

## Beliefs Related to Child-Birth in a Western Anatolian Town: A Review Article

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### Abstract

This is a review article based on a book written by a female French ethnology scholar, who carried out a field work in the region of Bergama in western Anatolia. It is about collecting information about folk beliefs related to sterility, pregnancy, birth and infants. Being a very important aspect of life, the topic is rich and interesting. The book got published in 1972. Current readers would only be glad to learn about its content via the article of ours.

**Key words:** Sterility; Pregnancy; Infant; Superstition; Belief.

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### INTRODUCTION

French ethnologist Michèle Nicolas spent six months (winter of 1963 and spring of 1964) in down-town Bergama, near Izmir, in western Anatolia. She spent another season (summer of 1964) in the nearby villages of the town.

Her host-family (or family of contact) was a well-to-do, respectable one, a chance which definitely facilitated her research, whether it be access to various people for information or obtaining other opportunities to get well-versed. Nicolas' intention was to gather a "collection" of folk beliefs and practices (along with proper interpretations) about the concept of child-bearing and

related issues (like fertility, sterility, pregnancy and post-natal care of the baby and the mother).

Having a small baby herself, Nicolas could approach womenfolk readily and easily. As a foreigner she was at the center of interest, anyhow. (Turks show hospitality to foreigners, especially Europeans and this is a further plus in the development of the research).

Michèle Nicolas would later re-visit the area in the summer seasons of 1966, 1967 and 1968; now much more in command of the Turkish language.

She says that she lets the modern minority alone. Those were the wives of officials and notables, the so-called *alafranga*/European-styled women as opposed to typical *alaturka* majority. Her main informants<sup>1</sup> were village-women and modest towns-women.



**Figure 1**  
**A Mother and Her Baby (Illustration by the Author—S.Ç.)**

<sup>1</sup> An informant is very useful for a researcher, especially when the researcher is from another country. There are some intimate pieces of knowledge which a researching scholar simply can not penetrate into. The word resembles "informer" (mouchard), which is full of negative connotations, suggesting collaboration rather than cooperation.

Interesting as it may seem, she observed that some town-dweller housewives were even more conservative and attached to customs than the peasant women! (Nicolas re-asserts this judgement in the concluding section by emphasizing a particular example: The village women are not so keen in observing the 40-day-long post-natal<sup>2</sup> periods. Economic and pragmatic restrictions compel them to rush back to work in the fields, while the town housewives enjoy the forty days by consuming sweet foods.

Nicolas made references to some sources in Turkish while writing down her book. But, she complains that ethnographic Turkish publications are somewhat lacking in depth except for a few ones like the works of Dr. Orhan Acıpayamlı, for instance.

## 1. STERILITY

There is a Turkish saying: *A woman without a child resembles a fruitless tree*. Sterility is a big misfortune for the typical Turkish female. Conversely; having a heir is a big virtue for the woman and the family.

In folk literature (like *Dede Korkut* tales) abundant number of allusions are made to this value-judgement: The *dervish* (white-bearded holy man) offering a magical apple to the childless couple; a stone-doll<sup>3</sup> being animated by the Providence thanks to insistent prayers to God-Almighty etc..

In the society, pejorative subjects are attributed to childless women. Some such phrases are: Defective woman, seedless woman, a woman without descendants (The respective original words in Turkish go as *kusurlu*, *tohumusuz*, *dölsüz*). If a couple does not have a child, it is always the woman who is held “biologically responsible”.

Many supernatural or magico-spiritual rites or rituals are employed initially (to begin with) by engaged girls or newly-married women (brides) in order to ensure future fertility (like embracing somebody else’s baby). If after a certain time the bride proves to be infertile, she will surely indulge in some practices without further delay.

Some of those practices are of purely magical character: Drinking some water out of the palm of a true mother; sitting on the still-hot placenta of a new mother; wearing the ladies-shirt of a mother or a pregnant woman for a time etc. (Nicolas notes that a version of the last

<sup>2</sup> A special Turkish word designates the post-natal period: *Lohusalik* / *logusalik*. The borrowed French synonym is “*lochies*”. The author seems to be quite impressed with the word. She specifies that the word comes from the ancient Greek language (Ottoman-Byzantium interaction had been rich in the history). Even the Ottoman scripts are provided in the text (in Arabic lettering): ل ح س و

According to the *Webster Dictionary*, Lucina was the Roman goddess of childbirth and in archaic English this word means midwife.

<sup>3</sup> The well-know *Pinocchio*-character created by the Italian author *Carlo Collodi* in 1881 displays a similar theme. *Pinocchio* was shaped of wood by a poor carpenter and life was blown into the marionette by a fairy. The stone-doll Turkish legend has other versions like the dough-doll (*hamur bebek*) or the cloth-doll (*bez bebek*).

practice in usage in Sivas, is wearing the jacket of a father and sleeping in it). Actual mothers required for such applications of rites are sometimes unwilling to cooperate, fearing the reverse contractual effects for their own sake.

In Bergama area, there are shrines whom childless women go visit in the hope of obtaining the intercession (*shefaat* / favor) of the saint vis-à-vis Allah-Allmighty. The most famous of those tombs are:

—*Helvacı Dede* (The halwa-sucrery-maker grandfather)

—*Bozerenler Dede* (The grandfather of gray saints)

—*Kız Turbesi* (The tomb of the Virgin-girl)

—*Mugalan Dede*

Similar sites in the suburbs of the city are:

—*Sarı Dede* (The blond grandfather)

—*Çiftlik Dede* (The grandfather of the farm)

Nicolas mentions that formerly (she means the Byzantium days) places like *Parmak Batıran Ayazması* (The spring of finger-dipping) and *Demirci Bogazi Manastiri* (the Monastery of the blacksmith’s gullet) had also been reputable for their healing properties against sterility. In the concluding section as well as in some other pages, Nicolas specifies that the all-Anatolian traditions, in fact, constitute an amalgam of former diverse cultures, anyhow. She (correctly) says that, nevertheless, the Turkish –Islamic “ingredients” always overweigh the others.

Nicolas notes the contradiction that; in spite of all the virtues of fertility, a trait attributed sheerly to females, a male baby is more desirable! Even the signs or omens for a male child are luckier ones, so to speak, like some symptoms on the right hand side of the body, the good temperament or the suddenly-acquired new beauty of a pregnant woman.

The secrets of the folk-medicine, which are relatively more scientific by nature, are jealously kept confidential in the “custody” of elderly ladies. (It is much easier to learn about such recipes for the opposite purpose, that is, the contraceptive measures or techniques. Nicolab considers that set of measures also pretty much scientific like methods causing a change in the pH [acidity or basicity degree of a medium] of the vaginal canal with certain infusions or extractions.

The recipes of the remedies mostly come from herbs and plants. Most are to be swallowed; some involve fumigation<sup>4</sup> like inhaling the vapor of beneficial herbs (thyme, cinnamon, oath, orties, garlic etc.).

Many types of sterility involve cold conditions for the ovaries. Nicolas herself had been warned by local women about not sitting on stones<sup>5</sup>, a temptation she could not

<sup>4</sup> Here at this point Nicolas correctly employs the word “fumigation” rather than the word “incensing”. Indeed; it is a matter of the alleged effects of the chemical ingredients, not the spritual benefits of the vapors. The Turkish word *tütsü* comes to mean either *fumigation* or *incense*, depending on the context.

<sup>5</sup> A wisdomfull proverb says in rhyming words: *Do not sit on Stone in summer and On a wet place in winter!* (*Yazın tasha kishin yasha oturma!*).

resist on hot summer days. Thus; applying hot water bottles on the belly or bathing in hot springs (spa) are popular measures against sterility.

The notion that the uterus collum might be blocked or closed would therefore lead to applications of lavages with infusions (of ginger, anise, hot-pepper etc.).

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## 2. PREGNANCY

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Pregnancy is a very critical period full of forbidding advices and recommendations of all sorts.

Some foods are not considered proper for pregnant women: Eating rabbit-meat will cause the child to have parted lips. Sheephead (*kelle*) will give you a snotty (*sümüklü*) child.

On the other hand; if the pregnant woman eats Quinces, the child will have dimples on the cheeks, a desirable trait. Apples, pomegranates, grapes and milk-curdle /crème (kaymak) are in respective order associated with red cheeks, long life, large and beautiful eyes, white skin complexion. Actually; the pregnant woman should be offered everything she feels like<sup>6</sup> eating or every delicious delicacy she just happens to cast her glance on. It is considered the lawful right of the eye (*goz hakki*).

The pregnant woman does not visit families in mourning (i.e. houses where recent deaths had occurred) or Turkish-baths (*hamam*)<sup>7</sup>. She avoids contact with animal

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<sup>6</sup> Nicolas should have mentioned the original key word: *Ashermek*, meaning to crave for a certain food passionately at a single moment.

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas does not clarify why a Turkish-bath is forbidden for a pregnant woman. One can infer that the hot wet environment will be hazardous for the embryo. It could also involve a spiritual tinting like being exposed to djinns (conventionally believed to be abundant in a Turkish-bath. Further ahead, in the section about after-birth practice, the concept is elaborated in more detail.

Studies in Turkish folklore show that such figures in *Dear Shameless Death* [the first novel written by Latife Tekin] as the fair-haired girl-witch *Sarıkoz*, the exhibitionist *Neighing Boy*, who is possibly a cross between a young man and a horse, and *Dirmit's* imaginary donkeys that bray "*ninnisare*", a nonsense word coined by the author, could well be jinns in disguise... in popular practice an exorcist like *Djinnman Memet* can be called upon to cleanse a person of what appear to be signs of possession by djinns, as happens when [the mother] *Atiye* is pregnant with *Dirmit*. (From the Introductory section of the mentioned novel, by the translators, 2001, p.14)

<sup>8</sup> Nicolas confirms the logic of this precaution by referring to the danger of penetration of the soft tissues of the fetus.

In a sense, this occasion presents one of the few cases whereby a woman, in the religious sense, can lawfully refuse the physical approach of her spouse. Let us quote an American female anthropologist, who had studied a mid-Anatolian village in early 1980s: In any case a woman does not have the right to refuse sex with her husband. Haddad cites Al-Bayhani:

The greatest thing in which obedience is imperative is intercourse, which is the goal of marriage. It is not permissible for her to refuse it except for a legal purpose such as menstruation, sickness and child-birth. For if she does, God's curse will be upon her (1980). (Delaney, 1991, p.45)

furs. She does not cross her legs; otherwise the fetus might get strangled by the umbilical cord. She never imitates crippled people. She avoids vigorous physical activities and (after a certain stage of the pregnancy) coit<sup>8</sup> with her husband.

When the fetus makes its first movements, it is good for the pregnant woman to contemplate the face of a beautiful person.

The gender of the coming baby (in 1960s ultrasonic devices were not developed or in use even in city centers yet; besides in early embryonic stage even those devices do not help) can be forecast by the physical appearance of the would-be-mother: Round belly means a female baby whereas a small and pointed belly means a male baby. The dreams of the future-mother might also help clarify the issue: Dreams about the sun or bracelets and jewelry or spoons or needles or fruits would indicate a female baby whereas dreams about the moon or rifles or knives or wild animals would indicate a male baby.

Nicolas also mentions about measures to determine the sex of the embryo by certain eating habit. Sour foods would bring about a female baby; sweet foods would increase the probability of a male baby.

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## 3. BIRTH

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The pregnant women continue laboring in the fields<sup>9</sup> and sometimes have their baby right there! Mostly it is the elderly, experienced women who assume the role and responsibility of the midwife. Belly-massage or strolling in the house with the aid of relatives (by supporting the armpits), is considered helpful.

If a female visitor comes home, she consigns one of her belongings (usually a belt or a hair-buckle) to the pregnant woman (who shall return it after the birth).

### 3.1 Measures Against Difficult Deliveries

The patient may swallow pulverized egg-shells. This is a symbolic ritual, since a chicken also hatches from an egg, by breaking the shell.

Anything locked<sup>10</sup> or closed is now opened: Trunks, scissors. Locks, windows, laundry-sacks (*bohça*), buttons etc.. Even braided hair is let loose.

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<sup>9</sup> As Çaya (2013, p.134) specifies; this custom should not be interpreted as mistreatment of village women. On the contrary; they are spoiled and cajoled by their men during pregnancy and after birth, especially if the baby is a boy. It is just that, surprising as it may be, peasant women are more rational in such matters than their city counterparts.

In her original book in French (1972, p.146), Nicolas says: *The village is a community, one might as well say a grand household; where life goes on by fulfillment of the same tasks by every one; that is, work in order to survive. There, agrarian activity commences from childhood onwards. People do not have time to worry over executing detailed rituals which are not somehow related to either common sense or religion or good health or production or smooth flow of local life.*

Water taps are turned on. The patient herself (with help from others) might leap over a pool or a basin of water.

She might drink the (now dirtied) ablution wastewater of people with whom she had quarreled or sulked. Sometimes she might drink the hand-wash of her very husband; *with whom*, notes Nicolas, *conflicts could be highly probable*. Nicolas rightfully considers this an honorable socio-religious amendment. Indeed; in Islamic creed, all Muslims are (figuratively speaking) siblings and the sulking period should not exceed a maximum of three days between any two individuals. Nicolas does not quote the original key-word “*küsmek / küs*” on which Paul Stirling (1965, pp.408-409) dwells on, at some length, in the case of a central Anatolian village:

When two persons quarrel they are said to be *küs*. This word is constantly heard. On one occasion a grandmother left to cook and to mind her baby granddaughter while the rest of the household went out to harvest in the fields, remarked jokingly at the end of the day that she and the baby were *küs*. The dictionary meaning for this word is ‘sulk’, but this is too undignified a word. It implies the behaviour of Achilles in his tent, a formal breaking off of social relations, usually in the interests of honour. Its converse is the word for speaking together, *konushmak*.

This formal state of hostility often exists for longer or shorter periods between individuals or households. A man may be *küs* with his parents-in-law, or husband and wife may be *küs* with each other. But if it is established between two normal non-kin households then the agnates on each side are likely to be involved.

No recognised machinery exists in the village for the settlement of such quarrels. It is always possible for people to decide to resume social relations, and this may be done simply by a single formal visit. Sometimes third parties with ties to both sides may attempt to bring them together.

Muslims are (figuratively speaking) siblings and the sulking period should

### 3.2 After-Birth Times

Following the birth, the crucial interval of forty days of lochia is saturated with conventional practices.

The placenta<sup>11</sup> (umbilical cord) is either buried or else it is thrown into water. It is never burnt. Sometime it is salted and preserved as a remedy to be eaten for the intention of healing diseases like throat-ache, scrofula, epilepsy<sup>12</sup> etc..

<sup>10</sup> I have personally heard that the rite of opening locks may also work for promoting the chances of marriage for an aging maiden. Before I knew this; way back some years ago; on a summer day on a street in Scutary region of Istanbul; I once got approached by a young, scarve-headed, homely female and requested to open a lock with the key inserted, which she was holding in her hand. I happened to be among the scattering crowd just getting out of a mosque after the noon prayer. She obviously took me as a pious man returning from one of the daily collective prayers. I immediately grasped the ritualistic nature of the demand and granted her wish. I had a dim idea about the reason for which it was intended but refrained from inquiry.



**Figure 2**  
**A Traditional Baby Cradle (Photo by the Author—S.Ç.)**



**Figure 3**  
**The Opening Formula of Islamic Prayers in Arabic Scriptures (in the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful) Carved of Wood. Hunged on the Wall, It Is a Spritual Protection for the Household (Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.)**

If the child gets born enveloped in a membrane (a portion of the foetal membrane) this is considered good luck. The baby is said to be in-a-shirt (*gomlekli*) or in-a-voile (*duvakli*). Nicolas points out that such a membrane usually covers the head of the baby, thereby the word

<sup>11</sup> A cat-lover once said that the feemale cat eats her own placenta after the birth. He added that the legend of some cats eating their young ones originates merely from the careless version of this observation.

<sup>12</sup> Expert of History of Fine Arts, *Talha Uğurluel*, on a TV program explained the ethymology of epilepsy. Prophet Abraham’s wife *Sarah* was young-looking even in her fourties. While crossing the border to Egypt, she caught the attention of guards, who were eager to satisfy the love-needs of the insatiable Pharaoh (suffering from Don Juanism, in modern terminology) at the time. The Pharaoh assaulted *Sarah* and he got paralysed, foaming in his mouth. With imploring eyes he looked at the woman before him. *Sarah* forgave him but after recovery he attempted a second assault. The same symptoms occurred. Again he got granted an amnesty. After the third attempt and the third recovery; the Pharaoh simply acknowledged *Sarah*’s divine immunity. He released her by bestowing her with a Black handmaiden, *Hagarr*, whom would be a concubine of her husband, Prophet Abraham. The disease thus got named after *Sarah*, *sar’a* in Middle-Eastern languages. (*Hagar* would later give birth to Prophet Ishmael, at quite an advanced age).

*crépine* or *coiffe* in French. She even mentions the figurative phrase “*il est né coiffé*” meaning “he is born with luck”

The umbilical cord is cut off at the length of a span. The vestige (the navel knot) dries and falls off in a week. That faalen navel knot is either kept in the house in a trunk as a precious souvenir or it is thrown on the tiles of a roof or else it is buried, preferably to a favorable<sup>13</sup> place. The infant is traditionally dipped in salty water<sup>14</sup> or else solid salt is spread onto the body.

The baby is protected against evil-eyes and / or djinns by various talismans like blue beads, granules of alum, raw coffee-granules, *micocoulier*-fruits (*chitlembik*) etc.. A specially dangerous djinn at this stage is the *Scarlet* (*al*, meaning red-color), who is a mythical female entity of Persian –Asiatic origin. If the *Scarlet Wife* (or *Scarlet Mother* or *Scarlet Girl*) (*Al Karisi* or *Al Anasi* or *Al kizi*) ever attacks the house, this incident of possession by the evil spirit is known as *Scarlet raid* (*Al basmasi*).

<sup>13</sup> My maternal Grand mother made it sure that my navel knot got buried in the courtyard of a school. A place nearby a mosque is also commonly chosen. About two decades ago I once visited a friend, an army officer. He was on duty at the entrance of his military unit, where he received me and offered tea between light talk. A modestly-clothed, young, moustached man approached the outermost sentry-cabin, expressing his wish to see the officer on duty.

My friend appeared at his window and asked his request, attentively. The man was demanding permission to bury a baby's navel-knot in the courtyard of the military unit. The navel knot was in a nylon bag along with a miniature spade for digging. He became immensely happy when his Grant got acquitted, obviously believing that his son would become an officer, maybe even a general!

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas specifies that intoxications sometimes occur while dipping the new-born into salty water. Indeed, a seemingly-innocent material could turn effectively poisonous in excessive amounts, which is related to body weight, as well. A certain amount of NaCl, table salt is no exception. It may cause an insistant diarrhea, by itself a danger for infants.

Spreading solid salt onto the baby's body is much safer, eliminating the danger of swallowing it. Here is a case history relating to this salting custom: While I was a boarding Lyceé student in İstanbul, one of our dormmates, an İstanbulite, was subject to bronchitis very often. Another dormmate, a village boy from Antalya, once explained the sickly situation of the boy as follows:

— “No doubt you are from İstanbul and an alafranga house. They did not salt you at your birth!”

An equivalent of salting, in Eastern Turkey, is dipping the baby into deep snow. The method is called *chelikleme*, the root-word *chelik* meaning steel. (Simultaneously it means grafting a tree with a sample branch of another tree). A Physics teacher friend of mine from the eastern city of Malatya narrated the following anecdote: An army officer appointed to the East admired this tradition. Aroused by the advice of his local neighbor, he did dip his new-born son into deep snow. The baby got sick and died. When the officer blamed his neighbor, the man asked:

— “Are you steeled, yourself?”

— “No, I am not”.

— “Maybe this was your mistake. You should have said it when I gave you my advice.” (Indicating his own son, the local man went on) “This boy here comes from a very long lineage of steeled ancestors”! (*bunun yedi cediti chelikli*).



**Figure 4**  
**Protective Blue Beads (Along With Dried Peppers and Eggplants, Corns, Roll-Breads Circles) (Photo by the Author—S.C.)**

According to folk beliefs; the *Scarlet* may appear in the form of an animal, while her real image is that of a red-faced, red-haired, ugly and gigantic woman. Special preventions against the cast of the *Scarlet* are the following:

—A basin full of water placed at the threshold of the gate.

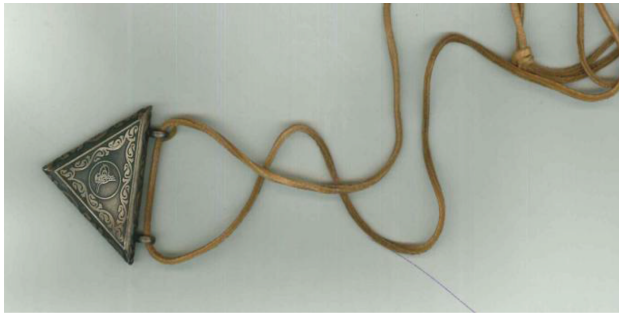
—Presence of onions or garlic<sup>15</sup> in the room.

The tradition can be interpreted as a means of testing the potential health of the baby. Ancient Spartans did it, in a way. The disabled babies were left in the wilderness. Sparta was a martial city-state despite a more humane attitude prevailing in the neighboring Athens. The adjective *spartan* reflects being immune to plain or even harsh conditions, in modern English. It also resembles a forced natural selection. Darwin's studies verify that there are varieties among the offsprings of the same parents. The fittest survives. The innate superior qualities of the fittest are most likely inherited by the next descendants and so forth. (Lamarck's views asserting the inheritance of acquired characteristics is discarded, meanwhile).

In a novel about eastern Anatolia in 1930s, we encounter the concept again. Djanno is the favorite man of a feudal-lord, agha. One day the master sets him a difficult task: To abduct the daughter of another feudal-lord as a wife-to-be. (The father did not consent willingly, despite an enormous offer of bride-money). Djanno succeeds the mission but struck by the girl's renowned beauty, he keeps her for himself. The girl, named Kevi, does not object to that braveheart. They lead a hidden life on the hills. Kevi dies soon after she gives birth to a female baby. Djanno then gives all his love to this child, named Gemmo:

“I fasted so that she might eat. I shivered so that she might be clothed. I wanted her to be as wild as a wolf, so that no man could threaten her. I forced her to climb with me in the hills. When she was drenched with perspiration, I cracked the icy film on the rivers and plunged her in. I tempered her iron to turn it to steel. The horse was her friend, the gun was her plaything” (Bilbaşar, 1976, pp.29-30).

<sup>15</sup> Here we observe an overlapping with the vampire myths of western origin.



**Figure 5**  
**An Amulet/Talisman Containing Prayers (Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.)**

—Blue beads attached to the baby.  
—A piece of red ribbon (if possible, accompanied by a red gold-piece)<sup>16</sup> attached to the mother.

If the baby gets haunted by the djinns, a physical deformity may be caused. A five-year-old bearded baby in *Yaylakoy* village was considered as such a case. Nicola affirms that even in France and England, harmful effects of djinns for babies are widely-held folk beliefs<sup>17</sup>).

If there had been former child deaths in the family, new measures are to be taken, in order to ensure a long life span for the baby. One is accomplished in the following manner: The mother first donates the baby the midwife and then “buys” it symbolically; thereby they give the name *Sati* (selling)<sup>18</sup> to the female baby and *Satilmish* (sold) to the male baby.

Another measure is to name the baby *Yashar* (meaning *he will live*), *Dursun* (meaning *let him stay*), *Durmuş* (meaning *stopped*), *Durak* (meaning *bus-stop*) or *Temel* (meaning *the foundation of a house*).

<sup>16</sup> No doubt this particular practice involves some economic tinting. Indeed, many anthropologists, including Nermin Abadan Unat do explain a lot of customs from this point of view; the compulsory bride price paid to the father of the young wife before the wedding in Africa, eastern Anatolia and some other places being the most conspicuous example.

<sup>17</sup> After all, the simple uneducated folk mentality is universal, in many respects. In a detective story one of the sub-themes was that the criminals, including the most intelligent ones, think that the aged detective has a secret treasure accumulated in so many years. He definitely must have appropriated the possessions of the bandits himself after capturing them in the name of the so-called law.

Again; a chief German archeologist’s anthropologist-wife (Dörner, 1983) mentions in the introduction of her book that her German neighbor housewives expressed their jealousy towards this lucky family, before the expedition. Her husband must certainly preserve some portion of the valuable antique findings for himself. (She had accompanied her husband to the Kommagene- excavations in Southeastern Anatolia and wrote a marvellous, illustrated book about the social aspects of the region).

<sup>18</sup> *Sati* is also the name of the one of the few first-generation female Turkish deputies of the early Turkish Republic. She was a peasant woman in the *Kazan* village of *Ankara*. In one of his exercises, President *Atatürk* visited the place on the way in his official car with escorts. He was ceremoniously offered a glass of cold butter milk (liquified yoghurt, a popular Turkish drink) by the head of the village and the accompanying notables. *Sati*, relying on the famous cunning peasant mentality, made a quick manoeuvre by grabbing the glass and sipping some of it before placing it on the tray again.

The baby and the new-mother stay indoors for forty days (the exception happens in villages as mentioned before). Both receive gifts from neighbors, friends, relatives. A list of the common gifts goes as follows:

- Slippers
- Clothing material
- Towels
- Socks / stockings



**Figure 6**  
**Blue Glass Eye, the Most Common Talisman for Expelling the Harmful Effects of Evil Eyes (Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.)**



**Figure 7**  
**Woolen Socks Among Common Gifts (Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.)**

Everybody froze. It was a big scandal! Then *Sati* explained that the drink could be poisonous. How could she afford a possible jeopardy targeting the life of the Pahsa, the heroic savior of the nation? *Atatürk*, impressed by her civil courage and intelligence, appointed her a deputy. Following a condensed improvised training in good manners and a visit to the hair-dressers and stuffed in modern attire; she would soon go sit in the Parliament.



**Figure 8**  
A Traditional Toy Among Common Gifts (Scanned by  
the Author —S.Ç.)



**Figure 9**  
Sugar-Coated Chick Peas, a Popular Sucrerie  
(Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.)

- Head scarves
- Toys
- Underwear
- Sweet foods (honey, halwa, syrups, cookies)
- Toys
- Other delicious meals (rice, rolled bread leaflets  
etc.)

*Halwa* is the favorite dessert on the country side, especially because it is durable and thus usually available at the village shops. A diabetic peasant man at a village tea-shop was cursing the doctor who had ordained him strict abstinence from that delicious delicacy! Lamenting over the “probable threat of death” he kept asking his friends: “*Won’t the doctor himself die?*” There are many

different sorts of *Halwa*, containing sesame, walnuts etc.. An old adage exclaimed by reflex when something good gets spoiled, is: “So, the rosy flax candy is all burnt up!” (*Yandi gulum keten helva*”).

Another measure is to name the baby *Yashar* (meaning *he will live*), *Dursun* (meaning *let him stay*), *Durmuş* (meaning *stopped*), *Durak* (meaning *bus-stop*) or *Temel* (meaning *the foundation of a house*).

After the birth, following three prayer-calls (*ezan*) the baby starts lactation. Meanwhile it is fed with spoonfuls of sugary-water. Nourishments like onions, liver, boiled corn, figs boiled in milk, salty almonds, salty sun-flower seeds, viscous raisin-syrup (*pekmez*) increase the mother’s milk production.

If the mother’s milk dries; she exchanges her bread with that of a shepherd — a symbolic rite because after all, the shephardkeeps many milky sheep under his constant custody— or a foyer family<sup>19</sup> (*ocaklı*, herd-possessing household) melts some lead in a bowl and the mother drinks water out of that bowl.

Worry or anxiety is too bad for a *lochies*-woman and so is the sight of a passing by coffin. When a visiting female guest leaves the house, the hosting *lochies*-woman always tells her to please come in again. This too is considered a socio-religious honorable custom by the author Nicolas.

## CONCLUSION

Nicolas affirms that in Bergama in 1960s the town life was soaked with customs, most of which are of

<sup>19</sup> Many traditional healers originate from foyer-families, where the curing talent or ability is a long legacy transmitted from one generation to the other. A rural cairopractor (bone-setter), for instance, usually belongs to a foyer.

In his world-famous novel analyzing a Central Anatolian village; author Makal (1963, p.121) mentions healing foyers in the vicinity of the village where he works as a school teacher. They are specialized for different sorts of diseases like high fever or nose bleeding etc..

Noah Gordon in one of his novels (*The Physician*) writes about a foyer-healer. The nine-year-old Scottish boy Cole becomes the apprentice of an itinerant barber-surgeon. The boy has a “gift” for sensing the approaching death when he grabs the wrists of a sick person. Eventually he would become a doctor and this innate talent would contribute a lot to his professional career and pass on to his son.

In one of his well-known novels Hemingway refers to the “odour” of death which is detected by certain individuals in Spain during the Civil War in mid 1930s and here again it is a foyer-like special trait to smell it. Pilar, a stern-faced female partizan on the Republican camp and fighting against the Faschist camp, take up the topic in a cave used as a shelter, on one occasion.

She used to be the darling of a dead matador and she knows a lot about the bull-fighters’ world. She relates that a certain matador named Manolo was actually stinking death at the chapel before going to arena. Two of his henchmen, Blanquet and Juan Luis captured that terrible scent and talked about it, expecting to be in error. But that afternoon in Madrid the bull demolished Matador Manolo, jamming the man against the planks of the barrier and crashing his head with a corn hieb (French version of the book, 1954, p. 275).

supersititious nature and they were especially well-observed by the womenfolk of the town. Nicolas specifies that some younger females refute such traditions on an



**Figure 10**  
**The Famous Halwa-Dessert (Photo by the Author—S.Ç.)**



**Figure 11**  
**A Zinc Bowl (Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.)**

individual basis but that they, nevertheless, do conform to the existing norms in appearance.

She suggests that the housewives have a lot of leisure time and the customs and traditions also function as an interest or hobby. Since the immigration is flowing from the provinces onto the cities (rather than the reverse direction) and since weddings are affected from within the region; Nicolas is of the opinion that those deeply-rooted folk beliefs must endure time for many a years to come, even in urban centers.

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