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ЖАҢА ЖӘНЕ
ҚАЗІРГІ ЗАМАН ТАРИХЫ

NEW AND MODERN
HISTORY

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**ABOUT THE GANJA POPULATION'S KIZSECHME,
ELCHILIK CUSTOMS AND ENGAGEMENT CEREMONY**

Abstract. The article is devoted to the ethnological study of the (kızsechme- bride choosing, elchilik (the girl's request to her family to marry the chosen bride to the family's son) customs and engagement ceremony, which constitute an important aspect of family life in the city of Ganja, one of the oldest cities in Azerbaijan, distinguished by its rich material and spiritual culture, customs and traditions, which gave the world such poetry and art geniuses and masters as Abullula, Mahsati, Nizami, Mirza Shafi Vazeh, etc., as well as several commanders in the person of Javad Khan. This article provides extensive information on who previously selected girls for the boys who were going to get married, why the poor did not go as elchilik to the doors of wealthy families, and the main reasons for this. At the same time, it is said that a woman called a "go-between" is appointed for the chosen girl, and that she visits the girl several times under certain pretexts to collect information (for example, the girl's character, work skills, cleanliness, whether she is defective, hospitality, relationship with her siblings, etc.). The article extensively comments on issues such as who participates in the first and second-third emissaries, bringing sweet tea to the table after the girl's family answers "yes" to the emissaries, and not marrying off the younger ones when the older brother or sister is present.

Another point followed in the article is the process after the small and large engagement ceremonies. According to the collected materials, a few days after the balga (small engagement ceremony), the boy's house would take 10-15 relatives and a red khoncha, jewelry, and a kelaghayi. This was called "taking the balga." The boy's house would cover the cost of meat, food, and other products to be used in the balga ceremony. Wealthy families would also hold an engagement ceremony after the balga. Unlike the balga, more guests would attend the engagement ceremony. The boy's house would also pay for the food and drink at this ceremony.

Keywords: Ganja, population, girl's choice, balga, engagement ceremony.

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**Гянджа халқының қыз таңдау,
елші жіберу дәстүрлері және құдалық рәсімі**

Аңдатпа. Мақала Әзербайжанның ең көне қалаларының бірі—Гянджадағы (қыз таңдау – kizsechme, елшілік – elchilik (қыздың отбасынан оны ұлына қалыңдық ретінде алуға рұқсат сұрау)) әдет-ғұрыптары мен құдалық рәсімін этнологиялық тұрғыдан зерттеуге арналған. Гянджа өзінің бай материалдық және рухани мәдениетімен, дәстүрлерімен ерекшеленеді және әлемге Абулла, Махсати, Низами, Мирза Шафи Вазех сияқты ақындар мен өнер майталмандарын, сондай-ақ Жавад хан сияқты бірнеше әскери қолбасшыларды сыйлаған қала. Бұл мақалада бұрын жігіттер үшін қыздарды кім таңдағаны, неге кедейлер дәулетті отбасылардың есігін қағып елшілік жібермегені және осының негізгі себептері туралы кеңінен ақпарат беріледі. Сонымен қатар, таңдалған қызға «делдал» деп аталатын әйел тағайындалатыны және ол әртүрлі сылтаулармен қызға бірнеше рет барып, оның мінез-құлқы, еңбек дағдылары, тазалығы, денсаулығы, қонақжайлылығы, бауырларымен қарым-қатынасы туралы ақпарат жинайтыны айтылған.

Мақалада сондай-ақ бірінші және екінші-үшінші елшілерге кім қатысатыны, қыздың отбасы елшілерге «иә» деп жауап бергеннен кейін дастарханға тәтті шай әкелінуі, үлкен аға немесе апай тұрғанда кіші бауырларды үйлендірмеу туралы мәселелер кеңінен талқыланады.

Мақалада қарастырылған тағы бір маңызды аспект—құдалық рәсімінен кейінгі процестер. Жиналған материалдарға сәйкес, шағын құдалық рәсімінен (balga) бірнеше күн өткен соң, жігіттің отбасы 10-15 туыстарын алып, қыздың үйіне қызыл қонша, зергерлік бұйымдар және келегай апарған. Бұл «balga алу» деп аталған. Сондай-ақ, жігіттің отбасы balga рәсіміне пайдаланылатын ет, азық-түлік және басқа да өнімдердің шығынын көтерген. Дәулетті отбасылар balga рәсімінен кейін үлкен құдалық рәсімін өткізген. Balga рәсімінен айырмашылығы, құдалыққа көбірек қонақтар келген. Бұл рәсімде де жігіттің отбасы тамақ пен сусындардың шығынын өз мойнына алған.

Түйін сөздер: Гянджа, халық, қыз таңдау, құдалық рәсімі, этнография.

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Introduction

The customs of “girl selection”, “elchilik” and “engagement” have a special place in the family life of the Ganja population. According to the information we received, boys would see girls mainly in the city baths, at certain holidays and ceremonies, choose them, and like them. Let us also say that even in ancient times, there is information that boys themselves carried out the custom of girl selection among the Turks [Короглы, 1976:114,129]. Nevertheless, in all regions of Azerbaijan, and especially in Ganja, this work was mainly done by the aunts, aunts, and older sisters of the boy to be married.

According to the information we received and the literature, a mother who wanted to marry her son would invite her sister-in-law and sister to her house and instruct them to “find a beautiful girl for her son” [Ganjabasarın ad-anenali, 2022:122]. When choosing a girl, the identity of her lineage and parents would be of particular interest. As they say, women who “sit hard and come” and daughters of influential men were preferred. Undoubtedly, the popular saying “look at the side and buy the diaper, look at the mother and buy the daughter” or “the one who comes from the back of a man is better” was also used in this regard [Aliyev, 2012:40].

According to the information we have obtained from the people of Ganja and the ethnographic literature, in the past, the rich did not choose girls from the poor class [Babaeva, 1964:177]. It was very rare for poor girls to be liked and chosen by the rich. This rare event would happen when the girl from the poor family was extremely beautiful. In turn, the poor boys would not “look at the girls of the rich as customers”. Because it was unthinkable for the poor and the rich to form a kinship relationship. That is why the poor would choose the girl from the family that suited them, relying on proverbs such as “what

is a scoundrel doing in the reserve” and “stretch your legs under your blanket” [Aliyev, 2012:40]. The boys who turned a blind eye to everything and fell in love with the daughter of a rich man, who went out of their way for their love, demanded so many “headpieces” or other things that it was impossible to give them. The opposite of what we have said is shown by the list of things sent to him by Mirza Bey, the man of Ashug Ali of Gizilvang, who chose Basti Khanum, the daughter of Kokhan of Goychali Niftali, who was considered one of the famous beys of the 19th century, as his wife:

Mirzə Bəylər, xətrin məndən qalmasın,
Bu adətnən elin işin istərəm.
Əbrudan, ətlasdan, tirmədən, şaldan,
Cəmi parçaların başın istərəm.
İki dəvə gətir yanında köşək,
Gələn töhfələr də olduqca qəşəng.
Ətliyinə gətir iyirmi erkək,
Kabab çəkmək üçün şişin istərəm.
Başlığına gətir üçcə min manat,
Cüt qızıl bilərzik, həm qızıl saat.
“Hə” deməsinə iki köhlən at,
İpək heyvə yəhər qaşın istərəm.
Niftaliyam, budur sözümlün öyü,
Çağırnam toyuma rəyyəti, bəyi.
Əlli put yağ gətir, doxsan put düyü,
El yeməyə yağlı aşın istərəm [Murovdağlı, 14 aprel 2007].

Let us also say that the issues mentioned above are among the customs that existed until the 50s and 60s of the 20th century. Now the issue of choosing and liking a girl is carried out by the boy and the girl themselves.

Material and method

In conducting the research, ethnological literature and field materials, as well as the knowledge

we gained through our personal observations, were used. In fulfilling the task set, a scientific-theoretical, objective, systematic approach to the work, historical-comparative-critical analysis, descriptive method were taken as the basis and a generalized conclusion was drawn.

Discussion

After the performance of the "girl selection" custom, preparations for the embassy were made. On this occasion, the elders-white-bearers were consulted, and the "experts" were informed about the identity, lineage and nobility of the girl they liked. It was after their blessing that the activity began.

According to the residents of Ganja, as in other parts of Azerbaijan, a eloquent woman called an "intermediary" or "helper" would be sent to visit the girl chosen for the boy, to learn about her character, work skills, cleanliness, hospitality, health, relationship with her older or younger siblings, and also to learn about the financial situation of her family. The "intermediary" would visit the girl's family under a certain pretext and after several visits, would discuss the matter with the girl's mother. The girl's mother would say, "Let me talk to the man of the house, if necessary, I will send a message." After that, the girl's house would also collect information about the identity of the boy's parents, his character, height, behavior, work capacity, and relationship with relatives and neighbors. If the character of the boy's side, this or that feature, satisfied the girl's family, then they would say, "Go and tell the boy's family to send people," when the intermediary next arrived. After this message from the girl's family, the boy's mother, aunt, and aunt would go to the embassy in the evening. However, at this stage of the embassy, the issue would not be resolved positively: "Go and send your elders and white men, let's see who wants our daughter, and which marriage center we should give her to," they would say. The second stage of the embassy was already extensive: the elders and white men of the generation, the boy's parents, uncle, aunt, etc. At the same time, the elders and white men of the girl's side, their parents, uncles, and aunts participated in this embassy. After the elder of the boy's side explained the purpose of their visit with eloquent words and speech (since information about the boy had been gathered beforehand and his characteristics satisfied the girl's family), the people of the girl's side would nod their heads in agreement

and say, "May they be happy." After this, tea and sugar cubes were brought to the table in a tray. The tea was sweetened and after a sip was taken, a blessing was given.

Let us also say that using eloquent expressions and saying heartwarming words in an embassy has existed since ancient times. We see a clear example of this in Dede Gorgud's appeal to Deli Garjar for Banuchicek:

Qarşı yatan qara tağını aşmağa gəlmişəm.
Aqındılı görüklü suyını keçməgə gəlmişəm.
Gen ətəginə, tar koltuğına qısılmağa gəlmişəm.
Tənrinin buyrugüilə, peyğəmbərin qövlülə
Aydan arı, gündən görkli qız qardaşın Banıçıçəgi
Bamsı Beyrəgə dileməgə gəlmişəm
[Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud, 1988:56].

Even if the girl who did not get a "ha-yes" brought tea to the table, she would not be touched. According to ethnographic literature and the words of the elderly residents of Ganja, as in the neighboring provinces of Gazakh-Aghstafa, parents who did not want to give their daughters to the coming ambassadors here would give various excuses. For example, they would say that they intended to marry their daughter to the son of one of their close relatives and would ask them not to come to the embassy next time [Salehov, 1995:54]. As a result, the eloquent women of the boy's house would sometimes be upset when they did not receive a "yes" for the girl they had spoken to. Over time, this sadness was reflected in the bayati:

Əzizim buda məni,
Ağac al, buda məni.
Gör nə günə qalmışam,
Bəyənmir bu da məni?!

Yola, izə gəlmərəm,
Durub, dizə gəlmərəm.
Nə çoxdu qız qapısı,
Bir də sizə gəlmərəm.

Let us also say that sending a eloquent woman as an ambassador for a girl was a practice among the Yakuts [Pavlinov, 1929:98], as well as among the Siberian and Altai Turks [Семейная обрядность, 1980:15-36].

According to the information we received, sometimes when the girl did not want to give up, the ambassadors did not give up, they would "knock

on” the girl’s door several times, declaring that they would take her by force or pleasure. There were even those who spoke to the young men in the language of “dava” in order to get the girl. This is also shown by the following two examples of bayatı:

Əzizim çağır məni,
Qoy durum sağır məni.
Fələk çox danışdırıb,
Lal-dinməz, çağır məni.

Əzizinəm baxaram,
Dərya olub axaram.
Bu qızı verməseniz,
Yeri, göyü yaxaram.

It would be appropriate to mention one subtle point here. According to the customs of the Azerbaijani Turks, insulting or expelling ambassadors was considered a ridiculous act. The ambassadors would be welcomed, listened to, not interrupted, and even if they did not answer “yes”, they would respectfully send them on their way.

Ethnographic materials collected from city dwellers show that members of the lower age group were not married off until an older brother or sister had married. Otherwise, the older brother or sister would have been considered “defective” (e.g., disabled – mute, deaf, blind, insane, etc.). Younger people would marry before the older ones only for excusable reasons. This approach was also typical for the Garayazi-Borchali-Baskechid-Bolus-Garachop Turks living in neighboring Georgia [Aliyev, 2012:43-44]. The existing feature we have mentioned was also of great importance for Abkhaz families. This is also indicated by information in the literature. It says: “Two sisters and two brothers from the Amichba family in Sukhumi ... helped me a lot in collecting material. These intellectuals, who had received university education, understood well the importance of the accuracy of the information they provided. Although these girls, who had many admirers, were over forty years old, they refused to get married until their older brothers got married. According to Abkhaz customs, older brothers and sisters should get married first. According to the Amichba sisters, late marriage cannot cause any problems in the upbringing of children.

For example, they recalled the marriages of two of their aunts. Their aunt, Dzhug, was fifty when she married seventy-year-old Tamshuk Ashula. This

was the first marriage for both of them. They have two sons. Both the aunt and her husband are still alive. The second aunt, Dzab, was fifty when she married seventy-year-old Petro Kanba two years later. They have a son and a daughter. The children are over twenty years old. The parents are also healthy. There is an Abkhaz proverb: “Children from the elders are wise” [Benet, 1989:78].

Familiarity with ethnographic literature shows that the custom of embassy-holding in Ganja was the same as that of other Turkic peoples – Kazakhs [Аргынбаев, 1974:70], Kyrgyz [Абрамзон, 1971:280-281], East Turkestan [Катанов, 1900:142-146], West Siberian Tatars [Валеев, 1972:98-100], Central Asian peoples [Лобачева, 1978:144-147], Bashkirs [Руденко, 1955:259-260] and other Caucasian Turks [Гаджиева, 1990:167].

After the performance of the bride-choice and ambassadorial customs, the “belge” or “small engagement” ceremony, which the people of Ganja attached great importance to, prepared for and celebrated with great enthusiasm, was held. During the belge, 10-15 close people from the boy’s side would go to the girl’s house. During this procession, the “lucky ring”, “kelagay”, “kelle gand”, other sweets and a ram would be taken for the girl. The book, which provides very brief and scanty information about some of the customs and traditions of Ganja, states that animals were slaughtered and delicious dishes were cooked during the ceremony in question. Each family tried to set a table worthy of its name and organize a gathering within its means.

The boy’s house was welcomed with pomp. As soon as they entered the door, they were blessed and both parties greeted each other with kindness. The guests were seated at the top. Before the assembly began, one of the closest men of the boy would put a ring on the girl’s finger and put a kelaghai on her shoulder [Ganjabasarın ad-anenaları, 2022:124].

Ethnographic literature contains information that is considered typical for the entire population of the Western region. It says that the owners of the house would break the skulls brought by the male side in the “belge” and send them to the room where the women gathered through the girl. The girl would then throw the skulls into cups filled with tea and place them in front of them. After that, the relatives of both sides would congratulate each other [Salehov, 1995:54].

Research shows that from the day after the belga, the girl who was “named” had to wear a

kelaghay and a veil when she went out of the house [Geybullayev, 1994:167]. This meant that she already belonged to someone else, that she was engaged. Moreover, after the belga ceremony, a kinship relationship was established between the boy and the girl. As in various ethnographic regions of Azerbaijan, as well as among the Azerbaijani-Turks of Georgia [Aliyev, 2012:45-46], in Ganja, the people connected by kinship were expressed with special terms. The boy's relatives called the girl "gelin". The girl's and the boy's parents called each other "guda". The girl called the boy's father "kayınata", her mother "kayınan", her brother "kayın", her sister "baldız", and her brother's wife "elti". The girl's parents addressed the boy as "küreken", and his brother as "yezne".

According to the collected ethnographic materials, in Ganja, the "big engagement" ceremony was celebrated more lavishly. Unlike in Belga, the number of guests at the engagement ceremony was large. During this ceremony, the groom would inform his relatives, neighbors, and other people he knew close to him in advance that the engagement would take place on such and such a day of the month. That is, it was indicated that "relatives and neighbors should also prepare for the engagement, and those closer to him should even decorate the "khoncha" [Javadov, 1993:92].

A large cave was built in the yard for the engagement ceremony. The inside of the cave was decorated, and a carpet was laid on the floor. At least 40-50 people from both sides would participate in the ceremony. As in other parts of Azerbaijan, as well as among our compatriots living beyond its modern borders, in Ganja on the engagement day the girl would be brought an "eyebrow ring", "earrings", "bracelet", "necklace", a colorful "pal-paltar", as well as khonchas filled with fruits and sweets [Aliyev, 2012:46], as well as "a gold-stitched tsek, gold headscarves, a carpet" [Ganjabasarın adet-anenaları, 2022:125], etc.

The engagement ring differed from other rings in its shape. Thus, "the bottom of the engagement ring was flat, and the top was convex, and it was also relatively thick and heavy. Among the people, the engagement ring was considered a symbol of love, spiritual affection and commitment. The engagement ring was worn on the "bride's finger" of the left hand [Mustafayev, 1977:98]. The bride's finger was sometimes called the "engagement finger" or "treasure finger".

According to the residents of Ganja, as in most regions of Azerbaijan, the boy's house would provide the meat (3-4 male goats), food, and other products to be used in the engagement. The boys sent to the bride's house would have a red kelaghay tied to their horns, and sweets would be hung on a string around their necks. Those who took the meat and food to the bride's house would be given various gifts.

Shortly after the engagement, the bride's family would return the brought khoncha trays to the groom's house. This work was done by the bride's aunt. This was called "gabqaytarma" among the population. Literature and ethnographic materials show that in Ganja, all the trays were filled to the extent possible. Usually, they would leave clothes for the groom, his father, his mother, and in general, for his closest relatives. For example: a robe, cloth, kelaghay for women, and shirts, socks, scarves, etc. for men. [Ganjabasarın adət-ənələri, 2022:126].

The engagement period of a boy and a girl sometimes lasted several, even seven years. There were certain reasons for this. The information we get from the fairy tale "The Generous Butcher" recorded in Ganja also completes our idea: "Butcher Ahmed had a cousin. They had been engaged for seven years. Since both of their parents had died, they could not hold their weddings in mourning" [Ganja Folklore Anthology, 2003:239].

As in all parts of Azerbaijan, during the Novruz holiday, a portion was brought for the girl in Ganja: baklava, gogal, badamura, nuts, khonchas filled with various sweets, a lamb with a red ribbon tied around its neck, etc. It was of this kind.

The engaged girl was also sent various gifts on the Eid al-Adha. In a book that contains some of the customs and traditions of Ganja, we come across the following information: "They buy a sheep for the sacrifice and decorate it beautifully. They tie red chaps on its legs, a red ribbon or tassel on its horns, and a red belt around its waist. Some even decorate the sheep with henna.

Early in the morning on the day of the holiday, a close person from the groom's house takes the decorated sheep to the girl's house. The groom's mother gives gifts of scarves, socks, shirts, etc. to the driver of the car carrying the sacrifice sheep and the boy next to him. In the girl's house, they welcome those who bring the sacrifice, and after slaughtering the sheep, they wrap one of its legs (para shaqqa) in red cloth and send it to the boy's house" [Ganjabasarın ad-anenaları, 2022:126-127].

According to the elderly residents of Ganja, bringing gifts to the engaged girl on holidays has been a tradition for a long time and continues to this day.

H. Sarabski wrote that during the summer, spring, autumn holidays, and Novruz holidays, they would buy and send a festive dress for the girl, fresh fruit, and nuts, as well as a sheep for the Kurban holiday. It was the duty of the boy's house to buy and send her clothes as long as the girl was in her father's house [Sarabski, 1958:100].

According to the information we received, while the engaged girl was in her father's house, the boys would often visit her. These visits were considered a sign of respect for the girl who would become a bride.

Conclusion

The research shows that significant changes have occurred in the customs of "girl selection", "elchilik" and "belge" and "nishan" ceremonies, which are important aspects of family life in Ganja. Thus, now, not in baths or at the fountain, but at wedding ceremonies, folk festivals, schools, institutes, and workplaces, the boys themselves see and choose girls and then inform their parents about it. After that, the parents fulfill their duties and, as before, go as messengers with the participation of elders and elders and betroth the young people. And engagement ceremonies, attended by relatives, neighbors, friends, and other close people, are celebrated not in tents, but in wedding palaces.

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