

*The Life Cycle Rites of the Tatars-krjasheny: Sociocultural Characteristics
(the 20th Century)*

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Our paper is devoted to the life cycle rites of the Tatars-krjasheny living in Russia, in the Volga region. These rites are the integral attributes of symbolization for the most important events in daily life of people: birth, reaching of manhood, marriage and death. Necessity of consideration of this theme is caused by two reasons: firstly, analysis of the life cycle rites in the context of common cultural experience allows to express an ethnic and confessional originality of any people; secondly, the study of this or that tradition suggests finding out of a cultural resource, innovations for a developing society. As the life cycle rites are closely intertwined with daily life of people, it reflects the moral of society. Its dark oblivion may be perceived not as refusal of the past, but as renunciation of ethnic identity. The life cycle rites which are called transitional in the scientific literature serve as keepers of supreme goals, which are wider and more considerable, than life space, and have other ontological bases. Its value is not pressing need but symbolism. The rites are performed without distinction of that it is necessary to all practical purposes. The ceremonial action has a special force, severity, intensity that is not an exterior form but an appreciably significant event for its participants. Also timeliness of research of the life cycle rites of the Tatars-krjasheny is defined by that it is as a connecting bridge between traditional culture and modernity, provides continuity of generations.

As a whole the essence and functions of the life cycle rites became a subject of studying of historians, ethnographers, anthropologists, philosophers. At that, interest to this phenomenon of culture has arisen for a long time. So, mention of it in the Old Russian annals of the beginning of the 12th century “The Tale of Bygone Years” indicates that essential role, which it had in folk world outlook. The beginning of scientific studying of the life cycle rites usually is connected with a name of the German philosopher of the second half of the 19th century Wilhelm Mannhardt. In the 20th century the life cycle rites were investigated by such outstanding scientists as Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. In particular, Arnold van Gennep classifies it as rites performed at a birth, puberty rites, a marriage and a death of a man. He calls rites of passage and marriage rites transitional that supposes change of the status of their participants. As van Gennep considers, maternity and funeral rites don't have this quality [3]. However, our transcultural researches of the life cycle rites show that various ethnoses perceive a birth and a death of a man as change of his status, the transit from one status to another. Theoretically this thesis has been already proved by V. Turner where these rites mean increase of the status [9].

Furthermore, it is brightly expressed only two “extreme”, “boundary” stages in the life cycle of a man: a birth and a death. All the rest inherent in existence of the individual has a minor character as used herein. Compare: a marriage, a birth of children, a reassignment, an ordination, a retirement and other events can be or can not be in the life cycle of a man. To our opinion, it is defined by dynamics of culture, its national characteristics. So, there was no the concept of childhood in the European Middle Ages, children were «small adults», wore garments for grown-ups, early started to work and create alliances by marriage. Literature and artistic paintings of that epoch serve here as a confirmation. Remember W. Shakespeare's plays, his “Romeo and Juliet” in particular where there is such dialogue between Capulet and Paris:

“Capulet. But saying o'er what I have said before:
My child is yet a stranger in the world,
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years...
Paris. Younger than she are happy mothers made” [11, pp. 38-39].

Hence, a girl of thirteen had been already considered as a bride in the Middle Ages. Only few artists as Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci, for example, represented the baby Jesus Christ and angels as children, not “small adults”. At bottom their artistic endeavor had ushered in a new period when the childhood became to be perceived as the separate world with its values.

Certainly, a birth and a death are admitted biological facts but the society attaches great importance to any one of it. Some nations include future children and decedents in the life cycle. Australoids consider unborn children as spirits of dead ancestors. Hindus believed that souls of those people or animals who had already lived on this planet in their former incarnations came to the earth in the likeness of future children and this process of reincarnation does not have a limit [1]. Hence, the society perceives formation and “dying-out” of the individual according to own traditions and places in strong relief of those stages of development of the person which it considers the most important. So, the Tatars-krjasheny lay stress on processes of marriage and death that’s why marriage and funeral rites have unique features. In our view these features are caused by ethnic history of the Tatars-krjasheny.

The Tatars-krjasheny are a small group of the Volga Tatars of Turkic extraction. They were christened by the Russian authorities in 16-18 centuries. After Christianization Krjasheny culture could not sort entirely with Russian culture, as it had a deeply synthetic character and received into itself the features inherent in the ancient Turkomen and Tatars-Moslems. The Orientalist and the professor of the Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy M.A. Mashanov wrote on this subject that the majority of the Tatars-krjasheny is “Christians only by name and rather Moslems in the merits of a case though the Christians themselves do not understand it considering the Islamic concepts as the Christian ones” [5, pp. 12-13].

The significance of research of Krjasheny culture is defined now by two circumstances. Firstly, the Tatars-krjasheny aspire to find the status of the separate people rather than to be one of groups of the Volga Tatars. Secondly, the history of the krjasheny is an understudied subject in Russia; therefore we have decided to be intent on it.

As to the life cycle rites of the Tatars-krjasheny, it is a unique layer in which have been embedded Old Turkic elements of culture. To our opinion, the description of the life cycle rites of the Christian Tatars is impossible out of the religious context. This is precisely why we will show some characteristics of religious beliefs of the krjasheny.

The one or supreme god was among the krjasheny from of old. He was as Tjangere-boogieman (literally “God-grandfather”). He symbolized the heavenly Spirit-owner who lived constantly in the sky. Tjangere-boogieman was imagined as the

God of truly cosmic scale, as the One beneficent, the All-knowing and the Just. He ordered destinies of a person, the people and the state. Based on this mythology, modern scientists have already given a guess about existence of a certain general religion characterized for all the Turkomen in the past. It has been conditionally named Tengriism [6, p. 501]. Hence, the religion of the krjasheny – Tengriism mixed with Christianity – has played a special part in preservation of traditional ritualism of these people in the 20th century.

The history of the life cycle rites of the Christian Tatars in the 20th century depended largely on the specific character of state-religious relations. In the Soviet times the development of ritualism of these people had dual character: on the one hand, the part of rituals was saved and remained invariable and, on the other hand, it was essentially transformed. The core of transformational processes was expressed in weakening of severity of performance of separate rites and its loss that was caused by distribution of antireligious mood among the Tatars.

However, during the 1920s an active struggle against religious carry-overs in the Soviet Russia was perceived by the Tatars of the Volga region extremely negatively. The archival materials found by us can serve as a confirmation of it. So, we are found out in one of files sharp evidences of discontent among the Tatars with an antireligious policy of the Soviet state at the time. We will give some of it: “You say justly that the Soviet power tries for us, it is all true, but that is not our way about religion and we have no desire to listen to you” [7].

The answer of the Soviet government to the similar protest has followed at once. In 1927 there was a set of administrative measures taken towards the gentlemen of the cloth who offended against the law about the separation of Church and State, permitted opening of illegal schools, marriages without the registration, kept from public work of women. A stakeout was placed on activity of churchmen and religious schools. Total censorship extended to the Tatar literature.

These antireligious actions of the Soviet government among the Tatars were effective that had been reflected in daily life of the Tatar people. So, the essence of the life cycle rites of the Christian Tatars was filled in the Soviet period by absolutely new elements, the new sense with ideas of universalism and national unity.

In the 19th century wedding among the krjasheny took place in church. Proxy parents being birth relatives of a fiance led newlyweds down the aisle – *kyyamatyk*. They became guardians of a young family for life. A bride settled in their house after a wedding. She was replaced there a maiden headdress by female one – *bush bailau*. She was moved from this house to a house of a husband where the basic wedding was. The moving of a bride to a house of a husband among all the Tatars was called *kilen tvsheru* and, as a rule, took place in the summer. All rites among the krjasheny were accompanied by special wedding, guest songs [12, p. 130].

In 1930-1960 drastic reduction of traditional wedding rites was observable. A nuptial

feast in a house of a groom was after marriage registration. It was tried quite often to coincide with any Soviet holiday. As distinct from traditional a nuptial feast it was done in a new light: with the simultaneous invitation and spread of men and women at the same table that in the 19th century was impossible. The wedding itself came to be called “red”. Similar processes were in maternity rites and rites of passage.

As to funeral rites of the Tatars-krjasheny, its transformation in the 20th century was not such considerable. In the Soviet times the last offices of the Tatars of the Volga region consisted of the several interrelating stages: ritual preparation of a body of a dead man to burial; a direct burial; a funeral feast.

In the 19th the defunct was buried next day after his death if there were no extenuating circumstances for procrastinating of funeral: a waiting for arrival of family members etc. In the latter case a funeral could take place in a couple of days after a death and it was not condemned [10, p. 125].

The wide participation of not only relatives, neighbors, but also colleagues was illustrative of funeral of the 20th century. As a rule, arrival of a considerable amount of people was strong distractions for heart-broken relatives. Besides, trade union organizations of major concerns, plants quite often undertook organization of funeral, including the most part of material inputs connected with it.

Sometimes in urban area they came to pay respect to the defunct with flowers: it put on a coffin. It was absolutely a new ritual element which had arisen from influence of urbculture in whole.

As distinct from urban environment the old life cycle rites were observable in countryside. So, a custom to invite special people to wash a dead man was steadily saved. It existed for many centuries; therefore it was not simple to break this custom. The people of the older generation who knew the rite and had expressed a desire to pay last respects to him were invited by tradition. As a rule, they were believers and induded the rite of ablution with a religious sense. In spite of the fact that the ritualism of the Christian Tatars was undergone by a most strong influence of Christianity, Old Turkic elements were saved in it. In particular, burial service of the defunct and prayers with sacrifices of animals (a cow, a lamb, a chicken) could be made in the villages of the krjasheny by especially religious people, usually women. The tradition of investment of the woman with similar authority apparently goes back to the Old Turkic goddess Umaj whose the primary objective was the protection of the Turkomen – both live and dead – from the evil spirits.

A civil memorial service became an important component of the Tatar funeral in Soviet times. A civil memorial service was a statutory mourning where a funeral oration was said. As contrasted with other sort of meetings the music played here a major role. However in countryside the krjasheny performed commemorative songs which had its tune [4].

The 20th century has brought about the swing in after-funeral rites. The main rites of it commemoration acted. Commemoration of the Tatars-krjasheny, as well as many peoples of the Volga region, was a feast where the deceased was remembered. Commemoration of the krjasheny also included some cultural archaic elements and was held in the third, seventh, fortieth days and death anniversary. The originality of commemorative ritualism of the Christian Tatars showed to the best advantage a tradition of sacrifice – *cun chygaru* (literally “deflation of blood”). Three victims were brought, as a rule. The first victim (mostly a sheep) was for the sake of the defunct, the second victim (a chicken) was for the sake of the deceased relatives, the third victim (a fish) was for the sake of all departed [12, pp. 138-139].

At the end of the 20th century traditional funeral rites of the Tatars-krjasheny were continued to be rethought and found a reflection in the Soviet funeral. So, in the 80es of the last century the traditional last offices were kept up by 67-73% of the Tatar families living in cities. That said this percent included groups of the population with a various educational level, except persons with higher education [8, p. 53].

To our opinion, the abovementioned material allows to emphasize the basic sociocultural characteristics of the life cycle rites of the Tatars-krjasheny:

1. The continuity of the development of rites. In the 20th century the life cycle rites of the Tatars-krjasheny were transformed, reinterpreted, but, essentially, were saved and transmitted from generation to generation.
2. The nepotism. All members of family collective, old and young generations, close and remote relatives took part in the life cycle rites.
3. The devoutness. The memory of Tengriism contributed to preservation of the rites, especially the last offices.
4. The ethnic purity. The Christian Tatars have a large share of aspiration for support of national traditions compared to other peoples of the Volga region. This factor plays a key role in stability of the life cycle rites, does it isolated and original.

In summary the life cycle rites of the Tatars-krjasheny receive into itself many features which have created in the past, but at the same time the substantial transformation is indicative of it. On the one hand, it contemplates a possibility of a revival of long-standing traditions and, on the other hand, its further changing caused by life journey of the Christian Tatars in the multicultural space of Russia.

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