

The Medieval Invention: Self and the Other in Albanian Medievalism (Shqipja E Mesjetes)

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The studies of the author, who is specialized in the history of the Middle Ages and history of the Mediterranean at the University of Turin, , has comprised a solid soil for his knowledge to compare between the Western Europe and Eastern Europe. The main objective of this book is focused on the illustration of the interpretation of the Late Middle Age based on the Albanian historiography. The Albanian historiography through the analysis of the two centuries which conclude the period of the Late Middle Age, concludes that Albania was from Western countries based on its territory and cultural unity and by placing the Orient away from geographic scope and considering it as scale low-

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culturally, more than an analysis of journey into the Albanian medievalism, the study of this author is focused on the way in which this research report to its object.

The Albanian historiography perspectives according to this author are three: National Romantic approach born from the late nineteenth century, characterized by the domination of nationalism in the interpretation of the Middle Ages; the eroticist character of access due to the importance of Europe and the transformation of Europe in this interpretation of the cult in the Middle Ages.

The second phase in which practically creating a genuine school of Albanian historiography coincides with restoring the country after World War II and when Sciences Institute, University of Tirana and the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania were established, Europhile is disappeared, devotion to the nation reduced to the political homeland Albania without the involvement of the nation to which the regime had no strategic interest and not to mention the fact that its existence was damaged by the political issue. Unlike the first phase, in this one a collective memory was produced on scientific basis. The third period is of the postcommunist quarter century. The current phase vigorously recycles the europeanist model of the first phase designed to determine the collective identities and consequently the form and content of the refused Other. Analysis is conducted on a thematic rather than chronological basis so therefore the book is divided into four parts, each combines various stages of medieval periods with the exception of the latter of which in terms of time is focused mainly century XV.

In the first part, the weight of the concept of the national consciousness is elaborated. The drafters of the Albanian history, the first Albanian (Arbërorë) political identity which dates back to the XII century with the birth of the first Albanian principality where ironically the royal family is unclear. The author analyzing the concept and processes through which the nation concept has passed through, informs Albanian historians that the concept of national consciousness is not delegated to the Middle Ages as it is a modern concept. Even quoting from the works of E.B. Vlora, the author reinforces the idea that there was not a national consciousness even in 1922. "I will never forget the face of a captive citizen from Dibra in 1922, he was one of the fighters of Elez Isufi, who then attacked Tirana but were defeated by the government troops. *"Sir –he told me he expressed his disappointment now he had fought against Albania - in Dibra, we have always believed that we were a strong people , undefeatable! We have forced the Sultan to do what we wanted, we struggled with Serbia and forced them to make a deal with us; when Bulgarians came we waited them with the heads of Serbs ... So we remained the absolute masters of our country. But what a strong country is this Albania that defeated us today?"*(p.83). As you can see the national consciousness until late in this period extends over a locality and not based on (cultural and political) national identity as claimed by Albanian historians.

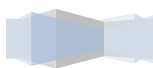
The second and the third part are focused on the Other. The continuity of comparisons will take the reader to different ages, continents and regions. It started with the filter used in the reading of sources, mainly Byzantine and ottoman ones, focusing on particularly on the opponent's exaltation primitivism. The Other, apart from being violent, it is also subject to the ottoman dominant morals, while this is not applicable to Himself aimed at the deepening and the enriching of the gap of differences in the contempt camera of the collective imagination. The position of the enemies such as the Venice's, Serbs and ottomans is not considered the same by the Albanian historiography. To clearly understand this, consider the fact that in this issue it was not used the same measure unit, and the *"author shows that the term byzantine explained among others stand out words such as 'art', ' architecture, ' culture'.* A similar situation is observed in the explanation of the Venetian term which stands out amongst others Venetian culture, style and commerce. To illustrate the term 'Roman' alongside with the Roman

conquest it is given the explanation of the Roman Empire State and Roman world, law, art, and rule. Now, however mediocre style, art, architecture, to be fair must be a also a characterization of the Ottoman Empire. At least to the same rules of definition used for the Roman should have been used to illustrate the Ottoman historiography and name the invasion which was not noticed at all, thus the term invasion turns into ideal- only Ottoman tip. More Illustrative can be considered the book on the history of Albania, volume III, covering the years 1506- 1839. In this book there is a chapter devoted to specific documents on culture. Among the Twenty three of the documents provided, seven are dedicated to education and Church education exclusively, and for this whole period the authors of the book found no document representative of the Islamic education. Normally, in this climate paving the memories , it remains to the Ottomans to be considered only as occupiers without trace except the demolition” (p.266-277).

Let's consider the diverse application of the terms “invasion” and “triumph”. Arguing about it, the author explains how Plasari in the same book (p.643) prefers to associate the name of Mehmet II with the adjective the Conqueror, while when describing the victory of Karl in Poitiers he picks up the term triumph. What provokes the author further is the author's referring to Skanderbeg as occidental when negotiating, whereas he is promptly altered into a janissary when fighting. Therefore, Plasari ascribes the war exclusively to the ottomans, which in a cultural confrontation become identification to the Other, since we are used to negotiate: in the worst case murder is imported from the Orient (p.332). The author has focused longer in arguing that the war has not been fought by Ottoman Empire only, illustrating it with previous and later examples of violence, onslaughts, extirpation continuously plied by the westerners. He refers to the case of violent submission of the American indigene population, cited from Todorov. In the footnote (p.325) Todorov mentions an incident in the Caribbean isles on the way children were treated. “Some Christians met with an Indian woman, who was carrying and suckling her infant. As their dog was hungry they grabbed the infant from her and threw him to the dog and let it tear the baby into parts in the face of the mother...” (p.197). While these incidents sound distant, the author reminds the Albanian historians Zygmund Baun, who points to the modern society's holocaust, at the most spread level of the western civilization and the top achievements of humanity.

The last part is dedicated to the Self at the peak moment coinciding with the Scanderbeg's epopee. The purpose of the author is to highlight the mission of the epopee, its method of reading, and the metamorphosis according to the needs of the history-makers. The chapter dedicated to the psycho-physical characteristics of Scanderbeg facilitates the contact with the Albanian medieval history to Scanderbeg, more as an icon sanctified to the details. Without any physical flaw, perfect in every respect, humanized by the interests and therefore reasoned based on choice rather than a man of his time. Throughout this part, the rapport with Europe and the current need for Europe is more actual.

According to the author, everything starts with the disengagement of Scanderbeg from the Ottoman Empire and his return to his town of origin in 1443. However, Albanian authors such as Noli, Bicoku, Pulaha, K. Frasheri are in a disagreement on his date of birth and his social, economic and judicial rank of Scanderbeg prior to his return back home. Doan Dani identifies three factors causing this uncertainty: (1) the period prior to 1443 has a minor role to Albanian nationalist ideology. The Scanderbeg's court life period may have a contravening profile to the heroic life of Gjergj Kastrioti. (2) The Ottoman Empire's chronicler's resources are poor and mainly focused only in the conflict's period. (3) The research summarized in a three-volumes set published by the end of 1980's has not been conducted by authentic historians (p. 385).



Given this condition of research, the year 1405 marks the birth of Scanderbeg as a chronologic event, whereas 1443 carves his birth as an historical event. Thirty eight years covering the period between these two milestones of the historical character remain unknown. From a public at large point of view, the anti-ottoman Scanderbeg is more important than the Scanderbeg the collaborator (p. 338). The character of Scanderbeg is exaggerated by the Albanian nationalists and communists, and throughout the recent decades he is viewed as a defender of Christianity. In less than two pages dedicated to the history of the Scanderbeg's period, Şemsedin Sami Frashëri never mentions the religious aspects, on the contrary he links the hero to the family and homeland, as a savior of the country from a tragic situation. On his brother Naim Frashëri's view, Scanderbeg represents the King, the Savior, the only hope of the nation. During the communist era, equivalence between Scanderbeg and the dictator Enver Hoxha is noticeable. *“Our people led by Scanderbeg made Albania and Kruja a prominent moment of the history of humanity, as they fought together for our nation's and others' liberation and justice. Scanderbeg was always in an offensive position gaining only victories. The Albanian people led by the heroic and glorious Labor Party follows the legendary model of the fathers and moves ahead into revolution, victory and socialism”* (p.380).

During the post-communist period, as Albania's efforts are invested primarily into the process of European accession, the Scanderbeg's character is used to ascribe the Albanian's the image of Europe's savior. *“Thanks to the Albanian's struggle, the advancement of Ottomans armies towards Western Europe was stopped for a long period of time. Done this, Albanian's made a great contribution to defending and advancement of the European civilization”*(p.404).

In the Albanian literary and historiography tradition, the Scanderbeg's character is compared to the great names of history such as Julius Caesar, Gustav Adolf, Saint Louis and Alexander the Great. Plasari re-approaches the eulogist paragraph, where the Scanderbeg's activity is assimilated into the Moses action, since he moved to save his people against the pharaoh of Constantinople. While insisting in the religious viewpoint, Kadare regrets why Scanderbeg was not compared to the Christ, as he had undergone the de-exteriorization process after his death. According to the Christian legend, the Ottomans exhumed his remains to use them as talismans (p. 473).

As a conclusion, we may say that the author, thanks to his deep understanding of both the western and eastern civilizations and cultures, has explained quite well the official thesis of the Albanian historiography between east and west and its obvious inclination towards west. Emanating from the Middle Ages of Ottomans and Scanderbeg, even nowadays we continue to distinguish two antagonist categories: exploited and exploiters; Albanian and non-Albanian; we and the other; Occident and Orient.

