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Karakalpak Family Ritualism: The *Bes Kiyim* Custom in the Transformation of Traditional Culture

This study describes the bridal and funerary rite of exchanging clothes (Bes Kiyim – ‘Five Costumes’) in the context of the traditions and innovations in the Karakalpak culture. On the basis of field data collected in 2014–2019 and earlier in places with a continuous or patchy distribution of the Karakalpak population (Chimbaysky, Karauzyaksky, Kegeyliysky, Nukusky, Khodzheyliysky, and the Takhiatashsky districts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Republic of Uzbekistan) and of earlier sources, changes in ritualism are analyzed. Bridal rites include exchanges of gifts, such as items of clothing. The comparison of sources shows that the Bes Kiyim rite originated in the mid-20th century in the context of socio-cultural changes. It has remained rather stable up to the present time, being an integral part of Karakalpak bridal ritualism. This indicates its importance in the normative culture of that ethnic group. In one district of Karakalpakstan, the term Bes Kiyim was transferred from the bridal to the funerary rituals. The origin of the rite relates to the transformation of the Iyis custom—the distribution of the deceased person’s clothing among those participating in the ablution of the body. In the late 20th century, specially purchased items of clothing began to be used for that purpose. Apparently, the five items distributed among those participating in the rite symbolize the deceased person’s transition to the ancestors’ world. By the same token, the bride’s five outfits allude to her passage to the category of married women and the beginning of her marital life. Therefore, the ritual innovations of the Karakalpaks, caused by socio-cultural and economic changes, mirror the logic and content of traditional family festivals whose complex symbolism relates to status change.

Keywords: Karakalpaks, tradition, transformation, innovation, family rites, ritual exchange, *Bes Kiyim* custom.

Introduction

The Karakalpaks are a Turkic-speaking people, Sunni Muslims, the titular ethnic group of Karakalpakstan—the sovereign republic in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Over 1.8 million people live in Karakalpakstan, including Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmen, and representatives of other peoples (Russians, Tatars, Koreans, etc.).

Since ancient times until the present day, interethnic contacts have largely determined the distinctiveness

of the culture of the Karakalpaks. The most important ties were with the Kazakh, Nogai, Turkmen, and Uzbek communities; they had a great influence on the emergence of the normative ritual culture of the Karakalpaks. Family rituals—wedding and funeral-commemorative ceremonies—remained the most stable.

The first studies on the traditional family ritualism of the Karakalpaks were undertaken in the first half of the 20th century. Ethnographers U. Kusekeev (1934), K. Esbergenov, T. Atamuratov (Esbergenov, Atamuratov, 1975), A. Bekmuratova (1969), and R. Kamalova

(1996) continued the research. Their works describe specific features of marriage relationships among the Karakalpaks and most distinctive rituals performed during matchmaking and wedding. Systematization of evidence on the Karakalpak family and marriage was carried out by N. Kislyakov. Many aspects of traditional ritual culture were analyzed in his summarizing study “Essays on the History of Family and Marriage Among the Peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan”, yet when describing the wedding ceremony of the Karakalpaks, the scarcity of information on this topic was noted (Kislyakov, 1969).

The funeral-commemorative rituals of the Karakalpaks were studied in the works by K. Esbergenov (1963a; 1964) and T. Atamuratov (Esbergenov, Atamuratov, 1975), where the genesis of religious beliefs associated with this area was analyzed. Certain aspects of the Karakalpak funerary ritualism, more precisely magical beliefs, were analyzed in the study by K. Turekeev (2020). However, a systematic study of family rituals among the Karakalpaks has not yet been carried out. In recent decades, these rituals have undergone transformations, which are very important to study.

This work is based on original field materials collected in 2014–2019 in the places of compact settlement of the Karakalpaks (Chimbaisky, Karauzyaksky, and Kegeyliysky districts), and in the areas with mixed population (Nukussky, Khodzheyliysky, and Takhiatashsky districts). The evidence from the expeditions of 1960–1980 carried out by the Department of Ethnography at the Davkaraev Institute of History, Language, and Literature of the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan was also widely employed.

This study intends to analyze the Karakalpak family (bridal and funeral-commemorative) ritualism in terms of traditions and innovations. The research focuses on the practice of ritual exchange of clothes—the *Bes Kiyim* custom.

Clothing in the rituals of the wedding and funeral-commemorative cycle among the Karakalpaks

Family rituals of the Karakalpaks have shown the stability of structures, scenarios, and practices of social communication throughout the 20th century. Traditionally, wedding celebration was timed to summer or autumn. People also tried to ensure that wedding did not coincide with the month of Sapar—the second month of the Muslim lunar calendar, which was considered unfavorable for such celebrations, and the holy month of Ramadan—the month of fasting, obligatory for the Muslims. This requirement is strictly observed even now.

Traditionally, the Karakalpaks had several types of marriage arrangement: *aqlay quda* – agreement about the marriage of yet unborn children, *zhaslai quda* – agreement since childhood, when the boy’s parents asked the consent of the girl’s parents concerning the future marriage of their son with their daughter, and agreement concerning the marriage of full-aged children. In addition, there was a custom of bride stealing – *alyp qashuw*. According to field evidence, this form of marriage-arrangement had not been formerly typical of the Karakalpaks. Most of the respondents showed a negative attitude to this tradition: “*I got married in 1958. Previously, matchmakers were sent to girl’s parents. We did not have a tradition of stealing the girl;*” “*When I was in the sixth or seventh grade, we did not have a tradition of stealing the girl. Such an action was condemned by the population. This tradition appeared later and was associated with the desire of the girl to marry her beloved one, and not the one whom her parents have chosen*” (FMA*, 2018).

The choice of the marriage partner among the Karakalpaks was determined by the parents. It often did not coincide with the choice of the young people. In such cases, they might decide to arrange a kidnapping. The practice of abduction still exists today, but as a rule, it is formal in nature: the guy steals the girl by agreement with her.

Traditional Karakalpak wedding included several stages. At the initial stage, the groom’s parents chose the bride, often taking into account his opinion. The family clan attribution of those entering into marriage was of great importance. The exogamous norms of the Karakalpaks forbade persons belonging to the same clan to marry, even if they were the members of different divisions of this clan – *tiyre*. After the choice of the bride and the approval of numerous relatives of the young man, matchmakers *zhawshy* (from *zhaw* – ‘foe’) were chosen, who had to obtain consent to the marriage on the part of the girl’s parents. If the answer was positive, the day of official matchmaking – *quda tusiw* (literally, ‘arrival of matchmakers’) – was appointed.

The next stage of the Karakalpak wedding was *esik ashar* (literally, ‘opening of the door’) – the first visit of the groom to bride’s house after his paying a half of the bride price *qalyn*. In the evening of the same day, a cycle of ceremonies related to the first meeting of the bride and groom began; the Muslim wedding ceremony *neke* was performed.

After full payment of the bride price, the groom’s side asked for permission to perform the wedding. On the day of the girl’s departure, the ritual of seeing off the bride – *qyz uzatuv toi* – was performed in her parents’ home; after

*Field materials of the author.



Fig. 1. Bride and groom wearing traditional Karakalpak outfits (Nukus, 2019).

that, the wedding train went to the groom's aul, where the traditional wedding *uly toi* (literally, 'big wedding') took place (Fig. 1).

Traditions were steadily preserved in the Karakalpak funeral-commemorative ritualism. Even nowadays, there remain the Karakalpaks' beliefs on the immortality of the soul, afterlife, and the associated rituals, the purpose of which is to "provide services" to the deceased in this and the other world. The custom of loud mourning of the deceased by his family (*dawys shigaryw*) should be understood in this context. Hearing loud mourning, the neighbors learn about the death of the person and begin to gather in his house. While a specially appointed person *aitywshy* (literally, 'bringer of the news') was notifying the relatives, friends, and acquaintances of the deceased about the day of the funeral, the household began to prepare for this. The Karakalpaks, like other Muslim peoples of Central Asia, performed ritual ablution of the deceased – *suwga endiriw* (literally, 'immersing into water'), associated with many magical procedures. After that, the deceased was dressed in a shroud – *kepin*. The funeral was conducted on the second or third day; people sacrificed an animal, prepared pilaf, flatbreads, and *bawyrdaq* – pieces of dough fried in oil.

The female relatives of the deceased, having gathered in one room, received condolences from the women whom one of the sons or close relatives led to the doorstep with loud crying. Men did not enter the house; they expressed their condolences in front of the house. Guests (men and women) were seated separately in different rooms, where the *dastarkhan* commemoration tables had already been prepared. After commemorating the deceased, everyone gathered again in front of his house to see him off on his last journey.

The body was carried out on a wooden stretcher – *tabyt* or *agash at* (literally, 'wooden horse'), but before that, *phidiya* (absolution of sins) was performed. This was followed by funeral prayer – *zhanaza*. After that, the stretcher was lifted, and the deceased was as quickly as possible carried to the cemetery where he or she was buried. Commemoration prayer began for the participants in the ceremony. This was the end of the ceremony associated with the farewell to the deceased.

The funerary rites of the Karakalpaks, like those of other Turkic Muslim peoples, included fivefold commemoration: 1) *qara asy* (literally, 'black meal') was performed before the funeral; 2) *zhetisi* – 'week commemoration' was conducted after seven days;

3) *qyrqy* – ‘fortieth day obit’ was carried out on the 37th and 40th days after the funeral; 4) *zhuzi* – ‘one hundred days’ was celebrated on the 97th and 100th day; 5) *zhyly* – ‘yearly commemoration’ was celebrated a few days before the anniversary of the funeral.

One of the obligatory elements of the wedding and funerary rites was various offerings. Wedding ceremonies included payment of a bride price by the groom to bride’s parents. It consisted of various kinds of livestock, food, and household items; their cost was translated into *tuwar* – the cost of one head of cattle (Bekmuratova, 1969: 66). In addition, on the eve of the wedding, the groom’s parents sent to the bride’s house *sogym* bull meat, which was distributed among the inhabitants of the aul. The groom usually also gave dresses to the bride’s closest relatives (Ibid.: 71).

The bride’s dowry included a yurt with all the necessary furnishings, and clothes. The bride was supposed to prepare *sarpai* gifts for the parents and relatives of the groom. She presented an *aq kiymeshek* headdress to the groom’s mother, which, according to tradition, the bride had to embroider herself; a *shapan* robe to groom’s father and to the person who gave away the bride (*muryndyq ata*); a shirt to groom’s brother; a *bogzhama* carpet bag for storing clothes to the brother’s wife; *tubeteika* skullcaps to the patriarchs of the aul; and headscarves to the elderly women of the aul (Fig. 2).

The funerary rites of the Karakalpaks were also accompanied by ritual gifting. An obligatory one was the *zhyrtys* ritual (from *zhyrtyw* – ‘to tear’), during which men were given the clothes of the deceased, bundles of money, and pieces of fabric; women were given flatbreads, sugar, oil, meat, etc. (Esbergenov, 1963b: 35). Traditionally, the clothes of the deceased were presented to those who performed the washing of the body, as well as to his or her close relatives.

Among the practices of the Karakalpaks ritual exchange of clothes, noteworthy is the custom of *Bes Kiyim* (literally, ‘five costumes’). On the eve of the wedding, the groom presented five items of clothing to the bride, and this was no less important than the bride price.

In the normative culture of the Karakalpaks, *bes kiyim* is a set of clothes consisting of five compulsory items without which it was not customary to appear in public. This included a headdress, shirt, pants, outerwear, and shoes, i.e. things that completely cover the person’s body and mark his or her sex, age, and social status. The number of items—five (*bes*)—had not only a functional but also a symbolic nature. In the opinion of the majority of scholars, the number five in the symbolism of the popular Islam of the Karakalpaks was associated with the anthropomorphization of the cosmos: according to the earthly order of things, the limbs, body, and head of a person relate to each other as four cardinal directions



Fig. 2. Passing the gifts brought by groom’s relatives (Nukus, 2013).

and center (Leffler, 1913: 8; Kerlot, 1994: 577; Zhuraev, Rasulova, 2014: 104).

There are many metaphorical expressions where the number five appears: *bes sawsaq* (literally, ‘five fingers’) – hand, *bes qonaq* (literally, ‘five guests’) – five cold days of autumn, *bes togys* (literally, ‘five oppositions’) – five frosty days of winter, *bes namaz* (literally, ‘five prayers’) – five daily obligatory prayers, *bes paryz* (literally, ‘five requirements’) – five pillars of Islam mandatory for all Muslim believers. Such expressions suggest a five-fold structure as a designation of obligatory (inherent in nature and confirmed by the religious canon) wholeness and completeness.

Information about *Bes Kiyim* in the culture of the Karakalpaks is very contradictory. It is absent from the ethnographic manuscript of U. Kusekeev written in 1934. Some scholars from the 1950s–1960s considered this custom to be old and common (see, e.g., (Kamalov, 1959: 123)), other scholars emphasize that *Bes Kiyim* was established only in the first half of the 20th century (Karakalpaki, 1962: 499). T.A. Zhdanko wrote: “According to the new custom, the groom must definitely prepare a present for his bride, the so-called *bes keyim* – ‘five costumes’. This set of clothing includes: 1) footwear – ‘ayak keyimi’, good shoes, usually of urban style; 2) a large elegant (festive) scarf; 3) ‘shoiy koilek’ – a dress made of Bukhara silk; 4) camisole (usually made of plush) or ‘suit’ – a jacket of European style; 5) ‘palton’ – a coat of urban style, most often also made of plush or velvet. Things are bought according to the girl’s liking” (1952: 519). When describing the rituals of the Karakalpaks associated with matchmaking, A.T. Bekmuratova referred to the tradition according to which the girl, before leaving her home, changed her girl’s clothes for a new outfit prepared by her family; these clothes were a part of bride’s dowry (1969: 74). However, the author does not mention donation of *bes kiyim* by the groom.

Field evidence collected from the Karakalpaks by the author of the present article on the issue of gift exchange give cause for reflection. One part of the informants claimed that the *Bes Kiyim* custom had existed for a long time and was passed down from generation to generation, while the other part (the majority) indicated that it appeared relatively recently. According to the data from the 1980s, *Bes Kiyim* became a part of the Karakalpak bridal ritualism in the late 1920s: “*Bes Kiyim emerged in 1929–1930, when collectivization was carried out. These are the items of clothing that the groom was supposed to bring as a gift to the bride*” (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography in the Karakalpak Research Institute of Humanities of the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan (hereafter, KKRIH KKB AS RUZ), 1988). Field evidence gathered by the author of this article confirms that date: “*In the 1920s, it happened sometimes that the bride did*

not have an elegant dress for the wedding celebration. In this case, people resorted to the help of relatives or neighbors—they borrowed festive clothes from them. It is not for nothing that a saying appeared among the people in those years: ‘El zhiberse barady’ (‘If the people let her go, she will marry’)” (FMA, 2014).

Bes Kiyim of the early 20th century included *turme* (a silk scarf that women tied on their heads in the form of a turban) or *aidylly* (fabric depicting a crescent moon, which women also used as a headdress), *pashshaiy koylek* (a silk dress), *qara kamzol* (a black camisole), and *beshpent* (a sleeveless shirt); *shyqyldama qara etik* (literally, ‘squeaky black boots’) were put on their feet (FMA, 2014).

Informants mentioned that the bride could only lay claim to *bes kiyim* if the marriage was concluded through matchmaking. The composition of the clothing items was usually reported by one of the bride’s parents. A female resident of Takhiatash gave the following information: “*Bes kiyim is given only when the girl is agreed to be given to marriage. It is brought by the groom’s side. In the past, people assessed the wealth of matchmakers from the richness of the costumes in bes kiyim. Expensive things in the bes kiyim made it possible to conclude that they were wealthy people, and their status in the eyes of bride’s relatives markedly increased. Bes kiyim was evaluated primarily by winter clothing [coat or fur coat], dress [both winter and summer], scarf, and shoes. The gift was considered to be rich if it included qizil etik [red boots], since these boots were expensive and only wealthy people could afford them. There were cases when more modest boots, made of goat skin, were put into bes kiyim. As my grandmother told me, a bride’s outfit was very expensive; one had to sell several heads of cattle to buy it*” (FMA, 2019).

The fidelity of observing this tradition and the completeness of the set were repeatedly emphasized by the informants. If even one out of the five compulsory items was missing, the groom was not allowed to take the bride, even despite his full payment of the bride price (Kamalov, 1959: 123).

According to the survey data and evidence from expeditions, the value of clothing began to be sensed by the Karakalpaks in the early 20th century, when important social and economic transformations were taking place. As a result of dispossession and collectivization, a significant part of the population of Soviet Karakalpakia, after losing their lands and livestock, ended up in extreme poverty (Qaraqalpaqstan..., 2003: 225). In search of a better life, rural population began to move to towns. By 1939, the population of the autonomy was about 475,700 people, including 57,800 of the urban population. The level of well-being both in towns and in villages was very low.

The severity of life in those years was reflected in people’s memoirs. In his recollections, U. Tilewmuratov

wrote: “From the early morning, people went to kazu [works on cleaning the main canals], plowed the land with oxen and donkeys harnessed to the yoke, and dug earth by hand. They would sow cotton, sorghum, rice, alfalfa, and barley. After harvesting, the next stage of work began. There was not enough bread, food, good shoes, or clothes. Sherim etik boots got soaked in wet weather and fell off the feet; in order to keep them on the feet somehow, people used to tie them with ropes made of kendyr [fibers extracted from the stems of the plant *Apocynum venetum*]. Many even went to work barefoot” (2009: 9).

During the Second World War and in the post-War years, the inhabitants of Karakalpakstan, like all peoples of the Soviet Union, experienced great difficulties. Old people still remember these years with bitterness: “The 1940s were hard. There was not enough footwear, although local shoemakers made it. It was manufactured from home-processed animal skins; it was called sherim. The clothes were worn until they completely disintegrated” (FMA, 2015). According to the recollections of old people, there were not enough fabrics and clothes. Local industrial enterprises were unable to meet the needs of the population, most of people did not even have a change of clothes.

For many families, purchase of clothes was a mark of wealth. This period is well preserved in the memory of the older generation: “Life on the collective farm was difficult. In December, people finished picking cotton and immediately began to clear the fields and fertilize them. With the onset of spring, people began to prepare embankments for retaining water on the field, and so on. Eighty percent of the work was done manually; there were no tractors yet. There were not enough clothes; it was extremely rare to see a person in whole clothes, without patches. Only after the 1960s did people begin to live better” (FMA, 2018).

In the post-War period, the population of Karakalpakstan (mostly rural) continued to wear traditional clothes. The female outfit of that time consisted of dress and pants, several types of outerwear (*shapan*, *zhegde*, *kamzol*, *ton*), headdress (*kiymeshek*, *turme*), and boots (*etik*) or shoes. These types of clothing made up a set of mandatory items required for going out.

The provision of this set determined the meaning of the *Bes Kiyim* custom. A resident of the Nukussky District, E. Kurbanbaev explained its appearance as follows: “During wartime, it was difficult to find clothes, especially in rural areas. During celebrations, for example a wedding, the clothes in which the bride was dressed were borrowed from relatives and friends. Usually, they were asked to give the most beautiful outfits. It happened sometimes that after the wedding, the relatives took back their clothes, and the bride was left without any costumes. To avoid this, people came up with *Bes Kiyim* – five types of clothes, which should belong to the bride. Even if the groom could not

pay the bride price, he was obliged to buy *bes kiyim* for the bride” (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1987).

Even in difficult economic times, the brides of the Karakalpaks had to look elegant and different from their peers. As a resident of the Khodzheyliysky District recalled, “I was married at the age of 20. Before arriving at the groom’s house, I was dressed up in beautiful clothes. After the wedding, a couple of days later, the neighbors began to come and take back their things. It turned out that all the clothes were borrowed from them” (FMA, 2018). The Karakalpaks believed: “*Bes kiyim* should be assembled completely. It was considered unacceptable to bring an incomplete set. Therefore, if the groom could not buy something, he asked the neighbors to lend the missing clothes for a while” (FMA, 2018).

The *bes kiyim* set allowed the bride to look beautiful on the most important day of her life, and to make a favorable impression on her future relatives: “When the groom came to take the girl who it was agreed should be taken in marriage, he was accompanied by numerous relatives. They evaluated the bride—how she walked, her appearance, her manner of speaking. Special attention was paid to the outfit; beautiful clothes adorn a person” (FMA, 2018).

Analysis of field materials makes it possible to assert that a new rite emerged in the War and post-War years. The set of *bes kiyim* of the War and post-War years included the following items of clothing: “*turme* – a turban wound by the Karakalpak women around the head; *kok koilek* – an elegant traditional blue dress covered with embroidery and intended for young women; a *camisole*, most often made of blue velvet; *zhipek zhegde* – a robe-cape on the head; and *gewish* – shoes” (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1989).

In the mid 20th century, a new type of outfit emerged among the Karakalpaks, combining the elements of traditional and modern clothes of the European type. Girls and young women began to wear dresses with a turned-down collar, long sleeves, and a wide gathered skirt. During this period, kerchiefs made of crêpe de chine, colorful woolen scarves, and shawls were in fashion.

Remembering the 1960s, A. Kunnazarov wrote, “Until the 1960s, several kilograms of flour and calico clothing could be bought on a salary, while most of the money was spent on buying mandatory state bonds, and plans for turning in butter, milk, or eggs. In the 1960s, after the plans were canceled, there was some money left from the salaries, and people began to go to the store more and more often; women began to wear dresses made of staple, crêpe de chine, and satin” (Kunnazarov, 2000: 113). Starting in the 1960s, the improvement in the living standards of the population led to transformations in *Bes Kiyim*. Moreover, the changes affected both the ceremony

and the set of clothes. The bride could now choose her own clothes. If earlier *bes kiyim* was brought by the groom and the bride had to accept this gift, now the opinion of the future wife was taken into account. In some cases, the groom's side gave the needed money, and the girl bought the clothes she liked: *"The bride shows these clothes to the guests during the send-off, then takes the clothes with her to the groom's house"* (FMA, 2016).

Gradually, traditional types of clothing were driven out by European designs. The composition of items included in *bes kiyim* varied depending on fashion trends, as well as social and economic factors. In the 1980s, the *bes kiyim* of the dwellers of the Kegeyliysky District of Karakalpakstan consisted of the following types of clothing: *shaiy koilek* (silk dress), *maqpal nagysly kamzol* (velvet decorated camisole), *etik* (boots), *madeli oramal* (shawl with the fringe of dark red color), and *aq gezhi* (scarf) (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1987). Around the same time, in the Chimbaysky District, the mandatory set of gifts from the groom to the bride included: *shaiy koilek*, *koberkot kostyum* (cover cloth costume), *qyzyl etik* (red boots), *gezhi oraippek* (scarf), and coat (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1988). Instead of a dress, the set of *bes kiyim* often began to include a piece of fabric for a dress. According to the informants, this tradition became widespread in the 1980s. *"At this time, bes kiyim consisted of a piece of fabric, most often panne velvet, gezha sharshi – a large woollen multi-colored scarf and a small scarf, European-style costume of modern design, and factory-made boots"* (FMA, 2015).

Over time, this practice has not disappeared; it has rooted in the wedding ceremony. By the 2000s, the *Bes Kiyim* custom was already perceived as an integral part of the tradition: *"Us, Kareken [the Karakalpaks], have had Bes Kiyim for a long time. People brought bes kiyim before the wedding. Usually, clothes are folded in one of the compartments of a qorzhyn [saddle bag]. The bride's family accepts the gifts and dresses up the girl in them on her wedding day. When my marriage was being agreed upon, my father told the groom's family to bring bes kiyim of the following things: coat, boots, scarf, suit, and dress"* (FMA, 2016); *"Until the groom prepares the bes kiyim, he cannot take the bride away"* (FMA, 2018).

Informants (regardless of where in the Republic they live) report that the *Bes Kiyim* tradition has begun to be observed even in the case of bride kidnapping. Today, *bes kiyim* for the bride is purchased when she is already in her husband's house. A resident of the town of Takhiatash says: *"Recently, people have begun to buy bes kiyim even when the girl is kidnapped. She chooses the clothes which she likes on her own. When I was getting married [in 2000], they brought a small red scarf, a large scarf, beshpent [sleeveless jacket], traditional dress, and shoes that were in fashion at that time"* (FMA, 2019). A small

bright headscarf has become an characteristic of a married woman.

The tradition of giving clothes to the bride has survived in the present-day wedding ceremony. The former name (*Bes Kiyim* – 'Five Costumes') also remains, but the number of items included has changed: *"Now, bes kiyim has ceased to include the obligatory five types of clothing. Those who are wealthier give the bride ten types of clothing or more"* (FMA, 2015).

Clothes in the wedding ritual of the Karakalpaks marked the changes in the status of newlyweds. According to the universal logic of rites of passage, the wedding ritual implied the formation of a complete holistic image of a mature person; the set of *bes kiyim* served as its symbol.

Notably, the number five appears in the same symbolic meaning (as expression of integrity) in Karakalpak funerary ritualism. Field evidence from different years contains information about the ritual dressing of the dead. Records from 1989 mention that five items should be prepared for a woman: *"The first is a shroud, which covers her on the outside; the second is cloth that is wrapped around the body from the waist to the knees; the third is cloth for the legs below the knees. The fourth element is kiymeshek; and the fifth is a headscarf"* (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1989). According to K. Esbergenov, "the shrouds differ somewhat in shape and consist of three parts, named by distorted Arabic terms: 1. 1. Kyryk covers men and minor children (boys under 13, girls under 9) from shoulders to knees; 2. Lpala covers the deceased from head to feet; 3. Kamis is sewn as a cylinder with extra space over the head and at the feet, no less than the width of the palm, so that it can be tied like a bag. Dead women are dressed in 2 kyryk, 2 lpala, and 1 Kamis. Thus, the shroud for women consists of 5 parts" (1963a: 80–81).

The five-fold composition of the "clothing" of the deceased is a stable tradition among the Karakalpaks. According to field evidence collected by the author in the Kegeyliysky District of the Republic, the term *bes kiyim* denotes the clothes of the deceased, which are distributed after his funeral to those who took part in the ablution ritual: *"Bes kiyim exists not only during wedding. Now, when an old man dies, his children must prepare bes kiyim. Even before the funeral, shoes, outerwear, shapan, hat, and skullcap are prepared—exactly five items, which are folded into one knot"* (FMA, 2018).

Traditionally, the washing of the deceased among the Karakalpaks ended with the performance of a *zhanaza namaz* prayer over his or her body. After that, the elderly people who participated in the ritual of ablution were given items of the best clothing of the deceased (Karakalpaki, 1962: 500). *"On the day of the funeral, the participants in the ablution ceremony are given the bes kiyim clothes. About 20 years ago, these were the clothes*

that the deceased used to wear during his lifetime. Now these are five new clothes” (Field materials of Turekeev, 2016).

The Karakalpak tradition of distributing clothes of the deceased has existed for a long time. Clothes are given not only to the participants in ritual washing, but also to close relatives, as well as friends, if the person lived a long life. This practice is associated with the beliefs that the clothing of the deceased is sacred and a part of his soul remains in it. Earlier, the clothes of the deceased in old age were called *iysis* (literally, ‘scent’). The relatives received them as a *teberik* (literally, ‘sacred/blessed’) offering (FMA, 2019).

The Karakalpaks denoted the Muslim tradition of commemorating the dead on Thursdays with the word *iysis*. Every week on this day, Karakalpak women fried *shelpek* flatbreads on oil in the morning and distributed them to the neighbors. This was a commemoration treat which was supposed to be received with the words “*tiye bersin*” (‘let him reach’). On the days of holy Muslim feasts, this tradition was strictly observed. The Karakalpaks commemorated their relatives on May 9th, the Memorial Day—public holiday in the Republic of Uzbekistan; this is an innovation in an old tradition.

Similar customs existed among other Central Asian Muslim peoples. The Nogai customs were described in detail by A.A. Yarlykapov (2008). According to their tradition, the personal property of the deceased (mainly

clothes, shoes, and headdress) was donated to the people who washed the deceased, to the relatives, and to the poor. Only worn things were given away, with the words: “*Iyisin taslamai alyp yuriniz*” (‘Wear the scent constantly’) (Ibid: 113).

According to B.K. Karmysheva, among the Uzbeks of Fergana, the ceremony of ritual washing of the deceased was performed by professional washers *yuguvchi*, *gassol*, for whom this occupation was hereditary. Elderly people selected from the community were also invited. There was a belief that if a person washed seven dead people in his life, he did not have to fear the fire of hell. In the cases where the ceremony was performed by non-professionals, five people participated in it (Karmysheva, 1986: 142, 144).

The Karakalpaks do not have professional washers. Relatives or neighbors usually participate in the ritual. Their number must be even. According to various sources, from four to eight people participated in the ritual, depending on the age and status of the deceased. “*Eight people took part in washing of a relative, an elderly woman. Everyone tried to be included among the washers. At the end of the procedure, they were given good things: a coat to the most important person, and other types of clothing to the rest. The clothes of the deceased were taken, because she was a respected woman and lived a long life*” (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1986) (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Things of an elderly woman intended for distribution as *iys* (Nukus, 2019).

Tradition determined the order in which the clothes are distributed among the washers. *“The most precious thing (the headdress) is given to those who washed and held the body. The best clothes are given to the one who poured water. The one who drew water from the vessel receives inner clothes, and the one who brought water gets the rest”* (Field materials of the Department of Ethnography of KKRIH KKB AS RUz, 1985). *“The coat was given to the one who washed the upper part of the body and head; a piece of fabric or scarf was given to the one who washed other parts of the body; galoshes or masi were given to the one who washed the feet”* (FMA, 2019).

According to traditional beliefs, the clothes of the deceased had to be given away, so after the transition of the person to another world, he would not turn out to be undressed. Five required types of clothing formed a holistic image projected into the other world: *“If you do not assemble bes kiyim, the head of the deceased will be cold in the next world; he will walk barefoot and without clothes. It is especially bad if he does not have a headdress”* (FMA, 2018).

The ceremony of distributing the clothes of the deceased is ubiquitous among the Karakalpaks even today. The transfer of the term *bes kiyim* from the wedding ritual to funeral ritual was observed only among the residents of the Kegeyliysky District of Karakalpakstan. While in the past washers and relatives received used clothes, now as a rule these are specially bought clothes, and the number of things has decreased. Clothes are often replaced with pieces of fabric. Old people, preparing for death, try to procure new clothes in advance for rewarding the participants of their equipment to the other world. Most of the respondents explain the replacement of used clothes with new things by the fact that people began to live well (FMA, 2019).

Dressing up into new clothes among the Karakalpaks is one of the obligatory transitional rituals of the family cycle. It is likely that the five items of clothing for the newlywed bride symbolize her transition to a new status and the beginning of a new life, while the five items that are distributed to the participants in the ritual of ablution are associated with transition to the world of the dead—the world of ancestors.

Conclusions

The analysis of field evidence has shown that the *Bes Kiyim* custom in the Karakalpak wedding ritualism appeared in the first half of the 20th century under the influence of changes in social and economic conditions, and declining living standards. At the same time, the use of clothes in the wedding ritual was deeply traditional, since it marked the change in the status of a woman during her transition to a new age and social class.

Stable preservation of the *Bes Kiyim* custom testifies to its firm place in the normative culture of the people and its perception as obligatory element of contemporary Karakalpak wedding rituals.

The transfer of the term *bes kiyim* from the wedding ritual to the funeral ritual is of a local nature. However, it relies on the widespread custom of *Iyis*—distribution of clothes to the people who took part in the ritual washing of the deceased and in his dressing. While initially these were the things which belonged to the deceased, in the late 20th twentieth century, they were replaced by specially purchased clothes. Such transformations are associated with the improved living-standards of the population. However, the tradition of distributing used clothes of the deceased persists when it is related to the person who lived a long life. In this case, the clothes of the deceased are accepted as blessed objects. The funerary traditions of distributing clothes established a symbolic completion of the life path of a person who, with the transition to the other world, lost his complete and integral earthly image. The five obligatory items of clothing (*bes kiyim*) projected it into the other world.

Innovations in the ritual practices of the Karakalpaks, which emerged in response to the social, cultural, and economic changes, corresponded to the logic and content of traditional family festive ceremonies. Changes in the attributes have not altered their meanings associated with the change of life cycles and statuses.

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Received May 15, 2020.

Received in revised form August 7, 2020.