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ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΑΛΒΑΝΙΑΣ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΑ
ΜΕΧΡΙ ΣΗΜΕΡΑ

Stefanaq Pollo-Arben Puto με τη συνεργασία του Kristo Frasheri and Skender Anamali, Θεσσαλονίκη 1979, pp. 403. Translated into Greek by Babis Aktsoglou.

(Review Essay)

The aim of this work is to make known the conclusions arrived at by modern Albanian historians and its translation and consequent availability to the Greek public are of exceptional value.

The book comprises a significant amount of historical evidence, which is presented as a narrative. The footnotes give very few references to sources and refer, for the most part, to other general works. The length of the chapters varies considerably and two thirds of the book are devoted to the XIXth and XXth centuries. This disparity is particularly evident in the chapters concerning antiquity and the period of Ottoman rule (XVIth-XIXth centuries). The book has one positive aspect, however, in that it provides a valuable review of Albanian history.

The Albanians consider themselves to be descendants of the ancient Illyrian tribes who inhabited the regions between Dyrrahio and the Adriatic Sea and the Divra mountains area—the central area of contemporary Albania. The Illyrians were an Indo-European race with their own language, from which the Albanians today suppose contemporary Albanian to be directly descended.

Much has been said about the origins of the Illyrians. Today two basic theories exist: the first maintains that the Illyrians were immigrants to the Balkan peninsula, and the second that they were indigenous. Recent research in Albania has convinced Albanian archaeologists, ethnologists and linguists that the second theory is the correct one.

Greek scholars accept that Illyrian tribes lived north of the Yenousos (Skoubi) River in the region known today as Albania, whereas Greek Epirots lived south of the river. The area we call Albania today in ancient times did not comprise a part of Illyria only, but also a part of Epirus, the northern boundaries of which extended according to Stravon (Z' 4) as far as the Yenousos. It is upon this ancient concept that the administrative partition of Epirus

was based during the period of Turkish rule when the whole region was under the administration of the vilayet of Ioannina.

Through their contact with the Greek world, the Illyrian tribes along the Adriatic attained a high level of cultural development. There were several Greek colonies, of which the most important were Epidamnos and Apollonia. The Albanians today stress that Greek culture did not penetrate deeply into the hinterland and that there was no contact between the Greek colonists and the indigenous Illyrians because the Greek colonists were content simply to maintain their chief settlements.

The Adriatic Illyrians created a kingdom in the middle of the third century B. C. with Skodra in Northern Albania as its capital: the kingdom was incorporated into the Roman Empire in 168 B. C. and thus commenced its gradual latinisation. This was intense, however, only around the administrative and military centres, the town garrisons and the main thoroughfares.

It was then that the Illyrians began to enter the Roman army and administration. Some, like Avriilianos and Diocletian, also became emperors. The names Illyria and Illyrian were preserved even after the Slavs settled on the Balkan peninsula.

The Albanians maintain that the basic characteristic of Albanian nationality is the continuity of place, language and cultural tradition. Of these three elements, continuity of place is the most important as regards nationality and proves that the Albanians were indigenous to the region they occupy today. If we accept the genetic relationship between the Illyrians and the Albanians then we admit that there is a relationship of continuity between them as well.

The Illyrian population, which inhabited the northern part of Illyria, resisted the Slav's assimilative policy. According to the Albanians this was the basic historical circumstance of their national origin, because the Albanian nation was formed from this starting point and in this area. Another important factor was that the Byzantines had withdrawn from the region in the sixth century and when they returned in the ninth century neither they nor the Bulgarians were able to subjugate the indigenous population. And so this population was able to create the circumstances for its own independent development, relying on its old traditions which it enriched with new elements. During this period, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, the Albanian nation began to be formed and its folk culture was born.

By the XIVth century the Albanians' national culture was developing rapidly, beginning with the evolution of productive agriculture and the transformation of the towns into important centres of production. On such a basis the way was opened up for the formation of a state comprising the region

occupied by a population speaking the same language and having the same culture. The book emphasises that the foundations of the state were laid by Balsha II and that this process was hastened at the time of Skenderbey's fighting against the Turks. This new factor and the war with the Turks completed the national consolidation of the Albanian people.

An assessment of the cultural profile of the Albanians of the Middle Ages is closely bound up with the indigenous population's cultural borrowings from their neighbours. The influence of these borrowings and their nature are closely connected with the fact that in the course of their history the Albanian people were under Turkish rule for a long time, and this left its marks.

During the XVIIIth and in particular in the XIXth century, with the birth and development of capitalistic relations, the formation of the Albanian nation as a national community entered a new stage. The development and consolidation of the folk culture and its transformation into a national culture were a result not only of the widening of socio-economic and cultural-intellectual relations between the various regions of Albania, but also of the enriching of the folk culture with the new culture of the Albanian national renaissance. The case of Moschopolis is referred as indicative of Albania's cultural flowering: although the Albanians present it as a purely Albanian town, historical evidence reveals that the majority of its population consisted of Vlach-speaking Greeks¹. During the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries Moschopolis developed into a very important commercial, industrial and intellectual centre: its relations with Western Europe, with which it had established close commercial intercourse, allowed it to flourish and prosper. Moschopolis' merchants were in constant communication and business with most of the inland towns of the Balkan peninsula and also with the most important trading houses of Venice, Italy and Austria. Moschopolis' great prosperity and wealth allowed the Moschopolites to make it a great intellectual centre. There were schools there by the XVIIth century and at the beginning of the XVIIIth the renowned "Ελληνικὸν Φροντιστήριον" (Greek School) was established and in time

1. Cf. Ioakeim Martinianou, *Ἡ Μοσχόπολις* (Moschopolis), Thessaloniki 1957, Evloyios Kourilas, *Νέα Ἀκαδημεῖα Μοσχόπολεως* (The New Academy of Moschopolis), Athens 1932, Konstandinos Skenderis, *Ἱστορία Παλαιᾶς καὶ Νέας Μοσχόπολεως* (The History of Ancient and Modern Moschopolis), Athens 1928. Also, concerning the places where the Moschopolites settled and worked after the destruction of their town in 1769, cf. Mil.S. Filipović's interesting study "Cincari u Velesu" (The Koutsovlachs of Velesi) *Južni Pregled*, Skopje, sv. 5 Maj (1936) 173-180. See also the Greek translation of this work by Yannis A. Papadrianos, in *Balkan Bibliography*, vol. V, 1976, Supplement, Thessaloniki, 1979, p. 315-328.

this became a cradle of Greek philology and philosophy. Moschopolis' School very soon attained such eminence that it could claim precedence over all the other schools of the Turkish-occupied nations, and by 1744 it was being called the Νέα Ἀκαδημία (New Academy); the subjects taught there—Greek, philosophy and theology—were of an academic nature, as far as the standards and scholarly resources of the time went. Thanks to the Academy, Moschopolis produced men who excelled in the world of letters and worked on a broad scale towards the enlightenment of the Greek nation.

Apart from the Academy, a great contribution was made to Moschopolis' intellectual movement and development by its printing-house, which was founded in 1720 by the *ieromonach* Gregory Konstantinidis. Moschopolis' printing-house offered invaluable services to enslaved Hellenism. A great quantity of books, particularly of an ecclesiastical nature, were printed there and circulated to Greeks and Hellenists everywhere, thus contributing not only to their education but also to Moschopolis' great renown.

The town was adorned by twenty beautiful churches distinguished by their size and magnificence: they all had fabulous artistic wealth in the form of ikons, rich liturgical vessels, wood-curved ikonostasis and elaborate and costly murals. The ikonostases were monuments of masterly wood-carving.

The continual development of Moschopolis, its wealth and abundant means, roused the envy of its Turco-Albanian neighbours; in 1769 they attacked, pillaged and utterly destroyed it in three days. After the destruction and decay of the town, its inhabitants settled in Korytsa, Monastiri, Perlepe, Velesa, Ahrida, Belgrade, Budapest and above all in Vienna, where they turned to commerce. Simon Sinas also sought refuge in Vienna—the grandfather of Simon Sinas the great national benefactor and founder of the homonymous Academy in Athens and the Athens observatory—and through bartering cotton bought in Turkey for Austrian industrial products he became extremely rich. Besides Sinas, many other Moschopolites also made their mark in commerce and became rich abroad. The Moschopolites, though Vlach-speaking, were always Greeks both mentally and spiritually.

Apart from what the Albanians have to say regarding the period of Turkish occupation it should be mentioned that there was no concord between the various religions and races. An abyss of undying hatred divided the Moslems from the Christians; and there was a deep chasm separating the Catholics and the Orthodox Christians. But, apart from these religious divisions, a traditional enmity characterised the relations of the GEGS and the TOSKS in general. But the chief division between the Albanians lay in the Islamisation of the greater proportion of the population, and this smothered any other

idea. Here too the Koran brought about a deadly social inequality between believers and non-believers, between Moslem feudatories and Christian serfs, an inequality which confuted any notion of changes in the political status quo which might possibly damage the former and benefit the latter. Always connected with these various divisions were the political or national sympathies of the Albanians too. It is obvious that the Orthodox Albanians always had their eye and their national hopes fixed upon Athens. The Catholics, though, turned to Austria, given that it had claimed the right to protect them ever since the beginning of the XVIIth century. The Moslem Albanians had always been firmly bound to and absorbed by the Turks and indeed the fact that the highest military and civil offices in Turkey were always easily conferred upon Moslem Albanians played the most important part in delaying the Albanians' national awakening. Having bound up their fate and prosperity with the existence of the Ottoman Empire, they were ill-disposed towards any activity which might impair their advantageous position. This explains why the Albanians accepted the Turkish yoke for centuries without complaint and took no part in the demonstration of nationalist propensities which had taken place in the other Balkan countries by the middle of the XIXth century.

But the eastern crisis during the period 1875-78 greatly changed the situation in Albania and brought an Albanian nationalist movement into the international scene. The Berlin Conference in 1878 was a stage in the development of Albania's recent history. The proposal for the expansion of Montenegro and the Greek demands in Epirus had roused the Albanians' interest, and this was the exact point when the first signs of an Albanian national awakening appeared. Albanian nationalism essentially dates from 1878. In that year, on June 10th, the "Albanian Union for the Protection of the Rights of the Albanian Nation" was founded in Prishtine. The aim of the Albanian Union was two-fold: to resist any attempt to annex territory considered by the Union to be Albanian, and to create an autonomous regime within the Ottoman Empire; in addition, the Union favoured the retention of the Sultan's sovereignty as a guarantee of Albanian unity. Since the preservation of Albanian territorial integrity coincided with Turkish interests the Sublime Porte encouraged the Albanian Union, hoping that it would prevent the loss of Turkish territory. However, after the Greek-Turkish agreement of March 1881, when Thessaly and the region around Arta were given to Greece, the Turks no longer needed the Albanians: and so, in April 1881, they sent an army to dissolve the Union and to arrest and exile its leaders.

All the same, the dissolution of the Union did not extinguish the Albanian idea, which was transplanted abroad, first in Bucharest, then in Sofia and later

it managed to progress as far as Egypt and America.

Southern Albania, the district of Korytsa and some districts in Greek Epirus showed themselves to be suitable territory for the development of Albanianism, not only because the seed fell there but also because the people there were in communication with the Albanian centres abroad, and as they were more advanced than the rest of Albania they were more easily converted to nationalism's innovatory ideas. The book characteristically emphasises the fact that the "Prisreni Union was the first frontal attack made by Albanian nationalism against the expansionist policies of the neighbouring Balkan nations" (p. 172).

As far as Greek-Albanian relations are concerned, the basic problem was always the fact that both the Greeks and the Albanians were laying claim to essentially the same area, which the Albanians called Southern Albania while the Greeks called it Northern Epirus. The Greeks' point of view was based on historical rights, national, racial and religious affinities and military reasons. Their assertion that there was a Greek Orthodox majority in Northern Epirus was refuted by the Albanians, who in their turn laid claim to parts of Greek Epirus with the justification that they were inhabited by Albanian-speaking Orthodox Christians and Moslems.

The history of Greek-Albanian relations shows that during the period between 1881-1908 the idea often arose of creating a Greek-Albanian dual state, along the lines of the Austro-Hungarian prototype. Within this confederation Albania would have her own government, her own judicial system and her own army, while her citizens would retain their religion, language, customs, manners and national traditions. However, the rapid development of a certain degree of Albanian national consciousness forced the Greek government to reconsider its policy towards Albania; the creation of a dual state was not practicable, since the Albanian nationalists, like the rest of the Balkan peoples, were fighting for independence or autonomy and not for a dual state. And so the Greek government attempted to reach an understanding with Albania; the developments in the Balkans after the triumph of the Young Turks favoured such an understanding². The Greek government accepted the Albanians' demand for independence, considering the creation of an independent Albania, friendly towards Greece, to be in Greece's interests.

But in the summer of 1912 the Albanians managed to secure significant concessions from the Young Turks, the greatest of which was a clear definition

2. Cf. Basil Kondis, "The Malissori Uprising of 1911 and Greek-Albanian Negotiations in the United States for a Secret Understanding", *Balkan Studies*, 18, I, Thessaloniki 1977.

of what constituted Albanian territory. Until then Albania had been simply a geographical expression with no exact boundaries; now the Turkish government acknowledged that the vilayets of Skodra and Ioannina and large parts of the vilayets of Kosovo and Monastiri were all incorporated within the term Albania. And so the Greeks began to be suspicious of the Albanians. They realised that there was no possibility of approaching the Albanians at a time when they were working towards the creation of an extended autonomous Albanian state containing many Greeks. Moreover, the Albanians were laying claim to the whole of Northern Epirus.

The outbreak of the first Balkan war placed the Albanian nationalists in a very difficult position. It was daily becoming clearer to the nationalist leaders that the Balkan allies intended to dismember Albania, and so they had a very acute problem to face: what should their position be during the Balkan war and what ways and means should they employ to save Albania? Another serious consideration was the fact that there was no central authority recognised by all and strong enough to control independent operations and to direct complex politics.

The Albanian leaders, determined to create a policy, held a conference in Skopje in October 1912. During this conference they reached the conclusion that Turkey was going to lose the war, and it was decided that a declaration was to be made to the Great Powers to the effect that the Albanian nation would fight not to reinforce Turkish authority in the Balkans but for the territorial integrity and freedom of Albania. The declaration, further on, announced that the Albanians would accept only one form of government for the four vilayets. This declaration was given to the Great Powers on October 16th 1912. And so Albanian troops fought on the side of Turkey, not because they desired the continuation of Turkish sovereignty, but because they believed that with the Turks they would be able to defend their territory and prevent the dismembering of "Great Albania".

Meanwhile, the advance of the Balkan armies deep into Albania, as the book reports, aroused great disquiet amongst the Albanian nationalists living outside Albania and made them realise that it was up to them to take some action to save their country. Their objective aim was to save Albania from dismemberment. At this point, Ismail Kemal and Luigi Gourakouki took the initiative: they immediately left Constantinople and went to Bucharest, where they instigated an assembly of the large Albanian colony. Kemal and the others present at the assembly decided to help the land of their fathers. Albanian historians do not admit the part played by Austria and Italy in the creation of independent Albania in November 1912: they aim to show that, despite

the machinations and interests of the Great Powers and the neighbouring states of Greece and Serbia, Albanian independence was won by the Albanian people themselves without the help of the Great Powers, since before independence in 1912 there were many uprisings in Albania. This historical event was the crowning point of many years of armed battling on the part of the whole nation and Ismail Kemal is presented as the Albanian nation's great hero. The nationalist leaders' contribution to the establishment of the new state was undoubtedly substantial; somehow they managed to inflame the people's national consciousness. Nevertheless, what really brought the Albanians to the point of declaring their independence was the threat of dismemberment by Serbia and Greece and the encouragement the Albanians received from Austria and Italy, who wanted to make use of Albania for the realisation of their own aims. For Austria the creation of an independent Albania was desirable since it seemed the most sure and effective way of cutting Serbia off from the Adriatic and from expansion westwards. The Italians, for their part, did not want any part of the Albanian coast to pass to another nation as they were afraid that Austria would claim a part for herself. And so the Italians supported the integrity of Albania³.

After the declaration of Albanian independence, the study reports the events which led to the intervention of the Great Powers in the fixing of the Albanian borders in 1913. Greece's hostile policy towards Albania is emphasised, this having reached a climax with the creation of the autonomous Northern Epirus. The authors of the study stress the fact that it was the Greek government who provided the fuel for the uprising and encouraged the activities of the Epirots in their quest for union with Greece.

The Greek government, had it had the power, would certainly have fixed Albania's boundaries differently. Nevertheless, the existence of an Albanian state accorded with Greek interests. The Greeks' opposition to the new state and its founders was due simply to the fact that the Great Powers had included Northern Epirus within it. In the face of this the Greeks aspired first for the new state to include as few Greeks as possible, and secondly for guarantees to be given for the national status of the Greeks it would include.

The Northern Epirot rebellion was neither induced nor supported by the Greek government, though it cannot be doubted that emotionally it was absolutely on the side of the Epirots. The only way Venizelos could have prevented the Epirots declaring their autonomy would have been by declaring martial law. But this action would have caused turmoil in Greece and probably

3. Basil Kondis, *Greece and Albania, 1908-1914*, Thessaloniki 1976, chap. V.

the resignation of the government. It must be emphasised that after the fixing of Albania's boundaries in December 1913 the Greek government followed the Great Powers' orders faithfully, with the result that the Greeks withdrew their troops from Epirus and did not encourage the Epirots to revolt. They had no intention of preventing the uprising, but it was their duty constantly to advise the Epirots not to resist. In not encouraging the Epirots the Greeks government followed a more prudent and a shrewder policy: it was in Greece's interests to be on friendly terms with the Albanians and to try to rescue them from Austrian and Italian dependence, rather than taking a hostile stand towards them and sending them into the arms of these countries in search of help. The Greek government of that time believed that Greece, Albania and Roumania were a natural counterbalance to the Slavic combination of Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria.

In the chapter covering the period between the two wars there is a discussion of the social and political development of the Albanian people, so hindered by the interventions of the Great European Powers and by the expansionist policies of the neighbouring states. The Albanian people, however, fought and did not yield before the plots and intrigues of their various enemies and never handed over their arms.

Greece's policy during this period is wrongly described as expansionist. On the contrary, the Greek government tried every means of pursuing Greek-Albanian collaboration⁴, and Pangalos even went so far as to keep in Greece as an Albanian minority the Moslems of Thesprotia, instead of sending them, as he could have done, to Turkey, in accordance with the Greek-Turkish exchange agreement of January 30th 1923. In 1926 trade agreements were signed, as were others concerning citizenship and a treaty for the extradition of fugitives. In addition, many Albanians with Greek government scholarships were studying in establishments of higher education and in the military schools. Greece made no protest against the Albanian-Italian agreements of 1925 and 1926 and was the first country, in September 1928, to recognise Zog as king of Albania.

For their part, the Albanians began a systematic programme of de-hellenisation. The Greek schools, which had enjoyed great prosperity during the period of Turkish rule, their numbers having been in excess of 200 during the Balkan wars, began slowly to decrease. In 1925-26 their number fell to 78 and in 1932 only ten schools were functioning⁵. During this same period

4. Alexis Κυρου, *Οι Βαλκανικοί γείτονές μας* (Our Balkan Neighbours), Athens 1962, chap. VI.

5. Chr. B. Papastavrou, *Ἡ Ἑλλάς καὶ ἡ Β. Ἠπειρος* (Greece and Northern Epirus), Athens 1945, p. 79-80.

the Albanian government for the first time appointed Moslems to teach Albanian in the Greek schools of the prefecture of Argyrokastro. The following year all the schools closed down, which forced the Greek government to appeal to the League of Nations. The matter reached the International Court in the Hague, where Greece was vindicated and the Albanians were forced to reopen the Greek schools.

Apart from this educational persecution, there was also religious persecution: the Albanians arbitrarily cut off the Orthodox Church's relations with the Patriarchate and established an autocephalous Albanian Church which was subject to the state. A general outcry by the Christians forced Zog in 1937 to ask the Patriarchate of Constantinople to recognise the Albanian Orthodox Church as autocephalous⁶.

The persecution against the Church and schools clearly demonstrates Albania's hostile policy towards Greece. Nevertheless, Greece followed a policy of non-intervention in Albania because of Italy, which was using Albania as a basis for expansion into the Balkans. And so all the Greek governments avoided not only resisting but even thinking about the situation in Northern Epirus.

The last three chapters deal with the struggle against fascism and for national liberation (1939-44), with the journey towards socialism, and with contemporary Albania. It is emphasised that the years-long struggle begun by the Albanian people against the fascist invasion became an armed uprising of the whole nation only when the Communist Party of Albania, led by Enver Hoxha, undertook to lead this struggle. The Communist Party's seizure of authority was the starting point which led to the victory of the socialist revolution, the great social transformations and the moulding of the new man.

Clearly the book's aim is to show the continuity of Albanian culture from ancient times until the present day, emphasising the development and the genuine character of the folk culture which nurtured and now supports the new Albanian socialist culture. The Albanians wish to show that the Albanian socialist nation has a very great heritage, has created new cultural values and is fighting to protect and develop them further. And all this has been realised through the intense revolutionary fighting and the great courage of the people with Enver Hoxha at their head.

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6. Apostolos Glavinis, *Τὸ αὐτοκέφαλον τῆς ἐν Ἀλβανίᾳ Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει ἀνεκδότων ἐγγράφων* (The Autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church on the Basis of Unpublished Documents), Ioannina 1978.