

**Nicholas C. PANO**

## **SKENDERBEG IN THE UNITED STATES<sup>1</sup>**

There are, in my view, three aspects to the history of Skenderbeg in the United States that need to be considered in order to put this topic into its proper perspective. These are, first, the propagation of the deeds and exploits of Albania's national hero into Europe, and more specifically into England. For it will be primarily from the English mother country that the literature and history pertaining to Skenderbeg will be transmitted to its American colonies and subsequently to the newly independent United States of America. In this connection the noted American intellectual historian Merle Curti has observed:

The ideas and agencies of intellectual life bequeathed by the colonial era owed far more to Great Britain than to any other land, for English-speaking peoples made up the dominant element in colonial society.

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 [This] meant, among other things, that the Americans shared with Great Britain the ballads and the more formal literature of the motherland. But the literary legacy was greater than this, for it was through English and Scottish channels the Graeco-Roman classics and the literature of the Renaissance were transmitted to the American people.<sup>2</sup>

Skenderbeg's odyssey to America thus begins in Britain in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the first English language literary works recording and glorifying the exploits of Skenderbeg were published. It is not my intention to present here a detailed account of the development of what B. B. Ashcom has termed the "Skenderbeg theme" in English literature, an issue that has been more fully explored by such scholars as Skender

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<sup>1</sup> This presentation is part of the lectures segment run from 1-2 November 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), pp. 30-31.

Luarasi, and Robert Elsie along with Ashcom.<sup>3</sup> Rather my selective review of these writings is intended to note the influence of these works on three American authors, namely, Clement Clark Moore, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and James M. Ludlow, all of whom during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century published works incorporating a Skenderbeg theme. The results of their efforts constituted the second phase of the history of Skenderbeg in America.

The third phase of the Skenderbeg saga in the United States dates from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Albanians in significant numbers began to settle in the United States. The establishment of the Albanian-American community and its emergence during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a major center of the Albanian National Renaissance served to inspire among the new arrivals a devotion to Skenderbeg, who symbolized national unity and greatness. The example of Skenderbeg encouraged them in their quest initially for greater autonomy for the Albanian provinces within the Ottoman Empire and then for independence.

Indeed, Skenderbeg's exploits on 15<sup>th</sup> century Albanian battlefields had made him a hero in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, which lived in fear of subjugation by the Turks until the Ottoman armies were finally defeated in 1683 on the outskirts of Vienna. During this bleak period in Europe's history, its peoples derived hope and courage from the books singing the praises of the Albanian warrior-prince that circulated throughout the continent. One of the first of these accounts of the life, times, and heroic deeds of Skenderbeg was the *Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi, Epirotarum Princeps*, authored by the Albanian Catholic priest and historian Marin Barleti (ca. 1450-1512). This book, which appeared some 40 years (ca. 1508-1510) after the death of the Albanian national hero, was translated into the major European languages during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and enjoyed considerable popularity among the European reading public up to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The English version, based on the French translation of Jacques de

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<sup>3</sup> B. B. Ashcom, "Notes on the Development of the Skanderbeg Theme," *Comparative Literature* 5 (Winter 1953): 16-29; Skender Luarasi, "Skenderbeu ne Letersine Angleze," *Konferenca e Dyte e Studimeve Albanologjike: Tirane, 12-18 Janar 1968* (Tirane: Universiteti Shteteror i Tiranes, 1969), pp. 229-234; Robert Elsie, "Benjamin Disraeli and Skanderbeg: 'The Novel The Rise of Iskander' (1833) as a Contribution to Britain's Literary Discovery of Albania," in *Sudostforschungen* 52 (1993): 25-52.

Lavardin, was completed by Zachary Jones Gentleman and published in London in 1596 under the title *Histoire of George Castriot, surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albinie, containing his famous Actes, his Noble Deeds of Armes, and Memorable Victories against the Turkes for the Faith of Christ*. This translation of the Barleti biography of Scanderbeg remained one of the prime sources of information regarding the life and career of Skenderbeg in both England and the United States into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There were among others, two noteworthy 16<sup>th</sup> century English translations that burnished the reputation of Skenderbeg in the English-speaking world. The first of these was titled *A short Treatise upon the Turke's Chronicles*, published in London in 1546. This work was a translation of the *Commentario delle cose de Turchi*, by Paulus Jovius, Bishop of Nocera. Jovius in this work asserts that the contributions of Skenderbeg in the struggle against the Ottoman Turks surpassed those of other Christian leaders of his time. The second translation was Andrea Gambini's *Two very notable commentaries, the one the originall of the house of Ottomanno, written by Andrew Cambine, and the other of the warres of the Turke against George Scanderbeg*. Collectively these 16<sup>th</sup> century accounts of the exploits of Skenderbeg served initially as a source of inspiration to Christian Europe's struggle against the Muslim Ottoman Turks. They subsequently, especially in the case of the English-language version of Lavardin's work, became important sources for the study of both the 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century European-Ottoman wars and for the life of Skenderbeg.

The Skenderbeg theme reoccurs at various times in English literature throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, again emphasizing his role as a bulwark of Christian resistance to the expansionist impulses of the Ottoman Empire. Although Skenderbeg was also the subject of several novels and plays in England during this period, his most significant impact on the intellectual life of England's American colonies derived from such historical studies as Richard Knolle's *The Generall Historie of the Turks from the first beginning of that nation to the Rising of the Ottoman Familie, Together with the Lives and Conquest of the Ottoman Kings and Emperors*, published in London in 1603; and, of course, Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which was published during the American Revolution (1776-

78). Although he devoted only a portion of a chapter to Skenderbeg, Gibbon's contribution to the historical literature on the subject is important for his questioning what he views as the virtually uncritical adulation that the Albanian national hero had enjoyed up to that point. But helping to enhance the image Skenderbeg enjoyed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century were the evaluations of him by such prominent personalities of this era as the diplomat and author Sir William Temple, who included Skenderbeg among what he termed the seven uncrowned chieftains of history;<sup>4</sup> and the martyred hero of the Battle of Quebec (1759) General James Wolfe, who three years earlier had commented in a letter to Thomas Townshend:

...and if a tolerable account could be got of the exploits of Scanderbeg, it would be inestimable; for he excels all the officers, ancient and modern, in the conduct of a small defensive army. I met with him in the Turkish history, but nowhere else. . . .<sup>5</sup>

The cultural bonds between Great Britain and its former colonies remained close following the establishment of the United States. The interest on the part of segments of the American reading public and many of the fledgling nation's writers in the Balkans, Albania, and the figure of Skenderbeg was kept alive by the accounts of travelers to the region. Especially influential in this respect both in England and the United States were the writings of John Cam Hobhouse and Lord Byron. Both Hobhouse's book, *Journey through Albania and Turkey...1809-1810 (1813)* republished in an American edition in 1817, and Byron's lengthy poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-19) were enthusiastically received in literary circles both in England and America, and they reinforced the exotic and romanticized images of Albania and its national hero fashioned during the previous two centuries.

Typical of the interest on the part of the Anglo-American reading public in the Skenderbeg theme was the response generated by Benjamin Disraeli's melodramatic novel *The Rise of Iskender*, first

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<sup>4</sup> Sir William Temple, "Essay of Heroic Virtue," in *Works*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Hamilton and Balfour, 1754), pp. 226-315.

<sup>5</sup> Beggles Willson, *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe* (New York: Dodd Mead), pp. 296-97.

published in England in 1833 and in the United States in 1842. Although the novel is considered one of the lesser products of Disraeli's literary efforts, it remained in print in both countries until the 1920s. Although the plot in the novel in its broad outline is based on the history of Skenderbeg, its hero is a "Grecian Prince" from "Croia, the capital city of Epirus," who after a series of trials succeeds in winning the hand of his beloved.<sup>6</sup>

It is against this background that we enter the second phase of the Skenderbeg odyssey to America. As previously noted, the predominantly British populated American colonies shared in the intellectual and cultural heritage of the mother country both prior to and following their achievement of independence. The cultural life of the new nation was nurtured by the establishment of private and public colleges and universities as well as public and private secondary schools both before and after independence. The relative prosperity of the United States contributed to the emergence of a commercial and professional class that formed the core of the emerging reading public. The gradual establishment of public libraries contributed to the growing interest in and demand for books. These developments in turn created an expanding market for the output of American writers.<sup>7</sup>

Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863)<sup>8</sup> had already attained literary fame in the United States when he authored his biography of Skenderbeg titled *George Castriot, Surnamed Scanderbeg* in 1850.<sup>9</sup> His celebrity status, much to his dismay, did not derive from his scholarly writing. Rather, it had resulted from a poem titled "A Visit from St. Nicholas," which he had written in 1822 as a gift for his five children. As knowledge of the poem spread, it soon became a Christmas classic known to most Americans as "the Night before Christmas."

But, in reality, Clement Clarke Moore was an archetypical 19<sup>th</sup> century American intellectual. He was an only son in a family of wealth, learning, and status. His mother, Charity Clarke, was an heiress

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed discussion of this novel see Elsie, op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> See Curti, op. cit., pp. 51-337.

<sup>8</sup> The only full-length biography of Moore that I have been able to locate is Samuel White Patterson, *The Poet of Christmas Eve: A Life of Clement Clarke Moore* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1956). I have drawn extensively from this source in my discussion of Moore.

<sup>9</sup> The book was published by D. Appleton Company, a respected New York publisher.

to the fortune of a prominent New York family and his father was the Episcopal Bishop of New York and President of Columbia College. Clement Moore was tutored at home, where he completed a traditional classical curriculum (languages, mathematics, literature, etc.) before enrolling at Columbia. He graduated first in his class in 1798 and three years later received his M.A. from the same institution. Shortly thereafter he was appointed Professor of Biblical Learning and Greek and Oriental Languages and Literatures at the General Theological Seminary, which prepared clergy for service in the Protestant Episcopal Church. In addition to compiling the first Hebrew lexicon in America, he published articles in such diverse areas as religion, languages, poetry, and politics.

Moore appears to have embarked upon the serious study of Skenderbeg and his era during the latter half of the 1840s. He was apparently already familiar with Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* since this work was in his personal library. As Moore recalls, 'The high encomiums passed by Dr. Samuel Johnson in the 22d number of his Rambler, upon Knolles' History of the Turks induced me to procure that work from England. . . .I was much interested and entertained by the account given of Scanderbeg, the heroic prince of Epira, and great enemy and scourge of the Turks. . . .'<sup>10</sup>

Moore proceeded to request the proprietor of the bookstore he patronized to "import any 'Life' of George Castriot, surnamed Scanderbeg, King of the Albanians, he could find on foreign publishers lists." Among the first of the books he received in response to this request was the English translation of Jacques Lavardin's *The Historie of George Castriot . . .* by Zachary Jones Gentleman. Before he completed his research, Moore had consulted sources not only in English and French, but also in Latin. Included in the latter category was the Marin Barleti account of Skenderbeg's exploits. Apparently this study made a profound impression on Moore. Originally his intention was to edit and modernize the language in the Lavardin book. He thus eliminated those sections of the book in which Skenderbeg had not played an active role, summarized what he considered to be the less important speeches, and modified or excised passages that he believed interfered with the flow of the narrative. But as the work progressed, it

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<sup>10</sup> Patterson, op. cit., p. 136.

began to reflect more of Moore's insights and reactions to the personalities and events about which he was writing. In this connection Patterson observes:

Again as with St. Nick, Moore has a sure grasp of the art of making a character live. George Castriot is a vivid personality as his biographer molds him chapter after chapter. His essential greatness is brought out by a contrast with his bitter enemy the Sultan Murad II, and by an etching in clear lines of the devotion of the Albanian people to their deliverer.<sup>11</sup>

The content of this biography follows the pattern of what can be termed the traditional Skenderbeg narrative. It traces the progress of Skenderbeg's life from his service as a hostage of the Sultan and his forced conversion to Islam to his assuming the leadership of the Albanian anti-Ottoman resistance movement and his nearly quarter century struggle to free his homeland. Beyond this, Moore strives to make Skenderbeg a lifelike figure by providing a description of his physical characteristics and prowess, his speech, and his manner and bearing in varying situations as well as his personality. Above all, however, Moore emphasizes the moral and spiritual virtues that distinguished Skenderbeg from both his allies and his enemies. Moore's admiration for the subject of his biography is best summarized in the conclusion of his book, where he observes:

Such were the life and death and posthumous honors of this most extraordinary person; whose single arm may be said to have rescued his country from the dominion of the Turks, and to have preserved its liberty and glory as long as his life was spared.<sup>12</sup>

Although Moore's biography of Skenderbeg initially generated some interest on the part of American readers, it did not sell particularly well and within several years disappeared from bookstore shelves. It did, however, serve as a resource for those interested in developments in the decaying 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire and as an inspiration for at least a few writers in search of a new theme to explore.

One of the most prominent of Moore's contemporaries to have been attracted to the Skenderbeg saga was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), who during the course of his lifetime would become

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<sup>11</sup> Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>12</sup>As cited in Patterson, p. 138.

America's most beloved and popular poet. Longfellow was an admirer of Lord Byron and may well have been introduced to Skenderbeg and Albania through the British poet's writings.<sup>13</sup> It is also probable that Longfellow was aware of Moore's biography of Skenderbeg. Like Moore, Longfellow was born into a family of wealth and prominence.<sup>14</sup> His father was a successful lawyer in Portland, Maine, who later served in the U.S. Congress. As a youth, Longfellow enjoyed reading and was intrigued by the foreign languages he heard sailors speaking on the streets of Portland. He developed a fondness for stories set in foreign locales such as the *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and many of the Shakespearean plays. After completing his studies at several private schools, Longfellow at the age of 14 entered Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, in 1821. After graduating in 1825, he traveled in Italy, France, and Spain for three years to improve his facility in these Romance languages. Upon his return to the United States, he served from 1829 to 1831 as a professor of modern languages and librarian at Bowdoin. He then returned to Europe to study the Scandinavian and Dutch languages and literature. His sojourn in Europe was cut short by the untimely death of his first wife in 1835. Longfellow accepted an appointment as professor of European literature at Harvard, where he taught until his retirement in 1854. From the time of his undergraduate days at Bowdoin, Longfellow attempted to combine the demands of the academic life with those of maintaining his creative production. By 1854, with his financial situation secure, he decided to devote his full time to writing. He thus became America's first full-time poet.

Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, which includes the saga of Skenderbeg, had been gestating for nearly two decades before it appeared. It is one of Longfellow's more controversial works. He has been accused of borrowing heavily from Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Cantebury Tales* in formulating the concept of this work and in the presentation of its component parts.<sup>15</sup> This poem was published

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<sup>13</sup> Newton Arvin, *Longfellow: His Life and Works* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), pp. 9, 214, 216-17.

<sup>14</sup> For biographical background on Longfellow and an overview of his writings, see Arvin, op.cit.; and Bonnie L. Lukes, *Longfellow: America's Beloved Poet* (Greensboro, NC: Morgan-Reynolds, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Arvin, op. cit., pp. 205-8.

in three parts: the first appeared in 1863; the second in 1872; and the third in 1873. The tale of Skenderbeg was published in the final installment of this series.

A review of the content of this work suggests to me that Longfellow most likely derived his inspiration for the poem from Barleti and possibly Moore. He may also have profited from his knowledge of Byron.<sup>16</sup> Fan Noli, however, in considering both the content and the literary form, believes the poet has relied mainly on Demetrio Franco, “whose variations,” he says, “are faithfully reproduced” by Longfellow.<sup>17</sup>

Longfellow’s Skenderbeg deals with one interconnected episode in the career of Albanian’s national hero: his defection from the Turks following the Battle of Nish in 1443, his extortion of a royal decree appointing him governor of Albania, his seizure of Kruja, and his raising of the banner of revolt, “The Black Eagle with double head.”

Although Albanians and Albanian-Americans have come to treasure Longfellow’s Scanderbeg in both its original English version, and especially in its Albanian translation by Fan Noli,<sup>18</sup> some American critics have been less generous in their appraisals. Arvin, for example, observes that ““Scanderbeg” . . . is a short ballad like poem of vigorous action more reminiscent of Byron . . . with its ferocious Albanian hero who treacherously beheads the Turkish Pasha’s Scribe by a sudden stroke of his scimitar. It has a certain dash, but it is one of the least interesting of the *Tales*.”<sup>19</sup> Patterson adds that while “admirable” “Scanderbeg” is not the best of Longfellow’s *Tales*.<sup>20</sup>

Irrespective of the controversies surrounding Longfellow’s *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, excerpts from this work were included in some high school and university literature anthologies for nearly a century following its publication. In this manner, a number of Americans became acquainted with the exploits of Skenderbeg and received their first, and for most, their only lesson in Albanian history. The

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Fan Stylian Noli, *George Castrioti Scanderbeg (1405-1406)* (New York: International Universities Press), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Noli’s original translation of this work was published in 1916. It also appears in *Albumi dyzet vjecar ne Amerike, 1906-1946* (Boston: VATRA, 1948), pp. 56-62.

<sup>19</sup> Arvin, *op.cit.*, pp. 216-17.

<sup>20</sup> Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

publication of Longfellow's "Scanderbeg" helped to spread the knowledge of Albania and its national hero beyond the narrow segment of the American public to which, up to this point, it had been confined. Longfellow's "Scanderbeg" was also among the first examples of American literature to have been translated into Albanian, and it remains one of the works in American literature most frequently cited or quoted by Albanian-Americans to this day.

The last of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American authors to publish a book on the Skenderbeg theme was James Meeker Ludlow (1841-1932).<sup>21</sup> As was the case with the two previous 19<sup>th</sup> century authors, Ludlow came from a well-established American family whose ancestors had settled in New York during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. After completing his preparatory education, he enrolled in Princeton University, from which he graduated in 1861. Subsequently he earned his graduate degree in theology and began his career as a Presbyterian minister. He enjoyed a reputation as a dynamic preacher and persuasive author of newspaper articles on religious and social issues.

In 1881, Dr. Ludlow undertook an extended tour through Egypt, Greece, Turkey, and the Holy Land. This experience apparently sparked his interest in Skenderbeg. After completing a book project in 1883, he again turned his attention to Skenderbeg. What emerged from his efforts was a novel titled *Captain of the Janizaries (A Story of the Time of Scanderbeg and the Fall of Constantinople)*, first published in 1886 by Funk and Wagnalls. The book also appeared in a British edition.

Based both on his reading and his travel in Southeast Europe and the eastern Mediterranean, Ludlow displays a good knowledge of the geography of the area as well as its history. He appears to have been acquainted with the traditional accounts relating to Skenderbeg, including Moore's. Although Ludlow takes those liberties with historical facts that are appropriate for a novelist, his narrative is grounded in reality. The novel portrays "the Captain of the Janizaries" as a principled, humane leader who harbors a deep and abiding love for Albania even as he serves his Ottoman masters. Among the major strengths of this work are its realistic portrayals of the various

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<sup>21</sup> For biographical information regarding Ludlow, see *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 8 (New York: James T. White & Company, 1924), p. 59.

characters as well as its attention-grabbing descriptions of the landscapes on which they perform.

In retrospect, it is apparent that, with the possible exception of Longfellow, the trio of 19<sup>th</sup> century American writers who had made Skenderbeg the focus of at least one of their major creative efforts had enjoyed only limited popular and commercial success with this subject. This situation was understandable given the diminishing interest in Skenderbeg on the part of the European public during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as the Ottoman threat to the continent steadily declined. Indeed, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, governments and public opinion were more concerned with the issue of the so-called Eastern Question—how to address the problems arising from the decay of the Ottoman Empire.

This indifference was also reflected in the attitudes of American elites, who were increasingly preoccupied with issues of economic and social development in the country as well as with its sectional conflicts. Furthermore, there was no Albanian-American community in place at this time to keep an interest in Skenderbeg alive in the United States.

The establishment of the Albanian-American community and its emergence as a leading center of the Albanian nationalist movement during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century marks the beginning of the third phase of the Skenderbeg odyssey in the United States. As the patriotic sentiments of the steadily increasing community began to intensify, the memory of Skenderbeg and his exploits served once again to promote a stronger sense of national unity and pride among Albanian-Americans.

At this critical juncture the community was fortunate to have within its ranks two talented and charismatic leaders, Fan Noli (1882-1965) and Faik Konica (1876-1942). Both had earned university degrees and were avid students of Albanian history. Konica had edited the journal *Albania* first in Brussels and then in London between 1897 and 1909. He arrived in the United States in 1909 and served at various times as editor of *Dielli* and president of VATRA. Konica was unquestionably one of the best-informed Albanians on the life and activities of Skenderbeg and of the scholarship concerning him.<sup>22</sup> In the period during which he had edited *Albania* Konica had discovered in various

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<sup>22</sup> See Jup Kastrati, *Faik Konitza* (Monografi) (New York: Gjonlekaj Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 273-81.

European libraries and museums valuable artifacts and documents relating to his illustrious compatriot and had written brief articles about these in *Albania* and other Albanian-language publications. Between 8 August 1912 and 17 November 1918 he had also published in *Dielli* a series of articles titled “Jeta e Skender Beut,” which appeared as a supplement to this newspaper.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately these do not seem to have been collected and published in either book or pamphlet form. Tragically, Konica at the time of his death had failed to complete the chapter on Skenderbeg for his book *Albania: The Rock Garden of Southeastern Europe*. This task fell to Gerim Panarity, a long-time editor of *Dielli*. Panarity’s account of Skenderbeg in this book, as he acknowledges, was essentially a summary of “Bishop Noli’s writings and a few other sources.”<sup>24</sup>

Skenderbeg scholarship would have been considerably enriched if Konitza had devoted more of his energies to his scholarly research and writing, and less to some unproductive activities. Yet Albanians everywhere are indebted to Konica for reporting in *Albania* and other publications the results of his research on such matters of interest as the helmet and arms of Skenderbeg, Skenderbeg’s various portraits, the geography of the regions where Skenderbeg’s battles had been fought, and the location and holdings of the repositories containing important documents and artifacts pertaining to Skenderbeg.

Noli, on the other hand, authored two important biographies of Skenderbeg. The first, *Historia e Skenderbeut*, was published in Albanian under the auspices of VATRA in 1921. This volume had in part been written to satisfy the demand from the Albanian-American community for a biography of Skenderbeg in their native language and to strengthen their national pride. The second of Noli’s Skenderbeg biographies was published in English in 1947.<sup>25</sup> It was a revision of Noli’s 1945 Boston University doctoral dissertation. It is especially valuable for its critical evaluation of the Skenderbeg scholarly literature. The narrative text chapters (1-6) provide a fine overview of the life and activities of Skenderbeg interspersed with comments and

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

<sup>24</sup> See Faik Konitza, *Albania: The Rock Garden of Southeastern Europe*, ed. G. M. Panarity (Boston: VATRA, 1957), note, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> Fan Stylian Noli, *George Castrioti Scanderbeg (1405-1468)* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947).

notes by the author to highlight points of contention among scholars on aspects of the Skenderbeg saga. Noli's 1947 biographical study of Skenderbeg continues to serve as a useful resource for those interested in conducting further research on Albania's national hero. Another of Noli's important publications relating to the Skenderbeg theme was his Albanian translation of Longfellow's "Scanderbeg." It was published in pamphlet form by VATRA in 1916. This publication was intended to underscore for Albanian-Americans the historical significance of Skenderbeg and to reinforce their patriotic sentiments.

A further noteworthy Noli contribution to the Skenderbeg legacy is his symphonic poem "Skenderbeg" composed in 1937 while Noli was a student at the prestigious New England Conservatory of Music. According to Noli's notes, the poetic setting for this work is the Longfellow poem "Scanderbeg" from *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. Unfortunately, this composition has been rarely performed. In conjunction with the commemoration of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Skenderbeg's birth, however, a Russian recording company announced the release of a CD of Albanian music that includes the performance of Noli's "Skenderbeg."<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to note that the authors of the first two English-language books on Albanian history published by members of the Albanian-American community, Constantine A. Checkrezi<sup>27</sup> and Christo A. Dako,<sup>28</sup> both included brief chapters on the era of Skenderbeg in their respective books. Checkrezi employed excerpts from Longfellow's "Scanderbeg" in his work in order to elicit sympathy for the Albanian cause from the American and European audiences for which the work was intended. With the newly independent Albanian state facing dismemberment in the aftermath of World War I, both Checkrezi and Dako sought to capitalize on the Skenderbeg theme by noting that Albania under the leadership of Skenderbeg had fought to save Europe from Muslim domination and was now deserving of support to restore its independence and territorial integrity.

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<sup>26</sup> See "Albanian Music Classics/Klasike Muzikore Shqiptare" <http://www.Kailas.ru/en/release.phtml> and "Music in Albanian History and the Figure of Scanderbeg" <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/music/staff/ek/4articl.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Constantine A. Checkrezi, *Albania Past and Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1919).

<sup>28</sup> Christo A. Dako, *Albania: The Master Key to the Balkans* (Boston: E. L. Grimes, 1919).

During the interwar period, the Albanian-language press in the United States and Albanian-American organizations such as VATRA continued to use the Skenderbeg theme to foster both unity within the community and national pride. In 1939, for example, when the Albanian-American newspaper *Bota* published its “Kalendari i Botes i Vitit 1939,” it included a three-page spread consisting of a full-page photograph of a painting of Skenderbeg in battle dress, excerpts from Longfellow’s “Scanderbeg,” and a poem titled “Scanderbeg” by the Irish-American poet Padraic Colum (1881-1972) that had originally appeared in the *Dublin Magazine* two years earlier. In this manner, the Skenderbeg heritage and legacy continued to be preserved within the Albanian community in the United States.

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the national hero’s death in 1968 provided an opportunity for the community to reflect on his role and significance in Albanian history and life. The noted Albanian-American journalist, author, and educator Nelo Drizari timed the release of his book on Skenderbeg<sup>29</sup> to coincide with this event. Somewhat similar to Noli’s study, Drizari’s book is less a biography than a selective literature review, collection of letters and other documents attributed to Skenderbeg, and excerpts from such poems as Longfellow’s “Scanderbeg” and Lord Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” Drizari’s brief biography of Scanderbeg is in the panegyric tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century authors whose works have been previously noted. VATRA also held a seminar to commemorate this important anniversary and produced a booklet containing the presentations made at this meeting. Stavro Skendi, one of the pioneers and most distinguished scholars in the area of Albanological Studies in the United States, also published a brief article on Skenderbeg at this time.<sup>30</sup> He hailed Skenderbeg “as the Albanian national hero who succeeded in uniting his people and defending his country against the expanding Ottoman power, thus becoming the embodiment of Albanian national consciousness.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Nelo Drizari, *Scanderbeg: His Life, Correspondence, Orations, Victories, and Philosophy* (Palo Alto, CA: National Press, 1968).

<sup>30</sup> Stavro Skendi, “Skenderbeg and Albanian National Consciousness,” *Sudost Forschungen* 35 (1968): 83-88.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

In the interim between the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Skenderbeg and 600<sup>th</sup> of his birth, there appears to have been only one new Skenderbeg biography published in English.<sup>32</sup> Although Harry Hodgkinson's posthumous account of Skenderbeg's life and activities breaks little, if any, new ground, it is generally well written and largely reflects the current state of scholarship on the subject. In this connection, it should be noted that the book is intended for a general audience rather than academic specialists. Although published in Great Britain, the book has also been marketed in the United States.

The influx of successive waves of new immigrants into the Albanian-American community in the years following World War II has ensured that the memory of the national hero will continue to be honored in the United States. There has been renewed emphasis, especially in explaining the significance of Skenderbeg to non-Albanians, to underscore that he is the champion and symbol of unity for the entire Albanian nation. And the fact that the Albanian-American community today includes representation from all major Albanian population centers in the Balkans suggests that this outlook will persevere here.

This outlook was apparent a when the Albanian-American community celebrated the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Skenderbeg's birth during 2005. The numerous and varied events—banquets, cultural programs, and seminars—held during the year were on the whole well supported. Also, through the efforts of the Albanian-American Civic League, a Congressional Resolution honoring the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of “Gjergj Castrioti (Scanderbeg), statesman, diplomat, and military genius for his role in saving Western Europe from Ottoman occupation” was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in October.<sup>33</sup> These activities provided convincing evidence of the vitality of the community and of the esteem in which they continue hold Skenderbeg .

It was against this background that the Albanian-American community commemorated the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Skkenderbeg's death in 2018. The celebration began with a symposium in January dedicated to a discussion of the life and exploits of Skenderbeg and his

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<sup>32</sup> Harry Hodgkinson, *Scanderbeg* (London: Center for Albanian Studies, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:H.+Res.+522:>

significance in Albanian history. During the course of the year, there were a broad range of activities in the major centers of the community to celebrate this important anniversary. The 2018 Year of Skenderbeg concluded in the United States with a session devoted to a consideration of the various aspects of the Skenderbeg legacy at the Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies in December. There was also a symposium in Boston under the auspices of the Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese to commemorate the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Skenderbeg and the 110th anniversary of the celebration of the first Divine Liturgy by Father Fan Noli.

In addition to the growth and sophistication of the Albanian-American community, the prospects for the promotion and perpetuation of the Skenderbeg legacy in the United States will, I hope, be enhanced by the developments in printing technology and publication practices of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. With the advent of customized and on-demand printing services and their ties with nation-wide book sellers, it is now possible to provide institutions or individuals with rare and out-of-print books and other publications—especially those not protected by copyright—that were formerly difficult to access. As a consequence, a growing number of works of literature, history, poetry and poetry pertaining to Skenderbeg are now readily available to scholars and others in the United States and elsewhere for study or to pursue other interests.

There are currently more than two dozen English language titles relating to Skenderbeg that can be found on Amazon or similar on-line sources. They range from Z.J. Gentleman's *The Famous Acts of George Castriot, Surnamed Scanderbeg (1596)* to Moore's 1850 and Noli's 1947 biographies. There are also references to the dramas of Thomas Whincop (1747), William Harvard (1733) and George Lillo (1735?) as well as to works of fiction such as James M.Ludlow's *Captain of the Janizaries ...*

The past decade has also seen the publication of several books which in varying degrees have contributed to the preservation of the Skenderbeg legacy in the United States. The first of these is Halit Daci's *Scanderbeg, or the Knight of the Eagle (2009)*.<sup>34</sup> This important

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<sup>34</sup> Halit Daci, *Scanderbeg or, the Knight of the Eagle* (Tirane, 2009)

study is an outgrowth of the author's M. A. thesis at SUNY/Lehman College titled "Scanderbeg in Anglo-American Literature." It provides a comprehensive compilation along with a valuable review and an analysis of the Skenderbeg theme in English language literature from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is an essential starting point for those who wish to further explore this topic.

A.K. Brackob's *Scanderbeg: a History of the Albanian Resistance to Islamic to Islamic Expansion in Fifteenth Century Europe*(2018)<sup>35</sup> was, according to the author, written to commemorate the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Skenderbeg's death and to memorialize his valuable contributions to the preservation of Western Civilization and European Christianity by his resolute opposition to "fifteenth century Islamic expansionism". Brackob emphasizes Skenderbeg's role in inculcating a sense of unity and national identity among Albanians that would be ingrained in their memories for generations. The book is based primarily on an array of Albanian and non-Albanian pre-2000 secondary sources. It presents what may be best termed a conventional account of Skenderbeg's life and activities that has its roots in the Barleti biography.

Shpetim "Tim" Lezi, an Albanian-American author and journalist, has also made several contributions to the Skenderbeg English-language bibliography during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with his compilation titled, *Scanderbeg, The Hero of Europe: Three Books*. This publish- on-request book is comprised of the author's Preface consisting of brief excerpts of poetry and prologues to plays from a variety 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century authors, including Naim Frasheri, that extol the deeds of Skenderbeg. The first of the "three books" included in this work is Lezi's novel, *Scanderbeg "General of the Eagles."* This is an entertaining work, but essentially a retelling of the traditional Skenderbeg saga. The next two "books" are the author's revised versions of two 18<sup>th</sup> century dramas: George Lillo's "Scanderbeg, the Christian Hero," and Thomas Whincop's, "Scanderbeg, Love and Liberty". Although publishing these plays in an attractive format is commendable, the value of this effort is somewhat diminished by the compiler's failure to provide neither an introduction nor some

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<sup>35</sup> A.K. Brackob, *Scanderbeg: A History of George Castriota and the Albanian Resistance to Islamic Expansion in Fifteenth Century Europe* (Buffalo: Histria, 2018.).

explanatory textual comments to assist the reader in better understanding these works.

With the passing of the Year of Skenderbeg, those of us in the United States must be concerned with keeping his memory and legacy alive in our country. How might we seek to realize this goal?

First, we must strive to expand and enhance our knowledge of the role and significance of Skenderbeg in Albanian and European history to ensure that our succeeding generations will appreciate and preserve this legacy. And, as I have indicated, the greater accessibility of printed, electronic, and other sources relating to Skenderbeg may facilitate the realization of this objective.

Second, as Skenderbeg demonstrates during his quarter-century struggle against the Ottoman Empire, Albanians are capable of great accomplishments when they are united. The challenge now confronting the Albanian-American community is to work to achieve a much higher degree of unity and cooperation than currently exists to ensure the preservation of our national identity and heritage so that we can better serve the interests of our community and those of the Albanian nation.

And finally, we can honor the memory of Skenderbeg by adopting and practicing those values and virtues for which he is known—honor, integrity, patriotism, bravery, selflessness, and hard work—in our personal, professional, and public lives.