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# THE PHENOMENON OF CALENDAR LYRICAL POETRY AND ITS GENESIS

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### ABSTRACT

*In accordance with the title itself, this paper deals with a study that aims not only to appreciate the Albanian folk cultural heritage included in the ritual calendar songs but also to evaluate and synthesize the scientific and evaluative thinking of the studies on the subject. Folk poetry, that is, lyrical calendar poetry, is a mouth-to-mouth creation from generation to generation. We can rightly say that these creations overcame the tragic ruins of centuries, always renewing, enriching, many of them, fading, nevertheless constantly in harmony with the development of the people's life and social circumstances.*

*Ancient as the people themselves, Albanian oral creativity in general, ritual lyrical songs in particular, and especially lyrical songs of calendar rites, are still fresh, wherever used, exclusively in rural settings, where part of human life consists of livestock and agriculture. Regardless of their intense developments, this creativity is constantly transformed.*

**Keywords:** *ritual calendar songs, winter cycle songs, summer cycle songs.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The point we have considered here is the fact that Albanian lyrical calendar poetry is part of folk rites, some of which are still living rituals to this day; hence they continue to live in a syncretic form. Undoubtedly, part of the difficulty of studying these rituals today presents an objective difficulty due to the level of their realization under today's conditions, and on the other hand, the study of the texts of these rituals is very complex, as those texts appear along with music, various ritual acts, dancing or accompanying performances, with different masks, etc.

It is of particular importance to emphasize the fact that today's ritual folk songs appear to be connected to the three main beliefs among the Catholic, the Muslim, and the Orthodox Albanians. The layer of religious coloring is strong and is placed over a foundation that must have been from earlier than these and which was the basic, popular belief.

In this paper we have addressed issues of the phenomenon of lyrical calendar poetry and its genesis, aiming to address and discuss the main aspects of these phenomena. A critical reading of other authors who have dealt with Albanian calendar songs has likewise been carried out.

In Albanian studies, which have originally attended renown European schools in the study of folk culture, the author notes that the issues of this ancient tradition have been examined as constituting part of pagan antiquity, very present in the life of the Albanian people, though at different periods of time, under the influences of the three major religions were present.

## **2. THE PHENOMENON AND ITS GENESIS**

Our oral creativity in the lyrical calendar poetry preserves the great variety of ancient rites and cults associated with various songs, dances, and games, the tracing of which is very important. For scholars of this part of oral poetry, which can be compared to a wealthy mine, where are studied the various layers of paganism, animism, magic, totemism, fetishism, the examination and systematization are among the important problems that arise during the research. In this part of the oral creativity even today during different celebrations songs are heard, games are played, in which layers of former pagan and pre-pagan rituals are preserved. The presence of such elements in today's life, of high technology and the amazing daily inventions in human life, proves for the seventh time the thought that the source of all human knowledge and the way of life confronting the phenomena of nature is first manifested, expressed and shaped in such creations of the oral creativity of the people. It is not an easy task to gather, systematize and examine all these customs, along with the multitude of variants and their versatility. The researcher sometimes finds himself in a difficult situation when it seems that every material gathered in the field and systematized on file has priority. Which one of them should he deal with first: Colendrums and Night of Buzmi, or Lazars (from St. Lazarus) and Shakers of St. George (similar to trick-or-treat), Rusics and Vangelism, or Dajlinats and Dordolec.

Winter cycle calendar songs make synchronous units, they are songs and rites related to the end of the year and the beginning of the year. This phase of the year was of particular importance in the lives and beliefs of the pagan man, of the tribes, which were predominantly farmers. Arguments for this are found in the songs that were sung and played, hence they had words and movements to understand that hunting was just a form of war. This song cycle begins in the second half of autumn, ie from late October and beginning of November. That is when most of the fieldwork is completed, but it is also the time when livestock returns from the stables.

From here one should search for the songs and rites of St. Mitri's day. This day was celebrated in for the gratitude for the goods that the crops had brought, as well as the prosperity of the livestock, wishing there were more crops and livestock for the year to come. The cycle then continues with the songs related to the end of the year, the Buzmi songs, the Colendrums songs, as well as the New Year songs. They are characterized by the same sign of gratitude for the past good year, expressing the desires for more prosperity and opulence in the coming year.

St. Miter's Day is a kind of organization of all ages precisely at the height of winter and is likewise associated with the legend of the old woman petrified with the flock of sheep when it is known that her being tricked by the good weather, a month before spring arrived goes to the mountain with her sheep. Such a legend is preserved in the region of Opoja (south of Kosovo) and a series of rites are performed around it described by humorous, moralizing and satirical tones about the harsh winter in the Sharr Mountains. For all this, the guilty are held the old woman who brings winter with snowflakes and thick plates, because as an old person she wants winter to be over. These satirical verses are also sung by young girls addressing an elder neighbor.

*Who brought us malice ahead of time*

*"Uncle Smail who got old"*

*"Uncle Smail who got old*

*Whose ax drags"*

*"Uncle Smail who is disgraced*

*Who led us all in vain"*

Among the main Christian celebrations are the Christmas holidays on December 25th. Although Christmas is treated by the church as a religious celebration, it is nonetheless celebrated by devotees with various nonreligious customs, most notably the "Night of Buzmi" (the celebration of this holiday, December 24<sup>th</sup>).

Many foreign authors dealing with the study of folk culture of various Balkan people, as well as, with Albanian folk culture, have addressed issues of this ancient tradition, describing it as ancient elements of the spiritual culture of the patriarchal environment (Sako, 1984).

Such conclusions have been made by the well-known albanologist J. Hani, then Nopca, Shtajnmec, and others. Similar conclusions have also been made by scholars of the cultures of various Balkan people, such as Vojislav Djuric, with Serbians, Tvertko Cubelic, Josip Kekez and Maja Boskovic-Stuli with Croatians and others. In Albanian studies, which have originally attended renown European schools in the study of folk culture, the issues of this ancient tradition have been examined as constituting part of pagan antiquity, very present in the life of the Albanian people, though at different periods of time, under the influences of the three major religions were present. Such very interesting materials have been noted in the mountain areas of the North, especially in relation to Buzmi, and their study has likewise included Albanian authors such as Eqrem Çabej, Rrok Zojzi, Anton Çeta, Ali M. Ahmeti, Aferdita Onuzi, Mark Tirtja, Adem Jakllari, and others, who have made valuable contributions to the scientific study of rites.

Night of Buzmi is celebrated in almost all areas inhabited by Albanians, in political Albania, especially in its Highlands, in Kosovo, among Albanians living in Montenegro, as well as other areas. This celebration falls, according to records, on December 24<sup>th</sup> according to the new calendar, which coincides with the time of the winter soloist, when the Sun's power is renewed. The word itself, in its first meaning, has the usual meaning of Christmas trunk (of the

tree), the generous Buzmi, which is an all-Albanian word, because the word is also from Southern Tuscany. In Gjirokastra we find it literally as a tree trunk; in Himara in the meaning “thick” (like a tree trunk), in Vlora, as an edge. Therefore, it can be said that for these cults and rites, songs for and in honor of trunk, for all the acts of a magical character, and for the role of the ‘mythical being of the guest’ in the family bosom during this night, are aware most of the Albanians. At the center of this ritual celebration, which seems to be the most ancient of the festivities among Albanians, are rituals such as choosing, cutting, carrying and placing Buzmi (the tree trunk) at home, placing it in your nest with all the devotion. and the sacrifices of food and drink that are made for it, and finally the other magical acts applied to the cattle, on the lam of the grain, and on the trees, are ritual acts performed with the utmost care. Therefore, in the place called Kokkoda of Puka, on Buzmi Night, after the host places the trunk, according to the recorded gathered thus far, the people of the house come and congratulate loudly:

*Buzmi generous!*

*The host replies:*

*Welcome to sheep, goats, cows,*

*With men, berets and all the best!*

After this blessing, the dinner is served, putting on top of a little of all the food that is cooked for that night, then the host prays to the trunk:

*I pray for Buzmi generous!*

Christianity presents the birth of Christ, to distinguish him from the common man and to depict him as a supernatural being, as god-like. In spite of the fact that Christianity has attempted to present both the birth of Christ and himself as God and distinguish him from humans, some of the traces of the pagan life of the creators of this rite, in its very beginning, have not only been preserved, but they are still present in the core of these rites, now with that layer of religious affiliation. This has been a legend, therefore, well-known, many centuries before Christianity, even widespread among pagans. The birth of gods by the “immaculate virgin” - parthenogenesis, which in Greek means the birth of a daughter without the participation of the male, but with the participation of gods or plants and magic. There have been such beliefs in the religions of many people (Tirta, 2004). An interesting phenomenon observed in the celebration of these holidays is that many religions and beliefs related to Buzmi vary not only among different people but also within ethnic boundaries, from tribe to tribe and province to province. Thus, for instance, among the Catholic Albanians in Mirdita, there was a celebration of Christmas with Buzmi, which a thick trunk of the tree which continued to burn all night long. When Buzmi is brought into the room, as the well-known Austrian albanologist J. Hahn writes, “Welcome, dear Buzmi, burn in the fire”, it is seen that in this is preserved the blessing for Buzmi. Buzmi gets special honors by throwing a little of all food and drink prepared (Kekez, 1983: 236).

A part of the Albanian people, after the acceptance of the Christian religion, began to participate in the rites of the celebration of Christ’s birth. These rites were performed with fellow pagan citizens. Nonetheless, the church decided to celebrate Christmas on this day, therefore inviting believers to “not celebrate the Sun but the creator of the Sun” (Tirta, 2004). Christmas has been celebrated since ancient times. Its traces are found among many people in the world. But they vary from country to country, from one tribe to another, even within one ethnic group to another. There are times when these also vary within an area. Many of these rituals, however, have similarities among people living far apart. Today they are celebrations of Christianity, inherited from the pagan era when they were widespread. Christmas rituals are many and various, depending on the people and places they are celebrated. But inwardly they

have everywhere layers of origin, that is, the pagan meaning and sense. It means they are shaken in the cradle of paganism.

Christmas rituals are a multitude of customs that come up with different purposes and explanations due to the influence of certain religious systems. Consequently, it cannot be ascertained which system previously existed of one or another people, nor can it be said precisely what the exact meaning of this or that rite was (Skëndi, 2007: 307- 338). Their commonality is that they all relate to an unreal world, to “that world” or “this world”, to the worship and reverence of unknown superhuman powers, which, according to rites, influence the development and the well-being of the home, of its people, its livestock and of the field where the Christmas is celebrated. Some of these rituals were intended to tame or push away the “evil spirits” as not to endanger the people of the house and the harvest. Others are dedicated to imagined souls and creatures with the aim to gain their friendship and protection, hence have auspiciousness at home and work. Christmas trees, as an analogy to the old pagan Sun religion, are celebrated on December 23-25, when “the good times return”, when the day begins to extend when the period of the revival of nature begins.

### **3. CLASSIFICATION OF ORAL LYRIC POETRY**

Colendrum holiday, or Christmas, is the biggest holiday of end-of-year and begins on December 24<sup>th</sup>, according to today’s calendar. This is the day when the power of the Sun is renewed. Albanians celebrate this holiday with two names: Colendum (Kolendra) in the south of the country and Kullona (Kudhona and Kellena) in the north. However, this name derives from the Latin word *Calendae*, from which derives the word calendar itself. This pagan celebration of Christianity was associated with Christmas as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The celebration, as such, was held in Rome in 354, and in 379 it was celebrated in Istanbul, and in 386 in Antioch. Earlier Christmas was celebrated on January 6, in remembrance of Christ’s crucifixion. Therefore, the church placed this celebration on December 25<sup>th</sup>. In this way, it replaced the great celebration of the ancient solar creed (*Dies Natalis Solis Invicta* - the birth of the invincible sun deity). By identifying this pagan holiday with that of Christianity, the church wanted Christ in the future to be a light-shining Sun. Then the holiday, as such, spread to Europe. Albanians of the Catholic and Orthodox religion, for this holiday, prepare a cake called colander or kullona.

Like all other holidays of the winter cycle, Christianity tried to make the old pagan New Year’s Eve, its own celebration, by baptizing the feast of St. Basil. In different regions and different places, this holiday is celebrated in different ways. For instance, in Calabria, they light fires and spend the night talking around it. In Zagori, for the New Year’s Eve, they make a pie and divide it for each person as well as each animal. They put a coin into the pie and whoever finds is believed to be lucky that year. This fateful search for luck throughout the cities can be said to have degenerated into gambling. On this occasion, all members of the family should be around the table creating a joyful atmosphere and everyone is struggling to find the coin. After that, when they gather the table, everyone sings the song:

*Let the heavy abundance, spring,  
like seawater, like oil, like a grinder,  
Like blessed water, cheers for many years!*

Similar to the winter cycle songs, the summer cycle calendar songs are about the start of the New Year. Nevertheless, now the beginning is of a practical nature, as it relates to the melting of snow, or, to the coming of spring. This is the new agricultural year, which preserves many folk beliefs, rites and practices of magical character, doctrines, customs, and mythical rituals. The songs of the summer calendar cycle are rites and songs of the resurrection of nature,

its greenery, the risings and movements of nature, the actions and events related to the life of the farmer and the livestock. As such, they create the unique set of marked days that, by magical ritual deeds, have become taboo, which man, powerless to nature, was obliged to observe. Thus, he tried to make the most of his hard work, which was unprotected, since agriculture and farming were always “roofless houses”. Therefore, everything was at the mercy of fate. Following this logic in all the songs and rites of these creations that also mark the resurrection of life, man must face the dilemma that has to do with the mentality of the people of the time when these rituals were created. He was powerless, so he surrendered to the inexplicable phenomena of nature, or as always in human life at all times, there is always something inexplicable, unuttered, which remains a mystery. How else can one explain the many facts found in these creations, which speak, whether of the joy of life when nature brings them prosperity or of their disappointment, which come despite their prayers or plans?

Further, how can one explain the fact that in these creations one always finds a great desire to change for the better, in particular, in life related to agriculture and livestock, as two of the main aspects that man of those times dealt with? The calendar songs of this cycle begin with the Summer Day songs which are celebrated at the end of March. These rites and songs are characterized by wishes for a prosperous, fertile year and full barns. It continues with the songs of the First Swallow, those of Evangelism, or Nev-Ruz, the songs for Lazarus, the Easter songs, the songs of St. George, then the songs of Pagan May, the songs for Rusica, ending with songs of the Dordolec.

In the Albanian rituals and customs, besides the songs of St. George, the songs of the Summer Day are considered as the rites and songs dedicated to the most important celebration. This holiday is celebrated on March 1, according to the old calendar, or on March 14, according to the new calendar. In some places where Albanians live, it is celebrated on another day as well, according to the new calendar. In the magical rites and deeds of this holiday, there are thews and customs in common with other calendar holidays. It may, therefore, be said that the wishes for prosperity, for riches, for wellness, and the increase in the family and the tribe, for good health and other wishes, are the same.

Spreading the demands for prosperity, for wealth, and for the family, these rites reveal that fundamental aspect of human life is the urge to change different aspects of life in order to move forward. The character of the social consciousness of these demands cannot be further revealed here, but it can be said to be the first attempt of man to change the life for the good of the home, that is, of the family and the entire collectivity, even if by magical acts. Either way, this holiday has some special features. First, on the day of this celebration, people perform ritual actions to dispel the evils brought about by the change of time periods, to protect them, and to testify that new work and actions are beginning. They perform these rituals and magical acts with utmost devotion and guarding every element of them with the utmost care. Second, they perform ritual actions that seek out all the good that the new season brings with the resurrection of nature, while also putting certain signs, such as white and red, that express the momentum of youth, that reveal dexterity and complete health, endurance, and strong will, as well as dreams of love. Generally speaking, they reveal all the aspects that make life enjoyable.

The celebration of Evangelism is on March 25, according to the new calendar, and according to the Ottoman tradition, on March 1. This too is a spring holiday that is characterized by remaining habits of protecting livestock and crops from spring harms. Thus, the elderly “bind” the mouth of the beasts, the wolf, the fox, and especially the snakes. The children, hitting the tins in fields, vineyards, gardens, meadows, as well as near fences, scare the harmful living creatures with noise. Such rituals, as survivors of ancient pagan beliefs, are also accompanied by occasional songs:

*Run away snakes, run away drain  
When the Vangelism comes, he will kill you,  
He will Wait for you, with scimitar and gun.*

(Mitko, "Albanian Bee" 1890)

The songs of the summer cycle calendar are also interesting because they have a great motivational variety within the different types of Albanian oral creativity. This celebration, in some parts of Central Albania, is said to be a sign of spring. For other celebrations as well as for Lazarus, after lunch, children, adorned with baskets, go door-to-door singing.

The biggest Christian celebration is Easter. This word comes from the Hebrew *pesah*, which in turn is associated with a passage, which means 'go beyond'. The Easter was to be celebrated every year on the 14th of the first month (Abib or Nisan) at dusk, to commemorate the liberation from Egypt.

Acts and rites make the festival the largest Christian one, because, according to religious teaching, Christ resurrected this day and so has Life triumphed over Death. According to this belief, Jesus Christ is regarded as the son of God, who is at the same time the second person of the Holy Trinity - of which the Holy Trinity is composed. These divine triumvirates are formed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The origin of the Father and the Holy Spirit is not known, but Christ was sent by the Father to the earth to spread the Christian faith among men and to save mankind from sin.

St. George (Shëngjergjit) feast is one of the most popular celebrations. This holiday which is celebrated in different ways by different people is greeted in the spring. For this celebration, there is a multitude of songs and rites, as well as variations of them, but also dances which are very special. St. George is a celebration of paganism that survives centuries-old tradition in Albanian culture and is at the same time a popular holiday with no religious ethnic differences (Siceca, 1990).

Spring is a season of the year, which in addition to the revival of nature in this part of the globe, has created the rite of coming of something new in the spiritual life of humans, unlike what it was, so it is more cherished. Among the calendar celebrations of the summer, the cycle is Pagan May, whose songs and rites relate to ritual actions for the fertility of the cattle and the fertility of the crops during the coming summer. Pagan May feast is celebrated on May 1, and Christianity later baptized it with the name of the feast of St. Jeremiah.

According to the folklore and ethnological data and materials collected in the field, the Albanians call both Saint Jeremiah and Saint Dilli, guarding saints of the outcomes of their work. That is why in the songs and rites of this feast, the names of these saints are uttered.

Rusicas are celebrations for which different songs and rites are created, celebrated somewhere before and somewhere after Easter. Unlike some other festivals of summer cycle calendar songs, women and children are mainly present at Rusicat.

One of the ancient feasts of pagan origin is the Dordolec Carnival, which is associated with the cult of the goddess of fertility. The celebration symbolizes man's attempt to provide the rain needed for the crops, for the cattle grazing, evoking the fall of rain by imitation that may be considered a trace of the magical ruins of ancient calendar song rites. The Dordolecs are held before the Pentecost, beginning with St. Lazarus, when the crops need rains the most.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The folk genius, with all the uninterrupted historical seasons that have played a part in his historical life, has found time, and evoked his creative muse, even for the calendar ritual songs that have accompanied him since the ancient time joint with the rite, which was a collective act of magical productive character. In very small things, in very small demands, it became magnificent, turning into an important monument to the life of the individual, but also to social life, in particular, when agricultural affairs, during the changing seasons, sometimes grew rapidly, sometimes sparingly, thus, it is understandable that in these types of oral art, the concerns and wishes of the farmers were best reflected. It can be said, therefore, as in the lyrical songs of labor, as well as in the ritual calendaric songs, one reflects the love of man for work, for nature and the prosperity of the ancients, for the riches.

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