

Submission of 'The Last of Albania's Sworn Virgins' Tui McLean

Thank you so much for your time in reviewing this submission.

Centuries ago, deep in the Albanian Alps—an unusual tradition began. Women with limited options took the burrenesha oath to become 'Sworn Virgins' pledging to lead a life of celibacy and adopt the appearance and behaviours of men. To dress like men, work like men, and take on both the responsibilities and privileges of men.

Often their reasons were ones of female empowerment: avoiding unwanted marriages, to inherit family money, or simply to experience societal freedom.

Today the numbers of this marginalised community are dwindling with only an estimated 12 Sworn Virgins left in the world, and many Albanians don't even know they exist. But could the loss of this community mean progress for Albania's younger generation of women?

I produced, directed and reported on this feature, taking the viewer inside the private world of the burreneshat, exploring first person accounts of those who took the oath and spent their lives in the community, as well as a young Albanian woman who has decided not to take the oath.

The story explores the cultural factors which led this minority group of women to choose the burrenesha life, how women's rights in Albania have changed during that period, and why the tradition is dying out. It also crucially gives a voice to the last remaining Sworn Virgins as they witness their customs disappearing in an ever-changing world.

As part of a joint project between BBC 100 Women – BBC World Service, BBC Reel and BBC World News this was a single story told over multiple different formats, which was published by BBC 100 Women - BBC World Service as an article and online short 3min documentary, aired by BBC World Service and BBC World News as a 23min documentary on World TV (in North America) and is available to watch back on BBC iplayer, and by BBC Reel as a 14minute documentary which is still available online. I have included links in the submission to the videos as well as pdf's of the articles in case you have any problems accessing, and can confirm it was published/aired to a global audience (including North America). To access the long form 23minute of the documentary you can either watch via the YouTube link in the submission, or via the bbc iplayer link included in the submission (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001jh5w/100-women-the-last-of-albanias-sworn-virgins>) if you use iplayer please use the following login:

- LOGIN: tui_mclean@hotmail.com PASSWORD: tu1mclean

Full Credits for the project for each BBC department:

- Producer, Director & Reporter: Tui McLean, BBC Studios
- Cinematographer & Editor: Derrick Evans, BBC World Service
- Assistant Producer & Translator: Omer Saraci, freelance
- Animation: Michal Bialozej, freelance
- Research Assistant: Eric Czuleger, freelance
- Executive Producer, BBC World News: Vara Szajkowski
- Executive Producer BBC 100 Women - BBC World Service: Valeria Perasso
- Commissioning Editor BBC 100 Women - BBC World Service: Claire Williams
- Executive Producer BBC Reel: Camelia Sadeghzadeh
- Commissioning Editor, BBC Reel: Dan John