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KAZAK SOCIAL STRUCTURE
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*For Ruff with
warmest regards
A. E. H.*

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THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

THE FAMILY

In discussing the nature of the Kazak uru it was noted that genealogically speaking Kazak society consisted of a series of blood related groups divided and subdivided into units of more and more closely related individuals. These units were all called uru. It becomes of interest to consider how small a group, for genealogical purposes, may be considered to form an uru. My informants were unable to decide for some time whether, for example, a man and his immediate family could be described as an uru. Such a usage of the term, it developed, would certainly not be common although in theory it might be permissible. It would require all the descendants of a man for several generations, said Tlenshiev—just how many he did not know, perhaps five or six—to form an uru, which would comprise a hundred houses or more. The basic uru would consist of the blood members of the group customarily occupying common winter quarters which broke up for the summer migrations into a series of family groups.

The individual family was known as yj, meaning literally "house." The members of the family, the inhabitants of the "house," would normally be a man, his wife or perhaps wives, and minor children. As his sons came of age and married they would be provided with kibitkas adjacent to their father's;¹ then the father's kibitka became known as the ylken yj, (senior or great house) and the son's kibitka as otav (junior or small house). Originally, according to Kuftin,² otav meant "without fire."³ Thus there might be four or five otav around the senior kibitka. The youngest son would continue to live in the senior house which he inherited at the death of his father.

Such was the normal, or more accurately, idealized arrangement. Actually many families were not able to afford such extensive premises and several sons with their wives might continue to occupy the father's house. If three generations lived in one kibitka the grandfather and his wife slept on the left, son and son's wife on the right with grandchildren, guests and all others in the middle. If a son and his wife were living in the kibitka, especially a newly married son, his section might be separated by a curtain, not apparently for the observance of any avoidance custom but merely for the sake of privacy.⁴ The left hand side of the kibitka as one entered was considered the most honorable and was reserved for the master of the house. As far as I could learn this principle was not extended to the winter dwelling; there the head of the household took what he considered the warmest and most comfortable place, the others making out as best they could.

¹ Zaleskie, *La Vie des steppes*, 18-19.

² *Kirgiz-Kazaki*, 34.

³ In connection with the family fire compare the quotation from Pozdnev on pages 77-78.

⁴ See also Karutz, *Unter Kirgisen und Turkmenen*, 70.

Among prosperous families the number of kibitkas occupied by its members might be quite large. In addition to a separate establishment for each of the older sons those who could afford to do so had additional kibitkas for each wife and her children.⁵ Radlov⁶ mentions that a rich Kazak might have kibitkas in several different places with a wife and children in each among which he divided his time.

In general, however, most Kazak were obliged to rest content with one wife because of the financial outlay involved in acquiring additional ones. By Mohammedan law a man was allowed four wives but this restriction seems to have been treated lightly by those who could afford to do so. Tlenshiev knew, or at least had heard of, a man with forty wives.

The senior wife, the first one married (*bajbice*) was nominally the mistress of the household and dominated the others (*toqal* or *kici ejel*⁷). The degree to which the senior wife actually controlled her juniors varied considerably with circumstances and the personalities involved. Levshin remarks⁸ that even when the husband had no particular affection for her he was obliged to respect her and compel the other wives to do so. Zaleskie⁹ points out, however, that the position of even the senior wife depended to a great extent upon the caprice of the husband. He describes a journey from one camping place to another in which the favored wife of the moment, mounted on a horse, led the procession in which others followed on camels, while she who was in disgrace at the time brought up the rear on foot, as the ultimate humiliation. My informants explained that the chief cause of friction within the household was that the senior wife delegated the heaviest and most disagreeable tasks to the junior, while she herself was jealous of the sexual preference shown by the husband for her younger colleague. On the other hand, according to Karutz,¹⁰ the senior wife in some cases, especially if she were childless, would herself select a younger wife for her husband in order to have children in the family and assistance with the domestic chores. Grodekov says that in case of continual quarrels among several wives of a man the local judge (*bij*) might intervene and apportion the various household goods, furnishings and utensils among them in order to keep the peace.¹¹

Of the general position of women in the Kazak family there are conflicting points of view. Radlov¹² considered them as rather worse off than among the Kalmyk who, of course, were not Mohammedans, and thought that the Kazak treated his wife as his property because he had bought her at a high price. Domestic quarrels were frequent and the husband customarily addressed his wife in a harsh commanding voice. Levshin¹³ remarks that the

⁵ See also Levshin, *Déscription des hordes*, 363; Zaleskie, *La Vie des steppes*, 24.

⁶ *Aus Sibirien*, 1: 484.

⁷ *Toqal* is a somewhat rude term translatable perhaps as "wench." *Kici ejel* is preferable, meaning simply "younger wife."

⁸ *Déscription des hordes*, 363.

⁹ *La Vie des steppes*, 24.

¹⁰ *Unter Kirgisen und Turkmenen*, 113-14.

¹¹ Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 151.

¹² *Aus Sibirien*, 1: 484.

¹³ *Déscription des hordes*, 353.

sole recompense for the toil of the Kazak woman was to be treated like a slave by her arrogant and severe master. Grodekov also considers the wife as legally a slave whom the husband had the right to punish by beating,¹⁴ and Zaleskie¹⁵ points out that although the Kazak woman had complete physical personal freedom she was less the companion of her husband than the animals of his herds.

On the other hand Karutz¹⁶ denies specifically that the relation between husband and wife approached that of master and slave. The household was harmonious and in it the wife held a respected position. That the senior wife at least might be considered a responsible partner in her husband's affairs is indicated by Lansdell:¹⁷

The head of a household will often send a portion of his herds several hundreds of miles away under the care of this [the senior] wife while he himself will either remain with his other wives about the grazing ground or go and encamp somewhere by himself.

And Ibn Battúta says:¹⁸

A remarkable thing which I saw in this country was the respect shown to women by the Turks, for they hold a more dignified position than the men.

And again:¹⁹

Among the Turks and Tatars their wives hold a high position; when they issue an order they say in it "By order of the Sultan and the Khatuns" [queens, wives of a khan]. Each khatun possesses several towns and districts and vast revenues, and when they travel with the sultan they have a separate camp.

These observations of Ibn Battúta were made about 1332 and it is uncertain exactly to which Turco-Mongol group they refer, although considering the route of his journey they probably include tribes ancestral to the Kazak. They agree with other information on the status of women among the steppe nomads at the time,²⁰ but may be somewhat discounted as applying particularly to the highest class among whom marriages took on something of the nature of political alliances with a consequently enhanced position for the wife. His remarks are, however, interesting as applying to a period before the wide acceptance of Mohammedanism among the Turkish nomads. It seems possible that the contradictory accounts of the status of the Kazak woman may be due to her somewhat anomalous position resulting from the imposition of Mohammedan concepts upon a former culture pattern in which she occupied a more respected position.

My informants on the whole painted a rather gloomy picture of the life of the Kazak

¹⁴ *Kirgizy i Karakirgizy*, 23; also Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 151-52.

¹⁵ *La Vie des steppes*, 23.

¹⁶ *Unter Kirgisen und Turkmenen*, 114-15.

¹⁷ *Russian Central Asia*, 322.

¹⁸ *Travels in Asia and Africa*, 146-47.

¹⁹ *Idem*, 100-101.

²⁰ *The Texts and Versions*, 134, 196-97.

woman but agreed that this position varied considerably from family to family. There were examples of hen-pecked husbands dominated by their wives, but these were looked upon with a mixture of disdain and amusement by the community.

According to Mohammedan custom women are considered unclean at the time of menstruation, but the Kazak woman seems to have been little affected by this view because she could not be spared from the work around the camp to perform the proper ablutions, prayers and fasts.²¹

When circumstances made it possible for each wife to have her own kibitka she brought up her children more or less separately from those of other wives. When there were two or more wives living in one kibitka maternal authority tended to become somewhat confused but under the general supervision of the senior wife. Children applied to other wives of their father the same term (cece) which they used for their own mother or, if it was necessary to distinguish, added a descriptive term: egej cece (stepmother). The several wives likewise referred to any of their husband's children as ul (son) or qbz (daughter). As the children passed out of the infancy stage boys were brought up by the father, while the girls were trained by their mothers.²² Boys were circumcised at any time from three to twelve years of age by a mullah (Mohammedan priest). For this occasion parents were expected to give a feast. Levshin notes²³ that this ceremony was much more strictly observed than any other of the obligations laid down by Islamic law.

There were no ceremonial observances at puberty or coming of age, nor was there any fixed age at which a youth was considered to have obtained his majority. According to Grodekov's information²⁴ it might be anywhere from the twelfth to the fifteenth year, depending on the precocity of the individual. Inasmuch as the sign and symbol of having attained majority was to be master of one's own kibitka it also depended on the affluence of the parents, since the rich could afford to set up their sons at an earlier age. Girls could hardly be said to have ever come of age since a woman was "only half a man," but their marriage might be considered, in this respect, as equivalent to the son's obtaining his own kibitka. The marriage of a girl might take place at any time from about nine years of age on.

Children were frequently adopted. This might be because their own parents had died and they would be taken in by relatives of the latter, usually by their father's brother. Or a childless family would adopt a son from one that had several, preferably also from among close relatives. Grodekov²⁵ further mentions reciprocal exchange of children between two families. I did not obtain any information on this point.

Adoption took place before witnesses and was symbolized by the child touching the breast of his foster mother, indicating that she considered him as her own. Such adopted

²¹ See also Rudenko, *Ocherk Byta . . . Kazakov*, 49.

²² See also Grodekov, *Kirgizy i Karakirgizy*, 33.

²³ *Déscription des hordes*, 356-57.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, 36.

²⁵ *Kirgizy i Karakirgizy*, 37; see also Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 152-53.

children were entitled to shares in the distribution of the father's property as were his own offspring. Grodekov, however, remarks²⁶ that the adopted son may leave his foster family whenever he wishes or the foster father may cast him out, suggesting that the tie may not have been so close as that between blood parents and children. In extreme circumstances, however, it was also possible for a father to disown his real son. The father was the indisputable head of the family as reflected in the Kazak proverb: "A son before his father is like a slave before his master."²⁷

EXOGENY

The question of the exogamous unit in Kazak society is of crucial importance in defining the concept of the *uru* and the nature of social groupings.

My informants agreed that a man might not marry a girl of his own *uru*, but when one endeavors to discover in exactly what sense the term *uru* is used in this connection, difficulties develop. Tlenshiev declared that one might not marry a girl with whom one had a common male ancestor within seven generations. "Beyond seven fathers," he said, "it will be another *uru*." This of course opens up a new concept of the *uru*, mathematically determined for the purposes of exogamy as comprising all those related through seven generations in the male line. Such a classification would not correspond to any of the named groups. It would be possible, according to the informants, for a man of the Davlet *uru* to marry a Davlet girl provided the requirements of seven generation exogamy made it possible. Such a situation, however, seems to have occurred rarely. The informants agreed that such marriages were theoretically permissible, but were unable to give any specific instances.

In principle this system of exogamy agrees with information from other sources, although there appears to have been considerable variation in the exact number of generations which defined the prohibited group. Grodekov writes:²⁸

Marriage occurs between the *ordas*, tribes and *gentes* as far as the seventh ancestor; that is, to the seventh generation of ancestors reckoning in the male line, or, according to some opinions to the fourth and even third generation.

He adds that

. . . among the Kara-kirghiz marriage may be concluded as far as the fifth generation. At the present time they marry even closer, even to the second generation, which they condemn with the words "You are violating *zak*" [the customary law] but they do not dissolve the marriage and do not punish the participants. The mullah Asan [one of Grodekov's informants] declares "Formerly among the Kara-kirghiz they married, as among the Kazaks, a bride from the seventh generation, now they take her from the third, and are even beginning to marry from the second generation, in conformity with the *shariat* [Mohammedan law]"

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, 37.

²⁷ Grodekov, *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 33.

²⁸ *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 27.

INTER-GROUP RELATIONS

The main aspects of relations between the various local groups have been considered in the previous section. Here we may mention certain cultural patterns which influenced the relations of individual members of one group with those of another.

It has been noted above in discussing the nature of social groups that an uru of more or less close blood relatives in the male line usually had living and migrating with them members of other blood groups. It is pertinent to consider their status more closely.

My informants said that if a man did not like his own uru he might go and live with another. This they seemed to think was true in more recent times but would not have been so "originally." However, even though he went to live with another group and joined their community, he would still be considered as belonging to the group into which he was born. He might then marry a girl of the uru among whom he was living but could not take a wife from the group to which he belonged by birth. Grodekov¹ expresses this by saying: "Transference from one tribe to another is not possible but living and migrating among a foreign tribe is permissible." Rudenko² observes that an immigrant to an alien group may be entitled to call himself by their name even though not related to them by blood, thus: "Kazaks coming from another tribe do not lose their tribal origin. For example an Argyn . . . who has joined the Karatai gens bears the name of Karatai but may nevertheless marry any Karatai girl."

I was not able to find any instances illustrating the uru affiliation of the children of such marriages. Tlenshiev said that technically they would be considered as belonging to their father's original group and a son would be permitted to marry into the uru among which he was born. But after a few generations "people would become confused" and the descendants of the original immigrant might come to be considered blood members of the group among which they were living.

Several categories may be distinguished among those residing in the group who were not its blood members in the male line. The most numerous appear to have been composed of hired workers, servants and artisans. These were the people who, having little or no property of their own and no strong patron to support them, were obliged to make a precarious living by selling their services to others. They tended to become semi-permanently attached to the group, though sometimes they went off to seek employment elsewhere. The artisans, chiefly carpenters and blacksmiths, were rather more independent than the unskilled hired herdsmen, since their knowledge of a trade assured them of being able to make their way wherever they went. In former times the slaves also formed a numerous group of

¹ *Kirgizy i Karakirgizy*, 27.

² *Ocherk Byta . . . Kazakov*, 59-60.

permanent residents among the uru members, except for such of them as might be ransomed or freed for other reasons. Their children would also be slaves of the same owners. Here, in a slightly different status, must be included the slaves and maid-servants who formed part of the dowries of wealthy brides. In the unlikely event of their mistress being sent back to her parents they would perhaps return with her.

In a quite different economic class were individuals who, while not blood members of the group, might own and occupy land for fodder and winter quarters among them.³ They were mostly rather wealthy cattle owners who were obliged to supplement their hay-fields and to find better or more extensive winter shelter for their herds. In some, and perhaps in most, cases they were related to the uru members through the female line.⁴

Children might be brought up by the mother's group. Grodekov⁵ writes:

Children enjoy protection from the mother's tribe when the father's is inactive or absent. In that case when the father is of the tribe of, say, Chumeke, and the child is educated by the mother's tribe, Dzhappac, he is called among them Dzhappac [compare Rudenko's statement above] to avoid coldness of relations . . . [but] no one may belong to his mother's tribe.

Grodekov further indicates that a group may have a legal claim on daughters of its female members by birth:

If a father dies without relatives, the children go to the mother's tribe. The son may choose whether to go or not, and may take up a trade but the girl is obliged to go since they claim her by law.

There is no further light on this point. It seems contradictory to other information.

There might be children other than those whose mothers had belonged to the group adopted by families within it. Usually, however, adopted children were taken from a brother's family, and therefore were by birth uru members. I have no satisfactory information on whether or not they would be considered as uru members if born outside but formally adopted into it.

A wife's kinsmen might in some cases come and live with her in her husband's group. Grodekov says⁶ that a widower may go to live with his married daughter, but only with the permission of his son-in-law. One of my informants remarked that if a girl married well into a rich family her own kinsmen might be expected to spend a large part of their time visiting her.

In enumerating the foreign elements resident among the uru group there must also be included the free-lance warriors and the Telengut who served the powerful local chiefs and khans.

All the categories mentioned above were more or less permanently attached to the

³ See also Grodekov, *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 15.

⁴ Grodekov, *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 15, 37; Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 214.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 37.

⁶ *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 35.

various local groups. Transients of course were numerous. Levshin⁷ mentions that in some places a fiancé who had paid the first part of the kalym might pitch his kubitka in the camp of his betrothed and live there until the transaction had been completed and he was able to take her home. Since the payments might sometimes be extended over a period of several years the prospective bridegroom perhaps became a fixture about the camp.

In addition there were large numbers of itinerant visitors, travelers, merchants, and wandering mullahs. Beggars formed a large group to whom it was considered meritorious to make gifts.⁸

All these alien elements went far to increase the complexity of social groupings and to obscure the sharp demarcation between uru groups.

HOSPITALITY

The custom of hospitality (qonaqçB) to strangers may be noted in its connection with inter-group relations.

In principle any passing traveler was entitled to stop at any man's kubitka and remain indefinitely. One of my informants said: "He doesn't have to pay and can stay as long as he likes; the owner of the house will never tell him to go." The host was responsible for the welfare of his guest and might be obliged to pay damages equivalent to those for murder for any stranger who succumbed to starvation or exhaustion even in the vicinity of the camp.⁹

Apparently such open hospitality was liable to prove a burden because Grodekov remarks¹⁰ that the Kazak always avoided camping near roads or frequented routes in order to obviate a deluge of ravenous guests and "if it is necessary to camp near a road they conceal themselves behind a hill."

In addition to thus escaping the responsibilities of hospitality, the custom was in practice considerably limited by two factors.

Although in theory anyone, even an enemy, was entitled to hospitality, my informants said that such an instance would never arise. One usually stopped only at places where one had some expectation of finding a welcome.

A more important limitation was that in practice hospitality was restricted to members of one's own class. The rich entertained the rich and the poor sought shelter with the poor. The poor man would probably not be turned away from the rich man's door but where the duties of hospitality were ceremonially observed for an important guest by cutting the throat of a sheep, which was afterwards eaten, a humble visitor would receive only milk or tea. The gauging of hospitality by the importance of the guest is mentioned

⁷ *Déscription des hordes*, 360.

⁸ See also Levshin, *op. cit.*, 344; Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 222-23.

⁹ Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 217-18.

¹⁰ *Kirgizy i Karakirgizy*, 110.

also by Grodekov¹¹ and Dingelstedt,¹² who say that a visitor is treated well or ill according to the importance of his "tribe" and the number of his ancestors. Zaleskie¹³ also suggests that it was chiefly the rich who kept open house.

It may be noted here that *qonaqçB* (hospitality) was also the term applied to social gatherings to celebrate circumcisions, weddings and funerals.

FRATERNIZATION

A form of fraternization or sworn brotherhood might exist between two particular individuals, usually of different but not too distantly related *uru* groups. They swore solemnly on the Koran, or embraced one another over the blade of a sword or with a dagger at the throat of each, taking oath that they would be friends (*tamBr* or *dos*) to one another for a specified time or for life. This relationship seems to have involved mainly an obligation of reciprocal hospitality and a certain sharing of one another's property. My informants were vague on the subject.

Grodekov¹⁴ indicates that the relationship had a decidedly commercial quality with strong emphasis on an exact balancing of accounts. He writes:

They swear to be *tamyr* or *dos* to one another and grant a gift. Receiving a gift obliges one to give an equal gift in return. *Tamyr* come by turns to one another and make a choice of cattle and goods and the chosen objects must be given without a refusal. In former times it was not customary to complain at the non-receipt of an equivalent gift in return; but now the *bii* computes the money value of the gifts on both sides and forces them to pay the difference. Said one *bii*, "Satisfy the wishes of this *tamyr* and afterwards you can go to visit him and he must satisfy your desire." According to Torgai [one of Grodekov's informants], in *dos* one may take things without asking while in *tamyr* it is customary to ask. Another *bii* said that in *dos* they swear before god not to bring lawsuits about the value of the presents.

The children of individuals who were *tamBr* and *dos* to one another might continue the relationship. It was also possible for women to be *tamBr* to one another and the relationship might exist between those of opposite sex.¹⁵

A somewhat similar form of fraternization, though apparently without the overt mercenary aspects of the *tamBr* and *dos* relationships, existed in Mongol culture.¹⁶

¹¹ *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 27.

¹² *Le Droit coutumier*, 147.

¹³ *La Vie des steppes*, 13.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, 40-41.

¹⁵ Grodekov, *Kirgizy i Karaķirgizy*, 40-41; Dingelstedt, *Le Droit coutumier*, 219-20.

¹⁶ See pages 82-83.