

# ETHNOGRAPHIC PHENOMENON OF THE ÇAMËRIA REGION

(16)

**Afërdita ONUZI**

First of all, I would like to apologize for any possible inaccuracy or incompleteness in my speech. Even though I am an ethnologist, I haven't had the chance to visit this Albanian region. I have heard a lot about it and I have read some materials collected by various researchers but we should mention the fact that there isn't enough written literature.

I am very fond of the virtues, moral values, culture and the lifestyle of the Cam people. That's why I want to make a promise that I will investigate thoroughly the cultural inheritance of this Albanian region.

As it is known the most southern region populated by Albanians is called Çamëria. It is situated in a hilly and mountainous area with coastal fields and it is protected from the cold winds by the range of mountains that divides it from the area of Ioannina. The sunny weather has given this area many advantages making it resemble Paradise. There are some very fertile parts in this region. There are not many areas with so many natural resources as Çamëria. Olive trees, fruits such as cherries, apples, figs, citruses, hazelnuts, pears etc, are grown here.

There are many delicious milk products produced by using a traditional technology well-known by the Cam stockbreeders. Çamëria is also known for the physical beauties and the natural intelligence of its people. Everyone knows how hard – working the Cam men and women are.

The geographical position of this region has favored not only agriculture and husbandry but also the trade development through land or sea. These were some of the Cam occupations since the early times, but they have dealt with many other kinds of jobs such as the building of cities with an admirable urban system. The seaside towns are a proof of the close

relations that existed between this region and the neighboring ones as well as with many others developed countries of the east and west. Such close relations with the markets of developed countries had a positive impact on the economical and cultural life of this region and they accelerated the development of its society. It is true that the destruction of feudalism and the Turkish suzerainty in Çamëria was felt earlier than in other regions. Many towns such as Ioannina, Filati Markat, Ninati, Gumenica, Preveza, Arpica, Paramithia, Parga etc, became known thanks to the skills and work of the Cam population.

The development of these towns was really admirable for the time. Trade and various craftsmanship, especially the weapon manufacturing, were flourishing. The pistols and rifles called "Karajfile" manufactured and engraved by the Cam artisans" were well known in the royal courts of Europe.

Other important crafts were silkweavers, coppersmiths curriers, embroiders etc. these small business were situated in the streets within the towns or in separate shops. In general the towns were organized with their own market areas, schools, mosques, churches, drugstores etc. Among them you could notice the dwelling houses with their characteristic decorations of wood engravings, oriental carpets, handmade furniture of oriental and European style, silverware, china from India etc.

There were families in Çamëria since the medieval times, which were considered "big families". Some of them were the Demats, the Sejkots, the Dinejts etc. They became known through historic documents only after the ottoman invasion.

The level of development of the Cam society in the towns and villages was reflected in many other aspects of everyday life. Whoever had the chance to be invited in the Cam families has been impressed by the hospitality of its members. According to "protocol" the guest was held in high esteem. The Cam housewives were distinguished for the order and tidiness that dominated their houses as well as for their cooking skills. You can enjoy

the most delicious recipes in a common day and the most extraordinary food on special occasions such as weddings. The different types of bread and pies are worth mentioning. You will be amazed by the joyous environment created by the elegant movements of the women dances or the songs of men dedicated to love, gallantry or the fits of famous people. The folk outfits of the region are so colorful and beautiful. The most common men's outfit for Muslims and orthodox was the kilt embroidered with silver thread, the doublet, short shirt with wide sleeves, the fez, the leather clogs with red topknots and white knee socks. Other parts of the outfit were the silver chest ornamental and the holster embroidered with silver thread used to carry a gun or a pistol.

Up to that time this outfit was common for all Albanians starting from Novi in the north to Preveza in the south. There was a little difference in its length. Northern men wore longer kilts (up to the calf), whereas southern men, including the Cam people, wore shorter ones (up to the knee). The kilt of high society men was the most beautiful. It was made of many folds (about 250 - 300). Later on, this outfit was substituted by slacks and the former one was only used on special occasions.

On the other hand the traditional women's outfit was being replaced by an oriental style. Thus the common outfit became a kind of oriental silk or cotton baggy pants. They wore on the cotton ones daily, whereas the silk ones only on special occasions. Other parts of this outfit were: the silk shirt weaved in their home looms and the vest embroidered with gold or silver thread. Sometimes they wore a velvet waistcoat on it too. On their heads they wore a silk headkerchief. Rich women wore an embroidered sleeveless silk coat too.

During 1880 - 1890 the town women mostly wore long skirts or dresses. They were dark red or violet and embroidered with gold thread. Other parts of this outfit were the sleeveless waistcoats, silk shirts with wide sleeves embroidered with such a rare finesse. On special occasions they also put on a half-length coat matching the color of the dress. It was

embroidered with various flowery motives. Another beautiful part of the outfit is the silver belt, the silk headkerchief and a great number of jewelry such as earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces etc.

We also find information about the women's outfit in the Cam folk poetry.

Hiqe vallen me javash Fustan kuqa me mëndafsh	Dance it slowly, oh lass, In that red silky dress.
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Dil moj të të shoh gjerdanë Fustan në kërcof të larë Qëndisur gajtan, gajtanë	Let me see your necklace, And the gilded dress Embroidered in decorative seams.
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Dullamani i verdhë dillë Prere e qepur në Janinë	Honey yellow dullaman Cut and sewed in Iannina
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Ferife, moj Feride Tuman kuqe kadife	Freide oh Feride Dressed in red velvet
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We find verses of the same type about men's outfits too, especially about their kilts.