

ALBANIAN HUMANISTS OF 16th CENTURY

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Abstract:

Through this paper, the author examines a crucial era for Albanians—the sixteenth century. At this time, eminent writers like Gjon Buzuku, Lekë Matrnga, etc., created a valuable body of literature. Additionally, we discuss topics relevant to this subject in this study, such as the historical continuity of Albanian humanism in the 16th century. The author of this paper demonstrates how he tends to emphasize this subject, which is of exceptional importance to Albanian culture and history in general.

Keywords: humanism, literature, culture, and the Albanian region, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

We must acknowledge that the Albanian culture developed in the 15th century with the European Renaissance, along with the literary and historical publications. When Albanians under Skanderbeg’s leadership made sacrifices for their country and the defence of European civilization against Ottoman invaders before choosing to flee rather than go into captivity, there was a period of growth and development in Western Europe, particularly in the Apennine Peninsula and Dalmatia, where humanist schools proliferated. This time period signifies a turning point in every way because the Ottoman occupation burned and ruined Albania. Even under these conditions, Albanians found the fortitude to make their remarkable contributions in many different sectors, to be duly represented in this progressive era’s culture and art, and to do so without forgetting their own country. In exile, the Albanian humanists, thinkers, and artists of the Renaissance are a testament to the resurgence of our people and the strength of our cultural traditions. They are also a shining example of patriotism for social progress because of their multifaceted and forward-thinking lives and work in a variety of fields of science, literature, and the arts.

Albanian humanists abroad had the chance to hone their skills in the most prestigious humanist institutions of the day, including those in Italy and Dalmatia, while always retaining a love for their native country and its people. These humanists were renowned for their honourable contributions to literature, oratory, mathematics, astronomy, the fine arts, philosophy, pedagogy, history, etc.

The names of the minds of the time, such as *Gazulli*, who served as Skanderbeg’s ambassadors for his missions in Ragusa and also worked as an astronomer in the 15th century, help us to differentiate them because they are ranked according to the time they lived, then *Mikel Maruli* from the Arbëresh of Greece, *Marin Barleci* from Shkodra, *Nicolë Tomeu* from Durrës, *Marin Beçikemi* from Shkodra, *Mihail Artioti* from Arta of Southern Albania, etc.

The wide scope of the Albanian contribution to the European Renaissance is complemented by the greatest Albanian artists of the 15th century such as *Adrea Aleksi* from Durrës, *Viktor Karpaçi* from Korça, *Mark Bajaziti*, *Onufri* from Elbasan, *Johannes Oggnenouich* from Novobërdë, *Miho Mikel Tivarasi*, *Gjon Progon Novobërdasi*. Among these humanists, we also encounter renowned Arbërian musicians like *Kolë Durrësaku*, *Filip*

Drishti, Progon Buriziani, Kristofor Ulqini, Martin Balistari, Stojan Shkodrani, etc. The early European humanism and Albanian humanism both had parallel development. The Albanian intellect of the era, which never severed relations with the people and the traditions of the Albanian region, provided favourable conditions for the Renaissance ideas.

2. ALBANIAN HUMANISM OF 16th CENTURY

It is important to stress that the 16th century Albanian authors started writing works in the Albanian language. As a result, we are suggesting that such authors should be handled individually in order to better comprehend their work in support of the Albanian people. Here, we shall discuss a few specific instances of renowned Albanian authors who had a profound impact on the country's culture.

Gjon Buzuku was certainly one of the first humanists to actively participate in the 16th century. About the life of this author, not much is known. He served as a church pastor and was a Catholic priest.

The Vatican Library includes a copy of his "Meshari," which appeared in print in 1555. Gjon Nikollë Kazazi made the initial discovery of this book in 1740. Following an almost 200-year hiatus, it was once more dictated in 1910 with the help of the Arbëresh bishop Pal Skiroi. The book includes information on a variety of religious topics, including the liturgies for the major holidays, book comments on prayers, passages from the Gospel, and fragments of rituals and catechisms.

The contents of the book, which are similar to other Bosnian equivalent books of the time, indicate that our author had interactions with the Slavs of Dalmatia and Bosnia. Buzuku's work should not be unattached to these events and circumstances more than the alphabet.

The Latin alphabet used in Buzuku's book is of the semi-Gothic style that was popular in Northern Italy. Additionally, five unique letters were used for Albanian sounds that

are not represented in Latin, such as *u, g, gj, th, dh, z,* and *x*. Buzuku's nationalistic sentiments can be shown in different ways, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, such as his attempt to use the Albanian language in Catholic religious services and his decision to write an Albanian novel at all given the challenging Ottoman occupation circumstances. Love for the Albanian people and language served as his inspiration. He claims that he was inspired to write the book out of love for his fellow countrymen and to enlighten their brains after seeing some passages from the Bible translated into Albanian. The work of Buzuku is crucial for Albanian culture since it offers extensive information on the development of our language's grammar and literary language history.

This information serves as a solid foundation from which to follow the documented evolution of Albanian. The language of Buzuku is unmistakably representative of the Albanian spoken in the sixteenth century, a time when few dialectal differences existed.

The significance of "Meshari" also stems from the fact that it was the first work of literature written in Albanian and laid the path for the development of a new literary tradition. The author Lekë Matrënga (1560-1619), for whom we have some limited information, is one of the Albanians who rank in chronological terms in terms of literary compositions and significant contributions. One of the first priests to get training at the St. Athanasius religious college in Rome was Matrënga. Along with studying religion, he also studied Latin and Greek literature there. The dearth of religious literature prompted Matrënga to begin translating a catechism. In addition to considering the youngsters of Hora and the Siqelia villages' needs for religious instruction, he also considered his fellow Albanians in Calabria and Puglia, where, in his estimation, there were hundreds of Albanian neighbourhoods and villages. The Spanish priest Ladesma's catechism was the one that Matrënga transcribed. Three

separate manuscript copies of the work can be found in the Vatican Library.

The author of the book elaborates on the goal, circumstances, and impact of the translation of this work on his believers in a conditional letter that is included in the book. A whispering song with eight verses of eleven syllables each and an alternate rhyme comes next. It is a free translation of the four published Latin distiches. The fact that this poem contains the very first verses of Albanian poetry gives it historical value. They were composed with total assurance and proficiency. The first known speaker of Albanian poetry is Matrënga. The book by Lekë Matrënga is brief (just 28 pages), yet it has a religious theme. The lexicon utilized there doesn't go over 450 words; therefore the author doesn't supply much in the way of rich linguistic material. Despite this, the book holds a particular place in the history of Albanian literature, language, and culture as the second 16th century literary-linguistic monument and the first work of Arbëresh literature. Matrënga's catechism is also used to track the historical advancement of Tosk Albanian and the Arbëresh dialects in Italy. Matrënga used the Italian phonetic equivalents of the letters of the Latin alphabet as a starting point. He created letter combinations for sounds that were missing from Latin. He was the first to differentiate between writing *ë* from *e*. The Albanian writing Arbëresh tradition is founded by his works.

3. JAK PJETËR LLUKARI, Historian of the Humanistic Era

During the 12th to 15th centuries, the Diaspora occupied a large area in Southern Italy, Marche (Ancona), Republic of Venice, More and part of Dalmatia.

It should be noted that all the upper lands could be regarded as the hearths of Arbërian humanism because they were also settled by Arbërian emigrants who arrived at large just as they were being overtaken by the humanist waves as the hearths of Arbërian humanism, since here too, our intellectuals established stable communities of

Humanism and the Renaissance. After the most dramatic period in the history of our people, when the Arbër under the leadership of Gjergj Kastrioti–Skanderbeg waged an unfair battle against the Ottoman invaders, the Arbër lived in the territories of Italy and Dalmatia from the 13th century till the 15th to 18th centuries. Due to their high level of intelligence, certain members of the Arbër households were able to become well-known learned men. Here we will mention the well-known humanist of Arbërian descent Jak Pjetër Llukari (Lluka 1551–1615), who gives Ragusa or Rrusha, which is connected to medieval Arbëria, a prominent place in his historical-literary work titled “Annals of Rrusha,” which was first published in Venice in 1605 and then in Ragusa. The Chronicle of Bar, Gjergj Bardhi, Marin Barleci, and Engjll Drishtjani are included in the list of authors he mentions. Members of the Llukari family arrived in Ragusa from the districts of Lezha somewhere in the 10th century, according to the annals, chronicles, the book's introduction, and a Ragusan chronicle. Family members of the Llukari can also be found throughout Kosovo's urban areas, such as Novo Brdo, Prishtina, Trepça, etc. The aristocratic families of *Gondolët* and *Llukaj* historically belonged to the same genealogical branch. Also descended from this same ancestor was Ragusa's most brilliant writer, Gjon Gondoli (after *slavicized* by the everyday political circles as Ivan Gundulic). Along with Mauro Orbin, Jan Pjetër Llukari, an Arbërian humanist historian, was one of Ragusa's most well-known historians, particularly during the humanist era.

Jak Llukar is incorrectly referred to as Peter in today's Skanderbegian history, starting with Fan S. Noli, who discovers that this historian knew of a History of Skanderbeg, authored by his contemporary, the Archbishop of Durrës Pal Engjëlli, who used this for his book *Annali di Ragusa*. If the Archbishop and Tivaras were different people, it comes out that Llukari has saved for us the last remaining pieces of a lost

work on Skanderbeg. Llukar's book is a significant source in both situations. Despite not having access to Llukari's work, the scholar Fan S. Noli—who is a superb expert on the character and military exploits of our daring man—comes to the aforementioned conclusion by quoting J. Fallmerayer of Ch. Hopf. He most likely connects Pal Engjëlli, the archbishop of Durrës and a contemporary of Skanderbeg, with Engjëll Drishtjani, whom Llukari only acknowledges in the text and not in the list of writers referenced. The fact that Llukari mentions Engjëll Drishtjani and Marin Shkodrani (Marin Biçikemi or Marin Barleci) in relation to Ndre Topi while omitting any mention of the former's work—whose name we never see again in Llukari's text—shows that this argument cannot hold up to the scientific reality. Jak Pjetër Llukari provides valuable information on Gjergj Kastriot–Skanderbeg thanks to the chance to use records from the Ragusa office and chancellery as well as the wide literature of the time. His remarks show both depth and breadth. As a result, the following line from Llukar's book establishes the Hasian ancestry of our daring man: “Gjon Kastrioti, Lord of Kruja, whose family hails from the village of Kastrat under the jurisdiction of Has of Arebria, not far from the river Drin.” Additionally, Llukari is aware that Gjergj Arianiti is the father-in-law of Gjergj Kastrioti–Skanderbeg.

Skanderbeg's name, George, is actually a combination of his father's names, John and Gjon. The issue of the return of Gjergj Kastrioti–Skanderbeg to Arbëri occupies an important place in Llukar's treatment of events: “Skënder Kastrioti returned to Arbëri with a false letter and started to re-liberate his country. Murat, ruler of the Turks, forced them to convert to Islam since Hamza Kastrioti's son, the lord of Kruja, had been taken hostage by his father together with Reposh, Stanish, and Konstandin. After Hamza's death, the barbarians conquered Emazia or Vemustia”. The individual mentioned

above is Skanderbeg, also known by the name Skënder Kastrioti, and his father (Gjoni), also known by the name Hamza (Camusa) Kastrioti. Reposhi, Stanishi, and Kostadin are the names of Gjergj Kastriot's brothers that Llukari also cites. He lists them in the same chronological order as Marin Barleci. Llukari focuses a lot on the wars in Kosovo, unlike certain Ragusan and Italian historians and chroniclers of the humanist age, even if the territory of Kosovo is frequently referenced in his writing. Llukari gives a synthetic representation of the Battle of Kosovo (1389): “The same year. The count of Serbia was betrayed by Vuk Brankovic, his son-in-law, and Murat of Turkey entered Fushë Kosovë, also known as Kosovo to the Turks, Rigomezi to the Hungarians, and Amselveld to the Germans, among other names. On the banks of Sitnica, the Count was shattered and beheaded. Murat was slain there by Milosh Kopiliqi. Even in this instance, Llukari, like other writers, highlights the crucial role that the historical figures played as well as the geographical and statehood significance of Arbëria.

Llukari does not give much thought to the Second Battle of Kosovo (1448). However, by naming the Sitnica and Llap rivers as well as the larger region of Kosovo, he provides interesting onomastic data. Our humanist underlines that before Skanderbeg came in Kosovo, Murat II offered the assistance of Skanderbeg to the Hungarian commander Janos Hunyadi in the Second Battle of Kosovo, who had already experienced defeat there.

Sultan Murat II attacked Kruja for this reason, as well as for the defeats he had previously experienced at the hands of Skanderbeg: “However, wishing to confirm his counsellors' recommendations”, Murat landed in Kruja out of resentment for Skanderbeg's intrusion. In order to expel him from the city, he so organized and prepared a sizable force. However, Gjergj Kastriot–Skanderbeg was able to beat him and bring him back to Edirne, where he passed away at the end of 1449.

When it comes to the Kosovar terms of Llukar, it is interesting to note that Duke (Logofet) Bogdani, who is probably an ancestor of Pjetër Bogdani, according to the findings of some scholars, as well as the well-known mines of Janjevo, Kratovo, and Novo Brdo, rich in gold and silver, occupy a special place here.

In this connection, he makes reference to the Kopaonik Mountains, which are also rich in gold and silver ores and were known to Titus Livy, the famous Roman author who was born in Patavia (Padua). The fact that Llukari is aware of the church of St. Angelo, which stood outside the city walls of Prizren, which the emperor of Dardanian descent Justinian (527–565) named for himself Justiniana Prima, is what draws the most interest (Justinia the First).

This announcement of immense historical significance, which has not yet been covered in our historiography, poses a number of fresh, more complicated questions, which we shall cover in a different case. But Llukar's assertion that Prizren existed in Justinian's time further establishes the link between the medieval Prizren that existed before to Nemanjid reign and the ancient Prizren (Theranda). When Jak Pjetër Llukari discusses historical events that took place in the Arbërian territories in the 12th century, specifically during the reign of Emperor Emanuel Komneni (1143-1180), the city of Prishtina is also brought up. According to anti-Albanian theories, the city's existence is connected to the time of Emperor Dushan's rule in Kosovo (1342). In this context, the city of Skopje and the territory of Polog from the 12th century are mentioned throughout the early Middle Ages. The chapter in Llukar's work that discusses the ties between Byzantium, Arbëria, and Serbia during the rule of Byzantine Emperor Emmanuel Komneni has been given special attention in addition to these reports that shed light on the presence of Illyrian-Arbërians in the region of Kosovo during antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The Arbërian ancestry of

Coccapar, the monarch of Zeta, is also cited in this context. K. Jeriek, a scholar, confirmed Coccapar's Arbërian ancestry when he stated, "This name is not Slavic; it used to be Arbrian." The Diocletian Abbot (Cocciaparus, Cocciaparo) and the Ragusan historian Mauro Orbin (Cassiapar, Cocaparo, Cocciaparo), as well as Visare, both contain it in the same form and have it Latinized. These historical names refer to the Illyrian-Arbërian community of cities, and include Scodra - Scutari (Shkodra), Deçani, Cruy, Croia (Kruja) in Albanian, Dolcigno (Ulqini), Dragno, Durazzo (Durrësi), Podgoriza, Drivasto (Drishti), Antivari, (Tivari), etc.

Territories in the quality of political formations, such as Dardania-Cosovo, Epirus, also called Arbëria, a place that starts from Vlora and to the south including Arta and Ambrakina, where the warlike peoples Kaon and Thesprotians lived, Arbëria of England, Arbëria or Arbërs of Asia, of hydronyms, such as Burana (Buna) etc. Interesting information on Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg is provided by Jak Pjetër Llukari.

As a result, as shown by the three judgments of the Council of Rogats, our audacious man travelled to Ragusa in December 1450 to request assistance from the government there. However, the government there provided only little assistance in the form of 500 ducats. Being an expert in Ragusa's official records, Llukari also included this incident in his history, placing it immediately following the siege of Kruja in the same year and listed chronologically. But even here, as before, he wanders for a year while identifying the chronological terms (1449). In August 1461, following the armistice and peace treaty with the Turks, Skanderbeg travelled to Apulia to aid Alfonso V Ferrant's son. Skanderbeg halted in Ragusa on his way to Apulia. On August 24, he landed there and was formally welcomed. When explaining this incident, scholar Fan S. Noli quotes Llukar in addition to the Ragusan deeds found in the vast collection

of Ragusan records known as the *Diplomatarium Ragusanum*: “Following the armistice with the Turks, Skanderbeg hurried to Ragusa where, in accordance with an ancient tradition of the city, he was supported by public (state) expenses while assisting Ferrant, king of Naples, against Renati, duke of Anjou.”

Llukari is aware of the specifics of the formation of the Christian alliance, which was brought about by Pope Pius II, who invited some leaders from Asia in addition to the major European kings to the Congress of Mantua. Llukari said to these princes: “The legates of Pope Calixtus III consented to create a covenant with us to engage in crusades, prompted by Abbot Ludwig. Calixtus died. The concerned princes pleaded with Pion II to reinstate the earlier ruling in the meantime. The general captain of this holy venture should be Philip, the duke of Burgundy, and Gjergj should be made the leader (bayraktar). But Pius passed away in Ancona. In their battle against Shtjefën Kosaça, the Turks ransacked the Konavli settlements. According to Llukari, Gjergj Kastrioti–Skanderbeg passed away in 1465, two years earlier. Skanderbeg’s death date was probably estimated using the Venetian calendar, but it always got stuck for a year. Llukari compares Skanderbeg to Hercules of Ancient Greece in the chapter when he pauses to discuss the death of our daring man: “In 1466 Gjergj Kastrioti passed away, who based on his numerous fateful efforts and actions, was worthy of comparison to Hercules of Greece.”

4. ARBËRESH OF ITALY

As we witnessed, a significant portion of the population left because of the terrible calamity that our people experienced as a result of Turkish assault and occupation. Thousands of Albanians left the cities and fields in response to the destructive measures taken by the occupier against a people who had put up such a strong fight, and they travelled to Italy in order to flee the “*Turkish dogs*” and protect their honour and lives. They did this out of pure hatred

for the foreign invader. This immigration began at the beginning of the 15th century and happened in waves. Fewer groups immigrated in the first waves in 1448 and 1461. After Skanderbeg’s passing in the years 1468–1478, they grew huge and dense. In the barren, uncultivated areas of Basilicata, Molise, Kapitanata, Puglia, and Calabria, large numbers of immigrants were dispersed across the provinces of Naples and down to the south of Italy, where they established new communities. Fewer other groups made Sicily their home. Another significant Albanian immigration occurred in Italy in 1532–1533, this coming from the Greek Arbëresh of the province of Korona of Morea. Even after, Albanians continued to leave their country and settle in Italy, founding new communities in the Campobasso and Foggia provinces.

Vila Badesan Abrucet, the new colony, was established in 1744 by villagers from the Himara settlement of Piqeras. Without assistance and under challenging circumstances, the Arbëresh started farming, battling the elements by growing grapes and oranges, transforming many barren areas into bustling villages. These Albanians never gave up on their dream of returning to their country for a very long time, even after settling in Italy. They tenderly maintained the language, rituals, and traditions, as well as the yearning for their parents’ native land and the remembrance of their great past.

Every Easter, groups of singers in traditional attire strolled through the Arbër villages singing the traditional Albanian rhapsodies. The majority of the Arbëresh lived on feudal estates in some of Italy’s most undeveloped regions in terms of economy, society, and culture. Due to these factors, the Arbëresh did not interact with the native Italians as much until the nineteenth century the masses avoided being influenced by Italian culture and their colonies were preserved whole, with their national traits.

Later, as new social and political ties, connections with Italian residents, and

linkages with major cities developed, Italian habits, culture, and language crept deeper and deeper into the villages, wiping out both the Albanian language and physiognomy in many of them. These immigrants from Albania who settled in Italy helped to preserve the Albanian language by writing and speaking literary works in it. Additionally, they produced literature in it, allowing them to constantly preserve their love for national customs. This literature has existed for practically as long as Albanian literature and has grown concurrently. The Arbëresh literature begins with religious works, just like the other Albanian literature of the 16th and 17th century.

Because the people either could not understand Italian very well or did not know it at all, it was necessary to begin speaking in their native tongue and to create propagandistic Albanian. Poems and religious texts were consequently translated into Albanian.

Pjetër Budi is the following humanism (1566-1623). At the age of 21, he was ordained as a priest and assigned to the ecclesiastical provinces of Macedonia and Kosovo, which were overseen by the Archbishopric of Bar. It should be noted that when it comes to Budi's published books, four of them have more than 1000 pages. The Doctrine of Christ, a 292 page catechism study with questions and answers between the priest and the deacon, is one of his writings. It was released in 1618. There are 741 four-line stanzas of religious poetry spread across 110 pages, with alternating rhymes. His other work, "Rituali Roman," which had 360 pages and was published in 1621, outlines the annual religious observances. While the prayers are said in Latin, the sacraments and their commentary are performed in Albanian. Two poems, one in Latin and the other in Albanian, are included near the conclusion. There are additional 25 original pages, which are essentially a message to the Albanian clergy that is not translated. Except for the Roman Mass explanation, which was published in

a separate folder with the "Ritual," it was all published together under the heading "Whoever says Meshe, these creatures shall be served." The majority of Budi's works are rather loose translations or adaptations. Budi represents a new development in literature both because of the vast volume of his output and because he was the first author of authentic Albanian prose. His original prose is significant because it provides insight into many facets of early seventeenth-century Albanian society and the surrounding cultural environment. It simultaneously preserves information about the author's life and reflects his nuanced personality. They are translations of Latin and Italian poems. There are also original poetry in which he expresses gratitude to Pope Gregory XV, prayers to St. Mary in which he discusses the evil that has engulfed the Albanian people, etc. With his contribution, Budi continues to be the most notable character in our ancient literature.

5. CONCLUSION

A national-patriotic attitude manifested in many ways defined the writings of Albanian humanists in the sixteenth century. Its creators were concerned with preserving Albanian from the impact of foreign terminology and fostering the growth of Albanian as a literary language. Many of them were noted for sowing enmity against the Ottoman invaders, felt pride in Albania's historical past, and had other nationalistic traits. Additionally, because they were Catholic clerks and had studied in Italy, they shared the Latin-Italian cultural formation. In particular in the ecclesiastical domain, everyone employed the Latin alphabet and extensively relied on the Italian spelling, which contains numerous Latin and Italian words. The authors of our literature from the sixteenth century advanced the development of Albanian literature due to their love and concern for the home tongue and their strong classical culture. The fight of the Albanian people against the

occupiers and the Albanians' pursuit of a national culture were expressed in their works.

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