

## TWELVE



### MARRIAGE RITES OLD AND NEW<sup>1</sup>

[172–173, 159–162, 170–171, 173–192; 229–270;  
267–268, 258–262, 268–284; 135–136, 130–132, 136–144]

AS AN ILLUSTRATION of the obligatory character of marriage to a woman of the mother's clan, some chapters back we related an episode taken from an old Gilyak poem in which a man, dying from a wound inflicted by a person who had a legitimate claim upon his daughter, calls his murderer and exclaims: "Though this man killed me, give my daughter to him. Do not go against my word." In a similar manner, Gilyak epics depict types of ancient marriage which correspond exactly with the Gilyak norms [135].

Since these marriages were obligatory, there was no talk of complicated marriage procedures such as betrothal, negotiation over property obligations, or bride-price. Nor were there any of the religious ceremonies connected with the passing of the bride into a strange clan. The bride and bridegroom were of common blood on both father's and mother's sides. Therefore in all the epics we find the same picture of marriage occurring without any formalities. A man, appearing from afar and being a candidate only from hearsay, needs only declare the purpose of his visit to receive the consent of the parents, after which he has all the material rights of a husband. On the next day he may take his wife away. Furthermore, not only does no one ask him for compensation, but usually the father-in-law provides him with generous gifts. It is true that for the sake of formality the consent of the daughter is sought, but usually the daughter obeys the will of her parents and of the law. The only rite invariably practiced is the most primitive form of the Roman *conferratio* where the married couple have to eat and smoke together.

The following is an example of a marriage ceremony taken from a poem which I recorded. An old woman, the mother of two daughters, asks a newly arrived youth, "Wherefore, my son, have you come? Did you come for a wife? Your wives live in

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<sup>1</sup> [Editor's note: The AMNH Russian typescript presents this material as three chapters, "Means of Obtaining Wives," "The Modern Way of Obtaining Wives," and "Forms of Entering into Marriage." Shternberg, *Giliaki*, reduces this to two chapters, "Means of Obtaining Wives," and "Forms of Entering into Marriage"; while Shternberg, *Sem'ia*, further sets aside the subsections "Bride Price and Dowry" and "Marriage Pitfalls" as separate chapters. While the Russian versions slightly reorder the sections found here, I agree with the AMNH English typescript that the prefatory marriage vignettes make an effective introduction to the question of how Gilyak epics informed turn-of-the-century rites.]

that elevated yurta. Go!" Our Gilyak ascended and entered. Two women were there. He sat between them. He took a pinch from his tobacco bag and gave some to the younger sister. She smoked. He then gave some to the older one. She took it and smoked. The older sister said, "Prepare food and feed us . . ." The three ate together. After eating, they slept. On the following morning they awoke early and ate. Our Gilyak said, "Are we going today?" His new brides said, "We will pass the day here and will start tomorrow." On the day planned, they started back in a boat.

In another poem, a father-in-law responded to the demands of a bridegroom by setting one condition: "You must go back tomorrow." He ordered his slaves to prepare food, and said to his daughter, "Go eat together with your husband." The woman then ate with our Gilyak. After eating they went to urinate. They reentered the yurta, prepared the bed, lay down under one blanket, and slept. On the following day the old man said, "In the five boats loaded only with treasures you will start."<sup>2</sup>

In another case, the hero of a poem visits a well-populated village. When he entered the middle yurta a woman was there. This woman said, "Guest, from where did you come?" Our Gilyak replied, "I came to take you." The woman said, "Go speak to my father, if you want to take me."<sup>3</sup> Our Gilyak exited and entered another yurta. An old woman and an old man were there. This old woman said, "Young man, where did you come from?" Our Gilyak said, "I came to take your daughter." The old man said to his wife, "Prepare the *mos*' and feed my son-in-law."<sup>4</sup> Our Gilyak then went back to his new wife. "Your father said that we both must come in the evening to eat." After sleeping they got up, ate, and departed for the husband's village [135].<sup>5</sup>

### MANNER OF OBTAINING WIVES

It would be interesting to reconstruct from the data given in the epics how the Gilyak of old obtained wives. According to the *nastund* [epic poetry], obtaining a wife was by no means an easy task, as is attested to by the term used for searching for a wife, *ang'rei nanigind*. The verb *nanigind* is the technical term for hunting beasts, with many difficulties and dangers implied. The greatest task for the Gilyak hero was finding a wife. To do so, he had to undertake hazardous journeys to remote parts of the country. He had to swim stormy seas, rise to heaven, and even go down to the bottom of the sea, not to mention battling a whole series of monsters connected with such an enterprise [130].

Why should the Gilyak hero, a strong man, have to search for a wife so far away when there were a great many opportunities to find *ang'rei* nearby?

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<sup>2</sup> [Editor's note: This paragraph is not found in Shternberg, *Sem'ia*.]

<sup>3</sup> [Editor's note: Shternberg's use of first-person Gilyak speech in this paragraph of the AMNH Russian typescript and elsewhere runs counter to his assertion that Gilyaks preferred third-person address even when speaking to someone in the same room.]

<sup>4</sup> [Editor's note: *Mos*' is an aspic made of fish skin, seal fat, and berries.]

<sup>5</sup> Shternberg, *Materialy po izucheniiu giliatskago iazyka i fol'klora* (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1908), 57–58, 84, 118. [Editor's note: This footnote is not found in Shternberg, *Sem'ia*.]

The term *ang'rei nanigind* might give one reason for thinking that violence and rape were the only means of obtaining wives in the olden times. But such was not the case; although rape and violence did occur occasionally, most men obtained their wives in a peaceful manner and without bride-price. The term *ang'rei* itself indicates a category of woman to whom the Gilyak have a legitimate marriage right. And really all evidence shows that the aim of the hero was merely to find a legitimate wife. Wherever he appears with his claims, he is called *imgi* (son-in-law) and the women he claims are his *ang'rei* (potential wives). It is quite different when a strange woman is shown as a candidate for a wife. She is called not *ang'rei* but *shankh*. The following is a characteristic example. The hero of a poem was refused by his legitimate *ang'rei*.<sup>6</sup> She said that she would kill herself if she were forced to marry him. Then her father said to him, "Son-in-law, the girl does not want you. Search for another woman (for *shankh*, but not for *ang'rei*)." After that the hero came to another place. In a *yurta* he found an old woman. She said, "My son (sons-in-law are often addressed in this way by their mothers-in-law), if you come for a wife, your wives live in that log house." The plural was used here because in the *yurta* lived two sisters, and both according to the Gilyak law belonged to him. Indeed, it may appear strange that the hero of this poem should have to search for a legal wife under such difficulties. It should be an easy task since usually there are many of that category and their residences are known to practically everyone. Usually they can be found in the nearest village [131].

But such is the destiny of heroes—that extraordinary adventures become their lot. Generally some catastrophe has befallen their clansmen and they are left quite alone. It might be that the nearest clan of their fathers-in-law was wiped out during some epidemic or famine. The surviving branches might have settled far away and lost all connection with their former home. Under these conditions, it is understood that the hero has to wander about in all directions and, as in hunting, reach his goal by scarcely visibly traces, questionings, and conjectures. Finally it may happen that the desirable *ang'rei* for whom the hero is searching is already engaged to a stranger. In this case the hero must apply all his imposing power and fame in order to force the father-in-law to break his promise to the other suitor. For such a violation, he is threatened by war with the clan of the offended groom, or in the best possible outcome he gets off by merely paying a heavy fine. The hero himself has to go through a whole series of wars for the wife he has obtained in this manner.

Such a case is the following, taken from a *nastund* poem. The hero arrived in the house of a woman who was to become his wife. He received the following answer from her father: "She is already betrothed (*nigivin iokhta*, that is, the technical term for a girl engaged to a non-kin). There is a clan of mountain people, and several others who will come to fight with you." The hero answered, "Still I will take her and drive away with her." The old man said, "You go back tomorrow." On the next day, after the usual meal, he not only let the girl go without any payment, but also gave an order to load two boats with precious goods as her dowry. Such cases are, of course, only possible when the girl is a legitimate bride of the groom by birthright.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 118.



FIG. 18. A large group of Gilyaks and Russians surround a tethered bear during a winter bear festival marking the return of the bear kin to the spirit community in the hills. Photo by Lev Shternberg. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 98, l. 192.

It is characteristic of the purest Gilyak poetry, free from any Gold-Manchurian influence, that we do not find any betrothal procedures. The whole ceremony consists in the following dialogue: The groom says, "I came to take a wife"; the father-in-law says, "Alright, take her." Thus the marriage ceremony is accomplished immediately. The only rite performed is that of *conferratio*.

The father of a bride asks the hero, "Where did you come from?" The latter answers, "I am a dweller of the village in the middle of the bay. I came to marry your daughter." Then the old man says, "My child, this guest came to take you. Go to him." The woman says, "Alright, I will go to him." The old man says, "Workmen, prepare food and feed the guest." Then our Gilyak and his new wife eat together.<sup>7</sup>

Occasionally there are incidents when men take their wives by force. This has often been the case when a Gilyak's *akhmalk* clans were wiped out through some catastrophe and he was forced to get a wife by any means. Such catastrophes, as we will see later, are not exceptional. The two alternatives which faced the Gilyak of olden times, either to marry a legitimate *ang'rei* or to obtain a wife by violence, with almost no mention of betrothals to strange women as a special case of marriage, prove that bride-price was of later origin. It seems to have appeared as an alternative to abduction with all its bloody consequences, in the same way that fines appeared as a remedy for the custom of blood revenge. Such were the methods of obtaining wives in the olden times, as appears to us from the traditional epics.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 47.

### ORTHODOX MARRIAGE AT THE PRESENT TIME

There is still strong feeling among the Gilyak that only the orthodox marriage from the *akhmalk* clans is pure (*urlaf narkin*).<sup>8</sup> Even in the Amur region, one hears the following Gilyak maxim:

*Pi pand os anakikh pu umgu furara.*

[From the fathers-in-law of the common root of your birth (origin from a common mother), one must take a wife.]

The most frequent and preferred of such orthodox marriages are those between the brother's daughter and the sister's son. These marriages are so valued that a brother and a sister arrange them even long before their children are born [136].

Thus orthodox marriage is still considered not only desirable but obligatory. During the match-making negotiations in one of the *akhmalk* clans, the first words were, as usual:

*Tsi naf nakhmalk nekhlin kunu tsekhlan kunu vaza vasa akhmalk gun nate. Tsi nakhlan kim khavrkhaimrolf torsik pikizndra. Sik urlaf pazkund khunivmugate.*

[You are my *akhmalk*. Let our children also be *akhmalk*. If you will not give your daughter to my son you will break completely the old law. Let us live according to the law. Let us live cleanly.]

After such a reminder, it is seldom that anybody shirks his duty, although it is accompanied with the loss of a certain amount of property because in such marriages there is no bride-price, and even when there is, it is very small if the *akhmalk* clan is not very old [136].

Mothers usually negotiate early on, when the children are 3 or 4 years old. When the consent of both sides is obtained, a public ceremony is held in which the fathers and grandfathers participate. The father of the groom brings a male dog and the mother spins two threads from its hair with the aid of a nettle. She ties one thread around the girl's hand, while the father does the same with the boy's hand. All this is performed in the presence of the oldest members of the clan, who consider it to be an inviolable bond. From that moment the children are considered husband and wife and they address each other by these terms. A Gilyak friend of mine who had betrothed his son in this way told me proudly, "All of Sakhalin knows about this betrothal" [132].<sup>9</sup>

Usually in these cases, the underaged wife moves to the house of her husband, sleeps with him in one bed, and they spend their childhood together. With the com-

<sup>8</sup> [Editor's note: Shternberg used the Russian word *ortodoksal'nyi* in the sense of "proper" or "traditional" Gilyak marriage, rather than Russian Orthodox church rites.]

<sup>9</sup> It is curious that among the Haida the ceremony of betrothal, which is accompanied by the presentation of blankets instead of dogs, bears the technical term "putting a string on." Apparently in olden times this ceremony was executed by the tying of a thread, as is practiced among the Gilyak and the Tamil of India. Cf. Swanton, *Contributions*, 50. [Editor's note: The AMNH English and Russian typescripts place this footnote here, while the 1933 Soviet editions place it several paragraphs hence in a like context.]

ing of puberty, they begin their matrimonial life. This haste in marriage between minors could be explained by many factors, but the fundamental reason seems to be to find a legitimate marriage partner before another comes along, such as another sister's or cousin's son. Further, there might be a change in the economic standing of both parties. The bride's father might become impoverished and be tempted by the bride-price offered him by a stranger.

On occasions when children of very different ages are married, the betrothal procedure is the same. One of my acquaintances, Pletun, a lad of 20, was married to his cousin who was only 5, the daughter of Iksus. He took her to his house and they slept together, but their matrimonial life did not begin until her first menses. Sometimes the underaged wife lives in the house of her parents and with the first menses transfers to that of her husband. There is no formality connected with moving into her husband's house because the former agreement is considered a public act well known to everyone. "All the island knows about this," another Gilyak told me with pathos after he had betrothed his underaged daughter to his sister's son.

Betrothals between children of first-cousins are made with the same simplicity, although even in some cases a small bride-price is incurred [132].

### NONORTHODOX MARRIAGES

Various factors have caused the dissolution of the orthodox forms of marriage in the *akhmalk* clan. The dwindling of some clans has forced marriages with women from newer, strange clans. Plus, Gilyak contact with civilized peoples of the Far East has wrought havoc with ancient marriage norms. This contact brought about a development of trade; sable pelts, fox pelts, and other articles previously having no value have become trade objects for which Gilyak can exchange luxury items—expensive textiles, precious arms, ornaments, and foodstuffs such as rice, cereals, alcohol, and tobacco. By contrast, the memory of a time when sables and foxes walked around Gilyak houses is still fresh, for Gilyak long preferred to dress in dog skins. Suddenly it became possible to obtain the most desirable things from the skins of these smaller animals. Inevitably an enormous change occurred in the psychology of the Gilyak and in their relations to one another. If before, the ideal of a Gilyak was to gain the reputation as a good man—*urdlā nivukh*, that is, a prominent hunter who shares his game with his kinsmen—now the expression *urdlā nivukh* is synonymous with a rich man, whose ambition it is to accumulate wealth. On the scene appeared greed, boasting, and the desire to surpass one another in wealth, even if one's wealth consisted only of a few pieces of silk and some Japanese sabers [136].

A tendency towards differentiation also appeared: The rich wanted to associate and intermarry only with the rich. A new element in marital selection appeared: The bride had to be the groom's equal in wealth as well as distinction. One frequently hears nowadays, and even in the ancient *tilgund* (legends), such expressions as, "He or she is not my equal." Wealth gave one the right to demand a wife of great beauty, homemaking abilities, or skill in sewing. Thus, once marriage between strangers became a frequent practice, the old simplicity of the marriage ceremony disappeared.

Bride-price introduced into marriage an element of barter and marriages between strangers requiring numerous negotiations expressed in new procedure of betrothal. To this matchmaking institution we now turn.

### TERMS OF MATCHMAKING

The various elements of matchmaking are expressed in Gilyak terms such as *utguela tigid* or *iokhpurid* (W.D.), *iokh gagandtakhund sagund*, meaning literally, "to consent, to negotiate for the bride"; hence also, *takhir nigivin*, meaning matchmaker or negotiator; *iokh orang'rei munind*, "future wife"; and *pu munind*, meaning bridegroom or future husband. The expression *nigivin iokh ta* means to be betrothed (when applied to women). The last terms for bride and bridegroom are of special interest. In the case of orthodox marriages there is no special term for bride or bridegroom, because by the very right of birth they were called *pu* (husband) and *ang'rei* (wife). The term *iokh* for bride in the orthodox type of marriage is impossible, because as we saw it is a term applied to a category of women with whom sexual intercourse is prohibited. Thus the terms themselves prove that the procedure of betrothal originated after the orthodox type of marriage was on the wane. There is a special term for designating infant betrothal—*tkhagund* (E.D.), *tignid* (W.D.).

The participants of the betrothal on the bridegroom's side are his father and mother, the father's brother, the bridegroom's older brother, and the husband of the father's sister. The role of the latter can be explained, it seems, from the norms of orthodox marriage according to which the husband of the father's sister is the father of the husband of the bridegroom's sister. As his daughter cannot marry the brother of the daughter-in-law, the husband of the father's sister considers it his duty to help the marriage of his nearest *akhmalk*, that is, of the brother of the daughter-in-law. If the father is dead, one of the *urdla nivukh* (respected men from among his kinsmen) takes his place. Besides these persons, several respected clansmen take part since marriage is considered a clan affair. It is especially considered as such when the betrothal is between very rich and prominent people, and the girl is of outstanding reputation. In such cases, the people arrive in several boats, bringing with them articles of the bride-price. Often, if such representation and the bride-price make a proper impression, the girl is taken immediately after the negotiations. The bridegroom is present during the matchmaking proceedings. If he is absolutely alone or, on the contrary, rich and prominent, he can attend to the betrothal himself. In one song a girl sings to her beloved, *nrmkiabiz nsagia*, "holding my hand woo me." Betrothal is dispensed with if a married man takes another wife. He then goes to the clan of his former wife to choose a second one, or often enough his wife goes herself to her own or another clan to select a new wife for her husband [137].

On the bride's side, her father and mother are usually present. But the final decision is made in the presence of clan representatives. These clan representatives of both sides play a rather passive role in spite of the fact that they take part in the discussions. The wishes of the bride's brothers are also considered in the marriage arrangements, and in many cases they prevail. This tradition is a relic of an earlier matrilineal organization. The role of brothers is especially emphasized in the



FIG. 19. Four Gilyak women play a specially toned wooden beam during a winter bear festival, 1890s. Photo by Lev Shternberg. *Source*: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 162, l. 96.

epics. In one tale, a son informs his father that he intends to marry off his sister. The father answers, "Consult your younger brothers and then decide." It is remarkable that in the marriage arrangements, the mother plays a role no less important than that of the father, in spite of the fact that women do not as a rule openly participate in public affairs. This curious fact is only true of Sakhalin. In the Amur region, the girl is not consulted at all, though the marriage negotiations are carried out in the presence of the bride, who sits silently among her dowry chests and awaits the decision on her fate. Her role commences after the decision has been made and all she can do is obey. If she has no lover and the suitor is more or less acceptable, she says laconically, "Once you want it, how can I object?" But often, upon the arrival of the matchmakers, the girl escapes from the house and does not return until the matchmakers have departed. In such cases, the matter often comes to nothing.<sup>10</sup>

I do not think that the neglect of the daughter's wishes is the result of the modern type of marriage, with its temptation for a big bride-price. Rather it is a survival

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that I found some differences among the Negidal, whose customs are usually the same as those of the Gilyak on account of old matrimonial relations existing between the two. The bride is absent during the betrothal and the mother has absolute right of veto, while the kinsmen have no voice in the arrangements. The bride appears on the scene only at the last moment when the bridegroom comes to take her away.

of the old orthodox marriage when a girl was predestined to a definite person or group of persons from birth. Under such circumstances, there could be no question of freedom of choice.

### BETROTHAL PROCEDURES

The current betrothal procedure of the Gilyak is very much the same as found all over the world. It is carried on with a great deal of strategy and amounts almost to a diplomatic war. In important cases, when the girl in question is very rich and prominent, the matchmakers try to catch her side unawares. Appearing in her house, they say that they are merely passing through. As if by accident, vodka is produced. The host drinks willingly, and when everyone is in good humor the matchmakers recall what good friends they have always been and that their host has never refused them anything, and that in the future they hope he will continue to do so. The host, unsuspectingly, promises to help them by all available means. He is caught up on this and brought down to business. He cannot refuse because he has given his word. In order that he should not refuse, the matchmakers see to it that there are witnesses on hand (though that is not necessary, for there are always plenty without invitation—the arrival of strangers becomes known immediately and the *yurta* is crowded with neighbors). Going back on one's word is a very serious affair potentially leading to threats of lawsuits involving heavy fines (*naing vad*) "to cover the face" [138].

Even when matchmakers do not wish to hide their purpose, etiquette does not permit them to get down to business at once. The most remote things are spoken of without any intimation of the real purpose of the visit. During the conversation they drink, and after they have spoken enough about news (*kier*), little by little the matter is approached. It is done carefully and by circumlocution, in order to find out how favorable the chances are. If the girl's father does not consent beforehand, he immediately cuts short the conversation by an absolute refusal. But such cases are rare because only those whose chances are good make the proposal. Usually "equals go to equals" say the Gilyak, since they all know each other well, notwithstanding the distance which separates them. They know everything to the smallest detail, even to the number of sables one has caught during the past season.

The main thing for the girl's father is not to give one's consent too quickly, in order to procure the largest bride-price. Etiquette demands that the father of the bride must pretend as long as possible that he does not understand at what the matchmakers are driving. And when it becomes impossible to pretend any longer, he will devise all kinds of obstacles and excuses—that the girl is ugly, that she is inept at household duties, that she is quarrelsome, and so on. But the guests are prepared for such tricks and have answers ready. "We do not hunt for beauty," they say. "As for her ignorance of household duties," they respond, "She is young yet, she will learn. Anyway we have enough able women without her. Her quarrelsomeness is not a calamity; with years she will learn to live with people." Or he is cut short by, "This does not concern you, that is our work. If she is bad, we will teach her." This unconditional praise for the bride is the thing sought by her father, for then he can name the most advantageous price and the matchmakers are forced to accept. If the match-

maker refuses the bride-price demanded by the bride's parents, he risks being hailed before a court to pay a large fine—*nivkh tsguzkhl nain vanidra*. The fine often consists of a silk gown, a kettle, and other treasures.<sup>11</sup> If it happens that the father is not satisfied with the matchmaker's proposals, when all objections are exhausted, he will suddenly utter a word usually used when the Gilyak want to stop an unpleasant conversation. "*Ta'arai*" ("I do not know anything"), he mumbles through his teeth, clamping his pipe. After a pause he angrily says, "Ask my wife what she wants. It does not concern me." Then the mother is approached and after many excuses she in turn ends with the laconic phrase, "*Ta'arai*. Why do you ask me? I am only a woman. Let the men decide."

Finally the conversation turns to the matter of bride-price and dowry. These procedures differ between Sakhalin and the Amur region. On the Amur, where the people are more shamelessly commercial, the bride's side enumerates every single article of the bride-price. On Sakhalin only the most valued articles are mentioned, after which agreements are made about the less valued articles. But the negotiations in both regions are carried on in a heated manner [139].

During this stage the conversation reaches its climax, and the word *ta'arai* begins to play an exceptional role. I happened to witness such negotiations in the village Pilavo in Sakhalin, where a friend of mine, Isaika, was wooing for his son the daughter of an old woman. The old woman had no relatives in the village, either on her own or her husband's side. Therefore all the respectable men of the village were invited by her. On the bridegroom's side was Sofronka, who was considered *khlainivukhin*, the best candidate. At first it appeared that the matter would be settled soon, because the woman was in great need and because she herself had pressed the proposal. But when the question of bride-price arose, Sofronka fought with her the whole day. In vain did he use all his eloquence and asked the witnesses to help him induce the old woman to accept his conditions. She endlessly repeated "*Ta'arai*." And the *khlainivukhin* replied, "It is a sin to interfere, for we are foreign people." Finally, after a day's painful discussion, when the old woman felt that she had shown enough character and had observed the proper protocols, she made a condition which was acceptable to the other side from the very beginning, namely, that the bride-price be paid at once.

### BRIDE-PRICE

The term used by the Gilyak to designate bride-price is very striking. It throws light, it seems to me, on the origin of that institution itself. Bride-price is designated by the word *askh izind*, that is, literally, "to bequest." The word *az*, *azr* literally means "a gift" given by the bridegroom's family or clan to the bride's clan. The following will show that this term did not come about accidentally. In all cases when compensation by payment is obligatory, such as a fine for murder, ransom for abduction, and so on, the Gilyak use the term *iuskind*, "to pay" [140].

<sup>11</sup> So the Gilyak explain the reason for the father's deprecation of his daughter. I think therefore that Iokhel'son was wrong in explaining this custom among the Koriak as a warding off of possible complaints in the future. Iokhel'son, *The Koryak*, 739.

It is of interest that the word *iuskind*, "to pay," itself originated from the word *uskind*, which is both an intransitive verb and a synonym for *ikhinund*, "to fight" or "to resist." The active form of this verb, *iuskind* or otherwise *ekund*, formerly designated revenge, which was afterwards replaced by ransom. This evolution can still be traced in Gilyak epics. In one poem the hero is asked upon his return from the scene of revenge for the death of his father, "*Pitk uskind?*" ("Did you accomplish *uskind* for your father?"). The hero answers, "*Sik khukhra*" ("I killed them all"). Here the term *uskind* is used to denote the act of blood-revenge. But in another poem the same word is used to express ransom: *ivn navkh uskind*, "they received ransom for their comrade who was killed."

All this shows that bride-price was not so much a payment for the bride but a gift, although of an obligatory character. This is also evident from the fact that the gift is not one-sided, for besides the dowry, the giving of a postwedding present [German, *Morgengabe*] on the part of the bride's father was also obligatory.<sup>12</sup> These presents continued for years in the form of clothes and various other valuables, which frequently amounted to as much as the bride-price itself.

The following example is illustrative. An elder from the Gilyak settlement of Pomr, not a rich man, received for his daughter a bride-price which consisted of two Chinese kettles, one Japanese saber, and five dogs. In return, the father-in-law sent to his son-in-law two Chinese gowns, and in the course of 2-3 years he regularly sent him rice, tobacco, and tea. In addition, he also gave a big dowry consisting of clothes, furs, and ornaments. It would have been considered disgraceful had he not returned the equivalent of the bride-price in gifts to the bridegroom. The man who disregarded this would become the butt of his village's jokes.

So it is clear, at least among the Gilyak, that bride-price is by no means a form of marriage by abduction as has been suggested by many, even today.<sup>13</sup> Marriage accompanied by a bride-price is not an act of buying or selling in the minds of the Gilyak. This is proven by the fact that it is absolutely prohibited to buy wives from one another.

Still we must ask: Why is the bride-price not found in orthodox marriages? That is because an orthodox marriage consists of persons of common blood on both the mother's and father's side, and the marriage is sanctioned by social and religious considerations. But when marriages are made between members of strange clans, the exchange of gifts is a symbol of friendship and a mutual guarantee against untoward magical influence. It corresponds to the exchange of gifts during the procedure of fictive brotherhood.

The Gilyak lending of religious and social significance to this symbolism is seen from the rites observed upon the entrance of the bride into the husband's house. It is quite possible that the concept of bride-price was introduced not only as a magical element but also as a religious one. Marrying into a strange clan was at one time taboo. Every violation of the taboo, according to the primitive mind, must be paid for if not by blood then by valuables. The bride-price from this point of view becomes a tribute

<sup>12</sup> [Editor's note: The German variant is found in the AMNH English typescript only.]

<sup>13</sup> Among Turkic peoples as among the Shoshone, where marriage is characterized as buying or selling, the reciprocal gift to the bridegroom is also obligatory.

to the ancestors offended by the violation of the clan taboo. Only this can explain why Gilyak have the same strong feeling against an unpaid bride-price as in cases of the murder of a kinsman. The obligation to wreak vengeance in such instances, as with murder, is a duty weighing on the clan until the third generation. For the sake of a bride-price, the people are ready to undergo the same dangers and suffering as in the carrying out of a blood revenge. The heroic deeds of a person engaged in such hazardous expeditions to distant places are the most common subjects of Gilyak epics.

The articles of bride-price are valuables of a particular character (called *sagund* [E.D.] and *sigid* [W.D.]) and are usually acquired through trading with the Chinese and Japanese. These include Chinese silk clothes and fur coats, jade work, Manchurian spears inlaid with silver, Japanese sabers and big cast-iron kettles. Besides these, fox and sable coats and women's precious ornaments are also included. These articles cannot be traded in; they are *extra commercium*. Only in extreme cases of poverty or in the absence of relatives is one allowed to dispose of them. For instance, the poor widow who had sold her only daughter answered my question as to what she would do with her *sagund*, "A part I will sell and the rest I will take with me in the Land of the Dead (*Mlyvo*)." They are kept only for extraordinary occasions during a lifetime, such as the payment of a ransom, payment of bride-price, or as dowry for a daughter, while after death they accompany one to another world. In olden times, it seems that adzes of stone and later of iron were articles of *sagund*. There is a fine legend to this effect. In the middle of Sakhalin there is a mountain known among the Gilyak as *Krius Pal*. Beside it is another smaller one, which is the wife of the former. She escaped from her husband and hid her *sagund*. Three littoral cliffs are the various articles of this *sagund*. One is named *va-ul-sif*; it is the place where the Japanese saber is buried. The second is *vin-ul-af*, where the kettle is buried, and the third is *kizokhmi*, where the head of an ax is buried [141].<sup>14</sup>

The objects just enumerated are usually used in the bride-price of rich people. That of the poor consists of valuable articles for everyday use such as boats, guns, and dogs. The rich man hunting for a big bride-price is stirred mainly by ambition, for the receiving of a big bride-price is the best proof of his own wealth. For the poor man the bride-price is the only chance of establishing an independent household of his own. On the other hand, it is almost impossible for a poor man to maintain a family and an independent household. The only salvation under such circumstances lies in the right of group marriage and the establishment of a common household with brothers. Nevertheless, it is the dream of everyone to establish a family life of one's own. Generally a poor man is helped by his wealthy kinsmen, but not every clan has rich people, and there are persons whose clan is entirely extinct. The only way to obtain a wife is through bride-service. Such deals are usually made by families who have no male descendants. A son-in-law is proclaimed an adopted son, although he cannot be a real heir for he is a stranger.

In principle bride-price is considered clan property. In serious cases, such as when a kinsman has to pay ransom, all the kinsmen have to participate in its payment

<sup>14</sup> [Editor's note: While the paragraph sequencing here follows the AMNH Russian and English typescripts, the legend from this paragraph is contained in a footnote in Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 278, and Shternberg, *Sem'ia*, 141.]

with their *sagund*. But usually bride-price is divided among brothers, however unequally. The youngest brother, as heir of the house, receives the smallest part. Besides his inheritance, however, his elder brothers usually buy a wife for him so that the youngest brother does not need the *sagund*.

Together with the family division of *sagund*, a curious custom has survived, vividly showing the old orthodox type of marriage. Often a part of the bride-price is given to the old *akhmalk* clan from which the family used to take wives. For example, if for several generations family A took wives from family B, every time family A married off one of its daughters (who are prohibited to family B on account of the one-sided cousin-marriage) the entire bride-price or a part of it was given to the oldest member of family B. It is interesting that this form of bride-price was generally given by the bridegroom's family to the old *akhmalk*. Sometimes this custom is performed in an even more striking fashion. A minor sister is given to the mother's brother, or one's daughter is given to the wife's brother, in order that these persons should receive a bride-price. It is not allowed, however, to demand a share in such a bride-price. "It is better to offer a daughter or a sister to an *akhmalk* than to wait for a request for them," the Gilyak usually say. Furthermore, if the mother has several brothers and a nephew has several sisters, a sister has to be given to each uncle [142].

What is the explanation for this custom? We might note that a similar one is found among the Tamil of India. There, a mother's brother also gets part of the bride-price for her daughter. But among the Tamil exists a bilateral form of cousin marriage. Therefore if the sister gives her daughter into a marriage that is not with a brother's son, she violates the law. But among the Gilyak, where we have only matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and the sister's daughters are prohibited to the brother's sons, why would such a privilege be given to the mother's brother? Two explanations are possible: first, that it is a survival of a matriliney when the role of the mother's brother was so important; or second, that a bilateral cousin marriage when every girl had to marry the sons of the mother's brother once existed in Gilyak society, such that this custom is a survival of a more ancient form of marriage.

## DOWRY

Let us now consider the dowry that accompanies every marriage. Dowry in the Gilyak language is designated by the term *iokh sond* (E.D.), literally "being brought by the bride or by a woman." The dowry consists principally of a variety of clothes and ornaments. The rich bride brings rich fur coats of fox and sable, silver bracelets, expensive earrings, Chinese pipes, and carved and ornamental dishes and plates, including an assortment of artistically ornamented birch spoons. A mother usually gives the daughter her ornaments and sometimes her bed, but for some unknown reason, it is not permitted to give the pillows.

The accumulation of the dowry begins when the girl is a child and continues until her marriage. It is designated by the following expression: *iokh vakh vakhind*, "to prepare a bride." The dowry together with the family treasure is packed in trunks. The value of the dowry must be proportionate to that of the bride-price. When gos-

sips comment about someone's wedding they generally speak of "a rich or poor dowry," *iaskand mangand iokh* and *sandy iaskand*.

The greatest pride is taken in giving a slave as part of a daughter's dowry. It may be either a man or a woman. In one clan of my acquaintance, a part of the girl's dowry was a female slave supplied with a Japanese saber to clean the mud from the boots of her mistress. Particularly ambitious Gilyak reserved a separate house for their daughter and a slave, which later became part of her dowry.

Although the dowry may be a compensation for the bride-price because it liberates the husband from large expenditures on his wife, it is nonetheless entirely the personal property of the bride, to which the husband has no right. She is free to sell it or to give it as dowry to her own daughter. After death it is transferred to her daughters, and if there are none, it is passed to her brothers or anybody else according to the wishes of the deceased.

After the two main aspects of the bride-price, its quantity and the terms of payment, are settled, the marriage contract is considered complete and the couple are called to eat and smoke together. A small feast is arranged, and at night the bride's mother orders the bridegroom to lie in the bed of his wife. After the wedding night the bridegroom takes his wife home. However, these cases are rare, only occurring when both sides are so poor that the small bride-price is brought at once and the dowry consists only of the most essential things for the bride's wardrobe. In such cases, there is no need for preparations. Among rich families, the immediate departure of the bride takes place when the bridegroom lives far away or when the marriage is so esteemed on account of the distinction of the bride's parents or the prominence of the bride that the suitors are afraid to postpone the marriage lest a richer rival appear. In such cases, the bridegroom arrives with several boats containing his bride-price and the payment is made promptly. A short ceremony is followed by a small feast and the bride is taken away. But we repeat that such cases are rare [143].

Usually the marriage is delayed and the bride-price is paid in installments. Generally only one item, such as a kettle, is given immediately after the agreement. The rest of the bride-price is paid before taking the bride, or if the bride-price is large, a part is paid on a fixed date after the bride is taken. Sometimes the marriage is postponed also on account of the dowry. Although the dowry has been accruing since the girl's childhood, depending on the bride-price it may be necessary to add things to it. The marriage date is the last thing decided in the marriage negotiations. The date is considered very important, for the dowry must be gotten ready by the day of the groom's arrival; also, numerous dishes of food must be prepared in sufficient quantities for the wedding feast and for the bride to take along with her as a gift for the family of the bridegroom.

The agreement made between two families is considered an agreement between two clans. From that moment the bride is considered a member of another clan. In case of subsequent refusal by her parents or herself, she is demanded by force. The agreement is obligatory on the bridegroom's side too, but here no sanction is necessary, for in case of refusal, usually half of the bride-price which has been paid is retained. Sometimes it may happen that the bridegroom asks for one sister instead of another. This is absolutely prohibited. In such cases the answer would be:

*Nevin ckhazkhai menimin okhoia, stsanin akhai tsi urian agkikhai tsikh mukhna un ngtakhai nugi garnon tsi sik inkharkhai, enand saprindra.*

[If you do not like one, you do not like both of them. When it is a question of dogs, and you desire the good one, I give you a good one. But if one is bad, then both are bad. When you are being treated and when you have finished the first dish, I'll offer you the second one.]

In other words one can ask for two sisters, but one may not ask for one instead of another.

When the agreed upon date arrives, the bridegroom, together with his relatives, comes in boats or on sledges if it is winter, bringing along the stipulated part of the bride-price and food for the feast. Protocol does not permit coming on foot, even if the bride may live in the neighborhood. The articles of the bride-price are hung outside for examination by the clan and the feast is arranged for the elders of both clans. The women attend the bride, soothe her, and give her advice on how to conduct herself in a strange place. If she is displeased with her marriage, they cajole her. During the farewell feast the bridegroom and bride sit together and eat from the same dish and smoke from one pipe. But during the day they do not speak to each other. The bridegroom must behave quietly and be silent. Late in the evening, after the feast, the bride's mother sends the bridegroom to the bride's bed. The bride appears later. And so the marriage is consummated. On the following morning the bride brings food to the bridegroom and calls him "husband"; then they depart. During the last feast, the relatives of the couple exchange good wishes and blessings. In the Amur region they say,

If God so wills, people live their life in happiness.  
If God so wills, life is passed unhappily.  
Oh God, make the life of our children happy.

After that the bridegroom's father exclaims:

Oh God, make the days of our children happy,  
so that we will live in happiness together.

Vodka is splashed to the sky and in all directions during these blessings. Just before the departure of the bride and groom the ceremony *nits sitsivind*, "stepping in the kettle," is performed. A big Manchurian kettle with five handles, generally used for feeding dogs and brought as part of the bride-price, is placed near the threshold inside the yurta. Another one belonging to the bride's parents and smaller in size is placed near the threshold on the outside. On leaving the yurta the couple, first the bride and then the bridegroom, each place one foot in the big kettle and the other in the smaller one, so as not to touch the threshold. The big kettle is taken by the bride's father and the smaller one is given to the bridegroom. This ceremony, interestingly, establishes a symbolic union of mutual feeding and friendship before the two female penates: one, *limizm*, an old woman who is the spirit of the threshold, and another, *kel gelnani*, an old woman who is the spirit of the door's cross beam.<sup>15</sup> A simi-

<sup>15</sup> [Editor's note: Penates, from the Latin word *penus*, meaning provision of food, is a term borrowed from Roman mythology meaning household deities, especially those in a storeroom.]



FIG. 20. A Gilyak man in a Chinese scarf, canvas tunic, and sealskin skirt, 1890s. Photo by Lev Shternberg. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 161, l. 27.

lar ceremony is practiced among the Negidal under the name *odilavi*. These people have been intermarrying with the Gilyak for a long time and probably borrowed the ceremony from them.

A year after the wedding, the couple, already with a child, come to visit the bride's family. When they depart for home the same ceremony, *nits sitsivind*, "treading upon the kettle," is performed, but in this case cups are used instead of kettles.

### MARRIAGE PITFALLS

As in our society, Gilyak marriages are not always happy. This is very likely because women are not consulted in the choice of mates. It is very seldom that a girl disobeys her parents' will, and the parents rarely submit to the daughter's protests, even when

she threatens suicide. Thus, postmarital life ends in tragedy. A woman escapes to her lover or goes back to her parents. Such refuge is a common form of escape when a woman is badly treated by her husband. In such cases the husband attempts to take the fugitive by force or demands his bride-price back. As nobody likes to give up things which have already become one's property, the resulting lawsuits are endless [144].

During my various trips across Sakhalin, Gilyak often looked upon me as an official, and almost in every settlement I had to listen to complaints about the return of bride-price. Generally, however, the men preferred to ask that their women be brought back by force. This latter request was often executed by the Sakhalin administrators with the help of Russian Orthodox clergymen.

Very often persons who fell in love with or captured other men's wives went to a clergyman and asked to be baptized in order to be married by church rite. This was done in order to protect the wife from being taken back forcibly by her husband. Missionaries willingly fulfilled such requests and gave the suitors their marriage certificates, which gave the man, when the woman was forcibly taken from him, the right to have her brought back with the help of public authorities. Very often this resulted in tragedy. The following is a case which I think should be immortalized. The wife of a Gilyak called Tis', aged 22, from the village of Mkhil on the Amur, was stolen by another Gilyak, Urgain, from the village of Vaida. Urgain immediately went to Russian Orthodox missionary Moskvitinov. Tis' overtook them and implored the missionary not to perform the marriage ceremony. But the missionary, for a fee, sanctioned Urgain's request. After that Tis' called his relatives and took back his wife with their help by force. However, Urgain presented his marriage certificate to the police, who in turn took another fee and issued an order to return the woman to her legitimate owner. Tis' shot her and then himself. The bride-price is returned without dispute when, soon after marriage, the wife dies without having produced children or when the wife escapes because the man is so poor he cannot support her. Finally, bride-price is returned when the wife betrothed in infancy dies while still a minor.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [*Editor's note:* The AMNH English typescript ends with the story of Tis'. Thanks to Lydia Black's observation, the last lines are restored to comply with the AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet versions.]