

## GOETHE'S "KING OF THULE" AND ITS TRANSLATIONS INTO ALBANIAN

### GOETHE'NİN "THULE KRALI" VE ARNAVUT DİLİNDEKİ ÇEVİRİLERİ

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**ABSTRACT:** Johann Wolfgang von Goethe placed his poem "The King of Thule" on the mythical island of Thule, which is thought to have been the northernmost place in which the ancient Greek sailors had the courage to travel to. Because of the fact that this poem has been included in all versions of this play, it is perceived as a part of Faust, which is the most famous tragic play of Goethe. The fact that this ballad is a champion in terms of its translation into Albanian, adds importance to the present study, and is therefore selected for analysis. It was translated for the first time, probably round 1900, by Ndre Mjeda, a well-known Albanian poet, and then later on by 11 other translators. This artistic ballad, in the original, in German language, is written in an artificial and outdated poetic language - to make it sound like traditional folk songs. The aim of this article is to see the reception of this work into the Albanian literature. The comparison of the translations will try to give answers to the research questions emphasised in this article: which of them is closer to the original one and to exhibit what did the translators used, in order to save the idea of old language, besides rhyme, style and string form. The article also aims to see the differences between the translations into two different Albanian dialects (Gegë and Toskë), and to analyze which one is more suitable for this ballad.

**Keywords:** Ballad, German literature and language, reception, translation, comparison, Gege and Toske dialect

**ÖZ:** Johann Wolfgang von Goethe 'Thule Kralı' adlı şiirini efsanevi bir ada olan Thule'de konumlandırmıştır. Bu bölge, eski Yunan denizcilerinin açılmaya cesaret ettikleri en kuzey nokta olarak bilinmiştir. Bu şiir J. W. von Goethe'nin en çok tanınmış trajedi oyunu Faust'un bir parçası olarak tanınmaktadır, zira, bu oyunun her versiyonunda yer almaktadır. Bu baladın Arnavutça dilindeki çevirileri açısından bir şampiyon olması gerçeği çalışmamıza önem katıp, buna binaen inceleme konusu olarak seçilmiştir. İlk olarak, 1900 yıllarında, tanınmış Arnavut şair, Nder Mjeda tarafından çevrilmiş olan bu şiir ardından on bir çevirmen tarafından işlenmiştir. Bu sanatsal balat, aslı olan Alman dilinde, yapay ve eski şairane bir dilde yazılarak geleneksel halk türküsü etkisini yaratmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı bazı çevirileri kıyaslamak ve hangisinin aslına en yakın olduğunu bulmaya ilaveten, çevirmenlerin kafiyeye, biçim ve dizi şekli yanı sıra eski dil fikrini korumak için neleri kullandıkları ortaya çıkarmaktır. Diğer yandan da iki farklı ağızda olan çevirilerdeki farkı görmek ve bu balat için hangisinin daha uygun olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlıyoruz.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Balat, Alman dili, çeviri, kıyaslama, Gege ve Toske ağızları

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## **A few Words about the History of the Poem**

Goethe's poem entitled *Geistesgruß* is considered to be a precursor of *Der König in Thule* as written by the time he traveled along the Lahn River in July 1774, after having seen Lahnen Castle. Under Herder's influence, the location of where the story takes place was changed to the mythical island of Thule, which is thought to have been the northernmost place in which the Greek antiquity sailors had the courage to travel to, or "*The Tulle (Ultima Thule) the Romans called a Fairy Tale Country; by this name they considered, as it seems, Iceland; however, a "very far country in the north of Britain"* (Luarasi, 1988: 185).

The poem, *The King of Tule* might have been originally written as a creation on its own, but perhaps, since the time of its creation coincides with *Urfaust*, it could have been conceived as Margarita's song. This poem was used as a part of this play in all its versions. There are distinct differences of this poem between the *Faust's* various versions, which reflect Goethe's progress in this tragedy. However, this poetry continued to exist even out of the drama. This shows the existence of many musical compositions that have been performed on this poem, the most famous being the Schubert's composition.

This song or artistic ballad is written in an artificial and outdated poetic language to make it sound like a traditional folk song and, as it was said, it was used as an introduction to *Gretchen* (Goethe, 2000:98).

The ballad has here a dual function: on the one hand, it is a part of the scene (*Gretchen* sings this song during dressing), on the other hand, it has an important symbolic and dramatic function: the ballad sings loyalty and this element could be considered as an opposite behaviour in regard to Faust's behaviour.

The Ballad "King of Thule" is one of Goethe's most popular poetry creations. Karl Friedrich Celter (1758-1832) and later also many others turned this ballad into a song. This might count as a reason for the popularity of this ballad. Goethe wrote this ballad in a style of a folk poem or a folk song, a style that was made popular by Herder and was considered as a very popular by the people of the nineteenth century and very soon were accepted as a "folk song".

### **Translation of "Der König in Thule" into Albanian**

After a comprehensive study of Goethe's reception in the Albanian Literature, it can be stated once again that "King of Thule" is the champion in terms of the number of its translations into Albanian. To date, fourteen different translations of this poem are known in Albanian, starting with the most well-known one of the writer Ndre Mjeda, followed by other authors and translators.

The ballad "The King of Thule" was translated for the first time by Ndre Mjeda (1866-1937) and was published in the summary of his poems, known as "Juvenilia", published in Vienna in 1917. Since the poems and lyrics of this collection were written years before their publication, we believe that Goethe's *King of Thule* was also translated prior to 1917. The reason for the selection of this ballad might be his wish to bring Albanians closer to the world literature.

The first strophe in the original is as follows:

*Es war ein König in Thule,  
Gar treu bis an das Grab,  
Dem sterbend seine Buhle  
einen goldnen Becher gab. (Goethe, 2000:98)*

In Ndre Mjeda's translation it is:

*Deri n'dekë besnik ke s'thohet  
Ishte n'Tule 'j padisha,  
Vdiq e dashtna mbas do kohet  
E 'j got' arit shej i la. (Mjeda, 1982: 84)*

Translated by Pashko Gjeçi:

*Në Tulë na ish një mbret  
Gjer n'varr besnik pa fjalë;  
Duke vdekë dashnorja e vet  
një kupë krejt ar i fal. (Gjeçi: 2008, 141)*

This strophe in Jorgo Bllaci's translation:

*Një herë pat sunduar  
Në Tulën larg një mbret;  
Një kupë i kish dhuruar,  
Kur vdiq mikesh' e vet. (Bllaci, 1998: 10)*

Translated by Skënder Luarasi, the same strophe looks like this:

*Na ish një mbret në Tulë,  
Besnik qe gjer në varr;  
I fali mikja bullë,  
Kur vdiq, një kupë n'ar. (Luarasi, 1988: 185)*

Or by Vehbi Bala:

*Besnik gjer buzë varri  
në Tulë ish një mbret.*

*Tek vdiste, një kupë ari*

*i fali mikja e vet.* (Bala, 1998:10)

The first verse sounds almost like the beginning of a fairy tale: "*Na ishte një mbret në Tule...*" (*There was a King in Thule...*). The most important thing to say about this king is a short sentence: "*Besnik gjer në varr*" (*Faithful to the grave*) (2. verse). He was "*gar treu*" which in Albanian would be translated "*entirely, completely, fully faithful*" that seems to have been used to show the king much nobler. His girlfriend has given him a golden cup before she died and this explains the initial condition, but not the reason why.

Because of the use of "*Na ish një mbret*" (*There was a King*) in the first verse, as it is in the original, the first verse in Gjeçi's and Luarasi's translation seem to be more like the beginning of a fairy tale, but the other translations also create a similar feeling.

Interestingly, everyone translated the word *König* as *Mbret* (King), which is actually the proper word in Albanian for that. But we see that its first interpreter, Ndre Mjeda, translated it as *Padishah*. So, he chose the word with an old use like *Padishah*, which refers to the title used for the Sultan in the Ottoman Empire or a title formerly used for various rulers, including the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The reason could be assigned to the fact that the translator had in mind the reader's better comprehension, because, as we have said above, this ballad may have been translated long before it was published, that is, at a time when Albanian territories were part of the Ottoman Empire and for the public, the word *Padishah* was more understandable. However, we think that Mjeda may have even used this word to create the idea of an ancient empire.

It is also questionable whether the word chosen by Goethe *Buhle* (dear, lover) (strophe I, verse III), which even in the late eighteenth century was already outdated, has the meaning of wife or the illegitimate lover.

Only in the first Albanian translation of this poetry, that of Ndre Mjeda, this word has been translated with "*e dashtna e vet*" (*the love of his*), which leaves open the issue of her status, making it closer to the original. Meanwhile, in all other subsequent translations the words *dashnore* or *mike* which are used, have the meaning of *illegitimate lover* in Albanian.

Pashko Gjeçi translates it with *dashnore* (lover):

*Duke vdekë dashnorja e vet*

*një kupë krejt ar i falë.* (Gjeçi: 2008, 141)

Whereas, Skënder Luarasi, Vehbi Bala, Jorgo Blaci translate the word *Buhle* with *mike*:

Skënder Luarasi: *i fali mikja bullë,*

*kur vdiq, një kupë n'ar* (Luarasi, 1988: 185)

Vehbi Bala: *Tek vdiste, një kupë ari*

*i fali mikja e vet.* (Bala, 1998:10)

Jorgo Bllaci: *Një kupë i kish dhuruar,*

*Kur vdiq mikesh' e vet.* (Bllaci, 1998: 10)

Both translations *dashnore* and *mike*, in Albanian associate only *the lover*, but never the wife. Bala and Bllaci even change the place of the word by putting it in the last verse so that they can rhyme *mbret- vet*.

Similarly, like the rhyming word "Thule" (a legendary kingdom in the distant north), the selection of words might have been used intentionally to make the events timeless and fixed to no place and to make them an example –similar to the folk songs. Evidence of this can be other obsolete phrases that Goethe uses in his ballad, like the formulation taken from the Martin Luther's Bible "die Augen gingen ihm über" to say "cry".

*Es ging ihm nichts darüber,*

*Er leert' ihn jeden Schmaus;*

*Die Augen gingen ihm über,*

*So oft er trank daraus.* (Goethe, 2000:98)

The expression "*Die Augen übergehen*", in that case, meant "*weeping too much, crying with tears*" (*cried many tears wept*). In the translations of Albanian writers or translators, except Vehbi Bala, who translated it with:

Bala:

*Gjë më për zemër s'pati,*

*e mori ndër gosti*

*dhe derdhi lot i ngrati*

*sa çoi me të dolli.* (Bala, 1998:10)

Which translated it with: "*derdhi lot i ngrati*" (*poured tears*), by the others it is mostly translated with *një lot* (*poured one tear*):

Mjedja:

*Sa at gotë arit gja nuk donte*

*E gjithmonë me tene piu;*

*Por ka j'lot për faqe i shkonte*

*Gjith' sa herë pinte fatziu.* (Mjedja, 1982: 84)

Gjeçi:

*Si atë asgjë nuk donte,*

*e merrte n'çdo gosti,*

*një lot sysh i pikonte*

*sa e çonte n'të me pi.* (Gjeçi: 2008, 142)

Luarasi:

*Sa atë gjë tjetër s'donte,  
në çdo gosti e shpinte,  
prej syrit lot' i shkonte,  
sa herë me të pinte.* (Luarasi, 1988: 185)

While, Jorgo *Bllaci*, if there is no printing mistake, seems to have misunderstood it, because he even confuses the person who was crying, by saying *A teardrop shined /always in HER eyes*:

*Sa herë ulej pinte  
Nëpër gosti me të,  
Një pikëz loti ndrinte  
Në sytë e saj gjithnjë.* (Bllaci, 1998:10)

In the third strophe, that has the function of the third act of the tragedy where the event takes direction, the king, at the edge of the grave, at a banquet held for the country leaders, leaves everything he had to his successor, except for the cup.

Goethe:

*Und als er kam zu sterben,  
Zählt' er seine Städt' im Reich,  
Gönnt' alles seinen Erben,  
Den Becher nicht zugleich.* (Goethe, 2000:98)

So the king was on the verge of death. In translations into Albanian the same is translated into different forms, although all of them correct:

Mjeda:

*Kur pa vedin tue mbarue  
Njëhë qytetet, e gjithçka  
Trashëgimtarit i la shkrue,  
Por putirin nuk ia la.* (Mjeda, 1982: 84)

Bala:

*Kur erdh duke u shuar,  
të tëra ç'pat ia la  
trashëgimtarit shkruar,  
por kupën nuk ia dha.* (Bala, 1998:10)

Luarasi:

*Kur iu afrua varrit  
rigatë e ç'kish ia la  
të gjitha trashgimtarit,  
por kupën nuk ia dha. (Luarasi, 1988: 186)*

Bllaci:

*Kur erdh te buza e varrit,  
Kështjella e pasuri  
Ia la trashëgimtarit,  
Po kupën, kurrsesi! (Bllaci, 1998:10)*

Only *PashkoGjeçi*, at the same verse, adds the word *qyqar* (coward) to describe the king, probably just to rime with *trashëgimtar* (succesor):

*Kur fundi i erdhi qyqarit  
qytete e tokë kudo  
t'mbretërisë trashëgimtarit  
ia la, por kupën jo. (Gjeçi: 2008, 142)*

Another connection in this strophe is found between the words that rhyme and associate us with the *Sterben-Erben* (dying - inheriting) semantic link, namely *vdekja* dhe *trashëgimia*. This, as can be seen above, is also achieved in all translations in Albanian: *tue mbarue- la shkruë*, or also *varrit- trashëgimtarit*.

In the fifth strophe:

Në strofën e pestë:

*Dort Stand der alte Zecher,  
Trank letzte Lebensglut,  
Und warf den heiligen Becher  
Hinunter in die Flut. (Goethe, 2000:98)*

The expression: *der alte Zecher*, which means the *pijaneci i vjetër* (old drunkard) in Albanian, is correctly translated by *Mjeda* with *pijsi plak* (the old drunk):

*E t'ksaj t'kandshmes jetë dëshirin  
Piu ma t'mramin e lumnoj  
Pijsi plak, mandej putirin  
Ndër val't'detit e flakroj. (Mjeda, 1982: 84)*

Whereas by all the others it is translated only with *plak* (the old man).

Gjeçi:

*E piu n'mes tyre krejt  
t'fundit afsh t'jetës plaku,  
mandej kupën e shenjt  
ndër valë të detit flaku. (Gjeçi: 2008, 142)*

Bala:

*Të fundit afsh piu plaku  
të jetës në një ças,  
pastaj putirin flaku  
në detin me tallaz. (Bala, 1998:10)*

*Luarasi* uses the word *plaku* (the old man) and in the last verse he also adds the word *bekriu*, which is a Turkish word to describe best what Goethe means with this verse. So, not just someone who drinks too much, but someone who is very fond of drinking (sot, drunkard, winebibber):

*Atje të jetës afshin  
e fundit plaku piu,  
pastaj të shenjtën kupë,  
e flaku n'det bekriu. (Luarasi, 1988: 185)*

In this strophe the word *hinunter* (down), that Goethe uses to describe the end of the cup, also foreshadows "the path" of the king. In the last strophe Goethe uses the verbs "*stürzen, trinken, sinken*" (fall, drink, sink) to describe its end. *Falling* and *sinking* show the way of the cup while *drinking* its fate, because it was the one from which the king has always drunk, and now it drinks the tide, loses what it is destined for and doesn't give a drop more. Just the way the cup is sinking, so does the king's eyes fall and he dies. The king's death is related to the end of the drink, because drinking from the cup of love was his life.

*Er sah ihn stürzen, trinken  
Und sinken tief ins Meer,  
die Augen täten ihm sinken,  
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr. (Goethe, 2000:99)*

This last strophe is translated by Mjeda this way:

*Tuj u zhyt' e pa n'fund t'zallit,  
Tuj këcye nalt, tuj hupë me turr;  
E n'at ças i ranë prej ballit  
Fikun syt' e s'pui ma kurr! (Mjeda, 1982: 85)*

We see, that in Mjedas translation of this strophe in albanian, he reached the same effect by using the verbs:



*u zhyt n'fund t'zallit (sank at the botom of the sand)*

*i ranë prej ballit/ syt' e s'piu ma kurr! (his eyes fell out of his forehead/ and he never drunk again)*

At the same time, these verses show that Mjeda, like in the translation of the poems "Capricorn" and "The Burial of Sir John Moore after Coruna" of Charl Wolfe, the main values of the poem remain in the last two verses (Quku, 2004: 469-470).

*E n'at ças i ranë prej ballit*

*Fikun syt' e s'piu ma kurr! (Mjeda, 1982: 85)*

At Pashko Gjeçi's translation it is like this:

*E pa si ra, si u zhyt*

*si u mbytë e pa në det;*

*i mbylli të dy sytë*

*e nuk piu më për jetë. (Gjeçi: 2008, 142)*

This strophe at Vehbi Bala's translation is like this:

*E pa si ra tej zallit,*

*si vala e përpiu:*

*iu fikën sytë e ballit*

*e kurr' me të më s'piu. (Bala, 1998:10)*

Luarasi:

*E pa si ra, prej zallit,*

*si shkoi në fund, atë.*

*Iu shuan sytë e ballit*

*e s'piu kurrë më. (Luarasi, 1988: 185)*

Before we come to the conclusion, we should mention another fact as far as these translations is concerned. All of them, accept for the first one, presented by the Albanian poet Ndre Mjeda, are in the Standard Albanian language. In contrast, Mjeda's translation of King of Thule is done in the Gegë dialect, one of the two dialects of Albanian. Gegë belongs to the northern regions of Albanian-speaking territories. Precisely because it is in Gegë, rather than in the Standard variety (which is predominately based on the other dialect, that of Tosk) may sound better and closer to the original version in German, which, as we have emphasized at first, is intentionally written using archaic words to resemble the folk literature creation. The fact that the translation is in the Gegë dialect makes it look older, more archaic, too. The reason for this is that the oldest and most important works of Albanian Literature and history were written in the Gegë dialect, and as soon as one sees a creation in this dialect, arouses a memory of a past time.

## Conclusion

Out of all that is said above, we can conclude that all the Albanian translations of J. W. von Goethe's Ballad "Der König in Thule" analysed in this article, have preserved the scheme of rhyme and have been very well-adapted to the original. They sound as if they were written in Albanian by translators themselves: stylistically / poetically very achieved ones in the target language. However, the translation of Mjeda will be emphasised. Not only because of the preservation of the poetic structure, the aesthetic-poetic values of the original, but also because of the selection of words. Despite its simplicity, it is considered to be among the most accurate and the most trustful at the time created: the interpreter, instead of using words that are originally Albanian, such as Mbret, for example, uses older words such as Padishah, which is the name for the rulers of ancient empires, but also for the Ottoman Sulltan. At the time when Mjeda translated it, Balkan territories were part of the Ottoman Empire. We believe the translator does this, not only to bring it closer to the readers of the time, but also to create the idea of exotic places, such as the Orient. During the analysis, we have noticed that even the other translator, Skënder Luarasi, who is perhaps the most famous translator from German into Albanian, also uses a Turkish word, probably for the same reason. Luarasi translated it in 1957, but he, as we said, uses the old Turkish word *bekri* instead of just using the albanian word *pijanec* (a drunkard). Through this, the translator achieves the goal of creating the idea of a previous, historical time, in the same way as Goethe does in his poem Der König in Thule.

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