbors, and the needy, or are donated to the church.

It is noteworthy that in the village of Bryansk, the custom of hiring professional mourners for funerals persists, a practice that "was common among Russians" [12, p. 355]. For their lamentations – which "are based on the assumption that the deceased can hear everything that is said to him" [12, p. 355] – they are given memorial packages of food intended for the deceased.

After the deceased is placed in the coffin, a paper crown – a ribbon with sacred symbols – is placed on their head [28, p. 191], a cross is placed around their neck ("a cross and a belt on the deceased are strictly obligatory" [12, p. 347]), and an icon is placed in their hands, though it is removed before burial. The deceased's jaw is tied with a bandage, and their hands and feet are bound with rope. Before the coffin is lowered into the grave, these bindings are untied and placed beside the body. These ropes are believed to possess healing properties for

sore legs if wrapped around the limbs. The soap used to wash the deceased is similarly thought to be endowed with power and is used to lather sore spots on the body. If someone felt a fear of the dead, they were advised to overcome it by approaching the coffin and holding the feet of the deceased.

The deceased, lying in the coffin, is covered with a church shroud or tulle before the lid is nailed shut. Prior to this, relatives and friends bid their final farewells ("it is believed that the dead person hears and sees everything until he is lowered into the grave" [29, p. 262]). During this farewell, it is customary to send greetings to relatives who have died previously.

The burial does not take place immediately after death; it is essential that the deceased "must definitely spend the night at home" (Krasny Voskhod, Kalinovka). A funeral service is held if the deceased was baptized.

Russians typically bury their dead on the third day after death, though in recent years this has sometimes occurred on the second day, or even on the same day if the person died during the hot season (Krasny Voskhod).

After the deceased is carried out of the house in the coffin, the floors are immediately washed – "so that there would be no new deceased."

The body is carried out of the house feet first, sometimes not through the door but through a window, to prevent the deceased from seeing the way back [28, p. 191]. The coffin is first brought into the yard and then carried to the cemetery through the gate, which is closed afterward. Those leaving the yard must exit not through the main gate but through a small wicket, adhering to the belief that this prevents further deaths in the household.

The deceased is carried to the cemetery in an open coffin, always positioned feet first to prevent them from seeing the way back [12, p. 348]. The coffin is carried and lowered into the grave using special church towels, which are afterward cut into equal pieces and distributed to the bearers (Talovka). Coins are placed in the coffin – in a corner, under the pillow, or at the foot – "so that the deceased can buy back land for himself in the next world." Belongings and objects the deceased cherished in life are also placed inside [29, p. 262].

Burials take place in Christian cemeteries. In Talovka, the cemetery is situated near the Muslim one, while the deceased from Averyanovka and Krasny Voskhod are interred in the city cemetery of Kizlyar.

Among Russians, close relatives traditionally do not carry the coffin or lower it into the grave; this duty falls to friends and neighbors of the deceased. The bearers are often identified by handkerchiefs tied to their left hands. After the funeral, they are given towels and soap as tokens.

The coffin is lowered into the grave with the deceased's feet facing east, "so that on the Day of Judgment, the deceased will rise from the grave facing the Lord" [28, p. 193]. During the burial, those present are expected not to stray from the graveside or approach the burial plots of other deceased relatives and acquaintances (Krasny Voskhod).

Among the Russians of the Kizlyar region, commemorative feasts are held immediately after the funeral, known as the "*goryachiy pomin*," and subsequently on the 9th and 40th days, at six months, and on the anniversary (Kardonovka). In some villages, commemorations are also observed on the 3rd year (Krasny Vostok, Averyanovka, Talovka, Kalinovka) and on the 6th and 9th years (Alexandria). This frequent observance is rooted in the belief that it is necessary "to ensure that the souls do not die of hunger and, on the other hand, that they do not take revenge on the living for not being fed" [33, p. 342].

The funeral meal traditionally includes *kutia* [12, p. 356], an agricultural ritual food [34, p. 80, 82], alongside other dishes such as borscht, chicken noodle soup, stewed meat, fried fish, boiled chicken, cold cuts, mashed potatoes, pies with various fillings, and *blini*, which "are a ritual food at funerals" [12, p. 143]. Compote and a thick, strong *kissel* are served as drinks. The deceased is also honored by drinking alcohol for the repose of their soul, typically involving "three prescribed glasses" of wine or vodka, followed by a fourth toast "for the health of loved ones," a practice frowned upon by priests.

In recent years, it has become common to hold these funeral feasts in cafes. During the meal, all dishes are eaten with a spoon, a custom observed "so as not to hurt the deceased" and "so as not to poke his body with a fork."

B.A. Rybakov linked funeral ceremonies to the cult of ancestors [35, p. 120].

After the earth on the grave has settled, a temporary wooden or iron cross is placed at the feet of the deceased. On the first anniversary of the death, this is replaced by a permanent stone cross.

Mourning is understood as an outward expression of grief for a lost loved one [36, p. 732]. In Kalinovka, mourning for the deceased lasts one year. Male relatives observe a 40-day period of not shaving. In the villages of Alexandria, Averyanovka, and Talovka, the mourning period is 40 days, during which men

refrain from shaving and women wear black clothing. A widow is permitted to remarry after this period if she wishes.

Thus, an analysis of the funeral and memorial rites of the Russians in the Kizlyar region confirms their syncretic nature. While Christian rituals predominate, they retain a significant portion of archaic Slavic rites and beliefs, alongside newer customs. Traditional elements include omens rooted in oneiromancy. Echoes of a funerary cult can be seen in the practice of sending greetings to previously deceased relatives during the farewell and in placing the deceased's cherished belongings in the coffin. A more recent development is the custom of holding the commemorative feast in a café.

It should be noted that the modern family and life-cycle rituals of the Russians in the Kizlyar region are not a closed or isolated phenomenon. With the exception of minor local peculiarities, the life-cycle rituals of the Russians of Dagestan align seamlessly with the broader cultural context of Russians across the North Caucasus – such as those in Stavropol [37, pp. 84–87] and Chechnya [38, pp. 65–60] – as well as with the core ethnic group in central Russia, for example, in Oryol [39, pp. 7–18] and Vladimir [40] regions.

Local peculiarities and subcultural elements were shaped by the influence of the surrounding lowland (Kumyks, Nogais) and mountain (Avars, Dargins, etc.) ethnic environment. The blending of Russian and North Caucasian marital traditions was observed as early as the beginning of the 20th century by G.A. Tkachev in his description of the wedding rites of the Greben Cossacks [41, p. 181].

Dagestan and the North Caucasus are characterized by centuries of cultural interaction and mutual influence among the mountain peoples, Russians, and Cossacks. This is evident in practices such as interethnic marriages, *kunachestvo* (formal friendship), *atalychestvo* (fosterage), and borrowings in economic activities, material culture, and spiritual life. This process of mutually conditioned cultural adaptation between the Russians, Terek Cossacks, and the indigenous population served as a vital resource for interethnic tolerance, the synthesis of diverse cultures, and the formation of a cohesive North Caucasian cultural world [42, p. 80].

Conclusion

Despite minor local variations, the wedding rituals of the ethnic Russian population of the Kizlyar region retained the principal features of a traditional Russian wedding until the mid-2000s. This continuity underscores the importance of marriage and life-cycle rituals within their system of values, the stability of intergenerational ties, and a historical memory that translates the distinct culture of this Dagestani Russian community into ethnographic reality.

The most significant transformations in the family and life-cycle rituals of this population occurred from the 1990s through the first decades of the 2000s, driven by global and sociocultural processes. The Russian wedding underwent the most substantial change, largely due to the introduction of new cultural traditions and the emerging "wedding industry." In contrast, birth and funeral ceremonies have proven more resilient to change. This disparity is explained by the nature of the rituals: unlike weddings, which often involve the entire community, ceremonies associated with childbirth, child-rearing, and death are more intimate, conservative, and typically confined to a small family circle. Funeral rites, while also social events, are further stabilized by the profound influence of the Christian church and its doctrines.

The persistence of traditional family and life-cycle rituals among the Dagestani Russians within a multi-ethnic environment offers hope for the preservation of their ethnic, cultural, and religious identity in an era of globalization. The lowland and mountain populations of the Kizlyar ethnocontact zone have exerted a discernible influence on the life-cycle rituals of the Terek Cossacks and local Russians. This interaction has formed a number of local subcultural elements in their family practices, distinguishing them from the marriage and family rituals of Russians in the core ethnic territories.

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