MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE JOURNAL

RESEARCH ARTICLE
Published Online: March 28, 2025
https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2025549

Songs and the cult of fire on the summer day in Opoja

Fikret Ramadani[a] | **Vjollca Dibra**[a]

[a]Faculty of Philology, University "Ukshin Hoti", Prizren, Kosovo.

Abstract This study analyzes two key elements of the summer day (Verza Day) festival in Opoja: song and the cult of fire. The *Verza* festival, held annually on March 13th in this region of the Sharri municipality, represents a rich cultural heritage with ancient historical roots. Songs and rituals related to fire have played a fundamental role in the spiritual experience of the community, representing early forms of communication with nature and supernatural forces. In this paper, song is examined as an artistic creation of oral literature with a distinct function. Through analysis, the artistic and cultural values embedded in these songs are highlighted. The ritual of singing is intertwined with specific symbolic actions, which contribute to maintaining spiritual and social balance within the community. On the other hand, this study explores the cult of fire as a widespread phenomenon in Albanian folk culture. In the context of *Dita e Verzës*, fire symbolizes purification, renewal, and protection from evil. Practices such as lighting bonfires and jumping over flames are interpreted as expressions of the inhabitants' belief in the transformative power of this natural element. By employing an ethno-psychological and historical approach, this study aims to provide a broader and deeper understanding of these rituals and their role in the cultural identity of Opoja. The preservation and documentation of these traditions remain essential to ensuring their continuity for future generations as part of historical memory.

Keywords: *Dita e Verzës*, song, ritual, fire, folk culture, Opoja

1. Introduction

The development of songs, dances, rituals, magic, customs, and traditions dates back to an early phase of human civilization when humans were still in a primitive stage. During this period, human thought was at a low level of development and was directly connected to natural phenomena. This means that humans made compromises with nature—sometimes taking actions to avoid angering it, and at other times pleading for life, health, and prosperity, which brought them spiritual comfort, hope, and motivation for life.

Alongside the evolution of humans toward perfection as a species, the forms and organization of certain festivals also changed, adapting to the times. However, depending on geographic locations, different regions that had limited or no communication with cities (and thus with external customs, cultures, and experiences) managed to preserve their festive forms to a significant degree up to the present day. One such festival is *Dita e Verzës* (Verza Day), celebrated annually on March 13th in Opoja, a region within the Sharri municipality.

Opoja is located in the Dragash (now Sharri) municipality in Kosovo. *"It has a surface area of 126 km²"* (Melqi, 1994, p. 17). The entire region lies at an altitude of over 1000 meters above sea level. *"It is part of the Dukagjini mountainous terrain, stretching deeply along the banks of Koritnik and Sharri"* (Mehmeti, 2015). Due to its geographical positioning, *"One gets the impression that it is a relatively enclosed territory in geomorphological terms"* (Qafleshi, 2011).

Due to its location and unfavorable climate, characterized by short springs, summers, and autumns but long winters (it is often said among locals that Opoja has only two seasons: summer and winter), the inhabitants of this area have primarily engaged in agriculture and livestock farming to survive. A considerable number of them have emigrated for work, while others have pursued education. These were the main means of survival for the people of Opoja, although in the earliest stages of their development, survival depended on labor. This kind of work keeps people closely tied to their homeland and limits their interactions with other regions, particularly cities.

A lack of contact with others results in a form of isolation, meaning that traditions, dialects, customs, songs, and various rituals remain largely unchanged. However, to avoid making this idea seem too exclusionary, we present some distinctive features that differentiate Opoja from surrounding areas. For instance, the Opoja dialect has several unique characteristics, especially in the articulation of vowels. According to linguist Dr. Naser Pajaziti: *"This is a distinguishing feature of this dialect and sets it apart from other dialects"* (Pajaziti, 2005). Additionally, it has *"a large number of rare words"* (Zymberi, 2014) and *"Specific phonetic, morphological, and lexical characteristics"* (Koçinaj, 2014)

"*It is worth noting that this dialect contains a significantly larger number of vowels compared to the standard Albanian dialects"* (Gjinari et al., 2008).

Similarly, Opoja stands out for its distinctive songs and dances. For example, its twelve traditional dances are characterized by synchronized and unusual movements not commonly found in the surrounding Prizren region. Without further elaborating on additional examples from different cultural fields, we believe that the evidence presented here is sufficient to support the argument that Opoja has preserved unique cultural elements. Below, we will further explore the distinct nature of the *Dita e Verzës* ritual in Opoja, analyzing the way it is performed, its characteristics, and its organization, which differ significantly from similar traditions in other regions. This uniqueness is primarily attributed to Opoja's historical and geographical isolation. Thus, taking these facts into consideration, we conclude that this is the main reason for selecting this topic for further study.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of this study is based on a combined approach that integrates analytical and comparative methods with an ethnographic perspective to achieve a comprehensive analysis of the songs and the cult of fire in the *Dita e Verzës* festival in Opoja. Initially, an ethnographic approach was employed, involving data collection through direct observations, interviews, and the documentation of songs with festival participants.

Before carrying out the fieldwork, we initially collected textual materials and subsequently researched the theoretical literature that has been published about Opoja as an area, specifically regarding the folklore that develops in its territorial environments. Then, based on an ethnographic approach, we used the observation method, participating in the villages of Opoja to follow all the actions and executions of the rituals of this area. The observation was open, and the residents were informed of our participation. By adopting this method, we were able to create a more authentic and accurate outline for approaching the study we aimed for. We placed special emphasis on integrating the focus group method, as well as specific groups that performed the rites, sang, and participated in the cult of lighting the fire and synthesizing actions. During the observation related to the groups performing the rites, we carefully followed every action, taking notes on the most interesting and important activities of this festive day; accordingly, we employed the method of data documentation. It is important to note that the groups of girls and boys rarely had a specific number. The execution groups consisted of young men and women from the villages, ranging from 3 individuals, as a small group, to larger groups, or the largest group (almost all the youth of the village– boys and girls). Regarding the interviews, we conducted them using both a purposeful (planned) selection strategy and a random selection strategy on site. In the planned interviews, regarding customs carried out in the premises of the houses, we followed the age criterion and did not include young girls, instead focusing on the older women of the house, who, consequently, in terms of education, are not illiterate but are socially disconnected from the world and are strongly connected to the ethno-customary traditions of their country; in a way, they are also spiritual representatives of the holidays and remember almost every small detail of the Dita e Verzës. They also prepare specific foods. The number of elderly women we managed to interview is 4. In the planned interviews, during the rituals that were held in the villages, we interviewed young girls with the following status: unmarried, who were mainly involved in collecting flowers in the villages and bringing them to their homes. During the rituals, they also sang some songs of joy. We were able to interview 8 unmarried girls. In accordance with the gender criterion, we also surveyed men, especially older ones, who were socially passive. During the Verza Day rites, they tended to sit and watch passively, wanting to remember the time when they were active participants. At the same time, they maintained the role of supervisors of the young people to ensure that they did not suffer any injuries while performing the rites or lighting the fire. We chose to interview the elderly who have mainly worked in agriculture or livestock farming during their lives and have at most completed primary school and are very connected to the customs of the country. There interviewed 3 individuals. On the other hand, we specifically interviewed 2 women who stood out for their good memory and execution of songs, remaining true to the verses as they have heard them from previous generations. The planned interviews were conducted based on these criteria to ensure that the information is as authentic as possible. Regarding the random interviews, we conducted a joint interview with the group involved in lighting the fire and the accompanying rituals. The interview took place in the village of Blaç in Opoja, with a group of 5 boys and 3 girls who remained close to the fire almost throughout. Thus, from the planned interviews, we interviewed 17 people and 8 from the impromptu interviews. In total, the number of interviewees is 25.

This enabled an authentic representation of traditional practices by recording how the songs are performed and their role in the ritualistic context of this day.

To analyze the artistic values and functions of the songs, a literary analysis method was also used, allowing for comparisons of literary motifs, poetic structures, and stylistic elements of the traditional songs of this festival.

Furthermore, the comparative method was applied to analyze the songs performed at different times throughout March 13th and to examine other accompanying rituals. The combination of these methods yielded concrete results in tracing how the execution of songs and the cult of fire function within the context of surviving pagan beliefs and rituals in Albanian folk culture.

Thus, this methodological combination ensures that the study is comprehensive and provides a well-rounded scientific interpretation of the examined phenomenon.

3. Theoretical and descriptive background

Origins and Development of the *Dita e Verzës* Ritual. The evolution of dances, rituals, and customs dates back to the earliest phases of human civilization, when humans were still in a primitive stage. As humans advanced toward refinement as a species, these elements—including songs, dances, rituals, and customs—evolved alongside them, adapting to new social and cultural contexts. Folklore, as a discipline, encompasses all these aspects, studying both their diachronic and synchronic dimensions. *"The term was first introduced by William John Thoms in 1846"* (Cena, 2015), derived from *volks* (people) and *lore* (wisdom or knowledge), signifying a body of traditional knowledge and folk creativity.

Within folklore, seasonal festivals—also known as periodic celebrations—are classified into two broad categories: summer (spring) cycle festivals and winter cycle festivals. Most of these festivities belong to the summer cycle, and *Dita e Verzës* is one such celebration.

The pan-Albanian pagan festival, commonly known as *Dita e Verës* (Summer Day) or *Dita e Beharit* (Summer Day), is widely celebrated across various Albanian-speaking regions. However, in Opoja, this festival takes on a distinct local variation, referred to as *Dita e Verzës*. This name appears to be a diminutive and endearing form of the original term, possibly serving an euphemistic function as well. Although it bears a similar name, this festival in Opoja features unique rituals, both individual and collective, that are distinct from those practiced in other regions where the celebration occurs. These elements, particularly the integration of songs and ritualistic actions, are a focal point of this study.

Dita e Verzës in Opoja marks the end of a long and exhausting winter. Historically, the festival took on a celebratory character at a time when people lacked sophisticated tools to ease their labor during harsh winters. With limited understanding of natural phenomena, people found solace in marking the arrival of spring, seeing it as a renewal of life.

As noted earlier, in ancient times, human consciousness was deeply intertwined with natural forces. This connection meant that people often sought to negotiate with nature—sometimes through offerings and rituals to avoid its wrath, and at other times through prayers for life, health, prosperity, and abundance. These beliefs provided spiritual comfort, hope, and motivation.

From this perspective, the ritual of *Dita e Verzës* emerged. The arrival of the first buds of spring brought immense joy, as it signaled survival through a long and difficult period. People were filled with hope, believing that the forces of nature had accepted their actions, promising a fruitful and prosperous year ahead.

3.1. On the Day of Dita e Verzës

On March 13th of every year, a festive atmosphere prevails throughout the villages of Opoja in celebration of *Dita e Verzës*. At the beginning of the ceremony, young girls are freed from any family or social responsibilities. They gather in the village square (or any location serving as the village center) to compose and sing traditional songs. Initially, the singing begins at the village center before they proceed from house to house. Meanwhile, the young men are engaged in gathering firewood, bushes, and juniper branches (more recently, even car tires) to ignite the ceremonial fire on the morning of the following day.

At home, mothers prepare the traditional dish known as *Fli* and boil, dye, and wash eggs. Before dusk, young men and women take the eggs and wash them in the village spring (a practice also found in many Albanian regions), then head to a suitable place to break them in a playful contest to see whose egg is the strongest. In the evening, they return home for the celebratory dinner, which consists of *Fli*. The eldest woman of the house hides a small wooden stick in the layers of *Fli*, and whoever finds it while eating is believed to have good fortune (*nafaka*) throughout the year. Young men and women, however, do not eat the first bite (*kållupin e flis'*), but instead place it under their pillows, believing that during the night, they will dream of their future spouse.

Early the next morning, before dawn, people wake up to ensure good fortune for the coming year, and the ceremonial fire (*zjârmît*) is lit. There is intense competition to create the largest and tallest fire, both within the same village and between neighboring villages. While the fire is burning, young women share their dreams with one another, believing in the prophetic nature of dreams.

Before sunrise, the eldest woman of the house takes a thread and ties it into a knot while reciting a prophetic phrase: *"syrmilie - syrmilesh, goja ukît\gjarpnit\bollës në korpesh (litar),"* then discreetly throws it into the nearest stream or river, ensuring that no one sees her. This ritual symbolizes protection for family members from wild animals, which in the past posed a real danger to people in these mountainous areas.

After sunrise, young men and women go out to gather *verza* flowers and bring them home. The eldest woman of the house places these flowers above the entrance gate. Then, in groups, the village girls sing traditional songs while going door to door, expressing joy for the arrival of summer. As a token of gratitude, they are given small symbolic gifts, often just a single egg (*võ*). By evening, everyone returns home, feeling happy and fulfilled from the day's festivities (Lecaj, 2011).

It is evident that each action in this festival is a ritual in itself, deeply embedded in tradition. This celebration is not only significant to the Opoja region but also holds broader cultural importance within Albanian heritage.

3.2. The Songs of March 13th – Dita e Verzës

Even though the ritual of this day places song at the forefront, alongside the syncretism of other actions, some scholars have viewed these songs not as aesthetic values in themselves, but as mere accompaniments to the ritualistic nature of the celebration. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. To illustrate this, we present an ancient song, which, based on its content, appears to have originated alongside this festival, embedding both pagan and superstitious elements. The song is considered old because many young girls in Opoja today are unfamiliar with it.

3.3. Ancient Song of Dita e Verzës

"Po kondon bilbili, Po kondon no ferr': Kondo të lumtë goja, Se dulom no ver! Po kondon bilbili Nopor fusha t'xhona Kondo, bilbil, kondo, Se verza osht' e jona." (Vinca, 1996)

"The spirit of this song is dithyrambic; the joy for the new season is painted with spontaneous emotion, a clear and flowing style, and a humanistic message embedded within its subtext—not overly explicit yet not hidden in abstract labyrinths either" (Vinca, 1996).

The verses create a lively panorama, infused with the vibrant colors of the approaching season. While the song does not employ elaborate stylistic figures, its expressive power and polysemantic nature allow for a clear reflection of rural life, deeply tied to ritualism. The nightingale (bilbil) serves as a symbol of joy, heralding the arrival of *Verza*, not only for humans but for all creatures, as spring breathes new life into everything. The nightingale's song adds richness to this lyrical piece, reinforcing the notion that its symbolism extends beyond folk poetry, becoming a central motif in broader Albanian literary traditions. Thus, this song stands at the pinnacle of ritualistic lyricism in Opoja.

In many songs sung on this day, superstition plays a notable role. The villagers appear to be summoning nature to rejuvenate—while flora has already begun to bloom, they call upon fauna to awaken as well. The village girls, with songs and dances filled with hope and optimism, sing:

"Po shkojmë porpjet pyllit Xhji po shkojmë porpjet pyllit, Bukë e vo po i çojmë bilbilit; Gji po shkojmë porpjet bjeshkos, Bukë e vo po i çojmë shkeneshkos; Ori veroz e lumja veroz, Dita e parë e pranveros; Ori veroz, verza gzuot, Dita jote s'ka t'paguot!" (Mahmuti, 2024).

Joy is always accompanied by song, and in this case, the village girls entice the nightingale with offerings of food, coaxing it into song. Similarly, they attempt to charm the "shkeneshka", an insect known for its distinctive interjective sounds, which are neither melodic nor musical. However, for the people of Opoja, even this noise is a cause for celebration, as their collective consciousness associates it with the arrival of *Verza*. In their minds, everything must be alerted to the coming of spring.

The prosody of this folk song aligns with the rhythmic patterns found in the traditional ritual songs of other seasonal celebrations. However, the natural balance between long and short syllables creates a harmonious rhythm, emphasizing masculine rhyme. Elements of paganism, as evident in this song, frequently appear in other verses of this cycle.

From an ethno-psychological perspective, these songs serve as a form of spiritual catharsis, helping individuals momentarily escape from daily concerns, fostering a sense of clarity and renewal in their psyche. Through song, people release the burdens of psychological struggles, often exacerbated by the harsh and monotonous winter months. Joy is expressed in various ways, as seen in the following lines:

"Lum e lum pranvera xhi ka ardh' mali tuj qit gjeth, fusha tuj qit bar." (Mahmuti, 2024).

"Syrmi li e syrmi lesh, goja ukit nô kôrpesh" (Maliqi, 2025).

These verses encapsulate the essence of *Dita e Verzës*, where nature's awakening is paralleled by the spiritual renewal of the people who celebrate it.

3.4. The Cult of Fire

"*As is widely known, fire has historically served multiple essential functions for humans—it provided protection from the cold, illuminated homes, and played a crucial role in crafting metal tools for work and defense. The cult of fire is deeply intertwined with the cult of the Sun, which explains its strong association with abundant agricultural productivity*" (Gjoni, 2012). Fire is considered an ally of the Sun, as it helps sustain warmth and light, while the Sun, in turn, *"Empowers new agricultural production"* (Titra, 2004).

One of the most fascinating aspects of fire worship is the belief in its purifying power. In Opoja, locals engage in an ancient ritual of fire-jumping, in which participants run and leap over the flames, moving from one side to the other. This ritual takes place immediately after the fire is lit, while the flames are still manageable, and continues even as the fire begins to dwindle. The act is repeated multiple times until the fire is no longer safe to cross.

Before making the leap, the participant—usually a young man—closes his eyes, makes a silent wish, and jumps forward. It is believed that the purifying force of fire cleanses the individual from all evil spirits and demons, as well as any negative energy that could hinder the realization of their wish for the coming year.

If the individual successfully jumps over the flames without difficulty, they earn the right to boast in front of their peers, particularly young women. This act symbolizes maturity and readiness to take on new responsibilities in life. As V. Gennep states, *"He can now assume a new role in society"* (Gennep, 1960, p. 65). Which, in traditional cultural terms, implies readiness for marriage.

This ritual, performed with great enthusiasm and conviction, reflects the belief that one's desires will be fulfilled and that human intentions are in harmony with nature.

From a theoretical perspective, we can apply Hans Robert Jauss' concept of "as if" (Chevrel, 2016), which suggests that when encountering a cultural or literary phenomenon, an observer should strive to experience it as if they were the one performing it. If an individual adopts this mindset, witnessing the ritual will evoke powerful and unforgettable imagery, similar to the emotions felt by the actual participants.

However, the spiritual awakening experienced by the singers and performers of these ritual songs is difficult for an outside observer to fully grasp. Only those who have endured the long winter and eagerly awaited the arrival of this day can experience the profound emotional catharsis it brings. Through song and ritual, participants undergo a unique spiritual purification—an experience that can only be fully understood by those who actively partake in reciting the verses and performing the rituals.

3.5. The Decline and Preservation of Dita e Verzës

In recent years, the celebration of *Dita e Verzës* has begun to decline. In an effort to preserve it as a documented cultural heritage, scholars from Prishtina and Tirana have traveled to Opoja on this date to observe the event firsthand. However, it must be noted that transcribing oral traditions inevitably alters their essence. As scholars have pointed out, *"This transition from oral to written form often results in a decline in poetic quality"* (Chevrel, 2016) a perspective originally proposed by F. M. Leuzel.

Nevertheless, we hope that researchers and observers have, at least partially, experienced the spiritual purification that this ritual offers—whether through the songs, the fire-jumping ritual, or the customs associated with this ancient tradition.

4. The cult of fire in Opoja and Has

Of course, lighting a fire in Albanian culture is well known, especially for special days on the popular calendar, but fire does not always turn into a cult. The fire rite on March 13th in Opoja is a peculiarity of the area; however, lighting fires for other holidays also appears to be present in similar Albanian cultures as well, for example, in the area of Has, Kosovo. In this country, special importance is given to the so-called Shëngjergj holiday. Shëngjergj is celebrated on May 6. "The celebration takes place around bonfires lit in the early hours before dawn, immediately in the first hours of the new day of May 6" (Statovci & Xhemaj, 2011). This celebration carries elements very similar to those found in Opoja. The lighting of the fire is done collectively. Even the return of young boys and girls to their homes occurs collectively, after sunrise. The youth gather around the fire, where everyone tries to play and leap high above the flames. However, there are also differences. For example: "Young people come out blowing their pipes, made days in advance, from ash or willow bark, with all their might - thus creating a trumpeting sound that spreads throughout the space, as a warning of a nationwide activity dedicated to this celebration, which is certainly pagan" (Statovci & Xhemaj, 2011). However, even though fire is not given the importance it receives in Opoja, this rite maintains some common characteristics with the fire rite and its sacredness, similar to that in the Opoja region. Thus, in addition to the lack of songs as an accompanying and quite important element in the fire cult in Opojë, which is absent in the Hasi cult.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the songs performed during *Dita e Verzës* in Opoja has highlighted several key elements that contribute to a deeper understanding of this cultural heritage. The findings of this study emphasize the following:

5.1. Songs as Essential Elements of the Ritual

The songs of this day are not merely accompanying elements of the ritual but are fundamental components that preserve the symbolic and emotional significance of the event for the local community. They convey a ditirambic joy for the arrival of spring, where spontaneous emotions intertwine with messages and humanistic themes. Also, the results of the research show that the songs sung in Opoja, in terms of metrics, are constructed with the usual folk verse of Albanian oral literature, that is, with 8 syllables. The construction of the songs of this day does not come with any exceptions in terms of metrics from Albanian oral literature. However, there is a special characteristic: the preservation of the autochthonous lexicon. The word comes, the particle xhi is completely preserved in the songs sung on this day. Additionally, the vowel ô and the nasal

consonant ŋ are very carefully preserved. "*These are two characteristics of the speech of Opoja among all the Albanian language dialects"* (Pajaziti, 2005), which are preserved beautifully in the songs of March 13.

5.2. Repetitive Formulas and Literary Motifs

Literary analysis has revealed that these songs contain repeated formulas and motifs linked to the life cycle and nature. Additionally, the songs carry both pagan symbols and strong naturalistic symbolism. One example is the nightingale, which symbolizes the arrival of a new season and the rebirth of nature. Pagan elements, such as lighting a fire to help nature warm up as soon as possible or even purification as a phenomenon, are indicators that the inhabitants of this area have managed to fanatically preserve authentic local pagan elements. However, "These places have been ruled by the three most powerful empires in history, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire" (Kadare, 2002). These empires have imposed cultures, religions, and ways of life, however, elements from the periods before the rule of the empires in question have been preserved.

5.3. Pagan and Superstitious Elements

The songs have retained pagan and superstitious elements, where the community calls upon nature to initiate a new life cycle. Comparative analysis with songs from other traditional festivals has demonstrated similarities in the use of symbolism and the function of songs as a means of intergenerational communication. Although it may seem so, the lyrics of these songs are another factor that strengthens the results of pagan findings in this culture. In such cases, men not only communicate with each other but also create strong connections with nature, and even communicate in a miraculous way (Strauss, 1999).

5.4. Ethnopsychological and Spiritual Functions

From an ethnopsychological perspective, the songs of *Dita e Verzës* serve as a spiritual and psychological mechanism for the community, removing negative thoughts and bringing mental clarity as spring arrives. The joy experienced through song offers a unique form of spiritual catharsis, particularly after the long and harsh winter season. From the fieldwork, as well as from the lessons of the texts, it is clear that catharsis is perceived collectively rather than individually by the inhabitants of the area. It is evident from the execution of the rites that the participants also lose their sense of time, and in most cases, they collectively experience this in the morning in their homes. And as Victor Turner wrote: "*Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized*" (Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, 1977, p. 104). Furthermore, the experience of spiritual catharsis is also confirmed by the way special songs for this day are sung. The songs are performed with excitement by the girls in the streets of the village and elsewhere. The results demonstrate that this day is awaited with great enthusiasm and has been inherited as such, certainly from a time when the youth of the country had no other means or mechanisms for entertainment. In the emotional context of the entire winter, an accumulation of negative energies occurred, and Verza's hospitality served as an opportunity for the art of liberation. This is how the researcher Shaban Sinani described catharsis: "*They enjoy themselves by going wild*" (Sinani, 2005).

5.5. Cultural Identity and Community Bonding

Interviews with community members indicate that these songs foster a strong sense of belonging and cultural identity. They serve as a vital link between generations, reinforcing the community's traditions and values.

5.6. The Cult of Fire

The cult of fire, an integral part of the festival, is associated with the belief in its purifying and protective power—both psychologically and physically for the people of Opoja. The ritual of jumping over fire signifies a symbolic act of purification, helping individuals transition into a new phase of life, often linked to maturity and readiness for marriage.

5.6.1. Fire as a Purifier and Initiator

The study has revealed that, although this fire-jumping ritual has been preserved within Opoja's traditions, it bears strong similarities to fire rituals in other cultures. Through interviews with festival participants, it has been observed that this ritual retains its deep spiritual and social significance, fostering a shared sense of identity and belief. Also, from the observations and interviews conducted, the residents declare that they strongly believe crossing or jumping over fires also has a specific meaning. Anyone who manages to jump over the fire, in addition to being ready to get married, is believed to gain the fire's purifying powers and be protected from evil until the next year. This belief is very strong, and is observed by the desire of young people to perform this meaningful rite as well and as soon as possible.

5.6.2. Fire as a Symbol of Continuity

Fire is perceived as a renewing force that connects generations, symbolizing not only purification but also the community's continuous bond with its traditions. This belief is very strong and is reflected by the desire of young people to perform this meaningful rite as well and as soon as possible. It is believed that the Summer Day festival cannot occur without the cult of fire. According to the observed results, the inhabitants spend the greatest amount of time collecting materials for lighting and preparing the fire among all other rituals. The fire is primarily lit with wood. However, that these elements are not isolated practices but rather part of a broader ethnographic and anthropological context. Mark Titra confirms this as well (Titra, 2004).

5.7. Oral Tradition and the Preservation of Songs

Since songs play a central role in all the rituals of *Dita e Verzës*, their preservation and documentation are crucial for safeguarding this tradition. The transition from oral tradition to written documentation has had an impact on the function and poetic quality of these songs. While researchers have collected these songs through fieldwork, it remains challenging to fully capture their aesthetic and performative qualities in written form.

5.7.1. The Decline of Dita e Verzës and the Need for Conservation

In recent years, the celebration of *Dita e Verzës* has significantly diminished. The older people we interviewed also confirmed this. They concluded during their speeches that the participation and intensity of people in this event were significantly greater years ago. They asserted that, years ago, the participation and intensity of people taking part in this event was significantly greater. This phenomenon is not happening because people have changed their aesthetic tastes, or are against tradition, but due to the migration of the area's residents to urban areas or other European countries. Undoubtedly, this fading phenomenon confronts what the well-known researcher Victor Turner once defined with the concept of liminality. With the last generation, those who are on the threshold, between tradition and modern elements of society. "*They are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such; their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions"* (Turner, 1967, p. 112). To maintain historical memory and ensure the continuity of this cultural heritage, it is necessary to implement professional video recordings that capture every syncretic action during the ritual performances. Anyway, based on the study's findings, it is essential to take concrete steps to promote and educate younger generations about the importance of this festival, its songs, and accompanying rituals. Additionally, these actions will affect the understanding and preservation of the tradition, including autochthonous rites. "*Undoubtedly, these rites are part of the native rites of the Albanians"* (Nushi, 1974, pp. 283-284).

6. Conclusions

The songs and accompanying rituals of *Dita e Verzës* are not merely folkloric expressions, but rather testimonies of a rich cultural system embedded with deep symbolic meanings and ancient rituals. These traditions reflect the profound connection between humans and nature, emphasizing the significance of seasonal cycles, renewal, and communal identity.

By preserving and promoting these elements, we ensure that the cultural memory of Opoja remains alive, serving as a bridge between the past, present, and future. It is therefore, essential that concrete steps are taken in the future to promote and educate younger generations about the importance of this festival, its songs, and accompanying rituals.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to the journal board and reviewers, who, with their advice and suggestions, have helped us improve the quality of this paper.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

References

Cena, S. (2015). *Lessons in folk literature (Authorized lectures).* Prizren.

Chevrel, Y. (2016). *Comparative literature* (A. Xhiku, Trans.). Tiranë: Naimi.

Gennep, A. V. (1960). *The rites of passage* (M. B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Gjinari, J., Beci, B., Shkuratj, G., Gosturani, X. D., & Totoni, M. (2008). *Atlasi dialektologjik i gjuhës shqipe, Vol. I & II.* Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe i Letërsisë.

Gjoni, I. (2012, January 5). *Mardhënie të miteve dhe kulteve të bregdetit të Jonit me areale të tjera mitike.* UNITIR. Retrieved from https://unitir.edu.al/doktoratura-irena-gjoni-fakulteti-i-historise-dhe-i-filologjise/

Kadare, I. (2002). *Autobiografia e popullit në vargje.* Tiranë: Onufri. *(Verifique o ano correto de publicação, pois está incompleto).*

Koçinaj, H. (2014). Fjalë e shprehje nga e folmja e Opojës. *Gjuha Shqipe, 113.*

Lecaj, K. (2011, March). *Verza në Opojë.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUSVitjMVYI

Mahmuti, F. (2024, January 25). *Mbledhja e këngëve popullore të Opojës.* (F. Ramadani, Interviewer).

Maliqi, S. (2025, March 13). *Mbledhja e këngëve popullore të Opojës.* (F. Ramadani, Interviewer).

Mehmeti, S. (2015). *Kontribute për historinë e Opojës.* Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës.

Melqi, H. (1994). *Opoja dhe Gora (Vështrim gjeografik).* Prizren: NGLB Berati.