

# Buffalo, Ram and Rooster in Family Ceremony Rituals

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## ABSTRACT

While many populations of the world have preserved animals and birds in order to improve living conditions, Albanians have coexisted with them and many times even mythologized them to the extreme comparing them with humans. Bulls, rams and roosters have played a major role in family ritual rituals in birth, wedding, death and other festivities such as the opening of new foundations, the beginning of plantings, yearly festivals and everything related to family ceremonies. While cows, bulls and rams are also considered gifts for some family ceremonies, especially at weddings, the rooster has replaced the absence of the groom. So, simply in all cases when for well-known reasons the groom was absent, the rooster entered the groom accompanied by songs and ceremonies. Apart from wedding rites, where their presence is greater and more rituals, there are, rams and roosters have also taken an important place in death rites, where their ritual power depends on the provincial units and the beliefs and superstitions, who have accompanied family ceremonies. In this paper, which is part of a large project of my research "Bull, ram and rooster in the Albanian tradition", with some special specifics I will stop to talk about the role of these animals and birds in wedding rites, death and laying the foundation of the house. I will try to give a geographical map of Albanian lands, when their role is present in family ceremonies and ritual differences between Albanian ethnographic areas.

**Keywords:** bull, ram, rooster, ritual, birth, death, foundation, etc.

## Introduction

Cows, rams and roosters, despite the treatment they receive, have been and continue to be an integral part of the life of Albanians and direct participants in many rites of family ceremonies. Hence, we can say that there is no family ceremony, where the buffalo, ram and the rooster are not present, sometimes more and sometimes less. Thus, in addition to wedding rites and death rites, their presence is also in other ceremonies such as circumcision, opening of the foundations of new houses, the beginning of the planting campaign, the emergence of cattle in the mountains, etc., these ceremonies, which also enter into family ceremonies. Many of these rites, though faint or transformed, have been passed down from generation to generation to this day, and are pagan rites that were once practiced by our Illyrian ancestors.

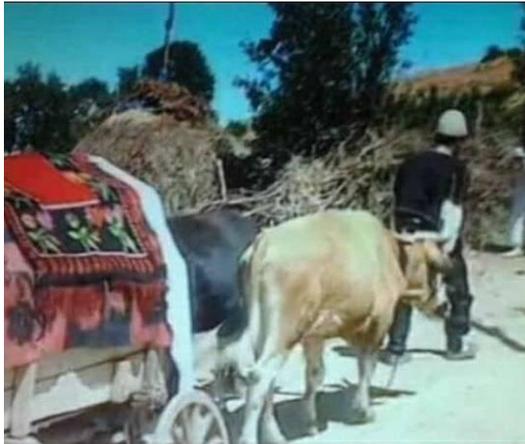
However, the most significant presence of buffalo, ram and turkey is encountered in wedding rites and death rites, which will be discussed in more detail in this paper, while their presence in other ceremonies will be

discussed in another paper. Ethnographic memory, in many Albanian environments still preserves many rituals, where in the foreground is the ram and the rooster, but also the buffalo as the bearer of the family economy and the bearer of the fate of a couple who get married.

The presence of buffalo, ram and rooster in wedding rites is mainly related to the logic of fertility, as the main purpose of the wedding is to create a new family, namely the birth of children by the young couple, while in death rites performs a function other, namely the function of protecting family members from the evils that threaten them. Then, their slaughter in the wedding rites also served as a form of sacrifice, which is in any case contrary to the norms and rules of the beliefs, but in accordance with the pagan beliefs of the Illyrians. Cows, rams and roosters during family ceremonies are not only considered as domestic creatures, but also as family members around whom many beliefs and superstitions are associated. Since buffalo and rams as pets and roosters as birds, have taken place in Albanian customary law, because it is

with these creatures that people have met daily needs and have regulated relations not only within the community, but also wide. Therefore, it is natural for these factors influencing the regulation of relationships to have beliefs and superstitions of that nature, which penetrate deep into the rites of family ceremonies.

Thus, the buffalo chosen to carry the bride



is also associated with a number of beliefs, such as the fact that it should have horns and should not be snatched, because as such the horned buffalo he emits the new moon, for which in symbolically marks fertility.<sup>1</sup> So, the buffalo that will be caught in the cart are mainly chosen based on the appearance of the horns, but the possibility that there are also preferences of colors, age, the origin of the fertile breed, etc is not excluded.

In connection with the symbol of the moon are also connected the ram's horns and the turkey's mane, which also in a way has the shape of a crescent, which in many Albanian environments is slaughtered on the wedding day, in which case only the groom has to cross the head and blood of the turkey, a belief that is associated with prosperity.

### **The Buffalo on Wedding Rituals**

The buffalo, in wedding ceremonies is quite present and his role depends on the weight of beliefs and superstitions in certain areas. Thus, in many provincial units the buffalo has been preferred for pulling the bride's chariot and in some cases, respectively

in some areas the buffalo has been preferred, for which a number of beliefs are also associated, that ostensibly it will bring them luck young couple. While in all areas where it was not possible to move the chariot, it was used as a means of getting the bride.

According to tradition, the buffalos with which the bride was taken, were not generally looked at in terms of color, but even in this case the exception was the buffalo black, for which color did not have good thoughts, but on the other hand buffalo were used, which had only the color black. In many Albanian settings, due to the importance of the buffalo in the household economy, they have been selected to pull the bride's cart, mainly those who have had crescent-shaped horns, who are believed to be more fortunate and that they bring luck and prosperity to the young couple. In this context, the buffalo has been a factor that has played a role in the Albanian family.

Because of the importance and respect that the buffalo has enjoyed in the ethnographic memory through proverbs, or even stories, it is preserved as something sacred, which has kept the village house with bread: "The buffalo is the pillar of the house!", "Who is has the buffalo of zeal brings out the bread of the summer year!" "You have, you have a home, you also have children's bread!" "The cow only sells maids for dowry and marriage!" So, as can be seen, the buffalo with which the land was worked was considered as a family value and was not slaughtered for food, but was left to die or was sold. On the other hand in the ethnographic areas of Tuscany, the ragged buffalo is allowed to be sold only in cases where the family has married the girl.

The buffalo is selected to be worthy of the bride's chariot, only if the land has been worked with it for at least a year. So it is not practiced for the bride's chariot to be pulled by the buffalo that has not made any furrows in the laver. On the other hand in many environments, where they did not go to pick up the bride with buffalo, or buffalo, when the bride came, it has been a tradition for the bride to bring food to the zealous buffalo, as it is believed th<sup>2</sup>at the buffalo is a symbol of

1 Aleksandër Stipçeviq, Ilirët, historia, jeta, kultura, simbolet e kultit, «Rilindja», Prishtinë, 1990. p. 375.

2 Bardhyl Pifti, Toskëria – Ligje të pashkruara, "Vllamasi", Tiranë, 2017, p. 279.

fertility, and takes care of the newly arrived bride in that house.

The buffalo, in the wedding rites, in some areas has also served as a gift sent by the uncles on the occasion of the nephew's wedding. In particular the gift buffalo was sent to the mountains of Dibra. In all cases, the buffalo as a wedding gift could not be an buffalo that has not reached the age to be caught in the rag, whereas today where this tradition still continues, the buffalo as a gift can also be a bull, not caught in zhele. The bull is then sent as a gift to the circumcision collective weddings in the villages of the Gryka e Sharrit (Zhupa).

### Ram in Wedding Rites

Ram, an important part of family ceremonies has been since the Illyrians and continues to be today. In this way, the ram, in addition to being considered a sacrifice in honor of the god Termin<sup>3</sup>, on the tops of the highest mountains, such as the peak of Pashtrik. Tomorri peak, Gjallica peak, Munja peak. "The ridges of these peaks are paved with a hornbeam, who knows how many years they are constantly sacrificed on them."<sup>4</sup>

According to ethnographic memory the rite of slaughtering the ram as a sacrifice to protect man from evil has been transformed into the slaughter of the ram for the foundations of new houses.



3 Nelson R. Çabej, *Në gjurmët e perëndive dhe mitologjive ilire*, "Fan Noli", Tiranë, 2014, p. 24.

4 Rrok Zojzi, *Kalendari primitive ASHSH – IAKSA*, Tiranë, 2020, p. 22.

Since the ram during the time of the Illyrians was considered a sacrifice of human protection, it began to be applied as a belief to later pass in the rite and in wedding ceremonies. The ram in wedding ceremonies, we find almost everywhere in Albanian spaces, but in different functions.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in the city of Prizren, there was a trap, and it continues even today, that for every Saint George the groom's family sends a lamb to the fiancée's family, and in this case the ram must have passed the age of six months and be with horns. And if the girl has stayed under the ring for more than a year, then for how many years she has been engaged, so many lambs have been sent to her parents, that is, for every Saint George, two or three rams of lambs.

While universally in almost the entire Albanian space, the ram as a gift for the groom's family from his mother's family (uncles), has been used almost everywhere. In many areas the ram was accompanied by song and dance and in some other areas there was a special ceremony of entry of the ram uncles into the groom's house. The slaughter of the ram has also been accompanied by a series of ceremonies, but also the service of the ram as food. Thus, in most areas of the North the ram's head has been the most preferred part, while in the southern areas including Toskëria, Labëria and Myzeqenë the tail has been served with a piece of meat around the pelvis as the most respected food for the honorable friends.<sup>6</sup>

In the areas of Tuscany, at the wedding ceremony it has been the tradition that the ram gift of the groom's uncles is slaughtered before the bridegrooms leave and the groom on horseback overcomes the slaughtered ram. Both the slaughter ceremony and the crossing

5 E dhënë gojore në mars 2021 e Feriha Sadik Shporta – Hoti, lindur më 1930 në Prizren.

6 Oral data of Viktor Hil Biba, born in 1940 in Kallmet - Zadrime; Martin Ndue Shpori, born in 1942 Mazrrek; Nazim Zogoni, born in 1946 in Bushat-Shkdoër; Hamit Haxhi Kadriu, born in 1934 in Sinë- Peshkopi; Xhemal I. Qyra, born in 1938 in Nashan of Gramsh; Gëzim Rakip Lenja, born in 1945 in Moglica - Opar; Avni Shefqet Hoxha, born in 1930 in Menkulas of Devoll; Hamit Resul Brame, born in 1924 in Vinçan, Korça; Ethem Isuf Vula, born in 1939 in Selenica, Erseka; Xhezo Daut Bajallari, born in 1940 in Topojan, Përmet; Lutfi Hasan Gjoka, born in 1941 in Gusmar of Kurvelesh, Nazër Haxhi Kongjinaj, born in 1943 in Brataj of Vlora; Mesir Rrapo Seferi, born in 1928 in Bubullimë - Lushnje.

of the ram by the groom on horseback are involved beliefs about the ram, which is in the function of protection from all dangers, in the present case of the bride and groom. According to the rites and beliefs, with the meat of the slaughtered ram, which the groom has overcome on horseback before the bridegrooms leave to take the bride, food is prepared for the bride and groom, but first the part they have eaten together is divided for the first time.

### **The Ram in the Rites of Death**

Although in some ethnographic areas the ram was sent for mortuary cases where the family facing death did not have a good economic situation, in many other ethnographic areas the ram was slaughtered as a sacrifice for the soul of the deceased. Since many of the traditions of death rites in the ethnographic areas of Albania in recent decades have begun to be renewed, while in the ethnographic areas of Kosovo to be forgotten, we will focus on those areas where these rites are applied. In the villages of Golloborda and Bulqiza, partly in the villages of Dibra and Mat, the slaughter of the ram for the soul of the deceased was applied as follows:

During the burial ceremony, a ram was slaughtered in the cemetery, its head was placed in the grave in some cases, especially in cases when a young person died, or even the owner of the house, in other cases he was left in the cemetery, while the meat is divided into two parts.

- A shoulder was given to the imam,
- While the rest of the meat was given to three poor families in the village, or even in the suburbs.<sup>7</sup>

The ram was slaughtered for the deceased in other areas of Albania, especially in the ethnographic areas of the South. Thus, in the areas of Toskëria, such as Korça, Erseka, Leskovik and Përmet, a ram was slaughtered on the doorstep and a line was made with the blood of the ram, over which the deceased passed, but also all the participants in the funeral. According to the belief, the slaughter

of the Cuban for the soul of the deceased happened so that he did not take the prosperity of the house with him and on the other hand the people of the family were protected.<sup>8</sup> In the area of Korça up to Përmet, the ram slaughtered for the soul of the dead is distributed to the poor, while in the area of Kurvelesh and the Vlora River, the same is done regarding the blood line at the gate of the house, but with the slaughtered ram it is prepared. the lunch of death and according to the beliefs that dish, which has been prepared and not consumed, is all distributed on the same day and none of the things that have been prepared for that lunch should be left at home.<sup>9</sup>

### **Rooster in Family Ceremonies**

Although the rooster has several names in the Albanian space, it is almost everywhere present in the rites of family ceremonies. The rooster, which is in fact equal to the ram and the ox, in terms of beliefs, in many cases he surpasses them, respectively has more beliefs. The turkey is generally found in beliefs and superstitions in all family ceremonies, including the laying of the foundation of the house. The rooster is used almost everywhere among Albanians as a sign of fertility and through his song he enlivens life and removes evils, or demons around people, so he was considered the protector of the whole house. We find the rooster in the birth rites, in the wedding rites more, but we also find it quite present in the wedding rites. So separately we will try to talk a little bit, except for the rites of laying the foundations, which we will talk about in another paper. We also find it quite present even in wedding rites. So separately we will try to talk a little bit, except for the rites of laying the foundations, which we will talk about in another paper.

#### **a) Rooster in family ceremonies - in birth rites**

Although the rooster is less present in the birth rites, it can still be said that the rooster as a protective symbol of man is also applied to

7 Oral data in May 2021 of Rizman Ramazan Sula, born in 1940 in Ostren i Vogël, Fiqeri Muftar Plaku, born in 1941 in Peladhi - Bulqiza, father of the imam.

8 Oral data of Avni Shefqet Hoxha, born in 1930 in Menkulas of Devoll,

9 Oral data of Avni Nexhip Varfaj, born in 1941 in Vranisht - Vlora.

the birth rites. Thus in the birth rites in the ethnographic areas of Tuscany the rooster becomes a sacrifice when a girl (maid) is born to protect her from evils throughout her life. While for boys chicken is slaughtered. The ritual of slaughtering a rooster for the birth of a girl, is believed to be done to protect the girl and to have luck in life, so to have a good marriage.

#### **b) Rooster in family ceremonies - in wedding rites**

The rooster is more present in wedding rites than in the birth rites and many beliefs about the rooster are associated with this family ceremony. Thus in the area of Devoll, but also of other villages of Korça and Erseka, the rooster is a tradition to be slaughtered when the groom is washed, which is a ritual bath. As soon as the groom comes out of the bathroom, a relative of the family slaughters the rooster and the groom has to overcome the knitted rooster, respectively his blood. It is believed that the slaughter of the rooster for the groom at the time of washing is done to protect him from the evils. So in a word it is considered a sacrifice for the protection of the groom in married<sup>10</sup> life. In the villages of Dibra e Madhe, almost everywhere, when the bride enters the yard of the groom's house, even before getting off the horse, the rooster is thrown to the bride while she is on horseback, or even in recent years above the car. According to the subjects, this action is done in order for the newly arrived bride to give birth to as many male children as possible. This action is also done in some villages of Peshkopi such as Grozhdan of Peshkopi<sup>11</sup>.

According to the subjects of this village, the rooster must belong to the groom's house and can not be without filling the year. It is also not preferable to be a bought or forgiven rooster. According to the subjects, at the moment when the bride enters the yard of the groom's house, the groom's mother or someone else throws the rooster over the bride's head. It is believed that the rooster bought or forgiven does not bring luck between the young couple.

10 Mizejin Xhelal Pulaha, born in 1929 in Pulahë - Korçë & Rajmonda Xhemajli Useli, born in 1943 in Zagradec - Devoll.

11 Oral data of Vesel Osmani, born in 1942 in Grazhdan - Peshkopi.

And only after the rooster is thrown over the bride's head can the vests be placed on the head and the child sit on the lap, because by throwing the rooster it is believed that all possible or evil spells have been broken. Meanwhile, in the villages of Dibra e Madhe, as soon as the bride enters the yard, with the rooster, one of the women of the groom's family touches the bride's head three times and then throws it over the bride's head. According to the subjects, this action was also done for fertility.<sup>12</sup>

In some villages of Leskovik and Përmet, the rooster is slaughtered by the groom during the party. According to some subjects, a rooster that is planned to be slaughtered as the groom's victim is released through the room,



in order to find out which of the guests may have rebelled against the groom. There are cases when brandy is thrown on the body of a turkey and two or three feathers are burned, in order to burn the wicked ones, respectively in order to weaken the bad ones (the evil eye).

This rooster is then cooked and eaten by the newly married couple, to protect it throughout its life from evil. Rooster, who as we have pointed out in many Albanian environments, is considered valued as a member of the family, he due to beliefs and superstitions, in many cases has replaced the absence of the groom, respectively has entered the groom symbolically, in all cases when the groom was missing. As a phenomenon, that the rooster has been introduced in the bride's room in the absence of the groom I have encountered in many provincial units, and without exception in all areas the rooster has been conveyed to the gerdek as the groom has

12 Oral data of Nuri Musa Koleci, born in 1948 in Solllokiq - Dibër

been accompanied with songs and ceremonies.

In the areas where the ethnographic memory remembers this phenomenon, or belief are the area of Devoll of Korça, Skrapar, the villages of Gryka e Madhe of the area of Dibra, the villages of Luma e Kukës and the villages of Has. From this extension of ethnographic memory, it can be seen that the rooster has been very important in the lives of the inhabitants of these ethnographic areas.

In Dhores of Skrapar, the elderly remember how many times the groom was delayed by the traveling abroad for a better life, or for various reasons they put the rooster in the bride's room, and her sister-in-law slept



with the bride that night. Meanwhile, in the memory of the inhabitants of the Great Gorge of Dibra, it is still remembered how Ali Pusa from Zall Sopot was married, because when he came to get married on the street, a murder had taken place, and he was stopped as a suspect. Until it was proved that he was innocent, he was held at the scene and thus he did not arrive home in time, where the family had hoped until late and when the time came the groom's cock was put in his place. A similar case had occurred in Bushtrica i Lume, when Milaim Lashi from Bushtrica was married to his wife Hida. According to the spokeswoman Hida from Slova e Dibra, she told how the rooster was brought to the room and then Milaim's aunt tied the rooster to the bed and left it overnight. As Hida Lashi recalled, her aunt also spent the night in the room with her, but she did not sleep all night and stayed close to the bride.<sup>13</sup>

13 Oral data of Costa Vasil Vezuli, born in 1942 in Leskovik.

14 Oral data of Mustafa Zenel Hysku, born in 1929 in Dhores of Skrapar.

15 Oral data of Saba Ali Gurra, born in 1953 in Zerqan

According to Xhavit, the event happened after the Second World War, because his uncle Milaimi had left Tirana in time where he worked, but had maintained bad weather for two days they could not move at all and remained in Gurabardh of Mat.

In Mazrrek i Hasit, in the sixties, when Nebi Karavidaj, who was working as a baker, got married, it was late for the wedding, as the grooms usually came home from the curb after the wedding started, it was late and they could not come to home at night when the groom was to enter. Then, as his sister-in-law Miradije Karavidaj recalls, the old women had instructed him to put a rooster in the room, but they were scared and did not respect the order, because Miradija was also the young bride of that house. But, as she recalls, the rooster was preferred to crash into the bride's bed and touch the quilt where the young couple would sleep, in cases where the groom was absent, an action that also took place that night, that the groom was missing, but then they took out the rooster.<sup>14</sup>

As a case it happened in the Zadrime area, but the subjects do not remember at what time it happened and do not remember when it happened to whom. The inhabitants of the Buna Coast, who are from Kallmet of Zadrime, also remember it as an event. According to the residents of Zadrime, because of these beliefs, the well-known song in the form of parody was created for the first time and was sung by Kole Vjerdha, who says:

*«Gjel kokoshi na'u martu,  
Pulen qorre i dhanë per gru.  
Gjel kokoshi na'u idhnu,  
Pulen qorre thotë se du....  
Gjel kokoshi na'u martu,  
Pulen çale i dhanë per gru,  
Gjel kokshi u idhnue,  
Pulen çale thotë se due.....*

Bulqiza.

16 Oral data of Xhavit Lashi, born in 1945 in Bushtrica i Lume.

17 Oral data of Miradije Karavidaj, born in 1937 in Mazrrek.

18 Oral presentation of Palina Nikolli, born in 1939 in Kallmet - Zadrime.

19 Oral data of Shefikate Riza Gjoka, born in 1947 in Koçaj, Hane Dylshyti born in Vajkal in 1952, Emërllah Hysen Basha, born in 1948 in Dragu etc.

*Gjel kokshi na'u martu  
Pulen plakë i dhanë per gru,  
Gjel kokoshi u idhnu,  
Pulen plakë thotë nuk e du.  
Gjel kokoshi na'u martu,  
Pulen zogë i dhanë per gru,  
Gjel kokoshi na'u shendue  
Pula zogë, asht per mue»*

### c) Rooster in family ceremonies - in death rites

There are many beliefs associated with the rooster in death rite ceremonies. The most expressed belief in the Albanian space is the one that is believed that through the slaughter of the turkey it is believed that deaths will be stopped. But, depending on the areas, the mode of action has changed, namely the slaughter. Thus, in the villages of Vajkal, Koçaj, Dragu of Bulqiza, it is believed that if a press is buried on Monday night, ie Sunday afternoon, the dead person will take a living person with him. And for this reason, at the moment when the corpse was raised from the place to go to the grave, the head of a rooster was cut off and its head was placed in the coffin. We find a similar belief in the villages of Has and Tropoja, but in Has and Tropoja the head of the turkey is placed in the coffin of the dead at the moment when two deaths have occurred in a family and this action is done with the belief that it does not happen third death. Even in Has, it happened that if there were two deaths close to each other, so that the third death would not happen, the slaughtered rooster, while the corpse was being cleaned, was introduced into the room where the corpse had stayed until a while ago and the bones cried the rooster, as if he were a man<sup>15</sup>. After the rooster crowed, his head was wrapped in a shroud and placed in the coffin of the deceased. But, there have been cases when the slaughtered and mourning rooster that is buried between the two graves of the dead of the same family, but with the same faith.

While in the villages of the Great Gorge of Dibra and in the Small Ostren of Golloborda, on the occasion of the death of the Lord of the House, in the impossibility of slaughtering a ram that day, it is slaughtered in a rooster and

its head is thrown in the grave and meat is given to it. hoxhës. The rooster was slaughtered over the grave in the ethnographic areas of Tuscany. It has even been practiced in some areas that with the blood of the slaughtered turkey, a line of blood is made on the threshold of the house and over that blood passes the corpse and all those present at that funeral. So it is believed that slaughtering a rooster is a sacrifice for the dead and will protect the living as well as stop the deaths.

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i Vogël.  
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