

Changes in the Rituals and Traditions among the Converted Yezidis-Pentacostals

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Изменение ритуалов и традиций среди обращенных езидов-пятидесятников

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Аннотация. В данной статье сделана попытка проанализировать изменения в традиционных ритуалах обращенных езидов (пятидесятников), возникающие в результате принятия новой религии. Исследования показывают, что с принятием новой религии у езидов формируется новый образ мышления, в результате чего они отказываются от ритуалов традиционной религии и начинают следовать правилам и ритуалам новой религии. Статья основана на анализе интервью автора с езидами-пятидесятниками Армении и России в 2018-2020 годах.

Ключевые слова: Обращенные езиды, традиционные езиды, пятидесятники, ритуалы, свадьбы, похороны, Великий пост, смерть Христа, Пасха.

Ծեսերի և ավանդույթների փոփոխությունները կրոնափոխ եզդիների շրջանում (Հիսունականներ)

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Ամփոփում Հոդվածում փորձ է արվում վերլուծել կրոնափոխ եզդիների շրջանում (Հիսունականների) ավանդական ծեսերի փոփոխությունները, որոնք տեղի են ունենում նոր կրոն ընդունելու արդյունքում: Ուսումնասիրությունները ցույց են տալիս, որ ընդունելով նոր կրոնը, եզդիների շրջանում ձևավորվում է նոր մտածելակերպ, որի արդյունքում նրանք սկսում են հրաժարվել իրենց ավանդական կրոնի ծեսերից և հետևում են իրենց նոր կրոնում սահմանված օրենքների և ծեսերի կատարմանը: Հոդվածի հիմքում ընկած է Հայաստանի և Ռուսաստանի Հիսունական եզդիներից հեղինակի հարցազրույցների վերլուծությունը 2018-2020 թթ.:

Վճռորոշ բառեր՝ Կրոնափոխ եզդիներ, ավանդական եզդիներ, Հիսունականներ, ծեսեր, հարսանիք, հուղարկավորություն, պահք, Հիսուսի մահվան երեկո, Չատիկ:

Introduction

During their long existence, the Yezidis have developed unique and rich traditions and rituals, rules and laws, according to their traditional religion – Sharfadin [7; 8; 10]. The Yezidis rituals' procedure has been transmitted from generation to generation mainly in the oral form.

The life and living conditions of Yezidis in Armenia have deteriorated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, what resulted in mass emigration. Many Yezidis left their homes and settled in other countries, mainly in Europe and Russia. Being cut off from their traditional roots and having no written guidelines for the performance of rituals and

traditions, the Yezidis began to perform the rituals according to their own ideas. As a result, they transformed somewhat their traditions. The performance options of the same ritual appeared among the Yezidis who are living in different countries. One of the reasons was that the *sheikhs* and *pîrs* were often absent during the festivities in the new settlements (sheikhs and pîrs didn't live in all new communities), while their direct responsibility was to conduct and control the rituals, to maintain them conform to the rules and regulations that were shaped during centuries [6, p. 210-211]. By accepting the religion of Pentecostals, many Yezidis renounced their traditional rites and

traditions, only a few people remain partly faithful to them. Pentecostals are governed by the commandments of the New Testament. They celebrate the day of Christ's death and Easter. A modest celebration of the New Year and birthdays are not forbidden.

Below are the rituals and festivals performed by the converted Yezidis (Pentecostals).

Easter

The Pentecostals celebrate Easter. They set a small table after praying in the assembly hall. Painting eggs is not part of the celebration ritual in the Pentecostals' religion. If there are small children at home, Pentecostals allowed them to paint eggs and play with eggs. This ceremony does not apply to adults. Three days after Easter they celebrate the Memorial of Jesus' Death.

Easter is celebrated every year on the last Thursday of April or the first Thursday of May, depending on whether the year is a leap-year or not. The celebration of Easter Thursday is called Holy Thursday. Three days after Easter, Sunday is the evening of Christ's death (the evening of Christ's Resurrection).

The Memorial of Christ's Death

The Memorial of Christ's Death is celebrated once a year, in April. According to the Pentecostals, before celebrating the Memorial of Christ's Death, the believers (including the converted Yezidis) must observe a three day fast. Then one day before the Rite of the Memorial of Jesus' Death, they go to the pastors to have their sins forgiven. The meaning of all this is to be ready to communicate with Jesus in a pure spirit. During the meeting, the pastors read excerpts from the Bible. The believers pray together, and the pastor brings a glass of red wine, which symbolizes the blood of Jesus, and a piece of bread that symbolizes the body of Jesus. The believers drank a sip of wine and ate a small piece of bread. At this day, the sisters (Pentecostals women) wash the sisters' feet. And the brothers (Pentecostals men) wash the brothers' feet. Moreover, this ceremony should be performed with care and love, as Jesus washed with love the feet of his pupils.

Fasting

Fasting is a symbol of self-purification, serving God, atonement for one's sins, and deserves God's favor. Traditional Yezidis call the fast «*Ruse*». The fast lasts for three days and is performed before religious feasts. During the days of fasting, traditional Yezidis eat only before sunrise and after sunset [1, p. 200]. The Pentecostal Yezidis also observe fast. Their fast lasts for three days, during which they do not eat anything, they only drink water. The Pentecostal Yezidis observe fast for three days when they have a seriously ill person at home or when they have great difficulty in struggling.

They believe that by fasting they facilitate the solution of their problems. Through fasting, they gain God's good will and compassion. The three-day fast is obligatory before the birth of Christ. According to the Pentecostals, sick people are freed from obligatory fasting or they fast only for a few hours.

Wedding

According to the Yezidis the tradition of marrying young girls comes from ancient times and has been preserved until now. Traditional Yezidis marry their daughters when they are 14-15 years old. The Yezidis marry only their nation's representatives. Traditional Yezidis' marriages have caste restriction: murîds can only marry their social class (the murîds) and the sheikhs can only marry the sheikhs' daughters and so on [4, p. 24]. There are many marriages between relatives. Most Yezidis marry without love by the decision of their parents. According to the elders, love will be born during the lifetime. The decision is made between the boy and the girl's parents. Nobody asks the girl's opinion. An adult Yezidi woman commented on why Yezidis marry their daughters at such an early age. «*At that age, it's easier for girls to get accustomed with their new family and subdue their husband. At an older age, it will be more difficult for girls to get used to the new living conditions and to make them obedient and adaptable*» [2]. Some parents marry their daughters after the age of maturity. However, marriages of young girls are common.

Yezidis traditional wedding ceremony has been formed over the centuries and includes many rituals [9, p.186-191], which are still practiced today. According to Yezidi tradition, only women can go to see the girl, and men's participation is strictly forbidden. The future bridegroom can enter the house only if the girl's parents have previously agreed to their marriage [5]. During a traditional Yezidi wedding, the bride wears a white wedding dress and the groom wears a suit and tie. On the right side of the groom's chest a red and green piece of tissue is tied, which is called 'Cosman'. The green color is the symbol of eternal life and it is the color of the bridegroom. Red is the color of the bride and symbolizes victory and honor. When the bride is brought home on the wedding day, the groom, who stood on the roof must hit the bride with apples from there (it is said that the newlyweds agreed in advance that the groom would throw the apples so that it would not touch the bride or that only small pieces of pre-cut apple would stick her). It symbolizes that the bride is his wife from that moment on. After that, a branch of a pre-cut tree is decorated with fruits, sweets and a colorful headscarf is shackled off by *azatbasy* (the friend of the groom) on the head of the bride and the guests.

This tree is called the tree of happiness. The bride's relatives enter dancing in the groom's house, bringing the bride's dowry on festively decorated trays. At the entrance door of the groom's house, two plates are placed upside down. The bride must break with right foot one plate and the other plate must be broken by the groom in the same way so that evil will fail.

As mentioned in *Yezdiname*, the Murazi's book, throwing apples at the bride by the groom during the wedding comes from the depths of the centuries, when the boy rolled an apple towards the house to show his parents which girl he wanted. At present, according to the author, the boy throws an apple at the girl's side to indicate her being chosen among other people [4, p. 151-152].

After the wedding, the girl enters her husband's house and lives with his parents and her husband's siblings, who are not married and live with them. From the first day, the bride has to obey all the members of the family.

Divorce in the traditional Yezidi religion occurs only in exceptional cases. A divorced woman has no right to remarry with an unmarried man. She can only marry a man who has lost his wife or is divorced and after marriage, she is completely submissive and is led by her husband.

Yezidis Pentecostals marry their daughters when they are eighteen and baptized. If the girl's parents are also Pentecostals, the girl naturally marries a Pentecostal boy, and by mutual agreement. If the girl's parents are not Pentecostal, often they force their girl to marry an 'unbeliever'. In this case there are two ways: the girl is at last forced to marry an 'unbeliever', or she leaves her father's home and finds refuge near the Pentecostals. Pentecostals engage their children from their early ages to religious life. Their children attend religious classes in order to be baptized at the age of eighteen and they try to exclude the marriage of a girl with an 'unbeliever'. When Yezidi Pentecostal boy and girl like each other and want to communicate, the boy comes to the pastor and says that he is in sympathy with that girl and their feeling is reciprocal. After informing the pastor, the couple begins to communicate in the presence of a third person and after a while they get engaged.

The first precondition for marriage is to legalize marriage. It is required to have the marriage certificate before the wedding ceremony in the assembly hall. During the ceremony, the pastor shows the marriage certificate to the meeting and after that he asks the newlyweds if they are ready to serve God together in their life and keep their union strong. After a positive response, the bride and groom exchange wedding rings. Then the pastor gives advice to the parents of the newlyweds to help

them to build a new family with their advice and financial support. But to do not interfere in any case in their family affairs and do not distort the newly formed family. After the wedding, the newlyweds go to a beautiful place or park, to take photos, and then have a wedding party in any hall. Wedding attendees come to the salon neatly dressed. Men are in suits and ties, women in beautiful but modest dresses and small headscarves, keeping the requirements of the Pentecostal religion. During the party, different dishes and drinks are served, but without extravagance. According to the requirements of the Pentecostal religion, alcohol is not used. Guests warmly communicate, talk and sing. By the way, in the wedding songs of the Yezidi Pentecostals the centuries-old sadness of the Yezidi nation can be felt even if the ceremony is happy. The song is accompanied by a small instrumental group. However, no one dances at the weddings because, according to the Pentecostal religion, dancing is not considered a godly activity.

The Pentecostals are divorced if one of the parties has committed a very bad action or had very bad behavior (drug addiction, drunkenness, betrayal, etc.). After the divorce, the wife may remarry, even with an unmarried man. All this is in opposition with the traditional religion of the Yezidis where the women's divorce is almost impossible, even in the case of the worst behavior of the husband. If a woman even manages to divorce, her future life and the possibility of remarrying are very unlikely, as there are numerous setbacks and obstacles.

Funeral

Yezidis perform the burial of the deceased according to traditional laws and rituals. The funeral service is led by sheikhs [9, p. 192-193]. At each unique death, the funeral is performed according to a centuries-old special ritual designed to help the rest pass the "Sala Salad" that connects the earthly, tolerant life. The death ceremony used to be in one day, but now it is kept in rest for three days. The main reason for this is that the Yezidis scattered all over the world will often not be able to come and participate to the funeral ceremony in one day.

The funeral rite, which is called "Dast Dam" (to reach out), is performed by the pîr and the sheikh of the given family. A sacrifice is made on the day of the deceased's death.

Nasrdin is the angel of death who takes the soul of the deceased. Sheikh and pir pray for three days for the peace of the deceased's soul. On the morning of the third day of death, the clergy performs the rite of purification of the deceased. This right is reserved only to sheikhs and pîrs, and after the purification ceremony, even the closest relatives do not have the right to touch the deceased. The sheikh and the pîr wrap the body of the deceased in a white bandage.

After this ceremony, the deceased is taken to be buried. In the cemetery, the pîr or sheikh takes the last step, when the priest opens and closes for three times the head of the deceased, wraps the coffin, and it is buried. While lowering his "eternal home", before filling the pit, tidying up the grave, the sheikh or pîr stands on the head of the deceased, looking to the east, praying for the peace of his soul. After the burial, all those present at the funeral take part in the funeral service [3].

During the ceremony among the Pentecostals, the brothers and sisters tell the story of the deceased's life. They praise him for his good deeds. Throughout the burial ceremony, the pastor stands at the head of the deceased; he reads passages and quotes from the Bible. After the funeral, the Pentecostals sisters and the brothers ate together in the hall. They don't have rites on the next, seventh and fourteenth days. Further visits to the grave of the deceased are free, at their discretion. If the relatives of the deceased prefer the traditional burial ceremony, the Pentecostals simply participate in it.

Tombstones of traditional Yezidis and Pentecostal Yezidis do not differ so far. The stones are placed both horizontally (tombstones) and vertically. The only point is that the traditional Yezidis, want, when it is possible, to be buried in the Yezidi cemetery, while the Pentecostals Yezidis are buried in Christian cemeteries.

Conclusion

Thus, by adopting new religions, noticeable changes take place in the rituals of the traditional community itself, making them more restrained and modest. There is a visible tendency to move from a traditional society's value system to a more modern one, where individual decisions and interpersonal relations are encouraged rather than institutional arrangements (comp. marriage registration and raising the marriage age of girls). It seems that the

religious community should have made interpersonal ritual relations more communal, but in the case of these new religious denominations, a window opens for the modernization of social life, unlike the traditional ethnic-religious community.

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