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TRADITIONAL UKRAINIAN WEDDING IN THE NORTHWEST OF VOLGOGRAD REGION OF RUSSIA: PECULIARITIES OF PRESERVING AND CURRENT STATUS OF EXISTENCE OF FOLK TRADITION

The author researches the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians of Volgograd region as an ethnocultural phenomenon, during which certain transmission of ethnocultural information between the generations takes place, which ensures the succession of the identity of Ukrainians living in Lower Volga region and is an integral part of the traditional and household heritage of Ukrainian people.

Key words: diaspora, Lower Volga region, wedding, tradition.

Traditional wedding rites are one of the most important components of folklife culture. The Ukrainian wedding ceremony in Lower Volga region, especially in the north of Volgograd region, preserved in itself a significant number of ethnic components that allow identification of a set of wedding rites held in a specified region as exactly Ukrainian. Unfortunately, the wedding rituality as part of spiritual and material culture of the Ukrainians of Lower Volga region has merely been researched, with only several authors such as O. Tereshchenko and A. Minh (19th c.) providing descriptions of wedding ceremonies of Little Russians – immigrants to Saratov province – in their historical-ethnographic works [6; 7; 10]. Analyzing the peculiarities of wedding rites held by the Ukrainians of the northern part of Volgograd region, the author relies on the results of his own ethnographic expeditions to Rudnyansky, Danilovsky, Kotovsky districts (1997 – 2014 [9]), comparing them with the materials of the 19th century.

The main objectives of the research will be, firstly, to define national Ukrainian (typical for all the Ukrainians) and local structural parts of the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians living in Lower Volga region, and secondly, to identify the elements of the wedding ceremony that were borrowed from the neighboring peoples.

Similar to the main ethnic territory, a traditional wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians living in the northern part of Volgograd region of Russia was divided into three stages: pre-wedding, actually wedding, and after-wedding, each of which consisted of a certain cycle of rites. The pre-wedding cycle includes the following ordinances: inquiries (interrogations, intelligence), matchmaking (“zmovyny”, “zhodyny”, “rushnyky”), engagement, “ohliadyny” (“rozhliadyny”, “obzoryny”, “perehliadyny”). “Pre-wedding rites were meant to help two families reach agreement on marriage, obtain the bride and groom’s consent to marry, and solve a number of economic issues concerning the formation of a new family and distribution of the wedding expenses [2, p. 21]”.

Preliminary investigation of the intentions of the bride's parents (inquiries) and engagement were not preserved in the memory of the respondents and did not appear in ethnographic research records of Saratov province of the mid-19th – early 20th centuries as structural elements of the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians of northern Volgograd region. As in many regions of Ukraine, the range of wedding actions performed by the Ukrainians of the northern part of Volgograd region of Russia began with "collusion" or "matchmaking": matchmakers often came without warning and even without prior agreement of the bride and groom. Groom's parents and matchmakers (usually groom's Godparents) came to the house of the bride with bread and salt ("palianytsia"), a towel and vodka. The old-timers could not remember a single case where the matchmakers would return from the bride with a pumpkin. However, everyone was intimidated by them: "She will give you a pumpkin!". Obviously, everyone knew about this custom, but it has lost its relevance over time. It should be added that, according to researchers, the custom of "hanging a pumpkin" ("hanging a squash", "licking a makogon", etc.) started to disappear in the territory of Ukraine in the early 20th century and has remained only as an idiom [2, p. 22]. It should also be mentioned that, in Ukraine, people acting as intermediaries in the process of matchmaking were frequently called the elders. However, in some areas (Kharkiv, Poltava, and Chernihiv regions), they were called matchmakers or "svatach" [2, p. 23]. Thus, the existence of this name in the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians of northern Volgograd region gives us one of the reasons to claim that this area was inhabited by the natives of the above mentioned regions of Ukraine.

The matchmaking rite began with an introductory speech, which was a stable element of the ritual, and a conversation that took place between the matchmaker and the bride's parents. The speech could be slightly altered, which depended on improvisational possibilities of the matchmakers, but verbal formulas of "matching a girl", which were based on allegories, were and still are stable forms, which is evidence to support the fact that wedding customs are very stable in nature and poorly amenable to change :

"We came to you with an offer.

We have a bull of a good breed.

And we were told that you had a nice heifer.

Why don't we intermarry?" (1st variant)

"We were lost on our way.

We have a sheep,

and you have a goat.

How about driving them into a separate barn?" (2nd variant)

During the "collusion", the agreement on when and where the wedding would be held was reached (the first day of the wedding was usually celebrated in the groom's house, the second one – in the bride's house, and the third one – as evolved, or as agreed), as well as the dowry was discussed. All the arrangements having been made, the bride's parents would break the loaf of bread brought by the matchmakers into pieces, and all the participants of the "matchmaking" rite had to eat a piece of bread with salt. Everyone drank a glass of vodka brought by the matchmakers but did not go drunk. Only after that the bride's parents would serve the table with their food (recorded in Tersynka village, Rudnyansky district, from the words of O. Yevseniova, born 1925).

It is necessary to note that the bride was warned not to tell anybody about the matchmaking in advance; this was a means of defensive magic. Only after the collusion had been concluded, the bride could speak about it. This occurred in the form of invitation: after the collusion the groom and bride would go together to visit their neighbors, relatives and invite them to their wedding.

“Ohliadyny” was an interesting structural element of the Ukrainian wedding ceremony in Lower Volga region; this rite took place in the house of both the bride and the groom (after the matchmaking the bride was allowed to visit the groom’s house). She came to the groom’s house in order to take measurements of the beds, windows and doors. According to these standards, she could prepare curtains, “pidzory” (“obboi” – white bed sheets embroidered and laced on the edges, which were put under the blanket so that the lace and embroidery remained visible), and towels for the wedding.

In the house of the bride, “ohliadyny” took place in the evening, the day before the wedding. The Ukrainians of the northern part of Volgograd region preserved this wedding rite calling it “linens redemption”: groom’s relatives (the married ones only) came to the house of the bride to “redeem the linens”, i.e. take the dowry. The dowry would be placed in a separate room so that everybody could see how rich it was, which demonstrated bride’s diligence. An embroidered pillow called “dumochka” was put in the most visible place; the bride’s matchmaker would sit on it with intent to hide the pillow from the groom’s relatives because if it fell into their hands, the dowry would be taken away without compensation. The process of “linens redemption” lasted for a few hours; the groom’s relatives were not allowed into the room where the dowry was placed, for every item of the dowry they needed to give money or vodka; sometimes even fights occurred. It was a kind of theatrical performance in which relatives would take turns to demand repayment for the dowry. Probably, this rite is a clear relic of the ancient rite of purchasing the bride from her family. The groom’s relatives along with the bride’s matchmakers took the redeemed dowry to the house of the groom’s parents, where the bride’s matchmakers would fill the house with the items from the dowry, hang the curtains, make the bed with the linens that the bride had prepared. Then, the game that started with the dowry redemption would continue in the house of the groom. The bride’s matchmakers hung the curtains unevenly, put the pillowcases on the pillows inside out, made different jokes – now, they demanded the groom’s parents to give them vodka. The bride and groom did not participate in everything happening that evening, and, for the ancient guarding considerations, were not supposed to see each other.

The bachelorette party took place in the bride’s house, where all her bridesmaids gathered together, a week (sometimes, two or three days) before the wedding. Under the influence of the Russian-language environment, the Ukrainian name of this wedding rite was forgotten and replaced by the Russian “divyshnyk”, which is used today. The girls would gather together to help the bride prepare the dowry (“prydane”, the name that prevails among the Ukrainians of the northern Volgograd region is another evidence of the influence of the Russian-language environment), and sing a lot (“till the star appeared”). Such components of the structure of the Ukrainian bachelorette party in the given region as “untwisting the braid”, “putting on the wreath”, “seating the bride and groom”, etc. did not survive, but the action itself took place mainly in the bride's house and symbolized her farewell to

maidenhood. It should be added that nowadays this pre-wedding rite has transformed into a festive dinner for the bride and her girlfriends, which occurs a few days or the day before the wedding.

The loaf ceremony, a complex ritual of manufacturing and distribution of the wedding loaf and cookies, which included a number of rites that were necessarily accompanied by wedding songs, has not survived in the structure of the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians living in Lower Volga region. However, the ritual bread (its numerous and various kinds) with its magical multifaceted semantics takes the most honorable place in the Ukrainian wedding of the northern part of Volgograd region.

The main kind of ceremonial used at the Ukrainian wedding, similar to the main ethnic territory, was “korovai”, which was baked in both the groom’s and bride’s families until the middle of the 20th century. In the late 20th century, when the wedding ceremony was reduced to one (sometimes, two) days, only one wedding loaf would be baked, a high round loaf made of yeast pastry and decorated with dough flowers, guelder (or rowan), etc. Today, the loaf is a mandatory symbol of the wedding in Ukrainian villages of Volgograd region that acts mostly as part of wedding entourage; over time, ceremonial distribution of the loaf has been replaced with the distribution of the wedding cake.

According to old-timers, in some villages, there was another kind of festive wedding bread, “lezhyn” (“a big fancy loaf looking like an Easter cake”, recorded in Osychky village, Rudnyansky district, from the words of M. Rybianchenko, born 1939). According to research, this was a name used in Chernihiv, Poltava regions and in some districts of Kyiv region for ceremonial oblong white bread decorated with cones. The bride brought this loaf to the groom’s house, kept it in the closet until the next morning and then handed the pieces of this bread and some honey out to children [2, p. 81]. Thus, it is possible that immigrants from these regions of Ukraine brought this kind of wedding bread along to Lower Volga region, where it remained in a wedding ceremony of the 1970s under a separate name, but without saving its functions (the bread that was placed in the headboard of the young couple).

One characteristic feature of the Ukrainian wedding of the northern part of Volgograd region is baking “cones”, muffins made of pastry in the form of pine cones (“A strip of dough was rolled out, with one of its sides cut in the shape of claws, then this strip was rolled and baked in the oven. The result was a “cone” with a curly top” (recorded in Ilmen village, Rudnyansky district, from the words of P. Bondarenko, born 1935). “Cones” are still baked in large numbers only at weddings in all the Ukrainian settlements of Rudnyansky and Danylivsky districts of Volgograd region. In some villages, “cones” were given to each of the guests who came to the wedding, while the main matchmaker got a special “big horned bump” (recorded in Ilmen and Osychky villages, Rudnyansky district, from the words of M. Statsenko, born 1933, N. Plushenko, born 1928, and I. Boroday, born 1941).

As for the wedding attire of the newly wedded couple, it has to be noted that Ukrainian national colors stopped being used in groom’s attire in the mid-1960s. However, the bride’s dress still included a bridal wreath with large colored paper (homemade) or artificial (factory) flowers, while those who were not rich made a wreath from small multi-colored flowers. D. Korovushkyn stresses that, in Russia, Ukrainian women’s headdress enjoyed great semantic significance and, for that reason, existed for decades, beginning to disappear

only in the middle of the 20th century. Remaining a national and symbolic element of the costume, the only functional feature Ukrainian headdresses had in common with the Russian ones was shared factory or industrial origin [4, p. 12].

In the middle of the 20th century, colored ribbons were rarely worn by brides; they were replaced with the veil, which was often made from ordinary gauze. However, some Ukrainian villages of southern Volgograd region settled in the 1940-50s added long colored ribbons to the bridal wreath of colorful flowers until the 1970s. This wedding headdress of the bride was called "velien" or "velion": the veil formed a ruffle over the bride's face, the wreath of flowers was placed behind it on the head, and then the veil was tied with a red ribbon or a ribbon rose behind the wreath (recorded in Svitlyi Yar village, Svitloyarsky district, from the words of G. Pasechnik, born 1943). It should be added that in the Ukrainian village of Bili Prudy (Danylivsky district, the area of Ukrainian settlement of the early 20th c.) the women's wedding headdress had the same semantic significance as the rest of the attire and long remained a national and symbolic element. According to respondents, until the mid-20th century, the Ukrainian national costume acted as a wedding dress. In the summer of 2010, we have found and photographed a Ukrainian embroidered wedding shirt, dress, apron and bodice, which were worn by one of the female residents of the village in 1956 (recorded in Bili Prudy village, from the words of L. Klymenko, born 1946).

Without dwelling on the first day of the Ukrainian wedding ceremony in Lower Volga region, which is mostly similar to the one in Central Ukraine, we will talk about some special wedding rites. Until the 1950s, at the end of the first day of the wedding the rite called "scrubbing the oven" was performed in some villages, which was a kind of test for the young wife: "She would use tongs to scrub the oven so that everyone could check how hard-working she was, whether or not she would be able to finish the job by the dawn." "In the 1950-s, my father, Alimpiii, attended one wedding; he used tongs to "scrub" all the walls in the matchmakers' house; they were shocked as Russians did not have such a custom. Dad laughed like little Audrey, recalling this incident "(recorded in Ilmen village, Rudnyansky district, and Bili Prudy village, Danylivsky district, from the words of M. Statsenko, born 1933, and Y. Goncharov, born 1937). In our opinion, this wedding ritual not only demonstrated decency of the young wife, but also symbolized wife's joining the family of her husband (it is no coincidence that the oven was the place where the ritual took place, for it was the most important place in the house to the villager and possessed multifaceted magical semantics). This rite has not survived as part of the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians of Volgograd region.

Wedding performances of the second day of the wedding (the particular name of this day is unknown) started with a large group of singing and dancing people (consisting mostly of the wife's relatives) dressed as gypsies, devils, and two of them necessarily as husband and wife coming to the husband's home to "look for the newly wedded couple". Meanwhile, the real couple were hiding somewhere in the house or in the yard; the crowd had to find them and solemnly walk them to the house of the wife, where the celebration continued. "Searching for the couple" was a very cheerful and hustling rite: the crowd tried to make the greatest mess possible in the yard of the husband and demanded vodka for everything. It is necessary to emphasize that this custom is part of the final phase of the wedding ritual,

namely "the cycle of carnival and comic rites that parody wedding ceremonies and are recorded on the broad space of Ukrainian ethnic lands". According to A. Kurochkin, "bacchanalian and carnival coloring of the scenes comes from the ancient notion that jokes (often obscene) cause laughter, which promotes fertility" [5, p. 45]. Thus, a mandatory component of the wedding rites performed at the husband's home, i.e. participation of the people dressed as traditional characters (false couple, gypsies, doctor, devil, etc.), which was common almost all over Ukraine, is to this day one of the racy constituents of the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians of northern Volgograd region.

Until the end of the 1960s, once the crowd had found the couple, the rite called "hammering the stake" was performed: a 50-centimeter-long wooden stake was hammered deep into the land at the threshold of the husband's house by the husband himself and then all the rest of male volunteers from his family (recorded in Bili Prudy village, Danylivsky district, and Rudnia town, from the words of Y. Goncharov, born 1937, V. Goncharov, born 1947). According to informants, it symbolized the fact that the wife came to the house and the family for good, but perhaps it was also a rudimentary remnant of the ancient wedding rite of testing the husband's "power". We are convinced that this ritual also possesses explicit erotic content and can be classified (according to the classification by O. Kurochkin) as wedding games related to imitation of processes of cultivating crops: "all of them, in terms of semantics, are parallel metaphors of coitus. Using the ethnographic material ... we notice how the agricultural and erotic code of ritual texts is gradually being separated from the mythological layer of the earth, becoming the "technological and erotic" code. Its dramatic scenario is also based on associative convergence of repetitive industrial motions with the rhythms of intercourse...". [5, p. 50]

Therefore, we can state that this phallic ritual used to be a kind of hint of the former ritual of defloration, but influenced by historical conditions, it changed its semantic essence. Ancient semantics of this rite is also confirmed by the fact that in some villages, as "the stake was being hammered", "the pots were being broken" around, as a sign of "the young wife having become a woman" (recorded in Ilmen village, Rudnyansky district, from the words of Y. Bystrytska, born 1932). Even the shape of the wooden "stake" and the pots that are split into two halves resemble human genitals. It should be added that breaking the pot next to the "stake" was probably another way to demonstrate "honesty" of the wife, which is stressed by A. Baburin, emphasizing the ubiquity of such actions as beating pots and breaking various items as a sign of virginity of the wife among East Slavic peoples [1, p. 85]. By the way, even today, at the beginning of the second day of the wedding, all the guests and mummers get red or pink paper flowers pinned to their shirts. This is probably a relic of ancient ritual demonstrating a sign of virginity of the bride to all the guests, combined with the amended rite of sewing flowers to the shirts of the groom and his best men by the bridesmaids.

Thus, the ethnographic feature of the Ukrainian wedding of the northern part of Volgograd region is the preserved ritual performed at the end of the second day of the wedding that is called "Pots". Starting from the 1960s, this rite became a ritual test for the young wife, whose goal was to emphasize the qualities of a good hostess. During the rite, husband's mother or godmother solemnly drops several clay pots or bowls on the floor, and if the first pot or bowl is not broken into shards, it is considered a bad sign, i.e. the marriage

will not survive. Once the pots have been broken, all the guests begin to dance on them and throw money into these shards (in the village of Bili Prudy, they would also smash pumpkins into these shards to create more mess for the wife to deal with). The wife was supposed to clean up the mess and collect the money as quickly as possible, while the people kept on dancing (recorded in Bili Prudy village, Danylivsky district, and Rudnia town, from the words of Y. Goncharov, born 1937, V. Goncharov, born 1947, L. Goncharova, born 1946, and N. Statsenko, born 1957).

Today, this ritual has changed even more: plates are broken instead of pots; the couple clean the mess and gather the money together, with the one having collected more money being the head of the family. Breaking pots is mentioned by A. Tereshchenko and O. Minh; O. Minh states that this custom was borrowed by the Ukrainian immigrants from the Russians of Saratov province [7, p. 118; 10, p. 362], although we have not found any evidence of the existence of this ritual in Russian villages of northern Volgograd region.

In addition, it is necessary to draw a parallel with the maternity-baptismal rite of "dropping the porridge," which was recorded by researchers in many parts of Ukraine. Porridge is the most common embodiment of fate in Ukrainian family and wedding rituals. Moreover, as observed by A. Toporkov and A. Baburin, the ways porridge is treated in both ceremonies coincide not only in terms of general structure and content, but also details, whose sustainability proves their high ritual significance [1, p. 83]. Baptismal and wedding porridge are made from similar products, are served as the last course, and then the pot is broken. In both rituals, shards are associated with children and breaking the pot - with the ritual way of granting destiny. A. Baburin adds that the choice of the pot to serve this purpose is not reasoned by its content only, but also the fact that it embodies the idea of integrity, and its breaking is irreversible and likely in nature (cf. divination: will be broken / will not be broken, if so, how many parts) [1, p. 83]. Thus, the ancient rite of "breaking the pots" has eventually obtained another semantics, but has not changed its name and place (at the end of the wedding ceremony), and is an integral component of the wedding cycle in Ukrainian villages of the northwest of Volgograd region.

On the third day of the wedding, the mummies went to visit the guests of the wedding; they sang songs, made noise, performed jokes and collected one chicken from each yard, all of which were then cooked and served at the wedding table (usually with homemade noodles; recorded in Yahidne village, Rudnyansky district, from the words of M. Koren, born 1957). Although there is no particular name for the third day of the wedding that would be preserved in the memory of Ukrainian residents of Volgograd region, the custom itself to dress up and prepare chicken dishes during the second and third days of the wedding does exist. According to the research conducted by V. Borysenko, the custom to cook chicken was widespread in the Central region of Ukraine - the region where the migration flows to the Lower Volga region were the largest. In Slavic rituals, chicken and eggs are close to wheat (grain) in value, symbolizing fertility and rebirth of life [2, p. 100]. So, cooking chicken dishes during the third day of the wedding is part of wedding rites and has magical semantics aimed at enhancing reproduction of the family.

Today, unfortunately, due to alien ethnic environment in the Ukrainian villages of Volgograd region, the majority of ritual wedding songs, many examples of which were

introduced by O. Tereshchenko [10], have not survived. The main reason lies in remoteness of immigrants from the main ethnic territory and consistent implementation of active policy of russifying non-Russian-language ethnic groups, which led to the levelling of national cultures, the loss of national roots, especially among the younger generation. Thus, nowadays, wedding songs are mostly everyday songs: popular Ukrainian folk songs, literary, lyrical everyday songs, such as "Nese Halia vodu", "Ty zh mene pidmanula", "Nich yaka misiachna", "Tsvite teren", "Oi, u zelenomu sadu", "Yikhaly kozaky iz Donu dodomu", "Byla mene maty", "Posiiala ohirochky", "Yak sluzhyv ia v pana", "Na horodi verba riasna", etc.

Thus, the wedding of the Ukrainians of Volgograd region has structural parts that are typical for the whole territory of Ukraine: matchmaking, preparation of wedding bread (cones, loaves, "lezhyn"), the pre-wedding youth event (bachelorette party), the wedding itself, seating the couple (splitting the loaf, giving presents to the newly wedded couple) covering the wife, the rites of the wife's joining a new family, etc. However, many years of residence in a foreign-language environment (although an allied one) has brought many changes into the Ukrainian wedding ceremony: the names of certain rites have changed names, some of the rites have acquired another meaning; the first day of the wedding is now celebrated in the husband's house, following the Russian tradition. Over time, influenced by such factors as urbanization, industrialization, spreading of literacy, convergence of folk and professional arts and rapid development of the means of mass communication, many of the wedding attributes and guarding ceremonies mentioned by the researchers of the 19th century (such as the wedding sword, the wedding chicken, the wreath of multicoloured flowers and the coloured cap for the bride, the use of amulets made of plants (tarragon, mint, wheat), redemption of the groom's hat, the groom's train moving through fire, covering the bride, etc.) have disappeared.

Thus, the structural outline of the Ukrainian wedding in Lower Volga region of the twentieth century underwent characteristic changes that took place in motherly Ukraine starting from the late 20th century (the disappearance / merger of some phases of the wedding ceremony, the reduction of certain wedding rituals, the growth ("swelling") of entertaining wedding ceremonies; transformation of functional load of the rites (shifting the focus from magic and legal functions to entertainment and gaming ones in today's wedding)). However, the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians of Volgograd region as ethno-cultural phenomenon, during which certain transmission of ethnocultural information between the generations takes place, which ensures the succession of identity of the Lower Volga branch of the Ukrainian ethnos, is an integral part of traditional household culture of the Ukrainian people and extremely valuable cultural heritage that deserves further in-depth historical-ethnographic and cultural research.

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