

The Priest in the Village Wedding (Ethnographic Notes)

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The participation of the clergy in domestic wedding rituals, primarily in village celebrations, is less well known than the Church marriage ceremony, which is conducted in accord with a rite that has been worked out in detail. Contemporary research on the wedding ritual completely ignores domestic ceremonies at which a priest is present;(1) questionnaires designed for folklore expeditions do not contain questions aimed at collecting such data. In 1978-1980, however, while gathering ethnographic materials on ritual traditions in the Nizhnii Novgorod province, I discovered to my surprise that it was in fact possible to study this topic. Informants in their seventies interviewed during that period had been born between 1905 and 1908. As children they had witnessed pre-revolutionary weddings and had themselves married in the 1920's before collectivization took place. At that time traditional peasant life as a whole was still somehow being maintained.

Though we had drawn up an extremely detailed questionnaire on wedding customs, like others it did not include any questions about the participation of the priest in domestic rituals. Intrigued by the depth of the questionnaire, local residents began wracking their brains and recounting much that was not included in the questionnaire itself. As a result, it was necessary to add new questions.

And so in the southernmost part of Nizhnii Novgorod province, in the village of Saldamanov Maidan in Lukoianov district, local women provided T. A. Novichkova and myself (who were working as a team in the village) with the following account: on the day of the religious marriage ceremony,(2) as soon as the bride was dressed in her wedding clothes, two strong men went off to the church to fetch the icon of the Virgin Mary. They had to carry the large, heavy icon on towels. One end of the towel was tied to the fastening below the icon, while the other was thrown over the shoulder. Before the icon walked a boy with a torch. The bells were also ringing, since that was the norm when the Virgin Mary icon was carried out of the church.

As the same time, gathered at the home of the groom, the members of his wedding party (in Russian: *poezzhane, družina* etc.) waited, while the godfather (in the local wedding ritual the godfather acted as a best man of sorts) went to get the priest. In his presence the groom's parents blessed their son. At the front of the wedding train (3) rode a man on horseback carrying a rifle; behind in the first cart was the priest, while the groom rode in the next cart with his godfather. When they led the bride to the groom (once he had arrived at the bride's home) and stood them side by side, the priest conducted a special service (*moleben*). That was the reason for bringing the icon of the Virgin Mary from the church. The icon was placed on a bench. Tables, which were positioned close together, were moved apart, so that everyone had a clear view of it. After the service, the bride's parents blessed the future spouses before then icon, and once this had been done, it was returned to the church. One of the men present carried it back; according to our informants, specifically who did this was not fixed in the ritual. The tables were once again moved together, and the participants in the wedding walked behind the tables and seated themselves. Refreshments were served. Members of the wedding procession received just

some wine, but no food. A light appetizer was served to the priest and the deacon (who seemingly had arrived specifically for the service; our informants made no further mention of him).

Refreshments now over, they all rose and set off for the wedding train. The priest went first and once again sat in the first cart. If there were only two carts, then he rode together with the groom and his godfather. If there were three, then he went separately in the first wagon, while behind him were the groom and the godfather and in the next, the bride with the matchmaker, one of the women who had arrived with the groom.

Upon the completion of the marriage ceremony in the church, the priest went to the groom's father's home with the newlyweds. Here, in southern Nizhnii Novgorod province, it was the norm after the ceremony either to conduct the newlyweds to the neighbors' house (*v shabry*: to the neighbors, dial.), or to the bathhouse, where the bride was given the hairstyle of a married woman (*bab'ia pricheska*). The priest accompanied them, walking in front while performing a "water blessing", that is sprinkling holy water. After that he returned home without staying for the wedding feast.(4)

Those who have followed published research on the wedding ritual in the last decades will realize the rarity of the wedding traditions preserved by the residents of Saldamanov Maidan. It raises the question as to whether domestic wedding rituals involving the participation of the priest disappeared from traditional life and memory as a result of the anti-religious campaigns of the 1920's, the ousting of the clergy and their repression and the destruction of churches in the 1930's. But if we recall data about the wedding ritual published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then we find the same picture; on the whole the participation of religious figures in domestic wedding ritual acts was uncharacteristic even then; witness the following clear example; between 1850 and 1852 the "Moscow Province Gazette" published descriptions of weddings from practically every region of this central Russian province. These descriptions were recently reissued in book form [Ananicheva, Samodelova 1997: 37-136], but not a single reference to a priest appears in any of the descriptions, other than in the church ceremony.

Nevertheless in nineteenth-century wedding descriptions, fragments of the material that interests me are there to be discovered. But they are definitely fragments. Thus, in the New Series of The Collected Songs of P.V. Kireevskii, which includes recordings from 1830 to 1840, the priest as a participant in domestic ritual acts of the wedding features in only one of the fourteen weddings described [Kireevskii 1911]. In P. V. Shein's The Great Russians (the earliest materials on the wedding in this work were recorded in the 1850's) the priest plays a similar role in four of the twenty-six weddings described [Shein 1900]. In the second part of Tereshchenko's Everyday Life of the Russian Folk, which evidently contains even earlier material including a description of a Don Cossack wedding reprinted from Kornilovich's Russian Antiquity ["Svadebnye obriady" 1824: 298-335], there are three such mentions of a priest [Tereshchenko 1848]. A complete picture of publications on the wedding ritual in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cannot be given in this article, but there is no sense in this mass of material that the priest is one of the typical participants in pre-marital rites at the bride's home, on an equal with the best man or the godfather acting as master of ceremonies.(5) As a whole, the general tendency is for figures of a religious calling to be omitted from the domestic wedding rituals of the common

people: the peasants and petty bourgeois (*meshchane*). And this is not so much the result of anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet period, but a consequence of much earlier processes.

Thus it appeared that I had at my disposal a few descriptions of wedding ritual featuring a priest participating in domestic ceremonies. The most detailed recordings were made in the central Volga region (the Iur'ev-Pol'skii district of Vladimir province, the Sergach and Lukoianov districts in the south of Nizhnii Novgorod province, and the Elabuga district in Tatarstan), as well as in Perm' province. In these two regions data on priests authenticating ritual acts occurring in the bride's home has been recorded three or four times. There are also isolated instances of this type from Novgorod province [Zimnev, 1865], including the coachman's village of Mshaga [Lapin, 1995: 171-72] as well as from the district town of Pinega and the Don Cossacks.

It would appear that the rituals of interest to us did not just possess a regional character, which might be explained not only by the historical circumstances of the colonization of Russia, but were also prompted by demographic factors, which are no less important, and possibly even more so. The participation of the priest in domestic wedding rituals is reflected in records made in large parish villages, in district cities and possibly in small villages contiguous to them. Both the Novgorod village of Mshaga, located on a major ancient highway, and the district city of Pinega belong to this category of fairly populous centers. For example, V. A. Lapin's designation of the village of Mshaga as having not a rural but a "suburban" (*slobodskii*) or semi-urban, semi-village culture is telling [Lapin 1995: 171-72].

In villages far from churches it would be difficult to conduct weddings according to such a rite. It is also possible, judging from the material on northern Russia, where great distances separate parish centers and villages attached to them (the Olonets, Archangel and Volodga provinces), that this is why the priest was not customarily present in village homes for wedding ritual procedures. There is likely to be an additional explanation for this fact; inviting the priest might have come into fashion later in the Russian north, with the fashion only catching on in populous locations, parish centers and villages close to them; meantime the ritual of distant villages remained true to older traditions [Zelenin 1991: 341]. Although this tradition [has been found somewhat more frequently in the Volga region and the Urals, the number of instances, however, also does allow it to be seen as characteristic of wedding ritual tradition in one region or another as a whole. Therefore, the question of the development of the tradition, as it would normally be resolved by ethnographic science, turns out to be fairly complicated; it is not possible to add much here to the calculation of its territorial diffusion and frequency.

It turned out that I had at my disposal data that fairly definitively outlines two wedding episodes where a priest was required. First, the priest witnessed the betrothal. When the agreement was concluded, then "they invited a priest, who authenticates the handshake(6) by reading from the Bible over them (the future spouses - M. L.)" [Tereshchenko 1848: 267]. In the Sloboda district of Viatka province a most impressive banquet then ensues: "When all the guests are have been seated, the groom comes out with the bride, who carries trays laden with cookies and nuts, offers them to the guests as the priest gives his blessing ... After dinner the priest reads the couple the betrothal prayer, and the guests leave for their homes" [Shein 1900: 472]. Prugavin, describing a wedding in the district center of Pinega in 1850, notes that in the groom's house, before those would

accompanying him set off for the engagement ceremony, they all sat at the table in a pre-determined order, most likely to receive a blessing. They then sat in the same order at the bride's home to observe as her father inquired of the groom: "Is it this bride that you love?" His future father-in-law thus asks the same questions at his home during the engagement that the priest asks later during the church ceremony. The domestic ritual of betrothal seems very close to the church ritual, although according to the author of this ethnographic description, the priest was not present at the former [Shein 1900: 392].

Secondly, the priest was at the head of the wedding procession formed by members of the groom's party on the day of the ceremony, beginning when the wedding train set off from the groom's home and ending with the rites at his father-in-law's home, which symbolize the transition of the girl into "a woman's state" or the anticipated union of the spouses.

This all followed more or less the same plan as in the ritual in Saldamanov Maidan, but there were also a few small differences. For example, in the wedding customs of Shel'bovo village (Iur'ev district in Vladimir province) the procession was headed not by a rider with a rifle, but by the best man's carriage, behind which came a second carriage where the priest and the groom sat. In this ritual the transfer of the bride to the wedding train was preceded by gifts from her, first to the priest, then to members of the wedding procession and only then "is the candle lit, *Dostoino est*"(7) sung and the prayer of dismissal pronounced by the priest" [Shein 1900: 667]. After the ceremony they all "go to the groom's house on foot: the priest wears the *epitrakhil'* (a type of ribbon worn during divine service - M. L.), and bears a cross (behind him the newlyweds follow wearing bridal wreaths).(8) Throughout the procession they sing religious songs (evidently, the church choir accompanied the procession - M. L.)" [Shein 1900: 667]. Upon return to the home of the groom's father's the priest blesses the woman's headdress, which is then placed upon the bride's head, and thereafter the couple is given some food before the priest takes them to the storeroom (*klet'*), where they can be with each other. It is in his presence, as can be seen from the description above, that the purchase of the wedding bed, which has been occupied by the wedding party, takes place [Shein 1900: 667-68]. In the Saldamanov Maidan ritual, despite the similarities with the Shel'bovo ritual, the bearing of gifts to the priest, the procession on foot wearing bridal wreaths to the groom's home and the blessing of the married woman's headdress - the so-called magpie-hat (*shapochka-soroka*) - are all absent. The newlyweds in this village in the Nizhnii Novgorod region did not go to the house of the groom's father straight from the marriage ceremony, but first visited the neighbors (*v shabry*). Nonetheless, the sanctification of the place where the newlyweds would unite occurred in both villages.

In most of the data, there is no mention of a wedding ritual in which the priest is present for a number of different domestic rites, such as the handshake (or engagement) and the accompanying of the couple to the ceremony at the church and then to the groom's father's; either just one or the other occurs. It is only in the wedding ritual from the district city of Cherdyn' [Predtechenskii, 1860] that both occur, and here even a third rite is presented in full. Here the groom's side visits the bride's home three times in exactly the same order: on the day of the engagement, on the day before the actual wedding (*devichnik*) and on the day of the ceremony itself.

Three times the celebrants gather at the groom's home before they go to the bride's. Once assembled, they send for the priest. When he arrives, the priest reads a prayer; and then there follows the ritual of kissing the cross and departure for the bride's home. Once the priest reaches her house, he goes to the anterior corner and places the cross there, while the other guests remain standing at the door and wait for the bride to come out. When she appears, she first goes to the priest for a blessing. Then she stands next to the groom, and gift-giving ensues. At the betrothal the bride gives gifts to the groom and his guests; at the *devichnik* the groom brings his gift to the bride; while on the wedding day an exchange of gifts is not customary. At the handshake the priest also gets a gift; from rich families he would receive a cloth for a new cassock, from poor families he received at least a handkerchief. However, at all three of the groom and his party's visits the girls laud the guests with songs, in fact one of the songs is dedicated to the priest:

You foot, foot of the church,  
 You, the candle on the altarpiece,  
 You, holy Father of ours...  
 Dear ... (laudatory invocation using the priest's name and patronymic followed)  
*Ty stopa, stopa tserkovnaia,*  
*Ty svecha prestol'naia,*  
*Ty sviashchennyi nash batiushka*  
*Svet ...*

[Kireevskii 1911: no. 69]

At the *devichnik* as conducted in Cherdyn', the groom's future mother-in-law was supposed to give the guests pancakes, with the priest receiving the first.

In this district city it was the norm on the morning of the wedding day for the groom and bride to go to church for confession and then to their respective homes for the gathering before the ceremony. The transfer of the bride to the wedding train followed the order mentioned above. After dinner at the groom's father's, the priest takes the newlyweds to the storeroom as he sings prayers, makes the sign of the cross over them, drinks the expected glass of red wine and departs for home. Meantime the guests continue feasting, awaiting the proclamation of the results of the wedding night.

The Cherdyn' traditions described above, the presentation of gifts to the priest during the betrothal and his accompanying of the newlyweds to the storeroom, are also to be observed in the wedding rituals of Pinega, the village of Shel'bovo in Vladimir and the village of Saldamanov Maidan in Nizhnii Novgorod province. But they never all occur together in any of these, but just singly in one or the other.

Wedding songs associated with the priest, including songs of honor, like the one cited above, satirical or "bride's" farewell songs, have never attracted much attention. (9) Created in a style in keeping with the ancient poetic traditions of the Russian wedding ritual, they, with their traditional character, provide fairly solid evidence that the priest had long participated in domestic wedding, at least in the places where such songs existed.

In one of the songs, twice recorded in Novgorod province, the transfer of the newlywed couple from one house to another, possibly from the home of the bride's father to the home of the groom's father, is described in detail. All the clergy participating in the process are enumerated:

That from a house, sir, to another house  
 The rugs are spread, the velvet rugs are spread;  
 That on these rugs, on these velvet rugs  
 Priests are walking, and deacons are walking,  
 Young singers are walking;  
 After them the young hero is walking,  
 Behind him he leads a beautiful maid ...

*Chto ot terema, sudar', do terema,  
 Stlany kovry, stlany barkhatny;  
 Chto po tem kovram, po tem barkhatnym  
 Idut popy, da idut d'iakony,  
 Idut malen'ki, idut pevchiki;  
 Po-za nim-to idet dobryi molodets,  
 Za soboi on vedet krasny devitsu ...*

[Zimnev 1865: 291](10)

In another variant of this song, also recorded in the Novgorod area, we once again find the transfer from one house to another, but in this instance the bride is alone, accompanied by priests and deacons. Judging by this variant, the tradition required that the bride was accompanied to the church for the ceremony by her brother [Rimskii-Korsakov 1977: no. 73]. But in any case, this song definitely attests to the obligatory participation of the priest in ceremonies held outside the church.

In general we should note that the motif of the transfer of the bride from her parents' house is widely developed in wedding songs; however, in the majority of the songs recorded, the groom (as well as his party) or most frequently the matchmaker, rather than a priest, accompany her. This can be seen even in the earliest recordings, for example in the song, "Oh a Candle Burns Hot in the House" (*Akh zharko v tereme svecha gorit*), which includes the following lines:

...Do not cry, do not cry, my child!  
 I am after all not giving you up to captivity,  
 I am not giving you into captivity, I don't want you to be a captive;  
 After all I am giving you in marriage  
 To a smart, to an intelligent,  
 To a white-skinned, to a red-cheeked (man);  
 After all, I am not releasing you alone,  
 I am not releasing you alone, I am sending a wedding party,

I am sending a wedding party, I am providing a matchmaker ...

*Ne plach', ne plach' moe ditiatko!*

*Uzh ia tebe v polon ne daiu,*

*Ne v polon daiu, ne polonit' khochu;*

*Uzh ia tebia zamuzh otdaiu*

*Za umnova, za razumnova,*

*Za belova, za rumianova;*

*Ved' ia tebia ne odnu pushchu,*

*Ne odnu pushchu, poezzhan poshliu,*

**Poezzhan poshliu, svakhu snaruzhu ...**

[L'vov-Prach, 1955: no. 117]

Thus it follows that if traditional wedding songs allow us to consider the priest a long-standing participant in wedding procedures taking place outside the church, then these were narrowly localized traditions. However, the following satirical minstrel song about the priest Emel'ia attests to a broader diffusion of such rituals involving a priest:

The new-fallen snow sank down upon the thawed earth;  
 Along this very new snow a wedding was passing,  
 Yes, a wedding was passing in seven sleighs,  
 And in the seven sleighs, in the sleighs there were seven each.  
 In the first sleigh sits the priest Emel'ia,  
 The priest Emel'ia sits, a cross on his belt,  
 A cross on his belt, a *sazhen'* and a half (11) long,  
 The string of sleighs drives by, protected by the cross;  
 Protecting him who jerks his legs (that is, will die — M. L.)  
 They met this wedding in Mar'inskii Grove,  
 In Mar'inskii Grove, at the beautiful pine.  
 This wedding was performed in Goat Swamp,  
 In Goat Swamp, at Chicken Knee.  
 And the best man and the matchmaker are an axe and a sword ...

*Zapadala porosha na taluiu zemliu;*  
*Po toi po poroshe da ekhala svad'ba,*  
*Da ekhala svad'ba i v semerykh saniakh,*  
*I v semerykh saniakh po semeru v saniakh.*  
*Vo pervykh vo saniakh sidit pop Emelia,*  
*Sidit pop Emelia, a krest na remeni,*  
*A krest na remeni, v poltory sazheni,*

*Oboz ob''ezzhaet, krestom ograzhdaet;  
Kogo ograzhdaet, tot nogami driagaet.  
Vstrechali tu svad'bu vo Mar'inskoj roshche,  
Vo Mar'inskoj roshche, u krasnoi sosne.  
Venchali tu svad'bu na Koz'em bolote,  
Na Koz'em bolote, na Kur'em kolentse.*

**A družhka da svashka – toporik da shashka ...**

[“Rukopisnyi sbornik” 1897]

The sleighs set out for Mar'inskii Grove, a suburb of old Moscow and place of ill repute, where the wedding train might well expect to be ambushed. This audacious allegorical song goes on to cover topics other than the wedding;(12) nevertheless, the variant given here from a manuscript miscellany of the first half of the eighteenth century describes in exact detail the composition of the wedding train, which corresponds to that of the wedding party in Saldamanov Maidan. Since, in one of the variants of the song it is noted that “Grishka and Marinka” were in the wedding train, the song has been dated to the beginning of the seventeenth century [Alekseeva, Emel'ianov, Lozanova 1966; 342]. It may have been composed during the Time of Troubles (1598-1613) or in its wake.

The wedding and wedding procedures are not included in all nine variants of the song about the priest Emelia that have been preserved in print. Five of them make mention of a string of sledges, with the priest riding in the last, more often than not in the seventh; but in one case he rides in the fourth. In the remaining variants, though a wedding is described, the priest is found in the wedding train in only two, the one given above and another, which has been poorly preserved and is barely comprehensible. In another two variants "the priest Emel'ia was walking to meet the wedding train," meeting a procession with horses. This meeting of the train, when the priest came out onto the church porch to greet the newcomers, might have taken place when important guests arrived at the church. From these variants it is not clear whether it was the wedding train that arrived at the church or whether important persons visited the train for other reasons. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in urban daily life in the eighteenth century the memory of the priest as the head of a wedding train was alive: the text from the manuscript miscellany bears this out this fact, forcing us to conclude that it was definitely not a purely local tradition for the priest to participate in wedding rituals conducted outside the church.

If we descend the chronological ladder even further, then we see that in the seventeenth century the participation of the priest in domestic wedding rites was obligatory in royal weddings, whose rite served as a model for others to imitate. One must assume, however, that particulars of the tsar's wedding, such as the arrival of the bride at the palace chambers allotted to her some time before the beginning of the ceremonial ritual, did not exist in the Russian peasant wedding; in the latter case the bride stayed in her parents' home until she left for the church.

According to Grigorii Kotoshikhin, who attempted a general account of the accepted traditions in the tsar's court in Muscovy in the mid-seventeenth century, the archpriest-confessor was present in the tsar's palace



during the "evening celebration" (that is, the reception of guests, corresponding to the *devichnik*, which was held not at the bride's, but in the ruler's chambers); before dinner he blessed the newlyweds with the cross and bade them kiss each other. On the morning of the wedding day the tsar went to the cathedral, received the blessing of the patriarch on the marriage, and then went to the cathedral church where his deceased forebears lay. There he ordered prayers for the dead, asked for forgiveness at the graves of his ancestors before returning to the palace.

At this point they installed the bride in a chamber, to which her parents and others were invited – this evidently stood for the girl's house, to which the groom would come. Before he left his chambers and went to the part of the palace where his bride was waiting for him, the tsar summoned the priest (an archpriest and his confessor), for prayer and a blessing. When the priest had read the prayers and given his blessing, he did not leave, but led the procession to fetch the bride. He was not at the very head of the procession; preceding him were servants carrying bread; behind him walked the remaining members of the wedding procession and, last of all, the royal bridegroom. Before the doors of the room where the bride was, the archpriest blessed the wedding party and the groom and then entered the bride's chambers first.

During the meal the priest sat at the table, reading the Lord's Prayer. He and the wedding party received a light appetizer, "not so that they would eat their fill, but for ritual purposes" [Kotoshikhin 1989: 258]. While the guests ate, women from the groom's party began to undo the bride's braid. The girl, with her hair styled in an unaccustomed manner, presented gifts of embroidered towels. The archpriest was the first to receive a gift. Upon the completion of the meal he read a prayer, and before the wedding procession left for the church he blessed all the celebrants going to the ceremony with the couple. He led the procession to the cathedral; before entering the church, he blessed them all with the cross and left, since he had to prepare for the wedding ceremony.

After the church ceremony the priest takes off his solemn vestments and heads the wedding procession as it returns to the tsar's palace. At the entrance hall near the doors, he blesses all the guests with the sign of the cross. Kotoshikhin does not mention anything more about him, except to note that the archpriest was not present at the announcement of the consummation of the marriage [Kotoshikhin 1989: 261].

The royal wedding, which includes the invitation of the priest to the *devichnik*, the bride's gift-giving to him as well as to other guests, multiple blessings according to the prescribed ritual, this is all very similar to the way weddings in the district city of Cherdyn' were celebrated in the nineteenth century. The splendid royal procession, of course, had many more participants than the wedding train in the "Song about the Priest Emel'ia" (*Pesnia o pope Emel'e*) or in the other wedding song cited above. The priest in these songs is at the head of the procession, but then, as in the royal wedding, servants carrying bread or other members are ahead of him. But he precedes the newlyweds and leads them; that tradition is retained.

If, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the role of the priest in wedding procedures outside the church in the Moscow court had reached a fairly impressive level, then in the preceding period, judging by the "Tale of the Marriage of Ivan the Terrible to Maria Temriukovna" (*Povest' o zhenit'be Ivana Groznogo na Marii Temriukovne*) [Rosovetskii 1976], it was apparently more modest. Although this story is thought to have been written in the second half of the seventeenth century, nevertheless it is possible that the wedding description was composed by an anonymous author on the basis of older material.

According to this last source, on the day of the wedding Metropolitan Filipp was summoned to Ivan the Terrible's chamber to grant permission for the royal marriage and to take the confession of the tsar's chosen bride. When he had conducted the marriage service in the cathedral and read the final prayer, the metropolitan conducted the newlyweds to the tsar's palace, where he conducted a special service and left, after receiving gifts for himself and for all the cathedral clergy. The story does not record whether he led the bride and groom to the cathedral. Whether it was intentional or an oversight that such an important part of the priest's ritual role was omitted is unclear, but one suspects that most likely it was intentional, given that the ritual canon was truly maintained in all other respects.

However, even earlier in the sixteenth century the *Domostroi* (Book of Household Management) prescribed the constant presence of the priest throughout the entire wedding. In this respect the rules for a ceremony at home went further than those for royal wedding rituals in Muscovy. The regulations for this kind of wedding are described in the earliest manuscript of the second redaction of *Domostroi* (1560), attributed to Silvestr, a priest at the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Kremlin.

According to the *Domostroi*, the priest should be present during the engagement, address the future spouses with admonitions and bless them. The day of the ceremony began with the transfer of the bride's bedding to her father-in-law's. In the place where the bed was laid out, the granary (usually situated on the ground floor of the house with living quarters above), the priest sprinkled with holy water the corners of the room and the place the bed was to be put. Since the wedding ritual in *Domostroi* proposes the participation of two priests, one from each family, one may conclude that it was the groom's priest who was present at the time.

With the news that the groom's wedding party was ready to fetch the bride, the matchmaker arrived at the bride's father's house and remained there until they had dressed the girl in ceremonial attire. The priest present in her home proclaims "*Dostoino*," blesses the bride and sprinkles with holy water the area where she is to sit, while waiting for the wedding party. Thereafter he prepares two candles for the ritual ceremony of the betrothal. As he does, the best man is dispatched to the groom to say that the wedding train can leave.

The groom's priest rides in the wedding train, and when the party goes up into the house, he blesses them with the cross. He also gives a blessing to the groom on his own, when he sits down next to the bride. Both priests, "the one that has arrived and the one from here" [Kolesov, Pogochnikova 1991, 1: 146], order the candles to be lit at the wedding location, so that they can begin to undo the bride's braid.

Although the ensuing ritual procedures with the participation of a priest are omitted from *Domostroi*, it is possible to conclude, based on what has been described above, that the role of the priest (or priests) was highly detailed. Priests are further recommended to act in accord with the canonical rule. In this case the priest not only performs the betrothal and the ceremony in the church, but also "says vespers" in the granary. It is also suggested that "in the morning, when the groom leaves the bathhouse, (he should) say a prayer, prime, a special service and the hours" [Kolesov, Rogozhnikova 1991, 1: 152]. Neither the ancient noble wedding rite nor the more traditional peasant wedding includes anything of the kind.

How and why the role of the priest in the Russian wedding ritual was reduced, we will see below, but for now we must note that his behavior in the domestic celebration was strictly regimented by ecclesiastical

regulations; after all, at a wedding a servant of the Christian Church would run across other, non-Christian traditions and norms of etiquette for guests. Early Christian Councils addressed this problem. As early as A.D. 364, a resolution of the Laodicean Council (canon 54) announced that "priests or spiritual figures of any calling should not look upon (events taking place – M. L.) at weddings or feasts, but should stand and leave before the musicians arrive" [Gertsman 1996: 196]. Rule 24 of the sixth Ecumenical Council (A.D. 680) commands that "holy servants, summoned to a marriage, should leave immediately upon the appearance of games that serve to seduce or excite the senses" [Bogdanov 1864: 119].

In the course of centuries this conception of appropriate behavior for the clergyman when he encountered ancient holiday traditions did not alter much. Explaining the prohibitions connected with this, in 1860 the journal, *Guidance for Village Pastors* (*Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastyrei*), recommended the following, "And one need not without cause excuse oneself from wedding meals, for even our Lord Jesus Christ favored the wedding in Cana in Galilee with his presence. It is only necessary for the priest to behave with dignity at the wedding meal, setting an example for others through his restraint in food and especially in drink ... There is a custom among some priests to bless a parishioner's wedding table and then to leave; this tradition is unfounded" [Eremich 1860: 444–45]. The description of peasant weddings from Saldamanov Maidan or Shel'bovo, however, shows that priests actually preferred not to subject themselves to temptation by leaving the feast immediately after performing their protective duties. But it was not this way everywhere. The comment of, evidently, a drunken priest noted by Pushkin, when he offered gifts in return to the girls who had sung a marriage song in his honor at a wedding feast ("Here you go, bitches, take this, do not revile the priest" (*Na te, suki, voz'mite v ruki, ne korite popa*)), attests, of course, to the crudeness of mores [Pushkin 1968, no. 55].

Wedding songs of honor and satirical songs, addressed to the priest and recorded in the countryside, best illustrate the fact that a priestly presence was the norm at wedding feasts, so to speak, on an equal footing with everyone else. These songs were not in any way permeated with religious feeling. Just as they did to other celebrants, they sang of the priest's beautiful clothing and luxuriant hair (his thick beard); everything that might bring their guest health and good fortune:

The priest has a beard,  
 The priest has a red beard.  
 The tsar loves this beard,  
 The tsar strokes this beard ...  
 Do you hear, Father,  
 How we are singing songs to you,  
 How we are doing honor to you, etc.  
*U batiushki borodka,*  
*U batoushki rusaia.*  
*Vot etu borodushku tsar' liubit,*  
*Po borodushke tsar' gladit ...*  
*Slyshish' li batiushka,*

*Tebe pesni poem,*  
*Tebe chest' vozdaem,*  
*i.t.d.*

[Shein 1900: 467](13)

\* \* \* \* \*

The wedding ritual is certainly a conglomeration, components arise at various times and duplicate each other fairly frequently, while some ultimately supplant others. The role of the priest is no exception in relation to the roles of other participants of this ritual that has formed over centuries. But what led to the priest being ousted from domestic wedding rituals?

It is well known that the sanctification of the marriage in church is a later addition; it came into a Russian wedding ritual that had already taken shape. In the church marriage ceremony now established in Russia the priest certifies the marriage, after establishing that the ages of the couple or their parents' relationship do not offer an impediment to the marriage. In weddings, where the priest participated in domestic rituals, he fulfilled additional functions; he placed the bride and groom under the protection of God's powers during the whole of their journey from departure from the parental home to the ceremony and their return to the place of marital consummation.

Similar prophylactic measures, among them especially apotropeic magic for warding-off evil, were generally well developed in wedding ritual. The godfather, usually in the role of master of ceremonies or matchmaker, as well as the godmother (in the north, the *bozhatka*), or the best man could serve as guide, conductor and protector of the newlyweds. The role of the best man, as established in our conception of the role, is always understood in the same way; he is as good a protector of the bride and groom as the priest. There is an abundance of textual material on the role of the best man, including prayers and incantations (*prigovor*).

But it turns out that this type of best man exists in far from every ritual. Quite often this role was not developed, but was taken by a number of members of the wedding party (that is by the groom's relatives), and not by a talented person hired to take on the role. In such instances it was said that the groom had "best men," who ascertained whether the bride was ready and whether the wedding train could set out and so on. The best men drove the sleighs of the wedding train and filled other minor roles in the wedding. Vlasova remarks that "regions existed where the role of the best man was retained, but also places where this participant in the ritual did not utter any incantations" (unfortunately, the author of this work does not cite the regions where this curious tradition existed) [Vlasova 2001: 84].

One may observe that in those few weddings, where we know the priest participated in domestic rituals, the best man was relegated to minor status. Collectors have not made special efforts to record the text uttered by this kind of best man, more than likely because it was not well developed and did not draw attention to itself. The task of the best man in this case was primarily to purchase the places later occupied by the priest, groom and other wedding party members. The result was that it is difficult to say whether the inclusion of the priest in domestic rituals required that the best man reduce his role, or whether the exclusion of the village priest forced

the best man to increase his role and expand his speech into a huge monologue. But it does not do to omit from consideration a possible third solution. I am unwilling to assert this possibility categorically, but it seems to me that the more developed incantations uttered by the best man was recorded on lands formerly associated with Rostov-Suzdal' (an important medieval principality located north east of Moscow), which are not far from the locations where the wedding ritual in which the priest takes part have come to light (Shel'bovo, Saldamanov Maidan), but nevertheless in another region from a historic and ethnographic point of view, where a somewhat different tradition was established.

In domestic wedding rituals there were also, however, roles that the priest could not avoid taking into account, even though church regulations had, from time immemorial, forbidden clergymen from making peace with them, for example, musicians. Thus *Stoglav* (14) notes that, when people go to church to get married, "jesters and musicians... shouting with all manner of devilish games" are at the head of the wedding train. For this reason the *Stoglav* commands that "priests should forbid this" [Kolesov, Rogozhnikova 1991, 2: 194]. One must admit that the church in Muscovy seemed to have coped with the problem of instrumental music in various wedding rites.

Nonetheless, the most striking point here relates to the attitude of the clergyman to the other sacred personage participating in domestic wedding ceremonies. The priest had to come to terms with the presence of yet another protector of the young couple on their journey, that is, the sorcerer. Strangely enough, the priest did not drive this functionary away. Tradition required him to be diplomatic. "In the prime place there sits the priest," Prugavin noted, describing a Pinega wedding in 1850, "next to him is the *vezhlivoi* (local name for the sorcerer – M. L.), then the father of the groom, the master of ceremonies and the groom" [Shein 1900: 392]. A similar situation existed among the Don Cossacks in the 1820's: "The groom, after being blessed, went to the bride's; before him walked the priest with a cross, then boys carried the blessed icons enshrouded with towels; behind them walked the groom between the best men and matchmakers ... Beside the groom for his protection there walked the 'knowing one,' whom the best man had sought out in advance" [Tereshchenko 1848: 612–13]. At the beginning and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century folk tradition, as we see, stubbornly clung to the sorcerer, and the priest was required to share with him the role of warding off evil forces from the newlyweds without complaining. This situation is consequently at odds with the way it seemed to D.K. Zelenin, who considered that the sorcerer had supplanted the priest in the ritual as a result of the difficulty and the expense of inviting the clergy to villages far removed from parish centers [Zelenin 1991: 341].

All the same, what could be the reason for the priest to be supplanted in domestic wedding rituals if it was not through the actions of the sorcerer? As the material examined here shows, the protection of the newlyweds by the priest on the day of the ceremony is generally a uniform and integrated ritual. In the strength of its persistence it closely resembles ecclesiastical rituals established from above and supported by religious writings and rules formulated by the hierarchy. However, in fact, the participation of the priest in domestic ritual procedures at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not regulated by the church.

Thus, the witnessing of the engagement nowadays is allocated in its entirety to secular participants in the wedding ritual. But formerly, as is well known, the engagement was seen as the only point in the whole

procedure when the marriage was agreed. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was during the engagement that the *riadnaia zapis'* (formal agreement) was written, in other words, the wedding contract was drawn up. The presence of the priest here ceased not through the logic of evolving folk or Church tradition, but from purely legal concerns.

The church marriage ceremony, which was a later addition to Russian wedding ritual, could in the sixteenth century take place as much as several months after the betrothal. It was quite possible for the intentions of the young couple to change in that time, such that the groom then "went under the crown" (a key part of the church wedding ceremony) with a different bride, not the one to whom he had been betrothed. Such a marriage was not recognized even if a church marriage ceremony had taken place. The resulting legal proceedings were frequent and tangled.

In 1702, Peter the Great issued an edict stripping the engagement and handfasting at the time of the engagement ceremony of their legal significance [Polnoe sobranie zakonov, 4 1830: no. 1907]. In the same edict he also abolished marriage contracts. Now only moral significance was attached to these actions, and documents ceased being drawn up at all. Thus "Peter the Great decreed that the betrothed were given complete freedom to separate" [Bogdanov 1864: 112]. This freedom went too far, evolving into a new tradition, and in 1744 during the reign of the Empress Elizabeth betrothed people were permitted to marry someone else only with the permission of the ruler [Polnoe sobranie zakonov, 12 1838: no. 9087]. This then turned out to be excessively restrictive. In close harmony with the spirit of the ancient traditions of the Christian Church the Holy Synod in 1775 decreed that handfasting and the marriage ceremony should take place at the same time; this was then enshrined in the laws of the state [Polnoe sobranie zakonov, 20 1830: no. 14356]. Thus the idea that a preliminary promise to marry could not be revoked was finally overcome at a legal level; hence the priest for all practical purposes was not needed at the engagement ceremony. As a result, traces of the tradition in question survived less fully in the peasant wedding than the tradition of accompanying the newlyweds to the church.

In domestic wedding procedures the priest kept to a tradition that had become over time a completely folk custom, not fostered by the Church authorities, and strictly localized. The events that had led to the reduction of his role in the ritual took place in the eighteenth century. As the ethnographic materials examined here have shown, the tradition of inviting the priest to the betrothal continued to exist until the middle of the nineteenth century, that is, despite everything, lasted another 150 years or so after the Petrine edict. The tradition of the priest leading the newlyweds survived much longer, right to the first decade after the Revolution.

It is surprising how quickly Russian wedding ritual tradition adapted to these changes; the edges were evened out, and the *lacunae* were filled with something else. Thus the song from the L'vov-Prach collection cited above, which described the wedding process without the priest was published as little as fifteen years after the edict about combining the betrothal with exchange of rings and the religious wedding ceremony into a simple sequence of actions performed in church. Nowadays we think of this song as an example of hoary antiquity, like a series of other "archaisms" in the wedding, which are simply not what they seem.

## NOTES

- 1 Allusion here is to articles and collective volumes such as Chistov, Bernshtam, 1978; Balashov, Krasovskaia, 1969; Efimenkova, 1973; Slaviana, 1982; Balashov, Marchenko, Kalmykova, 1985; Kulagina, Ivanov, 2000, 2003].
- 2 In Russian ethnographic practice the "wedding" is conceived of as an event occurring on a series of days including the day of the matchmaking (at the bride's home); the day of the engagement (at the bride's home); the eve of the wedding (at the bride's home); the day of the marriage ceremony (at the bride's home, the church and the groom's home); the following morning (at the groom's home); and the visit of the newlyweds to the in-laws on yet another day. All of this is spread over a period of at least two weeks.
- 3 The wedding train in the Russian village wedding was horse drawn and consisted of several carts or sledges, depending on the time of year. The groom organized the wedding train. Members of his wedding party (*poezhane*) rode in it, and it also incorporated the bride and took the couple to the ceremony.
- 4 Taken from the detailed description of the wedding ritual in the village of Saldamanov Maidan [Lobanov et al.1998: 48-69].
- 5 In Russian wedding tradition the term used is *tysiatskii* (from the word *tysiacha*, a thousand). In ancient Rus' the *tysiatskii* was a powerful warlord who commanded a thousand warriors. In the wedding ritual the term was given a new meaning, the *tysiatskii* becoming the person who controls the treasury, has a thousand rubles in cash used to pay the singers for their song and the girls for the groom's place next to the bride etc.
- 6 In various religious traditions of the Russian wedding, the *pomolvka* has several regional names, depending on what action is considered most important, either the fact of agreement between the sides (*sgovor*), the handshake (*rukobit'e*) or the drinking of wine (*sapoi, propoi*) as an indication of the conclusion of the agreement, or public prayers (*bogomolenie*), or the actions above the hands of the couple (*zaruchenie*). During the *rukobit'e* men exchanged handshakes either through cloth (the skirts of a kaftan or fur coat, etc. could serve as the fabric) or after donning mittens.
- 7 "Dostoino est'" are the opening words of a prayer addressed to the Virgin Mary.
- 8 In the material examined no other instances were found in which the "wreaths" left the church.
- 9 A typical feature of the last song group is its sadness. Such songs are sometimes connected with bridal laments and evoke them. An example of the farewell song was published in James Bailey's monograph on Russian folk-song meters [1993: 147]
- 10 A variant of the same song with a description of wedding processes with the same range of participants was recorded in 1937 in the region of Lake Kubenskîâ (Vologda province) [Kolpakova, 1973: no. 244].
- 11 A *sazhen'* ranges from 1.52 to 1.76 meters according to the Russian system of measures in the seventeenth century (translator's note)
- 12 This song has a long been studied as one of the pieces of evidence about the Time of Troubles, especially since one of the variants mentions "Grishka and Marinka", the names of real historical personages, the First False Dmitrii (real name Grigorii Otrep'ev) and his wife Marina. Recently this song was analyzed in its

original sense [Vlasova, 2001: 368–75]; the ritual-ceremonial aspects of this oral-poetic work were, however, beyond the purview of the author's study.

13 After this ceremony the priest reads the Lord's Prayer, blesses the table, leads the guest to their seats and only then does the feast begin. But the priest remains in the area at least until the newlyweds are led to the marriage bed, because it is he who, together with the matchmaker and the best man, conducts them there [Shein, 1900: 468-69].

14 *Stoglav* (One Hundred Chapters), a manuscript work compiled in 1551, contains the resolutions of the Synods of the Russian Orthodox Church. Since these resolutions are laid out in a hundred chapters, both the book and the Synod itself are always known as *Stoglav*. The first printed edition of *Stoglav* was published in London in 1860.

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