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**THE 'DEVER' (THE BROTHER OF THE GROOM) AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONS
BETWEEN TWO FAMILIES WHICH ARE
TO BECOME BLOOD RELATED**

Abstract: The 'devers' or the 'pobratimi' or 'bratimi' play an important role in the wedding ceremony. Whereas the role of the 'devers' in the contemporary Macedonian wedding ritual is designated to the biological brothers of the groom, in cases where he has brothers, and only in isolated cases the role is designated to his close relatives, in the past this role was performed by close relatives of the groom, but not by his biological brothers.

Key words: brother of groom - dever, families, wedding, Macedonia.

When two persons get married, they also create new relations between their families. However, to reach the goal of a successful relation between these two families, there is a need for mediators who would arbitrate during the process of establishing a contact between these people who at the beginning may be total strangers to each other. There are many such mediators related to the Macedonian wedding ritual (the 'strojnik', the 'bajraktar', the 'mushtuldzii', the 'kum' - the best man, his wife - the 'kuma', the old 'svat', his wife the 'starosvatica' etc). but in this article the role of the 'devers' i.e. the 'pobratims' will be examined.

The 'devers' or the 'pobratimi' or 'bratimi' play an important role in the wedding ceremony. Whereas the role of the 'devers' in the contemporary Macedonian wedding ritual is designated to the biological brothers of the groom, in cases where he has brothers, and only in isolated cases the role is designated to his close relatives, in the past this role was performed by close relatives of the groom, but not by his biological brothers. The field research done in many regions in Macedonia (Struga, Ohrid, Prespa, Zeleznik, Kichevija, Poreche, Prilepsko, Bitolsko, Kumanovsko), show that great care was taken that one of the 'devers' be a nephew of the father in law, while the other should be a nephew of the mother in law, so that both sides, the mother's and the father's side were taken into account, or this role could be taken up by a 'pobratim' of the groom (a very close person who is not an actual brother but is 'brother-like') who has taken this obligation since he was a child. The old 'pobratim' should be married, but not a widower or someone who has married twice, while the younger 'pobratim' should not be married. The way they were invited to the wedding speaks in favor of their important role (with special round bread, decorated 'karta' filled with wine) and this invitation usually took place three times. The 'pobratimi' (or 'bratimi', 'deveri) are all the time with the groom. Their role enhances during each passing of a stage that the groom has to go through. For example during the ritual washing and shaving of the groom the 'devers' are in charge of the shaving, as well as when the groom changes his clothes. Their role is one of important mediators that provide the successful transition of the groom from one phase to another, and this will be illustrated with a few examples from Macedonia. Thus, in the region of Zeleznik, after the groom has been shaved, the 'devers' would take of his shoes and socks and would put them over the 'kjumk' (a part of a **stow**) three times in those cases when the wedding took place in winter, or over the door in summer time. Similar to this ritual is the one that took place in the village of Krivogashtani (Prilepsko) where the two devers would take off the shoes of the groom and put them over the main supporting wooden beam of the house.

Their role of important mediators increases during the following ritual processes that are close to the passage that the groom is going to make. Thus it is considered as a characteristic of all wedding mediators that they should reach the house of the bride first, even before the groom himself makes his

appearance (1995: A. Zadrozinska, 142). In this context we can mention the ritual of taking away the bride when they are usually standing close to the groom, then the ritual of arriving at the bride's house when the 'pobratimi' are sitting beside the groom and in many cases advising him on what he should do (especially when it comes to the older 'dever'), after the ritual fight between the groom and the shura - the brother of the bride. The 'shura' is not only giving gifts to the groom, but also to the 'pobratimi', while the mother of the bride, when greeting her daughter who is leaving the house, also greets the groom and also the 'pobratimi'. The 'bratimi' are the ones who are present during the ritual 'deverisuvanje na nevestata' when they are giving their presents to the bride (the shoes and the wreath). The shoes of the bride are put on by the older dever. The fact that the shoes are given to the bride by the dever, as well as some customs that can be found in the traditions of other Slav nations where the bride has to sleep with the dever, the old svat or some other male svat for one or two nights, is related, according to some old research, to the time of the passage from a matrilocal to a patrilocal marriage. The tendency of this passage included the custom according to which the male relatives of the groom have the right to sleep with his bride on the first night (1956: Kulishic, 228-234). The main objection to such research is that they can not explain why the bride in some cases sleeps with her mother in law or with a child. According to E. Gasparini, this custom is related to the well known custom of postponement of the consummation of the marriage (1956: Kulishic, 232, quoted from E. Gasparini, *Nozze, societa e abitazione degli antichi Slavi*, Instituto univ. di Ca Foscari, Venezia, p. 165-168). The latest research agrees with this, since the first night, as a boundary one, is full of suspense and dangers (1993: B. Jovanovic, 150-151). The custom according to which the bride sleeps with the mother in law or some other female person, could reflect the tendency of prohibition of the relation between persons who are blood related, but at the same time, the symbolic way in which the bride is close to her new home and the relatives of her husband (1956: Kulishic, 234); other authors think that this is done in order to deceive evil creatures (1984: T. Dzordzevic, book 3, 337). Without going into the genesis of the custom, we would only like to stress upon the symbolic role of the shoes. The shoes are a symbol of the ownership right, the travelling to the world of the dead but also in all directions, a proof of identity, the biological coming of age (The dictionary of symbols, under: shoes, 1986: D. Kuper, shoes). Presenting shoes to the bride at the wedding means showing the authority and power of the groom regarding the bride, as well as the fact that she becomes his property. This is connected to M. Mause's opinion that giving a present means establishing a hierarchical relation, through which superiority is shown especially if the other person is not returning the present (1982: M. Mause, II, 207). The symbolism of the shoes which is related to the world of the dead, as well as the symbol of a passenger, is a western one, as in the case of the custom where shoes or boots are put near the fire place the night before Christmas (Dictionary of symbols, shoe). Since the main idea of all passage rites is visiting the world of the dead and being born again, this symbol fits here as well, since the bride, by marrying, leaves her maiden life and enters a new life. This maybe the reason why in all passage rites connected to the life cycle shoes play such a prominent role, like making cookies in form of feet for a child that has just started walking, putting new shoes on a deceased person etc. The symbol of identity is well expressed in the story of Cinderella, "the girl whose feet match the shoe will be the prince's wife". Some scientist, mostly psychiatrists have seen in this symbol of identity as a symbol of fertility or just a symbol of sexual desires that the foot inspires. Thus, the foot is a phallic symbol, while shoes symbolize the vagina (Dictionary of symbols, under: shoe, foot, 1979: B. Betelhajm, 292-295). The psychoanalysts consider the exchange of the rings between the bride and the groom at their wedding as something similar to the above mentioned (1979: B. Betelhajm, 295). However, even in the case of our wedding ritual, the symbolism of the feet and the shoes are connected to the biological maturity of the bride as well as of the groom. The symbolic role of the feet and the shoes emerges from their contact with the ground, i.e. the relationship with the Earth's fertility (1996 : Lj. Radenkovic, 19, 21). This relation to the fertility is stressed even more when one bears in mind that the shoes are put on by the older dever, who is married, i.e. who has already a status of a person involved in fertility, that is, who has been in touch with the unknown, the underworld, since according to the folk notions fertility

depends on these forces. A related ritual to this data is the one when the door of the bride's room is pushed by the dever, since the doors fall under the system of genital symbolism (for example the key and the key hole), while opening the door during the wedding to some extent symbolizes the deflowering of the bride (1983 : A. Baburin, 13-139). Proof of such a statement is found in the results of O. Frajdenberg's research (*Poetica sjuzheta i zhanra*, St. Petersburg, 1936, p. 211) that thinks that in the agricultural period the doors have symbolized the mother's womb and the vulva. At the same time in the frames of the folklore the female genital organ is known as a 'door'.

The role of the devers is also visible during the bride's exit from her house and the rituals that follow when she enters her new one, until the moment of her complete acceptance in the new family. Thus, following the moment when the brothers of the bride take her out of the house and follow her to the church or half the way to the church, the devers take over. When the bride and the groom enter their new house, the 'pobratims' put them into a 'jarem' (a yoke) which symbolizes that they both should bare the burden of the mutual life that lies ahead. They are present during the process of instructing the couple, especially the older dever who in the region of Kumanovo is known as the "mladozenjski momak" (the groom's friend), who has already gone through that ritual and who gives instructions to the groom. In this case the older dever is introducing the groom into the circle of the married man, so the goal is that he gets well accepted after the 'job' is successfully done. This is the moment when the groom is proving himself to be a mature man.

The older dever reminds the young couple during the night of their obligation, and he is the one who should wake them up in the morning. The groom, together with the 'pobratims' and the music players, is the one who informs the parents of the bride regarding her 'honesty'. This is the reason why we can agree with A. Zadrozinjska who says that during all wedding rituals the 'pobratims' can represent the groom when they enter the ritual processions, together with the guests, but they do not represent him in those rituals that mark the individual initiation of the groom like the "shaving of the groom", his washing, travelling towards the bride. Thus they are his ritual doubles that take upon his rights and obligations (1995 : A. Zadrozinjska, 141).

At the time when the young couple is performing their martial duty, the dever or other participant at the wedding is trying to overhear standing at the door what is happening inside the room. According to popular belief, this is done so that the children of the couple would not be deaf. This custom is probably a result of the function that the voice had in the history of culture. Thus, in the cosmogony myths the voice was at the beginning of the creation of the cosmos, since the light and the voice are the opposite of the darkness and the silence. The voice and the light are characteristic of the human and this world, while the darkness and the silence are representing the wild and the underworld (1996 : Lj. Radenkovic, 27). This is why the goal of some of the ritual activities that involve the young couple is to make them speak. In ritual terms the performing of their duty is followed by suspense, entering the underworld, and in these circumstances the moment of overhearing, of hearing a voice, should provide them with a successful entry into the human and the realm of this world, since the dever or some other person that overhears had the role of 'guardians' of the border between the wild and the social space, and they are enemies of the impure forces (1996 : Lj. Radenkovic, 40). The ritual practice that was done in many regions in Macedonia speak in favor of this opposition couple nature/culture. Namely, after the bride has been taken to the fireplace, the dever would take her and guide her to the room where she should sleep with the groom. The relation nature/culture is strengthened by the fact that in many cases the young couple slept in the 'keral' (a part of the household where the wheat was kept). This opposition can be traced also in the frames of the ritual when the bride is guided from the garden and into the house, towards the central parts of the house (the fireplace and the place where the bread was produced and the flour kept), and put into the 'keral' where she sleeps with the groom. She exits this space the next morning, after the female territory was conquered by the groom, or at vertical level, if one bares in mind the fact that in the past the couple slept few years or some time in separated premises, that is together with the animals, then this opposition nature/culture denotes that the

complete entrance into the human world is done only after the couple proved to be able to produce progeny - only after their child is born.

The acceptance of the bride into the new community happens when her 'honesty' is announced, that in most cases is done by breaking a barrel or shooting a gun, and in many cases this ritual is carried out by the devers. In Kumanovsko, for example, the honesty of the bride was announced by breaking a plate by the 'mladozenski momok' who by this ritual was calling upon the mother in law to join the celebration (2000 : V. Petreska, 351).

The dever's role of a mediator is illustrated in the best way by the ritual that was done in Mariovo, when the mother in law is given presents by the bride. During this procedure, the dever is 'strangling the mother in law with his shirt', so that he could get a higher amount of money, since he has provided a bride for the family. The mother in law in order to avoid giving money is saying: "I have given everything that I owned to her, I have given to her the 'kacija', the 'crepni', the 'vrshnik', the 'furka', the 'igli', the 'nokvi', the 'bukar', the 'sito' (small items of the household, used in the process of bread making or other house work done by females). Most importantly I have given her a young bull with one horn" (1962: M. Risteski, V, 40), meaning her son, which makes everyone laugh. Their role of mediators, as well as their role in the ritual of the final separation of the bride from her family, is very well presented in the ritual that was done in the area of Kumanovo. The mother of the bride would be informed about the honesty of her daughter by sending her a sweet decorated bread, sweet brandy and the bride would send basil bouquets for all girls in the village. The ones who are carrying the bouquets, the bread and the brandy to the mother of the bride are called 'deveri', 'kitkari' (the village of Orashac) and 'svekri' (village of Dovezence). Tuesday morning the sister of the bride would go out in the 'swine centre of the village' where the swine eat, and would distribute the bouquets that the bride sent to the girls (2000 : V. Petreska, 351-352). This can be connected to the demonic characteristics of the swine, that is to its relation to the underworld and the cult of fertility. Another example is when the girls before some holidays (like St. George or New Year) perform magic customs that involve the swine, so that they can get married. The relation of the swine to the cult of fertility is also shown when the Christmas ham is taken into account, ham according to which the prosperity of the family as well as the success of the agricultural and shepherd's activities was foreseen (1970 : CMP, under: the pig and the Christmas ham). A song was sang to the devers at this occasion:

Aj sozdravje dva ruchna devera

Aj sozdravje dva ruchna devera
Aj sozdravje dva ruchna kitkara / ij
Da nosite mnogo zdravo-zivo
Da nosite na nashata sestra / ij
Da ne zali ona da ne plache
Da ne zali ona da ne plache / ij
Kad kje idemo na sharena cheshma
njojni stomni mi gi nosimo / ij
Kad kje metemo shiroki dvorovi
s'njonma metla mi kje gi metemo / ij
(2000: Vesna Petreska, 352)

Goodbye two devers

Goodbye two devers
Goodbye two 'kitkaras' /ij
Bring good wishes
to our sister / ij
So that she is not sad,
so that she does not weep /ij

When we shall go to bring water
we shall bring her buckets too /ij
When we shall sweep the big yards
we shall do it with her broom /ij

The mediator role that the devers have during the separation of the bride from her family and her acceptance to the new family (and all its members, including the devers) as a part of the family, can be seen through the terms which she uses to address them. The bride has to use the terms 'brothers' to refer to the brothers of the groom, although they are being 'devers' to her. Apart from this being an everyday routine, we can trace this situation in the folk songs, where we can notice that this is a part of the 'training' of the bride by her family so that she can receive a good reputation in the new one. Referring to the 'devers' as 'brothers' is part of the training, although these are not biological brothers of the bride - "he is not a brother/but you should say 'brother'".

According to everything that was already said, one could notice the mediator role of the devers that enhances during each new passage and stops when the wedding ritual ends, when their mediatory role is fulfilled - connecting two persons and two families.

Notes:

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