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Sworn virgin – synopsis nl

SWORN VIRGIN is het verhaal van een vrouw die haar vrouwelijkheid opoffert voor haar vrijheid, en die jaren later haar eer moet opgeven om weer vrouw te worden.

Het is een reis naar het binnenste van de complexiteit van een vrouw haar leven; een film over het ontsnappen aan een onzichtbare gevangenis.

Hana Doda, slechts een meisje, ontvlucht haar lot van vrouw en dienst, een toekomst die wordt opgedrongen aan de vrouwen in kleine, afgelegen dorpjes in Albanië. Met de hulp van haar nonkel maakt Hana aanspraak op de oude, traditionele Kanun-wet en zweert ze eeuwig maagd te blijven opdat ze een geweer mag dragen en vrij kan leven, zoals een man dat kan. Voor de dorpingen wordt Hana Mark, een "sworn virgin".

Maar onder de mannenkleren heerst onrust. Jaren later, lijken de immense Albanese bergen en haar eigen keuze een gevangenis. Mark beslist om de reis te maken, die hij al te lang uitgesteld heeft. Hij reist naar Italië, grenzen kruisend tussen verschillende werelden: Albanië en Italië, verleden en heden, mannelijk en vrouwelijk.

Stilaan ervaart Mark een duizelingwekkende magie door zijn eigen lichaam te ontdekken, door andere lichamen aan te raken. Ze vindt de zorgzame, liefhebbende mensen die het leven haar ontnomen had, en stelt zich open voor een onverwachte kans op liefde, welke de Kanun hara ontzegt had.

Mark herontdekt Hana, en herenigt eindelijk de twee zielen die jaren lang gescheiden leefden in haar lichaam. Ze is herboren als een nieuw, vrij en compleet persoon.

90min – Italië / Zwitserland / Duitsland / Albanië i.s.m. Kosovo – Albanees & Italiaans gesproken



Sworn virgin – synopsis fr

SWORN VIRGIN (Vierge Sous Serment) est l'histoire d'une femme qui sacrifie sa féminité pour sa liberté, et des années plus tard, doit renoncer à son honneur de redevenir une femme. Il est un voyage à l'intérieur de la complexité du monde d'une femme; un film sur se libérer des prisons invisibles

Hana Doda a grandi dans un petit village reculé d'Albanie où le sort des femmes n'est guère enviable. Pour ne pas vivre sous tutelle masculine, elle choisit de se plier à une tradition ancestrale selon l'ancienne loi traditionnelle Kanun: elle fait le serment de rester vierge à jamais et de vivre comme un homme. Pour les villageois, Hana devient Mark, une «vierge sous serment».

Mais quelque chose de remue agités sous les vêtements de ces hommes. Des années plus tard, les immenses montagnes albanaises et son propre choix semblent désormais comme une prison. Mark décide de partir en voyage, trop longtemps rebuté. Il voyage en Italie, en traversant des frontières dans beaucoup de mondes différents: l'Albanie et l'Italie, passés et présents, masculins et féminins.

Lentement Mark commence à éprouver le vertige de la découverte de son corps, toucher d'autres corps.

Elle retrouve les personnes prévenantes, aimantes que la vie lui a pris, et elle s'ouvre à une chance inespérée de l'amour, que le Kanun l'avait nié. Mark redécouvre Hana, et essaie de remettre ensemble les deux âmes qui ont vécu séparé à l'intérieur de son corps. Elle renaît comme une nouvelle, libre et complète personne.



Sworn virgin – cast

Alba Rohrwacher
Flonja Kodheli
Lars Eidinger
Luan Jaha
Bruno Shllaku
Ilire Celaj
Drenica Selimaj
Dajana Selimaj
Emily Ferratello

Hana/Mark
Lila
Bernhard
Stjefen
Gjergj
Katrina
jonge / jeune Hana
jonge / jeune Lila
Jonida

Sworn virgin – crew

regie/réalisation
scenari/scénario
geïnspireerd door het boek / inspiré par le roman

producenten/producteurs

uitvoerend producenten / producteurs exécutifs

co-producent/co-producteur
afgevaardigd producent / producteur délégué
cinematografie/cinématographie
montage
muziek/musique
production designer
kostuums / costumes
coiffures
make-up
geluid / son
sound design
mix
casting

Laura Bispuri
Francesca Manieri & Laura Bispuri
Vergine Giurata - Elvira Dones
(Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, Italia)
Marta Donzelli & Gregorio Paonessa
Maurizio Totti & Alessandro Usai
Dan Wechsler
Michael Weber & Viola Fügen
Sabina Kodra & Robert Budina
James Velaise, Alessio Lazzareschi,
Jamal Zeinal Zade
Gabriella De Gara
Serena Alfieri
Vladan Radovic
Carlotta Cristiani, Jacopo Quadri
Nando Di Cosimo
Ilaria Sadun & Tim Pannen
Grazia Colombini
Connie Sacchi
Tanja Maria Koller, Miria Germano
Marc von Stürler
Daniela Bassani & Mirko Perri
Denis Séchaud
Francesca Borromeo

Sworn virgin – Laura Bispuri

Laura Bispuri werd, nadat ze haar diploma Cinema aan de "La Sapienza" Universiteit van Rome behaalde, geselecteerd om te studeren aan de regie- en productieschool "Fandango Lab Workshop".

Ze won met haar kortfilm *Passing Time* de David Donatello Award (de Italiaanse Oscars) voor Beste Kortfilm in 2010.

Passing Time werd ook geselecteerd als een van de acht beste kortfilms van de wereld voor de "Short Film Golden Night", georganiseerd door de Académie des Césars van Parijs. Voor haar andere kortfilm *Bionding*, kreeg ze in 2011 de Nastro d'Argento (de prijs van de Italiaanse Filmcritici) als "Rijzende Ster van het Jaar".

Sworn Virgin is haar eerste langspeelfilm welke geselecteerd werd voor het "Atelier de la Cinéfondation" op het Filmfestival van Cannes, door New Cinema Network voor de International Project Workshop op het Filmfestival van Rome, voor Les Ateliers d'Angers van Jeanne Moreau en voor "Gap Financing" op het Filmfestival van Venetië.

Laura Bispuri, après avoir obtenu son diplôme en cinéma à "La Sapienza"

L'Université de Rome, a été choisi pour étudier à l'école de direction et de production "Fandango Lab Workshop".

Son court métrage *Passing Time* a gagné le Prix David de Donatello (les Oscars italiens) du meilleur court métrage en 2010.

Passing Time a également été sélectionné comme l'un des huit meilleurs courts métrages du monde à la "Nuit du court-métrage d'or", organisée par l'Académie des César à Paris. Pour son autre court métrage, *Bionding*, elle a reçu le Nastro d'Argento (le prix des critiques italiens) en 2011 pour "Rising Talent of the Year".

Vierge Sous Serment est son premier long métrage qui a aussi été sélectionné par le Festival du Film de Cannes pour l'"Atelier de la Cinéfondation", par New Cinema Network pour l'International Project Workshop au festival du film de Rome, par Les Ateliers d'Angers de Jeanne Moreau et pour le « Gap Financing » au festival du film de Venise.



Sworn virgin – Alba Rohrwacher

In amper tien jaar werd de Italiaanse actrice Alba Rohrwacher een van de meest gesolliciteerde jonge actrices van de wereld.

Ze won recent nog de prijs van Beste Actrice op het Filmfestival van Venetië voor haar rol in Saverio Costanzo's *Hungry Hearts*. Ander recent werk waarin ze te zien is: Alice Rohrwacher's *Le Meraviglie*, Marco Bellocchio's *Bella Addormentata*, Doris Dorrie's *Glück*, Silvio Soldini's *Il Comandante e la Cicogna* en Emma Dante's *Una Via a Palermo*.

Alba debuteerde op het scherm in 2004 in Carlo Mazzacurati's *L'Amore Ritrovato*. Andere rollen volgden snel: van Melissa P. van Luca Guadagnino (2005) tot *Mio fratello è figlio unico* van Daniele Luchetti (2007); *Giorni e nuvole* van Silvio Soldini (2007). Voor die laatste won ze de David di Donatello prijs voor Beste Vrouwelijke Bijrol. Het jaar erop mocht ze de prijs voor Beste Actrice in ontvangst nemen voor haar rol in Pupi Avati's *Il Papà di Giovanna*.

Alba was een "Shooting Star" op het Filmfestival van Berlijn in 2008.

Andere films waarin ze speelde zijn Luca Guadagnino's *Io Sono l'Amore*, Costanzo's *La Solitudine dei Numeri Primi* (De Eenzaamheid van de Priemgetallen) en Marco Bellocchio's *Sorelle Mai*. Alba stond ook op de planken in het theater in *La casa degli spiriti* geregisseerd door Della Seta en Sevald (2003), *Bric à brac* geregisseerd door Lupaioli (2004), *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* geregisseerd door Cruciani (2005), *Lisa* geregisseerd door Gioielli (2006) en *Noccioline* geregisseerd door Binasco (2007).

Ze werd geboren in Firenze, haar vader was Duits, haar moeder Italiaans en ze studeerde aan de Accademia dei Piccoli in Firenze (1997-1998) en aan de Compagnia de' Pinti School (1998-2000). In 2004 studeerde ze af aan de Scuola Nazionale di Cinema.

Alba is later nog te zien in de nieuwste film van Marco Bellocchio, *Sangue del Mio Sangue* en in Matteo Garrone's *Il Racconto dei Racconti*.

C'est au début des années 2000 qu'Alba Rohrwacher marche sur les pas du cinéma italien : *Une romance italienne* (2004), *Kiss Me Lorena* (2005), "*Non c'è più niente da fare*" (2007). Des petits rôles qui la conduisent en 2007 dans la chronique historique *Mon frère est fils unique* avec Riccardo Scamarcio. Elle rejoint ensuite l'actrice italienne Margherita Buy à deux reprises, dans *Giorni e nuvole* et le drame au féminin pluriel *Due partite* (2009).

C'est véritablement avec *La Solitude des nombres premiers*, un "film d'horreur centré sur les sentiments, la famille et sur l'émancipation impossible du couple", selon les dires du réalisateur Saverio Costanzo, qu'elle se fait connaître du grand public, et notamment de la France. L'actrice y joue le personnage d'Alice adulte, une jeune fille à l'enfance perturbée et au corps meurtri, que la caméra filme pendant vingt ans.

En 2013 sort dans nos salles *L'Homme qui viendra*, un drame historique lauréat du David Di Donatello du meilleur film en 2010 et du Prix du jury au Festival international du film de Rome en 2009. La même année, elle rejoint Isabelle Huppert et Toni Servillo dans *La Belle endormie* de Marco Bellocchio.



Sworn virgin – sworn virgins

The right for a woman to declare herself a man, to behave like a man and gain all the rights that the Kanun reserves exclusively for men is recognized. There is evidence that this phenomenon has been going on for at least 200 years.

There are still a few cases today: approximately 100 cases in Kosovo and the areas near the Albanian border. This phenomenon was previously also present in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia.

It is assumed that the woman is a virgin, and consequently the conversion occurs on reaching sexual maturity. Total abstinence from sexual life is demanded, the reason why these women (“burrnesh”) are also known as sworn virgins (“virgjinat e bitume”). They are women who dress like men, as men’s clothing is seen as an element that legitimates the conversion oath, traditionally a ceremony before 12 men of the village. After the oath, the virgin takes on everyday male behavior. She takes a man’s name, she is allowed to carry a weapon, smoke and drink with men in rooms where women are not permitted. They also acquire the right to sell, buy and manage property and can even take part in war or vendettas between clans. They have equal rights to men, but they can never marry or have relations with anyone of either sex.

http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/albania_swornvirgins



Sworn virgin – the Kanun

The Kanun is the most important set of traditional Albanian tribal law. For centuries the Kanun has regulated social life in Albania, especially in the remote northern areas (and into Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro). The code deals with both civil and criminal law regulating various aspects of life: family, marriage, contracts, work, property, crimes against honor, and compensation for damages.

Giving one's word, blood feud, and absolute loyalty between family members, characterize an Albanian as a "man of honor". When it comes to honor, the Kanun is categorical: "In the eyes of the law a dishonored man is considered dead". Additionally, "blood cannot be paid for with a fine" and honor is not restored, not even by monetary compensation.

Furthermore, "a dishonored man does not appeal for justice and the valiant take justice into their own hands".

The sense of family is very strong; a patriarchal-type family system is based on the clan: an extended family with the eldest male as head.

Traditionally, the life of a woman is severely conditioned by male figures. The Kanun refers to women as "a sack, made to endure weight and work". Women have minimal decisional power. They cannot own property, and they are not included in blood feuds.

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SYMBOL OF A UNIVERSAL CONDITION

This film was inspired by the book by Elvira Dones (Italian publisher: Feltrinelli, 2007).

I fought to make this movie, pushed by a great love for the character of Hana/Mark, and by a sense of responsibility to the story, what I feel is a metaphor of the relationship between female freedom and the world. From the start, I was intrigued by the story's very unique dimension in terms of character, social topic and specific isolated geographical location.

Yet I was confident that all this could touch on much wider and universal issues. SWORN VIRGIN shares aspects of the Albanian culture, in particular that of village life in the remote northern mountains: the Kanun traditional laws of blood, honor, revenge, women's roles, family clans. All topics that have been rarely seen in cinema and that I have chosen to use as a symbol of a more general condition.

A FROZEN BODY

This is a film about the body, a frozen body. A body that cannot be either male or female; or that is both male and female. The Italian path of my character has always been for me a slow and progressive defrosting of a body. Mark is scared but also curious. He searches, experiments, opens up and then closes up again. Then finally, he slowly frees herself.

But what is important to me is that at the end of the film Mark not only is Hana again, but finally comprises both sides in herself. In the final scene in the bar, I could have put Hana wearing high heels or a skirt, but it would have looked fake. I would have had the feeling of betraying Mark. I wanted to still recognize Mark, but also see some discreet physical traces of the profound journey she makes.

MOUNTAINS OF THE DAMNED

We shot in the mountains of Northern Albania, at the border with Kosovo. They are known as the Mountains of the Damned because they are so hard and mysterious. We shot at a dead end in the mountains. Along this road there are some tiny villages, actually made of a few scattered houses, without any kind of town center. This is rough and rocky terrain. The mentality was as you'd expect from such an isolated area; Kanun law is quite rooted. The closest stores are one-hour away by car. Most villagers do not even have a car; they walk or ride. There is a different conception of space and time. We tried to make ourselves known to the villagers slowly, step-by-step. We involved many villagers on the shoot and we didn't have many problems, even if the working conditions were not easy.

LOVE MEANS DEATH

I visited those mountains several times during the long preparation of the film. I was able to meet several sworn virgins of very different ages. One of them was only 35 years old. She was very tough and said things like "Love means death to me". They all have different reasons for choosing to become sworn virgins. Their stories are very diverse, but what is similar is that they often made the choice in their teens, so with a relative consciousness.

Most of them are old as this phenomenon is disappearing, but there are still sworn virgins living isolated in those mountains. There are two moments in the film where a real sworn virgin appears.

A MUTUAL HEAVY PAST

The relationship between Hana and Lila is an important axis in the film. They have a warm relationship, nourished by a mutual heavy past. We see this immediately, then slowly understand why. Hana/Mark upsets the balance of Lila's home. This happens first when they are children as Hana becomes the beloved step-daughter of Lila's father. Mark upsets adult Lila's home when he arrives in Italy without a place to stay. Lila is the love of Mark's life, a soulmate, a point of refuge. I think I met with every Albanian and Kosovan actress of that age group. As soon as I met Flonja Kodheli all my doubts vanished. I think she and Alba Rohrwacher worked terrific together, and with them I could really achieve what I wanted.

YOUNG LILA AND HANA

The two Albanian girls who play young Lila and Hana were a gift of the region. They are sisters who actually live in those mountains. When I was location scouting, I took a picture of them standing in front of the house. The following summer, I went back and I found them standing exactly in the same position. I took another photo of them. When I compared the girls' photo to Alba and Flonja, I was immediately struck by the incredible resemblance.

Working with them wasn't easy, mostly because of the language. I had someone able to translate their mountain dialect, but in the end, particularly with little Hana, I managed to communicate directly. I still do not know how, but I did. She is a very emotional girl, and she gave all she had on the set. I love working with teenagers, and also this time I had a great experience.

ALBA ROHRWACHER AS HANA/MARK

I developed an almost symbiotic relationship with Alba Rohrwacher. On the set I felt a strong closeness to her. We were not Laura and Alba; we were Mark. I was sure Alba was perfect for the role from the very first moment I started writing the script. I convinced her to become a man, to speak Albanian, to abandon so many things. When she committed to this adventure, she gave all of herself. The most beautiful thing for me is that she really loved this character as much as I did. I wanted her to strip the layers of herself in search of the heart of the character. We had a lot of fun experimenting with coarse, alpha male attitudes. Mark amused us and moved us at the same time.

TRANSFORMING ALBA

I wanted to harden Alba's physical appearance. We made her hair and eyes darker. Finding the right hairstyle wasn't easy. I didn't want something too predictable, like a shaved head or military cut. In the end the look we chose seemed to me very Albanian and not too obvious. Then we had to work a lot on the body. The agreement with Alba was she would wear Mark's clothes also off set. I advised her to eat, drink and sleep as Mark, and she did! The body, the posture, the walk – nobody could be Mark like her. After the shoot, we both had the feeling that Mark was still alive. "What will Mark do today?" Transforming Alba into Mark was an incredible journey for both of us.

NECESSARILY FRAGMENTED

The film has three periods: the present, their past as children and the past when they're around 20. I chose this non-linear structure because I wanted to create an emotional crescendo and I wanted to be closer to the character's complexity. I knew the film's present-past structure wouldn't be easy, but I had hoped it would be intriguing and I worked on it starting in script stage. I was convinced that a linear narration wouldn't have helped me to reveal the layers of the Hana/Mark soul. My character in fact goes back and forth in her past, also in the present, and needs to go through her past again to feel free.

Albania is always experienced with a sense of nostalgia.

This is evident at the end when Hana and Lila sing an old Albanian song. Albania is the land they love but in which they couldn't remain. With a linear structure I'd have probably lost this nostalgia. Although the story is necessarily fragmented, I chose to have Hana/Mark as the emotional thread guiding us through this time and space journey.

A RECOGNIZABLE LINE

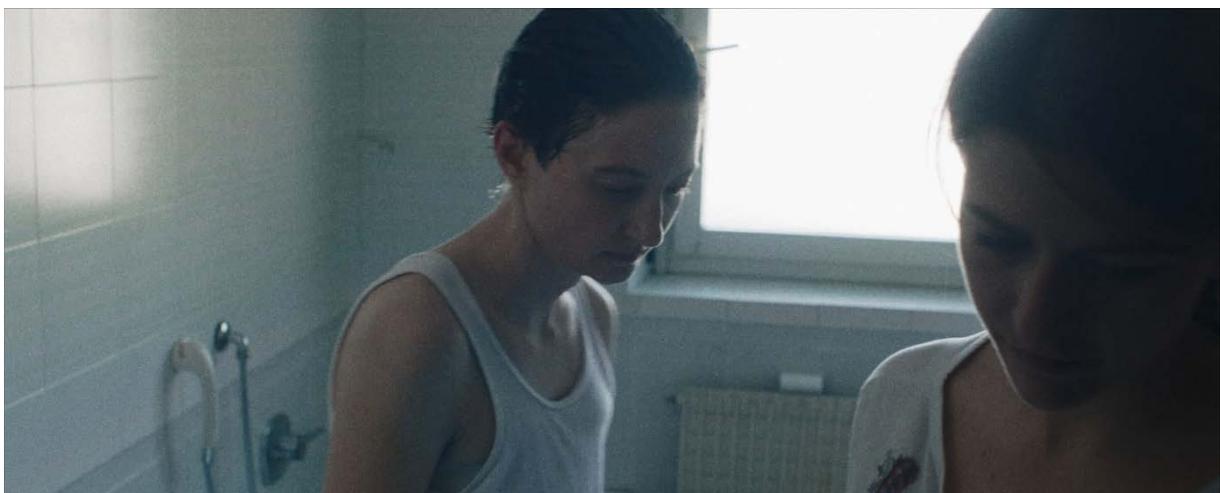
Because of the film's fragmented structure, I instinctively shot the film with long takes (AKA plan sequences). I shot all the scenes this way which was a rigorous, if not severe, choice.

Then in the editing I wanted to mark the difference between past and present by making internal cuts in the Albanian sequences, while in Italy the long takes remain untouched. This style makes the footage feel more lifelike to me. I feel the actors really alive in the scenes. If I had interrupted the action to frame them in various cuts and angles, I think I would have destroyed a vital stream.

I wanted to feel very close to Hana/Mark. I wanted her constantly with us. The film is all shot as Hana/Mark subjective POV. There's one scene (the swimming pool moment with all the bodies), where Mark's subjective POV is totally melted with mine. It's the only scene I did not shoot as a long take.

I worked by subtracting rather than emphasizing, choosing always to put the camera in a fixed position and trying to use the strength of that specific angle. I usually have a very precise idea of where I want to put the camera, a determined point of view. Sometimes I have to abandon some details, but after I try to find alternative solutions to include them if I really think they are important. This forces me to have a continuous flow of ideas on everything. I don't strive to achieve the perfect frame. On the contrary, I want the frame to come out spontaneously, because I am confident that it will. I try to avoid underlining. My goal is to have a perfect canvas, then soil it with rough strokes. Precise choices, but never tidy, composed ones. I chose a recognizable line also in the use of music. I do that because it belongs to me.

I like to recognize myself in it.



FEMININITY AND FREEDOM

SWORN VIRGIN is an exploration inside femininity told in its thousand folds and contradictory forms. I decided to tell the story of a divided identity, taking such a complexity as my entrance into the story itself. Being with Hana/Mark we continuously cross the line between her two identities, moving in different temporal dimensions, stories and states of mind. Sworn virgins are beings that in the name of freedom make a choice which in fact binds them.

Such a starting point is an invitation to a big reflection on femininity with reference to identity and freedom. A reflection which moves from the archaic to a contemporary level. I think that we should all ask ourselves: "Are women really so free today?"

Mark's relationship with the niece, Jonida, deals a lot with this question. Synchronized swimming is a sport where young girls are forced, even in water, to wear perfect makeup because they must look like identical dolls. In Western society, femininity is tied to an idea of women being obliged to be beautiful and perfect.

This relationship between femininity and freedom is for me the film's real red line. I wanted to make a contemporary movie, telling through my story also that of many other human beings living nowadays in our cities, that for other reasons or other desires, share a similar sensation of not feeling themselves women or men. Such beings are constantly changing, in search of a place, a way of life, a belonging or not-belonging that can lead them to happiness.

A QUEST FOR IDENTITY

A sworn virgin, because of her choice, is obliged to renounce all love and sex. It is a very serious oath, and in the Kanun culture, breaking it is not even conceivable.

Long ago, sworn virgins who broke the oath were sent to the stake. Mark has followed this law and therefore removed all thoughts of love and sex. But this repressed desire still lives inside her, and her body begins to push it to come out. In Italy, Mark finally finds the courage to follow his body. Meeting the swimming pool guardian Bernhard (Lars Eidinger) awakens her. She trusts her curiosity and lets go.

But also Bernhard is curious about Mark's ambiguity.

When I saw Lars Eidinger and Alba together, I was deeply touched by their similarity. This feeling inspired me to rewrite Bernhard's character. Mark and Bernhard are both strangers, both ambiguous. They both seem to belong to another world. I believe in their encounter.

I don't think Hana/Mark is lesbian or transgender, but I'm convinced that lesbians and transgenders can somehow identify with her/him. Most of all for the mood and quest for identity. I hope that not only they can identify with my character, but also everyone who is interested in great human journeys, life challenges, and the search for past loves and new encounters.

A PASSION FOR ALBANIA

I had no connection to Albania until I started working on this project. When I decided to make this movie, I began trying to penetrate the Albanian world and in different ways. It became a sort of healthy obsession. I made Albanian friends, spending time with them, talking to them. Then I read Albanian literature and poetry, studied the Kanun. I documented with photos, videos, I started listening to Albanian music. I ended up developing a constant urge to go there. As soon as I was away from Albania too long, I started to feel bad and I felt an urgent need to go back. I really developed a passion for Albania, which is full of contradictions, but wins over your heart. At least it did so to me, and I always felt great when I was there. I think this deep love was returned to me: during the shoot, those mountains gave me the beautiful gift of the snow I had hoped for!

The Kanun is a set of traditional Albanian laws. The Kanun was primarily oral and only in the 20th century was it published in writing. There is only one Kanun since the ancient times commonly referred to the “Kanun of Leke” from which six later variations eventually evolved, categorized according to the area, the personality and their time of origin: Kanun i vjetër (English: Old Kanun), Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit (English: The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini), Kanuni i Çermenikës (English: The Kanun of Çermenikë), Kanuni i Papa Zhulit (English: The Kanun of Pope Julius), Kanuni i Labërisë (English: The Kanun of Labëria) and Kanuni i Skenderbeut (English: Kanun of Skanderbeg) also known as Kanuni i Arbërisë (English: Kanun of Arbëria).

The Kanun of Skanderbeg is the closest in similarity with the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, and the latter is usually the most known and is also regarded as a synonym of the word kanun. The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini was developed by Lekë Dukagjini, who codified the existing customary laws. It has been used mostly in northern and central Albania and surrounding areas formerly in Yugoslavia where this is a large ethnic Albanian population; Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia. It was first codified in the 15th century but the use of it has been outspread much earlier in time. It was used under that form until the 20th century, and revived recently after the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s.

1 Etymology

The term kanun comes from the Greek "κανών" (“canon”), meaning amongst others “pole” or “rule” and was transported from Greek to Arabic and then into early Turkish and then in Albanian. Kanun was also known by the word of Doke.

2 Origin

The practice of the oral laws that Lekë Dukagjini codified in the Kanun was suggested by Edith Durham as dating back to the Bronze Age. Some authors have conjectured that the Kanun may derive from ancient Illyrian tribal laws. Other authors have suggested that the Kanun has retained elements from Indo-European prehistoric eras. Some other authors have suggested that there are many similarities between the Kanun and the Manusmṛiti, the earliest work of the Dharmaśāstra textual tradition of Hinduism, which indicate a common origin.

However several stratifications can be easily observed in the code, beginning with pre-Indoeuropean, Indoeuropean, Ancient Greek, Roman, general Balkan and Osmanli.

According to Serbian authors T. O. Oraovac and S. S. Djuric, it is largely based on Dušan’s Code, the constitution of the Serbian Empire (enacted 1349), which at the time held the whole of Albania. Noel Malcolm speculates that an article in Dušan’s Code was an early attempt to clamp down on the self-administered customary law of the mountains, as later codified in the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin, and if so, this would be the earliest evidence that such customary laws were in effect.

3 Development

Lekë Dukagjini was allegedly the first who codified the “Kanun” in the 15th century. The code was written down only in the 19th century by Shtjefën Gjeçovi and partially published in the Hylli i Drites periodical in 1913. The full version appeared only in 1933 after Gjeçovi’s death in 1926. In 1989 a dual English-Albanian version was published. And then replicated in a 1992 version.

Although the laws are attributed to Lekë Dukagjini, the laws evolved over time as a way to bring law and rule to these lands. The Kanun was divided into the following 12 sections: Church, “Family, Marriage, House, Livestock and Property, Work, Transfer of Property, Spoken Word, Honor, Damages, Law Regarding Crimes, Judicial Law, Exemptions and Exceptions, and Gjeçovi’s version has 1,262 articles which regulate all aspects of the mountainous life: economic organization of the household, hospitality, brotherhood, clan, boundaries, work, marriage, land,

and so on. The Besa (honour) is of prime importance throughout the code as the cornerstone of personal and social conduct. The Kanun applies to both Christian and Muslim Albanians.

Some of the most controversial rules of the Kanun (in particular book 10 section 3) specify how murder is supposed to be handled, which often in the past and sometimes still now led to blood feuds that last until all the men of the two involved families are killed. Women are only seen as producers of offspring and are referred to in a discriminatory manner and so are not considered worthy targets. In some parts of the country, the Kanun resembles the Italian vendetta. These rules have resurfaced during the 1990s in Northern Albania, since people had no faith in the powerless local government and police.

There are organizations that try to mediate between feuding families and try to get them to "pardon the blood" (Albanian: Falja e Gjakut), but often the only resort is for men of age to stay in their homes, which are considered a safe refuge by the Kanuni, or flee the country. The Albanian name for blood feud is Gjakmarrja. Former communist leader of Albania Enver Hoxha effectively stopped the practice of Kanun with hard repression and a very strong state police. However, after the fall of communism, some communities have tried to rediscover the old traditions, but some of their parts have been lost, leading to fears of misinterpretation.

Notably, the current Albanian Penal Code does not contain any provisions from the Kanun that deal with blood feuds, and no acknowledgment of this code is made in the contemporary Albanian legal system. In 2014 about 3,000 Albanian families were estimated to be involved in blood feuds and this since the fall of Communism has led to the deaths of 10,000 people.

4 Pillars of the Kanun

The Kanun is based on four pillars:

Honour (Albanian: Nderi)

Hospitality (Albanian: Mikpritja)

Right Conduct (Albanian: Sjellja)

Kin Loyalty (Albanian: Fis)

5 Kanun in literature and film

Albanian writer Ismail Kadare evokes the Kanun several times in his books and has it as the main theme in his novel Broken April. He also evokes the kanun in his novel Komisioni i festës (English: The Celebration Commission), where Kadare literally describes the Monastir massacre of 1830 as the struggle between two empires: the Albanian Kanun with its code of besa and the Ottoman Empire itself. According to Kadare in his literary critique book Eskili, ky humbës i madh (English: Aeschylus, this big loser), where loser refers to the great number of tragedies that were lost from Aeschylus, there are evident similarities between the kanun and the vendetta customs in all the Mediterranean countries.

Barbara Nadel's Deep Waters refers to Kanun and Gjakmarrja.

Joshua Marston's 2011 film The Forgiveness of Blood, a drama set in modern-day Albania, deals with the Kanun. The film relates a blood feud between two families in Northern Albania, focusing primarily on how the feud affects the children of one family.

The Kanun is referred to in season 6, episode 9 of Law & Order: Criminal Intent ("Blasters") as the explanation for the sudden retreat of a group of Albanian assassins.

The Kanun plays a major role in the Belgian movie Dossier K.

Elvira Dones's Sworn Virgin refers to Kanun and women's practice of swearing celibacy in return to being accepted as men by all local villagers.

Belgian TV maker Tom Waes visited Albania during one of the shows in his series Reizen Waes. He was served spit roasted goat and was offered the head of the goat. According to Kanun rules, this is how they honor a guest during dinner.