

## CHAPTER 4. THE RITES OF THE LIFE CYCLE

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## CHAPTER 4. THE RITES OF THE LIFE CYCLE

### **Birthing Rituals and Parenting**

The relationship of Mongols, including the *Altai Uriankhains*, to their children, especially to their young, were very soft and delicate, which was due, in particular, to the faith in the rebirth of deceased relatives in their own relatives. In addition, the idea was common on the unusual status of children, allegedly to three years of age (until they begin to speak) belong more to their creator and protector – zayan, i.e., “were” closer to the world of ancestors (spirits), rather than to the community of people. Therefore, from birth to adulthood and all life of a child is accompanied by a whole set of complex and various magical ceremonies, rituals, expiatory sacrifices, safety measures and protective charms. Let’s start with maternity rite.

One of the major attributes for the concept of happiness among the *Altai Uriankhains*, was the presence of children in the family. The more of them, the better for the parents. Hence the birth of a child – one of the most significant events in the life of any family, genus and clan. The news about the upcoming addition of the joy was perceived not only by their spouses, but also all their relatives.

Birthings are usually held in a yurt of mistress. Immediately after birth, it was given low-fat and unsalted soup with finely crumbled chunks of meat to a woman who delivered a newborn. During three days in a yurt is kept the fire which, according to legends, defended the mother and baby from the evil spirits.

Woman who gave birth was considered unclean (*buzartay*), so it was forbidden to touch the fire, and other things, in particular, to a home dish. She used only her intended cup in which she was fed a specially prepared meal. Before returning to normal domestic affairs and once again come to the fire, the woman required to attend the rite of purification (*ariutgah*). Usually it took from 3 to 5 days after birth. During this rite the first time washed and newborn child (*huuhed ugaah*). Rite of bathing and putting the baby in the cradle marked the initial stage, symbolizing the communion of the newborn to the family. Ritual action of the act consisted of granting a new member of its own “house”, i.e., cradle, and property (gifts, including pets), and naming. Rite of washing the child was held as follows: monk, who was invited on this occasion, to cope on their holy books, the fate of the unborn and advised to invite to a celebration of a certain number of children, and so were all of the same age. In addition, he

advised, how and what to feed them and give presents. On notions *Uriankhains*, the invitation and hospitality of children could provide a good neonatal and long life. So when guests gathered in the yurt, children, closely followed by the fact that not anyone of them turned out to be bypassed, discontented or resentful.

Baby cradle (*ulgii*) among the *Altai Uriankhains* enjoyed the special respect, and the attitude to it was very superstitious. An old cradle can be used only from parents of the husband, and not from other relatives, in particular, from the parents of the wife. Even the brothers did not borrow child cradle from each other. New cradle made only in case if the husband's parents did not survive the old one. Manufacture of a new cradle engaged only after birth. To her as the amulets were hung specially made miniature hammer (*alh*), knife (*hutga*) and arrows (*arc, sum*). It has to have the fallen umbilical cord of the baby wrapped and sewed it into a leather bag and hung to the belt, which stretched from the head board to the bottom cradle board. The number of such bags would indicate the number of childbirth that was carried out. Sometimes they are kept in the headrest of the mother (*der*).

When the children grew out of the cradle, they slept with their parents or elders, and then, becoming a little more – on the floor.

**Naming.** The special ceremonies connected with the naming among the *Altai Uriankhains* did not exist, but it usually happens during the ceremony of washing the baby and putting him in a cradle. The name of the newborn was given by his maternal uncle – nagats or grandparents – midwife. Very often the name of the child given by parents, pre-agreed. They believed that the name of a person connected to the future, i.e., fate. Therefore, given names had associated with the positive semantic value: Zhargal – Happy, Baatar – Hercules, Gan – Steel, Zorig – Brave, Tsetseg – Flower, Naran – Sunny, Sara – Moon, Altan – Gold, Mungun – Silver, Buyant – Noble, Chuluun – Stone, as well as the names that were intended to promote longevity: Urtnasan – Many years, Munch – the Eternal etc. According to the semantic values, names for girls and boys were different. Very often, parents appealed to monk, so he gave the name of the newborn. These were mainly names of Tibetan-Sanskrit origin: *Sambuu, Dolgor, Baasan, Badam, Dulma* etc.

For a child with frequent illness, parents do not call by his or her name, so as to not attract the attention of evil spirit. In such cases, they come up with a nickname with a negative meaning, for example, Zavaan – Dirty, Haltar – Unwashed, Hara – Black, etc. Often, in order to get loose the evil spirits were used names of animals as the names for them: Hulan – wild ass, and Bukh – Bull, etc. As researchers note, such a tradition of naming was common among almost all people of the Central Asia and Siberia.

In order to protect the child from evil spirits, *Altai Uriankhains* avoided

laudatory characteristics to the child. For example, it was impossible to say: what it is cute, nice, and beautiful, etc. Instead say: what it is ugly, ugly, bad, stupid, etc.

Caring for children and their upbringing among the *Altai Uriankhains* had its own specific features. The mother began breastfeeding starting on the first birthday. Baby was also given to suck a piece of sheep's tail fat (*khonini suul*).

Any breastfeeding regime did not exist, the child was applied to the mother's breast on the first demand. In the case of a shortage of breast milk baby fed by boiled goat's milk. Childlessness has seen as a misfortune not only by spouses, but also by members of all related staff. When the family had no children, *Altai Uriankhains* resorted to magic rituals and all kinds of tricks. For example, desire to have children gave birth to custom of their adoption. Large families willingly shared their children with those with whom they did not have. Usually adopt children of their relatives and in rare cases – children from strangers. If the children were orphans, adoption of them was considered natural and honorable thing. Therefore, the *Altai Uriankhains* orphans are not left unattended, they adopt.

**Rite of the First Haircut.** The next phase of socialization – the transition a child from infancy to childhood – usually refers to the age of three. Completion of “infancy” is noted by the haircut of the uterine hair (*sevleg urgeeh*), while keeping the two strands at the top on both sides of the crown for girls and a single strand on the crown for boys.

The first haircut reflects sexual differentiation, it not only marked the transition into the next age group, but also the alienation of the child from the “world of ancestors, deities, and to establish closer relations with the social collective. All close relatives on the paternal and maternal lines were invited at the ceremony. On this occasion, as usually monk is invited, who presided over the entire course of the rite. He would determine what day and what time to begin ritual actions on this issue, and point out to the man, who was first to cut the first lock of the child. He was chosen from among the close relatives of the child's parents. Head hair of the child would be sheared in the course of the sun. Latest hair would cut by the child's parents, first by his mother, and then by his father. They gift cattle to the child. Ceremony ended with a small feast – *sevlegiin nair*. The cut hair is kept in the headrest of the mother. Here the hair is kept up until the parents were alive. This was done in order to “touch wood” of the child. After the death of his parents a son or daughter, are adults, got his or her hair and kept in the *yurt*. Before reaching the age of fifteen a girl braided two braids. After 15 years, she braided over 20 braids. They were already a girl's braid.

After the first haircut, boys and girls differed by sex. Toys for girls were colorful pebbles–*ungiin chuluu*, and wool balls – *nooson bumbug*. Among homemade toys for boys were miniatures of bow and arrow, figurines of various

domestic and wild animals as well as figurines of tools: small wooden spades, forks, and rakes, etc. Children loved to sculpt toys from clay: figurines of animals, birds, people, household utensils. Great popularity, especially among boys, enjoyed the game-shagai (ankle bone). These games were quite diverse, each with its specific combination and regulations. It was common a lot of moving plays for children to play, reflecting the economic activity of the *Altaic Uriankhains*: racing – *hurdan mori uraldah*, *catching a horse with lasso-mori uurgalah*, and throwing hats – *malgai khayakh* etc.

*Altaic Uriankhains*, like other Mongols were very fond of children. On the one hand, they were brought up freely; on the other hand, the parents demanded unquestioning obedience from them, who gives it to them from early childhood. Severe punishments of children for any misconduct were not accepted, let alone apply rough physical punishment, as it was considered harmful to the health of children. *Altaic Uriankhains*, like other nomads of Mongolia, in the process of its historical experience had developed the ethical principles, rules and regulations in family and society, which are assimilated by every generation since the childhood. One of the main goals of education was to inculcate children with childhood obedience and deference to parents, respect, attention and sensitivity to the elders, especially to the elderly. Disobey, to show contempt, arguing with the older and moreover being rude to them, they considered impermissible. In the presence of elders, especially strangers, it was considered impolite to talk loudly, shout, interrupt or interfere with the conversation. In the presence of guests, children usually not only noisy, but tried not to show up: in the summer left the tent, but in the winter they would be sitting somewhere in a secluded place.

They also had their own rules of etiquette, which taught children from an early age. It was considered ugly, obscene scuff, stomp, slam the door, knocking, waving the arms during the conversation, take these or other indecent poses. Kids received traditional notions of human virtues and vices in daily life by the example of senior. They have highly prized human qualities such as diligence, honesty, fairness, kindness, humility, and courage which parents tried instilling into their children.

## **Wedding Cycle**

The wedding is not just a family celebration, but also it is an important event in the social life of the *Altai Uriankhains*. Many relatives of the bride and groom, and representatives of various sectors of society would take the most active participation in the processes of the wedding. The great importance was attached at the wedding to the magical and symbolic rituals, whose purpose was to ensure the newlyweds a happy, long, and prosperous life.

As we have noted previously, the most common rules of marriage was the

marriage matchmaking for bride–*ber guikh*. The initial moment of signing the marriage, like any other, was a conspiracy – *sui tavikh*. The whole cycle of wedding ceremonies would begin from this moment.

It was divided into three stages: pre-wedding, wedding and post-wedding. Rehearsal included the following ceremonies: *ber songokh* – choice of bride, *aman medee khurgekh* – oral transmission of information on courtship, *am khadag tavikh* – presenting a *khadag* to the girl’s parents; *zus, khadag tavikh* – presenting a *khadag* with glue, *ger burekh* – construction and installation of a new yurt for the future spouses, *or oyokh* - making bedding suite.

Ritual acts that were committed during wedding ceremonies included the following: *chigee uuh* – drinking fermented mare *koumiss*, *hurgen khuvtsaslakh* – ritual of dressing the groom, *gezeg buulgakh* – unwinding girlish braids, *ber morduulakh* – farewelling the bride, and *shar narand morguulekh* – ritual worship of the sun.

Post-wedding stage included such rituals: *khoshig tailakh* – the removal of the curtain, *ber torkhomchlokh* – bride and groom visit the yurt of the parents, *ber berluulekh* – performing prohibitions by wife, etc.

There is a very similar, to those of the *Uriankhains*, wedding ceremony among *Altains* of Mountains *Altai*, Russian missionary V.I. Verbitsky at the end of the XIX century wrote about it: “Wedding ceremony among the southern *Altai* people are wonderful and breathes with the local poetry” (Verbitsky 1893: 98). The same can be said about the wedding ceremony for the *Altai Uriankhains*. Starting with the courtship, ending with the arrival of the bride to the yurt of groom, the traditional wedding among the *Altaic Uriankhains* represents a series of colorful rituals and customs.

**Matchmaking for the Bride and Pre-Wedding ceremonies.** Now I turn to a specific account of these ceremonies. The first of them is *ber songokh* – choice of bride. Parents for boys who turned 16–18 years old, discussed among themselves the question of marrying his son and about where to look for a bride. Boys of this age tend to assist the father in all economic matters and were considered fully capable of independently run the economy. Girls from 17 to 18 years of age were considered as the normal age for marriage. However, surveys of our informants, we can conclude that boys marry at the age of 18–25 years old, and girls marry at 17–21. A decision about marriage and choice of bride was fully within the competence of parents of boys. According to the stories of our informants parents of the young could discuss the matter with their close relatives like maternal *tsusan turul* – blood relatives, and paternal *yasan turul* – relatives of the bone. Most youth was assigned a very modest role in these matters. The big role of parents in deciding marriage and the choice of a bride some researchers contribute to the features of nomadic life and the existence of a nomadic clan exogamy

(Shalhakov1982: 14). This is quite applicable to the *Altai Uriankhains*. Exogamous restrictions apply to relatives on the paternal line. Marriage within the paternal kind is not allowed. The genus can be divided only after seven – eight generations from a common ancestor – the ancestor, when the race grew, bringing a large number of members. Then a special ritual division of the genus is performed and it would result in two separate exogamous families, which already can share brides.

Rules of exogamy were forced parents of young men to seek a bride in a different way. For this father rode all the yurt, where in his opinion, were supposed to be a girl, suitable to his son. If anyone of them makes him sympathetic, he was consulted about it in the first place with his wife. When you select a future bride, parents first would find out the girl's family tree (*udam*): they are interested whether there were cases of childless among her ancestors and close relatives. This issue was of great importance, because procreation was the cherished dream of all parents and the general meaning of marriage. If they found some information that among her distant relatives were cases of childless, terminally ill and lunatics, these facts are made to think seriously about her candidacy. Further, parents of the young are interested in such issues as good manners, hard work of parents and relatives of the girl. The financial position of the family and the exterior of the girls did not play an important role in choosing a bride, but of great importance was attached to her personal qualities: charm, sociability, good manners, ability to communicate with people of different ages, primarily from senior and junior, appreciated her hard work, resourcefulness, the ability to sew, and run the household. Parents of young man trying to get the daughter, who continued to procreate and at the same time would be a good worker (Lkhagvasuren: 1988: 97). After making the selection, the parents of boys usually turned to lama, who defined the possibility of marriage between boy and girl over the years of their birth, guided mainly by Tibetan astrological books. It was believed that the years of birth of bride and groom should be in the line with each other (iveel lived).

Appeal to the lama in deciding about the marriage was considered obligatory for parents of young. Only with the approval of lamas they decided courtship. Lama will also determine which day will be favorable for sending the first matchmaker for the girl's parents (Zhukovskaya 2000: 112).

The first stage in the process of courtship called *aman yg hurgeh* – transfer of verbal information regarding the courtship. Parents of young men as the first matchmaker would choose a solid reputed person from the close relatives.

On the appointed by lama day, the person would arrive in the yurt of parents of the girl for a leisurely conversation with them, it makes the message that the family of his kind would be willing to promise in marriage of their daughter to

the son. After completing its mission the first matchmaker would return. After the departure of the first matchmaker, the parents of girl began to discuss the matter among themselves. The final word on this issue belonged to them, especially mother of the girl. They also could discuss the matter with relatives at both mother and father of the girl. Watching a wedding ceremony among the *Altai Uriankhains* at the end of the XIX century, G.E.Grumm-Grzhimailo noticed that parents are "... not consulted with her daughter regarding this very important issue for the daughter, but personally and irrevocably decide her fate" (Grumm-Grzhimailo 1926: 175). According to our informants, parents, of course, asked the consent of his daughter. S. Badamhatan wrote that parents of the girl would reply to the first marchmaker from the boy's side with the following answer: "... we can give the answer three days later, we learn whether our daughter agrees or not" (Badamkhatan1960: 5). Daughter usually frightened and refused, because proposal for it often happened unexpectedly. She had to be persuaded to teach and think about the future of marriage. In practice, on this subject could speak with her only the mother. According to our surveys, we can assume that the first response to the marchmaker is given usually by the mother. On the primacy of the mother in this important issue wrote, D.D. Shalhakov, who has studied wedding rituals of Kalmyks. He thought it was a relic of matriarchy among the nomads (Shalhakov 1982: 11). The girl's parents, when discussing marriage with daughter, attached the great importance to good manners, hard work, practical skills of cattleman, hunter, and the personal nature of the future groom. If they have the negative information about the young man that he is rude, not sociable, a bad worker and not a very good hunter, these facts led them to think seriously and often cause as the failure to the parents of the future groom (Lkhagvasuren 1989: 213). If the groom turned to be as liking, they, too, for his part turned to the lama, to clarify the possibility of marriage. While the girl's parents are learned regarding the future groom and parents of the young man would prepare for the next visit, in order to commit a ritual of offerings of the first *khadag* (*am khadag tavikh*).

After a few days following the first visit of the matchmaker, two men of the advanced age would attend parents of the girl, who are also among those of the closest relatives of the young man.

The person who performed the function of the first marriage broker not supposed to come again. The purpose of the visit this time was to test the mood of the girl's parents at wooing their daughter. Matchmakers pretend that they arrived to their yurt by accident, as it is often the case among the nomads. However, parents of girl usually guess who and why visit them. After a friendly chat over the tea, the eldest of the guests filed his snuffbox to the father of the girl, as usual did the nomads at the meeting. Generally, the nomads exchange snuffboxes expressed relative position of the parties. If the father of the girl did

not give in exchange his snuffbox, as usual, which meant that parents reject the wooing of their daughter. In this case, the father of the girl would take guest's snuffbox, snuff, and silently would return to its owner. All ends at this. Parents of young men no longer send the matchmakers to the yurt of the girl's parents. If the girl's father gave in exchange his snuffbox, which meant that the girl's parents look favorably upcoming matchmaking.

Only after this young man's parents would send another distinguished man, too, of senior age from the closest relatives of the young man to the girl's parents, handed him two khadags of blue color and other gifts, including dairy products including milk vodka *arkhi*. Thus, without probing the mood of the girl's parents, the parents of boys were hesitant on the third visit. A new visitor, the girl's parents took as a very distinguished guest, was seated in the north - western side of the yurt (*baruun khoimor*). The girl's parents knew that this man came to get their final approval. After exchanging greetings and snuff boxes, a guest turned to the girl's parents with the words: – “We have a good holder of lasso, and you have a skillful mistress. Let's admit them together!” – “Uurga bariach ni manaid baina, uyalga oyoch ni tanaid baina!” Saying these words, friend knelt down and brought to the girl's father an expanded khadakh on outstretched hands. Adoption of the khadag by the father of the girl meant that the parents of the girl agree to the courtship of their daughter.

By giving so *khadag*, a guest got up from his seat and began to lay out the sacrificial gifts to the home altar in the yurt of the girl's father, and outside of the yurt he would commit sprinkling milk on all sides, dedicated to the spirits, and protectors of the surrounding terrain (*khangai, delkhii*). Accordingly, his mission ended.

In very rare cases, the girl's father did not take khadag and pulling a thread from one end, brings it back to the presenter. He this way expresses his opposition to give his daughter to marry into this family.

**Rite of Presenting Khadag with Glue Zus.** After completion of the above ritual, the sides began to prepare for a very important event in the long cycle of wedding ceremonies: to perform the rite of presentation to khadag with glue zus, which sounded like *zus, khadag tavikh* in Mongolian. This ceremony is performed in the yurt of the girl's parents. Before that, the parties chose their mediator – *bergen*.

Both sides are independent of each other, turned to Lama with the question, what a day for them would be most suitable for presentation to the rite of *khadag* with glue. Lama not only determines the day, but hour of departure of the delegation from the yurt of young man, and time of their arrivak of the yurt of the girl's parents. Lama has even pointed out the color of the robe for *bergen* of the young man, with which *bergen* should enter to the yurt of girl's father. On

that day and hour indicated by Lama, the delegation, which consisted of 5–6.5 men from among the close relatives of parents, including *bergen*, visit to the yurt of the girl's parents. The delegation was led by the father of young man and this time the youth himself is not included in the delegation. On this occasion they carried along with them a blue *khadag* with the special size and a piece of adhesive *zus*, dairy products (cheese, milk), and a whole carcass of a freshly prepared sheep specially slaughtered the day before. The parents of the girl also long prepared for getting ready to receive the guests with the special mission. The close relatives of the girl's parents consisting of 5 to 8 persons were supposed to attend the delegation at the time of arrival in the tent the girl's parents. The delegation was greeted as the most distinguished guests, and invited to the north - western side of the yurt (*baruun - hoymor*) which is common among all groups of the Mongols. After exchanging greetings, the guests were treated to tea, milk, dairy products, etc.

After this, the father of the young man knelt down and brought the girl's father an expanded *khadakh* on his outstretched hands with a piece of adhesive *zus* holding with the right hand over the *khadag*. A piece of glue symbolized the strength of the future marriage of the youths. The girl's father takes the *khadag* with the words "Let your status will prosper!" – "Ta bugdiin amar amgalan delgerekh boltugai!" Following it, the father the father of young men began to bestow gifts to the girl's parents – *Sui beleg*. The value of *Sui beleg* depended on the viability of the young man's parents. It would be necessarily present a tile of tea, and silk for national *devel*. Gifts were also presented to all presented in the *yurt*. This ceremony was accompanied by a small feast – *Sui belgiin nair*. *Altai Uriankhains* traditionally observe the terms of this feast (*naira*) in their yurts. All guests were laid to sit only on the right side of the tent, but the owners – on the left. All participants were feasting on seniority: the oldest was seated as a sign of respect for them in the northern part of the yurt, and the young – is closer to the exit. Refreshments are also served by seniority: to the oldest are served the first and to the youngest the last. Refreshments carried only by specially designated girls. *Archi* and *koumiss* were served by a designated middle-aged man (*Sonch*). He was appointed by the master of the yurt, from among their relatives. He had to entertain the guests by his eloquence, so that they are not bored. All feasts must prepare a feast for all – *tavga idee*. They were placed on the table in front of the most honored guests, and they were treated everyone in attendance. Feast began with a tea party. Then all were treated to a little *tavga idee* then are offered with mare's milk, and meat dishes. All are treated with *archi* at last. It was served only to adults, young people were not supposed to be drinking hard liquor. This order is respected in all their feasts, which were held frequently, especially during the warmer seasons. If someone – that violated this order, his act was condemned,

and if someone – or do not know when and what he must do at such feasts, then look in the eyes of those present are not very well-mannered. In addition, the banquet necessarily invited *eroolch* – individuals who are well read good wishes – *erool*. After drinking of *archi*, when spirits rose, all began to sing at feasts. They would sing lingering songs by the length of tunes which are a little bit different from broaching the songs of the other Mongolian nationalities. Our informants claimed that singing at banquets usually began with a song about the *Altai*. The feast was usually supervised by the master of the yurt. At his command *eroolch* would read *erool*, and the rest were singing and drinking. Guests from the side of young man treated those who present at the banquet with items brought with them. On the same day, the guests returned home, they are not supposed to be to stay the night in a yurt of the girl's parents. It was the first out of the cycle of the wedding feast among the *Altai Uriankhains*.

After this, boy and girl are officially become as the bride and groom. During the banquet, the parties agree on the percentage of participation from each party to prepare a new tent for the newlyweds. By the custom, the bride prepared the interior, and the groom – the very tent. After the conclusion of the ceremony *zus khadag tavikh* parties started to prepare for the wedding. Traditionally, the wedding can be played within one to three years after the betrothal. According to the stories of our informants, after the boy and girl were officially announced as bride and groom, groom's parents send him to the bride's yurt. He stayed there for some time. During this time the bride's parents had an opportunity to assess the future in-law, future spouses themselves – to get accustomed to each other. There are reports from various sources, including “Secret History of Mongols” (Sokrovennoe skazanie 1941: §66) regarding the existence of such a custom among the Mongols in the distant past. Upon studying of wedding ceremony of Tuvians, L.P. Potapov wrote that after *zus, khudag* / in Tuvian it is called as Tukhten – I.Lkhagvasuren / bride might host the groom and to join with him in the sexual intercourse before the wedding feast. This is not condemned publicly. So often happened that the promise in marriage a girl becomes pregnant before marriage, and sometimes even manage to give birth, and it was not considered shameful (Potapov, 1969: 237–238). Our informants completely denied such a possibility among the *Altai Uriankhains*. The reason for this, they explained this way: the girl's parents, even at this stage of the courtship reserves the right to refuse to the groom, if he proved himself not very good during the stay.

After the stay in the bride's yurt, it comes a time when supposed to install a new yurt for the future spouses. This ceremony is called *ger bureh*. It has described in detail by Mongolian ethnographer G. Tserenhand for different ethnic groups of Mongols (Tserenhand 2005: 57–60). Parents of the young man prepared all component parts of the yurt: wooden frame, matted hair and ropes for

various purposes. The wooden frame of the yurt can be purchased two ways: either by an exchange of cattle for those who are specifically involved in their preparation, or if the boy's father was a carpenter, he could make them himself. Felts for the *yurt* had to prepare themselves, because while they had not been done on the exchange. Preparation of felt required a lot of time and effort. It is made from sheep's wool in the traditional way. When all was ready, the groom's parents propose on the date of installation of a new *yurt*. The relatives would gather on this day at the yurt of the parents of the groom. They would bring various supplies needed to install the yurt: Felt, hair cords, etc. In addition, they brought with them dairy products, cottage of cheese *byaslag*, dried curds *aaruul* intended for the feast, which is arranged at the end of work. Before the start, all were treated to tea. In the construction of a yurt *Altaic Uriankhains* build its wooden parts in the strict order. The new yurt is traditionally set to the south - east of the yurt of groom's father. Failure to comply with the rules of construction of the yurt could have negative consequences, so work is overseen – either by the father or someone from relatives of the groom, who knew all the rules.

Pattern of felt mats, cross-linking of individual plates to cover the yurt led by the mother or anyone of the close relatives of the groom. All work, including sewing and cutting out pieces of felt, should be completed by sundown. During the construction of the yurt was coming mother of the bride, accompanied by *bergen*, and a few of girls – assistants to help in their work. They brought felt, large needle and thread made of camel wool. Mother of the groom prepared a cover for the smokehole (*urkh*) for new yurt out of felt brought here. When the cover was ready, it was performed the rite of consecration of smoke tube – *urkh myalaakh*, ritual stretching of felt mats for smoke tube, the rite of good wishes for the yurt - *ger erookh*. The rite of consecration of felt cover for smoke tube is done as so: someone from the relatives of groom's father appealed to the groom's uncle on the maternal side – *nagats akh* with the words: “The river starts from a spring, a relationship begins with a maternal uncle. Please prize and consecrate the urkh!” – “Usni ekh – bulag, urgiin ekh – nagats bilee. Ta urkh myalaaj ugnu uu!” At the same time, he hands to him a cup of koumiss– *chigee*. Having taken a cup of koumiss, uncle, first sip a little bit, then started to sprinkle koumiss the *urkh* first at the center, then at and around the four corners. Sprinkling of koumiss meant that the the *urkh* has been sanctified. After that spread out the felt cover for smoke tube on the ground, and let seated on it with a number of small children. It symbolizes of what that in the new yurt will be a lot of children. Children fed and by this the ritual is ended. When the installation ended, the ceremony of good wishes starts for a new yurt - *ger erookh*. The father of the groom is seated at the northern part of the yurt (*hoymor*). Upon taking his place, he turns the attention to *eroolch* with the words: “Please provide the good wishes for the new yurt” -

“Shine gert eruul hairlana uu. At the same time, he hands to *eroolch* a full bowl of milk with the khadag, silver coins and a few of wheat grains (*khukh taria*).

The *Eroolch* wrapped in khadag coins and wheat grains and bind them to the middle of smoke hole (*toono*). Then he began to sprinkle the milk all the wooden parts of the yurt, starting with *toono*. Upon finished sprinkling milk, he began to read the good wishes of the new melodic yurt *erool*. At this time, the yurt was added milk tea and different food items and started a small feast. After this both sides began preparing a bedding for the newlyweds. Usually the wedding was arranged in the autumn. Autumn in the life of nomads are generally regarded as the most successful time for all parties. Over the summer, cattle would eat off the pastures, and each family had time to stock up plenty of dairy products. Usually the wedding played on so-called white days of the lunar calendar: the day of white horse, the day of the white sheep, and the day of the white rabbit day, etc. The groom’s parents made inquiries at the Lama. The monk based on the year of birth both of bride and groom determine which day will be fine for the wedding feast. By the *Uriankhain* tradition at the time of the wedding, *khotons* of the fathers of bride and groom would move closer to each other. *Khoton* of groom’s father at that moment would be at the final preparations for the wedding.

A few days before the official date of the wedding the bride would suit a small play –*chigee uukh*. The first to whom she came to visit was the brother of the mother. The bride and her companions have to stay overnight with the relatives. The next day, before their departure, the bride’s relatives made a gift. Further, it would conduct a variety of entertainment ritual contest among the youth. There were many. We can give the names of some of them: *shine ger daviruulah* – an attack on a new yurt, *khivs bulaaldakh* – struggle for a rug, *khurgen haltiruulakh* – rolling the groom, *chumug bulaaldakh* – the struggle for tibia, *ram’s tolgoi shideh* – throwing sheep’s head, etc.

The participation at least in a few of these races involved was required. The first of these was a contest *shine ger daviruulakh* – an attack on a new tent. It began as follows: When the bride returned from a visit to relatives along with accompanying her girls, they were greeted on the road by a few clever, strong guys on good horses from the bride and was accompanied by almost to the tent of her father. Then these young riders rode in *Khoton* of groom’s father, raced past the new yurt of the newlyweds.

Riders on the fly tried to break off the hair rope, skirted a yurt or disrupt the felt cover of the smoke hole of the new yurt. They even tried to wreck the lattice wall of the yurt. All those who at this point were near a new tent, by all means tried to repel the dashing horsemen. Riders repeated the raid a few times. If the attacker managed to break the rope or pull off the hair felt covering of the yurt, the groom’s side was considered as defeated.

Ritual contest *khivs bulaaldah*-struggle for a felt mat began: smart, strong young man from the groom's side on a good horse went to the yurt the bride's father. On the saddle of his horse lay oblong felt mat, which ends tucked under Stir-ups rope made of leather. In the middle of the path he waited four boys from the bride, also in a good race horses, two by two, facing each other at a distance of two-three paces from each other. A young man with litter in the saddle should slip between them. If he succeeded, then won the groom, and if he had selected her, the victory is getting for the bride.

The symbolic meanings of these games were different. For example, as our informants argued, defeat of the groom in the competitions *shine ger daviruulakh* – an attack on a new yurt, and *khivs bulaaldakh* – struggle for a rug, could cause a postponement of the wedding date or even the bride's parents to refusing to give the girl to marry to her fiancé. Parents of the bride want to check the seriousness of the intentions of the groom, and if she lost, then it for the bride's parents meant that the groom is not yet ready to take their daughter into their family, i.e., the groom is not trying very hard.

The night before the wedding in *khoton* of the bride's father came a group of guests from the groom's *khoton*. It was headed by the groom himself. He carried a hunting rifle on his shoulder. And in the distant past it was the battle bow with arrows. Before the arrival of the guests the bride's side did the following: at the threshold across the door from the inside of the yurt the bride's father placed bag (*tulam*) of goat skins filled in with water. First to a yurt enters the groom. He had left his gun at the entrance on the right side of the yurt. If the groom's reaction is fast, he could not step on the bag and go around his side. This way, the bride's relatives, "checked" dexterity, ingenuity and resourcefulness of the groom. The guests are treated with tea, dairy products, and cooked mutton. Before the groom is placed a treat on a separate plate, which necessarily had to include a sheep tibia (*shaant chomog*). After the guests ate and drank, the mother of the bride began to wear on the groom a shirt (*tsamts*), especially sewn by her for him. Then the bride's father put on a new groom *Uriankhain* male upper robe (*devel*). This is to how to perform the ceremony of dressing the groom – *khurgen khuvtsaslakh*.

**The Wedding Ceremony.** Last night at the parents' yurt the bride would spend differently than usual. This night she sleeps on a parent's bed, which was located on the left side of the yurt. Next to her, went to bed one of the younger sisters or best friend. Beds are closed with the curtain of white. Before going to sleep the bride should perform ceremonies of *gezeg buulgakh* – unwinding girlish hairstyle and replacing it with the wedding one. Among the *Altai Uriankhains* unmarried girls wore twenty braids: on top – two, on the temples – three, above the forehead – eight or at the back – four. Untwist girlish pigtails helped her wife of older brother and girls who accompanied her on a tour to her relatives. When

unwinding of girlish braids, the bride would pretend to resist, and ones who are untwisting were pretended if they use the force. The girl's hair combed and braided now only seven dreadlocks, which is her wedding hairstyle.

***Farewelling the bride*** (*ber morduulakh*). The next morning, at sunrise, 7 to 8 of riders, including two *bergen* by the groom would come for the bride. At the time of their arrival, everyone who was in the yurt of the bride's father, went out to meet them. In the tent there were a bride, her two *bergen* and some girls of the same age as the bride. Bride would be sitting on parent's bed behind the curtain. Relatives and friends were sitting around. Outside the door of the yurt there was a young man with a stick in his hand. He was "guarding" the bride. The bride's parents and some close relatives who came to farewell her, stood at the entrance to the yurt to the right. And those people who came together with groom for the bride standing waiting for the groom takes his bride from her father's yurt. They stood on the left side of the entrance to the yurt. First, the groom and behind him one of two bergens would enter the yurt of bride's parents. When the groom and *bergen* approached the entrance, a young man who stood at the entrance of the yurt with a stick in his hand pretends to prevent them. They also pretended to persuade him.

Having come into the tent, groom and *bergen* would not sit down and talk among themselves. The groom would come to his bride and say: "let's go" – "yavya!". He had to make a bride from a yurt on his hands. At this point, the girls who sat around the bride, pretended that they did not want to give her to him and "pushed" and "beat" him. Bride also pretended that she did not want to leave the parental *yurt*. The groom pretended that he had to force her to take away. When the groom comes out of the yurt carrying the bride over his arms, one of the riders who came along with the groom fiance, tucked it into his horse with a white suit. Thus the bride and the groom are on the same horse together.

Then all sat on their horses and cortege touches the road. At this point, the girl's father takes out the tent full bucket of milk, and her mother started sprinkling milk (*tsatsal urgukh*) after the bride and groom. By tradition, the bride's parents did not go along with them. When the cortege touched in a way, the bride should not look back toward the parent of the yurt. *Altaic Uriankhains* believed that if she look back, her happiness will stay in a yurt of the parents. Therefore, a man who was carrying her on his horse, closed her eyes when she unwittingly made an attempt to look back. Ahead the cortege drove the groom himself at a hunting rifle with a bipod pubescent. Behind him rode the bride. The horse on which rode the bride led one of the wives of his older brother of the groom and two bergens of the bride followed right on her horse. Before the bride rode two men, covering the bride's face, stretched out before her curtain that hung the night before in front of her bed. The curtain was attached to two sticks. It is

interesting to note that other Mongolian ethnic groups, whom the *Altai Uriankhains* lived in the neighborhood with, also closed the curtain of the bride's face, but it was done differently (Ethnography of Mongolia, 1996: 137). Russian missionary V. I. Verbitsky who observed the wedding ceremony among the mountainous *Altai* people at the end of the XIX century, wrote on the existence of such a curtain among *Altai* people during the wedding. Here's what he writes: "When everything is ready, then designate a day on which the bride would move in with her fiancé. Two young men /pals/ on horsetop approach the bride's yurt, each of them in the hands of a small birch trees, and the curtain is attached to them. The bride is brought atop of a special, and saddled horse. These buddies will go to the bride's side, holding in front of her fortified by birches curtain, until a new yurt of her fiancé" (Verbitsky 1893: 102).

Our informants stated that *Altai Uriankhains* did it to protect the bride from the evil eye. According to sources in the distant past to carry the bride into the open, especially to show it to a stranger among the nomads was considered dangerous. An example is the famous episode of "Secret Legend" when Esugaj-ba'atur, head of the tribe Tayichi'ut, stole from the Met in the steppe merkity Eke-Chiledu Oelun his bride, which he drove in a closed carriage, hiding from prying eyes, and you accidentally see Esugaj-ba'atur looking into this cart (Sokrovennoe skazanie 1941: §54–56). Kidnapped bride became the wife of Esugaj-ba'atur mother and creator of the Mongol empire of Genghis Khan, which nevertheless does not justify the act of the thief.

On the way a wedding convoy made a traditional ritual contest *chumug khuukh*-chasing rider, having kept with him tibia of sheep (*shaant chumug*). It was held as follows: a few people from the groom's side on the route of cortege make a fire, and they would burn juniper. Immediately there was a race-horse ready, on which sat a clever young man. Under the belt he had picked a sheep tibia. When approaching a wedding convoy, he raced toward the yurt of groom's father. In pursuit of him rushed the rider from the team of the bride. His task was to select the tibia of the ram from that rider. When the riders have sped past the wedding convoy, the groom took off a gun from the shoulder while not getting off his horse made a shot in another direction. By gunshot, the horses raced even faster. Chasing the rider with the tibia continued at a distance of about – 5 km. If the second rider was catching up on the first, and tried to wrest with power from him a bone. With a little of luck, the bride's side wins, but otherwise - the groom's side. Often, these competitions organized from three to five times.

***The rite of worship to yellow sun*** (*shar narand murgukh*). When the groom left for the bride, one member of the family watches for their arrival, standing atop a high mountain. Noticing approximation of the wedding convoy, he shall inform it to the parents of the groom. Wedding procession at first did three laps

clockwise around *khotons* of groom's father, and then stopped at the entrance to the groom's yurt.

All dismounted from their horses, groom and the bride put on their knees, a white felt, which stretched in three steps from their new yurt: the groom was standing on the right side, and the bride on the left facing the entrance of the yurt. A traditional ornament of the *Altai Uriankhains* was laid with wheat grains at the center of the felt. Once they took their places, a tubular bone of sheep is presented to them, and the groom would hold in his left hand a thicker part of the bone, and the bride holds in her right hand a thinner part of the bone. Behind them an eldest of the brides would stand and she spoke in a loud voice:

Bow to the yellow sun  
Bow to the tibia of sheep  
Bow to the four parents.

Uttering these words she bent slightly the heads of the bride and groom ahead, touching by her palm of her hand to their heads. The young men bowed in silence four times to the direction of sunrise. While all these happened, one of the men who drove the curtain in the face of a bride on the way of a wedding convoy, managed to hang a white curtain just below the bed on the left side of the in a yurt of the newlyweds. When the worship of the sun was over, the bride and groom got up from their seats while preparing to enter into their new yurt. The first entry is made by a bride and then – the groom. Behind them parents of the groom enter into the yurt. Entering the tent, the bride sat on the floor on the left side of the yurt before the hearth. Here, by a sign indicated by a daughter she did three bows in the direction of the hearth, and then went along with the bride behind a white curtain. There, she changed into clothes of the married woman. Her hair was loosened and made into two braids. Bergen helped her. From there, she came out in full attire of a married woman and began to brew tea. To brew the tea, she initially stoked heavy fire in the hearth. Then she put the iron pot on the hearth, and the wife of the elder brother uttered a wish: “May the family be always in abundance!” – “Khais ni khusamtai, kharaach ni utaatai baikh boltugai!” She has also helped to cook tea, preparation of which was somewhat different than the other Mongolian peoples west of the country. Tea is brewed among *Altai Uriankhains* in the following way: first cooked regular tea without milk. Then the tea is completely emptied from the boiler in a large wooden bucket and an empty pot was poured milk in the right quantity. When the milk is boiled, content of the wooden bucket was poured to the boiled milk and heated the mix to a boil.

When the tea was ready, the young wife regaled them to all present in the tent. First she served tea to the father of her husband and then to the mother. This

procedure for serving the tea she complied with all life. The tea is then poured to another on seniority. Everyone was offered tea, she again went behind the curtain. When she found herself behind a curtain, her husband's father just lifted the curtain in halfway and holding his hunting rifle from the bottom, and three times with a loud voice asked: "hard" – "*Khund uu?*" , "Easy" – "*khungen yy?*" Every time sitting in the tent people responded "seriously" – "Hund". At the third attempt, he lifted the curtain completely. At the same time he uttered those words of praise: "Let them look wider!" – "*Anisnaa khalia, atgasnaa tavi!*" When he uttered these words, the young wife went out there and sat down beside her husband at the northern part of the yurt. At this time, her sister poured to her tea. While she drank tea, the father of her husband would get up from their seats and secured *khadag* on the top open. His example was followed by the guests. Thus began the wedding feast. I must say that this feast was not prolonged. It was not supposed to drink milk vodka *arkhi*. The father of the husband was poured, but he did not drink, but only symbolically just took a sip. Drank only tea and mare's milk. completion of the wedding ceremony declared one of *bergens*.

After the departure of guests *bergens* do the cleaning in a yurt. Then one of them went to close the top felt cover of the yurt. When she returned to the tent, they all begin the preparation for the marriage bed suite: unfolded three layers of bride's felt mattresses with a green border, on top of them lay three layers of groom's felt mattresses with a border of red. Large headrest (*ikh der*) was placed at the head, drawing the face to the hearth. Then it was covered with a blanket. Upon finishing the making of the marriage bed, newbeds sat on a bed and fed them with sheep's cervical vertebra, which had been pre-cooked and hung on the upper end of the right wall of the yurt (*khaniin tolgoi*). Each of the newlyweds to three times bit off chunks of meat with their teeth and ate, after which they were placed on the bed and covered with a blanket. This ceremony is called the joining of head pillows (*der niiluulekh*). *Bergens* then removed from the yurt. The eldest of them for some time remained near the tent of the newlyweds. Making sure that everything is normal in the yurt, she soon went to sleep, too. Our informants claimed that in earlier times, the eldest of the daughters, leaving usually in the tent to help advice to the newlyweds, in which they are particularly needed in the first wedding night.

The next morning the bride would rise early, and the first thing is open the upper top of the yurt, which is as usually happens in a family of *Altai Uriankhains*. After the opening the top smoke-hole, she tied *khadag* to its hair rope. Then she opened the top smoke-hole of the yurt for husband's parents. After that she started cooking tea in the tent. Ready tea she poured out first to husband, who had already by this time got up and waited for the tea was ready. Served tea to her husband, she then poured the tea in traditional *Uriankhain dombo* and

carried it into the yurt of husband's parents. Thus began the first morning of a young family.

On the same day by noon invited into the tent of all married couples, who served the newlyweds during the wedding. There was arranged a banquet (*bergediy naira*) for daughters, wives, older brothers, wife and husband, all were treated koumiss and arkhi, meat and dairy foods.

**Post-Wedding Ceremonies.** Post-wedding ritual actions began with a ritual removal of curtain (*khushig tailakh*). After the wedding the parents of the wife announced their relatives on which day of the three post-wedding days they are going to celebrate this rite. A large group of guests headed by the father of a young wife would visit the yurt of newlyweds on the appointed day. Specifically for this rite he brought the carcass of a sheep slaughtered on the eve of, and boiled mutton ribs, (it was called *khushignii uvchuu* – breast of curtain), large amounts of dairy products, including arkhi and mare's milk, and various household utensils. Guests were welcomed by the couple and husband's parents at the tethering area. This is the first visit of the wife's parents in a yurt of newly married couple. They are seated in the northern honorable part of the yurt. Parents of the husband placed next to them. Daughter had cooked them milky tea and regaled all with tea, and then dairy products. On this occasion celebrated with a big feast. According to the stories of our informants, it is the biggest feast of the wedding in a long series of wedding cycle among the *Altai Uriankhains*. During the feast, father of the wife got up from his seat and came to the curtain, which still hung in front of the bed of the newlyweds. Father rented a curtain, at which time his mother presented him milk in a wooden bowl. Father sprinkled milk curtain, neatly folded it and gave his daughter. The curtain remained with her as a dowry. The symbolic meaning was to remove the curtain that now in the tent began normal family life of the newlyweds.

Parents of the wife stayed the night with young couples. When the next day her parents were going to go home, mother put a small stone in white and a few grains of wheat which were brought specially from their yurt on the hem of daughter's robe (*devel*).

At the same time she uttered these words: "Be brighter than gold and be heavier than stone!" – "Altnaas ungtei, chuluunaas hund!" It was the wish of happiness for her daughter in her new life. While his mother is not left for home, and the bride did not get up from her seat. Beside her in the tent remained its *bergen*. She sat on her lap. After the departure of the mother, *bergen* took white stone, and grains with the hem of the new wife and hid them in a large headrest previously wrapped in khadag. Newlyweds treasured this gem and wheat grains until the end of their life together. The final initiation of new wife to the clan of her husband, and her transition into the category of full-fledged mother were

associated with the birth of her child.

According to tradition, a return visit of *Uriankhain* married couple to the wife's parents, could only take place after the year, and sometimes even three years after the wedding. Until then, they have roamed away from yurt of his wife's parents. When it was time to visit the parent of the wife, the couple came with gift (*beriyñ khishig*). Then on this trip no one would accompany with. In addition, they did not visit her parents in the season when it was played out of their wedding, but in the other. On the occasion of their visit it was arranged a small feast. After this visit, her daughter could come to the parent's tent at any time. By this it ends the wedding cycle of the *Altai Uriankhains*.

### Funeral Rites

The dead among the *Altai Uriankhains* called "gone" – *taliigch*, who retired to the country of the gods "– *burkhny orondoo odson*," turned into a god "– Burhan bolsón, and gone to heaven" – *tengert khalisan* etc.

Upon submission of the *Altai Uriankhains* death comes from the fact that the human soul left the body as a result of malevolent forces. After the death of a man's soul for some time still keeps in touch with relatives. The seat of the souls of the dead people within a certain time is localized in different ways. It was believed that they could stay in place of the funeral and come to the yurt, etc.

In a family where a man died in the first place was invited Lama. Participation in funeral ceremonies by Lama was mandatory and indispensable. He oversaw the entire course of funeral. In accordance to day, hour of death, year of birth, Lama gave an indication of what day, hour, and in what direction to carry the deceased from the yurt.

Lama came into the tent with their ritual attributes. He brought the sacred book-sudar (Buddhist texts written in Tibetan language), *khengereg* (metal drum), *tsan* (a kind of metal plates), *damar* (instrument like tambour) and *khonkh* (small bell). All of these attributes, he was placed on a small table, which is put before him. Lama sat at the head of the deceased, and read prayers. First he read a very quiet voice, and then his voice becomes louder and accompanied by periodic attacks of instruments. It is believed that the way Lama disperse evil spirits (*savdag*) located in the tent. Lama during the prayer he took a cup of roasted millet and threw them in a yurt in different directions. Contents prayerful reading was reduced to a request that the soul (*syñs*) of the deceased quickly regenerated into a child. When Lama reading texts, relatives of the deceased are present in the tent. Lama spoke to the crowd with comfort.

By the end of XIX - early XX century, *Altai Uriankhains* knew only form of burial ground (*il tavikh*). The researchers noted that in countries where Buddhism is confessed, the funeral rites did not differ uniformly. He depended strongly on

the local national traditions. V.P. Dyakonova wrote that Altaic “body of a man in a dress and with the inventory fit into the extended position on the ground, and then it was placed with stones from all sides” (Dyakonova 2001: 192) L.P. Potapov wrote that Tuvans “dead left on the ground wrapped in cloth or in a wooden box (Potapov 1969: 386). N.L. Zhukovskaya notes that the Mongols” could bury their dead in both the supine and sitting position. Durbets even had a pose of nirvana (Zhukovskaya 2000: 113). It should be noted that the funeral of relatives did not wear special mourning clothes, and were buried in their everyday clothes. Upon return, all participants made a funeral rite of ablutions. Each washed their hands with holy water three times and envelope themselves with smoke of juniper. Then everyone would go through the two burning fire in front of the yurt.

Only after that they might enter into the tent to celebrate funeral (*tsagaalga*). Special dishes for the case is not made ready, and it was simply boiled mutton and put on the table all products which were in the yurt. Before the meal, first it would throw pieces of meat into the fire. Thus, the funeral ended. After the funeral, relatives of the deceased were taken to lamasery—*khuree* large number of dairy and other products for the three-day prayer reading – *khural hurah*. As a gift to khuree were taken a few head of cattle which meant as a sacrifice and pay for the rite.

According to the Buddhist notions, human soul is separated from the body within a period of 49 days of wandering in space, is called as *bardot*, awaiting a new rebirth. When this term expires, relatives of the deceased arranged the wake.