

### Traditions

- a) customs of the personal life (p. 229-265)
- b) traditional practices throughout the year (p. 266-293)

Besides the rich forms of organization that bind a people together from the outside, people own traditions, grown over centuries, which are living in them. These traditional practices have been of decisive importance for our people's ethnic continuance, because only these provide the force to build a community and to strengthen it. How much of it our ancestors brought with them from their homeland eight hundred years ago, maintained here in the isolation in Siebenbürgen, and developed further, who can say it? But which part goes back to pagan prehistoric times, according to faithful transmission, remained pure, or became filled with a Christian lifestyle, cannot be determined in every case, but can only be hinted at. The more isolated the habitat of a community is, the more faithful is the transfer of traditions. This way, in Grosskopisch, some traditions were preserved that were lost in the surrounding villages. Even as the temporary stay of some men in America looking for work had been detrimental to our system of traditional practices, today's ways of living threatens our entire cultural property to get lost. Therefore it is important to draw up a very accurate inventory. The following record will serve this purpose. The traditions will be divided into two realms: those traditional practices which accompany each person from birth to death, and those, that mark the course of the year.

- a) Traditions concerning the personal life

When a child was born the parents received it as a gift from God. Exhausted after its first bath it lay with rosy skin in the cradle in which at one time one of his parents, or even grandparents had lain. Cradles often got older than the people to whom they had provided protection at their most tender age. When the first-born was a boy, the parents were filled with special joy. Not the least happy were the young fathers, but subsequently also the mothers – that now there was the guarantee that the name of the family did not become extinct, and that the farm had a male heir.

Both had wished and hoped for this. If this hope was not fulfilled, perhaps even with the second child, the young mothers have often cried bitter tears into the cushions and only calmed themselves when the young father quickly coped with the disappointment, or, wisely and considerately covered it up until he found the strength to dissuade the grief, that were not to be, of his wife. Old experienced grandmothers knew an effective solace consisting in the assurance that later for every daughter there would be an adult strong son in the business.

During the following days the family first, and then the whole community, take notice of the new earthling. Friends and neighbors wish for the father happiness and joy with the little sprout, when they meet him, and that he may grow and thrive. The care for the woman in childbed is in the hands of the mother, the mother-in-law, and aunts. In the old days they brought her the Spartan childbed soup "dat Kimmlawand" soup with cumin with toasted bread. Today we know that a strong chicken soup is even better. Except for the next relatives no woman would dare to bring something to eat to a woman in childbed. It would mean to impose as "Taufgode" (potential godmother) at the Christening. The female relatives view the child with full interest to determine whether it is well formed, whether their advice during pregnancy kept the mother inadvertently saw a deformed person and therefore the child in the womb could have already suffered some damage. They also wanted to explore to whom the child demonstrated similarities. They were happy if they could detect a trait in his face of themselves or another one from their clan. Their faces became concerned if this little citizen of the earth confronted his being in the world with loud crying. Then their advices kicked in. In the old days a woman was called who mastered the art of magic to make him an "Äscherchen" (ash) s. 'aisarxan', that means glowing coals in a small pot, doused with cold water into which a small amount of lime wash is mixed in.

The lime wash had been collected by scraping all four corners of the room. With this water not only the child's forehead and the soles of his feet were moistened, but he was also given a small amount to drink. Although a short magical formula was whispered doing this, naming the Holy Trinity, it still remained an old pagan superstition. The elders still half believed in something that one could try, because it was not impossible that such a beautiful child could have been summoned by the evil eye. In order for not to let this happen due to their admiration of the child, they spit out three times, and, when it did not have happened right after birth, they fetched a blue or red silk ribbon and tied it to the child's wrist so that it may be protected from such evil. Today the woman in childbed seeks advice in a scientific treatise about the topic of mother and child, which she had studied already for months and rejects decidedly such behavior as unscientific nonsense. The ribbon at the wrist of her darling is in her eyes not a means of protection against the evil eye, magic or evil ghosts, but a sign of her love.

When the child has reached the age of four weeks the baptism is prepared. The parents already had agreed about the witnesses of the baptism, the godfathers, and 'godens' (godmothers). In the past there had been two, and then four. In our days there are six or even eight, although the regulation of the church only allows four to be entered into the baptism registry. At first witnesses were determined. Since the act of baptism had not yet been entered into a baptism registry, these witnesses could later testify to the baptism, and they could also take over the role of parenting during hard times, if necessary. When parents perished in the war or during times of pestilence the witnesses accepted the entire care for the baptized child. The so-called orphan songs, known in all of our communities, attest that this practice had been necessary. Then times changed and with it the understanding as to the function of a godfather.

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The responsibility for the physical needs of the godchild faded more and more into the background, until it only found its expression in a symbolic meaning in the form of a gift at the New Year. But what remained was the shared responsibility for the child's spiritual flourishing, about its growing up in faith, in loyalty, and honesty. When this awareness seems to have flattened out these days, there is no explanation by the pastor necessary. The baptism is not an occasion to form or to solidify friendships between the parents and any persons who are of a different faith or have no faith and as such would have little interest in a Christian education of the child. Such acquaintances were invited, if it is inevitable, to the church service and the subsequent baptism feast, the "Kaimasz". When for this occasion the chickens are slaughtered, fluffy bread, beautifully browned nut strudel cake, the "Hanklich", our National pastry, or, in our times, also small pastries and pies are baked, then the father of the child begins his preparation to visit and petition the chosen witnesses of the baptism and visit the pastor. When the evening bell rings on Saturday, he strides, dressed in a snow-white shirt, black trouser, boots, and covered with colorfully embroidered "Kirchenpelz" (special church garment), with the sure self-awareness of passed-down tradition, through the alleys of the village and taps on the familiar doors. Answering to the invitation from inside: "Please come in!" he enters the house. To his greeting: "Good evening! I wish to find you in good health!" he receives the answer: "Thank God! We have that." To the question: "What brings you to us?" he answers: "You will be aware, that God, our father in heaven, has blessed us with a beloved son (a beloved daughter). Since we are not mighty enough to carry him (her) alone and without help to the Holy baptism, I would beg you kindly to stand by us as godfather (gode – godmother)." The people addressed this way answered in response: "If God, the Lord, keeps us healthy we like to do you the favor."

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After a short conversation, which involved mostly the well-being of mother and child and at which a drink to the honor for all is offered, the father says good-bye and continues his way to the other witnesses of the baptism. All Saxon Christian men consider this as their duty and follow this tradition which is firmly anchored in their conscience.

The subsequent registration at the rectory follows, after a short greeting, in a manner passed down through generations, with a fixed script: "Honorable master and father, you will be aware that God, Lord in heaven, has blessed us not only with temporary and perishable goods, but also with a fruit of our body, a beloved son (beloved daughter). Now I want to ask you to be kind enough to register him (her) into the Registry of Life and baptize him tomorrow in the holy church in our Christian faith."

After a few contemplative words about the blessing of baptism, the pastor registers the child, the parents, and the witnesses of the baptism in the official Registry of Baptisms and then dismisses the father with a good wish and a blessing for the child and the parents.

On Sunday the godfathers go into the church as the bells ring and take their usual seats. The 'godens' (godmothers) pick up the child-to-be-baptized and the mother at their home. They set off in time and enter the house of God right after the sermon. The godfathers join them, go to the Choir, and place themselves at both sides of the baptism font. To the left are the women, and to the right the men. The parents form an open quadrangle with the two rows of witnesses on the sides that turn into a closed square around the font as the pastor takes his place across from them. After the address for baptism the ceremony is performed. For this, a woman holds the child on her arm over the font. The pastor moistens the child's forehead three times with the sign of the cross, followed by water, while saying the liturgy for baptism, and finishing with the Lord's Prayer. During the ceremony the witnesses raise the finger of the right hand over the child's head for the oath and thus seal their Yes-word, which they gave before on the question whether it was their will that the child be baptized in the name of the trinity of God and educated in the Christian faith.

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After the finishing the procedure of the baptism, which ends in a prayer, the witnesses carry the child around the altar where upon its left corner the women place a sacrifice. The men place theirs into the baptismal font as they pass it and take their seats. The women wait at the last row for women until the closing prayer. After the community left the church, the mother takes the child back and goes to the front of the altar, accompanied by the oldest gode, for the farewell blessing. Only after she had been "za Kirchan" (at the church), as it is called in regional idiom, the mother can leave the house and pursue work outside the house. This had been a tradition, rooted in an old Jewish law, and which represented a blessing for mother and child. In former times the baptism took place on the first morning after the birth of the child and occurred without the mother. She was not allowed to go to church until four weeks had passed.

On the way home the youngest gode carries the child. Entering the house she greets: "A hero we have carried, a Christian we return. May God grant that he grows and thrives to the joy of his parents!" As a sign of their future care for the child the godfathers present a gift of money. The godes had already done that when they had picked up the child in the morning in the form of linens and clothing. The subsequent lunch brought together the witnesses of the baptism and the parents, their siblings and the grandparents of the baptized child for the "Kaimos". The affiliated children sit at a table in the anteroom. With lively conversations but also with joyous songs the entertainment lasts until the late evening. People were drinking to the well-being of each other, to the thriving of the child, loyalty of "Gevatters" (brer), because from this day on parents and godfathers call themselves "Gevatter", and the godes were addressed as "Gevatterin", s. 'gafädar'. The child, also called little earthling, "pätxan" or "guitxan", a new person for communal care and love, ties new ribbons of love between the adults, between parents and godfathers, and often also among the Gevatters which can be stronger than those that tie blood siblings together.

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The care for growing child found its expression in the gift for the New Year that the godparents present to him. It consists of a heart made of cake, apples, nuts, and some coins. Handkerchiefs were also given. In response the child recites a shorter or longer wish for the New Year in form of a poem. The toddler says it in his still awkward idiom:

E (a) kloin Gangchan (Maidche) bän ich,	A small boy (girl) I am,
O schwaiar Zangshan hun ich.	A heavy tongue I have.
Wu menj Wäntschan wall huiran,	Who wants to hear my wish,
Sau:el uarden, bäs ich sa luiann.	Should wait until I learn it.

Everybody gladly waits and enjoys his growing up. Like the body and the mind grows, the New Year poem also grows, until, as a school child, he recites for the joy of godparents, aunts, and uncles an entire song for the New Year from the song book of his parents.

In this way the child grows up to be a candidate for Confirmation and prepares for it by attending the specific education for the Confirmation, s. Luir, which takes place on Palm Sunday. The examination for the Confirmation also had been moved to this day. Previously it had been taken place on Palm Saturday during the vespers. This change had been done mainly, so that those members of the community, who were working in state industries, could partake in the service without missing work. The examination consisted of a conversation between teacher and student about the most important articles of faith according to the Little Catechism of Martin Luther, the bible, the Confession of Augsburg, the song book, and about the history of the church.

On Palm Sunday, in the early morning all confirmands were on the way in the alleys of the village to their witnesses of baptism and the family relatives, before even the first church bells rang, so that they could ask the adults for forgiveness in case they had failed in something.

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Today they would receive the Holy Communion for the first time. For this event they should be in reconciliation with all people. Also, they thank their parents for all their love and care up to this day. When the bells are ringing the group of confirmands goes to the court yard of the rectory. There they include the pastor in their asking for forgiveness for possible past misdemeanors and thank him for the guidance to the word of God and their education. With a handshake the pastor assured them that all is forgiven and reminds them to never to ignore God's commands in their lives. Then the confirmands follow him into the church, where the community already is assembled in anticipation. Today the girls wear for the first time the "Maidentracht" (apparel for young unmarried women), the boys wear a dark festive suit. Only rarely one still wears the colorful, embroidered "Kirchenpelz". After the examination, which is a beloved hour of contemplation for all people in attendance, the benediction of the confirmands takes place. Each confirmand is awarded a quote from the Gospel to accompany him throughout his life. For the subsequent Holy Communion the confirmands follow the youth group, as of now the youngest members of the church community to receive the Holy Communion. Throughout the whole day a special festivity prevails, which also finds its expression in the tradition, that on this day, like at the occasion of baptism, godparents and family members are invited to a communal lunch in the house of the parents of the confirmand.

Before the brotherhoods and sisterhoods were abolished and prohibited, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Easter Holiday a plenary session, called "Zugang" (access) took place. On this day the young farm boys and farm girls were admitted into the Church Communities of the Youth, which were guided and supervised by two members of the Presbytery, the Council of the church. Under the direct guidance of the 'Altschaft" (elder council), consisting of the "Altknecht" (oldest council member), the young Altknecht, and the "Irtenknecht" (youngest council member), and with the same positions and hierarchy on the female side. It was here that the youngsters were guided for living in honor, and for acting responsibly towards the community. These institutions, together with the neighborhoods, were the nursery for a true democracy.

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The 'Altschaft' (elder council) was elected in a secret ballot. Everybody voted and everybody could be elected. All obeyed voluntarily the leadership they had voted on by themselves. A person who offended the order, which also happened, was punished at the plenary session based on the notification of the incident, either by self or by strangers. For the person coming forward to report the incident himself half of the punishment was waived. For lighter misdeeds a monetary punishment was issued, for more severe ones the guilty were excluded from one or more community functions.

Thus, the "Altknecht" reminded everyone at the opening of the 'Zugang' (plenary session): "Who is aware of one's misdeed, needs to announce it, thus he will receive only half of the penalty."

The proceedings were kept secret. The "Irtenknecht" (the youngest farmhand in this line of authority) upon closing the plenary session said: "What was talked about here within these four walls must remain here. He, who carries something out of here, will not escape punishment."

Brother- and sisterhoods insisted upon attendance of church service by all members and made sure that nobody caused any disturbances. If one could not attend he must notify the "Altschaft" (elder council), that is, he had to submit an excuse to the Council. In the village community everybody had to display a civilized behavior every day. Within the community everybody also had to fulfill certain tasks. Thus the brotherhood was responsible for the maintenance of the well in the field, clean it in February, prepare the cover, and insert tubes and channels, so that everybody could find fresh water on hot summer days. Heinrich Betz, long-time teacher in Marktschelden reports the following about this:

"After my acceptance in the Grosskopisch brotherhood, I was selected together with my best friend, Martin Löprich, to become "Irtenknecht". Very early the next morning we both started our service, going from house to house of our community to collect eggs for the brotherhood. For the eggs the brotherhood was committed to keep all field wells in a usable condition. The "Altknecht" assigned a specified well to each lad. When I provided my well with oak boards and a strong furrow I also attached a pole with a smooth-planed board, upon which I wrote in beautiful letters:

"Today for free! – tomorrow for money!"

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The sisterhood had the tasks to decorate the church with flowers on Sundays and to keep the paths in the cemetery and the stairway entrance to the church castle free of weeds.

To the nature of the youth it also belonged to care for entertainment and company through dance and play. For these activities there were traditional days, such as the second day of the religious holidays, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, but then also Peter and Paul Day, Bartholomew Day, and as the last of the year, the Kathreinen Day, upon which the old rule said: "Kathrein closes off the dances." After that came the quiet days of Advent during which no entertainments took place, and also no weddings were held. On Martin's Day the work on the field had ended. About him it said: "Dar Miartan kit af dam weisze Rausz." (The St. Martin comes on a white horse). For the farmers a quieter time began, but not for the women and young females. Now it was time to spin the flax which had been prepared in the last warm days of autumn. When at the beginning of March the song spoke of beautiful days, all the linen, that was supposed to have been weaved in the winter, and that was so important for all, had to be finished, because the sun invited to work in the garden, vineyard and the field. Spinning brought together the young women every evening in the spin room, except for Saturday, or unless they took part to prepare an evening at the theater, or in the choir. For the singing and cheerful jest the lads arrived as well. The nine o'clock bell reminded everyone to return home in time. The clock still rings today from St. Martin's Day halfway into the Time of Ordeal. The Time of Ordeal, or Lent started on Ash Wednesday. In the three preceding days the youth also had their "Fuasnicht", a two-day entertainment with play, dance and frolic. Three weeks later the regular meetings of the youth had ended until the fall. Young men and women only met each other on Sunday afternoons, walked arm-in-arm through the village, or sat beneath a shady tree and sang about separation, 'maidens' love and sorrow, of the joys of life and hardship, before they had yet ever encountered those.

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Picture of the youngest singers in the choir, 1973, photo at the end of the chapter.

This way the young people got to know each other, value and love each other. At the dance they were bound to dance with everybody. No girl was to be left, sitting alone. When the girls were leading no young man could stay in a corner alone. This was the task of the leaders of the young community, the 'Irtenknecht' and the 'Irtenmaid'. They brought a male or female dancer to the girl or the young man who needed a partner. If someone declined the offer to dance he committed an offence and was punished. The women who all sat around the dance floor soon figured out when two youngsters looked at each other with heartfelt glances and danced more with each other than duty demanded. Then they whispered secretly with their neighbors and weighed the pros and cons of marriage of these two young people. Some watched pensively the merry bustle and remembered their own happy time of youth, letting a secret little smile escape around their lips. Another one maybe let tears moisten their eyes about unfulfilled hopes or even grief and sorrow about lost happiness.

When two young people agreed to marry, the young man could also go to the house of the girl, and when the wine was ripe in the barrels, he stepped in front of the parents and asked for the hand of the daughter. This went well, if the parents had agreed to this union from the beginning and did not let some material considerations motivate them to have all sorts of objections, put obstacles in the way, and even openly protest against it. A river of tears flows through the history of our people, caused by applying force to young people. The song, which was also gladly sung in Grosskopisch, spoke about the unhappy bride from "Urwegen" who died on the day of her wedding, is an expression of suffered sorrow of love.

After the young man had requested the young girl and she was promised to him, his parents went to the house of the young maiden to talk about the engagement and the wedding with her parents.

In former times it was tradition on this occasion to also talk about the dowry and to agree about what could be contributed to the household of the children by both parents in terms of land, farm tools, and cattle, of linens and of household goods. In our days the dowry consists of health, a morally perfect way of life, diligence and joy in creative work, firmness of character and goodness of the heart. This is the essential possession of a person and about this an inventory had been taken well before this evening. Therefore, today, the advice given jointly involves only the preparations for the engagement, particularly as to how many guests should be invited. As a rule, not a few, because for people the desire for company is great, and on funding for it nothing will be spared. Thus, quite often more than one hundred people will come together.

On the Wednesday before the engagement the father of the groom goes to the courtyard of the rectory to register the event. On Saturday evening the engaged couple goes to the rectory for the hour of prayer. The groom wears a bouquet on his hat, while the white myrtle wreath decorates the "Borte"(a type of stole) of the bride. They were accompanied by their "Freimännern" (Freemen). The Freeman of the groom asks the pastor to prepare in prayer the young couple for the betrothal and announce their decision to enter into holy matrimony to the community during church service the other day, calling them out. Both happen with the view directed to God. In the hour of prayer with the admonition to place themselves under the guidance of God, and, during the church service following the sermon, in a communal plea to God for the engaged couple, so that the Lord may assist them in the seriousness of this decision.

After the hour of prayer The Freeman of the bride thanks the pastor for the guidance in the Word of God and the prayer. In the house of the bride they are expected by the guest as they return from the rectory. When they have barely entered the house under the window the song for the bride resounds, sung by her friends of her youth in the regional idiom or dialect. It had been written by G. Meyndt. On the next page this song is reprinted in whole. Reportedly, in 1910 it was first sung in Grosskopisch at the engagement of Anna Gaber with Andreas Ewerth, from Birthälm.

p. 243            Picture of a newlywed couple with their best men, photo at the end of the chapter.

p. 244            Melody and words of the "Schessorlid" (Song for the Bride) in dialect by G. Meyndt

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While the bride gives thanks by singing a song, the groom thanks with a speech. Then he receives a large wreath made of branches of fir decorated with colorful flowers and two silk ribbons, through the open window where he had stood with his bride. A paper in the form of a heart is tied to the wreath upon wishes for happiness are written, which were to be read in the course of the evening.

The guests seat themselves according to age groups at the table. On this evening the engaged couple sits among the young people for the last time. The food is served, a prayer is spoken at the table and with conversations and joyous songs the evening flies by quickly. At the latest, at two o'clock the Freeman of the groom gets up and speaks a word of closure, about like the following:

"Dear friends! It is said it is good to be with good people. But one must also say good-bye. Today we were met in this house not only with good words, but also with signs of love, with food and drink. For that I want to thank you heartily, in the name of all and wish you a blessing from God, our father in heaven, who has given it to us, so that he, in his mercy, replaces everything in order so that it is not felt as a loss. But we did not sit here silently; we have exchanged many speeches and words. Now I ask everybody to pardon each other in case we failed at this or that, so that we all can engage again in a friendly conversation when we should meet each other again. Now let us go home, you dear people. I wish everyone a good night!"

Previously, this request was complied with by everybody. Today, as all rules have been loosened, it happens, that nobody asks anymore (to close the evening formally). The older people go home at the customary time; the youth is easily tempted to stay up until the early hours in the morning and to sleep through the Sunday morning.

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As a result, it can happen that the couple-to-be-wed, which hosted the engagement the evening before, sits alone in the church when the engagement is formally called out. This is a sign, among many others, of an ever increasing decline of the unwritten laws prescribed by cultural traditions that came down through the ages.

Two weeks before the wedding the couple goes to invite the guests. In this case each invites their own relatives. This occurs also with traditional verbiage: "We are sent by our dear parents to invite you our wedding, which takes place in two weeks." The invited persons answer: "We thank you for the honor. If God, our Lord will keep us healthy we gladly follow your call." Why the groom does not invite the relatives of both of them had been justified because the preparations for the wedding meal were made separately. Who invited the guest received from the guest the customary gifts of contributions to the meal. These days, if the necessary preconditions are met, the preparations are done together in the house of the wedding. They begin a week before as the women gather there with the noodle boards and dough blenders to make the very thin, thread-like noodles for the chicken soup. This happens with great effort and diligence as they all compete to cut very best of noodles from the flattened dough.

Wednesday before the wedding some women come together very early in the morning and bake as many "Hanklich" so that everybody who brings a contribution of flour, eggs, cream, milk, sugar, fat, bacon, or also meat, can receive a piece of it. The father of the groom again set off for the rectory to register the wedding. Even the friends of the

groom are already occupied. They saw and split the wood necessary for the baking. Grosskopisch cooks with natural gas since 1958. But yeast-risen pastry only gets its beautiful browning when the glowing charcoal in the oven opening provides the necessary steady heat.

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On Thursday a hog, a calf, or even an ox or a cow is slaughtered because for the often more than two hundred guests four meals have to be prepared. In the cellar the casket of wine is ready and the "Butte" (tub, vat) with the 'sauerkraut', essential for a wedding meal. On Friday the women are busy baking fluffy bread and slaughter the chickens. Every invited family brought a fat chicken for the soup, the largest that ran about in the courtyard of their farm. And it could not be black, because that would have brought bad luck to the young couple. Everybody knows that this is old superstition, but there would always be the possibility that such a chicken would stir up an aggravation that nobody intends. Everybody wants not only to contribute to the meal, but also to ensure that this would be a meal of real joy. The time of preparation already is filled with joy, particularly the Saturday, the so-called 'Backtag' (day of baking) s. bäckerdauch. All of the women with their skills, advice and deed vouch for a good outcome.

In large vats the dough of flour, milk, eggs, butter, yeast and salt is kneaded. While the dough is rising the oven is heated. Then the dough is rolled out, coated with cream to which egg yolk and sugar had been added. This yields 'cream hanklich' and plain hanklich, called s. schliacht Hunklich. With the same dough one also makes the flat fruit cake, layered with slices of apple, halved plums, or cherries covered with a molding cooked from grit, milk and sugar and finally a layer of cream. The dough can also be covered with a mixture of ground nuts, egg yolks and sugar, rolled up, and baked in a form as a nut strudel. Dough baked without the nut mixture yields a "Striezel s. Sträzal", which is liked equally well. When the vault of the oven is white from heat the coals are pulled forward with the "Kässal" of wood, similar to a hoe with a long handle and now occupy half of the opening. The hearth is swept clean with a whisk of corn leaves kept wet in a vessel filled with water. The Hanklich is baked on the hearth; therefore no ash can be left on it.

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If the oven whisk catches fire, this is quickly extinguished in the stand-by water container. But if this happens with the "Ofenschiessel" s. Uiwashschässal, the flat board like a paddle with a long handle that is used to place Hanklich and baking sheets into the oven and also removes them from the oven, the women call out for help, seemingly in utter distress: "Za Hälf! Der Uiwschässel huat sich antzangeon!" This occurs so loud that the call for help reaches the ears of the fathers of the wedding, because this fire can only be extinguished with a jug of wine running over the mouths of the baking women. This type of event the master of the house knows very well and quickly appears with the necessary fire extinguisher among the women. This "disaster" happens only around lunchtime when another "mishap" occurs. Just then some Hanklichs broke while getting them out of the oven and therefore they had to be eaten immediately. In this way jest speeds up the work and makes forget the fatigue.

On Saturday afternoon the young men are occupied with carrying the necessary tables and benches from the neighborhoods into the community hall. They also decorate the gates for the wedding parties and the hall where the wedding is to take place with branches of fir, festooned with colorful paper flowers. Meanwhile, friends of the bride are busy to adorn the room with flowers and wall hangings. Since 1963 two items never fail to be present: The coat-of-arms of the Saxon cities and the words "Siebenbürgen – sweet home" and the picture of their church castle and the words at the beginning of the Luther song "Ein' feste Burg is our God!" (A firm castle is our God), designed by Pastor A. Türk and embroidered with black cross-stitches on the cloth. The young women also prepare the tables for the coming morning while the young men transport all the food supplies to the kitchen of the community hall.



In the church the altar is decorated with flowers and a double garland in the form of a cross is laid on the floor in front of it. The other morning bride and groom stand in the room with the cross beam. This is a symbolic sign that also in their marriage, like in so many before them, some crosses will be levied on them. But at the same time they receive the consoling affirmation that with the faith in the crucified son of God they will find strength and trust as well as forgiveness of sins and salvation. These thoughts are also expressed in the hour of prayers which ends the last day of the engagement period with the words of the pastor and in the prayer.

In the meantime the "Bittknechte" s. 'Bidarkniacht' (young men around bride and groom) went on their way in "Kirchenpelz" (traditional church garment for special occasions) and hat adorned with flowers to invite the guests again to come to the festivity tomorrow. In their hands they carry a beautifully decorated staff. The stick is smooth for about ten centimeters at the upper end and this part serves as a grip. Just below it long, colorful silk ribbons are attached to it in large loops. Below this point long stripes of wood were cut from the staff with a sharp knife at intervals of about ten centimeters. One end of the stripe remained fixed to the stick, the other end curled up so that the stick is decorated with white curls. With this staff (Herald's wand) they enter the house and speak: (s. illustration p. 229, Nr.13)

"We are sent by an honorable house of a wedding to kindly invite you to the wedding and ask you to report to the community hall early in the morning."

The answer sounds also this time:

"We thank for the honor. If God the Lord will give us the health we will gladly follow the calling."

Everybody follows the invitation with pleasure. If someone could not attend for one reason or another he probably had already notified the couple of the reason why they would not be there when they had responded to the first invitation.

On the evening before the wedding ceremony the bride presents the groom's shirt s. "Bredjamhend" to the groom. In the old says this was a shirt that the bride probably had already started preparing years earlier. Out of particularly soft flax she had spun a thin steady thread. This occurred with all her diligence during quiet hours when she sat in front of the fire in the hearth, lost in thought. Her thoughts wandered into the future, looking for one to whom she would give her heart, which was filled with good wishes, spun into the thread, weaved into the linen and sewed into the shirt.

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The question of what meaning this gift was supposed to have goes back into Germanic antiquity. In the pagan beliefs we find an answer. They believed that a person under a spell could regain his human form if you dress him with a shirt that an innocent girl has silently spun, weaved, and sewed without speaking over a period of seven years. Such a shirt not only could dispel the curse, but also prepares for steadiness and be victorious in many temptations. As a shirt of fate it had been brought in connection with the weavings of the Nordic goddesses of fate. Thus the groom's shirt obviously was supposed to be a shirt of fate. It should protect the dearest from tempting glances of unfamiliar beauties which were to enchant him or to release him from bewitchment by another girl or woman that already had taken place. It was supposed to strengthen him in his love of the woman he had chosen. Such was and remains the human heart: Something one barely can call one's own; one begins to fear about its loss. For sure, every young woman wishes for a strong and victorious man and to feel secure at his side, reaching happiness through his successes. The understanding of the significance of the shirt changed over time. In our times the shirt no longer is a magic shirt, but a symbol of deepest affection and trust. As such it is given, even if it no longer is self-spun, weaved, and sewed, but presented and accepted with the same wishes and expectations by both. This is a sufficient reason for bride and groom. As long as they are young, the shirt is worn at special occasions, such at the wedding of friends of their childhood, or at the baptism of their children. But then it is saved for the day when its wearer will be adorned with it for the last time "above the earth", s. that means on the "iwar lordan" on the bench of the dead and has overcome all fights, challenges, and temptations.

On the day of the wedding, at the previously announced hour, all guests gather together for the so-called "Bratensuppe" (soup of roast) s. "Brodalawand", a spiced stew.

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As on the baking day, on this day of cooking nothing is spared. The food is eaten quickly because time is running out. Soon the so-called "Vorglocke" (bell before the wedding ceremonies begin) starts to ring for the "Handshake". The Freeman of the groom asks all to line up in such a way that the groom with his parents and relatives are standing at his right side and across from them, at his left, the bride is positioned with parents and relatives. When this has occurred he addresses the present people:

"God, the Lord, we want to thank him that he has preserved us until the present day in peace and health. But even when health and peace have not always been according to our wishes, we will still thank him because he has made rigors bearable. May he also send us in the future only as much as we can endure.

We are aware that God, our Lord, has blessed our dear wedding parents not only with temporal and perishable goods, but also with loving children, one pair with a dear son, the other with a loving daughter. Thank the Lord that he has protected them from evil and misfortune, that they could be raised in our Christian community among the children of honest and pious people, in the fear of God, to be a delight to their parents, to the pleasure of God, and to the honor of sincere friendships. Now as they have grown up, the groom thought to enter holy matrimony. God has shown him the way into the house of the dear parents of the bride. He has asked for her, and she has been promised to him. Now we will get ready to accompany them to the church so that they give in honest way the Yes-word to each other before God and the community.

May God bless you for your matrimony and that it will be a state of joy!

May God bless you with health and a long life!

May God bless you with a healthy flock of children!

May God bless you in your work so that you always have cause to thank him!

But now you have to say good-bye to your parents. Step up to them and thank them for everything that they have done for you."

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Bride and groom address their parents and speak:

"The hour has come, dear parents, that I shall enter the holy state of matrimony and therefore must depart from you. I thank you that you have raised me with God's help. I thank you for each mouthful of bread, for each drink that you have given me! Have thanks for each step that you have done for me, for each good advice you have given me. I ask you to be for me and my dear bride/dear groom a dear father and a dear mother in the future. I promise to you in the name of her/his name that I will cherish you as parents and support you for as long as our heavenly father keeps us alive."

This promise of the children and the assurance of the parents to loyally stand by them are affirmed by a handshake. The same also occurred after the plea to and the assurance by the future parents-in-law:

"I ask you to accept me from now on as your child. I promise to honor you as my dear parents and be a support for you for as long as the heavenly father keeps me alive."

After that the Freeman asks the relatives of both:

"Now all of you step up to each other and shake hands that from this day on that you will stand together in friendship and that you are willing to assist the young couple in joy and in sorrow with advice and deed as long the heavenly father gives you the strength for it."

Bride and groom as the first now follow this request by asking the other side to admit their own relatives into the kinship of the other. After that the members of both families assure themselves of their friendship/mutual kinship from now on.

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Meanwhile it was time to go to the church service. The bells begin to ring.

Ahead the two Freeman march, followed by both fathers of the wedding. The groom follows among the 'Bittknechte' (best men), and behind them, the "Burschen" (young men). After them the bride follows between the two bridesmaids s. "Breaktmaid or Bidarmaid", followed by two veiled women and the maidens (young women). The men follow after that, and then come the wedding mothers with their women. At the end of the procession walk the children and the band of musicians.

In the church the Freeman and fathers take their seats on the chairs on the right of the choir where formerly the preacher had its place. The wedding mothers sit alone behind the bench for women of the parish. Groom and Bittknechte take the first seats in the gallery with the young men. The bride sits with the bride maids on the last left maiden bench and behind them, on the first women's bench the two veiled women take their seats, while the remaining men and women sit in their usual places.

When the community starts to sing the wedding song: "Jesus, go forward with life's path....", or: "How beautiful it is, Lord Jesu Christ, to be in the standing where thy blessing is, in the standing of holy matrimony....", the groom proceeds into the choir with his best men, followed by some friends. The bride with the bride maids and the veiled women and some friends follow them. The groom and his followers line up on the left side of the choir. The bride stands across from him with her entourage. Before the wedding ceremony she stood between the bride maids, after the wedding the veiled women will take her into their midst as the Freeman escort the groom to the exit. While the community sings the pastor steps in front of the altar and the groom guides the bride to the steps of the altar where she stands on his left. The church choir sings a hymn, the couple kneels down, and then the wedding is performed with an address, vows, and the exchange of rings. After a word of encouragement the now married couple walks around the altar, while it they give each other the traditional loyalty kiss. The wedding parade then leaves the church singing another hymn.

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In front of the church the bride's men used to take the bride on their shoulders and carry her, followed by the guests to the house of her parents along with merry marching band music. This still happens sometimes today. At the house the table with gifts is ready, covered with a beautifully embroidered cloth. Behind it the young couple stands up. The Freeman of the bride steps beside her and asks the guests for a donation to equip the new household. This too, cannot be done without following a traditional order. While the musicians play festive melodies the relatives of the couple step up to the table with their gifts. First come the relatives of the young man and after them the relatives of the young woman line up, ordered by degree of kinship, gender, and age. With congratulations the men hand over a gift of money,

while the women give objects for the household or linens. Baskets full of presents accumulate and considerable sums of money are still collected today.

After the gifts are presented lunch is served in the community hall. Now the place for the young couple is among the married couples. They sit among their Freeman. Younger women of both kinships serve the food, while the 'Bittknechte' (best men) and a few young 'Burschen' (lads, young men) don white aprons and take responsibility that no empty bottles stay on the tables that need to be exchanged for full ones. The meal consists of the proverbial "Hochzeitssuppe" (wedding soup), a tasty chicken soup, prepared by the experienced cooks of the village. The meat of the soup formerly was served with a sauce and pureed potatoes. But for many years now roasted pork and chicken are served after the soup, which are presented in large serving dishes on the table for everyone's choice. The side dishes are pureed potatoes and cucumbers, red beets, paprika preserves, and more. Not to be forgotten is the 'Sauerkraut'. After the roast several different pastries are served, but also the usual yeast biscuits, which are preferred by the men because they taste even better with a glass of wine.

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No wedding occurs without a contemplative dinner speech given by the Freeman and the pastor. In it tribute is paid to the meaning of the present day for the young family and the community. It also gives the young married couple hints about where to find the sources of human happiness, based on the life experiences of the older generation. Joyous singing of popular folk songs after dinner is followed by equally pleasurable dance music. On such days you can see grandfathers turned grey by life's burden happily swing their dancing feet with their granddaughter in a slow "Ländler", or swaying waltz. Nobody feels too old, and nobody is shoved into the corner by the young.

On such days special attention is paid to the poor and sick people in the community. While the guests are still sitting at the table, helpers are on their way to them, wishing them good health and bringing to them best regards and a small gift from the blessings of the feast from the honorable house of the wedding, that consists of soup, roast pork and chicken, pastries and bread. Food had been prepared in abundance; therefore all should partake in it, enjoy the glory of God and take a part in the happiness of both families.

Due to circumstances of modern life the celebration of a wedding has been compressed to one day and one night. Therefore the actions unfold quicker one after the other when compared with the old times. Thus the tradition of the "Young Woman's Day", which used to be celebrated on Mondays, was switched to the late afternoon on Sunday, just like the "Taking-off of the bride's and groom's ornaments". After several hours of joyfulness now follows the seriousness of farewell, since it means to separate from the friends of one's youth and, no less important, from one's own youth. For this the young couple is seated on two chairs in the middle of the hall, which had been partly cleared for the dance. The couple still wears the festive jewelry. The young people form a half circle in front of them. Her mother stands next to the bride and a Freeman next to the groom, while all the guests form a wide circle around the group in the middle. Then the youth used to sing the old folk song: "Beautiful is the youth in joyous times, it does not return..."

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After the Second World War this song was replaced by another that was sung in the regional idiom, and that had been heard and adopted by young people attending weddings out of town. It will be written down here with the text and the melody:

Laiv Jugendzetj...

(text and score)

When the song is finished, the Freiman addresses the couple:

"We want to thank God, the Lord, who by divine providence let you enter the holy state of matrimony.

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Therefore, at this time, you must take leave from the play mates of your youth. But I request from you that from now on you will give a good word to your former companions when you again meet them and honor you as before, until, they too, are being led by God to the way that you now have entered.

Thank God, the Lord, for your beautiful youth and also thank him for the luck of this hour as you need to say good-bye following his will and place the small bouquet of flowers, that is a sign of the youth, and the stole with the little wreath into the hands of the bride's mother as a keepsake.

But God, the Lord, in his benevolence has determined that you are not standing alone, but can continue to come to Father and Mother from now on. Also, great friendship will assist you in joy and sorrow. God has also placed you in an honorable Christian neighborhood and in a church community which will stand by you in all the joys and all times of need. They will not expect to receive more from you than they are willing to give in love. Become loyal members of our community, to the honor of your parents, for your benefit, and for God's pleasure. May he give you happiness and blessings in your life, in work, and in your calling. This is my wish!"

After that all sing the song: "Wahre Freundschaft soll nicht wanken." (True friendship shall not waver).

This way of "Taking down the stole" is of a newer date. In the past the stole was danced away and happened during a quick-step polka dance after midnight when the young men tried to swing the bride around so unexpectedly that she would lose the stole. She tried very hard that only her groom was successful in catching the stole, as a sign of her sole affection for her chosen-by-her heart. After this dance the young couple retreated. The next day the "Young woman's day" was celebrated. The tradition of it was later rescheduled for the hours after the "Taking down the stole" event.

After the "Taking leave from the youth" tradition the two veiled women still wearing their decorations take the young woman by her arms and lead her into the house of a woman knowledgeable in veiling so that she, now veiled, can be guided into the church to the "Young Women's Church".

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Picture of veiled women as they leave the church after the 'Young Women's church, photo at the end of the chapter.

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When the young married woman has finished putting on the beautiful traditional gown, the church bells start ringing. With music the guests pick her up from the house and accompany her to the church. Only she enters the church, along with the two veiled women. The man with his escorts waits for her at the portal. By the shine of candlelight serious words sound through the church about the duties of a Saxon woman and mother living a life before God. The admonitory words wind down in a solemn prayer asking for God's gift of love and forgiveness. After a word of blessing, that is

received kneeling, the three women walk around the altar. After they have shown the youngest woman of the community her place in the church by having had her sit on it three times, they leave the church.

In front of the wall of the castle they wait for the participants of the wedding and the young man.

Frequently the young woman is not given to him just yet, but she is led back to the house where she had been "geschleiert" s. gaschlijart (veiled). After the arrival of the three women the door is closed. When the door reopens and the young man is let in, three unrecognizable figures sit behind a white curtain, from whom he has to recognize his wife. Unless she gives him a sign they had previously agreed upon, it could happen that he has to go to the banquet hall with an unfamiliar woman disguised as an old ugly witch, or, worse, with a man. With much applause and merriment he dances a round dance with the one he chose.

When the cheerful mood has abated somewhat, the Freiman announces that now the dance with the young woman begins "so that she can get a few coins for the hopefully soon, necessary diapers s. 'Kotschan". She dons a white apron with bound-up corners that form in this way a big, properly large bag. The two veiled women do the same thing. Then the men dance a few beats of an infinitely long waltz with one of them after having placed a bill or a few coins into their aprons. The women and children grasp each other's hands and dance a roundelay.

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After supper, consisting of a roast, dancing, singing, and play continue. At around two o'clock in the night the traditional meal of filled cabbage, that belongs to every wedding meal, is served. Frequently the party has shrunk to about half, since the older guests and the children already went to night's rest. The younger guests stay until morning. After a few hours of sleep they come to clean up the hall, if they did not have to go to work. Together with women and children they put the hall back in order that only the green fir at the door indicates that there had been a wedding in the village the day before.

In our days life now takes its usual course. The young spouses move in with one of the two parents, but continue to go to their previous work, since both most likely are employees. In the old days they received a parcel of land, young cattle for work, and tools, so that they could start farming. The parents also gave them the necessary stuff for their livelihood at first, or they lived with them. Frequently it was a hard beginning. But the greater was the joy when in the fall their efforts were richly rewarded. During the long winter evenings and also on Sunday afternoons they found the necessary companionship in the circle of neighbors who were of the same age.

When the neighborhood came together on "Richttag" the new young neighbor put in a petition to admit him into the ranks of the honorable neighborhood. After the "Articles of the Neighborhood" had been read at the beginning of the plenary session, only the approval of the neighbors was necessary and the admonition of the neighborhood father that the new member act accordingly, fulfill his duties on time, and prove himself as a loyal neighbor. As an introduction the applicant gave the neighborhood a drink of wine, which was consummated after the session. The young neighbors often experienced the blessings of neighborhood very soon. Were it not they who gladly took advantage of their neighbors when the constructed or rebuilt their farm and outbuildings?

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The neighborhoods were the organizations which after the Second World War survived the confusion of the social restructuring of society while the brotherhoods and sisterhoods and all other social clubs of our people were scattered and perished.

Just like the entire village participates in joyous events of one person, such as baptism, confirmation, and wedding, this also happens when a family in sorrow or need, caused by misfortune or the death of one of its members,

requires help and consolation. Help will already be set up with prolonged illness. The sick person is visited and encouraged to have strength and hope by pointing to God's goodness and mercy which prevails over each human being beyond death. When dealing with poor, old, or people living alone, something will be done to care for their physical well-being. Women do not visit there without bringing some food with them.

When someone dies, it is said: "By God he no longer had any days left." When death comes after severe suffering, one also hears: "The father in heaven has done well to release him from his severe suffering." For children it is said: "The Lord has loved them and has taken them to his place." One expresses one's compassion in simple words to the relatives and hopes that God comforts them. Who could give true comfort if not God, in whose hand one feels safe in life and in death? An old woman from among the relatives prepares the dead person for the laying out. If it is a man his wife looks for the groom's shirt. No woman suspected, when she had sewn it, that he would leave her behind in this world. If the dead person is a woman the white lace cap is put on her that she wore under her veil as a young woman. Facing death all mortals recognize that God's decisions are unknowable. The dead is placed on the bench for the dead in an open casket with his hands folded on his chest. This bench with two carrying straps and carrying beams is the property of the neighborhood. If there had been a mirror on the wall of the room it would be covered with a black cloth as soon as the death occurred.

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The windows were closed and opened again only after the dead had been carried out of the house. Supposedly this should prevent the soul of the deceased to escape from the body and house and wander around as a mad spirit and to appear to and frighten the living.

Immediately after the death occurred the castle guardian was notified that he start ringing the bell for the dead. This way the members of the community were notified that one of their members had departed from life. The relevant neighborhood will be notified before the evening by a neighborhood sign that is carried from house to house with an affixed piece of paper as to who died and when the funeral will take place. In the evening the neighbors, relatives, and friends go to the wake. Entering the room everybody greets with the words: "May God give your deceased a blessed rest and a joyous resurrection on the dear Day of Judgment. May He comfort you the mourning bereaved!" The people already present answer: "May God hear it!" and invite the newcomer to sit.

The next day the younger men of the relatives dig the grave. In other communities this is a service performed by the neighborhood. Perhaps this should be a sign of special compassion for the relatives of the deceased. Not only were the members of the neighborhood notified about the time of the funeral but this also reminded them of their duty to participate in it. Such a calling is for all to follow. This duty of being a Christian is easier to fulfill than to forgive a possible dispute one may have had with the deceased while he still was alive and which still lasts on one's heart. But most often the awareness to live under God's forgiveness lets grow one own strength to be able to forgive. When under the current circumstances a person is unable to leave one's place of work to attend he finds a replacement who helps to carry the coffin to the cemetery and to dig the grave.

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When the cleric with his adjutant and the musical choir arrive under the gate the entire neighborhood has already assembled in the court yard. But nobody, who is healthy, still fun-loving and is full of joy being alive, wishes that the pastor "comes under his gate", that is to see him off from his house and this world.

The neighborhood father now goes with four strong men into the house. He says:

“Dear friends. The hour has come that you say good-bye to your beloved deceased and speak to him a last word of thanks for what he has done for you in love during his lifetime. After that we ask you to follow our request to release him from the neighborhood so that we can get him to God’s acres for his eternal rest according to our Christian tradition.”

After a word of thanks from a relative the neighbors carry the coffin into the court yard and put it there on the bench for the dead that had been brought out of the house. The music starts with the hymn: “My lifetime slips away, every hour I hurry to the grave and how little remains, perhaps, of the time I still have to live ....”, a song of transience, death, and judgment that all sing together. After a song of four chords by the men’s choir of the adjutants the pastor gives the “Leichenrede” (funeral oration). This is a farewell sermon given at the place where the deceased went in and out, where he had his home in this world, where he lived in his joyful work, where he shouldered joy and grief, in order to mature towards his home in eternity. This is probably the most difficult duty for a Saxon priest in a community where everybody is known. With a lot of tact he has to place the life and the deeds of the deceased responsibly before God and his community and into the light of eternity. Adulation has no place here. Besides the bright sides – carried by understanding and forgiveness – also the shadowy sides, human failings, weaknesses, and mistakes cannot be concealed; otherwise his credibility would suffer damage. Then the coffin is lifted by the two leather bands and the carrying beams by eight men. In this moment the bench of the dead is overturned, so that -it is said- it would not again be set up in this house for the next.

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With the sounds of a slow march for the grieving the procession begins to move to the cemetery. The relatives quietly stride behind the coffin. A lamentation for the dead like in the old times no longer exists, unless the pain of separation vents itself in heartbreaking, loud wailing when the muffled clods of earth fall upon the coffin. After the benediction the grave is quickly shoveled closed. When the grave mound is erected the tools that were used are placed on top so that the handles form several crosses of St. Andreas.

Then the father of the neighborhood steps to the grave and “dankt ab” (abdicates):

“Dear neighbors! We are aware that God, the Lord, afflicted our brother/sister with a major illness after blessed/ short/ long/joyful/severely challenged (...depending on each case) life. Since he was no longer able to bear it, God ordered his temporal death and took him in to himself (referring again to the specific case). Because the grieving survivors were not able to bury him alone on God’s acre, they came and pleaded:

1. To the venerable pastor
2. To the dignified choir of adjutants
3. To the worshipful Christian neighborhood,

If they would be so kind and be of service for the deceased this last time. Though we neighbors would have liked to do a favor for something else, we are glad to do this for you. The grieving survivors, /spouses/children.../now thank all present for this last service, which they all had performed for our dear deceased. They also beg you to forgive him in case he failed in something or offended somebody.”

The people present answered: “He shall be forgiven!” Later, in the house the so-called “Bread of Tears” is served, which in the old times consisted of fresh bread and a drink of wine. With the first glass of wine that is drunk, the oldest of the men present speaks:

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“May God give our departed brother/sister a blessed rest and a joyous resurrection on the dear Day of Judgment!”

The people present respond:

“May God hear it!”

This tradition too has been adapted to today’s circumstances and changed with time. Most families were ripped apart because many members of the community moved to the cities. They looked for occupation in the industry. Now, when they came home for such an occasion they must be served a proper meal. Therefore it became a tradition that instead of the “Bread of Tears” a substantial meal was prepared. This does not occur to the detriment of the community. Such an occasion serves to care for and maintain the community which is of a special significance for the people who had left, because in the city they easily lose their ties to the community.

Death and funeral close up the earthly presence of man. With death and funeral the circle of the traditions is completed that accompany, move, and enrich his personal life from cradle to grave.

We now turn to the traditions that accompany man throughout the year conditioned by the course of the year and that return year after year, like summer and winter, like fall and spring.



Junges Paar  
1909

A Young Pair 1909



Die jüngsten Chorsängerinnen  
1973

The youngest singers in the choir, 1973



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Brautpaar und Bittknechte  
1973

Newlywed couple with their best men



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Geschleierte Frauen beim Verlassen des Gotteshauses  
nach der Jung-Frauenkirche

Veiled women as they leave the church after the young