



Tokens of Affection: Gifts and Marriage in Historical Perspective

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Customs: It is customary to lead the bride at dawn because this is good and that is when Venus enters. And we learn this from: “And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings” (Ex. 19:16). That is why they take torches. And when the bride comes into the gate of the house, the groom goes towards her and takes her hand and puts it on the doorframe. And when the blessing is made they put the shawl (צעיף) on their head, as it is said: “and they stood at the lower part of the mount” (Ex. 19: 17). And they stand the bride to the right of the groom as it says: “ at thy right hand she stands” (Ps. 45: 10) And after the blessing it is customary to eat honey and cheese, for it says: “ honey and milk are under your tongue” (Cant. 4:11)...(R. Eleazar b. Judah, Sefer Rokeah, Jerusalem, 1960, # 353).

In Mainz they make the blessing right after the prayer services in the morning. And all of the bride’s and groom’s relatives wear Sabbath clothes. And R. Jaccob Segel who made the blessings would also wear Sabbath clothes in their honor...And they bring the bride with musical instruments until the entrance to the synagogue....and then the rabbi and other important members of the community go and take her by her clothes and stand her to the right of the groom...and the mothers of the groom and the bride go and stand by her on the tower during the blessings... (R. Jacob Mülin, Sefer Minhagim, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 465-466, #3.)

Generally, they arrange the betrothal¹ at the home of the rabbi, and immediately after the vessel is broken for the betrothal agreement,² the people who are present go to the home of the groom and say to him: “Mazal Tov.”³ And if they wish, they go to the home of the bride as well, to say to her: “Mazal Tov.” And the mother of the bride

1 Literally, “place the fine.”

2 Literally, “the fine.”

3 “Good luck,” or “Congratulations.”

brings along female neighbors and relatives to the home of the groom, they say to the groom: “Mazal Tov.” And the custom is for the fathers of the groom and the bride to distribute Lebkuchen⁴ after the betrothal. And on the day of the betrothal, the groom makes a meal, and this meal is called: Knass Mahl.⁵...

For seven days before the marriage [ceremony], the bride wears white [garments]. And they summon young women⁶ to dine with her, and this meal is called: Suppe Mahl.⁷ And the bride wears Sabbath clothing and Guelden Haube⁸ until the day of the wedding. And she does not leave her house from that day on, until Spinholtz Sabbath⁹ and until the Day of Savlonot.¹⁰ And during these days, the young women enter the home of the bride and rejoice with her and entertain her...

After the nighttime meal, the sexton calls through the streets, up and down: “zu der Spinholtz.”¹¹ And the entire community, men and women,¹² come in Sabbath mantles to the home of the groom. The fathers of the groom and the bride are also dressed in Sabbath mantles. And they stand thus, each one in his house before his table, and give drinks to those entering. And the groom sits at the head of his table, and his table is decorated and bedecked with lovely vessels, as is befitting his status, and with fruits and sweet delicacies brought by the merchants,¹³ such as Zucker¹⁴ and the like. And all who come sit around his table for a short while, and drink wine, and rejoice with the groom until others arrive. And then the first group goes on its way, and the [new]comers sit at the table for a short while like the previously-mentioned ones, and they too go when a third group arrives. And so forth.¹⁵ And after everyone else, the young men come and sit with the groom at his table, and rejoice with him, and drink in his honor. And the women do not sit, but stand behind the table and wait for their husbands to go, and the women go with their husbands. And outside, near the entrance to the house, stands the mother of the groom, or the mistress of the house if his mother is not there, and female relatives, and they distribute Lebkuchen to every man and woman who exits.

4 A type of pastry.
5 “Betrothal Meal,” or “Meal of the Fine.”
6 Betulot, literally, “virgins,” henceforth “young women.” The term refers to individuals who are unmarried.
7 “Soup Meal.”
8 A golden head covering.
9 The Sabbath preceding the wedding, as will be explained in the next paragraph.
10 “Day of Gifts,” as will be described presently.
11 “To the Spinholtz.”
12 Literally, “husband and wife.”
13 Literally, “of merchant’s powders.”
14 Sugar.
15 Literally, “forever.”

And so, afterwards, all of the groups go to the home of the bride as well. The bride also sits at the head of her table adorned with lovely clothing as befitting her status and with a Schepel¹⁶ and a Glencheck¹⁷ on her head. And the table is decorated and bedecked like the table of the groom. And around the table sit young women adorned with lovely clothing, and they sit there with great modesty, and they do not eat nor do they drink. And the men and women who come there stand behind the table and observe the table, and its vessels, and the bride. And the father of the bride provides refreshment for those entering and gives them wine to drink. And when they exit, the mother of the bride, or the mistress of the house, and the female relatives distribute Lebkuchen as well, like at [the home of] the groom....

And there in her home she sits at the head of her table, and the young women around her, around the table, and there is nothing on the table but a lovely cloth, spread in her honor. And the father of the groom brings the gifts to the Head of the Rabbinical Court, and the sexton summons to the [giving of the] gifts, from the Zettel, those whom the fathers of the groom and the bride wish. And all those summoned, they too come to the home of the Head of the Rabbinical Court. And the rabbi emerges from his home with the gifts, and so, exposed, conveys them to the home of the bride. The rabbi enters first and after him, the father of the groom and the father of the bride, and afterwards, all those summoned, the notables leading.¹⁸ And then the rabbi sets the gifts on the table, in front of the bride, and says: "This shall be a present to you from the groom, after the Huppah and from then on." And the young women who are sitting on either side of the bride take the gifts and adorn the bride. And afterwards, the rabbi leaves and returns to his home and, so too, all those gathered return to their homes, and the young women also return to their homes...

And so is the custom with the gifts that the bride sent. They eat two or three dishes, and afterwards, the father of the bride brings the gifts to the rabbi. And then the groom re-dons the Mitron. And the rabbi takes it, and looks at it, and gives it afterwards to some esteemed persons seated there, and they too look [at it]. And he sets it on the table, and he says to the groom: "This shall be a present to you from the bride, after the Huppah." And those sitting on either side of the groom, to his left and to his right, gird the gift on the groom. And then the groom is allowed to eat and drink and rejoice. And if he should wish, he may afterwards remove the Mitron and place the hat on his head, until the Grace After Meals, and then he re-dons the Mitron.

And the groom and the bride wear the gifts every single day until the Saturday night of the Schenk Wein...¹⁹

16 Or Schapel, a flower garland or gold tiara.

17 A checkered cloth.

18 Perhaps by order of importance.

19 "Wine Sending," the Sabbath after the wedding, as will be described presently.

And thus is the custom of the Mayen. The groom wears the Mitron around his neck, like a mourner. The groom goes first, and after him, the rabbi, and the entire community before them. Musical instruments, as well as the servants and the members of the groom's household, walk before them with torches in their hands. And they light the torches even on summer days, because they are not lit solely to illuminate, rather, the main purpose is to bring joy to the groom and bride. And they walk [until] they come to the Braut Haus. And the groom sits on a special platform for seating the groom and bride, and the rabbi and the community stand there. And the musical instruments and the torches go to the bride's home, and they bring the bride as they had brought the groom. And it is a custom to honor two women who walk alongside the bride to bring her to the Braut Haus, or else the mothers of the groom and the bride bring her. And these two women go adorned in festive clothing and bring the bride up to the entrance of the Braut Haus...And then the rabbi goes to the groom, to the place where he sits, and takes him by the hand and leads him to the bride, at the entrance of the Braut Haus, and the groom takes the bride in his hand, and the rabbi is still holding the groom's hand, and he leads them to the platform which is prepared for seating the groom and bride that was mentioned previously. And the two women who lead the bride come as well and sit alongside the groom and bride, and presently, they stand and take the bride with them and lead her to her home. The women with the bride exit first, and afterwards, the groom also goes and comes to the synagogue by way of a small entrance which is called: the Groom's Entrance, and young boys go with him and push him to enter via the small entrance of the groom, and the rabbi and the householders follow. (Juspa Schammes, Customs of Wormeisa, ed. Hamburger and Zimmer, Jerusalem, 1988, 2: #227-231, translated by Rachel Furst).