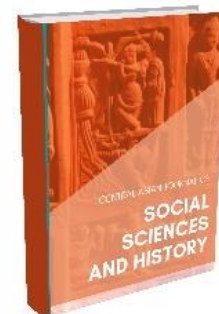




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## Rituals and Traditions of the Karakalpaks with the Participation of Women

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### Abstract:

The given article presents an overview of the rituals and traditions of the Karakalpaks, with a special emphasis on the participation of women. Exploring the rich cultural heritage of the ethnos, it examines various rituals performed by women within the framework of the Karakalpak culture. Highlighting the importance and role of women in traditional rituals, the author analyzes their impact on social dynamics and family values in Karakalpak society. Based on this research, the article calls for preserving and respecting the traditions associated with the participation of women in rituals in order to increase the cultural heritage of Karakalpakstan.

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Traditions and rituals are an integral part of the cultural heritage of various peoples. They reflect their beliefs, traditions and customs. In many cultures, women play an important role in these rituals, performing various functions that reflect their social, religious and cultural significance. Women can be participants as well as organizers of traditional rituals. In this article we will look at several traditional Karakalpak rituals in which only women take part.

In the culture of Karakalpaks, there are a number of traditions and rituals that apply exclusively to women. These are the rites of the children's cycle associated with the first placement of the child in the cradle *besik toy*, types of traditional mutual assistance in which only women participate - *kepkir kuydi*, in the wedding ritual - *qizdın jugin kóriw* the custom of displaying the bride's dowry and a number of others.

The ceremony of putting a baby into the cradle for the first time is a traditional and symbolic moment in the life of a newborn. In many cultures, the first placement of a child in the cradle is accompanied by rituals and ceremonies that are designed to protect and preserve the child from evil spirits, to ensure

his health and well-being. Among the Karakalpaks, “*Besik Toy*” ritual is performed on the eve of the first placement of a child in the cradle. Only women from among relatives and neighbors participate in this ritual; it is performed by respectable, large and happily married mothers. The basis of this idea is the desire for the child to have many children in the future and acquire the same respected status as this woman.

The cradle among the Karakalpaks, like other Central Asian peoples, is considered a sacred object. Among the Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs and others, it was believed that with the position of the child in the cradle, the danger from evil spirits is significantly reduced (Esbergenov, Atamuratov 1975: 149; Nurmukhamedova 2011: 373; Stasevich 2021: 514;). *Besik*, by tradition, has always been considered a sacred object in the family, so it was protected, guarded, respected in every possible way, handled carefully and passed on from generation to generation (Turekeev 2020: 85).

After the treat, the mother-in-law brought the cradle into the room where the women gathered, and handed the child into the hands of an elderly, respected woman with many children. She could be a relative or neighbor. Before the child was put into a *besik* (cradle), purchased or old, it was circled with fire in a counterclockwise direction, saying: “*ket bele, ket!*” (go away evil spirit, go away!). The woman examined the bedding. A round hollow pumpkin the size of an apple was hung from the crossbar of the cradle on a variegated thread as a rattle - “*alma-qabak*” (apple-pumpkin) and cowrie shells (*tatran*). Then the baby was placed in a *besik* with wishes of health, happiness, and long life.

During this ritual, women sit in a circle around a baby's cradle located in the center. The cradle is covered with seven types of clothing and pieces of fabric donated by the women present at the ceremony. If the newborn is a girl, then a larger number of cuts are placed on the cradle. Karakalpaks believe that the more clothes and fabric thrown on the cradle, the greater the ransom they will give for it when the girl gets married. During the ritual, one of the women approaches the cradle, throws her leg over it, imitating riding a horse, and holds the child in her arms. The remaining participants in the ritual “buy” the child from her for a symbolic amount. After the necessary rituals, the child is placed in the cradle, and some items of clothing and pieces of fabric are distributed to close relatives (Kurbanova 2016).

Rituals associated with preparations for a wedding with the participation of women are expressed in the form of mutual assistance *kepkir kuydi*. The day before the wedding, relatives and neighbors gather in the house to help prepare traditional baked goods, *bauyrsak* (Bekmuratova 1980: 117). *Bauyrsak* (*donuts*) are diamond-shaped pieces of dough fried in oil. This dish is mandatory for all Karakalpak ritual events. *Bauyrsak* is prepared in large quantities, so the help of neighbors and relatives is needed. Usually this process begins with kneading the dough, which is carried out by the older woman next door. Other women from district can also take part in the process of kneading the dough. Later, when the dough has risen, the young women prepare a cauldron for frying *bauyrsak*. The woman who will fry and maintain the fire is determined in accordance with the order that exists in the *mahalla/aul* (*village*). The women preparing the dough also assist in the process of frying the *bauyrsak*. As a reward for their work, they receive a piece of dress. This custom has a symbolic meaning associated with the exchange of labor and strengthening relationships between women in the community. In addition, the ritual consists not only of collective mutual assistance in preparing a ritual dish, but also of emotional support and solidarity with each other. This helps create an atmosphere of unity and joy during the wedding.

Showing the bride's dowry is one of the traditional customs in Karakalpak wedding rituals. This custom involves the groom's female relatives unpacking and displaying the bride's dowry to the female relative's present. Displaying the dowry has a symbolic meaning and is an indicator of the prosperity and wealth of the bride's family. They take part in this ritual.

In the past, the Karakalpaks prepared a dowry for a girl in advance (*bau-shu*). Her friends, as well as young women – *jenge* (*sister-in-law*), helped the girl in preparing the dowry. It was customary to invite neighbors to take part in preparing the dowry.

A. Bekmuratova, who studied family rituals, notes that previously the size of the dowry was not determined - by custom and was not determined by any agreements. They depended on the wishes of the bride's father. Usually poor or average people gave a small dowry compared to the *kalim* (dowry). Only the very rich gave a large dowry for their daughters, sometimes equal in value to the bride price. In such cases, both sides competed with each other, each family wanted to show that they could give more. Sometimes the bride's father gave a dowry that was even more than a *kalim* (Bekmuratova 1980: 69).

The bride's dowry included a yurt with all the necessary things, but this was not always observed. Sometimes a girl was married off without a yurt, and the groom's parents bought only the frame, and the bride had to bring with her everything necessary to decorate the yurt. The bride's dowry also included her own clothes. Usually, a yurt was given as a dowry either by rich families or by those who, in addition to the betrothed girl, had no more children.

In addition, the bride had to prepare gifts for the parents and relatives of the groom, which were called "*sarpay*" (*gifts*) among the Karakalpaks. The bride embroidered various items: a hat for her future husband's mother, a robe for her husband's father, a shirt for her husband's older brother, a robe for her sponsored father at a wedding, a carpet case for storing clothes, and a scarf for their daughter. Gifts were also prepared for the old people of the village, such as skullcaps (*takhya*), as well as scarves for the old women of the village (*jauliq*) and jewelry - bracelets, rings, earrings for girls from the groom's village. (Bekmuratova 1980: 70). The dowry has undergone noticeable changes in modern conditions. Many parents who support marrying off their daughters with a dowry do not know the traditional composition of things required for a dowry. Now it includes furniture, dishes, household appliances, carpets, and the bride's clothes.

Previously, the ritual of examining the dowry took place with the obligatory participation of the sponsored mother at wedding, *murindiq ana*, who accepted it. In the Karakalpak tradition, to this day there is the appointment of *murindiq ata* and *ene* to the newlyweds after the wedding. According to researchers, one of the reasons for the appointment of *murindiq ana* is the preservation of fading family ties, since most *murindiq ata* is appointed from their own clan or even from among relatives (Davletiyarov 2019: 88).

The betrothed father and mother should feel the same love for the young as for their own children, provide them with support, give advice, give gifts and help them in everything they need. For their part, young people must treat the advice of their "second parents" with respect and obedience.

Today, the reception and inspection of the dowry can be carried out both by close senior female relatives *jenge*, and by neighbors with whom the hostess has developed close relationships. She usually spreads out the *korpeshe* mattresses brought by the bride, demonstrating to everyone present the art of the craftswomen who made the *quraq korpeshe*. Covers for *korpeshe*, made for the bride's dowry,

were made using the *quraq* technique. The *quraq* technique is the production of various patterns by joining pieces of fabric of triangular and quadrangular shapes. The term *quraq* itself means to connect, derived from *qurıw* - which means to connect, to unite (Karakalpak-Russian Dictionary 1958: 41). A similar technique existed among many peoples, in particular among the Kazakhs, things made using this technique were supposed to bring grace to the house (Oktyabrskaya, Suraganova 2012: 340).

The existence of such rituals is associated with the development of the female world in a patriarchal society. Evidence of the once existence of matriarchy in Central Asia and the preservation of its remnants to this day are precisely the customs associated with weddings: the custom of avoidance and secret visits of the bride by the groom. In the ritual life of the Karakalpaks, there are a number of rituals, such as *besik toy*, *kepkir kuydi*, *qızdın jügin kóriw*, etc., which testify to those periods when women played a significant role in society.

In addition, rituals in which only women take part indicate the importance of female solidarity and support in society. Such rites can take various forms - from wedding rituals to initiation ceremonies or vital rites associated with the birth of children. In them, women pass on knowledge, experience and traditions to each other, and also create strong bonds among themselves.

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