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**RECEPTION OF SCANDERBEG'S HISTORY IN SOME  
ESSENTIAL WORKS IN THE WRITTEN ALBANIAN  
LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>**

The chronology of the written Albanian literature is above all related to the patchy texts and unique works from the content point-of-view, as each initial definition and of the presence in them of some textual elements defining the particularity and also the common thematic that makes possible a generalizing classification that characterize these works.

In general, in the logical publications compiled by groups of authors and with a thematic that describes historiographically in details the works of the year 1500 and with written records about that time, we find them in line and treated with the right attention of elaborated fulfillments mainly at the beginning of this providential century, in which would be eternalized at the same time the concrete periods that encaptured the historical developments in our country, mainly the political personalities of the European dimension that influenced in the development of the time's historic events, among which beyond any doubt and the most impressive one remains Gjergj Kastrioti, Scanderbeg.

Such a strategist, has been retaken since the period in which he lived and worked and has been given the characteristics of the hero, the military man and also of the personality acted as equal at international level. Not few works of the historic and documentary character result to have been realized and retaken in the European circles of literature and culture, each with particularities connected with the formation of the respective authors and with the motivation that they had in the aspect of celebrating such a special figure as that of our Kastrioti.

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

The beginning of 1500 would be marked among others things from the publishing of one of the editions of *Rrethimi i Shkodrës/The siege of Shkodra (De obsidione Scodrensi)*, one of the most well-known books of Marin Barleti, an author with a remarkable cultural preparation concretizing in the fact that his book has widely treating the figure of the Albanian leader, has been written in a cultivated Latin, fraught with not inconsiderable assets of usages, forms and evocations in searching the expressed perfection and in the wording that are collected in the content of his work. Classified among the publishing of our written historic literature in parallel of Gjon Buzuku's book and other books following it at that time, Marin Barleti's work marks another achievement of the Albanian scripture and of the possibility to eternalize a work of mainly historic profile with characters, contexts and figures of a reality that breaths through the person of Gjergj Kastrioti, an Albanian prince that had among other things an unusual perspicuity as for the vision on the territorial integrity, on the connection among the Albanian communities in our lands, on the relations with the time's nobility, on the relations with the neighboring regions and especially with those of the Italian Peninsula.

Not less interest presents the fact that the echo of his deeds doesn't delays to reach the regions of the other side of the Adriatic and more precisely, in the territory of a consolidated state by land and also by sea, and in the context of different circumstances didn't presented itself coherent in the relations with the Ottoman power of the time. Venice or the Serenissima wasn't indifferent towards the concrete achievements and goals of our hero, meantime attentively followed every development that might happen during the processes that have been an encouragement among other things for considerable waves of migration from one coast of the Adriatic to the other. It should be said again that such a period is marked by typical migration movements towards the Italian shores and from such a typical consolidation for the time itself of a relation that would be long marked during the history of both countries.

The perpetuation of Scanderbeg's figure also in these regions is believed that has happened through reflecting it in architectonic and artistic reflections that are still found today in monumental churches in specific regions and thus continue to evoke un undeniable relation

between the two countries, a connection which served as a bridge and medium precisely the history of the achievements of this unique and unrepeatable hero, legendary in the sense that made possible to intertwine even in the fantasy of his contemporaries narrative forms which are particular because of the fact that were outlined in specific historic circumstances.

Gjergj Kastrioti's figure was impetuous to draft the chronicles that still today are found in the most important archives of Europe. Not less, this figure was inspiring on the works of another nature, mainly glorifier, that of course didn't exclude at all the documentary component, important even in the today view, meanwhile that the historic research is inclined to be presented more objectively about the characterization of the period taken into consideration on the concrete role that this hero has played in history.<sup>2</sup>

Scanderbeg as personality has continued to draw the attention of the scholars who since the early years have emphasized the necessity of identifying indices of his biography that should be specified, by not diminishing the weight of his role on the time's historic developments. In the optic of a critical view, the data offered by Marin Barleti are again seen from the successors or Barleti's scholars themselves, causing inconsistencies in the latter narrations.<sup>3</sup>

In assistance of this objective view, are added the remarks that Fan Noli has put forward at the time when he dedicated himself to the study of Scanderbeg's history, remarks that are brought in the presentations on which the scholar Stefan Prifti accompanies the translated version fixed up with notes of Barleti's work. Noli himself, saw it reasonable to clarify the contextual differentiation and in the critical apparatus view to be contained in the re-edition of his work, which he introduces by

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<sup>2</sup> What is transmitted in works that were predestined to have a historiography nature, has been further made an object of attention from the part of scholars of the period taken into examination, that no doubt includes the historic and political conditions that prepared the more and more insistent invasion of the Ottoman power in the Balkan with a clear aim on Europe. See Sirdani M. O.F.M., *Kontribut për historinë e kulturën shqiptare*, Botime Françeskane, Shkodër, 2017, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> See also Pall F., *I Rapporti italo-albanesi intorno alla metà del secolo XV (Documenti inediti con introduzione e note storiche-critiche)*, Estratto dall'Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane, Terza serie, Vol.IV, Società Napoletana di storia patria, Napoli, 1966.

doing the role belonging to him as author and scholar of this complex argument and with interest for the history of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

Out of these facts, rightfully can be brought to attention some study remarks in the actual celebrations on the death anniversary of our national hero, Marin Barleti's work continues to present an object of interest, especially for a very objective reason: his work was written in a culture language with great importance for his time, a language which actually and especially for the accomplishments of that time includes Barleti as a factor that can be considered a bearer of remarkable characteristics on the writing view, of the possibility to use expressive elements and also stylistic performance. Meantime, is clearly seen that the author himself in the works written in the Latin about *The siege of Shkodra* and on *The life and deeds of Scanderbeg* has described a kind of not casual journey in the process of their preparation, by putting competencies to work, among which his writing, a mastery that continues to classify him one of the renowned biographers of Gjergj Kastrioti, Scanderbeg.

Certainly, the author has recognized the artifices and the time's procreations, has used useful means possible to him, because he had knowledge of antiquity on some most renowned personalities of it, but this fact doesn't corrupt at all the other accomplishments of his, that from the scholars and in particular the translator of his work are put in evidence in a concrete way, with translation examples or orthography of specific constructions. In the view of a detailed analyzes on the content elements and of texts based on Barleti's work, cannot remain out of the attention details that are connected with the local places nominations, with the typical weapons characteristics of each bellicose part, with the modalities of the besieged people way of fight, also of the attackers, a clear trace that the besieged part, the Christian faith, as inspiring force in parallel of the love for the homeland, a very strong component in the psyche of the characters that are the leading figures in these works.

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<sup>4</sup> Particularly see *the Foreword* through which Noli has equipped the second publishing of his work on Scanderbeg (Boston, 1950), written on April 1949 in Boston. Indeed, in this work Noli first of all clarifies how important remain the premises of an objective recognition of the events that have forerun the birth of a historic period of its own as was that of Gjergj Kastrioti's personality development, the leader of the Albanian regions.

The drafting of Marin Barleti's works in the Latin language proves among other things the benefit of his formation in a deeply cultural and European context, which has also left his traces in the adapted mental forms reflected in the writings of this author, and in the stand he seems that carries meanwhile describing the events that were an inspiring motive for drafting the mentioned works. The degree of his cultural preparation seems that has been closely followed by men of learning and time's patrons, renowned people for affirming the cultural and of bibliophilic aspect, as is lately emphasized from researchers of his working at best of further clarifying the indices that have to do as with the hero's figure, also with the data that prove how are intertwined the historic destinies of that time peoples, thanks to circumstances and events on which Gjergj Kastrioti plays an indisputable role.

Barleti's narration remains an object of interest in two directions: it can be observed as in the edited texts in the Latin language, also in the drafted ones by the translators of the book, among which as more interesting versions on our observations will consider those in the Albanian language, edited by the classicists and good connoisseurs of philological knowledge: Henrik Lacaj and Stefan Prifti.

Each of the translators into Albanian contributes in his way in reading Barleti's work, meantime that can be spoken for a continuity in using lasting usages in its content, in the meaning of the usages that take exceptional value exactly for the fact that are references towards the main scribes in it; toponomastic, onomastics, special linguistic registers that are exactly cultivated when are undertaken such fulfillments that are not lost from the attention in the documentary aspect on which is based the narration that makes possible the reader's approach with the content. And in the usages view that makes possible to be felt a typical spirit for a work of those dimensions, it's clearly visible the author's influence towards analogue works that were written at that time and reflecting beyond any doubt a political inclination in understanding and presenting the enemies and the image of the rulers of the time.

In case of battle scenes, the descriptions that have to do with preludes or pre military situations, in case of episodes that are explained in the context of a battle between two opposing sides, by no doubt the narration also takes characteristics which by not having as

purpose the aim to move away from this documentary aspect, brings towards the reception of a different contextual nature of the work, comparable with their similar fulfillments, not far in time of Barleti's corpus. This approach can be clearly felt even in the case when this work is presented in a different dimension as is the translation one, but is clearly presented during the reading process in the Latin language version, by making possible to us the renewed acquaintance of some mental and textual schemes proving that the author was aware of many artifices that were used when such works were drafted.

The critic that has found an excuse from the reading of the work, with reason emphasized on a more suitable method of its reading, especially about the usages that the archaeology knowledge specifies after making the territorial recognition and verification, having in mind the closest location of the regions mentioned in the work. This aspect should be taken into consideration if Barleti's work can have a functional value, out of its reception in literary circles and in the writing history.

The fact itself that among the main Barleti's accomplishments is classified the history of life and deeds of Scanderbeg with editions and re-editions, making on his personality to be laid hypotheses, to be asked for more about the issue of authorship of other similar works, of the presumed possible impacts and on all others biographers of Gjergj Kastrioti.

A useful clue about the attention to be drawn in this direction remains the textual and ornamental that accompany his known volumes, elements that are presented richer in content and data transmit if compared with the book of Gjon Buzuku. Meantime, such elements serve to put in evidence the time's editions similarities and affinities, that could be approached with the works that we take into consideration in different views, mainly thematic ones.

Remains all this period an object of interest for the researchers of the work, and also to the contexts that cannot be easily detached from anything that was happening in a geographical and political realm with clear connection to the Albanian territories and their history.

Barleti is considered a relatively good connoisseur of the events that have to do with the Turkish occupation in our territories, is presented as a biographer of Scanderbeg's life and deeds, facts these that help in a

certain way to deduce his relation with the country of Albania and perhaps the related age that he might have had when was living such events. There are scholars that emphasize with surety the issue of the direct recognition from Barleti's side of the Albanian territories written in his works, while others which have a more objective interest in studying the author's work and personality, relativising such cognitions in dependence of facts that still remain to be further clarified or verified. Indeed, this compounds a line that distinguishes a clear inclination in the research precisely directed on Barleti's person and seems that has cherished the interest of many scholars of that period in which the latter was living on.

Barleti will be reexamined not far in time if we consider the apologetic elaboration and not at all casual of a opusculum with Kastrioti's figure in the center, who was published after a year as an important work on the history of the old Albanian writing, *Latin-Albanian Dictionary* of Frang Bardhi, published in Rome on 1635. A modest work concerning the volume, but well originated and reasoned since its beginnings and naturally attached to all the arsenal of the works that are known to us in the writing tradition with our studies in the Albanian language. Its equipment with dedicating texts and introductive explanations, also gives the right textual characteristics to approach the time's models point-of-view constructions, approximate in thematic and substantial point-of-view.<sup>5</sup> The celebrative attributes on which is glorified the figure of the Epirotes prince, since the introductory pages of this work, also go along with the spirit of the time on which were drafted the works of this nature, and with all the context who saw the character of Gjergj Kastrioti as hero. The name of this Albanian writing history prelate is also therefore connected with a work of this nature, except that with reports that shed light on the church history of our country, with approbatory that prove his active presence on researching of catechism and liturgical editing progress in the Albanian language, or on works of lexicographic nature that remain unique in the history of the Albanological studies. The philological devotion of Stefan Prifti towards the content and its essential elements, remains a factor not without importance on considering and treating the

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<sup>5</sup> Bardhi F., *Skënderbeu (Apologji)*, translated from the Latin by Stefan Prifti, second edition, Tiranë, 1967.

responding version in the Albanian language of this small work, that read on the language in which was elaborated, also remains a prove of author's engagement on questions that have to do with the patriotism (our national hero's "Albanianhood", to use an expression of S. Prifti)<sup>6</sup> and in searching the right on a principled point-of-view.<sup>7</sup>

Meantime, it should be put on evidence that such an important motive for the national identity and the question of its continuity, made possible that on important periods of the writing of the history has to be retaken a lapidary figure as Gjergj Kastrioti, by adding value through works that of course took what was necessary from the historiography, but outlined in an exceptional genre of research. Particularities carry Noli's compilations, traceable on a content view, in a system of careful word formation, of their selection, of the characteristics and details that are connected with the author's formation himself and of his preferences on building a major edifice that shelters such a major history as that of Scanderbeg. Certainly, Fan Noli has been referring to many sources, has sought to find even better solutions in the new editions of his work on Scanderbeg, has considered with a critic eye the

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<sup>6</sup> Prifti S., in *Skënderbeu (Apologji)*, quoted edition, Tirana, 1967, p. 4: *Indeed, this work of Bardhi, rare and precious for all our literature, written in the Latin language, is a "song" on Scanderbeg, but a song composed not in verses, but in prose, with the style and the pen of an ardent apologist, that deeply loves the homeland and the nation and defends them with all the power of his spirit and mind the national rights. After "The Dictionary", "The Apology" on Scanderbeg, is Bardhi's second important work with emphatic patriotic character. Bardhi defends here a national question with capital importance: Scanderbeg's nationality, our Hero's "Albanianhood" against Jan Tomk, that claims him for himself.*

<sup>7</sup> Prifti S., in *Skënderbeu (Apologji)*, op. cit., Tirana, 1967, p. 6: *However the power of Bardhi's mind and pen becomes greater because he is completely convinced on the righteousness of the case he stands for. He openly speaks that "these we have put it aside until now, because this issue is to be examined with the greatest attention, without scattering in many directions, and of course having more in mind the truth rather than the fatherland." (p. 68, note nr. 145). This shows that Bardhi wouldn't serve the country on fake bases, to give it something that don't belong to it, but doesn't allows either to be taken what belongs to it. In this war, he defends with more vigor his fatherland, because the right is invincible, always triumphs. And the figure of this Albanian, nonetheless a bishop, that protects the rights of his nation with the power of the truth, takes an incomparable luster and moral weight, his love for the fatherland is ennobled higher as the feeling of the truth. Therefore Bardhi, on which the love for the fatherland, nourished by the feeling of the truth, compounds the gist, the essence of the soul, of his character, by saying: "I would never crush the desire to write, except if I wanted on shame betray myself and my fatherland." (page 22).*

objective sources and creations that are exclusively dedicated to his history.<sup>8</sup>

Noli's work differs from the above-mentioned ones and from other papers similar in object for many reasons: was written in another historic atmosphere and its author had a distinguished devotion of researcher on facts and events that traditionally are connected with the history and the deeds of Kastrioti, the son of Gjon Kastrioti. The details that are pursued in Noli's work compound an undeniable asset in the publishing arsenal that were elaborated on Kastrioti, meantime the writing of the latter and the transmitted method through his notes and summaries are a thesaurus of the Albanian writing. Noli dedicates a special attention on the reconstruction context that brings us closer the typical Middle Ages that accompanies all the progress and he episodes that are connected not only with Gjergj Kastrioti himself, but also with every element that supports in biographic point-of-view on this framework that later draw the attention of many scholars, especially the European ones.

Are quoted and mentioned also these scholars in Noli's work, meanwhile is clearly received a feeling of critical view of the scientific researcher on facts and details in which the latter are halted and concentrated. The pursue of a logical progress on historiography point-of-view and focusing on meaningful elements that clarify the real relation between the principedoms of that time, the attention towards the emphasizing of period not at all calm for the Albanian territories, for the European countries themselves that felt threatened from the progress and the continuous empowerment of a political and military

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<sup>8</sup> See in particular *Historia e Skënderbeut, kryezotit të Arbërisë(1405-1468)*. Written by bishop Fan S.Noli; published by Federata Panshqiptare Vatra, Boston, 1950, p. 56: Exactly that day, the Sultan Murat II, in a general attack agaisnt the stronghold, lost 7.000 soldiers except the wounded. Until the end of July, the Turkish loses achieved 20.000, and was visible that Sfetigrad couldn't be taken by force. However in this mess, the Turks have found the pipe, from where was getting water the only well of the stronghold, cut it and finished the job by getting thirsty the defenders. Remained without water, the besieged sent an envoy to the Sultan and offered him to give up the stronghold with the condition that he had to let them go with their weapons and stocks. Murat II accepted their conditions, and on 31 July, the besieged with their commander got out, and the Turkish army entered in Sfetigrad. The cutting of the water, as is shown to us by the Turkish chroniclers, seems that has been the true cause of the stronghold surrender. The dying dog, who allegedly was thrown into the only well of the stronghold by a traitor, from which the besieged refused to drink water, as Barleti says, sounds more like a popular legend, which shouldn't be taken seriously.

force coming from the East, the clear conscience that the pursue of a respective historic documentation was necessary on reconstructing this very important history for the nation and the Albanians, remain elements to be put in evidence meanwhile is treated and interpreted this work of Noli. Being descriptive and analytical doesn't averts him from the art of writing, meanwhile the reader follows involved in the episodes that mark sensitive fluctuations in the political and economic equilibriums of Albania's princedoms, on which geography convincingly lives again in the chapters of Noli's work. We find again in these descriptions and situations, not always linear in the relations of Albania's princes with the closer European powers, among which Ragusa and Venice are the most interested in forging alliances and agreements. The evoking of the sporadic victories achieved with not small sacrifices from figures that are mentioned in the history of the Albanian nation as defenders of our patriotism and national identity, that in any case mark meaningful episodes in the mosaic of Scanderbeg's history, naturally precede to the consolidation of the leader's profile that would be distinguished from his predecessors and who was aware that the lack of an organized mobilization was not honoring the progress and the security of his country.<sup>9</sup>

This remains a theme line that would be widely treated by Noli in specific chapters of his work, meanwhile seems that has outlined a specific terminology that helps to be better understood the differentiation from his point-of-view and among Scanderbeg's biographers and historians, a role that is proved that is not a lukewarm ambition of his inclinations. The reading and the interpretation of his work on Scanderbeg's life and deeds, convincingly emphasize this distinction, meanwhile the words notably chosen by him prove again such a fact. Indeed, in case of analyzing such works, but also the reading in a point-of-view that passes not only from the eye of the researcher in their content, but at the denomination mosaic, the diversity of the applied forms that bring closer to the time of events development, are the factors that will make possible to read again the

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<sup>9</sup> See in particular *Historia e Skënderbeut, kryezotit të Arbërisë (1405-1468)*. Written by bishop Fan S.Noli; published by *Federata Panshqiptare Vatra*, Boston, 1950, p. 19-21. See also the author's reasoning about the impetus Scanderbeg had about reflecting on an organized action against the Turks, *ibid*, *op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

work by the reader and the scholar, searching a far distant world in the chronological view, and so close about the indissoluble that the described context carries our national identity and conscience.

The disposal of many editions that have in the center of their discussion such a lapidary figure and unrepeatable of the Albanian Middle Ages, compounds a priceless asset also for the history of the written literature in Albanian. The archival documentation and not only the European one, remains another evidence of the fact that this figure involved in the interest and expectations view not few European countries of the time, also political powers that overwhelmed at that time projects and visions on the longevity and future of a religious belief that played an undisputable role on the European civilization, the Christianity. Such version fulfillments remain useful in the philological research proving that how involved have been the above-mentioned authors in the research of glorifying this character that belongs above all to our history and national memory.

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