Marriage Customs in Kakheti by Marjory Wardrop

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When a youth wishes to marry he does not tell the fact to the head of the family in so many words; he seeks rather to make it evident by various outward signs that such is his desire: at that time he either works extraordinarily hard or stands with bent head doing nothing at all. This his father and mother take as a sign that they must prepare for the wedding and search for a wife. If the young man has set his choice upon a particular maiden he says to his parents: “Go to such and such a girl’s master* and ask him to give me for her as wife.” If he has not seen her then he himself arranges with the girl’s parents for an Examination *gasasindja*.

If the girl’s master is content with the youth, he shows her to the suitor and his master, if not he does not allow the man to see her. Under these latter circumstances he must give up all ideas of marrying the girl and seek his fate elsewhere, I shall shortly describe the ceremony of examination which is an interesting one. When the girl’s master is satisfied with the wooer, he gives him permission with his master, to visit the woman’s house. She is in another house being adorned, if there is not a spare room in her own home. In the meantime the lords of the fate of these beings are engaged in pleasant talk and jesting. For the young man this is a trying moment: he frequently changes colour, with trembling hand he arranges his moustache and strokes his beard, now he places his hat on one side, now he handles his dagger, in a word, he tries not to seem contemptible before the intended bride and her master. He seldom joins in the conversation but sits silent awaiting with beating heart the arrival of his beloved. For her also it is natural a trying time: she weeps and refuses to appear, but her friends and neighbours encourage her to be brave, adorn her, joke and lead her to the place where her suitor awaits her.

When the gaily decked maiden with down-cast eyes is led before the youth, he gazes with delight upon her. She keeps her head bent seeking to avoid meeting the young man’s eye, but nature conquers and several times their eyes meet, as if by force. This momentary glance is sufficient for the girl to decide whether her future master pleases her or not.

Sometimes the young man's master, especially if it be a woman, is exceedingly particular at the time of examination: the intended bride must pass up and down in front to show that she is not lame or crippled, she must speak in case she is dumb or stutters, her dress is removed and her hair is examined in case she is bald, and in short, the lad's master to find for him a wife as perfect and sound in health as possible.

The examination being at an end the girl goes to another room or to a neighbour's house. In the house her master remains to speak with the suitor and his companions. Each of the parties concerned is asked if the choice pleased. When both are satisfied, then the talk of dowry (mzithevi) begins. Often the parents of the girl will not agree and refuse in spite of her wishes; they declare this to the youth and with the assisting woman's consent the affair of [intentional blank] (khebis dasadebi) is completed.

The man gives the Khelis dasadebi. It consists either of money (one rouble, two, three, or more, according to the means of the giver) or of some piece of jewelry (a ring, necklace, etc.)

When the man has given the khelis dasadebi the girl is his; she cannot marry another neither can she be betrothed to any one else. After this full freedom is given to the youth to go to the maiden's house in the daytime or at night. In the day time he comes less frequently to his betrothed, but at night often. At night the young people have not separate beds, Therefore it often happens that a girl becomes pregnant before the ceremony of marriage has taken place, but this is not considered a disgrace. But among the people this custom is unlawful and no one would tolerate it: there is very seldom an example of a man deserting his betrothed if they have shared their bed together. Desertion is considered such a great crime among the people that no other woman would marry a man who had acted thus; frequently he who performs the deed falls a victim to the dagger or gun of the girl's patroni.

But this is not all of the betrothal. There is yet a long time until the wedding: in the meantime there will be likely some great feast day: Christmas, New Year, Easter, the feast of Peter and Paul or the feast of the Blessed Virgin. On these days the intended husband goes to his promised bride for the mosakithkha (For example: suppose the mokithkha to be at the feast of the B. Virgin. For the man's patroni this is a period of great excitement: the cooks many hard loaves, kada, bread made of dough butter and eggs nazuki [more blank spaces for other ingredients of the sweet bread], he buys a fine fat sheep, big, fills skins with good wine, provides different

kinds of [unintelligble word], buys for the bride pretty shoes, headdress, robe, veil, buzica or daira in a word, whatever is the most suitable present at the time.

With these provisions and presents loaded upon either horses or uremis; with these the young man his friends and neighbours set out for the bride's. If she is near he goes on the feast day itself, if she lives far away, the day before. The girl's patroni sits at this time waiting in the hope that the son in law will bring with him all that is necessary. He only honours the guest who makes merriment. It is impossible for the son in law ; if the girl's father is not, in his turn, felicitated he is so angry, that it may happen that he will not give his daughter to the man at all. Then in the intended bride's house the festival is prepared after church, where the engaged couple have been assisting at the mass. The wine gradually mounts into the heads of the guests and acts as an incentive to gaiety. The buzica and daira are in motion, the young man leaps up, folds his arms and exhibits whatever grace and elegance in dancing God has endowed him. During this the girl looks from a distance at the agile and proud motions of her beloved.

When the man's dance tzecva is finished he bends his head before his betrothed. She rises bashfully and comes on to the arena. The noise of the daira and the clinking of glasses increases. Now every guest puts his hand into his pocket. The time of the gadalokva is come. The richest monied guests calls on the most eloquent to bless the dancing bride. The man coughs clears his voice and begins: People and all give ear and listen! You all know our Demetri?! I am a poor, one handed fellow; it is true I have not seen much but I have not failed at betrothals and weddings, house dinner is served, the meal includes "the capon of St Basil'd day" and St Basil's cakes" (khajapuri) and there is much merriment and singing of toasts, with that peculiar yodelling voice which the Tyrolese have made familiar in Europe.

After dinner a spade and some seed of maize or ghomi (a kind of millet the chief bread stuff of the Gurians) are taken out into the yard; a hole is dug and "the grain is thrown" into it. A pig's head, or the skeleton thereof is taken to the viney and as it it beaten with a stick the following song is chanted:

"Aguna, Aguna, pass by the doors of Bakhua.
Come! In our vineyard
Let there be bunches like this; (here the singer takes a child in his arms)
In other people's vineyards only branches and leaves."

The word Bakhua is supposed to be the name of the god Bacchus. Aguna, possibly a form of the word ghvino (wine), is the protection of vineyards.

Swinging is an amusement in which everybody must take part for luck on New Year's Day.

On the first and second of January it is considered very ill bred to call anybody from a distance, or to go into a neighbour's yard and call anybody out of the house.

If a child goes in front of a man before mass on New Year's Day, the man's liquor will disagree with him throughout the year; so the children are forbidden to pass a man.