

Chapter 3

Ukrainian Weddings in the 19th and Early 20th Century¹

Prerequisites

In the 19th and early 20th centuries it was rare for a young couple to make their own decision about marriage. The customs of patriarchal family and community laws survived into the middle of the 20th century in the western provinces of Ukraine.

In the second half of the 19th century societal customs prevailed when marriage was entered into. The family was created with the consent of the parents, who viewed the marriage of their child primarily as an economic advantage, in particular, the acquisition of a new pair of working hands.

“Those with a son do not allow him to take a girl poorer than himself, nor is a girl allowed to marry someone poorer,” state wedding accounts from Transcarpathia². The bride-to-be had to be in good physical health, as well as being neat, hard-working and having a large dowry.

Accounts of weddings recorded in the Odesa region show that before a lad set off to make a match, his parents told him to look closely at his choice, to take care that “his future wife was hard-working and elegant” and, perhaps even more importantly, that “she possessed a handsome dowry”.³

Small wonder that there were many marriages (even custom foresaw this), where the bride and groom had not met before the wedding. A folk song expresses this very aptly: “Oh, I know, I know whom I love,/ I just don’t know whom I’ll wed.”

In records of weddings from the 19th and early 20th centuries there are assertions that lads and their girls agreed on marriage at evening parties (*vechortnytsi*) and arranged for the sending of matchmakers. Although this did occur, it usually was limited to situations where both came from the same social stratum. “When choosing himself a wife, the lad’s prime consideration has to be material, love must take a second place,” asserts a wedding account from the village of Koliusyky in Podillia.

Apart from wealth, another consideration in marriage was the reputation of the girl or lad. Laziness was considered to be the main drawback, while the best qualities were modesty and “being as hard-working as an ant and a good housekeeper”.

In the distant past no account was taken of the lad’s age, only his physical maturity. Thus boys could marry at 15 to 16 years of age, while girls married from fifteen onwards. Later, the age of marriage in Ukraine was legalized and set at 18 years for boys and 16 for girls.⁴ The marriageable age for young men became 18-25, and for girls – 16-23 years. A marriageable girl was called a *viddanytsia*. Occasionally girls would marry at 14 ½ or 15, but this was an exception to the generally accepted rule.

According to custom the older daughters were married off first, the younger daughters being kept “under the trough” until the eldest sister had married.

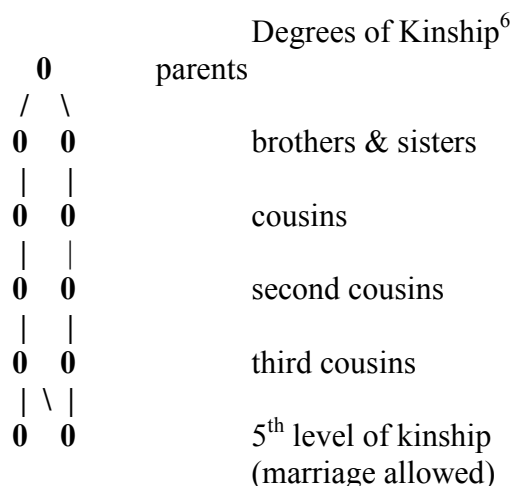
There were instances where the first to marry was a younger daughter, however this was considered a great insult to the elder sister, who was derided in the village and often could not marry afterwards. Guided by prevailing folk attitudes, the parents resorted to various means to marry their children in order of age, notwithstanding whether they were boys or girls.

After 23 years of age girls were referred to as old maids and lads – old bachelors or “grass” bachelors (occasionally “monks”). It was rare for the bride-to-be to be older than her intended. Old maids married old bachelors or widowers. Marriage to a widower or a widow was

considered bad luck. Girls married widowers only when they were desperate: “Better to become a beggar, than to be left unwed,” proclaims a Ukrainian proverb.

Records suggest that in the 17th century folk wedding rituals differed for those marrying for the first time and those marrying a second time. This tradition survived to a certain degree into the 20th century⁵. Girls were superstitious about marrying a widower.

Usually people married within their own village. In some places traditions forbidding incest were strictly adhered to. It was only possible to marry between the fourth and fifth level of kinship. Linguists assert that the present-day system of direct kinship labels in the Ukrainian language does not go beyond four generations in both ascending and descending order.



It should be noted that toward the end of the 19th century these customary norms were being violated both among the rural folk and the working classes. There were also instances, especially among people from the Carpathian Mountains, where second cousins married.

Weddings usually took place in the fall, from 15 August till 14 November⁷ and from 6 January until Lent, times when the church calendar allowed meat to be consumed. Weddings were only occasionally held in spring, from the first Sunday after Easter until the start of *Petrivka* lent,⁸ for peasants were afraid to hold a wedding in the lean times before harvest, so as not to undermine an already strained family budget.

The ritual of the Ukrainian folk wedding was divided into three parts: the pre-wedding, the wedding proper and the post-wedding period. The pre-wedding part included the ritual of the matchmakers – the matchmaking, the inspection and the betrothal or engagement.

The wedding began with the ceremonial baking of a *korovay* (wedding bread) as well as the *divych-vechir* (akin to a kitchen shower today) on a Friday or Saturday. The most diverse rituals took place on the day of the wedding proper, which included the procession of the groom’s party to the bride, the wedding feast, the presentation of the dowry. The meetings of the bride and groom in their respective parental homes were marked by special ceremonies.

Post-wedding rituals were rich in traditional customs such as *pydany*, *perezva*, *pyrozhyyny* and *tsyhanshchyna*. The order of the wedding process was as follows:

Matchmakers and Matchmaking. As in most Slav countries, the wedding ritual in Ukraine began with the *starosta* (matchmaker). This was considered the first step in the wedding ceremony, a precursor to the creation of a family. Thus when a lad had found himself a girl and sought his parents’ permission to marry her or if the parents themselves had decided to marry off their son – they proceeded with the matchmaking.

The ritual of asking for a girl's hand in marriage consisted of two parts. In most regions the prospective groom's relatives first sent a woman to the relatives of the girl. Most often she was an aunt, a sister or a daughter-in-law, while in the Kharkiv, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Rivne and Volyn provinces the boy's mother, or sometimes his mother and sister, went off to ask for the girl's hand in marriage.⁹ Countless ethnographic records show that during this first stage of the matchmaking – the *dopyty*, *zvidyny*, *rozvidky*, *osvidchyny* – arrangements were made for the marriage. The aim of the *zvidyny* (reconnaissance) was to exchange breads and agree to a marriage.

According to Zdoroveha, this first phase of matchmaking, with its participation of the women, is a survival of customs from the matriarchal period. In accounts of weddings from the mid 19th century, and especially in material gathered after that, we find evidence that the “emissaries” were men – an uncle, neighbour or father (Volyn and Hutsul regions).

If a girl's relatives agreed to the marriage, they would reply that they could say nothing definite for the moment and asked the emissaries to return or to send matchmakers (Hutsul and Dnister River regions). In other regions they agreed at the *dopyty* (questioning) on when the wedding sashes would be presented as a sign of the girl's consent; in some areas the emissaries were bound with sashes (Kyiv, Kharkiv and Poltava regions) or the women were given gifts of sashes or kerchiefs (Western Volyn). During this advance soliciting, the guests sometimes ate and drank, sealing their agreement with a *mohorych* (drink) or else went to a tavern to toast the nuptial agreement.¹⁰

After such a visit a family council took place in the young man's home at which it was decided who should be chosen as the matchmakers. Features of the patriarchal period predominate in the ceremony in the second phase of matchmaking, interwoven with relics of clan attitudes toward the young couple, especially the girl, who was viewed as the property of the clan. The rituals of matchmaking foresaw an agreement being made between the families of the future couple through a specially selected emissary – the *starosta* or *svat* (matchmaker). A matchmaker had to be an elderly, respectable, wise man, who was well acquainted with the traditions of matchmaking and was a good orator.

Quite often relatives were selected as matchmakers, occasionally the lad's parents or his godparents went, sometimes strangers were asked to participate, and very rarely did they ask someone from the girl's family.¹¹ The success of the match depended on the matchmaker, as well as the running of the wedding itself. The important role played by a *starosta* in a Ukrainian wedding becomes apparent when one considers the fact that a *starosta* was a supreme priest-ruler in Ancient Rus'.

Before the actual matchmaking the lad invited the matchmakers to his home with his parents' blessing; occasionally the invitation was extended by the father himself (Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk regions). The matchmakers were seated in the corner under the icons, entertained, and then blessed for the road.

Usually two men set off to make the match – a senior matchmaker and his assistant. In some areas of Volyn there were three matchmakers: the uncle, godfather and a married brother; at times they were also accompanied by the best man (*druzhiba*, *starshyj boyaryn*, *marshalok*) – an unmarried lad who was a friend of the groom. In some villages in the Ternopil region the swain made his match with only one matchmaker.¹²

Matchmakers bore staffs, which according to records from the 18th and early 19th centuries, were given to them by the groom himself. The groom and his best man had special wedding insignia – adorned hunting-crops, *druzhbivka* sticks and hatchets - a tradition which has survived to this day in the Carpathian Mountains.

In the past, according to S.Kylymnyk¹³, the business of sending matchmakers was nowhere near as simple as it might appear today. Matchmakers had to be well acquainted with the lad's state of health, as well as having advance knowledge of the girl. Before setting off to the girl's home, matchmakers inspected a lad to check that he was capable of fathering a family; they also spoke with him to see if he had the right frame of mind to be a husband. The girl's parents demanded the same prerequisites. When matchmakers arrived with the groom at the girl's home, the girl's matchmaker-relatives were already waiting for them. They would address the lad's matchmakers: "Is your swain well prepared to venture out into the world?" The groom's matchmakers replied that he was and said: "You can check for yourself." And if the girl's matchmakers had any doubts, they also took the lad to the storehouse to inspect him.¹⁴

Although today this might seem like a savage custom, a similar practice takes place these days in the West, where a doctor, rather than matchmakers, will inspect the bride and groom before marriage.

According to tradition the matchmakers took a bread, some salt and a bottle of vodka with them. The ceremony of matchmaking and betrothing, just the same as the ceremony of the wedding as a whole, is pervaded by beliefs that the young couple's future happiness can be influenced by certain actions and objects. Thus in Central Ukraine the bread had to be borrowed, in the Chernihiv region it had to bear signs of having been connected to another loaf and have traces of coals on the base. In Volyn parents blessed their son and his matchmakers with "twins" – two small loaves of bread baked together; the Hutsuls went matchmaking with two small breads and took along apples and nuts; in Podillia (Khmelnitsky and Zhytomyr provinces), matchmakers were also given a candle, which they lit in the girl's home.

The matchmakers would set off to the girl's home at any time of day, but usually they went in the evening, even late at night, after lights had gone out in the house. They made their arrival known by knocking at a window or door and almost always asked to be let in to stay the night, pleading extreme exhaustion after a long journey, sometimes deceiving the owner by talking about some supposed harm which had been done to his household (someone had untethered a cow, left open a stable door), and only when the owner opened the door did they begin the traditional conversation, asking to be let inside the house. A general custom throughout Ukraine was for the matchmakers to enter the house and the young man to wait outside; if he did enter, he stood near the door or sat at the end of the bench nearest the door and took no part whatever in the proceedings. The matchmakers greeted the head of the household, bowed before him, holding the bread, and placed it on the table.

The girl's father addressed the matchmakers with the words: "Who are you people and where have you come from? From near or far? Perhaps you are hunters of some kind, or maybe free Cossacks?" In Central Ukraine matchmakers replied with much rhetoric:

"We are German people journeying from Turkish lands. There was once a snowfall in our home country. So I told my friend: why worry about the weather, let us go and seek animal tracks. And so we set out. We walked and walked, but found nothing; and then – oh my! – we spied our prince coming toward us (the lad was usually referred to as a prince or *kniaz*'). He shrugged his shoulders and said to us: 'Eh, you boys, good hunters! Be kind enough to lend me a hand. I've come across a marten, a beautiful maiden. I haven't eaten, nor drunk, nor slept since that time and keep thinking how to capture her. Help me get her.' And so we began to follow the tracks through every town, but still we couldn't find the marten. But after we entered your village there was a snowfall: when we rose in the morning we managed to find the tracks again. We're positive that our animal has ventured into your yard and from your yard into your home and settled in one of the rooms here. So we must capture it. Our marten is holed up here. And so our speech has come to an end and you too can put an end to the whole

matter: give our prince his marten, your beautiful maiden. So please tell us, will you give her up or leave her to grow some more?"¹⁵

Such allegorical speeches helped the matchmakers stop the matchmaking early in the piece, if it was not desired by the girl's family. They would be told very politely that there was nothing for sale on the farmstead or that no marten had ventured into their yard.

The allegorical approach of hunting after a marten or a fox, or pursuing a purchase or sale disappeared in most places toward the end of the 19th or early in the 20th century, and instead assumed the form of a completely matter-of-fact conversation. Ethnographic records show that upon entering a house matchmakers often spoke of their intentions at the outset. At the host's invitation to be seated they would reply: "Well, *svat*, we haven't come here to sit around, but to chat and to seek your daughter's hand in marriage."

The young couple took no part at all in the preliminary talk. The marriageable girl could be at home, in which case she would be sent out of the house after something; in Volyn the mother occasionally sent the daughter away "to sit on the oven", sometimes the girl went off to an evening gathering. In the latter case the matchmaker and prospective groom followed her there. Here they stood a test of sorts before the other girls and lads, enduring their malevolent jibes.

When bidden by parents or the matchmaker, the girl entered the room, stood near the oven and, covering her eyes with her hand or lowering her head, picked at the oven or pretended to be busy. The custom of "sitting on the oven" or "picking at the oven" was quite widespread in Ukraine and was a survival of reverence toward the domestic hearth, which in ancient times assumed the power of a deity.

According to tradition, the girl was asked to give her consent to marry and if she agreed, she replied: "I will do as you bid, father and mother." In Subcarpathia the matchmakers would ask the girl to fetch them a shot glass and if she fulfilled their request, it was a sign of her agreement to the marriage.

In Podillia and Central Ukraine the girl reinforced her agreement to marry by bringing out embroidered sashes from the storehouse on a carved wooden platter. The matchmakers tied the sashes around one another (over the right shoulder and under the left arm). In Volyn, in parts of Kyiv region, Podillia and Subcarpathia the matchmakers were also given kerchiefs. In the Chernihiv, Kyiv, Poltava regions and Podillia the matched girl presented the groom with a kerchief, which she secured to his belt on the right side; in Volyn the bride-to-be fastened a kerchief to the young lad's pocket, while in the Boyko, Lemko and Hutsul regions she tied it around his right arm. The kerchief was usually red in colour.

The matchmakers and the groom placed money on the platter, approximating the value of the sashes and kerchiefs, and said: "God bless the parents and the young princess for getting up early and spinning the yarn for the sashes and kerchiefs."

After this, the blessing began. Near the oven (the oldest variant) or in the corner under the icons a bench was set up and covered with a sheepskin coat, the parents sat upon it, holding a loaf of bread and some salt. The young couple bowed low three times and each time the parents blessed them with the words: "We bless you with happiness and health, long life and good reason, a fortunate fate."¹⁶

Half a quart of vodka was placed on the table – this was the *mohorych*.¹⁷ Various dishes were served – "whatever there is in the house". However it was obligatory to slice the bread brought by the matchmakers and very often some cheese was cut up too.

No songs were normally sung at the matchmaking. However, as wedding accounts testify, in some areas the ceremony of matchmaking was combined with the engagement. Then there was plenty of revelry and games. The songs were reminiscent of engagement songs: "Gave my little hand, gave it and tied up my world, tied up my world with white nankeen and a black whip."¹⁸

The songs had been adapted to matchmaking, as can be seen from ethnographic material from Kyiv and Poltava regions and the Pidhirya district of Lviv Province.¹⁹

Matchmakers returned from their task early in the morning, so that people working outside in their yards could see them bound with sashes and so that the word would spread throughout the village that so and so had agreed to marry. Apart from the sashes and kerchiefs, a bread was presented to cement the match; this the matchmakers brought back to the groom's home.

For the most part the matchmaking finished on a happy note, if both parties had previously come to an agreement (either through emissaries or the lad had arranged things himself). All the same, there were occasions when the matchmakers returned empty-handed.

It happened that the lad's parents, having roughly chosen a girl for a bride, sent matchmakers to her, but just in case named several other candidates as suitable daughters-in-law in the event of refusal at the first house. If the lad was refused by all the girls in his village, the matchmakers set off to a neighbouring village. The matchmakers were often helped by the folk custom of decorating or outlining windows in red clay, if there was a girl of marriageable age inside. This custom was also practiced in Rumania, Poland and Bulgaria.

In houses visited by the matchmakers they were never refused outright, but told instead: "She's still too young, there's no one to give her away," or "We're not yet ready for a wedding." Sometimes the matchmakers were not given a goblet for the vodka, which they had requested. There survived a superstition into the 20th century that refusing matchmakers brought bad luck. For this reason sashes and kerchiefs were sometimes given to the first matchmakers to visit, although later the agreement could be retracted.²⁰ When matchmakers were refused, it was said in the lad's village that he was "given a pumpkin" or that he had "licked a poker".

Already by the end of the 19th century this expression had become purely symbolic. However, at the turn of the 19th century there had been a basis to it, for in refusing the girl would bring the matchmakers a wooden platter with a pumpkin and goblets of vodka. The expression "to lick a poker" can be explained too. In his description of weddings in villages along the Zbruch River, I.Halka says that if a lad was refused during matchmaking, the youths would erect a large straw poker atop the tavern to ridicule him.²¹

The Inspection

In Ukraine there was a custom to conduct an inspection (*obzoryny, ohliadyny, rozhliadyny*). Tradition foresaw that the next day, or two to three days later the bride's parents, together with a few other relatives (aunties, godmother, sisters, etc) went to the lad's home on the appointed day to become acquainted with him and to inspect the household into which their daughter would be moving. If they had information about the lad's material status, the inspection merely amounted to treating the girl's kin to food and drink, but if the lad's material standing was unknown, a meticulous inspection was undertaken.

This custom of inspection exists among other peoples too. However, among the Czechs, Poles, Germans and English the young man's kin inspected the chests, storehouses, stables, cellar and so on before the visit of the matchmakers. The marriage process in fact began with a detailed familiarity with the girl's material circumstances.²²

The custom of inspection in Ukraine was carried out with the same end in mind, but here the initiative belonged to the bride's clan, more rightly to the mother and the women of the clan. "... The old grannies set about crawling and rummaging throughout the entire household, inspecting the yard, the garden, the barn, checking how much grain and hay there was, examining the cattle, the storehouse, descending to the cellar and climbing into the attic, fingering the stored sacks, searching with sticks in the grain bins; they went and asked the

neighbours about the groom, if he was a scoundrel, whether his family was wealthy...²³ In all instances the inspection was carried out by the bride's clan, a practice which harks back to the matriarchate. If the visitors were satisfied by what they had seen, the inspection finished auspiciously. There were instances of sacks of grain, horses, sheep and cows being borrowed from neighbours and passed off as belonging to the family.²⁴ If satisfied, the visitors would banquet late into the night, the parents of the young couple referring to each other as *svat* (in-law). After the inspection, the time for the engagement was set.

If the groom's household or the general opinion of the groom in the village were not to the liking of the bride's kin, the match was annulled, they left for home and returned the bread which they had previously accepted.

The Engagement.²⁵ This was a public agreement between the bride and groom to marry, to create a family, and it was the community's blessing of their life together (although it was not a feature of some regions).

The engagement took place in the home of the bride-to-be. Parents, matchmakers and members of the groom's clan rode or walked to the bride's home, the best man or a groomsman accompanied the groom. Preparations were made for the engagement as if for some great celebration. Just as for the wedding, people were invited to the engagement by the groom and his best man, and by the bride with her maid of honour. Apart from family, close relatives and neighbours were invited to witness the engagement of the young couple.

In common law and in the eyes of the people the engagement probably occupied the most important place among all the pre-wedding rituals. Apart from being a community affair, the wedding was often imbued with great magical power, in an effort to maintain the indissolubility of the marriage. Therefore, in the process of the pre-wedding rituals and agreements an attempt was always made to foresee and arrange the wedding and to cement this with a conjugal pre-wedding ceremony.

The engagement was in fact a decisive pre-marriage civic act, which according to common folk law had the power of judicial law and sanctioned the marriage of the young couple.

The wedding and the civic marriage later became almost complimentary ceremonies. The engagement was accompanied by substantial expenditure on gifts and resulted in a noticeable drain on peasant households.

How did the ritual of engagement take place? Many of the older records explain that the engagement was a ceremony at which a lad and a girl made a mutual agreement to marry and the clans of the young couple sanctified the decision.

"All those assembled from the bride's and the groom's side of the family, and the young couple themselves, all place their right hand on a large pile, and the matchmaker binds them all together with a sash, while uttering the words: 'This here knot binds you not for a year or two, but for an entire eternity.' The matchmaker also said that the dissolution of such a union resulted in an dishonorable life..."²⁶ Such engagements were characteristic of the whole of Ukraine at the turn of the 19th century.

In his description of an engagement, J.Lożinski writes: "... As a token of the engagement the young couple exchange rings." This ritual was carried out with certain ceremony: the bride came up to the groom bearing a plate with a shot glass of vodka containing the ring at the bottom. The groom drank the vodka and then placed the ring on the ring finger of his left hand.

In areas such as Volyn and the Lviv region the groom and his clan were not allowed into the house, matchmakers made their ritual speeches outside, after which they were bound with sashes. Occasionally the bride would not be presented straight away and there was a ritual of bride substitution with another girl, and older woman or a man. The ritual of bride substitution was characteristic of many Slav peoples. Finally the bride was brought in, she bowed before

the groom, drank a toast to him, presented him with a ring, a kerchief, placed a garland on his hat (Lviv region) or sewed a flower onto it (Kharkiv region). The groom in turn showered the bride with gifts.

After the ceremonies of the couple's unity, the blessing by the parents began. The best man or the matchmaker led the couple (by holding onto one corner of a kerchief folded into a triangle, while the couple held onto each of the other two corners) up to the parents, who were seated on a bench covered with a sheepskin coat, and asked for their blessing. The young couple stepped onto an embroidered sash, bowed three times before their parents and were blessed with a loaf of bread or with "twins"²⁷ and a tuft of rye ears.

Before the engagement the house was decorated with *pokrassa* – small sheaves of rye placed in every corner of the house, and the blessing was done with a small tuft of ears taken from the sheaf in the corner under the icons. After being blessed, the young couple sat on a bench under the icons, everyone ate and drank, sang songs and clapped hands.

In some areas there was also a unique "dance of the young couple" (Volyn, Hutsul and Lviv regions). They were led away from the table with a kerchief and paraded about the room; they bowed to everyone, then danced or only twirled around once and sat down back on the bench under the icons, holding onto the kerchief, which was held by a bridesmaid or the matchmaker (Rivne region). After this the relatives exchanged gifts – kerchiefs, more rarely ashes, pieces of linen fabric and ribbons.

Apart from the mutual gift-giving, which the groom performed to the bride's family and vice versa, there was also a tradition of giving gifts to the young couple – people promised them cattle or grain and so on (Podillia, Volyn).

The youth of the village and not only close relatives were present at the engagement. The bride made the girls gifts of engagement sashes, and in the Chernihiv region, as she served them vodka, she also gave them a slice of the bread brought by the groom.

In general the cost of the engagement was borne by the groom's family, the groom also hired the musicians. At times the regaling and carousing dragged on late into the night, sometimes even lasting two days (Kyiv region), accompanied by singing and dancing. The engagement songs mostly related that "the bride had placed her white hand on a pledge" and that now her carefree girlhood in her parents' home had been lost, that her days would now be occupied with daily troubles, the continuous pleasing of her father- and mother-in-law. In song the girl addressed her parents, begging them to defend her from the in-laws. Many of the songs related to the treatment of the bride by her mother-in-law.²⁸

After this engagement, in some areas there was also the ceremony of the civic engagement, called *zapoyiny* or *pechohliadyny*. However, if the bride's relatives went to the groom's place for the *zapoyiny*, the groom and his comrade, who was destined to become the best man, went to the bride's home.

The bride's parents and some fifty relatives came to the groom's home. A series of magical rites took place during the *zapoyiny*, symbolizing the unity of the clans of the bride and groom. The bride's mother tied two loaves of bread into a kerchief, brought them to the groom's home and gave them to his mother "who first placed them on the table wrapped in the kerchief, picking them up later and swinging them three times over the table with the words: 'Just as this sacred bread is pure and majestic, so God grant that our children be pure, majestic, happy and long-lived'."²⁹ After this the groom's mother removed the loaves from the kerchief and placed them on the table, while in her own kerchief she tied up two of her own loaves, together with the kerchief of the bride's mother, handing all this to her and now referring to her as *svakha* (in-law).

The regailing began after this, accompanied by singing. Such *zapoyiny* – a unique engagement between clans – contained very archaic features. It was interesting that the mother, rather than the father, conducted the engagement, resorting to various magical actions, which attested to the old survivals of clan relationships.

This was how the engagement took – *placxe* in Transcarpathia: the matchmaker asked the groom to place his hat on the table. The bride then had to adorn it and place it back on the groom's head. Three times the bride would place the hat on his head and each time the matchmaker would remove it. 'So that you know, Marya,' the matchmaker said, 'that your husband is the head of the house.'³⁰

'You, Ivan, and you, Marya,' the matchmaker continued, 'step here to the middle of the room, hold hands and exchange kerchiefs, and then turn around three times!' The groom held a kerchief with a silver coin knotted into it, while the bride held a kerchief containing money and nuts. At an order from the matchmaker they exchanged kerchiefs. The mother, or if there was none, a female relative removed her *zapaska*³¹ and spread it out on the floor. The engaged couple stepped onto the *zapaska* and turned around three times, while holding hands. Meanwhile the matchmaker emptied a glass over their heads, whispering secret words, blessing them. After the ritual was over the mother picked up her *zapaska* and in jest struck the engaged couple with it, who then returned to sit at the table³².

The magical turning around three times probably had its beginnings in the marriage rites of the Ancient Slavs. For instance, even as late as the end of the 18th century old believers in Belarus kidnapped girls at a feast, took them into the forest and rode with them three times around a sacred oak or lake, and the marriage ended at this. After this the girl was considered the man's wife.

As can be seen, the engagement ritual at the turn of the 19th century contained many elements of the pre-Christian religion of the Slavs, which were passed on from generation to generation, Christianity being unable to completely displace them.

In the late 19th century, with the consolidation of the church ceremony for engagement, folk elements of the engagement disappeared, in most cases being abbreviated to the mere exchange of gifts and were replaced by elements of Christian religion.

Elements of the engagement from the folk wedding ritual were included in the church marriage ritual. In church the priest once again bound the couple's arms with a towel, in fact conducting the engagement a second time, imbuing it with church ritual. Perhaps this was the reason why this part of the wedding ritual cycle was most persecuted by the clergy. Thus, in the record of a wedding from Semyrivka in the Lviv region we learn of the existence of much older rites "which no longer exist, because the priest forbade them. The engagement used to take place on Saturday evening, before the second marriage announcement in church. Family from both sides and those who played a role in the wedding gathered at the bride's home. The fiancée gave her intended a kerchief to hang at his side and a ring. A bouquet of periwinkle was attached to the kerchief. But now, instead of the engagement, the groom sends off the matchmakers to the bride's home with a litre of vodka in the morning on Saturday, that is on the first day of the wedding, to fetch a kerchief to be hung at his side".³³

The Christianisation of the engagement ritual supplanted the old rituals only in places. On the whole in Ukraine, an engagement sanctioned marriage. Apart from the symbolic rites of unity, the exchange of gifts, the feasting accompanied by singing, the economic details of the marriage were discussed at the engagement and the wedding date was set. Perhaps because of this, the engagement was called *svatannia* (matchmaking) in Podillia, Central Ukraine and southern Volyn.

After the engagement both families parted, certain of the indissolubility of the marriage union. After the engagement and until the wedding the girl went about adorned with flowers and ribbons.

In many parts of Ukraine up until the 20th century the fiancé took advantage of the right to spend a night in the home of his intended on the first night after the engagement. The mother herself made the couple's bed. This old custom is quite common in the ethnographic literature. Some researchers have asserted that the custom was a relic of the German ritual known as *Probenachte*. However, this title does not apply to the customs of the Ukrainian engagement, for in fact there was no carnal intimacy between the couple. Such instances could not occur in the life of the Ukrainian populace, inasmuch as strict laws of ritual guarded the first nuptial night, borne of the morals of a patriarchal order. In the 19th century the night spent together after the engagement was a tribute to old rituals, a relic of ancient marriage forms.

After the engagement the households of the bride and groom began to prepare for the wedding proper.

Wedding Breads

Preparations for the wedding included the baking of a *korovay* and other wedding breads. A *korovay* was obligatory for those marrying for the first time, but not for widows or widowers. Women invited to knead a *korovay* put on festive outfits, decorating their headgear with periwinkle.

Only happily-married women were invited to knead and bake the *korovay*. Folk superstitions about happy marriages forbade the *korovay* makers to be widows or single women. Only in certain regions (Sumy, Kirovohrad) were single girls able to be present, but they prepared other wedding breads, such as the *dyven'*, *shyshky* and "geese".

There was always an odd number of *korovay* kneaders, usually seven. Those invited to knead the *korovay* brought flour, eggs and vodka along with them to the home of the bride- or groom-to-be, handing over everything they had brought to the head kneader or the mother.

The *korovay* was most often prepared three days before the wedding, sometimes in the morning on the day before the wedding, that is on the Saturday. In some areas of the Kyiv and Volyn regions the *korovay* was baked on the morning of the wedding.³⁴

According to records made of weddings in the 19th century, a *korovay* was originally baked from rye flour, as were the other wedding breads – the *kalach*, "geese" and "twins". The tradition of baking a wheaten *korovay* appeared later. Two *korovays* were baked in Ukraine: one in the home of the bride, the other in the home of the groom. After receiving the matchmaker's blessing, the *korovay* kneaders mixed the dough, while the matchmaker poured vodka into the dough trough, to make the *korovay* "merry".

A *korovay* consisted of two parts: the lower part, the so-called "sole", was made of wheat or rye flour; atop this was placed a large round rich bread – the *korovay* proper. This was ringed with a "hoop" of dough and then adorned. In all regions the *korovay* was adorned with various ornaments made of dough: birds, cones, heavenly bodies, various braids, bunches of guelder-rose and grape. All this symbolized prosperity, fertility and fidelity in marriage.

Money provided by the head kneader, sometimes even chicken eggs, were baked into the *korovay*. The formed *korovay* was placed into the oven – in places this was done by the kneaders themselves, but occasionally a lad was invited along for this task (dubbed "the curly-haired one" or "the Armenian"). The oven was swept out with a hearth broom and the *korovay* slid inside. After this, the person who had placed the *korovay* into the oven tapped the scoop against all four walls, while everyone else grabbed the dough trough and danced about the

house with it, striking the ceiling three times with it “so that the *korovay* will rise nicely and turn out well”.

During the placement of the *korovay* into the oven the women sang appropriate songs, occasionally with sexual-phallic overtones (“Our oven is guffawing, anxious for *korovay*”), they danced and leapt about, boisterously expressing their joy. After the *korovay* was in the oven, the women took the dough trough, raised it above their heads and kissed each other crosswise, crooning songs. The water used to wash down the tables was carried off to the threshing yards and poured out “so that the children will love each other well”. In the Poltava region the trough was sometimes smashed.³⁵

The baked *korovay* was removed from the oven, placed on the table on a bread-trough lid sprinkled with grain, or on a straw cover from a basket and allowed to cool. Then the *korovay* was adorned. It was girdled with a sash, then pine or fir branches were added (in Chernihiv and Podillia regions), in some areas the *korovay* was decorated with *terenky* (cherry twigs wound with dough and baked in the oven), paper flags of various colours and strands of wool. In some regions the *korovay* was painted red on top and gilded with gold leaf.

The women would bow toward the table while holding the *korovay* and sang songs about the storehouse, which would hide the *korovay*. Those present each grabbed hold of the cover holding the *korovay* and forming a ring, dancing and singing songs.

The *korovay* was taken off to the storehouse, accompanied by musicians. Here they danced too, sang songs, drank and ate sausage and fried eggs. This is the most archaic version of the *korovay* ritual, surviving in the Chernihiv and Volyn regions into the 20th century. In other areas this ritual had already died out. Instead the *korovay* was placed on the table in the house, where it remained throughout the wedding. For their efforts the *korovay* kneaders were given kerchiefs, dough “cones” and ribbons, treated to food and drink. Many of the kneaders’ songs now assumed an erotic character.

Apart from the *korovay*, the women also baked a *lezhen’* (a long bread containing coins and eggs), *shyshky* (cones) – small buns, round at the bottom, with adornments at the top, which made them resemble pine cones. The *lezhen’* was cut up on the second day of the wedding, after the nuptial night, and presented to the wedding guests, for the most part to the girls who brought the bride breakfast. Usually no less than 200 “cones” were baked and were given to the wedding participants during the various rituals. In Central Ukraine, the Black Sea Coast region, Podillia and Volyn they baked a large “cone” which was taken by the *svashka* as the bride left for the home of the groom and which, after the nuptial night, was adorned with guelder-rose, red strands of wool and ribbons, and was sent back to the bride’s home. Other special breads which were baked included the *hrebin’* (comb) – for the bride’s mother and the *borona* (harrow) – for the bride’s father.

The tradition of baking “twins” in the bride’s home survived into the 20th century. This was a pastry which symbolized unity and fidelity in marriage. It was placed upon two spoons on the one plate and set before the young couple. It lay there throughout the wedding, but when the bride went off to the groom’s home, it was carried into the storehouse and placed at the head of the nuptial bed (Volyn, Chernihiv and Hutsul regions).

In the Chernihiv region they baked a *perepiyets’* – a small bread with a cone on top (it was made of dough cut into teeth and was reminiscent of a pine cone). The *kalach* was a standard wedding bread throughout Ukraine and was made of braided dough. Occasionally “cones” were tinted red and decorated with gold leaf. This was undoubtedly an ancient tradition, for according to A. Tereshchenko, dough for wedding breads made in the late 18th and early 19th century had red dye added to it. He also noted the baking of horses, cows and other figurine breads, which were given to children and to guests with small children.³⁶

Garlands. Wedding Invitations. The Wedding Tree.

While the women were busy baking the *korovay* and other wedding breads, the bride and groom separately ventured out into the village with the bridesmaids and groomsmen respectively to invite guests to the wedding.

In the late 19th – early 20th century invitations would be made up to two weeks before the wedding to family living in distant villages. There were no special ceremonies here, except for the mother's blessing. Immediately before the start of the pre-wedding cycle, the wedding invitations were made with certain accompanying ceremonies. One of the most important of these was the weaving of garlands for the bride and groom.

Usually the garlands were made on Saturday morning, accompanied by ritual songs. Permission to make the garlands was obtained by the head bridesmaid from the matchmaker. Both the bride and groom wore garlands of periwinkle, the bride often had an additional garland made of mint, periwinkle and rue.

The evergreen garland symbolized everlasting love and marriage. In the Boyko region the gathering of the periwinkle became a ceremony in itself, starting off the whole wedding ritual. To the accompaniment of music and songs the wedding party went to gather the periwinkle, taking along with them bread, oats and vodka.³⁷ The leaves of the periwinkle used in the garlands were smeared with honey, then several cloves of garlic were added to guard the young couple against evil and coins were inserted to bring them happiness. In the Boyko and Lemko regions tassles of oats were woven into the garland. The finished garlands were placed on round breads and taken to the parents of the bride, so that they could bless their daughter for the wedding. The parents touched their daughter's forehead three times with the garland, before sitting it on her head. The groom was given his garland later. The bridesmaids had garlands of mint and rue.

As Beauplan testifies, garlands were used not only to adorn the heads of the young couple and the bridesmaids, but were also slipped onto the arms of individuals invited to the wedding.³⁸ After the garlands were finished, the matchmaker asked the parents of the bride or groom to bless them for the invitations. Invitations to the wedding were first handed out in one part of the village and then the invitation party moved, following the sun.

The bride and her bridesmaids and the groom with his groomsmen stood out because of their festive clothes. Usually the bride and the matron of honour carried kerchiefs, occasionally staffs, while the groom and his groomsmen carried whips or sticks (in the Boyko region a so-called *druzhbivka* and in the Hutsul region - the *topirets*'), which were adorned with *volichky* (tassles of multicoloured wool) or with colourful kerchiefs. The invitation was always made while bearing a bread, *kalach* or "cones". This custom disappeared in some areas in the late 19th – early 20th century.

There was a tradition in the villages, which survived into the middle of the 20th century in Subcarpathia, of inviting not only relatives, neighbours and village residents to the wedding, but also anyone whom the party chanced upon in the street. This in fact was not unique to Ukraine, but also occurred among other Slav peoples and in the Caucasus, and was probably a surviving ritual of clan order, when the conclusion of the marriage was a matter for the whole clan to decide upon and celebrate. The invitation to the wedding made on Saturday was in fact a symbolic request for permission to marry from all the village residents. The young couple first sought a blessing for their marriage, and then invited people to the wedding with the words: "Father and mother requested (sometimes they also listed all the brothers and sisters), and I ask you too, to come to partake of bread and salt, and to attend our wedding." This was

repeated three times by the young couple and the bridesmaids, accompanied by low bows, and then the bride or the groom repeated the invitation separately. The hosts usually gave the bride either money, or some hemp, or something useful, saying: "Take this for a cradle/ a swaddling band/ horseshoes."

In the late 19th century in separate regions of Ukraine the groom would set out to make the invitations with one or two groomsmen, while the bride went with one or two bridesmaids. In the Poltava and Kherson regions there were usually fifteen to twenty-five, sometimes even fifty bridesmaids.³⁹ They accompanied the bride in a large throng, their majestic singing notifying the village of an unusual event - the forthcoming marriage of their friend.

The groom's retinue was no less modest. Information available from the start of the 19th century supplied by J. Lozinski speaks of equally grand ceremonies when the groom invited his guests. According to Lozinski, the groom and his groomsmen dressed in *zhupan* coats, with kerchiefs slipped under their belts and had periwinkle in their hats (they always wore hats, even if it was summer), had rings, took along whips, and rode their horses, whose harnesses were adorned with greenery. A groom's mounted cortege can be encountered even today in the mountainous regions of the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine.

One of the most ancient traditions in the ritual of invitation must be the custom of leading the bride about the village with a sash. This tradition survived in some Kherson villages until the end of the 19th century.⁴⁰ The leading along of a young couple with a sash or a kerchief during the performance of the marriage ceremonies was characteristic not only of Ukrainian weddings, but also among all Southern Slavs.

Having invited the guests, the young couple returned home, where another ceremony awaited them – they had to make a *hil'tse* (wedding tree). The ritual of making a wedding tree was no less solemn than that of baking a *korovay*.

The wedding tree bore many diverse names. Depending on the region, it could be called *hil'tse*, *derevtse*, *vil'tse*, *troychatka* or *rizka*. Most often girls made the wedding tree on a Saturday; this evening was called a *divych-vechir*, *vinkopletyny*, *holovytsia*, *druzhbivsky tanets*'; in the Carpathian foothills it was called *roskolyny*, *zavodyny* or sometimes *posah*. In the Lviv and Boyko regions they used the names *vyhravantsi*, *drushchyny*. Usually on this evening the young couple gathered both in the home of the bride as well as in the groom's house.

In the Lemko region they wove a *rizka* in the home of the bride on Saturday night and at the same time the young people gathered at the groom's place for the so-called *druzhbinsky tanets*' (groomsmen's dance).⁴¹ In separate areas of the Volyn and Kyiv regions there was a custom of making the wedding tree on Sunday, after the bride and groom had returned from church. This tradition has also survived in the Lviv region (Yavoriv district). In certain areas, for example Subcarpathia, a wedding tree and wedding garlands were made by the wedding-bread kneaders or *korovainytsi*.⁴² This custom is believed to be older.

A wedding tree was made from the bushy top of a cherry tree, an apple tree, or the branch of a pine or fir. A tradition was adhered to whereby the tree had an odd number of branches. The wedding tree was sought out and chopped down by the groomsmen, more rarely (in Pokuttia), the groom himself had to chop down the tree for the bride.

In the Lviv and Ternopil regions, even in some places of western Volyn they made a wedding tree called a *kvitka*, occasionally *rizka* (this name appeared under the influence of Polish wedding customs). A *kvitka* was a branch with three or five side branches and a height of 80 to 90 cm (32–36 in.).

The oldest detailed description of the three-pronged *rizka* is to be found in Lozinski's account, who wrote that each branch of the *rizka* was 'entwined with oats, periwinkle and other

herbage, and there is an apple affixed to each tip...⁴³ The apple as a symbol of fertility is encountered in the wedding ritual of many peoples.

In the Hutsul region the tree is hung with garlic, oregano, carnations, sweet cicely, *tyndyrytsia* (a herb), multicoloured yarn, feathers and coins. After the wedding tree was decorated, it was driven into a bread and stood on the table throughout the wedding. So that it stood up well, it was fastened to the ceiling by a string. In some regions the wedding tree had a hand-made base with rods set into it, to which flowers were attached.

Usually a wedding tree was made not only in the home of the bride, but also in the home of the groom. This was done by the groomsmen. On Sunday evening the adorned tree was brought to the home of the bride: and here both wedding trees were broken up and thrown onto the bed (obviously a symbol of the union of the married couple).

According to an account by Verhovynets, the wedding tree made in the groom's home, was taken by the groom on his head to the bride's home on Sunday after the marriage ceremony. Among the Hutsuls, it was brought to the bride's home by the *bereza*⁴⁴, who was followed by the groom (account by Shukhevych).

The ceremony of the 'weaving' of the wedding tree was always very solemn. Permission to make the wedding tree was sought by the maid of honor from the matchmaker, in the Boyko region by the head *svashka*. Having received the blessing to proceed, they began to weave the tree to the accompaniment of appropriate songs. The most commonplace tradition was for the bride or the groom to be the first to decorate it. The maid of honour or the candle-girl handed the bride or groom a bunch of guelder-rose, some oat ears or periwinkle. In other areas the first flower was affixed to the tree by the mother, the brother or the father, in the Lviv region - by the best man.

After this the wedding tree was adorned by the bridesmaids, girls and *svakhas*. Most often the bride sat at the table with the bridesmaids. In the Podillia region while the bridesmaids adorned the tree, the bride had to stand near the threshold beside the oven and weep⁴⁵ – this was a ceremony of leave-taking of the family hearth. In some villages in the Poltava region the wedding tree was made in the *siny* (anteroom).⁴⁶ The wedding tree was adorned with clusters of guelder-rose, periwinkle, apples, tufts of rye, basil, paper flowers, feathers, gilded paper. Everything was tied on and interlaced with red ribbons and red woollen yarn. In the folk mind the wedding tree symbolized a newly-formed family, happy married life.

In Transcarpathia an integral part of the wedding to this day is the *kurahov*, the wedding staff (a stick two to three meters in length hung with multicoloured scarves and ribbons, with a small bell attached to the tip). Whatever its name – *kurahov*, *korohva*, *praporets*, *khuruhva* or *zastava* – the wedding staff is an indispensable element of any Slav wedding.

In the deep past during the armed capture of a bride by a military detachment, it served as a war banner. The *kurahov* is made at the very start of the wedding and is carried by the best man in front of the wedding procession (when they go off after the bride). During the wedding banquet the *kurahov* hangs on the wall and at the end of the wedding is placed at the head of the nuptial bed. After the wedding night the bride hides it and the best man must pay a ransom the following morning to get it back. The *kurahov* is taken apart after the wedding and the scarves given out to the girls.⁴⁷

The evening before the wedding was a form of leave-taking of the young couple with the youth of the village (*divych vechir*). Here they sang about the easy, carefree life of the young couple in the homes of their parents, wept over the separation from girlfriends and comrades. In some villages in the Poltava region the young people took the wedding tree into the house where they usually had village evenings and singalongs. The bride and her bridesmaids would

come here, sometimes the groom with his groomsmen, and the youth of the village. They sang songs and treated themselves to food and drink.⁴⁸

The ceremony of the making of a wedding tree usually finished with the treating of the guests and with dancing which was begun by the bride or groom. The bride, the groom, the father or the mother, paid a ransom for the wedding tree and later drove it into a bread or *kalach* in which it stood on the table for the entire duration of the wedding; it was used during various ritual processions.

Apart from the making of the wedding tree, other activities took place in the days before the wedding to symbolize the mutual agreement of the young couple to marry. This was manifested in the sending of a shirt by the bride to the groom, in the public presentation of kerchiefs.

The bride had to sew and embroider the shirt in which the groom was married. The bride brought it to the table, her girlfriends rolled it into a tube, bound it with ribbons under which periwinkle was slipped; a white kerchief was attached, meant to signify a letter to the groom.⁴⁹ With the kerchief a girl once more acknowledged her consent to marriage. The bride sent the shirt to the groom through emissaries, who proceeded with music and song to the home of the groom.

The tradition of presenting the groom with a shirt has survived throughout Ukraine, with perhaps only slight variations in ceremony in some places. For example, in the Dnister River region the mother played the chief role in the presentation of the shirt. And understandably, she resorted to various forms of divination so that her child's future with her husband would be happy. To this end the mother baked a small *kalach* and sewed it into the shoulder-piece of the shirt, together with three leaves of periwinkle, basil and three ears of rye: 'The basil, so that she is always fragrant to him, the periwinkle so that she is attractive as a flower to him, the ears of rye for a good life, and the small *kalach* so that they never want for bread.'⁵⁰

In some places, most often in the central provinces, the groom visited the bride on Saturday evening before the wedding "to obtain kerchiefs". For this ritual he assembled all his clan and went off to the bride bearing the wedding tree, accompanied by musicians, groomsmen, the candle-girl bearing an adorned candlestick - a sword with three candles affixed to it. The ceremony of unification of the two clan fires took place at the threshold to the house: the bride's mother and the groom's sister placed their right foot on the doorstep and united the fires of the candles; they kissed and after this the groom's entourage entered the house and seated themselves in the corner under the icons together with the whole wedding party.⁵¹

The ceremony of the giving of the kerchief went something like this: the bride's mother placed a kerchief she had readied beforehand onto a plate, handed this to the head bridesmaid, who passed it on to the bride. The bride came up to the table and handed the groom the kerchief across the table; having taken the kerchief, he placed some money onto the plate. After this the bride exchanged kisses of greeting with everyone in the entourage, treating each person to a glass of vodka.

In Podillia, southern Volyn and the Kyiv region the groom visited the bride on Saturday evening with his parents and his entourage. The elder matchmaker headed the procession and bore the wedding tree on his head. The *svakhas* and matchmakers were bound with red or blue belts over their shoulders.

After everyone was seated at the table, the bride-to-be presented the groom with a shirt and a kerchief, and he made her a gift of boots, which the *svakhas* immediately put on the bride-to-be. The gifts were presented on a plate with a bow being made, the boots were filled with oats (an older variant), sweets, nuts or bagels (the Podillia and Kyiv regions).

Ethnographic records show that most often on the day before the wedding the bride sent the groom a shirt, and he sent her boots, or his family came to the bride's home and an exchange of gifts between the families took place. The bride's sister made a 'flower' taken from the bride's head for the groom's hat. After the ceremonial exchange of gifts the young couple danced. Then food and drink were served to the accompaniment of songs.

Thus, on the eve of the wedding, ritual acts conclusively assured the consent for the marriage between the clans of the groom and bride, and between the young couple themselves. The ritual of the *divych-vechir*, the custom of making the wedding tree, has strong Slav roots.

Posad

The earliest records of weddings show that the *posad* (sitting down) of the young couple took place several times before the wedding. It took place both in the home of the groom and the bride. In both cases the ritual was almost analogous. It combined religious and mystical rites with clan and agrarian worship, which is characteristic of the wedding rituals of many peoples.

In Ukrainian wedding ritual there were in fact several instances when the *posad* was performed. The first *posad* before the wedding symbolized recognition of the maturity of the bride and groom, their ability as members of society to create a new family unit. The couple's joint *posad* sanctioned the final public marriage of the couple, while the *posad* of the bride during the *ochipyny* (capping) ceremony symbolized her transition from maidenhood to womanhood and her subservient position with respect to her husband and his clan.

Thus the "sitting down" of the young couple in each instance had its separate function. The joint *posad* of the bride and groom can be considered the high point of the Ukrainian wedding, its culmination.

The first *posad* took place in the evening before the wedding, after the bride or groom had returned from their round of invitations. Before sitting down for the *posad* the young couple asked their relatives, family members, neighbours and all present at the ceremony to bless them.

The parents made the blessing, but where an orphan was marrying, this was done by substitute parents appointed from among close family. The matchmaker (in some areas the best man) led the bride and groom up to the parents with a kerchief. The young couple bowed low before each parent three times, then before each family member. The father, mother and family then blessed them with the bread. Once the parents' blessing was given, the best man handed the bride or groom a kerchief and led them to the *posad*.

Much earlier records show that the ritual of *posad* was a survival from the original Slav pre-Christian religion, emphasizing a respect for the domestic hearth, the cult of the ancestor.

The bride and groom proceeded to the *posad* from the storehouse, their path to the house sometimes lined with strips of linen. Before sitting on the *posad*, the young couple circled the room three times. They sat down on a sheepskin coat (later a cushion was occasionally used) in the corner under the icons, where two benches touched. The ceremony of the *posad* was practiced as far back as the times of Kievan Rus'.⁵²

The most archaic elements of the *posad* ritual survived well into the 19th century in the Boyko, Hutsul and Volyn regions. In the Boyko region the young couple was led to the *posad* from the storehouse, where they were dressed in wedding garments. The *svakhas* accompanied the bride, who walked along pieces of linen fabric spread out along the ground from the storehouse to the house, and across the table to the *posad*, carrying a loaf of bread under each arm; in her hands the bride held a wooden plate with a shot-glass of vodka. A matchmaker led the groom to the *posad* with a kerchief. Before the ritual of *posad*, the matchmaker sought everyone's blessing: "You - father, you - mother, you - brothers, sisters, uncles and neighbours,

please bless the groom/bride to come to *the posad*.” Everyone then replied three times: “May the Lord bless him/her.” Occasionally the procession from the storehouse to the *posad* was led by musicians playing music, followed by *svashkas* singing wedding songs.

The mother walked before the young couple carrying a plate of oats, upon which sat a wedding bread. She scattered oats over the path and from the anteroom in the house she strewed grain over the table and the place of the *posad*.⁵³ Throughout the territory of Ukraine the educational element in the ritual of *posad* was highlighted. In the Hutsul region the mother held a candle and *kalachi* on the shoulders of the groom and, while circling the table three times alongside the godmother, lectured her son not to pine after his single life, telling him to live honestly, to manage the household well with his wife, to marry off their children. Throughout this ceremony the musicians stopped playing, so that the groom could hear his mother’s words.

The groom sat down, toasted his mother, then his father, who instructed him: “Thank you, son, for the honour! I marry you while you are young, with a young garland, with a young wife; do not beat her, do no maltreat her. May you run the household as I did, feeding your small lot; may you live well with your wife and not gaze into the eyes of other women!”⁵⁴

In Volyn it was usually the mother, brother, matchmaker, or most often the best man or the master of ceremonies who led the couple to the *posad*. When the young couple sat down, the gift-giving began, a unique form of clan dowry, assistance with setting up a new household.

The *rozpletyny* (unplaiting) took place on the day before the wedding or on the day of the church ceremony. The bride’s unplaiting was done very solemnly in the presence of relatives, neighbours and bridesmaids. The bride was seated on a chair or kneading trough which was covered with a sheepskin coat, sometimes a cushion. According to tradition, the plait was most often unbraided by the brother, and if there were several of them, then they unbraided according to seniority (beginning with the eldest). After the brothers, the whole family took turns at unplaiting the bride, starting with the mother, then the father, followed by everyone else. In some places traditions have survived where the maid of honour unplaited the bride and then adorned her head. In the Pidliashia region the matchmaker was the first to unplait the bride and comb her hair, followed by the mother, then the brother and finally the rest of the family.⁵⁵

The mother or brother usually placed a wedding garland on the bride’s head, but in the Boyko region this was performed by the father. When all this was finished the bride rose from her chair and each of the girls tried to be the first to sit down in her place. The belief was that the first to sit down would be the first to marry.

This was how the ancient ritual of unplaiting was explained by the common folk: “The unbraiding of the plait by the brother is a symbol that the bride has not lost her virginal honour, that no stranger has cut her plait for shameful deeds, but that her own brother has unbraided it with glory and helped bring her into respectable womanhood”.

The Church Ceremony

From an ethnographic viewpoint the church ceremony was not connected to the folk wedding rituals, but was a later addition. In the 11th century the church ceremony was not practiced among the common people, being obligatory only for members of the nobility. Little emphasis was placed on church marriages even during 15-17th centuries. Legal books of the day note that the marriage became legally binding only after the wedding banquet. A long time elapsed between the church ceremony and the wedding, sometimes as much as a year or two. During this time the couple lived apart and were not considered to be husband and wife. In the 16th

century the clergy often lamented that “many people in Rus’ are living illicitly: the women are knowingly not marrying in church and the government officials are in collusion with them.”⁵⁶

Sunday has long been considered the day of marriage in Ukraine. Sunday remained the wedding day in the central and eastern provinces of Ukraine and in Galicia up until the 20th century. With time, during the late 19th and early 20th century, it became traditional in the western parts of Ukraine to conduct marriage ceremonies on weekdays. The change in the wedding day was influenced by the Greek Catholic Church.⁵⁷ The wedding usually began on a Monday or Wednesday, instead of a Friday or Saturday.⁵⁸

On the day of the church ceremony the bride rose before dawn. There was a tradition of sending musicians to the bride early on this day, so they could play “to wish her a good day”. After this she would ready herself for the church ceremony.

In those areas where the unplaiting took place on the day of the church ceremony, this ritual was performed first, but if it had been performed the day before, the bride still dressed lavishly. She sat down upon a chair or kneading trough covered with a sheepskin coat; the bridesmaids, svashkas or her mother combed her hair, smeared it with honey or butter, braided into it several coins, a piece of bread, a clove of garlic and various herbs such as mint and basil to protect her from all evil. With similar protection/charms?? in mind, Hutsuls threaded small bells into a bride’s necklace; these were also attached to the harness??? of the horses on which the bride and groom rode.

New garments were made for the wedding – sheepskin coats, skirts, coats and so on, which would be kept until death. Where it was traditional to wear special wedding clothes, they sewed gugli, huni and wedding mantles (in Transcarpathia, Bukovyna and the Hutsul region). For weddings, as for funerals, people made new clothes. And simple though they might be, even if other family members had helped make them, they were one’s own garb.

Headgear worn on the wedding day was noted for being very sumptuous and different. It was prepared according to local traditions and could be made of red ribbons in the form of a full poppy or a rose, with glass-bead braids, woolen yarn and bronze or lurex decorations. There was a tradition throughout Ukraine to adorn wedding garlands with dyed feathers. At the turn of the 20th century there arose a custom, especially in the central provinces, of replacing the flowers made of silk ribbons with a garland made of paper, wax and stearin??. The groom and the rest of the wedding party began to have flowers attached to their chest, rather than their headgear (an influence of urban wedding customs).⁵⁹

A bride would put on the boots given to her by the groom; over her wedding garments she wore a peremitka kerchief, sometimes even tying on a silk kerchief. In Bukovyna and in most southern parts of the Hutsul region the kerchief was worn like an apron. In regions along the Dnipro River the bride was draped with embroidered or woven wedding sashes.

Before setting off for church the traditional circling of the table took place, usually led by the matchmaker. During this ritual the bride or groom held onto the matchmaker’s kerchief and bowed before their parents, who were seated and holding a proshchevyj (farewell) bread⁶⁰ and blessed their child to marry.

In the eastern provinces the circling of the table in the groom’s home took place with the best man, a groomsman and the candle-girl, who carried a candlestick – a sabre with burning candles affixed to it. For the “bowing” the parents sat in the corner under the icons, holding bread, salt and an icon. Among the Hutsuls the parents were joined on the bench by all the relatives, while the “wedding mother” walked ahead of the entourage carrying a wedding tree, followed by the groom and groomsman. During this time she uttered “remissions”, reminiscent of the blessing of the bride and groom.⁶¹

In the Boyko and Lemko regions the matchmaker spoke on behalf of the young couple, asking the parents to forgive them their trespasses and to give their assent to the marriage.⁶²

In those areas where the bride and groom did not go to church separately, the groom came for the bride in the morning before church, the bride's parents blessed both the bride and the groom together. In the bride's home the best man sought remission on behalf of the groom and the bride was represented by her brother. During the blessing the young couple stood on a rug or a sheepskin coat, which symbolized wealth and well-being.

The pre-marriage ritual

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... On the way to the bride's place they also avoided evil spells, careful that "no enemy should cross their path".

During the wedding procession, according to a tradition widespread throughout Ukraine, boys organized a *pereima* or interception for the groom.

Scholars such as V. Yastrebov and M. Sumtsov associated the tradition of *pereima* with a very ancient traditional right, whereby the young male members of the community displayed their right to the girl about to be married. This survived as a relic of the past among the swains of the village. The *pereima* involved placing a table or more often a bench in the middle of the road, which was covered with a white tablecloth or sash onto which bread and salt were placed. Occasionally the *pereima* was conducted using a unique square arch adorned with fir branches.

Ethnographic accounts of weddings show that the *pereima* was most often held close to the bride's home. This was an original form of barter between the groom and the village swains for the girl about to be wed. The groom was met with bread and salt and had to pay the swains a ransom consisting of a bottle of vodka and some *shyshka* breads.

Almost always the groom's wedding party encountered obstacles near the bride's home. Songs were sung to summon the parents to greet their guests:

Vyjdy, matinko, vyjdy,	Come forth, mother dear, come forth,
Ne vchynysh sobi kryvdy,	You won't do yourself no harm,
Stan' sobi na pomosti,	Come and stand upon the porch,
Pryvitaj svoji hosti.	And do welcome your fair guests.

This is the most peaceable version and the song was the most common one, sung by the wedding party in front of the bride's home.

In earlier records, also in the wedding customs of the Carpathians and Polissia, they sing of the bride's home resembling an impenetrable fortress, the path to which is set with a string of ceremonial rituals. The boys and relatives stand at the gate, stopping the groom's party from entering. The groomsmen try to force their way through to the bride, but without success. Then they enter into negotiations and all ends with the groom paying a ransom – a *kalach* bread or *verch* and a bottle of vodka. In some villages in Ternopil Province up until the 20th century there survived the tradition of fixing a scarecrow resembling a warrior onto the gate, with a pot of ash on its head; this was smashed as the groom's party entered the bride's yard. It is hard to ascertain the origins of the custom – whether it was a survival of some veneration of the domestic hearth or whether it was meant to imitate a clan's defence. In any case, there was a

tradition here of smashing a pot of ash over the heads of the young couple when they returned from the church ceremony.(1)

As the groom's party entered the bride's yard, negotiations took place. Gradually the theme of military attack became less warlike. Songs were sung, emphasizing the bad fortune of the bride, "for the scythe has come to reap your beauty".

In separate areas the negotiations at the threshold contained certain peculiarities, but in general this was about an agreement between two families and two clans. The couple's union was cemented through a string of rituals bearing a certain symbolism. %This was manifested either by the purchase of the bride's wedding tree (Black Sea coast, Hutsul and Pokuttia regions) or through the ritual washing of the hands of the best man and his assistant, with the bride's mother pouring the water for them; she also handed them the sashes which they bound around themselves (Podillia and Dnipro River regions).

In the Chernihiv, Kyiv and Volyn regions the entrance of the groom's retinue into the bride's home was accompanied by magical actions in which only the *svakha* women participated. Holding the bread, salt and burning candles, they came up to the house as representatives of the two wedding parties, placing their right feet on the threshold and bringing their candles together, so that they burned with a single flame; they kissed one another and exchanged breads. The exchange of breads took place everywhere in Ukraine, the ritual actions being performed three times. Finally, after the exchange of wedding *kalachi* between bride and groom, the groom's party was given permission to enter the house. Sometimes there was also a game – the seeking of the bride. To this end the matchmaker would begin talking about a ewe-lamb which had ostensibly disappeared, the talk similar to that of the matchmakers attempting to make a match. The matchmaker pretended not to see the bride and he was first shown the bridesmaids, but he did not give them the *kalach*, even though he praised each of them. Finally he placed the *kalach* before the bride with the words: "The young squire requests you to accept his gift."

The rituals called "bride substitution" or "false bride" were part of the wedding rituals of many Slav peoples and had a magical function, being a unique form of defensive sorcery.

Wedding rituals associated with the arrival of the groom at the bride's home retained features of the kidnapping (*umykannia*) of the bride, her purchase and also reflected features of the contractual wedding.

Songs accompanying the ritual requested that the entire wedding party be allowed into the home, for it was tired after its long quest after the bride, who was lovingly called things such as "the dear daughter-in-law", *korystochka*, *popratnytsia*.

At the threshold it was not uncommon for exchanges of gifts to take place. The mother was given boots, the father a harrow with a "driver" baked out of dough, the best man handed the bride a *namitka* holding three *shyshka* breads.

When meeting the guests, the bride's mother always came out in a sheepskin coat worn inside-out, holding a pot with water and oats. The groom took the pot from his mother-in-law and feigning a desire to drink, threw it over his shoulder, while the best man smashed it with a stick over the heads of the wedding party. The bride's mother traditionally showered the groom and his party with oats, rye and wheat, smearing the groom's lips with honey, plying him with vodka which he tossed twice over his shoulder, drinking it only the third time.

As the wedding party entered the house, the barter for the bride began, A song called on the brother not to sell his sister, not to relinquish his place at her side. The brother improvised a defence of his sister. Occasionally he even jumped up onto the bench and waved his sword about, stopping the groom in his tracks.

The groom's svashkas sang songs aimed at the brother, begging him to be kinder and to hand his sister over, while the bride's svakhas ridiculed the groom and his retinue.

The groom's party sometimes pretended to win a place beside the bride by force. Thus, in Chernihiv Province the best man came up to the table where the bride was sitting covered in a kerchief, and waved his whip across the table at the brother, to drive him away from his sister's side.

The bridesmaids (called *shuryinky* in Chernihiv province and Eastern Podillia) screamed, the brother rose to his feet and raised his whip at the best man with shouts of: "You dare not take my sister this way! If you want her, you have to buy her – we'll sell her to you!" The best man began to haggle, throwing progressively more money on to a platter standing before the brother.

Sometimes the trade between the bride's brother and the groom ended with the groom handing the brother a plate with a *kalach* and some coins, treating him also to a shot-glass of vodka. After this the brother bounded over the table, moving away from the wedding party; if there were several brothers, they all hastened to leave. The groom was led around the table three times by the best man, while the bridesmaids stood upon the benches, and only then the groom was seated beside the bride. In the Boyko region the groom had to jump over the table.

Covered with a kerchief or a *peremitka*, the bride feigned great despair, holding firmly onto the table; the groom removed the covering from her head, forcibly lifted her head and kissed her. After this the wedding party sat down at the tables to eat and drink.

However the most colourful ritual of the groom's entrance into the bride's home took place in the Hutsul region. After the traditional and characteristically Ukrainian exchange of breads, the bride and groom also exchanged *kalaches* here. Through his best man the groom handed his *kalach* to the bride, who looked through it to the east, turning around three times in the direction of the sun's movement, after which she handed her *kalach* to the best man, who passed it on to the groom. The "wedding mother" tied the *kalach* with the two ends of a kerchief, and two other groomsmen took it and lifted it up so that the groom could ride into the bride's yard on horseback underneath this unique gate. The groom waited until the groomsmen had bought off the bridesmaids. Thus, the bridesmaids, representatives of the female community, apparently defended the bride. After a token payment to the bridesmaids, the groomsmen invited them to dance and led them outside in the yard. Only after the dancing finished did the groom dismount. The groomsmen untied the cheese kalach from his wrist and bore it into the house to the bride. There they placed it against the bride's eyes and asked: "In which direction can you see best?" To which she replied: "In all directions, fine people, but finest is the star shining in the house." The father threaded a red kerchief through the bride's kalach and hung it over the groom's shoulder. Meanwhile inside the house the whole floor was covered with bedspreads and carpets. Relatives of both the bride and the groom drank a toast to the agreement before the bride's threshold, the groom's father doing all the filling of glasses; everyone kissed, held hands in a circle, the mother showered the groom and the wedding retinue with wheat, smeared the groom's lips with honey. Holding hands, everyone entered the house where a kind of trade took place. Haggling over the bride at a wedding sometimes indeed resembled a sale conducted at market.

¹ Text selected from N.I.Zdoroveha, *Vesil'na obriadovist' v istorychnykh dzherelakh i naukovii literature, Narysy narodnoi vesil'noi obriadovosti na Ukraini*. (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1974) and also excerpts from *Vesillia*, book 1 (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1970) and S.Kylymnyk, *Ukrains'kyi rik v narodnykh zvychaiakh.....*

² see p. 59, Zdoroveha, footnote 2

³ see p. 59, Zdoroveha, footnote 3

⁴ S.Kylymnyk, *Ukrains'kyi rik v narodnykh zvychaiakh.....*

⁵ Mrs ... Sydorenko, village, province, Ukraine

⁶ see p. 62, Zdoroveha, footnote 3

⁷ From the Assumption of Mary (August 15) till the Nativity of Mary (September 8), according to S.Kylymnyk, *Ukrains'kyi rik v narodnykh zvychaiakh.....*, vol. 5, p. 95

⁸ **Апостольський**, або **Петрів піст** (Петрівка) перед святом св. апостолів Петра і Павла. Починається через тиждень після дня Святої Тройці і триває до 29 червня (12 липня н. ст.). Тривалість посту залежить від того, коли (раніше або пізніше) святкується Пасха. Найбільша тривалість його – шість тижнів, а найменша – тиждень з одним днем.

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