

## RELIGIOUS AND OFFICIAL WEDDING CUSTOMS IN THE EARLY OF THE 20th CENTURY THE CRIMEAN TATARS OF DOBRUJA, ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** This paper is about the Crimean Tatar community and focuses on its social issues linked to religious wedding traditions and customs. This research is based on quantitative and qualitative documents. I used some documents owned by the Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, DJCAN, fond Cultul Musulman, Primăria Orașului Constanța (National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, fund The Muslim Cult, Constanta City Hall) and fondul Colecția Registrele de Starea civilă - Dobrogea, Primăria Orașului Negru-Vodă, Consiliul Local Negru-Vodă (Fund Civil Records Collection, Negru-Vodă Town Hall, Negru-Vodă Town Council); literary sources, which are heritage of the Constanța County Library "Ioan N. Roman"; and qualitative sources for oral history, based on interviews got on a field research developed in two stages: February and July-August, 2016. The body of the paper draws on the field research based on a survey, which includes face-to-face and in-depth interviews for pre-wedding, wedding customs with the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja. Finally, my paper shows community's challenges in maintaining its own cultural identity.

**Key words:** Romania, Crimean Tatars, Oral History, Religious Weddings, Wedding Customs.

### 20. YÜZYILIN BAŞLARINDA DOBRUCA KIRIM TATARLARININ DİNİ VE RESMİ DÜĞÜN GELENEKLERİ, ROMANYA

**Öz:** Bu makale Kırım Tatar topluluğun dini nikah gelenek ve görenekleriyle sosyal konulara odaklanır. Araştırma, nicel ve nitel belgelere dayanmaktadır. Bu araştırma için Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, DJCAN, fond Cultul Musulman, Primăria Orașului Constanța (National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, The Muslim Cult, Constanta City Hall - (Romanya Köstence İlçe Bölgesi Ulusal Arşivleri, Müslüman

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Kültü fonları, Köstence Belediye Binası) ve fondul Colecția Registrele de Starea civilă - Dobrogea, Primăria Orașului Negru-Vodă, Consiliul Local Negru-Vodă (Sivil Kayıt Koleksiyonu, Negru-Vodă Belediye Binası, Negru-Vodă Belediye Meclisi); Köstence İlçe Kütüphanesi “Ioan N. Roman” mirası olan edebiat kaynaklar; ve sözlü tarih için nitel kaynaklar, iki aşamada geliştirilen bir saha araştırmasına dayanan görüşmelere dayanmaktadır: Şubat 2016 ve Temmuz-Ağustos, 2016. Makalenin ana bölümü, Dobruja'nın Kırım Tatarları ile düğün öncesi, düğün gelenekleri için yüz yüze görüşmeleri içeren bir ankete dayalı alan araştırmasına dayanmaktadır. Son olarak, bu makale topluluğun kendi kültürel kimliğini korumadaki zorluklarını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelime:** Romanya, Kırım Tatarları, sözlü tarih, dini düğün, düğün adetleri.

## 1. Introduction

This study is elaborated from the perspective of a native Crimean Tatar. I always feel honored to study, write and talk on issues concerning the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, focusing above all on their history and day-to-day life, as I am the fourth generation of a Crimean Tatar family born in Dobruja, Romania. After the Crimean Wars (1853-1856), my great-grandfather, *Hacı İzzet İsmail* together with his family left their native home, Kerçi, Crimea and settled down in Dobruja.

Limited time conditions of this study led me to an article based on personal documentation, photo gallery and materials that I acquired from field research based on individual activity. For religious wedding I relied on documents with *Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN*, fond Cultul musulman (National Archives County Departments of Constanța), for changes in administrative organization of Dobruja I used documents with *Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN* fond Prefectura Constanța (National Archives County Departments of Constanța), for community's social and day-to-day life I relied on newspapers of time owned by the Constanta County Library „Ioan Roman” and my oral history documentation is based on the interviews conducted by me in a field research, in two stages: February 2016, and July-August 2016.

Although considerable research has been devoted to the history of the Crimean Tartars<sup>1</sup>, rather less attention has been paid to the history of the

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<sup>1</sup> Within this study I use the term Crimean Tartars as they belong to Turkic people. In the documents with the Ottoman Archives (BOA), the word *Kırım ahali* is used to denominate them before the establishment in the Danube Province (*Tuna Vilyeti*), *Kırım muhacir* after 1860, and after 1890 they are named *Tatar mülteci coming from Romania* (for more details see İsmail N., 2017, *Balkan Turks The Crimean Tatars of Dobruja*).

Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, on their runaway from the Crimean peninsula after the Crimean War 1853-1856, challenges they faced after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, how they had to change their life and adapt to new conditions in the newly created state Romania, and their day-to-day life. This research focuses on changes of religious weddings, pre-wedding and official wedding customs in the early 20th century, Romania. The study was designed to highlight the Crimean Tatars' life, customs and changes occurred along the 20th century. Today, in Romania, as part of the European Union, where the existence of the Crimean Tatar community is in question, they are an endangered minority, their religious wedding customs are also in danger of extinction.

This paper attempts at answering to a few research questions: i. what do we know about religious weddings of the Crimean Tatars in the early of the 20th century?; ii. did the Romanianization process change their wedding traditions?; iii. at the beginning of the 21st century, could we state about extinction of their wedding traditions?

### **1.1 Evidence in the Romanian literature**

In many ways, the focus and content of this part of the study reflects the literature that is available on the Crimean Tatar community in Romania today. For, despite over two hundred years of Crimean Tatar existence in this country, the scope and depth of scholarly literature on the group is very limited. This study is not about to give a brief story that was not told in English, but to take into consideration its wider implications in the field literature. I do not intend to attack the literature in domain. My intention is rather to reconstitute the social and historical dimensions of pre-wedding and wedding events about Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, in the field literature

Within this study my purpose, is to take a glance on pre-wedding and wedding customs with the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, a Turkic community living on the western shore of the Black Sea and highlight the community's link with the Turkic world.

There are two main research about wedding and pre-wedding customs with Crimean Tatars of Dobruja: Mehmet Naci Önal with his doctoral thesis "Din folclorul turcilor dobrogeni. Tradiții privind nașterea, căsătoria și moartea" (*From the folklore of the Dobrogean Turks. Traditions regarding birth, marriage and death*) published in 1997. Mehmet Naci Önal, in his book based on his doctoral research, page 39 gives details about I. Dumitrescu's studies, a former primary school teacher with Prevelia village, who in the early 20th century wrote about the Crimean Tatars living in Prevelia

(village's former Turkish name was *Tatâlgıac*<sup>2</sup>, Romanian spelling) (See Figure 1. Royal Decree, December 7, 1929).

9 Decembrie 1929  
*Small Decree Royal nr. 167 din 7 Decembrie 1929*  
 MONITORUL OFICIAL NR. 374  
**20. Județul Constanța**  
 Nr. consilierilor: 30.  
 Capitala: Municipiul Constanța. Nr. consilierilor de aici: 32.  
 Comuna urbană Carpen-Syren. Nr. consilierilor: 10.  
 - " Carpa Veche " " " 10.  
 - " Hârșova " " " 10.  
 - " Macaria " " " 10.  
 - " Medgidia " " " 10.  
 - " Tulcea " " " 10.

| N. Județ | NOMELE COMUNELOR RURALE    | N. satelor comunei în total | Date de organizare administrativă adoptate de comisie   |  | Datele de adunare ale comunei  |  |
|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|
|          |                            |                             | NOMELE SATELOR  | NOMELE SATELOR   |  |  |
| 1        | Albești - <i>Albești</i>   | 9                           | Albești 287<br>Ara 222<br>Căpâna 370<br>Dobâ Mai 222<br>Hârșeni 408<br>Lăncuși 276<br>Pocoseni 230<br>Tracari 288<br>Vârtoape 246   | 8<br>8<br>8<br>8<br>8<br>10<br>8<br>8                          | Strada 252<br>Hârșeni 270<br>Valea Veche 441<br>Vârtoape 258<br>Vârtoape 270 |  |
| 2        | Basarabi - <i>Basarabi</i> | 9                           | Basarabi 469<br>Căstani 292<br>Coca Veche 270<br>Galești 278<br>Năpârți 270<br>Poarta Albă 284<br>Sărmășeu 246<br>Valea Hârșor 298<br>Valea Seacă 292<br>Valul lui Traian 242   | 10<br>10<br>10<br>10<br>10<br>10<br>8<br>8<br>8                | Comuna 292   |  |
| 3        | Cetatea - <i>Cetatea</i>   | 14                          | Asănești 269<br>Cădăni 261<br>Cetatea 318<br>Dobreneni-din Deal 495<br>Dobromirivici Vale 478<br>Fundeni 278<br>Lăpești 280<br>Nădăroași 271<br>Pădureni 281<br>Pomonia 280<br>Sipotești 280<br>Tudor-Vladimirescu 280<br>Valea Hârș 285<br>Valea Tăpui 274 | 8<br>10<br>10<br>10<br>10<br>10<br>8<br>8<br>8<br>10<br>8<br>8 |  |  |
| 4        | Cobadin                    | 12                          | Căcăria de Jos 406<br>Căcăria de Sus 297<br>Cobadin 267<br>Gorcani 261<br>Ivanca 263<br>Pământeni 263<br>Ponora 263<br>Petrariu 263<br>Văzoara 263  | 10<br>8<br>10<br>8<br>8<br>8<br>10<br>10<br>10                 | Cobănița 491<br>Fura 26<br>Veteranul 291                                     |  |

*Note: Se va organiza în fiecare comună o comisie locală pentru organizarea administrației locale.*

Figure 1. Royal Decree, December 7, 1929. Romanian government, by an order issued on the 9th December 1929 changed the names of all settlements in Dobruja

I. Dumitrescu left us valuable information about Ottoman Turks and Crimean Tatars in the early 20th century Dobruja, but unfortunately he mentioned less about wedding customs.

Another study in this domain is Maria Magiru's "Istoricul așezărilor turcilor și tătarilor în Dobrogea după 1878. Viața, obiceiurile, tradițiile" (*History of Turk and Tatar settlements in Dobrogea after 1878. Life, customs,*

<sup>2</sup> Romanian government, by an order issued on the 9th December 1929 changed the names of all settlements in Dobruja "Royal Decree, December 7, 1929, Law no. 167/1929 for the organization of the local administration published in *Monitorul Oficial* (Official Gazette) nr.170 / 3 august 1929, *Constanța County, villages and village administrative units* <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdiobuge/legea-nr-167-1929-pentru-organizarea-administratiunii-locale?pid=37665662#p-37665662>, accessed on 29 November 2020

*traditions*). Maria Magiru's study provides details about pre-wedding and wedding customs as if all the events were related by I. Dumitrescu in his short story published in 1921. Once again, I emphasize that I. Dumitrescu left us less information about wedding, and almost nothing about prewedding "Tartars marry out of love. I counted all those in Prvelia and found that, out of 37 marriages, 28 weddings of love and only 9 were conventional weddings; so in this case, 75% of marriages are of love and only 25% are conventional. Now let me show what I mean by the conventional marriage to the Tartars. They, in addition to the well-known polygamy, are accustomed to the following, freely accepted and by law. I. a man can marry his older brother's wife, who is dead; II. a woman can take the husband of her older sister, who is deceased; III. Two brothers can marry two sisters; IV. two stepdaughters, a brother and a sister, children of parents who are remarried and born before their marriage, can marry; V. the rarest case, when a lad has the vanity to marry the daughter of a worthy man. These marriages between the same blood are done so as not to alienate the property; or small children, left over from the dead, not to fall into bad hands. As I said, we have a percentage of 75% of married couples in love and this is favored by the fact that the dowry does not play any role. Most of the time the young man steals the girl, in order to save the expenses, because in this way he is no longer obliged to give her parents the money mer-acî and siut-acî, nor to make the wedding with chatter, food and drinks. The lad is always talking to the girl in the evening, she pretends to be outside, gets in the cart and picks her up"<sup>3</sup>.

*"Tătarii se căsătoresc din iubire. Am făcut socoteala tuturor celor din Prvelia și am găsit că, din 37 de căsătorii, 28 s-au făcut din dragoste și numai 9 convenționale; deci, în cazul acesta, căsătoriile 75% sunt făcute din iubire și numai 25% sunt convenționale. Acum să arăt ce înțeleg eu prin căsătoria convențională la Tătari. Ei, în afară de cunoscuta poligamie, mai obișnuiesc urmaștoarele, libere și prin lege. I. Un bărbat poate lua pe femeia fratelui său mai mare, care este mort; II. O femeie poate lua pe soțul surorii sale mai mari, care este decedată; III. Se pot căsători doi frați cu două surori; IV. Se pot căsători doi vitergi, frate și sora, copii unor părinți căsătoriți a doua oară și născuți înainte de căsătoria lor. V. Cazul cel mai rar, când un flăcău are vanitatea să ia fata unui om de seamă. Aceste căsătorii între inși de același sânge se fac pentru a nu se înstreina*

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<sup>3</sup> Biblioteca Județeană Constanța „Ioan Roman”, Analele Dobrogei. Revista Societății Culturale Dobrogene, Vol.no.1, 1921 Constanța, pag. 174-175 (Constanța County Library "Ioan N. Roman", Annals of Dobruja. Journal of the Dobrujan Cultural Society, vol. no.1., 1921, Constanța, pp. 122-123).

*avutul; sau copii mici, rămași de pe urma celor morți, să nu încapă în mâini rele. Cum am spus, avem un procent de 75% de căsătorii din dragoste și lucrul acesta este favorizat de faptul că zestrea nu joacă nici un rol. De cele mai multe ori flăcăul fură fata, pentru ca să scutească cheltuielile, căci în felul acesta nu mai este obligat să dea părinților ei banii meracî și siut-acâ, nici să mai fața munta cu tărboi, mîncăruri și băuturi. Întotdeauna, flăcăul este vorbit cu fata și seara, ea se face că ese pe afară, se sue în căruță și mai ia-o de unde nu-i”.*

In 2016, browsing newspapers of the interwar time owned by the Constanța County Library “Ioan N. Roman” I found details about the settlement of the Crimean Tatar refugees<sup>4</sup> after the Crimean War 1853-1856 and the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 in Dobruja and some aspects of day-to-day life traditions with the Crimean Tatar community<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.2. Methodology within this research

This paper is a quantitative research based on documents of primary sources found with the “National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, fund The Muslim Cult” and qualitative study broadly based on sources of oral history, on interviews done by me on a field research developed in two stages: February 2016 and the end of July and beginning of August, 2016.

For secondary sources I relied on literary sources “Biblioteca Județeană Constanța „Ioan Roman” about wedding customs of the Crimean Tatars ethnic minority.

Despite all its qualities, observing and interviewing respondents is not a sufficient method of collecting data in the purpose of developing a study on an ethnic minority. But when the object of the analysis is about your own ethnic minority, which is on the verge of extinction, you find that field research is the only working method. In field research I had to record several hundred full hours of questions and answers, then the material was transcribed and analyzed in detail, but at the end of my activity I obtained a historical document as Dr. Martha Norkunas, from the University of

<sup>4</sup> Biblioteca Județeană Constanța „Ioan Roman”, Analele Dobrogei. Revista Societății Culturale Dobrogene, Anul 1, **no.1**, 1920, Constanța, pag. 174-175 (*Constanța County Library “Ioan N. Roman”, Annals of Dobruja. Journal of the Dobrujan Cultural Society, 1st year, no.1, 1920, Constanța, pp. 174 -175*).

<sup>5</sup> Biblioteca Județeană Constanța „Ioan Roman”, Analele Dobrogei. Revista Societății Culturale Dobrogene, Anul 1, **no.3**, 1920, Constanța, pag. 491-494 (*Constanța County Library “Ioan N. Roman”, Annals of Dobruja. Journal of the Dobrujan Cultural Society, 1st year, no.3, 1920, Constanța, pp. 491- 494*)

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Middle Tennessee, Oral History Department<sup>6</sup> states „*An oral history interview is something quite out of the ordinary because you are creating a historical document in those moments that you're sitting together. No paper documents exist to create the world that we've now created through these narratives*” Oral history have several types of activities with different scientific status, including the collection of oral testimonies practiced by professional archivists. From an archival point of view, the recording being the material resulting from the original interview, it represents a primary source document<sup>7</sup>.

By this field research conducted by me in two steges, the end of February 2016, and the end of July and the beginning of August 2016, I registred a number of interviews

with twenty six individuals, which were fully recorded and analyzed. Of these, sixteen interviews were recorded with Crimean Tatars residing in Constanța, eight with Crimean Tatars residents of Amzacea village (situated in southern Constanța county) and two with the Crimean Tatars residents of Tătaru village (situated in southern Constanța county). The interviews with the Crimean Tatar community in Constanța were the main focus of the study. The material collected at Amzacea and Tătaru provided a basis for comparing the responses received to the interview for the rural and urban communities. Relying on qualitative method, I interviewed a small number of respondents, and as Șandor Sorin Dan stresses the success of a field research based on interview “does not dependent on sample size<sup>8</sup>”.

The interview's participants were found through family and family contacts among the Crimean Tatar communities in Constanța, Amzacea and Tătaru villages. Most of the interviews were conducted within the family, because many people refused to speak, or did not show up for the interview, as happened with members of the community in Bucharest, where I did not find anyone at the headquarters, and the door was locked.

This study is based on another field research conducted by me with a number of open-ended interviews between the end of July 2011 and the

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Martha Norkunas, University of Middle Tennessee – MTSU, Oral History

<https://www.mtsu.edu/faculty/martha-norkunas>, accessed on 28 November, 2020

<sup>7</sup> Nicoară, Toader, 2005, *Istorie locală și surse orale*, p.42

[http://www.hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/studii/Public/File/cursuri/suporturi\\_conversie/Istorie\\_lo-cala.pdf](http://www.hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/studii/Public/File/cursuri/suporturi_conversie/Istorie_lo-cala.pdf), accessed on 28 November 2020

<sup>8</sup> Șandor Sorin Dan, *Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale*

[https://www.academia.edu/27674254/Metode\\_și\\_tehnici\\_de\\_cercetare\\_în\\_științele\\_sociale](https://www.academia.edu/27674254/Metode_și_tehnici_de_cercetare_în_științele_sociale), accessed on 29 November, 2020

early August 2011 with the purpose to find out the state of the Tatar language spoken by the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja and code switching about Crimean Tatar and Romanian language. The interviews were conducted with ten individuals, were fully recorded and the results were disseminated at various international symposia and published in the proceeding papers (2011-2014). As regarding the respondents from Tătaru I paid a visit to Tătaru village and the interview was done on the grounds of the mosque, where I found people working on renovating the mosque. Only two persons wanted to participate to my field study. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study in very general terms. It was presented to them in the form of a topic: "Study on education, language and culture with the Crimean Tatars in Dobrogea". The purpose of my field survey was to discover knowledge and information hold by the members of the community, knowledge that I grouped as follows: education, financial income, social status, day-to-day life, ethnicity, history and customs. Each question was drawn based on my previous studies and selected to be illustrative for: age, social status, education and culture. Within this study I used factual questions referring to: family income, if they attend meetings with the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tartars of Romania<sup>9</sup>, if they held a leading position with the UDDTMR, etc; identification questions, referring to certain socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, age, occupation, education, etc.; opinion questions: regarding their attitudes inside the community, beliefs of respondents, etc.

The interviews were conducted by me in Constanța (sixteen), Amzacea village (eight) and in Tătaru village (two). I do not claim that such a small number of people could represent the Crimean Tatar community, but the sample is fairly balanced regarding the total number of the community, 20, 282 in statistics with the Institutul Național de Statistică, România<sup>10</sup>. Both genders were equally represented and their ages ranged from twenty to eighty-seven. Some of them were trained professionals with college or university education with experience in their professions, 2 students but many of them retired.

In accordance with the purpose of this study, all the participants were fourth-generation of the Crimean refugees after the Crimean War (1853-1856). By this term I refer to the people who ran away from Crimea, their

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<sup>9</sup> Uniunea Democrată a Tătarilor Turco-Musulmani din România, UDDTMR, <http://uniuneatatar.ro/despre-noi>

accessed on 01 December 2020

<sup>10</sup> Institutul Național de Statistică, Recensământul populației și al locuințelor <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/> accessed on 28, November, 2020

homeland, came and settled in Dobruja, which in the meantime became their second homeland. Their length of living in Dobruja was ranging between one and a half century and two hundred years.

All the interviews were conducted at participants' homes, excepting the interviews with the respondents in Tătaru. Most people were interviewed as individuals on a face-to-face basis, but in eight cases couples were interviewed together. The time length of the interviews ranged from 60 min to 2h 30min, with the average length of one hour. In all cases, the language of interview was Romanian but many of the elder respondents preferred to speak Crimean Tatar language.

The interviews begins with identification questions, referring to socio-demographic characteristics such as: sex, age, occupation, education, we continued with factual questions: family income, if they attend union meetings, have ever held a leadership position within the union and I ended with the key questions: mother tongue, history of Crimean Tatars, culture and customs. The structured interviews were used for all the questions, semi-structured interviews according to the respondent's answer having the opportunity to explore in depth the basic topic and when a question was not understood to intervene, explain the question, and in turn the respondent felt obliged to be honest. During interviews so many times I used non-verbal language to encourage the respondent to speak, but also to assess respondent's sincerity degree.

The whole study was conducted entirely through my own financial efforts, during holidays between semesters and summer holiday.

### **1.3. Profile of the ethnic minority of the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, Romania from historical perspective**

Theoretical and methodological issues having discussed here I introduce the main characters within this study. This part of the study presents a short profile of the Crimean Tatar community in Dobruja, Romania and is intended to provide the historical and sociological perspective necessary for understanding the patterns of wedding customs that will be unveiled in second part. For although Crimean tatar weddings customs reflects to a great extent the types of wedding customs, traditions and ceremonies that can be found among the Muslim ethnic minorities and across the Turkic world, they also stem from the history and characteristic features of the Crimean Tatar community, as well as this community's particular position in Turkic world.

The first period of significant Crimean Tatars refugee to Dobruja began in the 1820's and lasted until 1878, when it was interrupted by the outbreak of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878. It is difficult to say how many Crimean Tatars, Nogays, Circassians entered Dobruja during that period,

because there are no records about them within the Ottoman Archives. The overwhelming majority were peasants, arriving from all parts of Crimea, where they had been impoverished by so numerous Russian-Ottoman wars and by the Russian army, with the only purpose to dislocate them from their houses, householders and agricultural lands. Almost all settled in the inland Dobruja's villages and began farming or in the Black Sea costs towns as Köstence, Varna, Balçık (İsmail, 2017: p.91).

In 1878, when Dobruja was ceded to newly created state Romania, based on documnets with the Ottomna Archives, it stresses the difficulties of peasants in their contact with the new reality which was, to say the least, shocking. They were unfamiliar with the Romanian new administrative relations and the pace of society, ignorant of the Romanian language, laws, institutions, and culture in general. The most serious problem was the lack of language competence, which forced them to take as real facts whatever documents were given to them, exposing them to robbery by public officers and notaries (İsmail, 2019: p. 85)

When Crimean Tatars, now Romanian citizens, began moving to urban areas after World War II, new problems arose, associated mainly with their slow adjustment to urban and industrial society of the communist era. The attitude of the surrounding society did not help much with the Crimean Tatars' adjustment problems. Many members of the communist regime's leadres expressed fear at the arrival of what they considered to be "traitors", as the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja, shelltered their relatives who ran away from Crimea after the Second World War.

During communist regime the Crimean Tatars formed ethnic organizations (İsmail, 2015: p. 450), but unfortunately these organizations were to replace the dissolving primary community.

## **2. Muslim Religious weddings in the early 20th Century**

Crimean Tatars: Turkic people, affiliated to Muslim religion, are Sunni Hanefi, with their country of origin in Crimea, the Crimean peninsula.

In the past, religious weddings had an important place in pre-wedding and it hold up before the wedding night.

Mehmet Naci Önal, in his book "Din folcroul turcilor dobrogeni. Tradiții privind nașterea, căsătoria și moartea" (*From the folklore of the Dobrogean Turks. Traditions regarding birth, marriage and death*), based on doctoral thesis, states "Until 1935, in Romania, the religious courts for Muslims (*kadılık*) functioned continuously. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find out if the wedding ceremony took place in these institutions".

„Până în anul 1935, în România, au funcționat continuu, pentru musulmani judecătoriile religioase (*kadılık*). Din păcate nu am reușit să

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*aflăm dacă festivitatea cununiei avea sau nu loc în aceste instituții”.* (Önal M. N., 1997: 163)

During a research on this topic with the National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, fund The Muslim Cult I found out that even after 1916, which was the year when the Crimean Tatars got the Romanian citizenship (İsmail, N., 2017: 442) religious ceremony still had an important place in pre-wedding. Analyzing documents, I noticed that they also performed the official wedding, which was fulfilled at the Town Hall or Village Hall.

As documents found with the National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, fund The Muslim Cult prove, in the first decades of the 20th century, religious wedding used to take place in the mosque or at home, in the presence of *kadı* and two eyewitnesses. From the official documents owned by the National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, fund Muslim Cult I found out that the official documents were written in Romanian language.

At the beginning of the 20th century, as proved by the registered wedding document, religious wedding was the equivalent of the official ceremony: *Registered no.4731 from 26 october 1926* (Figure no. 2)<sup>11</sup>. Investigating some marriage documents issued in Constanța (town harbour on the western shore of the Black Sea) between 1920-1929, we found out that religious wedding was performed inside the mosque – Constanța, *Anadolchioi camı* (Romanian spelling) or at home (see Figure no. 3)<sup>12</sup> by the *kadı*, with two eyewitnesses, in accordance with the Muslim cult.

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<sup>11</sup>Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fond Cultul Musulman, nr. inventar 116, pag.184 (*National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, fund The Muslim Cult, no. inventory 116, pag.184*)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pag.26

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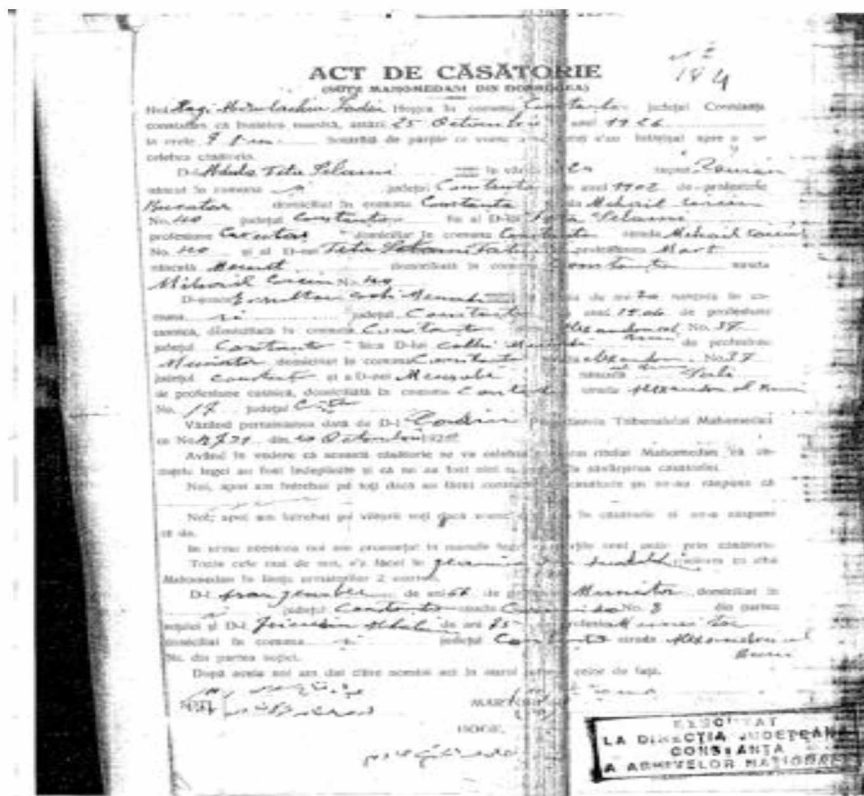


Figure no. 2: Marriage Document Registered no.473 /26 october 1926, Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fond Cultul Musulman, nr. inventar 116, pag.184

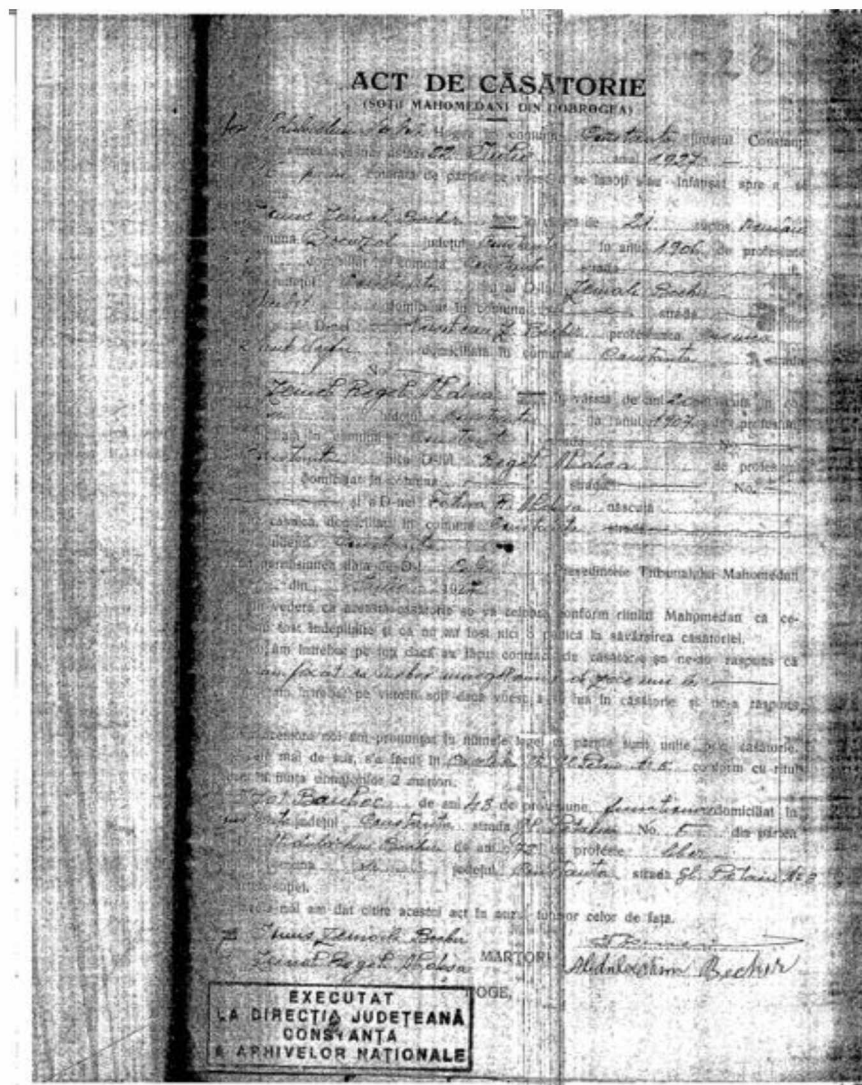
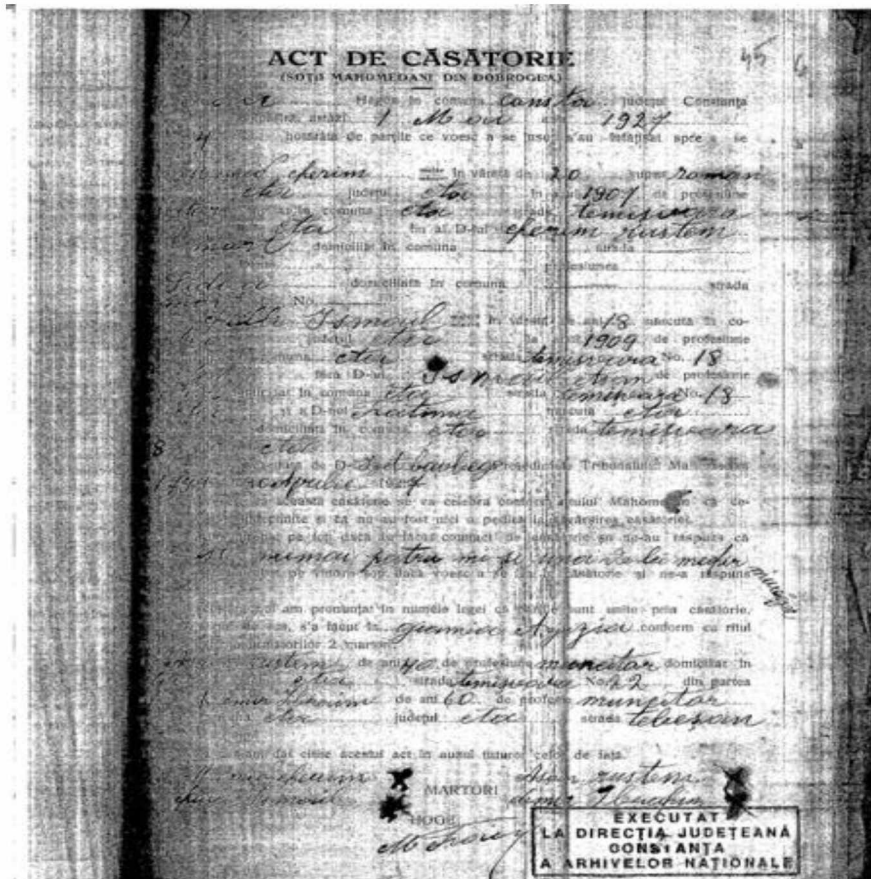


Figure no. 3: Religious ceremony took place in the mosque – Anadolchiocamii or at home 1927 Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fond Cultul Musulman, nr. inventar 116, pag. 26

For example, at that time, *kadı* İzet Baubec (Romanian spelling) was the President of the Muslim Court (see Figure no.4)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pag.45



**Figure no. 4:** Izet Baubec (Romanian spelling), the President of the Muslim Court, 1927, Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fond Cultul Musulman, nr. inventar 116, pag. 45

As shown within the Enclosure no. 2, the marriage document was a registered official document.

From some analyzed documents, I found out that with some wedding documents it was even stated the amount of *mehr*, which ranged from 3000 lei to 4000 or 5000 lei, and even to 10000 lei.

With documents consulted, I identified that many of wedding documents are signed in Ottoman writing (see Figure no. 4 and Figure no.5)<sup>14</sup>, which states that people even though owned Romanian citizenship, still used Ottoman writing.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pag.3

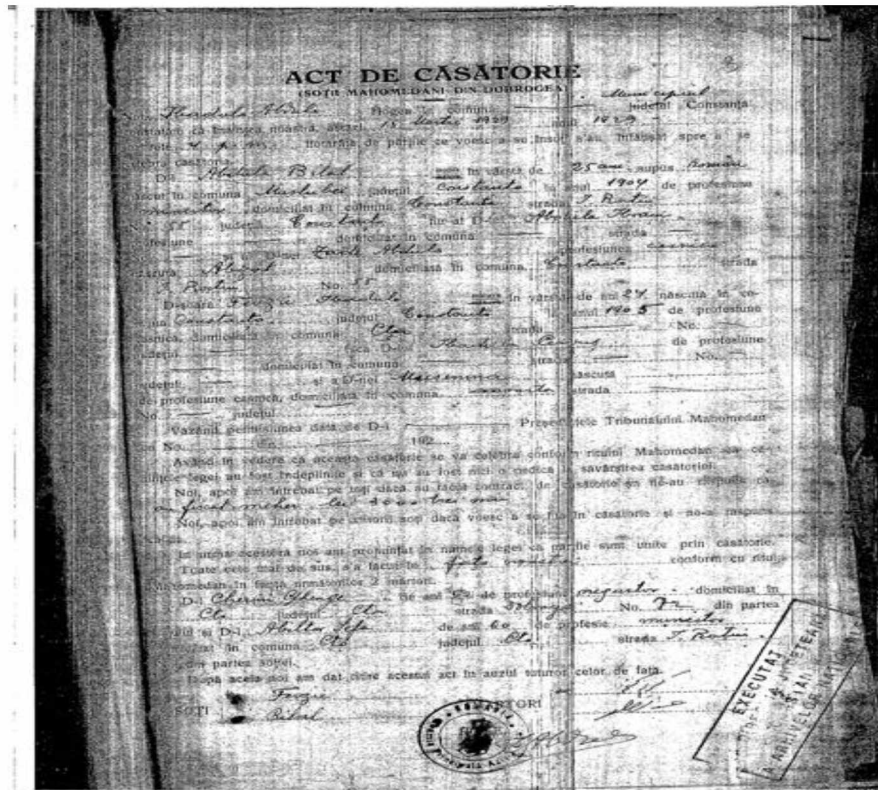


Figure no.5: Document signed with Ottoman writing, 1929, Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fond Cultul Musulman, nr. inventar 116, pag. 3

From documents presented and analyzed it is obvious that religious weddings took place according to old customs, nothing had changed until 1929. Even the payment of *mehr* is mentioned in the official document and the religious ceremony itself took place at the mosque. The fact that the marriage document is signed in Ottoman language, and sometimes fingerprint is used proves once again that almost nothing had changed, only the document was issued in Romanian.

### 3. Muslim Weddings in the Interwar Period and Communist Regime

Analyzing documents found with the Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fund Cultul Musulman and Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Constanța, fund Colectia Registrelor de Starea civilă - Dobrogea, Primaria Orașului Negru-Vodă, Consiliul Local Negru-Vodă, I identified that beginning with the 1930s there were many changes in official wedding and religious wedding. The most important thing that

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caught my eyes was that the official wedding became more important than the religious wedding and the mayor replaced the *kadi*.

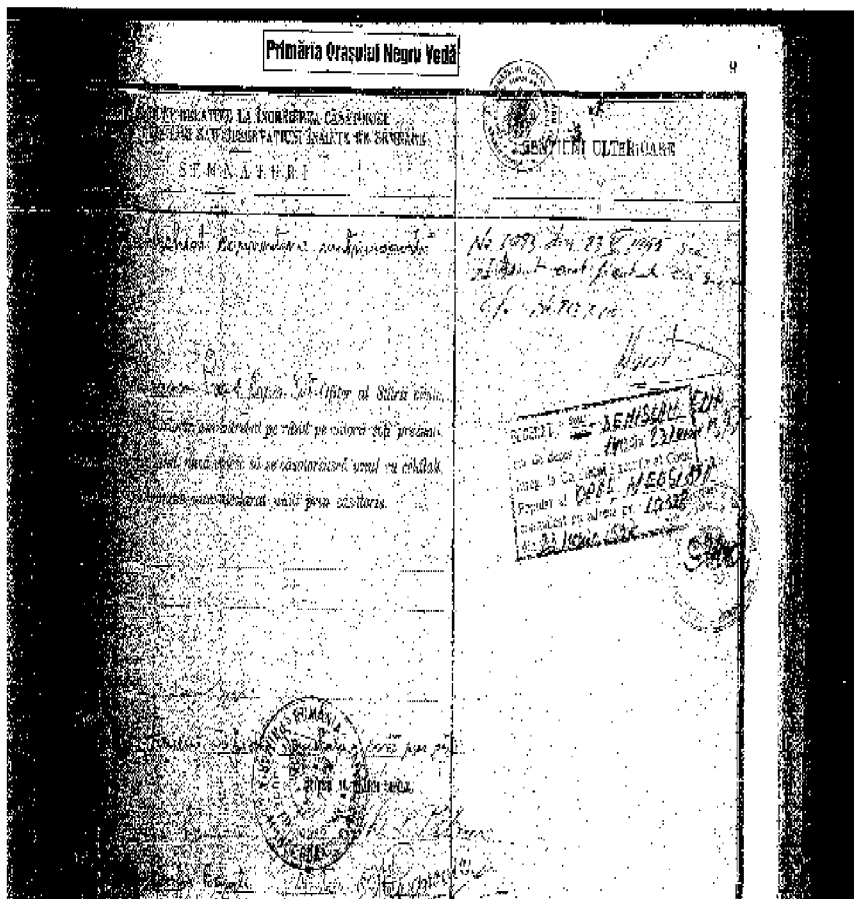
All Muslim couples got married at the State office and the event was performed by the mayor, inside the Town Hall. The religious wedding was performed at home witnessed by the family members. The wedding document is in Romanian language and it includes a note about the religious confession of bride and groom, and nothing is said about *merh* (Figure no. 6)<sup>15</sup>.

8

Primăria Oraşului Negru Vodă

| Nr. înregistrării | LOCUL, data, anul, luna și ziua căsătoriei         | PREZENȚA, vârsta, profesia, naționalitatea, locul și data nașterii   | PREZENȚA și NOMELE PĂRINȚILOR                    | PREZENȚA, vârsta, profesia, naționalitatea, locul și data nașterii   | PREZENȚA și NOMELE PĂRINȚILOR       | PREZENȚA și NOMELE PĂRINȚILOR              |
|-------------------|--|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
|                   |  | MIRELUI  |  | MIRESEI  |                                     |  |
| 1                 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6                                   | 7  |
| 7                 | În casa Popovici<br>1933. Decembrie 30. ora 12.00. | Do. Zehin Seiti<br>Veli Demirhan<br>De 34 ani, plugar<br>Muhamedan.<br><br>Născut la 22 Octom<br>brie 1909. Com.<br>Barabani.<br>Domiciliat în Com.<br>Barabani Județul<br>Constanța | Seiti Veli Demirhan și Soara Seiti Veli Demirhan | Do. İsmet Safa<br>Smetula<br>De 28 ani, casnică<br>Muhamedană.<br><br>Născută la 9 Noiembrie<br>1905. Com. Agulea<br>Jud. Constanța<br>Municipiul Comuna<br>Tataru Județul<br>Constanța. | Sofia Smetula și Maruşe S. Smetula. | Comandant Lechevici Ismail și Soara Bogdan |

<sup>15</sup> Arhivele Naționale România, Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN, fond Colectia Registrelor de Starea civilă - Dobrogea, Primaria Oraşului Negru-Vodă, Consiliul Local Negru-Vodă (National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, Fund Civil Records Collection - Dobrogea, Negru-Vodă Town Hall, Negru-vodă Town Council).



**Figure no. 6** Arhivele Naţionale România, Direcţia Judeţeană Constanţa a Arhivelor Naţionale, DJCAN, fond Colectia Registrelor de Starea civilă - Dobrogea, Primaria Oraşului Negru-Vodă, Consiliul Local Negru-Vodă (National Archives of Romania Constanta County District, Fund Civil Records Collection - Dobrogea, Negru-Vodă Town Hall, Negru-vodă Town Council).

During communist regime, after 1944, Muslim couples got married at the State Office, the ceremony performed by the mayor, inside the Town Hall; there is no mention about religious confession of bride and groom on the wedding document

In conclusion, as time went on, the importance's order of the two weddings – religious and official reversed; the religious wedding and wedding

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customs were partially forgotten, while the official wedding, performed by the mayor, inside the Town Hall, became the most important.

#### 4. Crimean Tatars wedding customs in the early of the 20th Century

This part of the study is based on interviews conducted by me in Constanța. The main interviewers are Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi)<sup>16</sup>, whom I first met on August 2016 and Şukran Denislam (Raşid)<sup>17</sup>, maternal and paternal relative.

As mentioned, both of the interviews are part the field research “Study on education, language and culture with the Crimean Tatars in Dobrogea”. The aim of the field research was to find out which of the minority’s customs are still in practice; if the new generations speak their mother tongue, which is the level of knowledge of history and culture related to Crimea and its history held by the ordinary people of Crimean Tatars minority, as it is well known that the ethnic minority of the Crimean Tatars is an endangered minority<sup>18</sup>. The aim of my project is to find out as much information as possible about the daily life of the minority in the Crimean Tatar villages, in the interwar period and the communist regime, before the last voices of the Crimean Tatar minority disappear. The objective of this part of my research is to show wedding and pre-wedding customs role to keep family all together.

The great surprise of the field research was Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi), a former primary school teacher, whom I did never meet before the interview. This interview was conducted in Crimean Tatar language, as the interviewer studied in the Crimean Tatar language; all generations after 1940s never studied in their mother tongue. Mamuriye Gazi introduced herself and stated:

“My name is Gazi, Mamuriye from the Mustafa family, I was born in 1934, in the village of Akbaş, Albești. I went to primary school before the Second World War (1940-1941), in the village, and the secondary school, one year, *ruştiye*, to Mangalia. At *ruştiye*, the secondary school, in the morning we studied in Romanian, with Romanian teachers, but that was before the Second World War. In the afternoon, we studied in mother tongue, in Tatar language, we had Koran classes, mathematics, geography - we learned

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<sup>16</sup> Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi), borne in 1934, Akbaş village, Constanța County, Romania

<sup>17</sup> Şukran Denislam (Raşid), borne in 1932, Kanlıçukur village, Constanța County, Romania.

<sup>18</sup> For more details see İsmail, N., A short presentation about the Romanian Crimean Tatars, in *Endangered Turkic Languages*, vol.3

Romania's geography in Tatar language and natural sciences. When we left school, prayers were said, and we stood. At the insistence of the teacher from the village, I attended the Tatar pedagogical school, the gymnasium, in Constanța, in 1955”

Mamuriye Gazi confessed to me that all her life she wished to publish her book about wedding customs (*toy* Crimean Tatar language spelling) and *sunet toy* customs with the Crimean Tartars, but she never succeeded.

“Here is what I wrote (and brought my manuscript), in Tatar, about our weddings, about the toy sound. I gave all this to the union, I also gave it to Professor Yusuf, but they did not receive it from me. They asked me where I got them from, but I lived through all this. I had nowhere to read them. There was no such thing then”.

And then I interfered:

“But the manuscript is in Tatar language”, “Yes, that's right, in Tatar, but I studied in Tatar and I wanted to pass on for children, as you see, they know nothing about our customs”.

Then, very disappointed, she showed me the rejected manuscript, which was in the Crimean Tatar language. The editorial staff of the Uniunea Democrată a Tătarilor Turco-Musulmani din România (UDTTMR) rejected her manuscript on the grounds “it is not typed”. From the beginning, Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi) amazed me with her stories about weddings and *sunet toy* in the Crimean Tatars villages during the interwar and communist times.

The second interviewer is Şukran Denisleam (Raşit), as Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi) belongs to the same generation and she had the chance (they were the last generation) to study both primary and secondary school (*ruştiye*) in Tatar language

“My name is Şukran Denisleam, married Raşit, I was born in 1932, in Kanlıçukur village, Grăniceru. I studied primary school in our village, and secondary school, two years, *ruştiye*, in Negru-Vodă”.

Şukran Denisleam (Raşit) talked about kinds of weddings: “Well, during the communist regim, in Dobruja, marriages practiced by kidnapping the girl, was a common event for marriages in the '40s and '50s. By mutual agreement, the lad kidnapped the young girl, and the young girl went to the house of the man she loved and settled in his house. In general, the kidnapping took place when both the young girl and the lad came from poor families. There was a lot of poverty in communism.

Everyone was poor. The communists had taken everything from our houses, we had nothing left”.

Following the discussions with Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi) I found out she knew a lot about wedding traditions and customs in general about the Crimean Tatars. She was so excited to talk about her knowledge on pre-weddings, weddings and traditions in general, that she didn't need the questions from the questionnaire. Ever since I interrupted her from her stories because I lost the series of stories, which for me seemed detached from a fairy tail.

She started:

“Well, the wedding is an event of great importance, and in the past, in our villages, all the inhabitants attended the wedding, whether or not they were invited. In the past, weddings lasted for several days, each day had its own traditions, which were strictly followed. In the past, the wedding ceremony, especially in the country, was sophisticated, full of mystery and agreed by both families. A couple would not marry without the permission and blessing of both families; there is an exchange of financial agreements accepted by the members of the two families. In Dobruja, in our Muslim society, the groom pays the bride's family a sum of money named *mehir*. *Mehir* is the amount of money that covers the costs of the perspective bride and, in case of misunderstandings in the couple and the two break up, the amount must cover the bride's costs. In our villages, among the Tatars, in Dobruja, there is a very strict custom that forbids marriage between a lad and a young girl, if they are father's relatives up to seven grade, and mother's relatives up to third grade. In contrast, in Dobruja, mixed marriages between a young Muslim and a non-Muslim are quite common. You know, in Muslim society, women and men do not have the same rights. With Muslims, the man and his family must take the initiative, while the girl and her family remain passive. The first step comes from the young man and his family”.

She talked about traditional marriage proces:

“In the past, traditional marriage meant a series of preparations and phases that were strictly respected by both families. The pre-wedding phase stars with - the search for the bride - the family of the potential bridegroom begins the search for a suitable young girl asking first the relatives, then close friends and finally the neighbors. The process of finding the bride was done in great secrecy and care was taken to include those who could pay a visit to the family of the future bride. The matchmaker had to be a respectful person, so that he / she (uncle, cousin, neighbor, sometimes even the young person's mother) could not be rejected by the bride's family. In the second stage - *agreement to marry* - the prospective groom's family must ask for the young girl in marriage. During the agreement to marry, the bride to be opens the room's door and asks suddenly „*Kârdan mi? Zarardan mi?* (It's

an yes or it's a no?). When the answer is „*Kârdan*” the bride to be, is expected to cook lunch for the groom's guests. Feasting the prospective groom's relatives, with food cooked by the bride to be, seals the second phase of the pre-wedding customs. The prospective groom's relatives, upon arrival at the house of the bride to be, offered traditional delicacies, among them *katlama*, a special home made pie. *Katlama* was offered to guests immediately after the agreement of the parties. In the past, the prospective bridegroom was not present at the time of this ceremony. During this event they discuss *mehir*, the amount of money to be paid to the bride. At the end of this step, each member of the prospective groom gets a *şeyre* (see Figure no.7) and a *testimal* wrapped in a *şerik* (see Figure no.8) from the bride to be's family.

The next step after the ceremony of agreement to marry is *the engagement*, named *nişan toy*, which, actually sets the price offered by the prospective groom to bride to be, and wedding's terms. Engagement ceremony is held in the bride's home and costs of engagement are financed by the bride's family. The prospective groom's relatives, upon arrival at the house of the bride to be, bring with them the traditional *bokhşa*, or *satu* - gifts from the groom's family to bride and her family, alongside with *katlama* pie. *Bokhşa* consists of presents, in general clothes for family member”.



Figure 7. Hand made *şeure*  
made *şerik*

Figure 8. Hand

## 5. Wedding Customs with the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja

Mamuriye Mustafa (Gazi) stated:

“And now the wedding begins. In the past the wedding ceremony lasted four days and three nights, from Monday to Thursday or from Thursday to Sunday, financed by the groom’s family.

The first day is named *kobete toy*. On *kobete toy*, a special meal is cooked by meat got sacrificing the animals sent by the groom. Feasting the wedding guests with *kobete*, a special pie cooked for them is a specific custom. The wedding guests brought presents, which usually consists of money, small objects for kitchen and home made pie, *katlama*. Bride, together with her family, organizes a sort of exhibition made from the gifts received.

The second evening, named *kına gecesi* (hena’s night) is held in the night before the wedding day in the bride’s house. Young girls and lads of both

families usually joined the event. It was a tradition, that in the *kına gecesi*, a young unmarried girl brought a hand made *mendil* (handkerchief) and gave it to the young man courting her. *Mendil* is the proof of acceptance, and at the same time it stands for young girl's skills, as she wanted to marry. *Mendil*'s lace border is hand made by needle and colored silk thread.



Figure no. 9 Hand made *mendil* (handkerchief)

Then follows the event named *kelin alma*, fetching the bride, which combines joy, happiness, dancing, singing, feasting and having a wonderful time. Everybody is invited to *kelin alma*. Guests go to fetch the bride, on foot if the bride's house is in the neighbourhood, or by horse-drawn cart, if the bride is from a remote village. During this event the following customs were strictly observed:

(i) Before the bridal procession starts, an elderly poor woman, who helps the bride, named *markhia kudaghi* (Crimean Tatar phonetics) leaves the bride's house with bride's dowry and goes straightforward to the groom's house, village.

(ii) Then the bridal procession moves to groom's village. Together with the bride in horse-drawn carts they arrive at the bridegroom's village.

(iii) At the entrance in the village, the bridal procession is expected by some young men, relatives with the groom. Young men on horse back go straight to bride's mother and ask for *şeyre and mendil*.

(iv) Bridegroom's mother makes special preparations for the bridal procession. A lad from the village, groom's close relative, on horse back meets the bridal procession at the village's entrance, and he announces the bride's

arrival loudly shouting „*Mujde: Khelin kheldi!*”. For *mujde* and his performance, the lad is rewarded with *Dokuz*. *Dokuz* is a home weaved fabric in a rectangular shape, edges embroidered with golden yarn made by the bridegroom’s mother for the special moment of *mujde*.

(v) The bridal procession is led by a lad riding a horse, carrying the holly book, *Koran*. At arrival, the young man asks a certain amount of money, which is the next step in selling the bride.

(vi) When the bridal procession arrives at the groom’s house, a member of the groom’s family brings a hen, the symbol of fertility. The hen is given to the bride’s sister or sister-in-law, and turned around the bride’s head, as hen stands for luck, happiness and fertility.

(vii) Following these customs bride goes straight to *koşe* and waits for her house to be arranged by the elderly women of the bride, who came as wedding guests to the groom’s house, to set up a special place for the young married couple.

On the last evening - *Khıyeu camı* (groom’s soul friends), the young unmarried men together with the groom gather in the stable or in the house of a neighbour. This evening means joy, feasting, having a good time and playing a lot of games.

In the end of the evening, two young men, groom’s best friends together with the bridegroom, enter in the house, which was decorated by bride’s relatives, who in the meantime finished their work and left the house. Groom’s duty, before entering the house is to perform a blessing prayer. Then the two young men accompanying the bridegroom look for the bride’s mother and ask for *şuberek*. Custom says that she has to be ready with *şuberek* for bridegroom’s friends.

The most famous dishes provided at the wedding receptions in Dobruja is *katlama*, a special home made pie along side with *kobete*, another home made pie baked from the meat of the sacrificed animals sent by the groom, and the famous Crimean Tatar dish prepared from minced meat named, *şuberek*.

## 6. Instead of Conclusions: Challenges in keeping wedding customs

Today, the modern state and its authority replaced the traditional authorities (including family) in many domains: education, social protection, legal regulation of marriage, divorce, child birth, inheritance, hygiene, health and security. During communism period the state attempted to monopolize all the responsibilities and to create a genuine paternalism. The communism regime has deeply affected the evolution of family in Romania. Its brutal and painful social upheavals brought a new type of social organization, a new economic, social and political environment and a new life. All these changes had a great influence on traditional Crimean Tatars family structure.

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Today, our traditional cloths, specially decorated rooms for wedding ceremony are preserved in museums. There is a special room arranged and decorated with the UDTTMR, the association of the Crimean Tatars of Romania. There are some traditional cloth and jewellery owned by “Muzeul de Artă Populară”, Constanța (*Museum of Folk Arts, Constanța*).

Our study suggests that we need knowledge about their traditions, customs, family structure and also, changes that occurred inside community. Some pre-wedding and wedding traditions and customs changed under the influence of factors such as industry, commerce, urban development, school instruction, hygiene, standard of living, people mobility, secularization of social organizations and the gradual development of state's social role.

Today, in a Romania, a European Union country, and in where the existence of the Crimean Tatar community is in question, they being an endangered minority, their wedding customs are also in danger of extinction. In the 21st century, when the process of acculturation and assimilation dominates, the community is in danger of losing its ethnic identity and altering its cultural identity.

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