

CHwB Kosovo office, Report series No. 4/2006



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Cultural
Heritage without Borders
KULTURAV UTAN GRÄNSER

KOSOVAR WEDDING

EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS 2005



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EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS

The Council of Europe officially instituted the "European Heritage Days" (EHD) in 1991, with the support of the European Union. Since then the Council has assigned responsibility for the practical aspects of organizing the European Heritage Days to a co-ordination office appointed for a set period: the Stichting Open Monumentendag (the Netherlands) from 1991 to 1994, the King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium) from 1994 to 2000 and the Centro Nacional de Cultura (Portugal) since 2001. Since 1999 the EHD have been run as a joint initiative with the European Union.

OBJECTIVES

The many aims of EHD go beyond the basic idea of promoting access to monuments and sites, and include:

- bringing European citizens closer to their cultural heritage to help them get to know and understand each other better despite the diversity of cultures and languages;
- safeguarding a heritage constantly under threat. This is something, which concerns public authorities (State, regions and cities), but also private organizations and individuals. The increasing success of this awareness-raising activity enhances the image of public and private institutions responsible for protecting and promoting the heritage, making public officials and individuals more aware of the work they do;
- promoting a more open attitude to others, as a means of effectively combating racism, xenophobia and intolerance, while also playing a key role in the search for identity and the affirmation of our collective memory;
- preparing for the future by re-appropriating, re-interpreting and re-positioning the cultural vestiges of the past in their political, social and economic implications.

Since 1991 the EHD are a driving force in promoting awareness of a European identity, not just in cultural terms but socially, politically and economically. Discovery of a common heritage, all the richer for its

diversity, helps to make Europe a meeting ground where mutual recognition, understanding and acceptance of diversity are possible.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

In order to harmonize all the national (regional) initiatives and to unite them under the European banner, a number of principles were defined in 1991:

- the Days should take place in September;
 - only monuments and sites not usually open to the public should be included in the Heritage Days program. Buildings open to the public during the year may however be included if they offer special activities, such as guided visits, exhibitions, concerts, lectures, etc...;
 - admission should be free or entrance fees should be reduced;
 - the EHD program should include organization of special activities involving the general public and, in particular, young people and children of school age;
 - all participating countries should use the official name "European Heritage Days". Those countries that launched this activity before 1991 under a different name should clearly mention that the event is part of the European Heritage Days;
 - the logo (based on the symbol for European Heritage Year 1975) should appear on all EHD promotional material;
 - the EHD flag should be flown on all buildings open to the public on this occasion.
- Since 1999 the EHD have had their own slogan: "Europe, a common heritage", which was the theme of the Council of Europe's 1999-2000 Campaign launched following the organization's Summit of Heads of State and Government in Strasbourg. The Summit called for a campaign to promote Europe's cultural and natural heritage while respecting its cultural diversity.
- The undeniable success, year after year, of the "European Heritage Days" is largely attributable to the application of these principles.

EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS 2005 IN KOSOVO

European Heritage Days (EHD) 2005 in Kosovo are organized by Swedish organization Cultural Heritage without Borders CHwB in cooperation with Ministry of Culture of Kosovo.

It is the third year since Kosovo is part of EHD celebration which is taking place in 48 European countries.

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This year, Kosovo chose the theme of "Kosovar Wedding" and organized it in the historic zone of Drenoc village. The wedding rite is a part of the very rich spiritual heritage in Kosovo.

This year's celebration was held on 17 and 18 of September 2005

WEDDING ON DUKAGJIN PLAIN

As part of the central traditional structure of Albanian customs, the wedding represents a moment of particular importance in the life of an Albanian, whether it is in the sense of organizing the composition and structure of family life, or in the sense of historical values of the family and society, as part of human civilization.

The Albanian wedding, like any other aspect of life and culture, consists of regional elements and those that make up the essential core of the national culture. Therefore, during the presentation, discussion and analysis of this customary family and social tradition, we will encounter moments where values will have regional dimensions as well as national ones.

ESSENTIAL STRUCTURE OF THE WEDDING

In essence, a wedding represents a ceremonial act in a traditional rite of customary family life, in which the main actors are the young man and the young woman.

They are regarded as spouses after the marriage, which is concluded with the wedding ceremony and the official act of matrimony in the municipal office. Furthermore, the married couple represents, though not always or bilaterally, only one (the main) part of the friendship between two families and, according to traditional social organization, between the brotherhoods and clans that belong to the bride and groom. This compositional structure of friendship is an expression of the hierarchical functioning of Albanian society throughout a long period of history. Naturally, in today's world, this essential structure could be considered as being almost vanished, unless it is a survivor that continues to live on in the people's inherited subconsciousness, only as a memory (amid older generations) and an experienced reflection.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

There is no doubt that the organizational structure of the wedding represents a time period with relative contents, especially if it is analyzed using a regional





approach. A diachronic approach to this highlights the evolution of the organizational structure of the wedding's ritual ceremony. We are thus compelled to provide a retrospective of the different layers of this tradition throughout history, which will result in the synthesis of this problem.

BETROTHAL / ENGAGEMENT

Since marriage is perceived to be life's aim, an engagement is traditionally considered to be a preliminary stage. Thus, there is an automatic time interval that separates these two points of the marriage rite. Bearing in mind that we are dealing with a relatively old tradition for organizing family life, we often encounter several characteristic forms of engagement, which are mentioned below.

The age of engagement of two people in Albanian tradition has been a relative notion that has often changed over time. Even though there were definite parameters in the majority of the population, the average age for the man was 20 to 30, while for the woman it was 15 to 18. Exceptions were not rare and often they were extreme. They were greatly dependent on social and economic circumstances and family relations, civil status, etc.

Betrothal of unborn children

Betrothal of unborn children is an archaic form that has now ceased to exist, but it was found until a few years after the Second World War. Even at that time it was not common, rather a rarity. This kind of engagement happened during occasional gatherings, particularly during festivities, where two pregnant women were friends, especially if the friendship was based on good relations between families that were highly esteemed for their wealth, honor, courage and patriotism. The engagement was made with a verbal agreement between the two pregnant women (without consulting the husband or anyone from the family, including the head of the house, which (head of family) at that time was considered as family cult) in case the babies were of the opposite gender. And so it was done. The engagement would be respected and was obligatory. It could not be broken, otherwise it would be

avenged in blood. The families would wait for their children to reach the age of marriage and then the wedding ceremony would take place. Since it was a very severe form of engagement, the subsequent marriage would usually create a lot of dissatisfaction and an abnormal relationship between the spouses which had consequences for the friendly relations between the families; there were often cases of divorce. These reasons meant that this practice was abandoned and nowadays no such cases are registered.

For this form of betrothal no matchmaking - *msitni* - was needed. Even though it was made public after the birth of children, the formal ceremonies were held only when the children reached the appropriate age, i.e. puberty or later. As this betrothal was an agreement between women (mothers) in families with a strong patriarchal structure, where hierarchy was respected, this leads us to believe that it was a remnant from an archaic form of family organization, which we will explain in the synthesis section.

Betrothal of infants

As regards procedure it is identical to the engagement of unborn children, but now the engagement is made by mothers while their children are still in cradles. In identical circumstances and conditions of evaluation, at a moment that the mothers consider appropriate, usually during festivities and with mutual agreement, mothers agree on their infants' engagement.

Afterwards, they inform the husbands, who inform the head of the house in the presence of family members. Usually the news of the engagement is first received by the first lady of the house, which, in most cases, is the mother-in-law of woman who had agreed on the engagement. In this way, the hierarchy of family organization is preserved, with the role of the woman having survived from the matriarchate. As it was a similar form of betrothal to that of unborn children, it did not require any matchmaking - *msitni*. It must be noted that the betrothal of unborns or infants used to be done by men as well. This would happen when two men formed a friendship based on mutual trust, honor and character, during military service, emigration or war, and they would see this is an opportunity to deep-



en their friendship.

Betrothal through matchmaker

This was one of the forms of engagement that survived the longest, as a form of family creation in the Albanian marriage tradition. Nowadays this form is almost extinct, even though it can be found occasionally as a tradition and a formal act, rather than a functional one. The "journey" called engagement would start at the moment the boy or the girl reached the appropriate age for engagement, which was usually the beginning of puberty. From that moment, the boy's family, but mostly his mother, grandmother or sisters - especially the married ones - would start to "pick out" girls that met the requirements for their son, grandson, or brother. The requirements were higher he was the only son in the family, or the only child in the family. When this was the case, the family would try to arrange an engagement as early as possible, in order that he married at the correct time.

According to tradition, first a family friend (mik - refers to the head of the family on the bride's side) had to be found who would correspond to the level of the boy's family. Often, families would aspire to establish friendly ties with families that were renowned for their virtues, morale, courage, patriotism and faithfulness. Even more frequently, the family of the boy would hold itself in very high esteem in order to match that of the future bride, even though in reality they were not equals. The future bride's requirements were even greater: She had to have brothers and sisters (it was preferable to have as many brothers as possible); her mother must have breastfed all her children; her family had to belong to a known clan - fis - but not to the same one as the groom, and the clans had to be separated in blood from each other for at least 7 generations; her family had to be known as trustworthy and hospitable. If such a family could be found, the beauty and the age of the girl were completely irrelevant; the important thing was that she had no "disability". As time passed, the physical appearance of the girl became more important and the mother, sisters or aunts of the boy resorted to meeting the girl in beforehand in order to decide whether to go further with the two youngsters' acquaintance. After

this, the matchmaking process would start. The boy's uncle (his mother's brother) would usually be appointed as the matchmaker - misit. This was done in order to preserve the family line from the mother's side. However, the matchmaking duty could be carried out by some other member of the family or a person related by blood, clan, territory or friendship. As soon as the matchmaker got the message from the head of the boy's family, be it his father, uncle or cousin, he would go to the family of the girl in order to inform them of the intentions of the boy's family. The matchmaker's duty was to offer the family of the girl a sort of "identification passport" for the boy's family, regardless of whether the two families knew each other or not. He informed them about the family, its size, financial and social status, virtues, character, moral, loyalty, their ancestors and the clan to which they belong. It was also the matchmaker's duty to convey to the girl's family the approval and honor that the boy's family felt at having the chance to establish a friendship with NN - the father of the girl, as a well respected and honored family in the region. The lodging expenses - coffee, sugar

and cigarettes were brought by the matchmaker himself, even though they were paid for by the boy's father, each time the matchmaker visited the family. The matchmaker would not demand a decision on the first visit - an answer, but he would give enough space to the family of the girl for them to think about the proposal, ask around about the boy's family, discuss the matter with relatives, etc. In course of this, the girl's father, or some other elderly man of the house who held the duties of the head of the family, when saying goodbye to the matchmaker from the doors of the yard, said: "if it is meant to be" ("si të jenë kismet").

According to popular belief, on the way to the family of the girl, the shoelaces on one of the shoes of the matchmaker should have been untied. This was a homeopathic (imitative) act where the untying of the knot symbolizes that there will be no obstacles to his endeavor. Sometimes it would happen that the matchmaker had to visit the family several times before receiving a positive or negative answer. This depended on how well the families knew each other, or the information they received from others, which was usually





decisive in giving the final answer. When the family of the girl had decided to confirm the friendship with the boy's family, in the evening, after having dinner, the head of the house would inform the matchmaker of their decision by saying, "We await the new day" ("po e presim ditën e re"), alluding to the morning of the next day tradition stated that the betrothal was celebrated - "përhajr fjala e fejesës", even though nothing specific is promised. On the morning of the following day, the father of the girl, or someone else, would invite the elderly relatives of the family and in the presence of the matchmaker would order coffee for everyone. The matchmaker would not start to drink the coffee until the father congratulated him on the betrothal. This ritual, which was a sort of unwritten rule, would begin on the first visit of the matchmaker when he would say to the girl's father, "oh, NN, I was asked by NN to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage with the son of NN, and they have the honor of bonding the friendship with you" ("o NN, me ka ba amanetgj NN, për me ta lyp çikën për djalë të NN, dhe kanë nderin me pas mundësinë me u nxan mik me Ju"). The head of the family would answer: "May the one who asked for my family's friendship have honor, and let it be as it may" ("qoftë me ner për atë që me ka pranue për mik shpie e, si të jetë kismet").

The next level of the ritual was reached when the girl's father addressed the matchmaker on this solemn occasion (if the honor is not given to an elderly member of the family as sign of respect) with the words: "...oh NN (the matchmaker) sends greetings to NN (the friend of family - boy's father) that I have accepted him as a friend of family and I give my daughter, NN (name of the daughter), to his son, NN (boy's name), and may it do them good ("o NN (msiti) i ban t'fala NN (mikut - babait të djalit), se e kam ba kabull për mik dhe po i'a jep çikën NN (emri i vajzës) për djal NN (thuhet emri i djalit), dhe i koft për hajr)"). The matchmaker replied to him: "May it do well to you and may you have honor. May you have many grandsons and granddaughters and may you see them married. Congratulations to both families" ("hajr paq dhe paq faqen e bardhë". Pritsh dhe martofsh nipa e mesa. Për hajr ju qoft miqësia dy parëve"). Then the betrothal was celebrated

between the men present at the event as they stood up and greeted each other. Then they would sit down and drink the coffee as a sign that the betrothal had been arranged. After this, the matchmaker and the father of the girl would agree on the future stages of the betrothal ceremony, about which the matchmaker would inform the family of the boy.

The matchmaker, joyous over the fact that he had successfully completed the matchmaking, would go eagerly to the house of the boy and inform them of the betrothal. On this occasion, the family of the boy would fire guns to notify the neighborhood that NN found a "bride for his son" (his son is engaged) and had "become friends with Mr. so and so". The matchmaker would be rewarded for his successful matchmaking by the boy's family. In olden times, as a reward for a job well done, the matchmaker would get a pair of short socks - called shputa, meste or këputë - as they only reached to the ankle, and for this reason successful matchmaking is referred to as "këputë". With the passing of time and depending on the circumstances, the matchmaker's rewards would vary, ranging from a towel with a pair of crocheted socks and underwear to sometimes even money. There were cases when the matchmaker would ask for a certain amount of money, often too high for the matchmaking service, and this money would be considered "hupse" (lost money). On Dukagjin Plain this practice was very rare in comparison to other regions and it rapidly fell out of use. Nowadays, it is not practiced at all, with the exception of a symbolic gift.

The matchmaker's duty was to convey to the family of boy all the messages from the girl's father: arrangements regarding dowry preparation, the time and the manner of announcing the betrothal (in some places it was called "giving the hand"), etc. These were matters that were usually resolved by mutual agreement through the mediation of the matchmaker until the announcement of the betrothal, when the matchmaker's duties were complete.

The word (promise)

Of the bride (Fjala e nuses) - The word of the bride is the first ceremony of the official marriage rite in which

both families (of the future bride and groom) participate. The matchmaker's presence at this ceremony is obligatory. The word of the bride is organized in the boy's house of the boy, i.e. the groom's, and all the expenses are covered by his family. It is usually a smaller ceremony than the wedding, but it can often assume the proportions of a real wedding, depending on the circumstances: on the person who is getting engaged and who is betrothed - whether he is an only son and the financial status of the groom's family, etc. The ceremony is always organized in the evening, when a ritual dinner is prepared, and continues until noon on the following day, when a suitable lunch would be arranged. The promise - *fjala* - would always be conveyed by the matchmaker, accompanied by two, three or four, though rarely more than four, members of the bride's family. In most cases, the matchmaker is accompanied by the uncles of the bride, her brother and, very rarely, by her father. All the family members and relatives are invited to the groom's house. They are called *pritës* - the ones who welcome the guests. They usually come to an *oda* - reception room - before the bride's family members arrive.

This ceremony is organized in a very similar way to the wedding, and includes the services of: the coffee-maker, the cook (*akcja*), the servants (*hyzmerqarët*) for coffee, cigarettes, dinner and other activities. A person must stand guard at the entrance in order to announce the arrival of the guests. They are welcomed at the entrance, and first greeted by the eldest member of *pritës*, in order to continue greeting other members of the groom's family who are lined up according to age. The members of the bride's family are also lined up according to age; the procession will be led by the uncle of the bride (the brother of bride's mother) and followed by others according to age. Entering the *oda e miqve* - the reception room for the family friends - is also done according to hierarchal order based on age, and the members of the bride's family are led into the room by the oldest members of the groom's family. The seating is also based on this hierarchy: the oldest member sits on the right side of the fireplace and then the younger guests sit next to him, descending towards the entrance of the room. The *pritësit* - members of the

groom's family, sit on the left side, in the same hierarchal order as the guests. The centre of the room is occupied by the head of the clan, accompanied by two or three elderly clan members, who sit on sheepskins with their legs crossed, and converse with the two groups of family members. Other members of the family and brotherhood sit in the lower part of the room. Except from when a lot of guests are invited, the large seating arrangement on the floor - *cerga* - on the right side is only at the bride's family members' disposal. Servants stand up, waiting to serve coffee, cigarettes, water, etc. As soon as everyone is seated, the oldest man from the welcoming party starts the conversation by welcoming the newly-acquainted family friends, asking them how the journey was, etc, and asks them to make themselves as comfortable as if they were in their own homes. Afterwards, they exchange questions and remarks about everyday problems, ask about elderly members of the family, extend greetings to the eldest person in the house, or other persons from the relatives or neighborhood who are acquainted with the bride's family, etc. When both parties are seated, cigarettes will be distributed (historically, a box with tobacco was passed between people in the room so they could roll cigarettes in turns, and they would exchange tobacco boxes made of "bakfan"). After this, coffee would be brought in.

According to the rule, no one starts drinking the coffee until everyone has been served, since this is the "congratulation" - *përhajrës* - coffee and, as such, there is a certain order. When everyone has been served coffee, two of the most highly respected members of both parties (bride and groom's families) stand up and congratulate each other, followed by others in the room. The promise - word - that their daughter has been "given" to the groom's family is usually delivered by the uncle (mother's brother) of the bride-to-be. Mutual congratulations are exchanged between all the people present in the room. After this solemn act, celebrations continue with songs performed by singers who are specially invited for this occasion. Celebrations continue until late in the evening. The next day, the family of the groom organizes breakfast and then lunch, after which the visiting family members of the bride depart - and, with

this, the celebrations are over.

The family of the groom prepares modest presents for the visiting members of the bride's family, such as socks, shirts, towels, etc, that they receive as they are leaving the groom's house, or they are given to the matchmaker who then distributes them to the family members. Sometimes, the presents also contain small amounts of money. When a divorced or widowed woman is engaged, the word of the bride ceremony is not organized. In such cases, only seven people from the groom's side go to take the bride from her house, and this is done on a Tuesday. A widowed or divorced woman would wear only women's, not girl's, clothes, even if she lives at her parents' home, waiting to be remarried.

PREPARATION OF THE DOWRY - "ÇEJZ"

From the moment the girl is promised, i.e. when the word is given, she starts to prepare her dowry. In olden times, when the bride had to make clothes for the

groom's family, the groom's family had to fulfill the demands of the bride's family by sending at least 100 kilograms of sheeps' wool, and at least 100 yards of cotton for clothing and the weaving of shirts and scarves, "shajak" (soutane cloth) to make "tirq" (men's traditional trousers), "xhurdi", "herrk", "japanxhë" (woollen socks), "xhamadanë" (doublet), "kallçinj"- with four threads ("liq"), "pështjellak" (type of apron) - with two threads, "qilima" (rugs), "sexhade" (mats), two-threaded "duqë" (cloth sacks for carrying items), etc. In addition to this, the bride-to-be would crochet different types of clothes and household coverings, with the exception of "market items", which referred to items that are produced by craftsmen or industry, such as various clothing accessories. The purchase of these "market items" would be the final step in completing the preparation of the dowry.

The bride would prepare all the clothing for herself, her husband and her future children, as well as the clothes





Fig. 27



she would wear in her old age and when she dies - on the "day of her death" - and the shroud that her body would be covered with when she died. These items and clothing were kept in two wooden cases that were purchased in the market, along with the "market items". The folding of the clothes in the cases had a certain order, representing a life's chronology, starting from the bridal day - the top of the case would be reserved for bridal clothing, then under this the bride would place her womanhood clothing, then her clothes for old age and then the mortuary ones.

The phase of dowry preparation, which is also called the "under the ring" ("nër unaz") phase, is characterized by high moral norms - the girl is subjected to movement restrictions, because she is no longer in her pre-engagement girl-days; she socializes with her friends to a much lesser degree, does not move around the neighborhood or village that often, she is careful not to be seen out of her yard (in case her future husband sees her by accident) or to be seen working in the field. As an external sign of betrothal, the girl wears a scarf on her head. For example, in Has region the girl would wear a white scarf with short fringe, while in Malësi të Madhe (Great Highlands) the girl would wear a white "xhubletë" (suit) with "oja" (form of spherical dress ornaments). The girl would spend most of her time weaving the dowry items. This time is also considered to be a meditative period in the girl's life, during which she dreams of the married life that lies ahead.

In this respect, the folkloric heritage of our people preserves very high values that are expressed through folkloric lyrics/songs. The dowry represents a heritage with special values from people's material and artistic culture, in which the ethno-cultural element has been successfully incorporated. Thanks to this tradition, we now have the chance to trace cultural influences back through time, as well as to assess the geographical expansion and mutual influences of different cultures and civilizations. A tradition like the one described above, on Dukagjin Plain, was in practice until the 1970s. After this, there was rapid change and it practically disappeared. From the 1970s and until the last war - 1998/1999, the dowry of the bride had to contain

two sets of national bridal costumes. However, this practice is now almost completely forgotten.

"TAKING THE THREAD AND SETTING THE DATE"

As soon as dowry preparations have been completed and, following continuous consultation between the two families (sometimes this would take several years), there would be a moment when the groom's family would go to the bride's family to "cut the deal" (me këput' hesap) and "take the thread" (marrë penin).

This meant that the wedding day was approaching and the only thing remaining was to set the date - "vadja". Setting the date would be done on the same day as the "thread was taken"- which was a sort of a measurement of the girl that would be taken so the groom's family could purchase fitting clothes for the bride. The head of the groom's house would usually go to set the date - "da vade" - and to take the measure - "marrë penin". Before the date was set, the members of the girl's family would consult with the head woman of the family, who would consult the mother and the girl in advance.

According to tradition, the wedding day would usually be set for a Monday or a Thursday. However, this tradition has recently been broken, as the majority of the population is employed or abroad, so now the wedding ceremony usually takes place on a Sunday. Previously, only the Slavs used to have their weddings on Sundays. If the bride's father did not limit the amount of clothes the groom's family had to buy, the head of the groom's house together with the head woman, or the mother of the bride, would go out shopping, according to the taken measurement, and purchase "market items", including wooden cases (handmade), blankets and clothing accessories such as earrings, rings, necklace, bracelet, wrist watch, henna for the bride - all the things that the girl could not make herself. The measurement, i.e. "the thread" would not be taken from the girl's body, but from that of a family member, in order to avoid possibility of black magic.

Nowadays, the purchasing of clothes is done by the girl herself together with her fiancé, often in the company of their sisters, just to have a second opinion.

THE WEDDING

From the moment the wedding date is set, the groom's house begins daily preparations for this ceremony. The public/official moment of the wedding's commencement is considered to be the moment when the household members start to clean the wheat for the preparation of the traditional wedding dish, called qyshkek, which is made of boiled wheat with water and sugar. This process is mainly of a ritual character. It is carried out in the yard, three days before the start of the wedding. On two sofra (traditional low tables), a certain amount of wheat is poured, which is then cleaned by the old women and girls of the clan and the neighborhood, accompanied by songs and dancing with tambourine and "tepsi" (a type of large copper or aluminum baking pan). Then the wheat is beaten - pressed with "dybek" - so it is easier to boil.

Meanwhile, as far as the men are concerned, the wedding starts by cutting the wood and preparing the men's oda (reception room), as well as the cook's preparations. These things are done after they have been discussed with relatives and fellow-villagers. This is organized three days before the wedding starts, and at this point they divide all the different tasks between family and clan members. The head of the house is in charge of (food) supplies, while organizing and working with the wedding ceremony itself is delegated to relatives and neighbors.

Wedding invitations

When the wedding was organized according to traditional norms, the process of inviting the wedding guests, depending on distances, started one month before the day of the wedding. The wedding day was set 4 to 6 weeks in advance, in order to allow the family of the groom to prepare better for the wedding. Only close relatives could be invited a minimum of one week before the wedding. Inviting a friend 3 or 4 days before the wedding was considered a great insult and he would not reply to the invitation. The invitation would then be accepted only in cases where a special messenger was sent to the door in order to invite that certain person. Invitations made at the market, at the mill, or at some accidental encounter/meeting were not be

taken into account. The messenger - person who delivers the invitations - had to be a man and under no circumstances a child or juvenile. It was a particular honor if the head of the house went to invite someone to the wedding personally. Wedding invitations were for the whole family - "me ship" - which meant that all members of that family were invited to the wedding; as far as the daughters were concerned, they were invited as a couple, i.e. with their husbands, as it was considered shameful to invite a woman without her husband.

There were cases when single people (one person from a family) were invited, which was usually the head of the house. However, if he was unable to attend the wedding he would send a "man" from the same house, the same family. A distant relative invited to the wedding could bring two persons to accompany him to the wedding, and this was considered a particular honor for the head of wedding, so the guests were also given great attention and respect from the groom's family. The number of wedding participants usually increased after dinner, when uninvited guests, such as acquaintances from the village and the surrounding villages, arrived and stayed all night to celebrate. With the exception of being served the dinner, the uninvited guests received the same services as the invited guests. The uninvited guests would be shown the same hospitality as the invited guests. "Bingji" (horse handlers) would be often invited to the wedding, even though they were not related to any of the families, with the sole purpose of entertaining the wedding guests by riding the horses, carrying out different competitions, etc.

These traditional ways of organizing a wedding already belong to the past, as nowadays invitations are made and accepted via the telephone and other forms of communication. They are accepted in any place and by any person.

Wedding gifts

At traditional weddings, the gifts were dedicated to the household that gave the wedding party, and not to the groom. Gifts ranged from modest ones, one kilo of sugar (in lumps) or 1 kilo of coffee, up to a ram or an ox. These last two gifts were usually brought by the



uncles for the nephew, or from "jara" - those who had become very close friends during war, military service or living abroad. These gifts were brought by men. Meanwhile, women would bring pies made with fat from "buallice" (a type of cow) or sheep. With the passing of time and lifestyle changes, modern circumstances have resulted in different types of gifts, from cutlery to clothing accessories, household items or even money.

The wedding night

On the morning before the Wedding Night, the man in charge of the wedding orders the raising of the national flag in a visible place at the oda e krushqve - wedding participants - which symbolizes beginning of the wedding and is an invitation to everyone to "celebrate the marriage of NN". The head of the family, usually the groom's father or a close relative, stays inside the oda to welcome all the guests who come to give their congratulations. Visitors can also be welcomed by an elderly man from the brotherhood. The visitors are served coffee and cigarettes.

"Oda" of bridegroom's men (krushq)

The reception room where the wedding guests (krushq) are welcomed and received is called an oda. This is the friends' reception room - oda e miqve - which has a special place in the vernacular architecture. This room would be appropriately arranged and decorated for the wedding. According to tradition, the wedding guests would be welcomed at the oda of a neighboring house, since the women and children - robnimi - were usually accommodated in the groom's house and all the cooking for the wedding was done there. The food for the wedding celebration was prepared in one of the corners of the groom's house yard. The compositional structure of the oda complex consists of: the oda - a room with an area of 50 or more square meters, divided into two sides; "cerga" (seating arrangements similar to mats), the large cerga on the right side of the fireplace, by the room's windows which are almost always on the eastern side, and the small cerga, which is on the opposite side to the large one. The fireplace is located on the opposite side of the oda to the door. The fireplace wall is the most respected



place in the room. The "trapazan" - a seating arrangement similar to a couch made of wooden plates stretches from the end of the large cerga to the side of the door; it is used by the household's family members and those who rarely get the opportunity to join in the elders' conversation - they are treated merely as attendants who listen to the conversation. On the other side of the oda, where the small cerga ends, there is usually a wooden shelf placed in the corner, which is used for storing any food left over from the dinner, while the bottom shelf is used for water mugs, in case unexpected guests arrive during night.

This is strongly connected to the tradition of always leaving the door open for friends or companions. On the sides of the fireplace, carved into the wall, are wooden cabinets where coffee and cigarettes - tobacco - are stored, and are managed by the elder of the oda, who is usually also the head of the house. All around the perimeter of the oda, at a height of about 2m, there are wooden hangers for coats and guns.

The room preceding the oda is called the "divanhane" and it has similar proportions to the oda, as well as a

fireplace in case the room is needed for coffee-making at times of celebration or mourning, and when men are received in gatherings.

Along the entire perimeter of the walls, and down to the beginning of the stairs at the entrance, is the "dysheklak" - a form of extension that comes out of the main walls, is covered with wood and has small window-like openings without glass. Family members would sleep here in the summer as it was cooler than in the rest of the house.

Small continual openings called "frangji" are placed at a higher level than the dysheklak, these are used for putting guns in, in case of a shoot out. The "avdes-hanja" is placed in one of the corners, usually in front of the toilet door or at the top of the stairs, and it serves as a place for cleaning the coffee equipment. According to an unwritten rule, traditionally all the wedding guests are seated here.

d-4) -Reception of bridegroom's men — krushq - In the Albanian wedding tradition, a special significance is given to the reception of the bridegroom's men - krushq - and their accommodation in the oda, accord-



ing to the hierarchy and respect they merit. Just before the sunset - "aksham" - the first guests begin to arrive. Designated persons with specific tasks are placed at certain points in order to receive and welcome the guests and guide them to the oda. When guests arrive at the entrance of the oda they are welcomed by an "odabashi" who guides them to their place in oda; certain persons are also designated to take care of the carts, horses and oxen.

"Pritesit" the people that welcome the guests, are in charge of receiving the gifts from the guests at the entrance to the yard and wishing them welcome. According to tradition, as the guest approaches the oda they fire shots as a sign of arrival (shots would usually be fired by the uncle of the groom, or a close friend of the family).

The seating places in the oda also had their own significance, the fireplace side was always reserved for the clergy, but, in their absence, elderly persons coming from respected far away lands could also be seated there. A special place is also reserved for the "bajraktar" (the person in charge of holding the flag) of a

battle/war, for the flag-holder of the wedding, for elderly men according to their age and level of friendship with the head of the family, for the village teacher, doctors, and for uninvited guests who come in company of invited ones. The division of seating arrangements in the oda itself is done according to the hierarchy of respect given to the men: the fireplace side, the places on the two sides of the fireplace, the large cerga and the small cerga lying on both sides of the fireplace, sanraq - the middle of the oda - the space between the two cergas reserved for people who welcome the guests and those who are in charge of leading the conversation, trapazani, divanhanja and dysheklak.

The guests' arrival takes place in no particular order, depending on how long their journey takes. When the guests are seated, the "pritës" of the oda will welcome them, greet and thank them for taking the trouble to come to the wedding - usually using these expressions: a question directed to the eldest men of the "pritësit": ...are you wedding a man? (a po e marton një mashkull, a ?); the elderly man answers: ...yes, I am (po vallah). Then the guest says, "Congratulations and



may they have good fortune, may they have a lot of descendants, and may you see the birth and marriage of many grandsons and granddaughters" (për hajr dhe me igball t'hajrit e, ishalla trashëgohen dhe pritsh shumë e martofsh nipa e mesa), to which the elder replies: "Thank you for coming and may you have good fortune" (hajr paq e këmbët u lumshin).

Cigarettes and coffee are served constantly. Soon after the guests gather, the singers arrive. These are usually two people from the region who are known to cultivate the folkloric tradition. One of them would carry a "sharki" (folkloric instrument with one wire) and the other a "çifteli" (folkloric instrument with two wires). It may be that they are joined by some villagers who can play the fife, flute, lute or can sing. Drums (tupan) and zurla (a type of woodwind instrument) can also be used at weddings, as accompanying music for the singers.

People say that singers grace the wedding. Their duty is to maintain the wedding guests' high spirits. The repertoire of songs is very diverse, ranging from historic songs, to elegies and lyric songs, so they suit the taste

and requests of guests of every age. Historically, most favorite songs were those of lute and epic songs about bravery, such as the songs about Muji, Halili, Omer, Gjergj Elez Ali, Ajkuna, etc. These songs would be followed by the highland songs, which wedding guests would sing when they came and left from the village, as a sign of departure and arrival. Shots would be fired at the end of the songs or even during them, as a sign of admiration for the characters in the songs, their deeds, or because of memories of youth.

The first members of the music group, who arrive before sunset and before the rest of the singers are the "defatoret" - two Roma tambourine players, who enter the yard of the groom's house while playing the tambourine. The first person to start dancing to the tambourine music is the head woman of the house (plaka), to be followed by the oldest aunt of the groom, etc. Dinner is served at around 8.00 or 9.00 pm, after the guests have been chatting and singing for several hours. The dinner is served by persons who are assigned this task. Firstly, ashtrays and cigarettes are removed from





oda, in order that the washing of hands may proceed. This is followed by putting up the "sini", the traditional dinning tables. Sofras are divided according to the importance of the people seated at them; the first sofra is designated for the clergy, bajraktar, the uncle and other highly respected people, the second, third and other sofras are designated for the other guests according to hierarchy. After the guests' dinner in the oda is finished, the servants' dinner, "hyzmeqar", is served. Veal with vegetables, cabbage broth with meat, pie, sour milk, cheese, pickled vegetables and salads, qyshkek (boiled sweet wheat) and sometimes "halva" and "tamlorizi" (rice with milk) are served for dinner and dessert.

Singing and conversation would continue after dinner, until the tambourines were brought in, and then the guests would start dancing. This would last for about an hour, even though there was no specific rule. In the end, the person who had brought the tambourine players to the men's house from the house where women were staying would take the tambourine and go around among the guests to gather tips for the players. The tips would usually be metal coins which the tambourine players would take as a reward for their music. At Dukagjin Plain weddings the tambourine and zurla players, as well as drummers, would always be of Roma nationality. When the tambourine players entered the oda, the singers would retire for the night in order to continue on the day of the wedding. After the tambourine players retired for the night, the elderly men also bid good night and took several guests to sleep over at their houses. Youngsters were left in the oda and often they continued to play traditional games until the morning.

Tradition establishes the order in the oda; when singers sing, the conversation halts. When the singers stop, the conversation continues down from the highest clergy to the eldest and others. Conversation is held in silence, as everyone listens to the speaker. Children are rarely allowed to enter the oda, but the few times they do come in, they are usually placed at the divanhane or behind the door. However they do not have the right to talk, only to observe. Meanwhile, in the women's house, young girls and women continue to dance,

mainly in pairs, accompanied by the tambourine. Singing is often interrupted by skits. Women, dressed in different clothes and with masks symbolizing different animals, donkey, bear, wolf, fox, etc, play skits until late evening hours.

Wedding Day

On the wedding day, all the tasks must be carried out in time; the preparation of the "bride's carriage", the "seksana's carriage" (dowry carriage), feeding the wedding guests before departing for the bride's house, selecting the bridesmaids for the bride's carriage, the "old woman of the carriage" and the "carriage boy". The celebrations on the wedding day continue in the same manner as on the night before the wedding. The departure time to the house of the bride depends on its distance from the groom's house, however it is always after lunch. The order of procession of the wedding guests is regulated by "odabashi", who used to be called "quash". The bride's carriage and the one of the seksana leave half an hour before the bridegroom's men. The bride's carriage is covered with red rugs. In olden times, an elderly woman, accompanied by another bride from the house and a small boy would leave along with the bride's carriage.

As the years went by, the number of people traveling with the bride's carriage eventually rose to nine people. The carriage boy would usually be five to ten years of age. He had to have both parents and have sisters and brothers. The reason they leave earlier than the rest of the procession is that they would dine in the bride's house while the bride's family was uploading the dowry. After the procession of the wedding guests has been put in order, it is led by the "bajraktar" - historically, the bajrak (flag) was held by two elderly people who were skilled at handling weapons, because they had to protect the flag if necessary. After the flagman came the clergy, followed by the elderly men and then the rest of the guests, according to age and how well they were respected. Children were not allowed to join the wedding procession.

The departure of wedding guests (bridegroom's men) was accompanied by highland songs and gunshots. The procession was also accompanied by "bingjite", who

played with their horses. If two different wedding processions met on the way they had to untie the oxen from the carriages, as a sign of respect for the other procession. According to tradition, the bridegroom's men threw cigarettes at all the passersby who congratulated them on the wedding.

When approaching the house of the bride the singers would start singing highland songs again, in order to announce their arrival. Young men from the bride's family would attend to the horses and carriages while the bridegroom's men were visiting the bride's house. Receiving and seating the wedding guests is done according to the instructions of the odabash but, once seated in the oda, they have to respect the order and rules of the head of the bride's family. After everyone is seated, the "pritësit" welcome the bridegroom's men. The father of the bride addresses the father of the groom, or some other appointed person, and congratulates him on the marriage, thus leading the way to others to congratulate each other. This is followed by coffee and cigarettes. Then, the singers begin to sing. Those present in the room listen to the songs in

silence. When the song is over, someone announces "we are ready, but we can stay as much as you like" (na jemi gati e, rimë sa të doni) as a sign that it is time for the bridegroom's men to leave.

While the bridegroom's men were in the oda, the flag was guarded by one of the members of the bride's family. When the bridegroom's men are ready to leave, the bajrak (flagman) leaves first, rewards the guard with money for guarding the flag and takes the flag, which has been decorated with gifts in the meantime, shirts and towels, etc.

Pritësit watch the bridegroom's men while they drink coffee so they can take the cups from them immediately after they finish the coffee, in order to prevent any of the guests from stealing a cup. Traditionally, one of the bridegroom's men must steal a coffee cup, so they can put it on the barrel of the gun and shoot it when they leave the village. This tradition has often caused squabbles between the two families, as the bride's family would not allow the bridegroom's men to leave before they returned the stolen cup.

The bride is taken out of the house by her brother, who



punches her in the back. Handing her over to the father of the groom is done by her father, while they hold each other's hands and say, "Congratulations and may my blood be of your service" (përhajr të qoftë dhe duke shtuar: gjaku im robi yt").

The departure of the bridegroom's men is accompanied by highland songs and gunshots from both sides, while the carriages belonging to the bride and the dowry travel behind the procession of the bridegroom's men. On their way back, the bridegroom's men have to take another route, i.e. "break" the road. They have to pass through other villages where the relatives and nephews of the groom's family live, and the bridegroom's men will be served with "petlla" (traditional doughnuts). When the wedding procession arrives in the village, the participants once again start singing highland songs and shooting. Before passing the gates to the yard, one of the participants in the procession calls the groom by name three times and shoots into the air three times. At this point the groom is hidden in an upper floor of the house, from where he monitors the arrival of the wedding procession, the descent of the bride from her carriage and her placement in the "divan" (type of couch). The bridegroom's men are obliged to enter the yard (if possible) with their carriages, circle the yard and exit the gates again, in order to head towards the oda, where they will sit, drink coffee and congratulate the father of the groom.

When the bridal carriage enters the yard of the house, an elderly woman throws candies mixed with corn, wheat and coins over the carriage. On the ground, where the bride will first step when leaving the carriage, a member of the groom's family will place a colander or a bushel containing a chicken egg and covered with a sack. Before the bride is taken out of the carriage, according to tradition, a young boy has to enter the carriage, however he is blindfolded so that he cannot see the bride, only touch her. The bride is not allowed to look at the boy either, except to give him a gift, which he must not open until the end of the wedding. From the moment of the bride's arrival until she climbs down from the carriage, women from the groom's family guard the well, the fireplace in the kitchen, the bride's room (qilar), the fireplace in the

house and the garden, in order to prevent any possibility of black magic.

The bride climbs down from the carriage with the help of her father-in-law or brother-in-law. The bride's first step out of the carriage is taken with her right foot, while with her right hand she touches the horse's buttocks.

She also steps on to the sack in front of her with her right foot, and then she is led to her place on the divan. At this time the groom is hidden somewhere in the house and he watches the bride. The bride does the same thing, she tries to identify who the groom is. While this is happening the wedding guests sing and dance, accompanied by the music.

After staying for about half an hour on the divan, a plate with honey or sherbet is brought to the bride, into which she dips her fingers. At the moment she enters the house, she will touch the top of the door frame three times with her fingers. She is then led into her room to rest for a while. However, whenever someone enters the room, be they young or old, the bride has to stand up as a sign of respect.

It must be noted that while the wedding guests are away visiting the bride's family, the groom undergoes the ritual preparation for passing from boyhood into manhood. He will bathe (ritual bathing), shave, remove his boyhood clothing and put on his manhood clothing. This is completed before the wedding guests bring the bride.

In the oda of the wedding guests, as well as at the women premises, the wedding celebrations continue. In the evening, dinner is served no differently to the first night. The after dinner partying continues the same as on the first night in both houses.

The groom's entrance to the "gjerdek" (his wedding room)

The ritual preparation of the groom was done while the bridegroom's men were still at the bride's house. After the wedding day dinner, at around 9.00 or 10.00 pm, a hoxha (or, in absence of clergy, a senior family member), would call for the groom and some of his close friends, and take him aside to one of the corners of the oda. Here, he would explain some rules to the groom

and say a prayer for a propitious marriage. Standing up from this part of the room, in the company of his friends, the groom walks to the door of his bedroom. He pretends to be reluctant to enter, but as the groom opens the door, his friends abruptly punch him on the back. Inside the bedroom, the bride waits for the groom standing up. According to popular superstition, those who guard at the door should listen to the conversation of the bride and the groom, even if it is only whispered, otherwise their descendants will be born deaf and mute. On this night, the bride and the groom eat a ritual dinner, which consists of food taken from the first sofa - that of the hoxha (where the hoxha dinned).

Breaking the kulaç (bread bun)

The bun is ritual bread made by women on the wedding night, in the presence of a boy who has both parents. The women would put three plisa (Albanian traditional hat) on top of the boy's head as a sign of magical homeopathic gestures to imitate the birth of male children.

This ritual bread has a marking in the middle, dividing the bun in to two unequal parts, perhaps symbolic of

domination. This bread is given to the newlyweds on the first morning of their marriage, i.e. on a Tuesday or Friday morning. They then break the bun in two parts, each trying to get the biggest piece for themselves, as it is believed that the one with the biggest piece of the bun would dominate in the family. After this act, the bride receives the gifts from the wedding guests. She is accompanied by a woman of the family, who helps the bride to identify the givers of the gifts. The bride is obliged to take the hand of each guest individually as a sign of respect.

After the wedding guests have eaten, they start to return to their homes. The only guests to stay for longer time are the daughters of the family or aunts of the groom. From this time onwards, the bride is considered to be a member of the family. After a week, the bride visits her maiden family and stays over for a night. She is sent there by the head of the family, or the brother of the groom.

First visit of the bride

The first visit of the bride to her family was one month after her wedding day. It was considered the first visit,



because for the first time since the marriage the bride's family would come and collect the bride, so she could stay at her parents' house for a week.

On this occasion, the bride's family would dine with the groom's family. When the bride went to her family, she would take some buns that were specially made for this occasion. She would also bring back uns on returning to her husband's house. On both occasions, these buns would be distributed among family and neighbors. The groom's family members would go to pick up the bride after one week of visiting her parents', though the groom's group would be much larger than the first group of the bride's family members, as a symbol of fertility and increasing family size.

The bride's visits to her family

After the first two ceremonial visits of the bride to her family, any future visits are not determined as to when they take place. According to an unwritten law, with the exception of extraordinary cases, a woman would not visit her maiden family very often, as she would have a lot of obligations at her husband's house. However, a woman would visit her maiden family at least twice a year, usually after the seasonal chores were completed: once in the autumn and once in the spring. These visits would each last for one month, and she would use these occasions to prepare clothing for her children, husband and herself. On these occasions, it was not important who brought and took the bride.

KANAGJEQI (BACHELORETTE PARTY)

In Albanian ethnologic literature, kanagjeq is also described as the wedding party at the maiden's house. However, this term is considered foreign to the traditional terminology and imported from other cultures. In the Albanian tradition, family and social customs and traditions are very well differentiated. One can distinguish those of joy and those of sorrow, or those of mixed joy and sadness, such as in the case of kanagjeq. People differentiate this from the wedding, which is a ceremonial rite dedicated to marriage and the increase in family members that brings fertility, while the kanagjeq is comprised of two components: the parents' feeling of joy that their daughter has reached the age of

marriage, and the feeling of sadness, because she will no longer be a member of their family.

The relationship between these two components has been balanced in the tradition of the Albanian family, so resulting in an appropriate name: the rite of kanagjeq, which represents a ceremony that is different from the wedding. Even its organizational structure and contents are different. While the wedding songs are dominated by joyful verses, the kanagjeq ceremony is dominated by songs that contain verses full of melancholy and sadness, demonstrating the feeling of loss and pain for the young girl that will soon become a bride.

Kanagjeq is a ceremonial rite, in which the number of participants and gender structure is quite different to the wedding.

The majority of guests in this ceremony are females, while at the wedding the majority are male. The number of guests at the wedding is much greater than at the kanagjeq.

The circle of guests invited to the kanagjeq is smaller than at the wedding. Kanagjeq begins on Monday morning, with a henna painting ceremony, and lasts until Thursday afternoon.

The preparations and code of conduct are similar to those of the wedding.

Henna painting

Henna painting is a ceremonial rite with initiation elements. It is done two nights before the bachelorette party (kanagjeq). It begins in the morning, as the sun rises.

The ceremony consists of putting the henna on the bride's skin, in the form of tattoo, full of symbols representing the transformation from maidenhood to womanhood. The henna painting is done by a married sister of the bride, or by an aunt or sister-in-law.

Initially, the girl will refuse to put the henna, but gives in due to the persistence of her kin. Henna is used for coloring her hair, fingers and fingernails. No one else takes part in this ceremony and after it the girl is isolated in a room for two days, without any contact with the outside world, until the night of kangjeq.

The night of kanagjeq

The night of kanagjeq is a ritual night that represents an initiation ceremony. On this night, the maiden will undergo a ritual preparation: the ritual bathing and wearing of the bridal costume, which is followed by her appearance in front of the kanagjeq participants.

This ceremonial begins sometime in the middle of the day, when a woman approaches the bride-to-be, and starts "crying" close to her: uttering words "huj, huj, huj". This is the sign that kanagjeq should start. It is followed by the emotional cry of the bride-to-be who is rushed into the room by the women, and she hugs each one of them, while continuing to weep "huj, huj, huj".

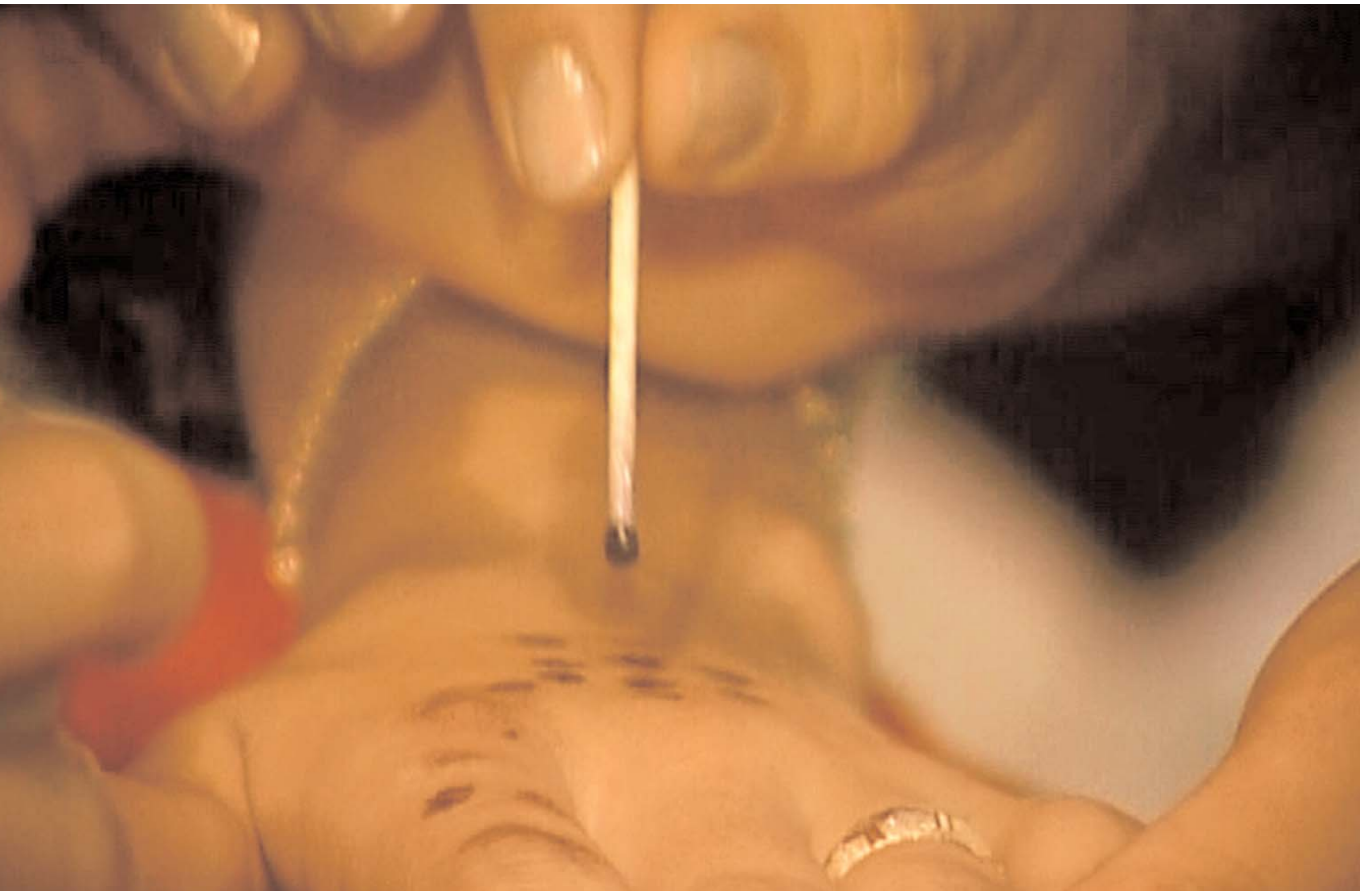
The girl will go and greet the kanagjeq participants once more in the evening, while her friends continue to sing. The songs are dedicated to her life as a maiden in her parents' house with her brothers and sisters, her social life, including her friends in the neighborhood, school etc. The participants also sing to the life that awaits her in her new family, new relations that will be

created in this family, etc. Here are some of the verses with such contents:

...Kaj moj çikë e kaj me za
(Cry loudly young girl),
N' Pleqe ti nuk del ma
(You will no longer be able to go to the mountains)

Huj, huj, huj!
Ngjitet kana pika - pika,
(We put henna in dots)
Sonte je bajrak ner çika.
(Tonight you are the first among girls)
Huj, huj, huj!

Ngjitet kana pika t'kuqe,
(We put henna in red dots)
Nesër je bajrak nër nuse.
(Tomorrow you'll be a bride)
Huj, huj, huj!





*Ngjitet kana pika t'mëdha,
(We put henna in large dots)
Nesër je bajrak nër gra.
(Tomorrow you'll be a woman)
Huj,huj,huj!*

*Kaj moj çikë n'shami t'verdhë,
(Cry you girl with yellow scarf)
Tana shoqet t'u kanë mledhë.
(All your friends are here)
Huj,huj,huj!*

*Tu kanë mledhë tu kanë tubu,
(They have gathered around you)
Se ty nuse dojnë me t'qu.
(Because you will be a bride soon)
Huj,huj,huj!*

It is worth mentioning that an important moment of initiation is shown by the fact that when the bride's friends sing about her future husband's house, the bride does not cry with "huj, huj, huj". On morning of the following day, the dowry is exhibited in one of the rooms in the house, so that invited guests,

as well as girls and women from the village, can come and see it. When the bridesmaids (krushka) arrive to collect the bride, they are seated in the reception room, where they are served with coffee while they wait to eat. The bride is brought into the room where the bridesmaids are and they give her different gifts. During this time people start loading the carriage of saksana (dowry) as fast as possible, so they do not delay the bridesmaids. In the meantime, two elder women take the bride by the hand and they take her to bid farewell to family members, friends and others, all the while crying "huj, huj, huj!" When the dowry carriage is loaded, two brothers of the bride (or male relatives if she has no brothers) take her outside the room, which she resists by holding on to the doorframe and crying out loud, and lead her to the dowry carriage. At the moment she gets inside the carriage, the big brother punches her on the back. The bride enters the carriage with her right foot first. The last one to enter the carriage is the "old woman of the carriage", whose duty it is to throw sugar cubes over the bride's carriage and to touch the horse's buttocks with the right hand as she gets in the carriage, so that the grandchildren will resemble the groom's family members.

EVOLUTION OF THE TRADITIONAL WEDDING

The Albanian traditional wedding, as with many phenomena in social life and other culture spheres, could not withstand a transformation process. Therefore, there is now a completely new situation when organizing and holding the ceremonies involved in this tradition. This new situation was greatly influenced by many social, economic, cultural, political, historical, informational, telecommunicative, cooperative and integrative elements. In the preparational phase of organizing the wedding, including its organizational structure, contents, participation, traditional cultural elements and the survival of the ancient spiritual, economic and social forms, there are elements that are nowadays modified and no longer applied. Instead, a modern tradition has been created, one that is filled with general elements, which cannot be called global, as they still contain stratifications, elements and nuances of ethno-cultural values, and yet they do not represent any diffusive value of any of the coexisting cultures. Being at this transformational crossroads, it remains to be seen whether the Albanian wedding of the Dukagjin Plain, as a part of the national entity, will lead towards universal cultural values and away from cultural identity, or whether it will create a new cultural reality in which the level of values will be a reflection of cultural self-advancement in the conditions and circumstances of a more dynamic life which, in its contextual and organizational structure, would preserve the values' nuances.

This is asserted by bearing in mind that cultural values are part of environmental circumstances, that despite the fast inter-regional communication now possible they cannot avoid environmental embodiment as one of the factors that color the specifics of every culture, including the Albanian one. In saying this we mean that cultural traditions are a part of the background that creates the global heritage, called culture, of Earth's civilization. However, the question is: what are the transparent points of the background that are filled with traditional and contemporary elements, which we consider to be evolved or transformed values? We will try to provide a chronological review of each value.

Among the first is the betrothal/engagement. "Betrothal

of unborn children" and "betrothal of infants", as well as betrothal thorough matchmaking, are forms that no longer exist. The engagement is made after two young people meet and decide to do so themselves, and are then supported by the family and the relatives. The "word of the bride" has been replaced by the day of exchanging the rings between the two engaged youths in their family members' presence. At the present this is an occurrence that is widely spread in the cities and towns, yet it is also becoming quite widespread in the villages. The differences between the city and the village are rapidly disappearing with in every field of life. In general, the modern wedding ceremony has completely changed. In almost every case it is organized in public spaces (restaurants and hotels), i.e. not in the house of the groom as tradition required. This style of organization has automatically resulted in the removal of the patriarchal tradition of dividing the two genders during the wedding ceremony, into the men's oda, where the bridegroom's men were gathered, and into the women's house, where the women were accommodated. Current standards of living have enabled the bridegroom's men to travel by cars, and not by horse and carriage, as was done before. Bridal carriages covered in red, as well as dowry carriages, are very rarely seen nowadays. Little has remained of the traditional music too, as it has been replaced by violin, fis-harmonica, clarinet, guitar and other non-traditional instruments. Highland songs survive only in the memories of those older than 50.

Historically, the groom not only stayed at home when the bridegroom's men went to collect the bride, but he also waited someplace high on a rooftop or a tree, hidden away from all the wedding guests, while nowadays he practically leads the wedding procession, and takes the bride himself. This occurs in cities and many villages. The bride no longer prepares her dowry in its classic meaning, nor does she wear national costume on her wedding day, but instead she wears a white bridal dress, be it in the city or in the village. Not even the handing over of the bride is practiced any more. However, regardless of everything, some things survived to modern times, and that is the wedding as a marriage ceremony, regardless of its transformations; taking a different road after collecting the bride; the homeopathic-imita-

tive action for a happy life by dipping the fingers in honey and touching the door frame; the exit of the bride from the car with the help of her father-in-law or brother-in-law; the existence of bajraktar - the flagman - as the leader of the procession holding the national flag; the firing of weapons, especially in villages, before departure, at the moment of arrival and exiting from the house of the bride, but also during the wedding ceremony itself; the existence of gifts, even though they differ from the traditional ones.

CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATIONS

A detailed analysis of the traditional Albanian wedding on Dukagjin Plain, as well as of Albanian weddings in general, will lead to the differentiation of cultural layers that, when seen from two points of view, can be traced from modern to ancient times. The first stratification belongs to Antiquity, and traces back values with aspects of economy and lifestyle, mixed with elements of pre-religion and paganism, as well as those of social organization. The most important elements from this group are the animistic elements such as: the colander or bushel, in some places ox bowing, chicken eggs, wheat and suchlike as crucial elements of a magical homeopathic character in the Dukagjin Plain Traditional Wedding. Belief in the sun and moon as elements of a cosmogonist background, are also found in the traditional wedding. Shooting firearms represents the act of repulsing demons, i.e. an act of purification. The imitative actions with the ritual bread, the "bridal bun", ritual shaving and bathing of the groom and bride, represent the initiation as a process of passing from one phase of life into another. This process is also accompanied by many other elements, such as the changing of clothes from the ones of childhood to the ones of manhood or womanhood - or elements of the bridal songs:

Kaj moj çikë e kaj me za
(Cry loudly young girl),
N' Pleqe ti nuk del ma
(You will no longer be able to go to mountain)
Huj, huj, huj!

This is a figurative description of the transition from one living place to another. The bride will move from the mountains, where she spent her youth, to another place where she will continue with the second phase of her life. The ceremonial character of this tradition is preserved the verses below:

Kaj moj çikë n'shami t'verdhë,
(Cry you girl with yellow scarf)
Tana shoqet t'u kanë mledhë.
(All your friends are here)
Huj,huj,huj!

These verses show the manifestation of a collective presence during the changing life phases of a woman, describing maidenhood with a sense of pain and a melancholic cry. Meanwhile, from the viewpoint of social stratifications, such as the economic and social formations, as well as the order of social organization, one can underline the exogamy element - through marriage with someone outside of the clan, then the traces of matriarchate, marriage in groups; such as punching the groom when he enters the bedroom to spend the first night with his bride, etc. Stratifications of religious background belong to the second group of stratifications. The bases of this stratification are Christian and Islamic elements. They can be seen in customs such as the ritual dining of the bride and groom on the first night of the marriage, with food taken from the first sofa - which is the one of the hoxha (Muslim priest); then the entry of the groom to "gjerdek", when the hoxha (in weddings of people of the Islamic faith) says a prayer for a good and fortunate marital life. The third group of stratifications belongs to the current times, and shows elements of both previous groups as well as the domination of the contemporary customs.

ETHNIC GROUPS IN WEDDING TRADITION

The historiography of different fields of science has made significant progress in analyzing the issue of the Albanian people and country, placing a special emphasis on historical negotiations. As a result of this, today's situation is very complex, not only when it concerns Albanians, but also when it comes to other nations that have passed through these parts as occupiers (the Serbs), or remains of the Ottoman army (the recomposed Turkish minority), or even through migratory movements due to economic reasons, such as the one of "magjups", or Egyptians (a nomenclature dating back to the 1990s).

For several centuries the Serb and Montenegrin ethnic group, in the total demographic structure, has composed around 5% of the population. Meanwhile, all the other ethnic groups such as Bosnians (a group descending from the ethnic people), Egyptian (the people known until recently as Roma, i.e. "magjup", a term which was also used by the members of the ethnic group themselves. As it had pejorative connotation, the local Albanian population did not use the term a lot, and in many cases they were presented as Albanians) and Turks, total around 10% of the total population. This ethnic structure has existed since Medieval times, starting with the Slav migrations in the Illyric Peninsula, initially as looting bands, later as groups orbiting around religious buildings - Metoh - due to their relations with church economy and financing. In later periods they functioned as large occupying groups, operating on the directions of the medieval state of Nemanja. Cultural prejudice between the local Albanian population and other ethnic groups in Kosovo were a constant occurrence. They were a barometer of social circumstances throughout history, often measuring the "boiling point", yet at times closer to normal (even though they were never normal, as this region always had conflicts and upheaval). Politically motivated turmoil and aspirations were always a challenge to cultural coexistence, let alone ethnic coexistence. Such relations created ethnocentric prejudice within the ethnic groups, thus creating communication barriers. This was also reflected in the jealous preservation of traditional values, which to some extent explains the survival of many ancient cultural elements, thus creating the trunk of the cultural life, with its roots and all its branches as cultural stratifications in time and space.

THE TRADITIONAL SERB WEDDING AS A CULTURAL REFLECTION, THE EXAMPLE OF HOCA E MADHE

The Serb people of Hoca e Madhe, of Prizren municipality, represent a slice of Serb culture in Kosovo. As such, these people reflect historical communication within the given circumstances. As a result of all this conditioned and influenced reciprocity, we now have a real cultural image of this environment. This exchange of values was present, but most of the local values, as a natural phenomenon, have left their traces to the present day. This reciprocity and convergence is also seen in the Serb wedding of Hoca e Madhe.

The wedding in this Serb village, according to tradition, lasts a week; it starts on Monday and ends the following Monday.

On the first day, the bride's best friends are invited to the groom's house, where they begin the ceremony of decorating "zdravica" (wooden or clay pot for carrying wine) singing the song "The clouds are winding ?ano, the hero is getting married" ("Oblak se vije ?ano, junak se zenil"). When the decorations are finished, the groom arrives and invites the best man and the brother-in-law to the wedding.

On Thursday, in the bride's house, the bride starts colouring her hair while singing "Color girls, we are putting color on you" ("Boj devojko, boju ti turamo"), while a boy invites the guests to the wedding, which officially begins in both houses.

Friday starts with a dinner for 'izme?are' (the people who serve during the wedding and are the closest relatives of the groom).

On Saturday, in the groom's house, 'komord[]ije' (people who bring presents - clothes for the bride and other presents) get ready. During this time, women color a bull with red coloring and put two apples on his horns, then they leave for the house of the bride carrying the presents and singing "May the komord[]ija bring health" ("Aj sa zdravljem našem komord[]ije"). Two of bride's best friends wearing 'are' (dimija) invite guests with 'zdravica' to welcome the members of the wedding procession. Every guest then brings tepsit (type of cake) to the house of the bride.

When the komord[]ije return on Saturday evening, with the presents from the bride's family for the groom's closest

relatives, the music arrives, as well as the 'mešalja' (woman that prepares the dough) who starts the 'kolo' (traditional round dance) carrying a colander, while 'aš?ika' (the cook) dances at the other end of the 'kolo' holding a large spoon. The celebration continues until late in the evening, with singing, eating, dancing and drinking, and then the guests of the groom (svatovi) retire in order to rest for Sunday, when they will go to take the bride.

Early on Sunday morning, before the dawn, by candlelight, the bride is decorated by her friends and elderly women. They put gold on her head and sing sad songs "Sabah Zora" (Morning dawn), "Oj devojko, oj nevero" (Oj girl, oj unfaithful), "Dal ti je □alba" (Do you regret) because the bride leaves her house and goes to a new home. These songs are accompanied by the cries of the bride because she is parting from her beloved ones.

After breakfast, accompanied by music, the wedding guests from the groom's house leave to take the bride. The wedding ceremony is carried out in the church. It is led by the "bajraktar" (who is usually the uncle) with an apple in the 'bajrak' (flag) and the oldest member of the wedding procession, signing old wedding songs, such as "Moj golube" (My dove) and "Biljbilj pilje" (Nightingale bird). At the entrance they are welcomed by the host, who congratulates and welcomes them. The guests sit around the 'sofra' (round dining table) where wine, pie and tepsišti are served. Then the celebration continues with songs and dancing.

On their return, the brother-in-law goes to the room of the bride, where her friends tie a scarf around his neck. Then he takes out "bisag", new shoes. One of the shoes contains candies, which he takes out and pours on top of bride, and he puts the shoes on her.

When she says goodbye to her family, two of her brothers, accompanied by the wedding guests, say farewell to the bride, while she is taken over by the brother-in-law and best man, who sing "□uta dunja" (Yellow quince) to the music of an orchestra made up of the following instruments: clarinet, violin, tambourine, go? and tarabuka.

At the gate of the groom's house, the guests are welcomed by the 'podrum□ija' (the man who is in charge of drinks) who throws grain on the wedding procession. The bride throws an apple over her head, dips her finger three

times in a glass filled with honey and touches the doorstep of the house where she will live from now on. 'Mešalja' puts a piece of pie on top of the bride's head, while the guests symbolically take a piece for themselves. When the bride goes inside the house, she walks to the stove and stirs the kettle with wooden spoon. Then she sits three times on the lap of her mother-in-law. After that, the bride starts the 'kolo' and the celebration begins. Guests sit around the 'sofra' on low chairs or pillows, and put towels over their knees so they do not stain their clothes. While singing "Kum kulu gradi" (Best man is building a fortress) every guest puts coins in one of two apples. After dinner, the bride pours water from the '?ugum' (pot) so the guests can wash their hands, and at the same time they give her presents.

After midnight, the bride and groom say goodbye to the guests by kissing their hand, and they go to their room. There is dinner there for them and the guests pound on the door so they can get in. Women sing "Sastali se mila nano mom?e i devoj?e" and they dance.

In Velika Ho?a the celebration continues on until Monday. The closest relatives and 'izme?ari' arrive and the bride serves them with boiled rakija, while the dimijas (traditional woman's wear) of the mother-in-law are put on the fire. The father-in-law and mother-in-law tie themselves on the rocking-chair with rope, while the bride rescues them with presents.

It is noticeable that the Serb wedding of Hoca e Madhe, close to Prizren, has preserved the line of historical evolution with its compositional structure. Nevertheless, the cultural reflections of co-existing nations are dominated by the habits of the natives. This can be seen in initiation ceremonies and poignant songs, such as "Biljbilj pilj". On the other hand, the organizational structure itself shows signs of borrowed customs. These old elements are also preserved moments of momentary influences on life's circumstances at that point.

Even the Serbian wedding of this village is prone to transformation, since the circumstances of today's life dictate cultural developments without isolation from the social environment, communication and cooperation.

WEDDINGS AMONG EGYPTIAN AND TURKISH GROUPS

As far as the Egyptian people are concerned, as an ethnic and cultural group in this region, it can be said that they have completely adapted to the anthropologic environment in which they live, and not only in Kosovo. The Egyptians, or as they are called in Albanian "magjup", unlike the Romas ("gabel") and the Jews ("cergash"), have completely embraced Albanian customs, traditions, traditional clothing, tools, faith, names and language as their being their own. This did not happen with the Romas, who spoke their own language, or the Jews, who were totally unadapted, or the Turks, who had preserved oriental traits.

In this context, the wedding of the Egyptian people is a complete copy of the Albanian wedding, without any changes made to it. Meanwhile, the Turkish wedding preserves the oriental characteristics, especially regarding music and dance. While the Albanian and Egyptian weddings preserve the patriarchal organization, i.e. men and women celebrate separately, Turkish and Slav weddings are organized jointly, mixing men and women.

In general, it can be concluded that elements of the cultural tradition survived until the final decades of the 20th century. At the beginning of the third millennium, cultural values have begun to unify as part of the course of globalization. This is also enabled by the new dynamics of life and practically unlimited possibilities for communication. Therefore, in the very near future, the differences in traditional values will only be made through the national symbol, for as long as it is used.

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