



ALBANIAN

A Survey of Albanian Language and Literature

(Area Background Studies)

1964

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FOREWORD

In presenting this short survey of Albanian language and literature we have attempted to make a synopsis of linguistic studies and literary achievements rather than analyze works of art, or ideas and events.

The part concerning the origin of Albanian and its relations to other Indo-European languages is included in this survey because of lack of information in English on this subject.

We have succinctly touched upon the period from 1944 up to date, because literary achievements in Albanian in this period are completely slanted towards Marxism, and what is produced as literature could be called Red propaganda and it should be treated as such with appropriate comments in another study.

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ORIGIN OF THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

One of the questions that Albanians abroad are asked as soon as they are introduced to some one is: "What language do Albanians speak? To what other language is it related?" It may seem very easy to answer, but the answer to these questions has puzzled scholars for over a century.

The first thing that strikes the student of Albanian is that its most serious and consistent scholars have been Austrian and German philologists. German philologists such as Xylander, Schleicher and Stier were the first to point out, during the first half of the nineteenth century, that Albanian belonged to the Indo-European family of languages. In 1854, the foremost linguist of the nineteenth century, the German scholar Franz Bopp, Professor of Sanskrit and comparative grammar at the University of Berlin from 1822 to 1867, proved through his research in comparative grammar that the earlier theory that Albanian belonged to the Indo-European family of languages was correct. Bopp provided all the available scientific facts in support of this theory. After Bopp's demonstration, no philologist has ever

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challenged the place of the Albanian language among the Indo-European family of languages.

The Indo-European family of languages comprises all the main languages of Europe, except Hungarian, Turkish and Finnish, so that if we say that Albanian is an Indo-European language, we have not really defined its position with any precision. The question immediately arises: To which language is Albanian related?

Franz Bopp, after devoting a great deal of study to the problem, came to the conclusion that Albanian had no close ties with any other Indo-European language, and that it stood all by itself, like Greek, Persian, Armenian and Lithuanian.

Bopp was one of the great pioneers in the comparative study of languages and since his day a lot of research has been done in this field by scholars of many nations. The question of the position of the Albanian language in the Indo-European family, and its relation to other languages is still being debated today. Not all philologists have illuminated this difficult problem with their studies. The German scholar Schleicher, for example, formulated

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in the last century the strange theory that Albanian was a Pelasgic tongue, which was supposed to have been spoken in ancient times by a pre-Indo-European people called Pelasgians. This theory was proved to be wrong, but not before it had caused a great deal of confusion and installed these Pelasgians in the history books as the ancestors of the Albanians.

The Austrian scholar Gustav Han was one of the first to make a serious study of the origin of the Albanian language. At first he asked himself the following question: "Albanian must be the descendant of some ancient tongue--which is it?" He tried to answer it in his book Albanesische Studien, (Albanian Studies) published in 1853. Through the careful study of names and place names he came to the conclusion that Albanian is an Illyrian tongue. Gustav Meyer, author of an Albanian Etymological Dictionary, (1891), came to the same conclusion.

This theory was contested by a group of scholars, which includes Weigand, Pedersen and Barich, who maintained that Albanian was spoken in the pre-classical age, not by the Illyrians but by the Thracians, another people that inhabited the Balkan

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peninsula.

Looking at this question from a historical point of view, Johannes Thunmann in 1774, observed the status of the Albanian language as something in between the Thracian and the Illyrian. Studying the authors of Greece and Rome, Thunmann observed that these authors mention Thracian tribes, who lived in Illyrian territory. The Istrians in Istria, Daorsians in Bosnia and Caonians in Southwest Albania are mentioned as Thracians. Dardanians, Paonians and Tribalians, who lived in the territory between Illyrians and Thracians are mentioned by some Greek authors as Thracians and by some others as Illyrians. Thunmann studied and gathered toponymistic data. From some names of places in the Western Balkans he found some which in form are Thracian--Thermidava, near Shkodër, Quimedava in Dardania (Kosova), the suffix -dava being characteristic of the Thracian language. According to Thunmann these names show that the Thracians were widely spread from the Black Sea to the Adriatic shores. Other historians, such as the French historian Arbois, and the Austrian historian, Karl Patsch, came to the same conclusion

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as Thunmann. According to historical and toponymistic data there is a great probability that the substratum of the Western Balkan peninsula is of Thracian origin and the superstratum of Illyrian origin.

These studies on the origins of the Albanian language were pursued with tremendous enthusiasm and perseverance by perhaps the greatest of all the Albanian language experts, Norbert Jokl of Austria, who died during the second World War. He devoted all his life to the study of Albanian in all its aspects and has enormously enriched the field. Towards the end of his life, he inclined to the conclusion that Albanian was equally related to Illyrian and to Thracian.

Until other discoveries are made, Albanian remains a language of Thraco-Illyrian origin.

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GREEK INFLUENCES ON THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

Albanian has some special concordances with classical Greek. Greeks and Albanians have been neighbors since pre-historic times. Archeological discoveries show that Greece and the Greek civilization exercised a great influence on Albania and its people. Greek colonies along the shores of the Adriatic played a great role in the commercial and cultural development of the Illyrians. In the courts of the Illyrian kings there were Greek physicians, officers and scholars.

The Greek influence continued in Illyria during the Roman occupation. In 395 A.D. the Roman Emperor, Theodosius, divided the Roman Empire into East and West. He gave his sons: Honorius, the West with Rome as its center, and Arcadius, the East with Constantinople as its center. Illyria was assigned to the East.

Administratively Illyria was divided into two provinces: The North called Prevalitania--from Dalmatia to the Shkumbini River and Epirus Nova--from Shkumbini to Vjosa River. The division of the Roman Empire into East and West, and the assignment of Illyria to the

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East, left the country under Byzantine influence during all the middle age period.

One of the important factors that kept Albania under Greek influence was the Orthodox Church. Let us see now how this Greek influence effected the Albanian language. A systematic study of the influence of Greek on Albanian has never been made. Such a study would be very important for both Albanian and Greek.

Regarding Greek influences on Albanian, we should consider three different periods in the development of the Greek language: (a.) Influences from ancient Greek; (b.) Influences from middle Greek; and (c.) Influences from modern Greek.

Chronologically these periods could be considered as follows:

(a.) Ancient Greek from recorded history up to the VI Century A.D.

(b.) Middle Greek from the VI Century A.D. up to the XII Century.

(c.) Modern Greek--we cannot very well establish a time when Modern Greek began. However, we are not concerned about the Greek language here,

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but about certain periods in which the Albanians borrowed words, expressions, etc. from the Greeks.

Gustav Meyer denied the existence of ancient Greek elements in the Albanian language. The merit of a careful study of Albanian borrowing from ancient Greek, goes to Albert Thumb. Thumb found in the dictionary of Franciscus Blanchus (Frank Bardhi), of the year 1635, some words of Greek origin, which undoubtedly are of a much earlier date.

Borrowings from ancient Greek have preserved the phonetic values of ancient Greek and have followed the phonetic development of Albanian.

"X" (kh) of ancient Greek is "k" in Albanian, whereas in borrowings from modern Greek, this sound is "h" in Albanian.

Examples:

Albanian	Ancient Greek	
lakën	lakhanon	(cabbage)
mokën	mokhané	(millstone)

Borrowings of middle and modern Greek are in the field of religion, agriculture, etc.

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LATIN INFLUENCES ON THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

There is a great difference between the Roman and Greek influence in the Balkans. Greek influence spread peacefully through commerce, cultural relations, etc., whereas Latin influence spread through conquest. With the Roman conquest the Latin language came to be the official language in Illyria. One of the great factors of the Romanization of Illyria was the road system that the Romans, for military purposes, built in the Balkans. The military centers or camps where Latin was used became real Roman centers and influenced the surroundings. Business was conducted in Latin and the farmers who wanted to sell their produce had to communicate in Latin. The veterans, who had spent many years in the Roman armies, when they retired received land and thus exercised a great influence on the population where they settled.

The Roman domination in Illyria lasted more than five centuries and the influence of Latin on Albanian is very great. Christianity came to Illyria through the Romans, and this too had a great influence on the language and culture of the Albanians. The Italian republics of the Middle Ages, such as the Republic of

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Venice, also influenced the language and culture of the Albanians.

Borrowings from Latin came into Albanian from Balkan Latin. Latin gave birth to several languages, each of them with different characteristics. In the Balkans two languages have as their source Latin--Dalmatian and Romanian. The last person who spoke Dalmation, Udina Burbur, died in 1898. Romanian is spoken by approximately twenty million people in the Balkans.

Some of the lexical elements borrowed from Latin have preserved some phonetic values of Latin, others have changed according to phonetic laws, which in a short essay like this would be lengthy and tedious to deal with. The changes have an amazing correspondence in Albanian and Romanian.

Examples:

Latin	Alb.	Italian	Greek	Romanian
furca (distaff)	furkë	forca	furka	furcă
mustum (grape juice)	musht	mosto	--	must

From the above examples we see that in Albanian and Romanian the vowel "u" (short "u") is preserved, whereas in Italian it has become "o."

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Example:

Latin	Albanian	Italian	Romanian	
noctem	natë	notte	noapte	(night)

The cluster "ct" of Latin is not assimilated in Albanian and Romanian as it is in Italian. In Albanian this cluster took three directions. Examples:

Latin- ct	Albanian- ft, jt, t	
lucta	luftë	(war)
directus	drejt	(direct)
fructus	frut	(fruit)

We find in Albanian borrowings from Romance language that have come through the Turkish language, such as pallavër (Sp. palabra). In modern times scientific terminology regarding electronics, medicine, agriculture and space is mostly borrowed from Italian. There are also some borrowings from English, i.e. speaker, meeting, etc.

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SLAVIC INFLUENCES ON THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

The Slavs settled on the Balkan peninsula from the V to the VII Century A.D. In the beginning the Slavs were not divided into groups or tribes with special names. Around the year 610 A.D. the Serbs and Croats were designated by the name they still have today. The Bulgars came into the Balkans as a tribe of Fino-Ugrik linguistic group and later adopted a Slavic tongue and are referred to as Slavs, and by language and culture they really are.

For brief spans of time, first the Bulgars and later the Serbs kept under their domination a great part of the Balkans, hence their language and cultures effected the Albanian language and culture.

Lexical borrowings from the Slavic language concern agriculture, household appliances and juridical terms.

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TURKISH INFLUENCES ON THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

The Ottoman Empire dominated the Balkans for more than five hundred years. Its influence on every human endeavor was very great. Every facet of human life in the Balkans was touched by the Turkish influence in one way or the other.

Turkish influences on the Albanian language are very profound. These influences on the Albanian language embrace social, political and family life. Through the religion of Islam, the faith embraced by almost three quarters of the Albanians, the Albanians adopted a lot of lexical items, ideas, and a whole new way of life. This fact brought fundamental changes in the culture and philosophy of the Albanians.

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THE INFLUENCE OF ALBANIAN ON OTHER BALKAN LANGUAGES

There is no doubt that Albanian has borrowed more from the neighboring languages than the others have borrowed from Albanian. However, if we consider only what Albanian has borrowed and not what the other languages have borrowed from it, this would not be a complete study of the Balkan languages. Listing of lexical items and statistics would take considerable space and defeat the purpose of a short study, such as this.

The Albanians have kept the ancient culture of the Balkans better than any other people of this region. With their way of life and with the preservation of their customs, which they have kept against many odds, the Albanians represent a special and distinct ethnic group in the Balkans. Albanian influences on the other languages of the Balkans have been on household appliances and in culture.

The Albanian word "besa" is used in all Balkan languages, including Turkish. Strong influences of Albanian are found in the pastoral life of the Balkans. In the Byzantine chronicles and in the Serbian historical documents the Albanians are

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mentioned as excellent shepherds. A Dominican priest, who remained anonymous, in 1308 travelled through East Europe and said this about Albania: "Terra est fertilis in carnibus, caseis et lacte, in pane et in vino non multum abundant. (The land is fertile in meat, cheese and milk, but there is no abundance in bread and wine.)

Gustav Meyer has dedicated a special study to Albanian elements in modern Greek. These influences are felt more in the Greek provinces near the Albanian border than elsewhere. However, there are elements which have acquired a general usage. Meyer found about seventy lexical items of Albanian origin in modern Greek.

Examples:

Modern Greek			Albanian
rentai	(Byzantine Greek)	(horse race)	rend (to run)
cupra		(girl)	çupë
kopela		(girl)	kopile
vllamis		(brother)	vlla

The influence of Albanian on the neighboring languages occurred in two different periods of time--an ancient

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period and a modern period. The ancient period geographically embraces a much wider area than the modern one.

Examples of the ancient period:

Albanian	Serbo-Croatian	Romanian	Ukrainian
bajgë	balega	balega	balega

Albanian: shytë; Modern Greek: siutos; Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian: sut; Romanian: ciut; Czechoslovakian: suta koza; Polish: szuty; Ukrainian: suta; Hungarian: csuta (a goat without horns).

Albanian: vatra, votra; Serbo-Croatian: vatra; Romanian: vatra; Ukrainian, Czechoslovakian, Polish: vatra (hearth, fire).

This word and its peregrination has been studied by Norbert Jokl. It is interesting to note that this form was borrowed from the Tosk dialect and it shows that "vo" had changed into "va" much earlier than was thought before Jokl's study.

Albanian elements that have entered into Serbo-Croatian in modern times are:

Albanian	Serbo-Croatian	
llajë	laja	(black sheep)

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Albanian		Serbo-Croatian	
i bardhë	(white)	barzast	(ashen, grey)
ogiç		ugic	(leading ram)
qeni		ceno	(dog)
hirrë		ira	(whey)

Albanian elements in Bulgarian:

Albanian	Bulgarian	
çupa	cupa	(girl)
dash	dasko	(lamb)
keq	kakav	(bad)

Albanian elements in the Bulgarian language have been studied by Norbert Jokl and Vladimir Georgieff (Naprosi na belgarskata etimologija, Sofia 1958).

In Greece, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia there are groups of people who speak a kind of secret language--jargon--the lexicon of which is borrowed from Albanian.

Albanian has had very little influence on the Turkish language, but we find some words of Albanian origin in use there too. "Besa" is one of these words. Some words have been borrowed from Albanian, have undergone vowel harmony influence, which is characteristic of Turkish and as such have re-entered

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in use in Albanian again. Examples:

Albanian	Turkish	
lug, -u luk-u	uluk	(pipe, drain pipe)

This phenomenon occurs in other Balkan languages as well. Example:

Greek	Turkish	
kalopus	kalup	(beautiful foot)

In this form it is used in Modern Greek and Albanian with a different meaning of the original.

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RELATION BETWEEN ALBANIAN AND ROMANIAN

Linguists and historians are in agreement that Albanian and Romanian are closely related. This relation is NOT in the lexicon of the two languages, but in the grammatical and phonetic structure. Since the features that make these two languages seem so close are found in the four main dialects of Romanian, it stands as logic to assume that this influence occurred when these dialects were not yet developed. It is believed that this happened from the VI to the IX Century A.D., a very obscure time in the history of the Balkans. During this time neither of the two languages had a literature; hence, here we operate in the realm of speculation, based on phonetic changes and grammatical structure, which modern linguistic studies and new sciéntific methods in this field have cleared up and given credence.

Now let us see some examples of phonetic similarities. The Latin element in both languages has undergone the same phonetic changes. Latin unstressed "a" has become schwa in both languages.

Latin	Albanian	Romanian	
camisia	këmishë	cămeasa	(shirt)

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The Latin open "u" has been retained in both language.

Latin	Albanian	Romanian	
furca	furkë	furcă	(distaff)

The Latin consonant cluster -ct- in Albanian has become -ft-, -jt-, and -t-, and in Romanian -pt-.

Latin	Albanian	Romanian	
lucta	luftë	lupta	(war)
directus	drejt	drept	(direct)
fructus	frut	frupt	(fruit)

Of great importance for the history of these two languages are the non-Latin elements.

Albanian	Romanian	
avull	abur	(vapor, steam)
baltë	balta	(mud)
daltë	dalta	(chisel)
fluturë	fluture	(butterfly)
gardh	gard	(fence)
moshë (age)	mos	(old)
përrua	pariu	(brook)

By studying these corresponding features between Romanian and Albanian we are compelled to think that at some time in the history of these two different

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peoples, they lived side by side. The problem of the relation between these two languages is one of the most difficult in the field of Balkanology.

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THE FIRST ALBANIAN TEXTS

Shortly after the death of Scanderbeg in 1468, the whole of Albania was occupied by the Ottoman Turks, who retained it as an outlying province of their empire right down to 1912--that is for almost five centuries. During this time the country was completely cut off from the fertile ideas and civilizing influences of Europe. People with ability did not stay in Albania, but moved to other parts of the Empire, where many distinguished themselves as soldiers, administrators, scientists, etc. Cities, roads and villages were destroyed through wars and revolutions, or decayed through neglect and oriental apathy. Old art treasures, particularly of the Byzantine period, were lost or irreparably disfigured.

The Turks did not allow Albanian schools of any kind. They decreed that Albanian was to remain a purely spoken language, with no literature of its own. Yet the first Albanian books known to us were written during the early stages of the Ottoman rule.

The date for the beginning of the Albanian

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literature is taken as the year 1555, when Gjon Buzuku published his Missal. Buzuku's Missal was the first printed book in Albanian. Only a single copy of it is in existence and it is to be found in the Vatican Library. It is written in Gegë dialect in archaic style, and is very important for the history of the Albanian language.

There are older documents of written Albanian, such as the Baptismal Formula by the Bishop of Durrës, Pal Engjëlli, 1462; a list of twenty words and eight phrases written by Arnold von Harff, a German traveler, 1492. Pal Engjëlli was a friend and adviser of Scanderbeg and he may have written other works in Albanian, but unfortunately nothing has been found yet.

In 1635, Frank Bardhi, (Franciscus Blancus), published a short Latin-Albanian dictionary with an introduction in which he tells us why he undertook this task. The introduction is addressed to "All those Albanians who will take up the book to read and study." He says he compiled the dictionary "to help our language which is being forgotten and corrupted as time goes on, but more particularly to

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assist all those who are in the service of our Lord and the Holy Catholic Church and who know no Latin, without a knowledge of which no one can carry out the services, functions and ceremonies of the Roman Church and at the same time avoid falling into grave error and sin."

As it is clearly stated, Bardhi wrote his dictionary in order to come to the aid of his religious colleagues and fellow-Catholics. Indeed he goes on in his preface exhorting the Albanians to study the dictionary carefully and learn Latin, otherwise, he adds when the Day of Judgment comes they (the Albanians) will not be able to explain their ignorance before the Lord! Nevertheless, he also says (and he places this assertion before his main purpose) that he wanted to help the Albanian language "which is being forgotten and corrupted."

This short and simple statement provides the first documentary evidence that we have, after Scanderbeg's great achievement, of Albanian people's awareness of what was happening to them under Ottoman rule, and of their will to preserve their language, and hence their national individuality. Bardhi's

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admonition is an important clue to the Albanian nationalist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Bardhi's work is chiefly a linguistic document of great importance and no serious student of the language or author of dictionaries has been able to ignore it.

Pjetër Budi, another Catholic clergyman, published in Rome in 1664 a translation of Bellarmino's Dottrina Cristiana, (The Christian Doctrine). Both in style and in spelling it is very similar to Bardhi's work, and equally archaic. A more important work was published at Padua (Italy) in 1685 by Pjetër Bogdani, under the Latin title Cuneus Prophetarum de Christo Salvatore Mundi. It is a collection of sermons in Albanian and Italian, together with the life of the Virgin Mary and Christ. Bogdani is an accomplished author. The intricate theological subjects he wrote about demanded a sophisticated approach. His style is elaborate and polished and his vocabulary is rich and varied.

To sum up, these Catholic clergymen of the XVI and XVII centuries can be called the fathers of

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Albanian literature. They kept the light of culture burning, when all around them was total darkness. They worked both for the glory of God and for their country. Their efforts have culminated in the publication of the great Franciscan Review, Hylli i Dritës, (The Star of Light); and also in the publication of the splendid poetic achievements of Gjergj Fishta, Albania's national poet.

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THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

The foundations of the written language were laid down during the XVI and XVII centuries by a group of Catholic priests, who wrote religious books because they rightfully thought that both Christianity and their mother tongue were in danger of disappearing in a Turkish dominated Albania. Of these clergymen, perhaps the two most important were Bardhi and Bogdani, whose works have proved to be real gold mines to lexicographers, poets and prose writers of our time.

During the XVIII and XIX centuries, the main centers of the Albanian literary movement were to be found outside the borders of Albania: in Calabria, Sicily, Napoli (all these places are in Italy); Bucharest (Romania); and Constantinople (Turkey). Its exponents were exiles from the mother country, who were motivated by deep patriotic nostalgia, and influenced by the powerful currents of the great European romantic and nationalistic movements. The Albanian inhabitants of Sicily and Calabria (Italy), whose forefathers had fled from Turkish rule "with only their shirts and rhapsodies," were able to combine in their writings the old traditional elements,

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particularly those based on the precious memories of Scanderbeg, with the ideas and techniques of the Italian Renaissance. The contributions from the Albanian exiles in Turkey is made up of three main trends: Hatred of the Ottoman rule; passionate nostalgia for their country; and a rather mystic belief in national liberation.

It would be a mistake to think that Albania itself was asleep during the XVIII and the first half of the XIX Century. For one thing, the Turks could not prevent the people from handing down from one generation to another the ancient ballads, songs, stories, elegies and proverbs. For centuries they had been the very fabric of their lives, and they continued to be so. Occasionally popular poets and troubadours published their works in small, poor editions, which circulated secretly like talismans.

Then there were the channels of religious and foreign schools, of travel and trade, which carried their own cargo of revolutionary ideas from central and western Europe. This could be called a period of assimilation, growth and preparation.

In Sicily and Calabria (Italy) there was a

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vigorous literary movement during the later part of the XVIII and throughout the XIX Century. Jul Variboba and Anton Françesk Santori wrote books on religious subjects, just as the first Albanian authors did. A few others were trying to widen the field by seeking inspiration in other subjects and themes. The old traditional ballads which the Albanian immigrants had brought over from the other side of the Adriatic were a perennial source of inspiration. Gabriel Dara is one of those who tapped this source successfully with his Këngka e Sprasme e Balës, (Bala's Last Song).

The XIX Century is dominated by two outstanding figures in the Albanian Renaissance--Jeronim De Rada and Naim Frashëri--both exiles from the mother country. De Rada, who was born in Calabria, (Italy), was a man of such genius and versatility that in a survey as this only a mere sketch of his personality and achievement can be given. He was a poet of great powers, philosopher, scholar, philologist, mystic and journalist. The consuming passion of his life was the independence of the land of his ancestors. All his thoughts and actions were directed to that single end. Through his paper L'Albanese d'Italia,

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(The Albanian of Italy), which began publication in 1848, and Fiamuri i Arbrit, (The Albanian Flag), 1883, De Rada brought the problems of Albania, in all their aspects, to the attention of the intellectual and political leaders of XIX Century Europe. It was he who inspired several leading German scholars to take up the study of the Albanian language. His tireless efforts and idealistic fervor impressed men as diverse as the British statesman Gladstone and the French romantic poet Lamartine. De Rada fought his battles on many fronts--literary, linguistic, political and national. In 1895, he presided over an Albanian linguistic congress held in Southern Italy. He was throughout his life a keen student and collector of old ballads and stories.

De Rada's fame as a poet rests chiefly on "Milosao," "Serafina Topia," and "Scanderbeu i Pafaan." Their principal sources of inspiration are the old ballads on the heroic exploits of Scanderbeg. His poetry is difficult because it is written in the Calabrian dialect and also because his own poetic idiom is rather mystical and obscure.

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Biographical note:

Jeronim De Rada was born on November 19, 1814 in Macchia, Calabria (Italy). He received his primary education in his native province and then went to Napoli to study law. He had to interrupt his studies because of cholera in Napoli and when he returned after the danger of the plague was over he was arrested for liberal activity. In 1849 De Rada was appointed Professor of Albanian Language and Literature at the San Demetrio College in Calabria. He taught only three years and then dedicated all his efforts to his literary and political activities. His personal life was a tragic one--his wife, his sons and brothers died young and this made De Rada lead a sad and unhappy life. He died on February 27, 1903.

One of the great Albanian writers born in Albania and contemporary of De Rada is Naim Frasheri, (1846-1900). Clarity and simplicity are the chief qualities of his work. He wrote in a pure Tosk dialect. He is the finest Albanian romantic poet. In Lulet e Verës, (The Summer Flowers), and Bagëti e Bujqësi,

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(Flocks and Agriculture), he wrote movingly of simple things: of shepherds and their flocks, of rugged mountains and green fields, of cool springs in midsummer. He was the poet of patriotic nostalgia, of pantheistic emotion, of sunsets, and of infinite sadness. Frasheri spent the greater part of his life in Constantinople.

If De Rada made the outside world aware of the existence of Albania, Naim Frasheri was one of the first artists who taught the Albanians how to feel and think for themselves.

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GJERGJ FISHTA
(1871-1940)

Albanian National Poet

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LITERARY ACHIEVEMENTS FROM INDEPENDENCE TO COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP

The Albanian literary movement at the end of the last century and of the early years of the twentieth century is closely linked with the struggle for national liberation. The two are, indeed, inseparable. Like De Rada and Naim Frasheri, many other writers drew their inspiration from the old struggles of the Albanian people to remain free and tried to keep alive hope and faith in a new national revival.

A great deal of work and research on the Albanian language itself was also being done during this period. One of the outstanding workers in this field was Konstantin Kristoforidhi, (1827-1895), who published in 1872 a translation of the New Testament and the Psalms. Before he undertook this great task, he made a profound study of the language, not only through reading everything that was available, but also by traveling all over the country and listening to the spoken word in all its rich variety. The fruit of all his tireless and intelligent effort was his dictionary, published in 1904 after his death.

The year 1908 is another important landmark in the development of the Albanian language. It witnessed

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the Congress of Monastir, which elaborated the present alphabet of the language out of a great variety of alphabets that were in use up to then; and also saw the publication of "Bashkimi," by the Literary Society of Scutari.

One way of writing the story of modern Albanian literature would be to write it around some of the most important reviews, which have appeared in the language. Reviews like Faik Konitza's Albania; Hylli i Dritës, (The Star of Light) of the Franciscans; Leka of the Jesuits; Nebil Chika's Minerva; Illyriria published by a group of young writers and Branko Merxhani's Përpjekja Shqiptare, (The Albanian Struggle).

Konitza's Albania began to appear in Brussels just before the end of the last century and contained articles in French, English and Albanian, mainly on historical and literary subjects. At the beginning and to a certain extent later on as well, most of the magazine was written by Konitza himself, who besides being a brilliant writer was also a man of wide learning and interests. Albania was later published in London, where it continued until 1909. Konitza's purpose was two fold: in the first place to acquaint

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western Europe with the existence, aspirations and problems of the Albanian people; secondly, to arouse among foreign and Albanian scholars an interest in the study of the Albanian language, folklore, literature, history, etc. His Albania was remarkably successful in the achievement of these aims, and one can truthfully say that it has made a very valuable contribution at a time when it was most desperately needed.

Later on Konitza became the editor and the guiding spirit of the newspaper, Dielli, (The Sun), published in Boston, Mass., in which he continued to write until his death in 1942. He was a polemical writer by temperament, but one who combined clarity, wit, learning and wisdom. He was the greatest intellectual liberating force of his generation.

The first editor of Hylli i Drites, which began its publication in 1913, was the Franciscan Father, Gjergj Fishta, (1871-1940). This famous review had continued without a break until the Communists closed it down when they came to power. Its numbers are a veritable treasure of literary, historical, philosophical and political studies. Fishta himself towers over this achievement with his own poetic work, which

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undoubtedly makes him the greatest creative genius that Albania has produced. There are people in Albania who have never read Lahuta e Malcis, (The Lute of the Mountain--Fishta's masterpiece), but who are able to recite by heart long passages from it, not quite sure in their own mind whether they are tapping a traditional stream of poetry or the outpourings of a famous man called Fishta. All that one can say of that immortal work is that in it the poet gave noble and final form to the old heroic concept of life of the Albanian people.

Although many people seem to think so, Lahuta e Malcis is not the whole of Fishta by any means. In his Mrizi i Zanave, (Muses in the Shade), he shows himself a lyric poet of tremendous powers. The Albanian language has never been pushed to greater heights of grandeur and expression, than in these and some of his religious poems. Then there is Fishta, the master satirist of Anzat e Parnasit, (Wasps of Mount Parnassus), and Gomari i Babatasit, (Babatasi's Ass).

The first is a series of attacks, funny attacks on hypocrisy, ignorance, corruption and dishonesty.

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No one has exposed pseudo-patriots and pretenders of all kinds with greater verve and force than he has.

In 1921, Fishta became a member of the parliament in Tirana. Although he was not a professional politician, this gave him a good opportunity to observe at close quarters the Albanian political scene after the first World War. The result of his sojourn in Tirana was Gomari i Babatasit, a comic poem in which he depicts in satirical terms the political and satirical panorama of the time.

When the Communists came into power in Albania, Fishta's name and his writings were banned. The Great Russian Encyclopedia, (Moscow: 1950, Vol. II, p. 49) describes Fishta: "... a chauvinistic poet and imperialist spy, (sic) who with his anti-Slav "Lahuta e Malcis," fostered enemity between Albanians and Slavs."

We have mentioned so far the most prominent writers, such as De Rada, Naim Frasheri, Faik Konitza and Gjergj Fishta. To this list may be added other names, such as Sami Frasheri, Çajupi, Prendushi, Mjeda and Noli. Of these only Noli is alive and his work is of great significance, both for its volume and its versatility.

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Fan S. Noli was born in 1880, in Ibrik-Tepe, a village near Adrianople, Turkey. He was a close friend and collaborator of Faik Konitza, and like him he has been an influencial leader. On the other hand he is a far more prolific writer than Konitza. He has translated some of Shakespeare's tragedies, two works of Ibsen, and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. To talk about his translation perhaps is misleading, for Fan Noli has only taken Omar's work as a source and from it has created a lovely bouquet of poems of his own.

He also is the author of two important books, one in Albanian and the other in English, on Scanderbeg. It is very unfortunate that Fan Noli, from time to time mixed with politics, for not only has his intervention done more harm than good, but also has led him away from a field of activity in which he excels.

Men of the older generation, writers like Fishta, Konitza and Prendushi, who belonged to the Albanian romantic movement, were active after the first World War, when Albania regained her independence she had temporarily lost during the war years. As a matter of fact, in many ways, they have dominated the

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intellectual and literary life of the country up to the Italian Fascist aggression of 1939. In the late twenties certain new trends became discernible in the country, trends produced by the new generation of Albanians, who were educated in national secondary schools and in the universities of Vienna, Rome and Paris. They became carriers of new ideas and new patterns of thought. The new period of the struggle of national liberation began to recede, together with its problems and its worries. New problems--complex and pressing--began to rise in great array. These were gradually reflected in the writings of the period. One of the first reviews that reflected them was Djaleria, (The Youth), published by the Albanian Students' Union of Vienna. In it Lasgush Poradeci published his first poems, they were mostly lyrics of a strange, haunting beauty, and difficult symbolist poems. Within a short time his work began to appear in many Albanian newspapers and reviews. He was soon recognized as the literary spokesman of his generation.

What is said about Poradeci's poetry can be said about Ernest Koliqi's prose. In his books Hija e Maleve, (The Shade of the Mountains) and Tregtar

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Flamujsh, (Merchants of Flags), he has proved to be the greatest Albanian short story teller of our time. His style is that of a poet--colorful, eloquent and magnificent in the Latin manner. Some of his best stories are profound and moving studies of the peasants and mountaineers of Northern Albania, among which he has lived from time to time. Koliqi is also a poet of distinction and in his Kushtrimi i Skanderbeut, (Scanderbeg's Call), and Gjurmët e Stinve, (The Tracks of the Seasons), he has drawn inspiration both from traditional and modern themes. He has also produced fine and sensitive translations of some of the greatest Italian poets and French symbolists.

Besides Hylli i Dritës and Leka mentioned earlier, other reviews and newspapers sprang up and young writers contributed significant writings. Of these the most important were Minerva, edited by Nebil Chika, a journalist of great enterprise and imagination; Illyria, published weekly by a group of young writers; and Branko Merxhani's Përpjekja Shqiptare. The last two attracted the best young writers and exercised a powerful influence on the cultural life of the country. An outstanding figure of this period

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was Merxhani, a man of great culture and an editor of fine perception. This period was brought to a close by the Fascist invasion of Albania in April 1939.

Some of the writers were obliged to go into exile; others remained in the country but stopped writing since there was no longer any freedom to write according to the dictates of their own inspiration.



Ernest Koliqi, Albania's best short story writer. (Pictured among the Albanians of Sicily.)

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LITERATURE UNDER COMMUNISM

The Fascist occupation of Albania lasted from April 1939 to August 1943; then the Nazis invaded the country and remained in control until November 1944. During this period of foreign military control, the greater part of the energies of the nation were absorbed by the resistance movement. Most people hoped that the struggle would end with the establishment of national independence and personal freedom. Whereas, the Communist regime which came to power by brute force brought along with it a system of dictatorship and enslavement far more ruthless than the preceding ones. Within a few months the Communists went back on all the promises they had made to the people during the war years, when they were in desperate need of their support. They closed all newspapers and magazines, including the venerable Hylli i Dritës, and allowed only their publications. They made all schools conform to the Soviet model and installed Russian as the only foreign language to be taught in them.

In place of the old newspapers, reviews and magazines, the people were given for their intellectual and spiritual nourishment Zeri i Popullit,

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(People's Voice), and Bashkimi, (The Union), two daily newspapers which carry the Communist party line. There is no attempt to reason things out in these newspapers according to logic and common sense. Everything is based on Marx and Lenin.

It seems that the Albanian Communist scribblers have the greatest contempt for anything of value that has been done either in their own country or in the outside world, unless it is done according to Marxism-Leninism.

The thing that strikes one who reads Communist authors is the uniformity of style in which their work is written. It is as though they were the product of one single mind.

One of the important activities of any Communist regime is to brainwash the people and this cannot be done if the people are illiterate. Before the second World War a high percentage of the population of Albania was illiterate and the Communists undertook the difficult task of educating everybody. The fight against illiteracy has been going on since 1944 and it is believed that there is no more illiteracy in the younger generation. This is not done for the

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sake of progress alone, by a long shot, the concern of the Communists is that their propaganda be read and understood.

No literary work of note has come out since the Communists took over in Albania. Research in the language has taken place under Eqrem Çabej, the most prominent Albanian linguist, and Buletini i Shkencave, published by the University of Tirana, from time to time has come out with valuable articles on folklore, linguistics, popular music and art. The magazine Nëndori, published by the Albanian writers' union, is based on Russia's "Novi Mir" and is filled with translations from Communist literature of other Communist countries, lately mostly from Red China.

Today's poetry in Albania is written to glorify the dictatorship of the proletariat without any taste whatsoever. Very often love poems and love songs are written to the tractor and the truck, just as in the free world a poet would describe the beauty of a girl, and one author lately wrote a love poem to the flock of pigs he saw on a collective farm.

One must say that the Albanian writers have had a harder time than any of their colleagues in the

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Communist countries. They have had to make three adjustments in less than twenty years. First they had to glorify Tito and the brotherhood of the Albanians with the Yugoslavs. Then in 1948, they had to downgrade Tito and glorify Stalin and the brotherhood of the Albanians with the Russians. In 1962, the Albanian writers had to change their tune again, this time they had to downgrade Nikita Khrushchev and the Russian government, keeping their great affection for the Russian people. Now the fashion is to glorify China and the Chinese Communist elite. The Communist leadership in Albania has remained the same since 1944, therefore, on this score the Albanian writers have had a slight advantage on the colleagues of the other Communist dominated countries.

Whenever the spirit of the writer is caged, whenever art is compelled to belong to the sphere of polemics and ideology, whenever the writer, the artist, the composer cannot remain true to himself, cannot follow his vision of truth--the artist, the writer, and the composer cannot serve his conscience, his birthplace or humanity. Whenever restrictions

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are put on the artists, writers and composers of a nation, that nation, in the words of Robert Frost has, "Nothing to look backward to with pride and nothing to look forward to with hope."

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