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## THE HISTORY OF UKRAINIAN STUDIES ON FAMILY CYCLE RITES

This article is dedicated to the history of Ukrainian studies on family cycle rites. Early stages of the research are characterized by their descriptive nature (G.L. de Beauplan, G. Kalinovskiy, I. Czerwiński, G. Brychynskiy, N. Sumtsov, D. Zelenin, F. Vovk, etc.). Later sources have undergone the analysis of the rites of life cycle in accordance with transitional rituals scheme provided by Arnold van Gennep. The history of perception of the theory of transition rituals by scientists, its influence on different branches of a science is considered. In order to find the scheme of rituals of transition, the next types of ceremonies of life cycle were investigated: maternity rites, age initiations, wedding rites, funeral rites.

**Keywords:** family cycle rites, wedding, funeral, childbirth, transitional rituals theory by A. van Gennep.

Rites of the family cycle typically include rituals linked to birth, wedding and funeral ceremonies. The presence of coming-of-age rituals is questioned by modern science and as such is not included in the current survey. First subject that drives the most attention about accumulated experience in the field of Ukrainian family cycle rites is the amount and variety of scientific material. Second important detail is the descriptive nature of the study. This article is focused on the most characteristic works dedicated to selected subject.

One of the earliest descriptions of wedding rituals is found in Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan's study "Wedding customs of Ukrainians in the first half of the XVII century" (1650) in which French traveler describes the matchmaking ritual, pointing out the detail he himself found bewildering: "In Ukraine it's not men who approach girls about marriage but women themselves – and it's uncommon for them to not achieve success"<sup>1</sup>. The description of marriage by abduction is just as noteworthy: "Even though plowmen are considered to be peasants, they still retain an old tradition of bride kidnapping during festivities, be that daughters of noble families or their landowners. Still, the kidnapper needs to be alert and nimble: if he fails to escape with his prey to neighboring woods and stay hidden for about 24 hours (which grants him total freedom of any guilt), he will end up on gallows. Moreover, he is obliged to marry the kidnapped girl under the threat of death penalty if she's willing to do so; if not, then the man will be forgiven. Those who are not agile enough or failed to stay out of sight for 24 hours are executed on the spot"<sup>2</sup>. It is worth mentioning that de Beauplan, having spent 17 years in Ukraine, admits he had never encountered such abduction in person. He takes great care to describe a typical Ukrainian wedding, taking freedom in his blunt statement about "the inherent passion for wine which exceeds each and every level of moderation during the wedding feast"<sup>3</sup>. Even more attention is drawn by the author to the chastity of Ukrainian brides and consequences that arise if a bride is revealed to have lost her virginity premaritally. Still, de Beauplan feels the need to "give credit to Ukrainian girls that resist the temptation of widely available alcoholic beverages by keeping in mind that their actions under its influence will result in public shunning and ridicule if they were to lose their virginity"<sup>4</sup>.

Another example of early descriptions of Ukrainian family circle rites is a study by Grigoriy Kalinovskiy "The description of traditional Ukrainian wedding ceremonies" (1777) containing a detailed survey of matchmaking, wedding ceremony and rituals after marriage<sup>5</sup>. The greatest weaknesses of this

<sup>1</sup> Боплан, Г.Л. (1970). Весільні звичаї українців у першій половині XVII ст. *Весілля*. Київ: Наукова думка, 1, 66-67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Боплан, Г.Л. (1970). Весільні звичаї українців у першій половині XVII ст. *Весілля*. Київ: Наукова думка, 1, 66-67.

<sup>5</sup> Калиновський, Г. (1970). Опис весільних українських простонародних обрядів. *Весілля*. Київ: Наукова думка, 1, 68-74.

work lie within its exclusively descriptive nature, total absence of any conclusions or generalizations. The study made by Ignacy Czerwiński titled „Matchmaking, wedding and family of Russian folk in Rus’, described by the inhabitants of this land” (1805) takes the same path, though the author chooses to point out the tradition of betrothal left out by abovementioned scientists – a ritual that takes place after the matchmaking and precedes the wedding ceremony<sup>1</sup>. In addition to that we may mention the study of Georgiy Brychynskyi titled “Ethnographical notes from Volynian Polissya” published in *Zbior Wiadom*” in 1888 (issue XII, p. 81-103), where he provides a short note of such traditions as christening, wedding rites, thirty short traditional wedding songs and funeral ceremonies. This work has received a notable criticism from Nikolay Sumtsov who deemed it as “short and mundane”<sup>2</sup>. It is also vital to point out the collection of studies by Zhanna Moshynska known as “Wedding customs, rites and songs of Ukrainians from Bila Tserkva”, released within „Zbior wiadomosci do antrop. krajowej”, 1878 II, 183-209. Wedding is described in several chapters: 1) courtship (zaloty); 2) love and charms; 3) matchmaking; 4) engagement; 5) pre-wedding Saturday and korovai (traditional Slavic wedding loaf); 6) bridal shower (weaving); 7) marriage; 8) visit to the groom’s parents; 9) visit to the bride’s parents; 10) return to the groom; 11) marriage in the bride’s home; 12) blessing; 13) marriage in the groom’s home; 14) second day after the wedding; 15) mother-in-law bathing (pouring cold water on her). Aside from that her work includes the description of sixty wedding songs<sup>3</sup>.

Native classification of the family cycle rites is represented within the works of the prominent ethnographer and folklorist Nikolay Sumtsov who is the author of a study titled “Wedding rituals of Russian folk”, where he divides all rituals related to the wedding ceremony into three large groups based on space criteria (or, rather, where do these ceremonies take place): 1) rituals performed in bride father’s house, 2) rituals that take place while a bride is on the way to the groom’s home, 3) rituals performed in groom’s house<sup>4</sup>. Still, the surveyor points out an “uneven quantitative distribution of the rites per separate acts of the wedding ceremony” and suggests a subjectively better classification method “for more convenient distribution of all wedding songs and rites between two broad groups: 1) wedding customs and songs related to the strengthening of civil marriage and 2) wedding customs and songs that were regarded as a religious blessing of a newly-wed couple in pagan past<sup>5</sup>. Aside from that, Sumtsov mentions marriage by abduction and contractual marriage that were common within Slavic tribes, as well as “marriage by kidnapping with bride’s consent”<sup>6</sup>.

The author has taken it upon himself to emphasize on the importance of wedding loaf known as “korovai” and the role it plays in Slavic wedding rites; according to him, this loaf was not only of utilitarian significance for Slavic people – it had a sizable ritualistic value. As the consumption of bread was obligatory and sometimes excessive, it has turned into an embodiment of “divine grace” bestowed upon humans by a God and as such the very act of bread consumption has become sacramental<sup>7</sup>. Grains were given to humans by the God and returned as a ritual sacrifice in the processed form – hence in the form of a bread loaf. This process of turning something foreign and raw into something of your own in its processed state has become the main reason of cultural mechanism, mimicking the natural cycle of the grain from birth to death and a beginning of a new cycle with its rebirth as a new plant<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Червінський, І. (1970). Сватання, весілля і родини у люду руського на Русі Червоній, описане мешканцем цього краю. *Весілля*. Київ: Наукова думка, 1, 76-77.

<sup>2</sup> Сумцов, Н.Ф. (1897). Современная малорусская этнография. *Оттискъ из журнала „Кіевская Старина”*. Київ: Типографія „Корчак-Новицкаго”, 61-62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 63-64.

<sup>4</sup> Сумцов, Н.Ф. (1996). О свадебных обрядах, преимущественно русских. *Символика славянских обрядов, Избранные труды*. Москва: Восточная литература РАН, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> Сумцов, Н.Ф. (1996). Хлеб в обрядах и песнях. *Символика славянских обрядов, Избранные труды*. Москва: Восточная литература РАН, 176.

<sup>8</sup> Байбурун, А.К., Фрадкин, В.З. (1996). Послесловие. Николай Федорович Сумцов и его работы в области обрядовой символики *Символика славянских обрядов. Избранные труды*. Москва: Восточная литература РАН, 276.

The sacred status of bread as a ritual dish has been further secured by the special status of the tools that were used for its production<sup>1</sup>.

Nikolay Sumtsov was the first one to systemize all data related to Slavic wedding rites regarding bride's hairstyle, whether that was cutting or unbraiding her braid, donning special headgear, setting hair ablaze etc.. Aside from his predecessors who had focused only on separate aspects of wedding rites, Sumtsov considered them to be an organic whole consisting of diverse phenomena and consequently has given a lot of credit to music, choreography and texts. He had paid great deal of attention to the key ritualistic symbols which were surrounded by a ceremonial gravity field saturated with varied contents. Such symbols included (and were not limited to) ritualistic tree representing the legendary tree of life according to Sumtsov. Moreover, he was the first one to point out the wedding dress of a newly-wed couple, such as bride's chemise; a net worn on bare skin as protective gear against bad charms; a belt bearing all sorts of significant merits according to native beliefs etc.<sup>2</sup>. As it was pointed out by Albert Bayburin and Vladimir Fradkin in an afterword to the 1996 edition of "Symbols of Slavic rites", "...though a lot of thesis listed in his works can be regarded as naïve by some, he was the one to start the vast survey of ritualistic Slavic wedding symbols. As such, his study is a valuable material for specialists in the field as well as for wide circles of pagan past enthusiasts"<sup>3</sup>.

Dmitriy Zelenin has described in a great detail family cycle rites in his work dubbed "Eastern Slavic ethnography" in chapter IX, from rituals related to family circle till funeral rites. Family rites were distributed between three groups: 1) birth: 2) introduction of a new member to the community: 3) cleansing mother and midwife<sup>4</sup>. In his description of family rites the author introduces many unique ethnographic examples which ensure its work's peculiar value for this article. Zelenin adherently addresses such issues as the difficulties of childbirth, cutting the umbilical cord and its utilization, the peculiarities of postpartum rehabilitation, introduction of a newborn to the community and his primary socialization, the peculiarities of traditional Slavic baptizing, types of cradles. Despite the thoroughness of his approach, the researcher gives preference to the chronological order of the rites rather than discerning a specific scheme which unites them. Same goes for Slavic age initiation rituals such as first time dressing by gender, first hair and nails trimming, first errand for household management etc. This category of rites in Zelenin's work is followed by wedding rites. According to the author, one of main objectives of the wedding itself is the recognition of marriage by the community consisting of three layers: "Slavic wedding rites are distinguished by three layers from different historical periods. They stem from prehistoric exogamy through bridal kidnapping typical for pagan times... Only after the baptism of Rus' these traditions have changed under the influence of Byzantine rites which hardly differ from Greco-Roman rites introduced beforehand to Southern Slavic people and mainly characterized by religious-mystical elements"<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Dmitriy Zelenin has pointed out theatrical nature of the Western Slavic wedding cycle, successively describing matchmaking, engagement, the wedding itself, the peculiarities of sacred meals such as korovai and rites after the wedding ceremony.

Having provided multiple ethnographic examples for wedding rites, Dmitriy Zelenin concludes his study of family cycle rites with a description of funeral. Yet again, just as with his previous studies, the author uses a large quantity of ethnographic material without deducing anything about the way in which funeral rites are connected.

Professor Fedir Vovk has made a great creative contribution to the study of family cycle rites in his works "Ukrainian wedding rites" and "Anthropological features of the Ukrainian people", which are distinguished thanks to his interesting observations and generalizations related to the case. In the very beginning of his first work Vovk points out the insufficiency of studies regarding Ukrainian marriage tradition and consequently Slavic rites as a whole: "At last every single achievement of my study has

<sup>1</sup> Сумцов, Н.Ф. (1996). Хлеб в обрядах и песнях. *Символика славянских обрядов, Избранные труды*. Москва: Восточная литература РАН.

<sup>2</sup> Байбури, А.К., Фрадкин, В.З. (1996). Послесловие. Николай Федорович Сумцов и его работы в области обрядовой символики *Символика славянских обрядов, Избранные труды*. Москва: Восточная литература РАН, 275.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>4</sup> Зеленин Д. К. (1991) *Восточнославянская этнография*. Москва: Наука, 319.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 332.

been done by sheer accident, without any kind of systematic or scientific approach. To be fair, all our knowledge of Slavic wedding rituals does not contribute to further and in any way worth recognition study”<sup>1</sup>. The author emphasizes on three ceremonial complexes or so-called “acts”: matchmaking, engagement and the wedding itself. Each of these acts is divided into a series of actions which subsequently develop into more complicated rites. Such actions include “attempted kidnapping, bride’s resistance, reconciliation, paying ransom to bride’s relatives, religious validation of the marriage and post-marriage cohabitation of a newly-wed couple”. According to Fedir Vovk, the reason behind this triple nature lies within “temporary cohabitation also known as “trial marriage” which is typical for some nations, for example Canadian and Mexican Indians, Santhal people in India, certain tribes of Ceylon island, Siberian natives and in general those nations which value the competition of breeding higher than the importance of virginity”. The Ukrainian researcher further elaborates on wedding rites by distributing them between two main categories: historically-dramatic and religious. The name for the first group is named after the fact that it “consists of a number of scenes in which the participants recreate events and relationship patterns of a bygone era; firstly they pretend to sneak into the girl’s home, then – break into it by force. Still, the scenario for the whole event thoroughly follows the pattern characteristic for societal relations in princely era”. Vovk assures that “the dramatic scenario of wedding ceremony defines modern wedding as an exogamy even though it bears no resemblance to it”.<sup>2</sup> As for the religious part of wedding ceremonies the researcher chose to classify them as remnants of the heavenly bodies cult: “After an examination of religious validity of the wedding ceremony, which consists of wedding songs, embellishment of the knot, utilization of wreaths and – most importantly – the process of baking the wedding korovai while praying to the Sun, the Moon and stars etc. it is beyond any doubt that every single of these rituals is a remnant of the heavenly bodies cult”<sup>3</sup>.

Fedir Vovk has put a great emphasis on the primary importance of traditional marriage ceremonies in comparison with the religious and legal consolidation of marriage: “The religious blessing of the marriage was not sufficient for the newly-wed to start their life together. They were not allowed to establish a family of their own until all ceremonies dictated by traditional customs... which comprise the full wedding ritual in its dramatic form were fulfilled”. Another interesting idea of his was introduced in a form of thesis describing the presence of informal organization between two gender groups of unmarried youth: “Young men on one hand and grown girls on the other were divided into two neatly organized communities: bachelors and maidens respectively”. According to the author, matchmaking is conducted amenably to an ancient ritual maintaining the characteristic features of marriage by kidnapping<sup>4</sup>. Yet another thesis of the author addresses cleansing rites which were mandatory for bride’s flit to her husband’s dwelling, even though we consider him being mistaken about the first wedding night being spent outside the living quarters, usually in the shed: “This tradition of leaving newly-wed sleep outside the home is based on an ancient custom of hiding in the woods, when a man, having kidnapped the bride, was doing his best to avoid being discovered by his pursuers”<sup>5</sup>.

If we were to introduce Ukrainian studies of family cycle rites based on analytical approach it would be worth mentioning a dissertation on ethnology by Mariya Mayerchuk called “Ukrainian Rites of a family cycle through a prism of transition model”, in which the author investigates Ukrainian family cycle rites in accordance to the scheme „Les rites de passage” by Arnold van Gennep. Mayerchuk analyzes ritualistically defined behavior of main transitional characters as well as examples of different traditions by utilizing the simulation of liminaire motives (such terminology has been borrowed by her from the works of Victor Turner) while describing table manners and certain aspects of ritualistic meals, defining the importance and meaning of clothes in a semiotic simulation of various phases in human life – in this case maturity is followed by the introduction of more complex clothing items (baptismal clothing known as “kryzhmo”, first belt, then chemise, pants or skirt, outerwear etc.) which signify the level of socialization<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Вовк, Х.К. (1995). Антропологічні особливості українського народу. *Студії з української етнографії та антропології*. Київ: Мистецтво, 220.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 208-209.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 227-230.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 277-279.

<sup>6</sup> Маєрчук М. С. (2002) Українські обряди родинного циклу крізь призму моделі переходу. Київ: б/в, 6-14.

As a conclusion Mayerchuk states that transitional structure of the ritual is modeled by the alteration of liminaire person's negative features introduced in the very beginning of the act, such as immobility and incapacity, into the positive, opposite ones. This ritualistic transition of a liminaire person from one social age status to another is just an intermediary link inside a wider phenomenon which unites three stages: 1) pre-ritualistic period (pre-liminaire phase) characterized by a growing urge to proceed with a ritual (nobility, pregnancy or terminal state); 2) ritualistic period (liminaire phase) signaling the transition to a new status; 3) post-ritualistic period (post-liminaire phase), which signifies the departure from ritualistic reality and assertion of new social roles<sup>1</sup>.

It is also worth mentioning that the researcher considers these transitional phases to be fully present only in intermediary rituals, such as when one changes status within the realm of living (wedding transition or the transition between father and mother of a newborn in family cycle rites): as for frame rituals which signify the transition between realms or departure from them there can be only two extremes: integrative phase related to birth and eliminative addressing the dead<sup>2</sup>.

Aside from that, the author sees clothes as an indication of socialization, the highest degree of which is reached during marriage and is characterized by the most complex choice of clothing. On the contrary, aging is followed with a decrease of clothes worn by old people, which links their social status to liminaire representatives. Mayerchuk takes note that during the wedding ceremony there are two polar opposite tendencies present at the same time: being "overdressed" and "underdressed" – which are explained by two different symbolic plans present within the ceremony itself; firstly its social meaning and then – ritualistic. The social context of marriage dictated to put as much clothing as possible in use, and ritualistic context opposed this rule, acting as a feature of a liminaire participant. In family cycle rites and funeral rites such conflict is irrelevant since the social plan of them coincides with a ritualistic one: birth and maturity bring up more clothes to the scene, while aging and death puts an emphasis on the decreasing amount of clothes<sup>3</sup>.

To conclude our study we would like to mention a dissertation called «Arnold van Gennep's theory of transition rituals: its content and verification on the example of ceremonies of life cycle», introduced in 2009. This work is a confirmation of the thesis that family cycle rites follow the transitional scheme devised by A. van Gennep (consisting of three phases: 1) pre-liminaire – acquiring independence from the previous stage; 2) liminaire – intermediary stage; 3) post-liminaire – the acquisition of a new state)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Пасічник, О.С. (2009). *Теорія ритуалів переходу А. ван Геннепа: її зміст та верифікація на прикладі обрядів життєвого циклу*. Київ: б/в, 1.

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