



REVISTA INCLUSIONES

TRABAJO EN EQUIPO SIN FRONTERAS

Revista de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales

Volumen 7 . Número Especial

Octubre / Diciembre

2020

ISSN 0719-4706

CUERPO DIRECTIVO

Director

Dr. Juan Guillermo Mansilla Sepúlveda
Universidad Católica de Temuco, Chile

Editor

OBU - CHILE

Editor Científico

Dr. Luiz Alberto David Araujo
Pontificia Universidade Católica de Sao Paulo, Brasil

Editor Europa del Este

Dr. Aleksandar Ivanov Katrandzhiev
Universidad Suroeste "Neofit Rilski", Bulgaria

Cuerpo Asistente

Traductora: Inglés

Lic. Pauline Corthorn Escudero
Editorial Cuadernos de Sofía, Chile

Portada

Lic. Graciela Pantigoso de Los Santos
Editorial Cuadernos de Sofía, Chile

COMITÉ EDITORIAL

Dra. Carolina Aroca Toloza
Universidad de Chile, Chile

Dr. Jaime Bassa Mercado
Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile

Dra. Heloísa Bellotto
Universidad de Sao Paulo, Brasil

Dra. Nidia Burgos
Universidad Nacional del Sur, Argentina

Mg. María Eugenia Campos
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dr. Francisco José Francisco Carrera
Universidad de Valladolid, España

Mg. Keri González
Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, México

Dr. Pablo Guadarrama González
Universidad Central de Las Villas, Cuba

Mg. Amelia Herrera Lavanchy
Universidad de La Serena, Chile

Mg. Cecilia Jofré Muñoz
Universidad San Sebastián, Chile

Mg. Mario Lagomarsino Montoya
Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chile

Dr. Claudio Llanos Reyes
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile

Dr. Werner Mackenbach
Universidad de Potsdam, Alemania
Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica

Mg. Rocío del Pilar Martínez Marín
Universidad de Santander, Colombia

Ph. D. Natalia Milanesio
Universidad de Houston, Estados Unidos

Dra. Patricia Virginia Moggia Münchmeyer
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile

Ph. D. Maritza Montero
Universidad Central de Venezuela, Venezuela

Dra. Eleonora Pencheva
Universidad Suroeste Neofit Rilski, Bulgaria

Dra. Rosa María Regueiro Ferreira
Universidad de La Coruña, España

Mg. David Ruete Zúñiga
Universidad Nacional Andrés Bello, Chile

Dr. Andrés Saavedra Barahona
Universidad San Clemente de Ojrid de Sofía, Bulgaria

Dr. Efraín Sánchez Cabra
Academia Colombiana de Historia, Colombia

Dra. Mirka Seitz
Universidad del Salvador, Argentina

Ph. D. Stefan Todorov Kapralov
South West University, Bulgaria

COMITÉ CIENTÍFICO INTERNACIONAL

Comité Científico Internacional de Honor

Dr. Adolfo A. Abadía

Universidad ICESI, Colombia

Dr. Carlos Antonio Aguirre Rojas

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dr. Martino Contu

Universidad de Sassari, Italia

Dr. Luiz Alberto David Araujo

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Sao Paulo, Brasil

Dra. Patricia Brogna

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dr. Horacio Capel Sáez

Universidad de Barcelona, España

Dr. Javier Carreón Guillén

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dr. Lancelot Cowie

Universidad West Indies, Trinidad y Tobago

Dra. Isabel Cruz Ovalle de Amenabar

Universidad de Los Andes, Chile

Dr. Rodolfo Cruz Vadillo

Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla, México

Dr. Adolfo Omar Cueto

Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Argentina

Dr. Miguel Ángel de Marco

Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dra. Emma de Ramón Acevedo

Universidad de Chile, Chile

Dr. Gerardo Echeita Sarrionandia

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, España

Dr. Antonio Hermosa Andújar

Universidad de Sevilla, España

Dra. Patricia Galeana

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dra. Manuela Garau

Centro Studi Sea, Italia

Dr. Carlo Ginzburg Ginzburg

Scuola Normale Superiore de Pisa, Italia

Universidad de California Los Ángeles, Estados Unidos

Dr. Francisco Luis Girardo Gutiérrez

Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano, Colombia

José Manuel González Freire

Universidad de Colima, México

Dra. Antonia Heredia Herrera

Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, España

Dr. Eduardo Gomes Onofre

Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Brasil

Dr. Miguel León-Portilla

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dr. Miguel Ángel Mateo Saura

Instituto de Estudios Albacetenses "Don Juan Manuel", España

Dr. Carlos Tulio da Silva Medeiros

Diálogos em MERCOSUR, Brasil

+ Dr. Álvaro Márquez-Fernández

Universidad del Zulia, Venezuela

Dr. Oscar Ortega Arango

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, México

Dr. Antonio-Carlos Pereira Menaut

Universidad Santiago de Compostela, España

Dr. José Sergio Puig Espinosa

Dilemas Contemporáneos, México

Dra. Francesca Randazzo

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, Honduras

Dra. Yolando Ricardo

Universidad de La Habana, Cuba

Dr. Manuel Alves da Rocha

Universidade Católica de Angola Angola

Mg. Arnaldo Rodríguez Espinoza

Universidad Estatal a Distancia, Costa Rica

Dr. Miguel Rojas Mix

*Coordinador la Cumbre de Rectores Universidades
Estatales América Latina y el Caribe*

Dr. Luis Alberto Romero

CONICET / Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dra. Maura de la Caridad Salabarría Roig

Dilemas Contemporáneos, México

Dr. Adalberto Santana Hernández

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Dr. Juan Antonio Seda

Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dr. Saulo Cesar Paulino e Silva

Universidad de Sao Paulo, Brasil

Dr. Miguel Ángel Verdugo Alonso

Universidad de Salamanca, España

Dr. Josep Vives Rego

Universidad de Barcelona, España

Dr. Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni

Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dra. Blanca Estela Zardel Jacobo

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Comité Científico Internacional

Mg. Paola Aceituno

Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana, Chile

Ph. D. María José Aguilar Idañez

Universidad Castilla-La Mancha, España

Dra. Elian Araujo

Universidad de Mackenzie, Brasil

Mg. Romyana Atanasova Popova

Universidad Suroeste Neofit Rilski, Bulgaria

Dra. Ana Bénard da Costa

*Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal
Centro de Estudios Africanos, Portugal*

Dra. Alina Bestard Revilla

*Universidad de Ciencias de la Cultura Física y el Deporte,
Cuba*

Dra. Noemí Brenta

Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ph. D. Juan R. Coca

Universidad de Valladolid, España

Dr. Antonio Colomer Vialdel

Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, España

Dr. Christian Daniel Cwik

Universidad de Colonia, Alemania

Dr. Eric de Léséulec

INS HEA, Francia

Dr. Andrés Di Masso Tarditti

Universidad de Barcelona, España

Ph. D. Mauricio Dimant

Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalén, Israel

Dr. Jorge Enrique Elías Caro

Universidad de Magdalena, Colombia

Dra. Cláudia Lorena Fonseca

Universidad Federal de Pelotas, Brasil

Dra. Ada Gallegos Ruiz Conejo

Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Perú

Dra. Carmen González y González de Mesa

Universidad de Oviedo, España

Ph. D. Valentin Kitanov

Universidad Suroeste Neofit Rilski, Bulgaria

Mg. Luis Oporto Ordóñez

Universidad Mayor San Andrés, Bolivia

Dr. Patricio Quiroga

Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile

Dr. Gino Ríos Patio

Universidad de San Martín de Porres, Perú

Dr. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez Arrechavaleta

Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México, México

Dra. Vivian Romeu

Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México, México

**REVISTA
INCLUSIONES** M.R.
REVISTA DE HUMANIDADES
Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES

Dra. María Laura Salinas
Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, Argentina

Dr. Stefano Santasilia
Universidad della Calabria, Italia

Mg. Silvia Laura Vargas López
Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, México

**CUADERNOS DE SOFÍA
EDITORIAL**

Dra. Jaqueline Vassallo
Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina

Dr. Evandro Viera Ouriques
Universidad Federal de Río de Janeiro, Brasil

Dra. María Luisa Zagalaz Sánchez
Universidad de Jaén, España

Dra. Maja Zawierzeniec
Universidad Wszechnica Polska, Polonia

Editorial Cuadernos de Sofía
Santiago – Chile
OBU – C HILE

Indización, Repositorios y Bases de Datos Académicas

Revista Inclusiones, se encuentra indizada en:





REX



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN



Universidad de Concepción



BIBLIOTECA UNIVERSIDAD DE CONCEPCIÓN

CONDITIONS AND FORMS OF MARRIAGE IN MORDVIN CUSTOMARY LAW

Dr. Iuliia N. Sushkova

N. P. Ogarev Mordovia State University, Russian Federation
ORCID 0000-0003-4388-0610
yulenkam@mail.ru

Fecha de Recepción: 11 de junio de 2020 – **Fecha Revisión:** 22 de junio de 2020

Fecha de Aceptación: 29 de septiembre 2020 – **Fecha de Publicación:** 01 de octubre de 2020

Abstract

The significance of this study derives from the increasing need to explore popular legal traditions as well as socio-economic, ethnic, cultural and religious aspects of the life of peoples in the context of legal pluralism. In common law, special attention is given to matrimonial law, which reproduces and affects, at a specific micro-level, almost every aspect of traditional jurisprudence. In this regard, the research aims to reveal conditions and forms of marriage in Mordvin customary law. The major research methods adopted in this study are field ethnography and case studies used to conduct an in-depth investigation of customary rules in different areas of their application. The study analyses customary specificities related to spouse selection, highlights matchmaking as the main form of marriage and, finally, examines practices such as abduction and *samokrut*. The results of the research can be used to strengthen the institutions of marriage and family in present-day Russia.

Keywords

Common law – Mordvins – Marriage – Family

Para Citar este Artículo:

Sushkova, Iuliia N. Conditions and Forms of Marriage in Mordvin Customary Law. Revista Inclusiones Vol: 7 num Especial (2020): 407-422.

Licencia Creative Commons Attribution Non-Comercial 3.0 Unported
(CC BY-NC 3.0)

Licencia Internacional



Introduction

There is an increasing need to explore popular legal traditions as well as socio-economic, ethnic, cultural and religious aspects of the life of peoples in the context of legal pluralism. Processes of the emerging ethnic self-awareness of Russia's peoples are still continuing today, echoed in all kinds of national movements aimed at reviving and maintaining traditional customs and practices as part of their national cultures and mentalities.

The increased role of customary law implies, on the whole, the study of its branches, the most important of them being matrimonial law, which reproduces and affects, at a specific micro-level, almost every aspect of traditional jurisprudence. Matrimonial and family traditions are some of the oldest behavioral references reflecting the popular understanding of justice and order. In late 19th- and early 20th-century community-based management, a big, undivided family was perceived as a social organism, in which human relationships were based on customs sanctified by ancestral memory and put into practice through their "words" verbalized by elders or geronta.

Methods

The study of marriage and family relationships requires relevant theoretical research methods and a methodological framework for empirical data collection and analysis. A number of specific field ethnography methods were used to collect factual data, mostly onsite observation and questioning. Preliminary work included expeditions to locations inhabited by the Mordvins, during which both itinerary- and camp-based research approaches were adopted to explore their legal lifestyle. In terms of survey tools, the author had developed a questionnaire to detect the general principles of Mordvin legal practices. Considerable field data was collected through interviews mostly with old-timers living in Mordvin villages. Interviews were conducted using author-developed thematic questionnaires.

Another working method was that of recording respondents' accounts of past events. The research also followed the traditional ethnological method of collecting vestiges, in which surviving customs and perceptions can be used to reconstruct these or those customs that governed marriage and family relationships in the early 20th century and at earlier stages of the Mordvins' historical evolution. Research methods used in this study include the comparative historical approach, quantitative, structural, correlational and interdisciplinary methods.

Results

Marriage-related codes of conduct governing Mordvin matrimonial relationships were highly important, since their very lifestyle "forced" men to reflect on choosing a "good helper" who could be "entrusted with all domestic chores and a woman who would be capable of bearing children, thus giving him new workers".¹ Old customary rules also reflected perceptions of marriage as a natural and necessary mode of life for both men and women.

¹ V. N. Maynov, *An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

The Mordvins regarded marriage bringing the young people together “once and for all” as a “deal” upon which their subsequent well-being and happiness depended. Marriage was perceived as a desirable and top-priority matrimonial customary law whose violation was punishable by social institutions. Being an old maid was considered “almost a crime” for a woman, and other people’s jokes only “exacerbated” her sufferings.² A dummy or a wood block representing a daughter- or brother-in-law used to be installed near the houses of parents who had not managed to marry their daughter or son. During the week of Maslenitsa, young people who had not married at the right time would be yoked to carts or forced to carry logs. These young people did not have the right to challenge decisions taken at family council meetings.

This said, Mordvin legal history witnessed some monasticism practices, such as a vow of chastity that implied the voluntary renunciation of marriage. As an example, the periphery of the village of Kuchenyayevo in Alatyr District of Simbirsk Governorate was known by two names, Keliyat and Groshovka (‘poor’ in Russian), because poor old maids with no households lived there in cells.³ Some of the reasons for monasticism, especially widespread among Erzyans, were the woman’s bad health, “the woman’s unenviable life and family oppression”, “excessive workload and financial insecurity as well and the desire to behave like ancient Christian hermits”.⁴

Customary law laid down criteria for spouse selection upon which the family’s welfare largely depended, as exemplified by the following Mordvin proverbs. *Ortas kirdi kafta svaysa, a kuds’ – kafta pryasa* (Mokshan), *Ortas ashti kavto svayse, kudos – kavto pryasa* (Erzyan) (A gate stands on two poles and a family on two heads); *R’vyayamas’ – af karen’ kar’semas’* (Mokshan), *Ur’van’ sayemas’ – avol’ karen’ kodamo* (Erzyan) (Marrying is not as easy as making bast shoes).⁵

The physical and mental health of young men and girls was an important part of the spouse selection process. *Shachemda af udalat, tsebyar’ stir’ mel’ge af kudalyat* (Mokshan), *Teyteren’ mel’s a tuyat, kozyaykayak a muyat* (Erzyan) (If you were born with a flaw, don’t expect to marry a good girl).⁶ The mentally impaired were forbidden to marry. Physically impaired people were allowed to marry only if their defect did not prevent them from performing their matrimonial duties, otherwise it could serve as a reason for marriage annulment.

Long-established anthropological and esthetic canons of beauty were traditionally used to assess one’s physical and mental health, especially that of a girl. A Mordvin beauty was “tall and clear-eyed”, “with a white and fine face” and “a curly head”.⁷ Foreigners often admired young girls’ “freshness and clean-cut features”.⁸ A Mordvin woman “has a brisk gait” and “always keeps her head high, never turns her eyes downwards and walks at a steady and even pace making long tassels wave like horse manes and beads, marbles and other decorations on her chest and back jingle and rustle; the ends of towels and tassels on

² G. Ploss, *Women in Natural Science and Ethnography* (Kiev: Kharkov, 1899).

³ N. Maslennikov, *On the Mordvin Lifestyle in the Village of Kuchenyayevo of Alatyr District of Simbirsk Governorate* (Kazan, 1916).

⁴ M. Grebnev, *The Erzyan Woman. Samarskiye yeparkhialnye vedomosti*, (1885).

⁵ *Mordvin Proverbs and Riddles. Vol. 1* (Saransk, 1959)

⁶ *Mordvin Proverbs and Riddles...*

⁷ UPTMN (*Mordvin Oral Poetry*). Vol. 1 (Saransk, 1963); *Russia’s Peoples* (St. Petersburg, 1880) y *Russian Writers on the Mordvins*. Ed. O. I. Chudayeva (Saransk, 1957).

⁸ M. Grebnev, *The Erzyan Woman. Samarskiye yeparkhialnye vedomosti*, (1885).

her waist clap like weapons of a galloping cavalryman”.⁹ A strong constitution and legs highlighted the Mordvin woman’s health. If a Mordvin wanted to “praise the beauty of a girl”, he would point to her “oak-like legs”. If a woman did not have such a merit, she would wrap her legs in “countless linen and even wool leggings” to be reputed as a beauty.¹⁰

Traditionally, a husband and a wife had to conform to each other, a belief summarized in the old Mordvin proverb: *Kodama tseras’, stama i stirs’* (Like man, life girl).¹¹ Every village had different types of beauty contests among young girls and men. For instance, in Nizhny Novgorod Governorate, young Mordvin men would get together once in three years on a late night, and each of them would attach a red ribbon on the fence of the girl who would make the best bride, in his opinion. Ribbons were then counted to see the fence of which girl was “more beautiful”. Competitions used to take place among young men too: the winner of the competition – and a “prize catch” for any girl - would be the most agile and brave young man.¹²

The tradition of choosing the best girl was known as the *Crown of Purdam* in the Mordvin village of Podlyasovo. Once a year, on the day of Pentecost, young girls would make wreaths and married women would select the worthiest candidate. Then, all women residing in the village – the oldest in front and the youngest behind – would march, headed by this beauty crowned with the wreath, and sing the song *Syure kshtirde Raman Aksyas* (Roman Aksya is weaving the thread). The best young man – the winner of the *Aksha Kelu* competition – was supposed to learn who the beauty queen was and marry her, thus making the right choice¹³. Every community would extensively discuss young couples, condemning those that did not match. Researcher M. E. Yevseyev thus cites one Mordvin old-timer: “They came running from the courtyard and scolded Ivan (the father-in-law). He had brought a daughter-in-law unsuitable for their son, a very fine fellow. She was small and had a hollow face”.¹⁴

Physical beauty had to match personal and business qualities. The bride was supposed to be not only beautiful, ruddy-faced and tall, but also robust, hardworking and capable of “carrying a bucket of water”.¹⁵ Special attention was also paid to the prospective bride’s gait: if she walked with a light gait, she would make a brisk housewife.¹⁶ The ideal bride was industrious and orderly. A cleanly washed front porch was always indicative of a clean house.¹⁷ Most importantly, the bride had to be in good health, capable of giving birth to a strong son and of running the house.¹⁸

⁹ Russia’s Peoples (St. Petersburg, 1880).

¹⁰ V. N. Maynov, Results of Anthropological Research Studies Conducted among the Mordvin Erzyans (St. Petersburg, 1883).

¹¹ Mordvin Proverbs, Adages and Sayings (Saransk, 1986).

¹² Field data, N. V. Larkina, b. 1961, village of Ardatov, Ardatov District, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. 2017.

¹³ Field data, M. A. Ananyeva, b. 1969, village of Podlyasovo, Zubovo-Polyansky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

¹⁴ Central State Archives of the Republic of Mordovia, F-R-267. Op. 1. L. 65. L. 6. 2017.

¹⁵ Field data, N. M. Vedyasova, b. 1950, village of Porub. 2017.

¹⁶ Field data, Kh. S. Zubareva, b. 1942, village of Novaya Potma, Zubovo-Polyansky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

¹⁷ Field data, P. T. Chapayeva, b. 1936, village of Pichpanda, Zubovo-Polyansky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

¹⁸ Field data, A. A. Balashov, b. 1943, village of Aleksandrovka, Temnikov District. 2017.

In choosing a bride, attention was also given to the state of her family's finances and her lineage because, by acquiring a daughter-in-law, the family not only acquired "another pair of hands", but also expanded its networks and authority within the community. The importance of tribesmen considerably enhanced the prestige of this or that family and was referred to when judging the young man's (girl's) good manners and his or her genetically instilled abilities or, on the contrary, flaws, mental or physical disabilities. One of the signs pointing to the family's good financial standing were the girl's garments, traditionally adorned with gold and silver coins. Besides, a person's social status and age could be identified by the clothes he or she was wearing. Even a mere jingling of "bells and rattles" distinguished a passing young girl from a young woman.¹⁹

The terms of marriage implied a number of interdictions (taboos), mostly in terms of young people's sexual behavior. Chastity was a compulsory marriage requirement for young men and girls. Although this requirement mostly concerned girls, debauchery was not exactly a merit for young men either, and parents often refused to marry their daughters to young men having such a poor reputation. One father would even "run after his son, who was notorious for deceiving girls, around the courtyard with a hay-fork in his hands".²⁰

A number of researchers pointed to free sexual practices among Mordvin young people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,²¹ referring to the so-called "test marriages". This conclusion seems erroneous, in our view. V. N. Maynov states that young men jealously safeguarded their "own" girls and, consequently, widespread common-law marriages were out of the question.²² Researcher on Mordvin daily life M. E. Yevseyev considered such allegations as "a slander against Mordvin young girls", given that chastity was a major social construct held in great honor, any departure from tradition was vehemently condemned. Out-of-wedlock births were also relatively rare because they "dishonored not only the girl, but also her entire family".²³ Non-observance of chastity were extremely rare.²⁴

Virgins even enjoyed special customary law status as holders of "divine power". In the times of cholera, loose-haired virgins used to be yoked to ploughs away from men's eyes and ploughed a furrow around their village to protect their community from danger.²⁵ According to old-timers, Mordvins had a century-old custom of burying a "bloodless victim", i.e. a beautiful virgin from their community, on the construction site of a church, more specifically under its foundation, mandatorily on the hill. In one village, Aksya, a girl of unearthly beauty, was chosen for this purpose and everybody felt very sorry for her. The church was demolished in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, and on its spot there is a cemetery now.²⁶

¹⁹ K. Milkovich, *Byt i verovaniya mordvy v kontse XVIII stoletiya* (Mordvin Everyday Life and Beliefs in the Late 18th Century) // TEV. Ch. Neofits (Moscu: 1905), 819.

²⁰ Field data, V. F. Trushkin, p. 1940; M. P. Khudova, b. 1947, village of Semivrazhki, Torbeyevo District. 2017.

²¹ V. N. Maynov, *An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

²² V. N. Maynov, *Results of Anthropological Research Studies Conducted among the Mordvin Erzyans* (St. Petersburg, 1883).

²³ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

²⁴ Field data, E. F. Kovyshkina, b. 1928, village of Aturyevo. 2017.

²⁵ Bay Baron de. *From the Volga River to Irtysh* (Tobolsk, 1898); A. A. Shakhmatov, *Mordvin Ethnographic Miscellanea* (St. Petersburg, 1910) y M. T. Markelov, *Saratov Mordvins*. *Saratovskiy etnografichesky sbornik* (Saratov, 1922).

²⁶ Field data, V. M. Kechin, b. 1937, village of Semivrazhki, Torbeyevo District.

Proof of chastity was not usually required for marriage.²⁷ When asking for the hand of a daughter, there would be a question concerning her chastity, and the matchmaker would normally answer it in the affirmative. If this was not the case, the husband's family would ask the *kalym* (or bride-money) back and would humiliate the young girl in different ways.²⁸

According to data reported to the Society of Lovers of Archeology, History and Ethnography affiliated with Kazan University, common law marriages were extremely rare in the village of Atyashevo of Ardatovsky District of Simbirsk Governorate in the early 20th century. Religious marriages were prevailing and "out-of-wedlock children were still widely recognized as dishonoring the woman",²⁹ as exemplified by the following story. A certain girl named Olena married while being pregnant and, as a result, "two of her brothers died, the third one disappeared and Olena's little son died too". To avoid retaliation in such cases, the girl "was not to be blessed when the groom arrived; the door should not be opened for her when she was going from the house to the church; instead, the door should be taken off its hinges; alternatively, the bride should leave through the fence dropped specifically for this occasion rather than through the gate or the wicket".³⁰ It was believed that if girls "started to love early", they would "soon ruin their maidenhood" and "marry late". Flirtatious girls were compared to a "crooked spindle".³¹

A girl who lost her chastity would suffer reproaches and could no longer hope to marry a single young man; she could at best marry an old widower, a poor man or a man with disabilities.³² Such girls could not even dream of any marriage celebrations or, at most, these celebrations would be rather quiet. Men married to such girls were constantly laughed at. If an unmarried girl gave birth to a child, she did not dare go out for a long time, fearing public outrage. If a girl lied to her husband-to-be concerning her chastity, he had the right to kick her away and to have the marriage annulled. Interestingly, in accordance with a Mordvin custom, the husband would send the liar away through the back door; alternatively, the woman would be chased through the hole in the fence, made by taking one of the planks out, behind the house.³³

Another major marriage requirement was a person's coming of age, which was, above all, related to sexual maturity. Young men usually had to undergo certain tests before they could marry. For example, to prove his loyalty and devotion, the bridegroom was required to sit at the bride's gate all night and her father could pose him additional "obstacles".³⁴

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the age of marriage for young Mordvin girls and men was 16 and 18 years respectively,³⁵ owing to both customary and official laws.³⁶ Eparchs

²⁷ Russian Academy of Medical Sciences. I-657. L. 126. 2017.

²⁸ Field data, A. A. Balashov, b. 1943, village of Aleksandrovka, Temnikov District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

²⁹ Manuscripts Section of the N. I. Lobachevsky Research Library. 7.525. L. 1.

³⁰ Manuscripts Section of the N. I. Lobachevsky Research Library. 7.525. L. 2.

³¹ Mordvin Proverbs and Riddles. Vol. 1 (Saransk, 1959) y Erzyan-Russian Dictionary (Saransk, 1993).

³² Field data, Z. P. Shnyakina, b. 1953, village of Kolopinka. 2017.

³³ Field data, E. A. Yakuncheva, b. 1911, village of Ardatovo, Dubensky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2002.

³⁴ Field data, A. A. Balashov, b. 1943, village of Aleksandrovka, Temnikov District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

³⁵ M. E. Yevseyev, Selected Works. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

³⁶ A. Tereshchenko, Russians and Their Lifestyle (St. Petersburg, 1848).

could authorize a marriage “if one of the parties was at most six months under the official age of marriage and solely on condition that the under-age person had sufficient moral development”.³⁷ Girls having attained the age of 22 to 25 were considered old maids, and Mordvin men, according to A. N. Minkh, preferred to marry right after turning 18 years old, and there were many cases of young men asking for permission to get married at the age of 17.

One of the Mordvin customs was to marry 6- to 10-year old boys to 20- to 30-year old women.³⁸ The Mordvins considered it normal for the wife to be older than her husband.³⁹ Russian old men could marry someone much younger than themselves, but a Russian young man would not marry an old woman, whereas it was widespread for a Mordvin young man to be married to an adult woman.⁴⁰ A. N. Minkh mentions that, in olden times, a 10- to 12-year old boy would be proposed as a husband to a 20- to 25-year old girl and that it was not rare to see “an old woman babying her little husband”. As for young girls, they considered marriage to a youngster as an act of cruelty, which often incited them to commit a crime, i.e. to kill their young husband. For example, N. V. Nikolsky points to the case of Varvara Maksimova who plotted to kill her husband - a “little child” who “ate porridge and slept in a cradle” - to whom she had been married for six years.⁴¹

There existed an established practice of marrying children according to their age. When younger children wanted to get married before the older ones, they were told not to “climb over the fence”, and young men who refused to follow the established procedure would have “their hair shaved off”.

Mordvin customary law prohibited inbreeding, i.e. marriage between close blood relatives and, in some cases, between relatives by marriage. Marriage was authorized only between four-degree (preferably, seven-degree) and more distant relatives; marrying a first-, second- and third-degree relative was strictly prohibited. The Mordvins believed that marriage between close relatives produced physically and mentally impaired children.⁴² “In a village, there were several marriages between close relatives. For instance, two cousins decided to marry. A year later, the girl became pregnant and gave birth to a dumb child. Rumor had it that marriages between blood relations led to health issues for their children”.⁴³

I. N. Smirnov suggested that, back in pagan times, the Mordvins did not consider blood relations as an impediment to marriage.⁴⁴ No documentary or folklore proof points to the existence of such a custom. Besides, the taboo against marrying a close relative was

³⁷ Rasporyazheniya eparkhialnogo nachalstva (Ordinances of Eparchial Authorities) // SEV. 1896, pp. 241-242.

³⁸ M. E. Yevseyev, *Historical and Ethnographic Research Studies* (Saransk, 1966); I. N. Syrnev, *A Complete Geographical Description of Our Fatherland* (Ulyanovsk, 1998); A. A. Shakhmatov, *Mordvin Ethnographic Miscellanea* (St. Petersburg, 1910); P. S. Pallas, *Travelling around Various Provinces of the Russian State* (St. Petersburg, 1809) y I. N. Smirnov, *The Mordvins: A Historical and Ethnographic Outline* (Saransk, 2002).

³⁹ Field data, V. A. Boyarkina, b. 1949, village of Kirzhemany, Chamzinsky District. 2017.

⁴⁰ Field data, V. F. Trushkin, b. 1940, M. P. Khudova, b. 1947, village of Semivrazhki, Torbeyevo District. 2017.

⁴¹ N. V. Nikolsky, *A Compilation of Historical Resources on Volga Region peoples* (Kazan, 1919).

⁴² Field data, P. T. Chapayeva, b. 1936, village of Pichpanda, Zubovo-Polyansky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

⁴³ Field data, Z. I. Kabayeva, b. 1953, village of Dukhonkino, Aturyevsky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

⁴⁴ I. N. Smirnov, *The Mordvins: A Historical and Ethnographic Outline* (Saransk, 2002).

related to bride kidnapping, a practice in which a man married the girl from another family or village to avoid incest.⁴⁵ Sometimes “spiritual kinship” was considered undesirable for marriage,⁴⁶ but the absence of consanguinity usually sufficed to waive this requirement.

The Mordvins had a unique practice of sororate in which a man married his wife’s sister after the latter’s death. As early as the late 18th century, I. G. Georgi wrote that a Mordvin man would “gladly” marry his sister-in-law after his wife’s death. If a man was rejected, he would quietly put a piece of bread on the table saying “get me my sister-in-law” and then flee. If caught, he was beaten “mercilessly”, otherwise he could “unquestioningly” marry his sister-in-law. The same practice was mentioned in later times too. Here is how N. Smirnov describes a similar case⁴⁷: “My great-grandfather was married three times: the first time to a Russian woman and the second and third times to Mordvin women. Upon the death of his second wife, he married her younger sister, a pure and unmarried girl at the time”;⁴⁸ “Muzovatka married according to Mordvin tradition: he married the newly baptized wife of his late brother Porvatok”.⁴⁹ Oral poetry also has a wide variety of plots dedicated to the practice of marrying a sister-in-law.

Mordvin marriages were primarily formed within their own ethnic group and even sub-ethnic group in following the practice of endogamy, which was due to the prevailing mono-ethnicity of settlements, insularity of natural economy, sustainability of customary law, behavioral stereotypes and so on. Before the spread of Christianity among the Mordvins, it was considered “a crime to marry a woman from another clan”, but later Mordvin “clans” started practicing “mutual mixing”. Gradual consolidation of the Mordvins led to inter-subethnic marriages.

Not only ethno-social and territorial, but also religious factors were taken into consideration when concluding a marriage. For several centuries, interreligious marriages were officially prohibited and pronounced illegal in Russia; those who had violated the Church’s precepts used to be excommunicated.

Mordvin marriage laws required observance of monogamy. Before the Mordvins’ adoption of Christianity, however, polygyny, i.e. the marriage of a man with several women, was sufficiently widespread owing to the development of property differentiation and bride buying. According to I. I. Lepyokhin, who conducted research in the Volga Region in 1769-1770, in pagan times a Mordvin was allowed “to marry as many women as he could support; however, no peasant usually had more than three wives, depending on his income”.⁵⁰ Mordvin peasants did not usually have more than two wives. Cases of bigyny, i.e. the state of having two wives simultaneously, were not rare in Mordvin customary law.

In case of the death of one of the spouses, the widower (or the widow) was allowed to remarry, as testified by *landratskiye knigi*, which provided, among other things, information about the number of stepsons and stepdaughters in every household. Before remarrying, the remaining spouse had to remain true to the memory of the deceased person - for six weeks among the Erzyan Mordvins and up to one year among the Mokshan

⁴⁵ Humanities Research Institute affiliated to the Government of the Republic of Mordovia, I-300. L. 31-47.

⁴⁶ V. N. Maynov, *An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

⁴⁷ N. Smirnov, *The Mordvins in Penza Governorate* (Penza, 1874).

⁴⁸ Field data (2017): A. I. Kechina, b. 195, village of Semivrazhki, Torbeyevo District.

⁴⁹ Field data: A. I. Kechina...

⁵⁰ I. Lepyokhin, *Notes on the Journey to Various Provinces of the Russian State in 1768 and 1769* (St. Petersburg, 1771).

Mordvins - and to treat foster children kindly. If a widower married a girl, the marriage was no different from any other marriage, and if he married a widow, a “party” without rites or lamentations would be held instead of traditional marriage celebrations. A bachelor’s marriage to a widow would follow the same pattern.⁵¹

Specific requirements were also imposed on timing of marriage, usually in the Autumn after the end of the field work and harvesting, which provided a peasant enough money to marry his son or daughter. According to folk tradition, the bridegroom and the bride were strictly prohibited from getting married on their birthday for fear of a difficult delivery.

The decision to get married involved the compulsory consent of the parents of the young man and the girl, in other words, their blessing. By tradition, the council of closest relatives had a lengthy discussion of the marriage partner’s candidacy and the girl’s parents were advised to make the right choice. To this purpose, it was also customary for relatives to go and consult dead ancestors at the cemetery.⁵²

In the Mordvin village of Alovo of Alatyr District of Simbirsk Governorate, in time-honored tradition, a young man’s father would choose the bride for his son and the latter had no other choice but to obey his father, whether he liked it or not; a father paid almost no attention to his son’s protests. Parents had absolute authority over their children who obeyed their will without question.⁵³ Furthermore, parent’s influence came largely from their dominant role in the big patriarchal family, from which the young couple was inseparable. The Russian parents’ consent to marriage was compulsory, whereas a Mordvin girl, if lively enough, could choose herself a husband.⁵⁴ Sometimes a girl would come by herself to live with a young man in his house, as it happened in the Yerofeyev and Chigirev families.⁵⁵ If a girl got married without her mother’s consent, the young family lived miserably.⁵⁶

In the late 19th century, evolving customary laws and the official eparchial order *On the mutual consent of a bridegroom and a bride as a compulsory marriage requirement* brought about changes in marriage regulations and the consent of both a bridegroom and a bride were required for their marriage to be legal.⁵⁷ At the same time, even though parents no longer played a leading role in choosing the groom or the bride, their “role as ‘counselors’ was still considerable, and the farther from cities and towns, the more old traditions resisted new trends”.⁵⁸ Parents used to take into consideration the young people’s feelings and opinions and most marriages were almost always formed “upon mutual consent”, “for love”, hence “good relations between the husband and the wife”.⁵⁹

Marriage ceremonies, based on a complicated cycle of rituals, each of which had a specific function, were necessary for Mordvin marriages to be held valid. To this end, all

⁵¹ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

⁵² Field data, Kh. S. Zubareva, b. 1942, village of Novaya Potma, Zubovo-Polyansky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

⁵³ V. N. Maynov, *An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

⁵⁴ Field data, V. F. Trushkin, b. 1940, M. P. Khudova, b. 1947, village of Semivrazhki, Torbeyevo District. 2017.

⁵⁵ Field data, P. T. Chapayeva, b. 1936, village of Pichpanda, Zubovo-Polyansky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

⁵⁶ Field data, G. A. Yeliseyeva, b. 1941, village of Shugurovo. 2017.

⁵⁷ (Ordinances of Eparchial Authorities). Sam. EV. 1899. num 3.

⁵⁸ Manuscripts Section of the N. I. Lobachevsky Research Library. 7.525. L. 2.

⁵⁹ V. N. Maynov, *An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

“rites” and “customs” had to be performed in a precise order, and the relevant guidelines were strict: “the rite shall be performed according to the rite and the custom according to the custom”.⁶⁰ The marriage procedure consisted of three stages: the pre-marriage stage (from the matchmaking proposal to the wedding day), the marriage stage (from the morning of the marriage day through the wedding night) and the post-marriage stage (one year following the marriage).

Rites aimed at obtaining the official consent to marriage had central importance during the first stage. These included the preliminary approval of the bridegroom’s candidacy, the agreement, inspection of the bridegroom’s household and, finally, the handshake. Given that the initiative usually came from the young man, rarely from the girl, the matchmaking proposal (*ladyaftoma* in Mokshan, *ladyamo* in Erzyan) was considered as one of the key moments of the marriage ceremony: the girl’s parents gave their official consent to marriage and any subsequent refusal of this consent was excluded.

Matchmakers would sit down on a bench under the ceiling beam, occupied by *Yurtava* (*Kudava*), the goddess of family who contributed to successful marriage making.⁶¹ Matchmakers’ choice of this particular place and the purse with bread and wine that that would bring along explained the reason for their coming to the girl’s parents.⁶² The conversation started with roundabouts and the matchmaking process itself consisted in a number of emblematic actions in accordance with customary law. In case the girl’s parents rejected the proposed youth, they did their best to reduce communication with their guests to a minimum, because each of their actions risked giving rise to controversy.

Among good signs were a warm welcome given to the matchmakers, an exchange of gifts and a joint meal with wine drinking. In some Mordvin villages, matchmakers who were met with refusal would leave their gifts in the front corner under an icon in an attempt to have their proposal reconsidered. Sometimes they would furtively come to a girl’s house and leave a “gift” on the front porch, whose acceptance meant an agreement to negotiate the marriage. If a girl’s father, brother or other relatives happened to catch sight of the matchmakers, they would run after them and beat them up so that they did not dare anymore to “impose” their bridegroom on them.⁶³

In many Mordvin villages, matchmakers would bring bread filled with liquid honey. If a girl’s parents accepted, cut and tasted the bread, it was a signal that the marriage proposal was accepted.⁶⁴ “A father looked for a wife for his son. If he liked the girl, he would bring bread with honey along, come to her house on horseback and throw the bread over the fence into the courtyard, making sure that people inside saw him. He would then go back home and the girl’s father or brothers would immediately chase him down. If they did not want to become relatives with him, they would give him back the bread with honey. Otherwise, they would chase him down just for the sake of appearances and, back at home, they would invite their family and guests inside and share the bread with honey with them”.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Central State Archives of the Republic of Mordovia, F-R-267. Op. 1. D. 65. L. 18.

⁶¹ M. T. Markelov, *Saratov Mordvins. Saratovsky etnografichesky sbornik* (Saratov, 1922).

⁶² Field data, M. V. Bakharev, b. 1939, village of Arzhedeyevo, Bolshe-Ignatovsky District. 2017.

⁶³ Field data, V. P. Derbeneva, b. 1916, village of Bolshaya Uda, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. 2005.

⁶⁴ Field data, V. A. Boyarkkina, b. 1949, village of Kirzhemany, Chamzinsky District; I. S. Obukhov, b. 1939, village of Inza; L. I. Shishkina, b. 1944, village of Yelniki. 2017.

⁶⁵ Field data, Z. I. Kabayeva, b. 1953, village of Dukhonkino, Aturyevsky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

Matchmakers were usually met with refusal during their first visit in order to boost competition between potential husbands and to provide the girl's parents with more opportunities to marry their daughter on better terms.⁶⁶ After all negotiations were completed, the girl's father would give his consent to her marriage and would invite the future husband's father to reach a final agreement on all matters relating to the conclusion of the treaty (gifts, price and so on), which was, in legal and economic terms, a purchase and sale contract. Wedding songs, plaints and lamentations reflect the customary legal nature of marriage involving a "human commodity" and a "girl's head".⁶⁷ "Drinking children away is selling children off".⁶⁸

Determining a girl's "price" (*pitne* in Mokshan and Erzyan, i.e. ransom) or the so-called "bride negotiation" was a significant issue in setting terms and conditions. *Pitne* refers to a payment that a girl's parents received for their consent to marry and a way of compensating the family for taking one of their workers away. Both parties worked on determining the form and amount of payment and each of them praised their "commodity" in an attempt to achieve as favorable terms as possible. Mordvin families considered daughters "good workforce", saying that "if your horse refuses to carry you, put a girl to the cart" (a Mokshan proverb). When a girl was getting married, her family strived to obtain good compensation from the future husband's family for the loss in labor force.

Overall, "Mordvin brides were very expensive",⁶⁹ but the amount of the payment depended on the girl's qualities. The more qualities she had, the higher her price was, and vice versa. Money as well as pieces of clothing (fur coats, mittens, thick woolen stockings, etc.), food, cattle and other property were acceptable payment methods. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the price of a girl that the future husband's father was required to pay was within one hundred rubles.

Russian authorities sought to eradicate the practice of paying a ransom for the bride by fixing mandatory fees that every person getting married had to pay to the public treasury instead of "bride ransom" and "drinking" money. As an example in September 1704, Yasash Mordvins residing in Saransk District – Ilyushka Kipayev (village of Perkhlyay), Kipayka Novdayev (village of Usad), Vushtayka Vedvanzin (village of Chamzino), Levka Bektin (village of Permissi), Nacharka Levkin (village of Stary Nayman), Puyansa Shestoyev (village of Semiley) and Zhityayka Svoytinov (village of Kochkurovo) – paid a state fee of 11 altyns for marrying for the first time and another fee in the sum of 3 rubles instead of "bride ransom" and "drinking" money. Yasash Mordvin Bukharka Chegodayev from the village of Kochkurovo paid a state fee of 22 altyns for marrying a second time and a fee in the sum of 3 rubles instead of "bride ransom" and "drinking" money.⁷⁰ The future husband acquired full rights of ownership to the bride, including the right to take her to his house or to that of his father, only after having paid the full amount of the agreed payment to his future father-in-law.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Field data, A. F. Plaksina, b. 1927, village of Konopat, Staroshaygovsky District, Republic of Mordovia. 2017.

⁶⁷ M. E. Yevseyev, Selected Works. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

⁶⁸ Mordvin Proverbs, Adages and Sayings (Saransk, 1986).

⁶⁹ Field data, N. M. Kondratyeva, b. 1939, village of Novoye Kachayevo. 2002.

⁷⁰ Humanities Research Institute affiliated to the Government of the Republic of Mordovia, I-66. L. 124-128.

⁷¹ A. N. Maksimov, Family Traditions of Russia's Peoples (Moscow, 1902).

The fulfillment of mutual financial liabilities, which completed the pre-marriage negotiations, was strengthened by a handshake: the matchmakers would put on mittens by candlelight and hit their hands. Sometimes they would not put on mittens but wrapped their hands in the flaps of their clothes. In the past, matchmakers performed this action by seizing the ceiling beam with their left hand and then hitting their hands while saying *kedem koskez* (“lest this hand wither”, Yu. S.). The described custom was still alive in Moksha Mordvin villages in the late 19th century.⁷²

The girl was considered engaged (*ladyaf stir* in Mokshan; *makson patya* in Erzyan) after the handshake ceremony. From the future husband’s perspective, the bride’s gift of an object representing the “girl’s will”, such as a handkerchief or a hairbrush, symbolized a successful marriage proposal.⁷³ This original token showed the girl’s consent to get married and served as an important proof of her acceptance of the marriage proposal.

Right after the handshake ceremony, the young man’s parents performed the rite of “marking” the bride, i.e. the viewing of the bride accompanied by gifting.⁷⁴ In her turn, the bride had to offer gifts to the matchmakers and the groom’s relatives,⁷⁵ which is indicative of a certain legal and economic equity between the parties at the pre-marriage stage. The bride’s representatives would inspect the future husband’s household and arrangements were made regarding wedding expenses. In rich families, the average wedding cost ranged between one hundred and one hundred fifty rubles for both sides, with two thirds of the sum being paid by the groom. A substantial part of this sum was spent on vodka. If the money was not enough, families would pawn their land or sell movable property.

Upon completion of the matchmaking stage, the bride would start her wedding planning, which consisted mostly in the preparation of gifts (*kazne* in Mokshan and Erzyan), for neither the girl nor her parents would agree to make a wedding without enough linen and gifts so as to avoid “disgracing themselves before others”.⁷⁶ Before her wedding, a Mordvin bride had to prepare the following items for herself and for wedding guests: ten to twenty embroidered chemises, as many men’s shirts, a considerable number of embroidered *kokoshniks* (headwear), towels and scarves. Interestingly, it was impossible to buy these wedding gifts, as Mordvin costumes were not “sold at markets”.⁷⁷ The bride’s girlfriends would help prepare this trousseau, thus highlighting the common interest of this or that social and age group. Besides wedding gifts, the bride had to learn traditional lamentations and plaints (*urnyama* in Mokshan and *urnema* in Erzyan). The importance placed on the bride’s knowledge of wedding lamentations highlighted, in the absence of writing, the people’s aspiration to maintain as long as possible centuries-old popular knowledge by introducing the youth to the long-established behavioral systems and customary laws, given that young people gained full legal competency only after marriage. Lamentations made up the largest part of the rite of their initiation into adulthood and were traced back to ancient initiation rites. In the distant past, ceremonial plaints were of real significance, echoing the miserable fate of the woman and her passage to another family, but at a later period tears were affected and of a ritual nature.

⁷² V. N. Maynov, *An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

⁷³ Central State Archives of the Republic of Mordovia, F. R-267. Op. 1. D. 655. L. 8.

⁷⁴ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

⁷⁵ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55...

⁷⁶ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55...

⁷⁷ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55...

The wedding day was determined once marriage preparations were completed.⁷⁸ At this time, the bride's parents obtained the payment arranged during the matchmaking stage, leaving only a few kopecks out, which the wedding procession would later bring along. This stage also involved the final arrangements concerning wedding expenses, activities and other things related to the wedding. Part of the bride's *pitne* along with her dowry was stored in a special trunk (*eryamo par* in Mokshan and Erzyan). The bride would wail over her maidenhood starting on the first night after the appointment of her wedding day. Yevseyev says that "from now on, the bride felt absolutely sure that she was getting married and moving on to a new life, of which she knew nothing, to a new family and to other parents".⁷⁹

The final stage of the marriage procedure was the wedding, which consisted of a number of various rites, including the farewell to the braid, wedding blessing, the wedding ceremony, coming to the groom's or bride's house, delivery of the dowry, changing of the headwear, the wedding night, the newlyweds' permanent residence arrangements and so on. The wedding involved religious and magic rites aimed at securing the young family's fertility, happiness, welfare and at protecting it from spells. The public nature of wedding festivities was an integral part of the marriage's validity. First, the wedding rites were performed separately in the groom's and the bride's houses and then both parties would appear together. I. I. Dubasov observes that the wedding ceremony itself was presided over by an old woman who would "take the bride's hat and the bride's ribbon, swing them back and forth over their heads and then put the hat on the bride and the ribbon on the groom".⁸⁰

Various elements of the wedding rite point to the surviving vestiges of old bride kidnapping practices, the fight against the rule, first, of the Golden Horde and, then, of the Khanate of Kazan, as well as abductions of Mordvin girls and women by Tatars. Thus, since olden days the "wedding procession" consisted of only the groom's male relatives and guests (3 to 19 people). Among the most active wedding procession members (*kudat* in Mokshan and Erzyan, from Turkic *koda*, a matchmaker), who controlled the practice of bride kidnapping, were the matchmaker (*kudava* in Erzyan), the best man (*uredev* from the Erzyan work *ure*, a slave, and *tev*, work, that is, a slave-maker) and an elder member (*poksh kuda* in Erzyan).⁸¹ The wedding procession members introduced themselves to the bride's parents as "merchants" who wanted to "buy" a girl of marriageable age.

Social taboos related to the bride's staying away from her future husband's relatives dated back to the practice of bride kidnapping and explained the tradition that the bride had to cover her face with a veil.⁸² Other rites can be interpreted in the same vein, including those that prevented the groom from entering the bride's house, imitated fighting over a girl, presented the wedding procession members as the Nogais, prohibited the bride from showing her face to the groom's matchmakers and so on.⁸³

When the Mordvins joined the Russian State and adopted Christianity, a church wedding became a mandatory part of the wedding rite. New components resulting from the interaction of the Orthodox canon law and Mordvin customary laws enriched the wedding ceremony, and a church wedding became compulsory for the marriage to be valid. As early

⁷⁸ A. A. Shakhmatov, *Mordvin Ethnographic Miscellanea* (St. Petersburg, 1910).

⁷⁹ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

⁸⁰ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*...

⁸¹ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*...

⁸² M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*...

⁸³ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*...

as January 13, 1724, Peter the Great issued the following edict: “Unmarried husbands and wives shall be married in church after Lent during St. Thomas Week. If a newly baptized person refuses to have a church wedding, he shall be sent to the Consistory to provide explanation, be taken under strict custody and accept the Church’s correction”.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a church wedding had become an absolute requirement for the formal validity of marriage in terms of not only official legislation but also customary law. The acceptance of a church wedding as a fundamental part of the wedding ceremony is testified by the tradition that a girl changed her hairdo to that of a married woman only after she had obtained official status of wife. Thus, only after the church wedding would the matchmaker lead the bride to a church gatehouse, where she would tie her hair in two braids and put a *kokoshnik* on her head, following which they headed for the groom’s house.

When the newlyweds entered the groom’s house, one of the elder family members would hit the wall with an axe just above the doorpost, leaving a cut on it. This cut meant the arrival of a new family member and each woman in the family had a cut of her own. The best man would strike the newlyweds with a rope, symbolically intimidating them into obeying the household head. In some Mordvin villages, the newlyweds “swore their loyalty” to each other in front of bread and salt.⁸⁴

Then, the newlyweds moved on to the joint wedding feast symbolizing the unity and sanctity of their family. The practice of joint meals used to confirm unions and agreements, including marriages. The rite of putting the newlyweds to bed in a barn or a stable was performed to conclude the wedding ceremony in full compliance with customary laws. It was often there that the husband would first meet his wife whom his father had sought in marriage for him. A rite that imitated bride kidnapping then took place in the barn: everyone would beat the soil with their feet, splash each other with wine and shout. After prayers and the symbolic ransom of the bed were over, the young couple would be left alone and the barn door locked.⁸⁵

Of great importance was the ritual gift-making ceremony performed by the wife after the first wedding night, the so-called “morning gift”, which symbolized the husband’s gratitude to his wife for having remained chaste and for having lost her chastity in marriage. The husband’s “morning gift” to his wife was a special form of purchase, in which the property for sale was neither the woman nor her parents’ custody rights over her, as in the case of the ransom for the bride; what was sold was the right for sexual involvement with her.⁸⁶ The official marriage procedure was considered complete after the wedding night.

The following rites had to do with the girl’s introduction to her husband’s family and household and to her compliance with her new family’s lifestyle. Interestingly, after becoming part of her husband’s family, the girl was given a new name (*Iemdema* in Mokshan and Erzyan) the day after the wedding.

Bride kidnapping or the abduction of a girl without her consent was a violation of traditional marriage practices by matchmaking, which had survived up to the early 20th

⁸⁴ K. Milkovich, *Mordvin Everyday Life and Beliefs in the Late 18th Century*. TEB. CH. Neofits (Moscow, 1905).

⁸⁵ M. E. Yevseyev, *Selected Works*. Vol. 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

⁸⁶ M. M. Kovalevsky, *Primitive Laws*. Issue 2 (Moscow: Semya, 1886).

century. According to M. E. Yevseyev, bride kidnapping was widespread among the Mordvins even after their adoption of Christianity and despite government prohibitions.⁸⁷

The practice of the so-called “mock abduction”, i.e. abduction performed by prior arrangement with the girl, resulted from families’ intention to minimize wedding expenses or from the girl’s desire to marry a specific young man against their parents’ will. Mordvin customary law designated such marriages as *lisema* (translated as “exit”). The Russians had a similar practice, known as *kradenaya svadba* (stolen wedding), *samokrutka*, *samokradka*, *samokhodka*, *samokhotka* or marriage by leaving (*brak ukhodom*) or by fleeing (*brak ubegom*). In general, both the Russians and the Mordvins condemned such marriages as violating long-established marriage traditions, even though they were due mainly to the precarious socio-economic situation of the peasantry.

Conclusion

The Mordvins considered marriage by matchmaking followed by a wedding as the only acceptable way of starting a family. Bride kidnapping, whether real or pretended, ran counter to Mordvin customary legal practices. Mordvin wedding rites reflect the vestiges of the clan system and of the Golden Horde’s influences as well as historical and legal processes, including the Mordvins’ integration into the Russian State, the role of communal institutions, Christianity and interactions with other ethnic groups.

References

- Bay Baron de. From the Volga River to Irtysh. Tobolsk. 1898.
- Erzyan-Russian Dictionary. Saransk. 1993.
- Grebnev, M. The Erzyan Woman. Samarskiye yeparkhialnye vedomosti, (1885).
- Kovalevsky, M. M. Primitive Laws. Issue 2. Moscow: Semya. 1886.
- Lepyokhin, I. Notes on the Journey to Various Provinces of the Russian State in 1768 and 1769. St. Petersburg. 1771.
- Maynov, V. N. An Outline of Mordvin Legal Lifestyles. St. Petersburg. 1886.
- Maynov, V. N. Results of Anthropological Research Studies Conducted among the Mordvin Erzyans. St. Petersburg. 1883.
- Maksimov, A. N. Family Traditions of Russia’s Peoples. Moscow. 1902.
- Markelov, M. T. Saratov Mordvins. Saratovsky etnografichesky sbornik. Saratov. 1922.
- Maslennikov, N. On the Mordvin Lifestyle in the Village of Kuchenyayevo of Alatyr District of Simbirsk Governorate. Kazan. 1916.
- Milkovich, K. Mordvin Everyday Life and Beliefs in the Late 18th Century. TEB. CH. neofits. Moscow. 1905.

⁸⁷ M. E. Yevseyev, Selected Works. Vol: 55 (Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo, 1959).

- Mordvin Proverbs and Riddles. Vol. 1. Saransk. 1959.
- Mordvin Proverbs, Adages and Sayings. Saransk. 1986.
- Nikolsky, N. V. A Compilation of Historical Resources on Volga Region peoples. Kazan. 1919.
- Pallas, P. S. Travelling around Various Provinces of the Russian State. St. Petersburg. 1809.
- Ploss, G. Women in Natural Science and Ethnography. Kiev; Kharkov. 1899.
- Russia's Peoples. St. Petersburg. 1880.
- Russian Writers on the Mordvins. Ed. O. I. Chudayeva. Saransk. 1957.
- Shakhmatov, A. A. Mordvin Ethnographic Miscellanea. St. Petersburg. 1910.
- Smirnov, I. N. The Mordvins: A Historical and Ethnographic Outline. Saransk. 2002.
- Smirnov, N. The Mordvins in Penza Governorate. Penza. 1874.
- Syrnev, I. N. A Complete Geographical Description of Our Fatherland. Ulyanovsk. 1998.
- Tereshchenko, A. Russians and Their Lifestyle. St. Petersburg. 1848
- UPTMN (Mordvin Oral Poetry). Vol. 1. Saransk. 1963.
- Yevseyev, M. E. Selected Works. Vol. 55. Saransk: Mord. kn. izd-vo. 1959.