

THE EVOLUTION OF WEDDING CEREMONIES OF SOUTH CRIMEAN TATARS: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Emine Atmaca¹ and Reshide Gözdaş²

¹Akdeniz University and ²Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University

Abstract. Marriage is the beginning of the family institution, which is the smallest building block of society and the only legitimate way for the continuation of the generation. It is an effective institution to ensure the continuation of lineage in all societies. Traditional marriage rituals in the South Crimean Tatars are a series of colourful and entertaining events that take place in the home of the bride and groom and last for three to seven days. In determining the information about these marriage rituals, historical data on this subject were utilized, and field research was carried out using observation and interview techniques. In light of the data provided by the informants, we tried to determine whether their own marriage-related traditions, customs, religious beliefs, and practices are like today's religious beliefs and practices, and whether the ceremonies still continue.

Keywords: Crimea, Crimean Tatar Turks, transition, marriage, ceremony, wedding.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2025.4.02>

Received 25 June 2025, accepted 7 July 2025, printed and available online 10 December 2025

1. Introduction

Marriage is a social institution that brings together two people who generally share similar social and cultural values but have different individual lifestyles (Chowdhary 2016). This union is recognized as an important rite of passage, not only in the lives of individuals but also in the social structure. Marriage, which strengthens social, cultural, and economic ties between families, carries out many

functions, such as continuity of the social structure and the transfer of tangible and intangible cultural heritage to future generations. The rituals applied during marriage enable the continuity or reshaping of individual and social identities (Burch 2019). Therefore, marriage can be considered a large-scale social phase in which many dimensions such as social, cultural, economic, religious, and historical are blended.

In the formation of cultural identity, marriage rituals are an important part of cultural diversity among the processes in which individuals build their identities based on their social and cultural environment (Karjalainen 2020). Therefore, marriage rituals, which are important in every situation, are an integral part of society.

During the twentieth century, traditional family rituals acquired several new features, and the structure of the wedding ceremony underwent significant changes and transformations. Universal features such as the urbanization process of modern society, the transition to industrial production, the merging of cultures, new knowledge, and the expansion and diversification of these fields of knowledge have been the main triggers of this change.

2. Research methodology

The main purpose of this article is to examine in depth the beliefs, practices, customs, and traditions related to marriage considering the information obtained from written sources and the informants interviewed within the scope of the field research. Written informed consent has been obtained from all informants or their legal guardians for participation in the study and for publication of identifying details of individual participants (source persons). In a qualitative context, the existence of traditional marriage rituals in contemporary society and the extent to which they have been preserved or changed will be investigated. This study, which aims to analyse cultural continuity and change processes, makes an important contribution to field studies by revealing the current situation of traditional practices.

When the marital status of the informants was analysed, three of them were married and the other three were widowed. Analysing the marriage types, it was found that all six informants were married through arranged marriages. There were no illiterate persons. The literacy rate of the informants was high, with at least one primary school graduate.

3. Marriage in the South Crimean Tatars in ancient times

Marriage is a civil contract between families outside mosques. The strength of this contract was secured by a monetary or other contribution in favour of the ‘victim’¹ in the event of the dissolution of the marriage. This contribution was called ‘*mehir* (*mehr* ‘fee’)’ which is required for the validity of wedding contract in all Muslim

¹ A person who has suffered direct damage or economic loss because of an offence committed against him/her.

societies (Bone 2020). *Mehir* is money or property that the husband is obliged to pay to his wife because of the marriage contract. Therefore, the woman was given financial security in the form of cash or property, referred to as *mahr*, with a marriage contract [Source Person (SP) 1, SP 2]. However, dowry, which is a custom of Eastern societies, is not found in the South Crimean Tatars (SP 1). In fact, in Islamic law, there is no such practice such as 'dowry,' which is a gift of goods, money, land, presents given by the man or his family to the girl or her family after the promise is finalized (Kavak 2019).

In the past, when a South Crimean Tatar person chose to marry a member of his/her own people, he would do genealogical research and paid special attention not to be related to him/her. This is still a valid rule today (SP 1). The type of marriage, even if it is an arranged marriage, is very meticulous in this regard, and it is important whether the family is related. Marriage of children of relatives or siblings is only possible after seven generations have passed. Otherwise, this situation is a great shame and embarrassment for families (Demir-Uysal 2020).

Among South Crimean Tatars, there was a practice of exchanging gifts at the time of marriage. Marriage did not occur without the consent of either side. It was strictly forbidden for parents (primarily the father, who usually decided on all marital matters) to force their daughters to marry. The in-laws wanted to know the bride's attitude towards the groom. If the girl agreed to the marriage, she would stand behind the curtain and lift the skirt of her dress slightly as courtesy after three repeated questions. If a girl never married, it was considered the fault of her parents, and there was a belief that they had to answer to God for each menstrual period, just as they did for infanticide (Roslavceva 2003).

The father chose a bride for his son based on the advice of his relatives. However, at the end of the 19th century, the groom's own wish gradually began to be considered, although he could not go against the will of his father. If the bride's parents did not agree to marriage, the groom had only one option. To 'kidnap' the girl, that is, to abduct her from home without her consent and the consent of her parents, or to 'take her away,' to marry without the consent of her parents, but with the consent of the girl herself (SP 1). However, in South Crimean Tatars, marriages based on abduction are almost non-existent. Such a situation is considered a source of shame for the girls' parents (SP 3).

4. Meeting and engagement

Young people met and married at folk festivals, holidays, and often at the weddings of friends and relatives (Roslavceva 2003). There was also an understanding that a good girl married someone from her own village and did not go outside the village (SP 1).

Only by peeping through doors or windows can men find a bride to be. Knowing this, young girls often try to play close to windows or doors to be better seen (SP 1). If a young man took a fancy to a girl, he would ask one of the bridesmaids in charge

of the wedding, the 'girl agha²,' to persuade her to play on the women's side but facing the door or window. If the girl was called to play several times, the wedding guests began to realize that someone liked her. When the young man returned home, he told one of his relatives (it was considered inappropriate to tell his family about his feelings) that he liked the girl and wanted to marry her. The relative would convey this request to the young man's family, and if they accepted the young man's choice and were convinced that there was no reason to refuse, after two or three days the *kudas* would send 'groomsmen, seers³' (Karalezli 1992, Roslavceva 2003). The dowrymen included three men among close relatives. If the proposal was accepted, the groomsmen gave 25 gold pieces (it could be money or some gold items) and a silk handkerchief to the bride's family and relatives (Lebedeva 2003). On the southern coast (Yalta region), only men (three people) engaged in the act of marriage, but in the region closer to the steppe zone, this task belonged to women (SP 2).

At the beginning of the 20th century, usually two in-laws were sent to the girl's house (Karalezli 1992; SP 1). A man and a woman. These men were under 40 years of age and were respected in the neighbourhood. They would take money with them and wrap it in a handkerchief. Fabrics and clothes were gifted to the bride's family members. At the beginning of the 20th century, or perhaps earlier, a blue, green, or red handkerchief was tied around the arm of the dowryman. Now, this handkerchief is no longer tied (SP 1). Traditionally, the marriage ceremony was held either on Thursday evening or on Friday. When they entered the bride's house, the greetings were exchanged, and then they talked about various topics, after which they started their work with the following words: 'let us not waste time, we have come to ask your daughter (they say her name) for the son of so-and-so (they say the name of the father and the son).' The father of the bride responds with the following words: 'Of course, if it is kismet, it will happen. 'The father of the girl then consults with his wife. To the husband's question, the wife usually answers: *sizge munasib, mana da munasib*, that is, 'suitable for you, suitable for me. 'They then sent one of their close friends to the girl and asked for her consent. When asked about the consent of the parents, the girl replied: '*As my parents wish, so be it*' (Karalezli 1992, Lebedeva 2003). The girl, bride-to-be, was not given so easily and bargaining over the dowry began. The bride's father would try to give more and the groom's representatives less (SP 3). The father consulted his wife several times, and the bargaining sometimes lasted for several hours until an agreement was reached. In addition to gold, the bride was asked for two expensive dresses, a silver belt, a velvet coat, and a special white cloth, the *ferece-marama*⁴, to cover her during the wedding and when going out. In addition, a certain amount of cash or, if the groom's side is well-off, a certain amount of land may also be requested. After the agreement is reached, the parties say, 'Word is one, Allah is one,' congratulate each other, and shake hands. After that, the groomsmen give the gold coins and silk handkerchief to the girl and her family. The girl's side gives only a silk handkerchief (Karalezli 1992, Lebedeva 2003).

² A single girl who is the chief assistant of the bride and accompanies the bride at every stage of the wedding preparations.

³ A person who mediates between a man and a woman and mediates their marriage, a messenger.

⁴ National costume of the Crimean Tatars.

5. Heavy engagement

The tradition of heavy engagement takes place two weeks after proposing to the girl. During this heavy engagement, gifts are exchanged between the two families. The bride presents the groom with gifts sewn from silver and made by herself. These gifts must consist of at least nine pieces (SP 1). In the bride's dowry, the gifts for the groom, called 'nine pieces'⁵ from the word 'nine', have a special place and importance (Roslavceva 2003; SP 1): These gifts are as follows: 1. *kirtle cord, a drawstring belt for men's trousers*, 2. *towel for wiping the feet after washing*, 3. *yemeni/handkerchief with embroidered edges*, 4. *pink cheesecloth with gold embroidery*, 5. *tobacco pouches (there may be more than one)*, 6. *tobacco pouches (there may be more than one)*, 7. *a small pouch covered with Caucasian silver braid or wool, with a small silver coin sewn into the bottom with the wish that there would always be money in it*, 8. *handkerchief, usually white in colour, with silver or gold embroidery on the edges*, 9) *Ties for tying long men's socks below the knee* (Karalezli 1992, Lebedeva 2003, Er 2022). In addition, these gifts include *two shirts, a pair of silk underwear and a watch case* (Lebedeva 2003; SP 3). If the bride-to-be is financially well off, she also prepares *dokuzlama* (nine gifts) to represent loyalty to the groom's mother and father (SP 1, SP 6).

Dowry is very important among South Crimean Tatars. Crimean Tatars teach weaving and embroidery to their daughters at an early age. The girls actively prepare a large dowry, both on their own and with the help of their friends. The bride and her friends gather in a house on long winter evenings, treat themselves as sweets and sing folk songs, and embroider numerous towels, scarves, dresses, and underwear with gold and silk. An indispensable part of the wedding is the preparation of gifts for the future wife, parents, and relatives. All gifts prepared by the bride are specially laid out in front of the bride's relatives before they are collected, so that they can see how the bride has prepared for the wedding. A note is attached to each item indicating to whom it was made (Roslavceva 2003; SP 1). These items were wrapped in a bundle with other gifts for the groom and his relatives. A piece of paper with silver-embroidered corners and the inscription 'Qur'an-Hatim' is also sewn on it. This means that the bride recites the entire Qur'an for the soul of one of the groom's close relatives (SP 1). Gifts to relatives, including babies, consist of shirts, sheets, face cloths⁵, and tobacco pouches. Before gifts are sent to the groom, they are spread on the cushions and pillows. In addition to the gifts, layered rice pastry was also prepared and sent to the groom together with gifts. After arranging all gifts, the bride's relatives are called to see them (SP 1).

After engagement, the bride accelerated dowry preparations. According to tradition, dowry preparations start from the day a girl is born. This tradition is even reflected in Crimean Tatar proverbs as follows: 'A girl is in the cradle; her dowry is in the chest' (SP 1). In ancient times, dowry bought in the market was not given importance and everything was prepared at home (Karalezli 1992). Nowadays, a bride-to-be can buy the missing items in her dowry from the market (SP 1, SP 6).

⁵ A kind of embroidered cover made of transparent silk gauze (cf. Ablayeva 2022: 111).

In the past, a mullah (in some Islamic societies a recognized religious scholar or a person with a certain level of education) or imam would be invited to the engagement ceremony, along with the bride's father and a few relatives and acquaintances (naturally, all male) (SP 1), who would ask for the girl's consent, explain the groom's 'mehir' (dowry) conditions and the amount of security the bride-to-be would demand in case of divorce, and then read Surah Yâsin (Kondaraki 1875) and the *mawlid* (SP 1), and say the betrothal prayer similar to the wedding prayer (SP 1).

5. 1. *The tradition of 'nine pieces' among the Turkic peoples*

Among the Turkic peoples, the Northern Volga Tatars also have the tradition of 'nine pieces', preparing nine dresses for the bride. The preparation of nine dresses by a bride or groom is a practice for marriage to be full of prosperity and happiness. Similarly, the custom of 'making nine wishes' during some festivals and celebrations is also common.

The organization of the gift into nine parts is related to the tradition of gift-giving in the Old Turkic and Golden Horde state hierarchy. This tradition continued in the Crimean Khanate and was called *toğuzlama* or *toğuzlama hedâyâ* (Er 2024: 159). The custom of measuring the gift number 9 also existed in the Ottoman Empire.

According to the observations of Mahmut Shurlu, a Crimean Tatar art expert, the embroidery pattern on the wedding items designed as a gift for the groom resembles number 9. It is as if the number 9 is embroidered in a square. In other words, 'dokuzlama' has emerged from the visuals in this embroidery. Gordlevski, one of the Russian Turkologists, also mentioned the sacredness and mystery of the number 9 among the Turkic peoples and pointed out that the number 9 is used in the Shamanic practices of the Altai Turks (for detailed information see Soboleva 2015: 175-176).

The number 9 is one of the most common numbers in Turkish and Mongolian cultures. 'The number 9, which we first saw used in the creation of the universe and human beings, was also considered sacred by the administrators who received the power to rule from God himself. The 'survival' feature of the sacred number 9 motif, which seems to be heavily fed by Shamanism, is frequently encountered in Turkish and Mongolian epic narrative tradition, literary and historical texts' (see Yılmaz 2022: 1421-1422). For example, in epics, heroes usually fight nine powerful enemies or set out to accomplish nine challenging tasks. In the Creation Epic of the Altai Turks, God, while creating the universe, also creates a tree with nine branches. God then creates a person from the root of each of the nine branches, and from each person, a tribe is derived (nine people, nine tribes in total). Again, according to the Siberian Turks, the sky and underworld have nine layers.

6. Wedding preparation and wedding

After heavy engagement and mutual visits, the mothers of the bride and groom started preparations for the wedding and set the wedding day. A few days before the wedding, 5-10 or more people brought weight⁶ from the groom. The bride gives them a shirt and a face cloth as a gift. After receiving the weight, the bride was covered with a shawl and, for three days, the bride was invisible to her mother, father, brother, and all male relatives. On the second day after weighing, all sweets and chewing gum bought with the weight were divided among the bride's relatives and friends. On the third day, a 'tailor-woman'⁷ and the bride's friends, including 8-10 girls, are invited, who sew everything necessary and stay in the bride's house permanently until the wedding day, when the bride leaves. At the end of the sewing, the girls sew a so-called face-pillow (made of expensive fabric, in which a pair of men's underwear and a facecloth are placed). When the bride leaves, this pillow is sold at auction to one of the groom's friends (sold by the maids), starting from very cheap to very expensive until it reaches the groom (Karalezli 1992). After all the work is completed, the wedding begins. On Saturdays and Sundays, the dough is kneaded, and bread, pies, and buns are baked. On Monday, *the best man* 'the groom's sister' arrives, holding a whip tied with a headscarf in one hand and a candle tied with a small shawl in the other (SP 1). On the day of the bride's departure, the shawls and scarves wrapped around the candle and whip are untied, and beautiful veils are tied to their place. On that day the best man takes them to the groom's house, where they stay for up to 40 days, after which they are returned to their owner (Karalezli 1992). Currently, this tradition is not practised (SP 1, SP 3, SP 4).

Following the best man, the groom's relatives and in-laws arrive, accompanied by many guests and music (SP 1). After they are served, the henna is diluted in a special container. Along with the henna, a gold coin and a 20 pennies silver coin, which the groom sent to the bride with congratulations on the henna ceremony, are placed in the bowl. During the dilution of henna, the girls present, holding lighted candles in their hands, stand in a row and sing the following song (Karalezli 1992):

*Ağlama kelin, ağlama
Bugün toy, qız evlene,
Qızlar keldi evine,
Hına qoya eline,
Ağlama, kelin, ağlama* (Karalezli 1992).

Don't cry, bride, don't cry
Today is the wedding day, the girl is getting married.
The girls have come to her house,
They've placed henna on her hands,
Don't cry, bride, don't cry (Karalezli 1992).

⁶ It is the payment of the girl's dowry with money provided by the man (cf. Er 2024: 159), weight is used in the Yalta region in the sense of 'a kind of bride price' (cf. Karalezli 1992: 229).

⁷ The woman who sews the bride's clothes.

Another henna song is as follows:

Kımalı parmak, cez tırnak, altın oymak, ah, ah,
 Seniñ tatlı tiliñe olurmu toymak, ah, ah.
 Pencere mekün tiymey meyvalıktan, ah, ah,
 Em sarardım, em soldım sevdalıktan, ah, ah (SP 1)

Henna-stained fingers, copper nails, golden thimble, ah, ah
 How could anyone ever get enough of your sweet words, ah, ah
 No sunlight reaches my window through the fruit trees, ah, ah
 I have withered and faded, all because of love, ah, ah.

At noon the in-laws, two witnesses, and a representative of the groom collect the bride. Before they arrive, young people lock gates and demand money. After receiving the money, young people allow the in-laws to enter the garden of the house where the bride lives. The groomsmen are served 7-8 kinds of food and then an announcement is sent to prepare the bride for the wedding (Karalezli 1992). Upon receiving the news, the girls bring water and prepare a bride for ablution. After the bride performs ablution and dresses, they make her to look in the mirror and announce that the bride is ready. Witnesses, in-laws, and representatives of the groom entered the room to sign the marriage contract and perform the wedding ceremony. Currently, the bride's face is covered with a thick veil (SP 1). Imam and mullah are invited to the house. The groom also prepares a bundle of blessings. Many breads, breakfast foods, and sweets are placed in this bundle. The imam recites the wedding prayer and performs a marriage ceremony in the presence of guests. Marriage is performed as follows: The imam or mullah joins the hands and thumbs of the bride and groom and joins his thumb with their fingers. This is the first time in their lives that two young people have been so close to each other, symbolizing their lifelong commitment to each other. To confirm their honourable entry into this marriage, the host brings a scarf or handkerchief to the hands of the three (bride-groom-imam or mullah). In this state, the imam first asks the bride-to-be in the presence of the witnesses present: Are you willing to marry so (the groom) according to the commands of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet? This question was repeated three times. Then, the bride answers, I accept. He then addresses the groom: By the command of Allah, by the Sunnah of the Prophet, you are accepted as a wife with such and such a person (bride). Do you accept this person (the bride)? The groom states that he accepts. Then, the imam or mullah turns to the guests' present and asks, 'Did you hear that? Then, witness what you have heard.' They also said that they had heard of them. Then the imam or mullah performs the marriage contract and recites the necessary prayers (Fazyl et al. 2010).

Then the imam or the mullah says, 'May they spend their lives together in one marriage, grow old together, and live a long and beautiful life,' and congratulate both parties. The groom and the bride congratulate each other. They kiss Imam's hand, and the bride kisses the groom's hand. The groom and the bride then kiss the hands of the witnesses and parents. The bundle prepared by the groom's side is then

opened. Imam says, 'Divide the bread in the middle'. Half of the bread is given to the girl's side and the other half to the boy's side. This means that until this time, the girl's sustenance was in the house of her parents; from now on, it is in the house of her husband. Finally, the groom and the bride are wished good fortune, good and long life (Fazyl et al. 2010).

According to the sources of the 19th century, during the South Crimean Tatar wedding, the bride was required to be in a corner close to a curtain. Only mullah, two witnesses sent by the groom, and the proxy could enter the room. The proxy and witnesses had to stand at the room threshold. The mullah would approach the bride standing behind the curtain, say the groom's name, and ask her three times if she wanted to marry him. In the first two questions, the bride would not give any answer, and in the third question, she would cry. The mullah would accept the bride's crying as a positive answer, and the marriage would be consecrated (Er 2022).

According to old traditions, after the wedding, neither the father nor the mother, nor the girlfriends had the right to see the bride's face before the groom saw her. It was believed that if someone saw her, '*kelin şirinnigi kete*,' that is, all the beauty and charm of the bride would disappear (Karalezli 1992; SP 4).

The best woman approaches the door of the room; however, she is not allowed to enter the room by the bridesmaids who want gift from her (SP 5). According to tradition, the best woman brings money according to the groom's means. She hands the money to the girls and says the following: 'I have to prepare the bride entrusted to me here, and with your permission I will go to her' (Karalezli 1992). The girls give way, and the best woman approaches the bride, covers her head with a special veil, like a headdress, with a sharp tip, reaching the heels at the back, and the whole face is covered in front. Girls sew this veil with their own hands and do not sew it with a machine (SP 1). They then turn the bride's face to the east and make her pray. The eldest sister comes out of the bride's room, turns to the in-laws, and says, 'Be prepared'. The in-laws start to gather, and the bride, crying loudly, says goodbye first to her girlfriends, then to her mother and father, and asks for forgiveness. The father of the bride ties a silver sash around her waist. The last farewell words of the father to his daughter are as follows (Karalezli 1992):

Ağlama kızım, ağlama.

Allah seni qorçalasın.

Eline qum alsan

Altınğa aylansın.

Canını ağırtqan olsam, bağışla,

Allah sizge baht, sevgi ve tınçlıq bersin! Amin (Karalezli 1992).

Don't cry, my daughter, don't cry.

May Allah protect you.

If you take sand in your hand,

It will turn to gold.

If I have hurt you, forgive me,

May Allah grant you happiness, love and peace! Amen (Karalezli 1992).

After these words, everyone raises their hands and prays (SP 1). After the father leaves, four young men from the groom's closest relatives enter the room and hold a curtain in their hands, cover the bride, and her four matchmaker friends. They carry the bride in their arms and place her in a carriage. Two young men hold white clothes and special poles in front of the bridal carriage. The poles are covered with 'duvazar'⁸ (Karalezli 1992). Relatives and friends of the groom stop the bride's car, demanding money. Finally, the groom's house is reached (SP 5). Young people sitting in front of the bridal carriage come to the bride and cover her and the four in-laws with a curtain so that she can enter the house. The groom's mother meets her at the door of the house and throws wheat, money, and sugar to her. In the room, the bride is seated in a corner and covered with a *duvazar*, after which the groom's mother enters the room (SP 1). When she enters, the eldest of the in-laws lifts the veil, and her mother-in-law puts honey and butter in her mouth with her finger and makes her drink coffee. The mother-in-law leaves the room and the in-laws start to open the windows. Now they save the bride from all unnecessary things and leave only the veil on her head (Karalezli 1992).

As the sun sets, the bride begins to decorate the rooms with her dowry. She invites one of the groom's relatives to pull the rope to hang things and gives him a shirt as a thank you for this. Then, another relative of the groom enters the room and asks for all copperware to be removed. They are filled with various foods and brought back. Each woman who brought a plate with food was given a linen cover (Karalezli 1992). Ten-fifteen women take turns bringing the plates full of food, so this meal costs 10-15 covers for the bride. After the meal, the bride is transferred to another room. There she performs ablution, prays and recites Surah Yasin (Karalezli 1992). They then started to dress her. She wears the most magnificent dress given by the groom: she is girded with a silver belt, a golden fez is put on her head, she is covered with a beautiful scarf, and she wears all the gold she has on her chest. The bride's face is covered with a scarf covered with sparkles called 'pullu şerbenti' (SP 2). After the bride puts on this outfit, she sits in a corner, wraps in the *ferace maramaya* again, puts a veil on her head, and the curtain is drawn. The bride sits in the corner and waits for the groom until he arrives (Karalezli 1992; SP 4).

Today, in South Crimean Tatar families, the wedding takes place either on the day of the solemn engagement or on the first day of the wedding on the bride's side (SP 6). This is a continuation of the collective 'engagement prayer' ceremony. Today, it is preferred that both brides and grooms are present in person at the signing of the religious marriage contract, and their consent to marriage is confirmed directly by them and not through their proxy (SP 3).

⁸ A kind of curtain used to protect the bridal carriage from prying eyes.

7. The wedding of the groom's side

After the bride's arrival, two of the groom's close friends, the *kiyev-başı*⁹, begin to prepare him for shaving (by that time the groom has returned) (Karalezli 1992). The groom is usually shaved in the garden during the summer and winter. While shaving, the barber occasionally stops and starts playing with the groom's companions. As the shave ends, the barber holds out his mirror, using it as a tray for guests to place their money. (SP 1). After more fun with his friends, the groom goes home. At home, the groom changes his underwear and goes out into the courtyard in his new underwear, where the young people surround him and *kiyev-başı* dresses him. At the same time, all young people lit candles in their hands. After dressing him, one of the *kiyev-başı* goes to the bride to buy a shawl. He covers the groom's neck with a silk shawl and then calls the groom's father, who prays for his son and puts his hat on his head, after which the groom kisses his father's hand. (SP 6). Now, all young men, led by the groom, go to his mother and ask for approval. Having received the blessing, the groom, following the eldest of his comrades, goes around everyone present and kisses the elders (Karalezli 1992).

Approximately ten minutes later, the bride dressed in all her wedding clothes is led out by two women. One of the women teaches the bride the following: 'Try to step on the groom's foot when he kisses your hands' (SP 1). It is believed that, in this case, her husband will be under her power and that otherwise he will order her around. The groom knows this and tries to be careful when the bride approaches. The bride approaches with slow steps, sits down slightly, kisses his hand, and then walks towards the door again, and this is repeated three times. After the third time, the groom does not let go of her hands. He squats in front of her and she takes off her veil, all her heavy clothes and takes them to the meal prepared there (Karalezli 1992).

An in-law comes to the bride, dresses her in a more expensive dress, cleans the room, and goes outside to inform her mother-in-law and husband's relatives that they can come. Soon after, they all arrive and inspect the young couple's bed. Then the bride, re-dressed in all her wedding clothes, is taken outside (Karalezli 1992; SP 1). The bride then rounds all the guests and kisses their hands. This is repeated twice. Then they bring a plate for putting the gift called *kız körümlük* 'kız görümlük' (SP 5). The mother-in-law places gold on the plate, while the others follow her with various gifts. The guests are treated and given a spoonful of jam and a cup of coffee. The guests leave, but in-laws remain. The groom drinks a cup of coffee with the guests as a tradition. Then everyone goes home, and the young people are left alone (Karalezli 1992; SP 5).

According to past beliefs and practices, after the wedding, the bride does not show her face to anyone for 40 days, does not go anywhere, does only household chores. After the expiry of the specified period, the bride's parents can invite the young couple to their home; the young husband and wife kiss their hands and give

⁹ A single man who is the chief assistant of the groom and accompanies the groom at every stage of the wedding preparations.

them gifts. Subsequently, the life of the newlyweds returns to normal. The wedding costumes of the bride and groom do not differ much from the traditional festive costumes in all details, except for purely wedding elements (SP 1).

8. Items used in marriage

One of the most important items used by South Crimean Tatars in the ceremony is the handkerchief (SP 1). There are several of them in the marriage ritual and each of them differs in purpose, colour, size, ornamental features (Roslavceva 2023). A handkerchief is a kind of confession of love when, during games at someone's wedding, a young man gives a handkerchief to a girl he sees for the first time and likes. If the young man arouses mutual feelings in the girl, after a while she gives him back the handkerchief embroidered (Sherfedinov 1979). The scarf is also of great importance during the pre-wedding stage (SP 2). When they come to the bride-to-be house, in-laws give her a scarf on behalf of the groom. In the Bakhchisaray region of Crimea, two small scarves are presented: *yavluk* 'yağlık' and *yemeni-yavluk* (from Yemen) (Bonch-Osmolovskij 1926). In return, the bride gives the groom a small white cloth or handkerchief, folded into four, called *yağlık*. This cloth is also called the 'wedding cloth'. The placement of the embroidery pattern on the cover depends on strict rules: the same motif is embroidered in each corner, usually the 'oak leaf,' the symbol of masculinity. This motif is embroidered with gold threads. Gold threads consist of thin gilded strips wrapped around silk or linen threads. These motifs can also be obtained by flattening narrow metal strips or using the 'forging' technique (Roslavceva 2023). The pattern is sometimes placed diagonally, with the ends almost meeting in the centre (Spasskaya 1926).

Following the agreement in the bride's house, preparations for a special dowry set, called 'nine,' which is specified in the marriage contract as mentioned above, begin. The dowry set symbolically refers to bringing together certain items. It consists of nine pieces and is delivered by the bride to the groom's house at the next stage of the wedding preparations at the engagement. The bride also receives a certain number of gifts from the groom, brought in a bundle, which is a shawl embroidered according to the same principle as the 'wedding shawl' she had previously given him. In the bundle prepared by the bride, there is also a pink handkerchief with gold embroidery, the so-called *yedegi yadigar*/memorable gift. This handkerchief is used before the wedding during the henna-lighting ritual, and the same handkerchief is used to tie around the left arm of the groom and his friends during the wedding. The nine also included handkerchiefs with corners embroidered with a gold thread. They are usually small in size, white in colour and have the name *çevre* 'handkerchief with embroidered edges or embroidered writing' (SP 1, SP 5, SP 6). Women's headscarves of various types are presented in large quantities (50–60 pieces) as part of the bride's dowry, as are perimeter handkerchiefs (Karalezli 1992).

When the young couple is alone for the first time after the wedding, the bride gives the groom white handkerchief. On the morning of the wedding, a young woman

covered her head with a red handkerchief. On the second day after the wedding, when the bride is sure of her virginity, a handkerchief with a 'yazma' pattern, also known as 'yemeni yağlık,' is placed in her hands, and the elderly female guests throw gifts and money on it (SP 1). The handkerchief serves as a symbol of virginity (Rajab 1984).

Scarves play a significant role in wedding rituals. There are several types of scarves, each with its own purpose. The 'sherbenti' scarf embroidered by the bride is given to the groom's mother by her family 'at the engagement,' and the absence of such a gift is considered shameful. The translation of the name 'Şerbenti' is as follows: 'shar' is an abbreviation of the word 'sharia (a term meaning the totality of religious, moral and legal provisions of Islam)', and 'binti' - the girl child; so 'sherbenti' is 'the covering of the girl child according to the Islamic religion'. This scarf covered the groom's shoulders during shaving before the wedding, and later the groom also used it when going to the coffee house (Karalezli 1992, Bonch-Osmolovskij 1926). The poor have a few scarves; the rich have more than 200 (Karalezli 1992).

During the wedding, the bride uses scarves. One of them is 'bürümçük/burumçik'. Bürümçük is the veil with which the bride's face is covered at the wedding. Bürümçük is given together with 'şerbenti' scarf by the representatives of the groom during marriage. Decorated by sequins, it is thrown over the head of the young wife on the second day after the wedding, thus covering her face. This is done after recognizing that she is a virgin. An embroidered scarf is also a part of the bridal headdress; it is thrown over the fez when the girl is dressed for the wedding. The face is always covered with a thick veil, which is called differently in different regions: 'chadra,' 'ferece marama', 'bürümçük' or simply 'veil'. The veil can only be removed by the husband in a separate room after the wedding (Roslavceva 2023).

The bridal sash has played a special role in the marriage ceremonies of the Crimean Tatars on the mountain area. In the 1980s, the bride was married, wearing a traditional fez and a mandatory silver belt. Before the wedding, during the dressing of the bride, a 'sash tying' ceremony was performed (SP 1). The girl's father, or in the Bahcesaray region, would walk around the bride three times with a silver belt in his hand, and only on the third time would he buckle it as a confirmation of marriage. When confirming the groom, her father put a 'kalpak' on his head (Bonch-Osmolovskij 1926). The groom's wedding sash was made of fine white cloth and was embroidered with gold. The bride decorated it herself and gave it to the groom at the wedding (SP 1). At the end of the 19th century, this belt was worn over the head. Unlike the women's silver belt 'sash,' the groom did not use it after the wedding (Roslavceva 2023). Therefore, the belt ceased to be an ordinary item and became a symbol of marriage (SP 1).

In the mountainous coastal Crimea, the groom also wore 'sock-bav'¹⁰ with embroidered laces sewn from a velvet strip covered with cardboard. Tassels were sewn around the edges, and these tassels tied the stockings below the knees (Roslavceva 2023). In the wedding rituals of the steppe part of Crimea, there is an apron 'peştamal,' which, like the wedding dress, is presented to the bride's mother

¹⁰ 'Stocking ties', which means laces.

by the groom's relatives. The apron was usually made of the same fabric as the bride's dress and was very elegant. At the beginning of 20th century, the apron was considered as an indispensable attribute of an old woman's outfit, and such an elegant gift showed respect for her age (Roslavceva 2023).

Usually, gifts to relatives, guests, and the bride and groom at the wedding were a certain set, which in each case differed between men and women (SP 1). In mountainous coastal Crimea, the gift set for men included the same items as in the nine that the bride gave to the groom: men's shirts, shawls, belts, laces, watch cases, pouches, etc. Shawls, scarves, towels, and *ferece-marama* covers were designed for women. Often the patterns of wedding embroidery included signs of wishes for happiness and sometimes embroidered and amulets¹¹ (Spasskaya 1926).

9. Wedding traditions in the years of exile

In 1944, the Soviet government expelled all Crimean Tatars from Crimea and forced them to exile in Central Asia and the Ural Mountains. Under these conditions, entertaining and decorative wedding rituals disappeared, and the structure of wedding traditions began to change. The 'henna night' and groom's shaving ceremony became rare. Competitions and games held at weddings were no longer played. Thus, the basic elements of the marriage ritual disappeared, and the number of wedding ceremonies decreased daily. The Tatars tried to maintain the most rational traditions that remained valid, regardless of harsh conditions. After the marriage, the exchange of vows, the engagement, and the consecration of the marriage, the wedding turned into a simple ceremony for the closest relatives and friends. Due to the lack of economic means, a symbolic exchange of gifts between the bride and groom began to take place. For example, for a Crimean Tatar couple who had been living in the Shahrihan region of Uzbekistan because of deportation and were married in August 1949, the bride was given a pair of socks and a triangular headscarf for the 'betrothal'; for the 'heavy engagement,' the bride was given very simple fabrics to sew a summer and a winter dress, a pair of everyday shoes, and a pair of leather shoes for special occasions. A shirt and a pair of trousers can be sewn and given to the groom by the bride's family. After the religious wedding, the bride, accompanied by two or three close relatives, was brought to their place of residence by a truck organized by the groom (SP 4). However, despite all these difficulties, we can say that the transport of the bride with a small dowry to the groom's house by car/truck as a representation of the transition of the young girl to a new family and a new social status has been preserved as an important element of the ceremony (Soboleva 2015; SP 1).

In the 1960s and 70s, along with the improvement of the living conditions of most of the Crimean Tatar population, the revival of traditional civilization occurred. However, the marriage ceremony took place, so to speak, not qualitatively but quantitatively. Archaic rituals (henna, shaving, *dokuzlama*, competitions, etc.) were

¹¹ The name is given to objects of various shapes and portable qualities that are believed to protect people from the influence of evil forces or to provide good fortune.

never revived, on the contrary, they disappeared. At the same time, very crowded weddings for 200, sometimes even 500 people, and a large and long banquet were organized. Wedding music became the task of professional musicians, and the traditional wedding ceremony almost disappeared (Soboleva 2015; SP 1). There were continuous processes of ‘modernization’ of the old wedding rituals, which were relevant not only for the South Crimean Tatar Turks, but also for most peoples in the 20th century. Thus, the modern wedding ceremony of the South Crimean Tatars acquired as many common European features as possible. Currently, popular and contemporary South Crimean Tatar music is played in weddings, and the games are popularized accordingly. Newlyweds now sit and dance together at weddings, which were very rare in the first half of the twentieth century. Several rituals have lost their original signs and symbolic functions and are now performed only in a stage and decorative version. Thus, a transformation/change in traditional rituals in the second half of the 20th century almost completely changed the nature and structure of the folk wedding ceremony, giving it significant forms (Soboleva 2015).

The South Crimean Tatars, who returned to their homeland Crimea after the collapse of the Soviet Union, tried to keep some forgotten elements of marriage alive in their wedding ceremonies (SP 1, SP 2). The most common example is the henna night (SP 3). In the 1990s, wedding ceremonies were organized in villages by setting up tents and preparing home-cooked food. Since the 2000s, hall weddings have become widespread. As European culture has become more widespread, Western music is preferred more in weddings (SP 2). Villagers also started to hold weddings in halls. In the past, wedding guests were served by family members, but now they have been replaced by waiters (SP 3).

Today, we can safely say that the South Crimean Tatar ‘engagement ceremony’ is one of the best-preserved traditional wedding rituals. Informants often noted that in the post-war years’ weddings could not be held at all, but engagement ceremonies were obligatory, which contributed to the preservation of the main pre-wedding ceremonies (Soboleva 2015; SP 1). Even today, informants said that if they do not have the means to organize a wedding, they may not do so, but it is recommended to make an engagement and, most importantly, to perform the ‘engagement prayer’ accompanying the engagement, because this should contribute to the well-being of the future family. The religious functions of engagement rituals are sometimes reinforced by the transfer to this time of the religious wedding ceremony, which took place only on or before the wedding day. This is often the reason why the engagement day now coincides with the first day of the wedding (Soboleva 2015).

The system of mutual material obligations of the two families also underwent changes during the second half of the 20th century. Since the 1970s, there has been a tendency to increase the amount of wedding dowries and gifts to relatives, while the old and very complex traditions of mutual gift-giving have been greatly simplified. The number of gifts on both sides is approximately the same, and only the groom must give gold jewellery to the bride depending on his financial situation. When preparing a gift for the groom, one no longer adheres to a specific number of 9, and few people today remember their names (Soboleva 2015; SP 1).

In the organization of the wedding, the groom pays for the musicians, but the parents of the newlyweds pay for the food for both parties separately. Traditionally, the groom's family was responsible for housing the young family, while the bride's relatives took care of the interior of the house. If the newlyweds are moving to a new house, the groom's family buys furniture for the living room, and the bride's family furnishes the bedroom (SP 3). In some families who migrated from Steppe Crimea, the tradition of giving a certain amount of money to the mother of the bride, called 'syut akı' (milk money), is still preserved (Soboleva 2015).

Nowadays, weddings last for only two days. The first day is celebrated at the bride's home and the second day at the groom's home. One day of the wedding is celebrated only if one of the parties refuses to hold the wedding because of the difficult financial situation. It can be celebrated on any day of the week, regardless of tradition. Most often, the wedding in the bride's house is celebrated on Friday evenings and in the groom's house on Saturdays. The order and structure of the celebrations in the bride's and groom's house are almost the same today (Soboleva 2015).

Among the southern Crimean Tatars, the morning after the wedding, a ceremony was held to see the bride's nuptial sheet and determine whether she was a virgin. According to the oldest sources, the bride was accompanied by her two aunts in the morning. They would bring new clothes for the bride, and, in return, they would take the bride's nuptial sheet or, in some villages (Er 2022). This patriarchal tradition of checking a girl's honesty has remained among the Crimean Tatars for a relatively long time. Over time, this custom became a mere tradition, and good news, or '*köz aydın*,' was announced without any verification. Instead, it has become a mutual trust between two family members, and the element of verification no longer exists. Although there is evidence that some families still check the bride's virginity, this is mostly done on the initiative of the bride and her relatives. Nowadays, we can say that post-wedding celebrations have also significantly decreased (Soboleva 2015).

10. Conclusion

Marriage, which is the second important transition period in human life, constitutes a crucial stage in the process of socialization and acquisition of the marital identity of both the girl and the boy. In ancient times, the South Crimean Tatar Turks fully fulfilled all rituals related to marriages in accordance with their cultural structures, such as pre-weddings, heavy engagement, dowries prepared by the girl's side and the boy's side, henna night, wedding attended by men, groom's shaving ceremony, fun competitions, and post-wedding traditions. However, the important events of the 20th century that influenced the world history 'October Revolution (November 7, 1917)', and especially the mass exile they experienced as a result of the decision taken by the Soviet government in 1944, dramatically changed the life and needs of the South Crimean Tatar Turks. In the past, dowries were prepared for weddings in the form of forged copper plates, shoes, jewellery for men and women, embroidery, dresses, homemade linen, carpets, felts, scarves, etc. Now, under the influence of the

Sovietisation of life and the historical process, the wedding of a South Tatar Turk can take place only in the registry office, without any decorative elements and without strict adherence to traditions, because of the necessities of the economic structure. A modern South Tatar-Turkish girl no longer needs an expensive dowry, nor does she have the means to make or buy one. In the villages of Crimea, weddings according to old rituals are very rare. They are held in a much more simplified way. Wedding traditions among Crimean Tatar-Turks are currently experiencing a period of revival. This is because the bride and groom candidates show great interest in traditional festive clothes and pre-wedding ceremonies like the rituals such as the in-lawship, the shaving of the groom, the rituals of colouring the hands of the girl and her friends with henna, and especially the gift exchanges on the bride's side. In addition, many brides were trained in traditional gold embroidery to prepare gifts for the groom and his family. Undoubtedly, receiving such training means that Tatar families will regain their cultural and spiritual richness and ethnic memory in terms of wedding traditions.

Acknowledgments

We thank source persons for providing information on the firsthand experience of rituals. Their information is assigned numbers that are used as references.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, E. A. and R. G.; data curation, E. A. and R. G.; formal analysis, E. A. and R. G.; Methodology, E. A. and R. G.; Visualization, E. A. and R. G.; writing-original draft, E. A. and R. G.; writing review & editing, E. A. and R. G. all authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding: This study received no external funding.

Ethical approval: Ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board of Akdeniz University (date: 14.08.2025, decision number: 471). This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data availability statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Addresses:

Emine Atmaca

Department of Turkish Language and Literature

Faculty of Letters

Akdeniz University

Dumlupınar Boulevard

Konyaaltı Campus

07058, Antalya, Türkiye

E-mail: eatmaca@akdeniz.edu.tr

Reshîde Gözdaş (corresponding author)

Department of Turkish Language and Literature

Faculty of Arts and Science

Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University

Golkoy Campus

14030, Bolu, Türkiye

E-mail: reshidegozdas@ibu.edu.tr

References

- Ablaeva, Ulvie (2022) *Šapki, feski, šali: golovnyje ubory i golovnyje ukrašenija Krymskix Tatar: evolucija kompleksa s XVII do načala XXI vv.* [Caps, fezs, shawls: the traditional headdresses and head decorations of Crimean Tatars: evolution of complex in the 17th–early 21st c.] Samarkand: MITSAL.
- Bonch-Osmolovskij, Gleb (1926) “Doistoričeskije kul’tury Kryma”. [Prehistoric cultures of Crimea.] *Krym* 2, 74–94, Moskva: Gosizdat.
- Bone, Amra (2020) “Islamic marriage and divorce in the United Kingdom: the case for a new paradigm”. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 40, 1, 163–178. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2020.1737412>
- Burch, Rebecca L. (2019) “The wedding as a reproductive ritual”. *Review of General Psychology* 23, 3, 382–398. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268019832848>
- Chowdhary, Usha (2016) “Marriage as a sociocultural rite: intergenerational changes”. *Journal of Education & Social Policy* 3, 1, 70–81. Available online at https://jespnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_1_March_2016/9.pdf. Accessed on 24.09.2025.
- Er, Elvina (2022) “Güney Kırım Tatar Türklerinin düğün geleneği”. [Wedding tradition of the Southern Crimean Tatars.] *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* [Cumhuriyet University Faculty of Arts and Sciences Journal of Social Sciences] 46, 2, 236–248. Available online at <http://cujos.cumhuriyet.edu.tr/en/pub/issue/74585/1202850>. Accessed on 24.09.2025.
- Er, Elvina (2024) “Kırım Tatar Türkçesinin güney ağzının düğün terminolojisi”. [Wedding terms found in the Southern dialect of Crimean Tatar language.] *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları* [Hacettepe University Turkology Studies] 40, 143–170. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20427/turkiyat.1386740>
- Fazyl, Riza and Sahtara Abdulvait (2010) *Buyurunız duvaga! Amma başta namazga.* [Come on, let’s pray!] Simferopol: Krym devlet okuv-pedagogika neşriyatı.
- Karalezli, Hatice (1992) “Starinnyj obyčaj tatarskogo zaručeniya i svad’by v derevnjax: Derekoj, Aj-Vasil i Autka Jaltinskogo rajona”. [The ancient custom of Tatar marriage and wedding in the villages: Derekoj, Aj-Vasil and Autka, Yalta region.] In *Zabveniju ne podležyt*, 227–238. Kazan: Tatarskoje knižnoje izdatel’stvo.
- Karjalainen, Helena (2020) “Cultural identity and its impact on today’s multicultural organizations”. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management* 20, 2, 249–262. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595820944207>
- Kavak, Nuri (2019) “Kırım Hanlığı’nda evlenme ve sonuçları üzerine bir tahlil”. [An investigation on the marriage and results of the Crimea.] *Al-Farabi International Journal on Social Sciences*

- 4, 3, 131–140. Available online at <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/farabi/issue/48975/617648>. Accessed on 24.09.2025.
- Kondaraki, Vasilij (1875) *Universal'noje opisanije kryma*. [Universal description of Crimea.] 7, XVII. St-Peterburg: Tipografija Vellinga.
- Lebedeva, Emilija (2003) *Svad'by*. [Weddings.] Simferopol: Eljino.
- Rajab, Jehan S. (1984) "Some towels and other Turkish embroideries", *Arts of Asia* (Hong Kong, Asia Publications), May-June, 83-86. See <https://artsofasia.com/product/may-to-june-1984-magazine/>
- Roslavceva, Lidija (2003) "Krymskije Tatary: sem'ja". [Crimean Tatars: family.] In S. Kozlov and L. Chižova, eds. *Turkskie narody Kryma*, 286–307. [The Crimean Turkic peoples]. Moskva: Nauka.
- Soboleva, Olena (2015) *Vesillja kryms'kich tatar: tradycijni formy ta transformacii*. [Crimean Tatar weddings: traditional forms and transformations.] Bila Cerkva: Vydavec Oleksandr Pshonkivskij.
- Spasskaya, Evgenija (1926) "Tatarskaja vyšyvka Staro-Krymskogo rajona (po materialam Aleksandry Petrovoj)". [Tatar embroidery of the Staro-Krymsky region (based on the materials of Alexandra Petrova).] *Vostokovedenie*, 1, 21–47, Baku: Izdatel'stvo vostočnogo fakul'teta Azerbajžanskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta.
- Sherfedinov, Jaja (1979) *Zvučit Hajtarma*. [Haytarma sounds.] Taškent: Izdatel'stvo literatury i iskusstva.

Appendix: Source persons

SP 1: A-EA daughter (b. 1960 in Uzbekistan-Andijan-Shahrihan) graduate of higher education, retired teacher, date and place of interview: August 25, 2018/ Ivanivka (Canatay) village, Akmescit region, Crimea.

SP 2: A NE son (b. 1962 Uzbekistan-Andijan-Shahrihan) graduate of higher education, imam, date and place of interview: August 25, 2018, Stroganovka village (Mamağ), Akmescit region, Crimea.

SP 3: S AB daughter (b.1952 Uzbekistan-Andijan Shahrihan), university graduate, retired accounting specialist, date and place of interview: August 25, 2018, / Turgenevka village (Teberti), Bahçesaray region, Crimea.

SP 4: K FA daughter (b. 1931 Crimea-Bahçesaray-Kokköz village), primary school graduate, retired, date and place of interview: August 25, 2018; Ivanivka village (Canatay); Akmescit region; Crimea.

SP 5: S GB daughter (b. 1938 Bahçesaray, Almaçık), secondary school graduate, retired post office worker, date and place of interview: August 27, 2018; Poçtovoye (Bazarçık) Village, Bahçesaray Region, Crimea.

SP 6: FM (b. 1959 Uzbekistan) graduate of higher education, retired kindergarten teacher, date and place of interview: August 27, 2018, İçki Town, Crimea.