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AQD

ʿ**AQD,** marriage contract, marriage contract ceremony. Iranian wedding ceremonies are divided into several distinct phases. Betrothal, the marriage contract ceremony (*ʿaqd*) and the secular wedding celebration (*ʿarūsī*) which includes or directly precedes consummation of the marriage. *ʿAqd* marks the formal legal and religious recognition of the marriage; it is the ceremony at which the legal contract (*ʿaqd-nāma*, q.v.) is read, formally agreed upon and signed. The *ʿaqd* is performed prior to the *ʿarūsī*, which may take place long after the marriage contract ceremony. For example, Tāǰ-al-salṭana, a daughter of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah, reported that her *ʿaqd* took place in 1890 and that her *ʿarūsī* was held a few years later (Tāǰ-al-salṭana, *Ḵāṭerāt*, pp. 27-33). The *ʿaqd* establishes the legal union of the bride and groom; it is celebrated later in the *ʿarūsī*, after which the couple take up married life together.

The *ʿaqd* ceremony is observed simply among tribal groups. Betrothal and wedding (*ʿarūsī*) ceremonies are more elaborate. Ḡ. R. Maʿṣūmī describes a perfunctory *ʿaqd* among the Kalhor tribe of Kermānšāh province. Elder male representatives of the bride and groom, and occasionally the bride and groom or groom alone, go to the official government office (*daftar-ḵāna-ye rasmī*) in the city to register the marriage (Maʿṣūmī, "ʿArūsī dar īl-e Kalhor," p. 61). The Baluchi bride (*ʿarūs*) does not participate in the *ʿaqd*. It is the clergyman, parents of the groom, the groom, and male guardian of the bride who attend the ceremony in the bride's home (Rīāḥī, "Zār wa Bād wa Balūč," pp. 49-50).

ʿAqd ceremonies are far more greatly elaborate in urban areas. Traditionally, the bride is taken to the public bath to bathe and be prepared for the

ceremony. All superfluous hair is removed from her face, and her eyebrows are plucked for the first time. Her hands and feet are colored with henna and makeup is applied to her face. Nowadays a lengthy trip to the beauty parlor may suffice.

An auspicious time is chosen for the ceremony; in the past an astrologer was consulted, now convenience plays a greater part in the decision. Traditionally, trays of sweets, biscuits and clothes would be sent from the groom's home to the house of the bride on the day or morning before the *ʿaqd* (Colliver Rice, *Persian Women and Their Ways*, pp. 140-41). One tray, the *ḵūṇča/ḵᵛāṇča-ye ʿaqd*, would be beautifully decorated and contain gifts from the groom to the bride. These would include a mirror, often in an engraved silver frame, two elaborate candlesticks and a Qurʾān. These items may be listed in the marriage contract and later figure importantly in the ceremony. In cities a modern version of the *ḵūṇča-ye ʿaqd* is now available for rent. It consists of a low, rectangular glass case in which wild rue (*esfand*), dyed red and green, is arranged in designs and around which small colored lights are placed.

The *ʿaqd* takes place in the bride's home. Men and women gather separately for traditional celebrations of the *ʿaqd*. The women assemble in a ground floor room under which there is no basement (Faqīrī, "Marāsem-e ʿarūsī dar Šīrāz," p. 78). The women in the room should all be happily married. In Shiraz girls may be asked to leave the room when the contract is read, lest they be unable to find husbands (*ke baḵt-ešān basta na-šavad*) (Faqīrī, p. 77).

A prominent feature of the ceremony is the *sofra-ye ʿaqd*, a cloth spread with symbolic objects which bode well for the bride's future married life. The cloth, white or of fine stuff such as high-quality block-printed Isfahani cloth or, in the case of one of Moḥammad Reżā Pahlavī's weddings, cloth of gold (Gérard de Villiers, *The Imperial Shah*, tr. J. P. Wilson and W. B. Michaels, Boston, 1976, p. 149), is spread so that when the bride sits on it during the *ʿaqd* she is facing Mecca (*rū be Qebla*). On the far end of the cloth stands a mirror, "the mirror of luck (*āʾīna-ye baḵt*) which the groom has given to the bride. Later the mirror should be the first object moved into the couple's new home. A pair of candlesticks, also gifts from the groom flank the mirror. One is said to represent the bride, the other the groom. A prayer cloth (*ǰā-ye namāz*), often made of lovely *terma* cloth with a fancy metallic trim, is placed in front of the mirror. Wheat or salt may be sprinkled under the cloth for prosperity and blessing (*barakat*). Objects representing sweetness, fertility, smooth relations

with in-laws and prosperity are arranged on the cloth. The cloth is decorated as elaborately as the resources of the bride's family will allow. A Qurʾān is placed on the prayer cloth and may be read by the bride during the ceremony. A loaf of *sangak* bread on which the words "*mobārak bād*" (congratulations) are written in poppy seeds (*ḵašḵāš*) is always included. Walnuts, perhaps slivered, are heaped in a dish and represent the hope that the bride will have a son. A plate of bread, cheese, and greens is placed on the *sofra* so that she will not acquire a co-wife (*havū*) (Šakūrzāda, *ʿĀqāyed wa rosūm*, p. 149). Eggs are present to bring about fertility. The candles are lit during the ceremony and symbolize brightness and long life. They should be allowed to burn down, rather than being snuffed out. Mercury (*jīva*) may be poured in a nutshell and included on the *sofra* so that, "just as the mercury slips back and forth in the nutshell, the groom's heart will beat for the bride" (Ṣ. Hedāyat, *Neyrangestān*, Tehran, n.d., p. 23).

Each region has its own customs regarding what must be on the *sofra*. For instance, in Shiraz a lamp made with honey and oil is lit so that the bride and groom will get along like the honey and oil (Faqīrī, p. 76). Small bundles of bread, cheese and greens are prepared in Shiraz, one for each guest; it is said that whoever eats of it will not suffer from toothaches (ibid.).

Hedāyat and Dānešvar both refer to a saddle being placed on the *sofra* so that the bride may sit on it during the ceremony, the rationale being that she will then be in control of her husband (Dānešvar, *Sūvašūn*, p.7; Hedāyat, p. 22). Alternatively, the bride sits on the prayer cloth facing the mirror during the ceremony.

When the women are assembled in the room around the *sofra-ye ʿaqd*, the bride is brought in and seated at the *sofra*, on the saddle or prayer cloth. She is made-up, fancily dressed and wears a veil over her face. In Shiraz a bride wears a skein of green silk threads around her neck so that she will be fortunate (*sabzbaḵt*, lit. "green luck"); the green silk is a present from the groom and is listed in the marriage contract. An urban bride may choose to wear a green dress at her *ʿaqd*. White is then reserved for the dress she will wear at the *ʿarūsī* celebration. Every knot or button in the bride's dress should be undone during the ceremony and her hair unplaited so that she will not encounter any knotty problems in her married life. This custom is no longer scrupulously observed.

Once the bride is seated, the clergyman comes and stands apart from the

women, perhaps on the other side of a curtain demarcating the women's area, or outside a window. He then reads the marriage contract to the women. The recitation includes a complete inventory of the gifts the groom has promised to the bride, the amount of the *mahrīya*, bridewealth, and any other conditions which have been agreed to by the bride's and groom's families in earlier negotiations. The clergyman asks the bride if she agrees to the marriage. She remains soberly silent; the reading is repeated two more times.

During the readings of the marriage contract, two female relatives of the bride stand to either side of her, holding a length of white cloth, hammock-like, over her head. Another woman, who must be happily married, rubs together two decorated cones of sugar (*kalla-ye qand*), so that sugar rubbed from them falls onto the white cloth, ensuring a sweet future for the bride. The sugar cones are kept by the bride. If she later suspects that her husband's affections have wandered, she may put a bit of the sugar in his food to win him back (Donaldson, *The Wild Rue*, p. 50).

A relative or friend of the bride may sew a small piece of cloth, often with a seven-colored thread, while the sugar is being ground. This is referred to as "sewing the mother-in-law's tongue" and is meant to bode well for the girl's life with her in-laws. Wild rue (*esfand*) is burned in a brazier; its pungent fragrance fills the air and is intended to ward off the evil eye.

After the third reading of the marriage contract the women urge the bride to accept, which at length she does with a barely audible "yes." The women break into a chorus of ululation (*kel zadan*), singing, clapping and drum beating while the clergyman returns to the men and announces the bride's assent.

Once the bride has agreed to the marriage, the groom enters the room and sits next to her on the *sofra-ye ʿaqd*. The bride receives a present of jewelry from the groom, and she may give him a gift in return. Her veil is drawn back and he has what is perhaps his first glimpse of her in the mirror. *Noql*, a white candy made of sugar-coated almond's slivers, and small coins are tossed over the bride and groom. The guests may scramble to collect them. A contemporary element of the *sofra* is often a large platter heaped with small tulle-wrapped bundles of *noql* so that each guest may have one to take home.

This completes the *ʿaqd* ceremony. The guests may remain to enjoy sweets, perhaps wedding cake, fruit and tea. The groom returns to his own home following the ceremony, and must wait for the *ʿarūsī* before his bride can join

him.

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