

ON THE RAIN-RELATED RITUALS OF TATEV VILLAGE, ARMENIA (Ethnographic field-notes)

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Village Tatev is situated in the south of the Republic of Armenia, in the region called Syunik or Zangezur. Geographically, the village (N39°23'8.79", E46°14'29.34"; 1500-1670 m a.s.l.) is in the basin of Vorotan River, a tributary of Araxes. The village is a part of the Tatev community (villages Tatev, Tandzapat, Svarants, Halidzor, Shinuhayr, Khot, Harzhis and Kashuni). Nowadays, village Tatev has a population of circa one thousand people, practically all are Armenians¹.

Rituals related to the rain are an intangible part of folk beliefs in Armenia although they may vary in different regions of the country and for different communities². Several rituals related to the rain are recorded and published for the Syunik region (including the village of Tatev)³. During our fieldwork in Tatev, we recorded narratives regarding the rain-making and rain-stopping rituals that had been practiced in the village of Tatev in the 20th century. Most of the memories and narratives refer to the Soviet period, 1930-1990.

Narratives about the rain-making and rain-stopping rituals in the Tatev village were gathered as a part of ethnographic survey aiming to study plant-related practices (including the use of wild plants resources, agriculture, vegetal food, folk medicine, agriculture-related rituals, etc) during field-works in

¹ Official website of the administration of Syunik region. About Tatev Community. <http://syunik.mtad.am/about-communities/991/> [in Armenian].

² For example, see **Bdoyan V.H.** *Agrarian Culture in Armenia*, Yerevan, 1972, pp. 484-501 [in Armenian]; **Lalayan E.** *Worship of Elements and Physical Phenomena. Borchalu Province* (Ethnographic Journal, N 10, 1903, pp. 200-202) [in Armenian]; **Lisitsyan S.** *Armenians of Zangezur*, Yerevan, 1969, pp. 129-130 [in Armenian].

³ See **Lisitsyan S.**, op. cit., 1969, pp. 129-130; **Grigorov N.** *Village Tatev* (Collection of Materials Describing Localities and Tribes of the Caucasus, Issue 13, Tiflis, 1892, pp. 67-68, 115-116) [in Russian].

the village of Tatev in 2017 and 2018⁴. Our interactions with research participants started with an introduction of ourselves, our work, interests and plans. Then, if we obtained their oral consent, we used semi-structured interviews (in some cases we asked also for reproductions of fragments of rituals and made observations). More than twenty locals were interviewed, both woman and man. After several interviews, it was clear that nobody practices rain-related rituals anymore in the village and only elderly people remember those rituals from their younger times, mostly from childhood. The narratives told by the locals have begun to repeat each other after several interviews. A summary based mostly on the interviews is given in this article. Particular interviews are cited only in the cases when specific information is given; for the rest, narratives are repeated in all interviews or in the majority of them.

There were three main groups of rain-related rituals in the village of Tatev; we conventionally named those *Stone & water/fire* (*Petrosakhach*, *Khozaghbyur*, *Kotrats khach*, etc), “*Ghodi-ghodi*” and *River plowing* (from the most popular to the less). Many details of these rituals were forgotten. I tried to gather as many details as possible, but some are still missing (e.g. a part of the *Ghodi* song). There are notes on the rain-related rituals of Tatev also in earlier publications⁵; ethnographic data I gathered partly repeat the data from the earlier publications. In addition to the rituals described in this article, there were several more in Tatev in the second half of the 19th century. For example, to stop the rain, old women boiled rain-water until it fully evaporated⁶, or opened backside of a first child under the rain⁷.

Stone & water/fire. The main idea of this ritual is that a cross-stone should be wetted to induce rain. According to some of the locals of Tatev, any cross-stone can be used for the rain-making ritual. However, there are three

⁴ I am thankful to all our research participants for their contribution to this study. Also, I wish to thank my colleagues, Nina Stepanyan-Gandilyan, who was present during some of the interviews and assisted me, and Christina Ayzvazyan, for professional transcription of the interviews. Ethnobotanical investigations in the community of Tatev have been initiated by Christian Stollberg, Nina Stepanyan-Gandilyan and the author in 2017 and continued by the last two.

⁵ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, pp. 67-68, 115-116, 118; **Lisitsyan S.**, op. cit., 1969, p. 129.

⁶ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, p. 115.

⁷ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, p. 118.

particular places which locals visited to conduct rain-related rituals (from more popular to the less): Petrosakhach, Khozaghbyur and Kotrats khach. Although there is the main action – wetting a stone by a female (sometimes male⁸) virgin, the rituals are somewhat different in these places⁹.

Petrosakhach, translated as the cross of Peter¹⁰, refers to a pilgrimage destination and a *khachqar* (cross-stone) in the top of a mountain. Ethnographic notes regarding Petrosakhach from the earlier publications refer the following: When drought, girls went from a house to a house, collected food products and (with boys) took those offerings to the top of a hill to NW from the village Tatev, where, according to the legend, the grave of hermit Petros was situated. Here they organized a party: eating, drinking, singing and entertaining. After that, they took the cross-stone from the grave and headed to the mountain spring nearby. The girls did not look back while carried the stone. At the spring, they immersed the stone into water and left it there. When there was no need of rain they took the cross-stone back to its place, else strong rains might wash away all sowings¹¹.

Nowadays there is a broken cross-stone on the summit of the mountain. Only the lower part of that cross-stone, identified by the locals as Petrosakhach, is present there (Coordinates: N39°24'24.11", E46°13'53.58"; Altitude: 2031 m a.s.l.; Fig. 1a,c). According to our interviews, the villagers, seeking for rain, sent virgin/unmarried women to this place to pour water on it. Lighting candles and praying for rain was a part of this ritual. To stop the rain, the women made a fire on the cross-stone. The ritual was so accustomed in Tatev at the end of the 20th century that an unmarried and blind woman (“Muni dada”) was in charge for conducting this ritual for many years (after her death this practice discontinued in the village). The locals strongly believed

⁸ Interview N RH18061601.

⁹ A similar ritual was described for Gandzak province for the end of 19th century (See **Lalayan E.** *Worship of Elements and Physical Phenomena. Gandzak Province* (Ethnographic Journal, N 6, 1900, p. 347) [in Armenian]).

¹⁰. According to epigraphist Arsen Harutyunyan, who later visited Petrosakhach and Khozaghbyur and studied the inscriptions on them, a man named Degh erected the cross in memory of his parents (there is no any indication of “Petros” or “rain”). The cross is dated to 11th-12th centuries A.D. (see **Harutyunyan A.** *Newly-Found Inscription of "Petrosakhach" ("Etchmiadzin": Review of Religious Studies and Armenology, (submitted))* [in Armenian]).

¹¹ See **Grigorov N.**, *op. cit.*, 1892, pp. 67-68, 115-116.

in the ritual of Petrosakhach; there were cases when unmarried women were sent to Petrosakhach and requested to pour water on it to verify their virginity before the marriage¹² (it had been expected that rain will fall only if virgin pours water on the cross). Nowadays, there are no narratives and memories regarding the taking the cross-stone from the top of the mountain to the spring as it had been practiced at the end of 19th century (see above)¹³.

Khozaghbyur, translated as spring of pig, refers to a spring in the foothill of the same mountain where Petrosakhach is situated (N39°24'10.86", E46°13'52.89", 1871 m a.s.l.; Fig. 1a,b). This locality is an assemblage of two old, medieval stone basins and a piece of cross-stone (Fig. 1b). The rain-making ritual at Khozaghbyur, according to our interviews, was the following: the villagers visited the spring and immersed the cross-stone in the basins of water. An elderly man attests that Muni dada (see Petrosakhach above) was performing that ritual with immersing the cross-stone into the water. And, when there was too much rain after this ritual the same woman was asked to go to Khozaghbyur and take out the cross-stone from the water basin¹⁴.

Having the above-mentioned ethnographic notes from the end of 19th century¹⁵, it is easy to conclude that Khozaghbyur is the spring where the Petrosakhach cross-stone was carried as a part of the rain-making ritual, and the piece of the cross-stone at the Khozaghbyur spring is the missing upper part of Petrosakhach. However, nowadays the locals were not aware of it and they consider Petrosakhach and Khozaghbyur rituals separately. Possibly, at one point the Petrosakhach cross-stone was broken during the moving. Then the locals decided to take only the smaller piece (upper half) to the spring of Khozaghbyur. After that, from some point on, the locals decided do not take the piece of the Petrosakhach cross-stone back to the top of the mountain. Possibly the war, revolution and negative attitude towards religion and beliefs from the side of ruling communistic authorities at the beginning of 20th century resulted in discontinuation of the practice, described for the second half of

¹² Interview RH18041904abcd.

¹³ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, pp. 67-68, 115-116.

¹⁴ Interview RH18041801.

¹⁵ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, pp. 67-68, 115-116.

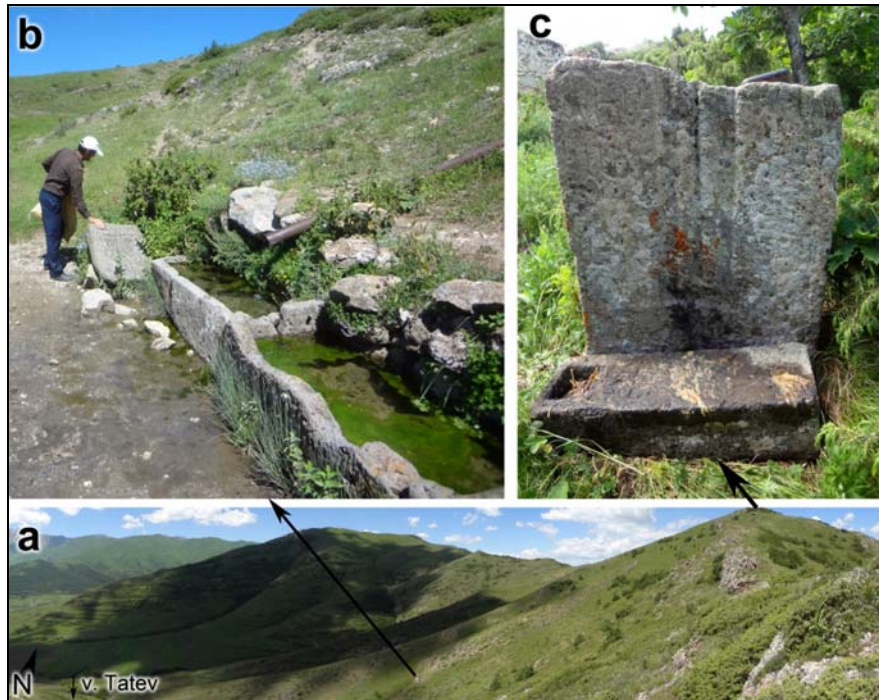


Fig. 1. Petrosakhach and Khozaghbyur, Tatev, Armenia. a – Petrosakhach mount, where both cross-stones are situated, b – Khozaghbyur spring: the cross-stone and the basins, c – Petrosakhach cross-stone with remains of lighted candles in front

the 19th century¹⁶. Discontinuation of that practice resulted in the loss of memory about the origin of this piece of stone at the Khozaghbyur spring.

Carrying this stone piece from its original place (Petrosakhach) to the spring and back in the earlier past, apparently, had been done many times (possibly for centuries) as the stone is heavily eroded: edges are rounded, the carving of the cross is barely visible on it. There is a custom that may serve as a link for these two, Khozaghbyur and Petrosakhach contexts: the visitors that frequent Petrosakhach first should stop at Khozaghbyur, put the hand on the cross-stone (Fig. 1b), drink water from the spring and only then start the climbing (according to the locals, after doing it the climbing is easier)¹⁷.

¹⁶ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, pp. 67-68, 115-116.

¹⁷ Interview RH180618ab.

Kotrats Khach, translated as a broken cross, is an assemblage with a small chapel like a building, which has carved crosses and inscriptions on it. A ritual similar to the one practiced for Petrosakhach had been practiced also for this case: an unmarried woman (women) went to this place, found a boulder, lighted candles and prayed, asking for rain¹⁸.

In addition to the above-mentioned, the locals also used to send girls or virgin/unmarried women to a random cross-stone or just a boulder to pour water on it for rain or make a fire for sunny weather. To stop the rain they also went to the monastery of Tatev, lighted candle and prayed¹⁹.

Ghodi²⁰. The locals call the ritual *Ghodi-ghodi* (Դոդի-դոդի). The main actor/figurant of the ritual is a female – often a doll (in a broad sense) and/or children. Young girls or children in general were the main actors of this ritual. Name *Ghodi* was referred to a spoon or a ladle that was “dressed” (usually wrapped using white cloth²¹) and used in the ritual. The spoon was danced while singing. The procession of children, particularly young girls or virgin women (two²²) dressed like old women²³ or like boys/men²⁴ or sackcloth²⁵ walked from a house to a house in the village, singing and gathering food products and sweets (eggs, milk, butter oil, bread, wheat grains, candies, walnuts, etc). The landladies sang something (the words are forgotten) as a reply while giving the food²⁶. The gathered food (dedicated to the ‘*Ghodi*’ and put in the scoop of the “dressed” ladle²⁷) had been later prepared and consumed by

¹⁸ Interview RH18041905a.

¹⁹ Interview RH18041705a.

²⁰ To the question what is the *ghodi*, what is the meaning of that word, the locals mostly tell that *ghodi* is the jewel made of a row of coins that elderly women of Syunik were wearing on their foreheads. One elderly woman attested that saying *Ghodi* during the ritual they referred to the doll made of ladle [RH18041902]. Another elderly woman [RH18061704] noted that they call *ghodi* also the red flower and the capsule of a wild poppy (‘pot’ (պոտ) in the local dialect).

²¹ Interviews RH18041902, RH18061601.

²² Interview RH18041705a.

²³ Interview RH18041801.

²⁴ Interview RH18061702.

²⁵ Interview RH18061704.

²⁶ Interview RH18061601.

²⁷ Interview RH18041902.

the procession members or shared²⁸. In one case, girls had gathered milk and rice that later used to prepare a traditional milk-soup called *katnav*²⁹.

Normally, this ritual was served as a rain-making one but two of the participants³⁰ noted that they (girls' groups) had done it also to stop the rain and to have sunny weather (although the words of the song that one of them³¹ cites say that it is for having rain).

Here are the words of the song³².

Ղո՛ղի, ղո՛ղի, մըեր ղողի՛, / Ghodi, Ghodi, our Ghodi,

Մա՛րթը մըերած, մըեր ղողի՛, / The one, whose husband died, our Ghodi,

Տըղա՛ն կորած, մըեր ղողի՛, / The one, whose son was lost, our Ghodi,

...

The majority of the research participants remember the above-mentioned segment of the song only; almost nobody remembers the rest. Here are some pieces for the continuation. For example,

Խոփըրը ընջըստըալ ա, / The mouldboards [of plows] got rusty,

Փոկերը թըզստըալ ա... / The straps got dusty...

...

Եղ տո քցե՛նք հարսին վարսը... / Give us butter that we oil the bride's hair...³³

...

Ձյու՛ տըվեք, տանըք ճաշ եփըք, / Give us eggs that we take and cook a meal,

²⁸ Interview RH18041705a.

²⁹ Interview RH18061704.

³⁰ Interviews RH18061601, RH18041902.

³¹ Interview RH18041902.

³² There were similar songs in other villages of Syunik region but “Choli, Choli” (Ճօլի, Շոլի) was used instead of “Ghodi, Ghodi” (See **Lisitsyan S.**, op. cit., 1969, pp. 129-130). First three lines of the song repeat the one for *Godi* in Artsakh (see **Ghaziyani A.** Artsakh (Armenian Ethnography and Folklore, vol. 15, Yerevan, 1983, p. 156) [in Armenian]). This song and the ritual of *Godi* in Artsakh, contrary to the one of Tatev, had been used predominantly for the rain-stopping ritual, although dual use is also noted (see **Hayrapetyan T.** On the Dual Perception of Rites to Call for Rain and to Stop Raining (Historical-Philological Journal, 2004, N 3, pp. 217-227) [in Armenian]).

³³ Interview RH18041902.

Յո՛ւղ տըվեք, տանըք ճաշ եփըք... / Give us butter that we take and cook a meal...³⁴.

In another version by the same woman:

Յո՛ւղ տըվեք, տանըք [գութանի] փոկերը թըրչենք, որ վեսկով (եզների լուծը) վարըեն,... որ անձրև կյա հետի:/Give butter that we take and dunk the straps [of plow] and use the yoke³⁵ to till ...that it rains³⁶.

Փայ՛ սուր, տանըք ճաշ էփըք.../Give us a share that we take it and cook a meal...³⁷.

In the second part of the song, a share, particularly a food share was requested; even those who did not remember the exact words of the song, noted it.

A similar ritual was recorded for the village at the end of the 19th century³⁸: if drought lasted long, girls sculpted a turtle/tortoise or a doll resembling a naked child from clay, went from a yard to a yard, where dwellers came out and poured water on the sculpture and gave food products to the girls.

Plowing of river. Apparently, for recent times, the tilling of a river had been practiced less frequently than the other rituals. This might be conditioned by the decreasing of the use of the traditional plow in the Soviet period as those were replaced by the tilling machine. During this ritual, women got into the river, which got shallow or dried because of the drought, and tilled the riverbed with a plow. There is more information on this ritual in the earlier publications³⁹: Eight women should have been tilling the river; meanwhile, one of them had to be dressed as men and should have been leading the group, and two other women from the group should have been driving their hitched friends.

These ethnographic notes complement the previous studies and enrich our knowledge about the rain-related rituals of Armenians.

³⁴ Interview RH18061601.

³⁵ See **Lisitsyan S.**, op. cit., 1969, Table 74 for photos of the yoke.

³⁶ Interview RH18061601.

³⁷ Interview RH18061601.

³⁸ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, p. 116.

³⁹ See **Grigorov N.**, op. cit., 1892, p. 115; **Lisitsyan S.**, op. cit., 1969, Table 78 for the photo of the ritual in Zangezour.

**ՏԱԹԵՎ ԳՅՈՒՂԻ (ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆ)՝ ԱՆՁՐԵՎԻՆ ԱՌՆՉՎՈՂ
ԾԵՍԵՐԻ ՄԱՍԻՆ
(ազգագրական դաշտային գրառումներ)**

ՀՈՎՍԵՓՅԱՆ Ռ.Ա

Ամփոփում

Տաթև գյուղում եղել են անձրևաբեր և անձրևախափան բազմազան ծեսեր, որոնք կիրառվել են մինչև XX դ. վերջը: Այս ծեսերի վերաբերյալ նախկինում հրատարակված ազգագրական նյութերը հիմնականում վերաբերում են XIX դ. վերջ (Ն. Գրիգորով, 1892) – XX դ. 60-ական թթ. (Ս. Լիսիցյան, 1969) ժամանակաշրջանին: Տաթևում կատարված ազգագրական հետազոտությունների շնորհիվ հավաքվել են խորհրդային շրջանին վերաբերող տվյալներ, որոնք լրացնում են անձրևաբեր և անձրևախափան ծեսերի մասին մեր գիտելիքները: Ըստ առկա տվյալների, Տաթև գյուղում XX դ. կենցաղավարել են երեք տարբեր բնույթի անձրևաբեր և անձրևախափան ծեսեր. սուրբ քարերը (խաչքարեր) թրջելու (անձրևախափանը՝ վրան կրակ անելու)՝ Պետրոսախաչ, Խոզաղբյուր, Կոտրած խաչ և այլն, «Ղոդի-ղոդի» (Նուրիի համարժեքը) և գետը վարելու ծեսերը:

**О РИТУАЛАХ СЕЛА ТАТЕВ (АРМЕНИЯ), СВЯЗАННЫХ
С ДОЖДЕМ
(этнографические полевые заметки)**

ОВСЕПЯН Р.А.

Резюме

В селе Татев были распространены обряды, связанные с дождем, в частности, с их помощью пытались вызвать и прекратить дождь. Подобные обряды практиковались до конца XX в. Ранее опубликованные этно-

графические материалы об этих обрядах относятся к периоду с конца XIX в. (Н. Григоров, 1892) до 60-х годов XX в. (С. Лисицян, 1969).

Обряды можно выделить в три группы: 1. обряды, вызывающие дождь (во время которых священные камни – хачкары поливали водой), и прекращающие дождь, сопровождающиеся разжиганием огня на этих камнях: Петросахач, Хозахбюр, Котрац хач и др., 2. "Годи-годи" (эквивалент обряда Нури), 3. обряд вспашки реки.