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ARBËRISHT LITERATURE AS AN EXAMPLE OF PRESERVING A CULTURAL IDENTITY ABROAD

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the origins of the literature of the Arbëreshë people and its impact on the survival of the language outside the country of origin. The cultural identity of the Italo-Albanians is marked by Byzantine influences: religion, economy, culture and military. The centuries-long, harsh Turkish occupation of Albania contributed to the cultural stagnation. Albanians in the territory of the Ottoman Empire were deprived of all rights, including the right to use their own language and profess their faith. The teaching of the Albanian language, as well as teaching in that language, and all publications were banned. Groups of Albanian refugees were welcomed in southern Italy as heroes and defenders of the faith. The few Albanian humanists were the descendants of immigrants educated in Ragusa, Padua or other Italian centres of research and education.

Keywords: Arbëreshë people, Arbërisht language, culture, ethnic minority, emigration

Slowa kluczowe: Arboresze, język arbaryjski, kultura, mniejszość etniczna, emigracja

LA LETTERATURA ARBËRISHT COME ESEMPIO DI CONSERVAZIONE DI UN'IDENTITÀ CULTURALE ALL'ESTERO

Lo scopo di questo articolo è dimostrare le origini della letteratura del popolo arbëreshë e il suo impatto sulla sopravvivenza della lingua al di fuori del paese di origine. L'identità culturale degli italo-albanesi è segnata dalle influenze bizantine: religione, economia, cultura e militare. La secolare e dura occupazione turca dell'Albania ha contribuito alla stagnazione culturale. Gli albanesi nel territorio dell'Impero Ottomano furono privati di ogni diritto, incluso il diritto di usare la propria lingua e professare la propria fede. L'insegnamento della lingua albanese, così come l'insegnamento in quella lingua, e tutte le pubblicazioni furono vietate. Gruppi di profughi albanesi furono accolti in Italia meridionale come eroi e difensori della fede. I pochi umanisti albanesi erano i discendenti di immigrati formati a Ragusa, Padova o altri centri italiani di ricerca e educazione.

Parole chiave: Arbëreshë, lingua arbërisht, cultura, minoranza etnica, emigrazione



Status quaestionis

Let us imagine the following situation: on the one hand – a small nation (with the population of more than 50,000 people today), deprived of its own state for over 600 years, living abroad; on the other hand – the language (with many archaisms), developing national literature, folk customs and preserving religious rites. Do we have to travel far to meet this small nation with such a great sense of cultural identity? It is enough to come to Calabria (southern Italy), and visit places such as Lungro, San Demetrio, San Benedetto Ullano, Acquaformosa, Firmo etc. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the origins of Arbëreshë people, their literature and its impact on the survival of the language outside of the country of origin.

The author of this article would like to point out that he has already written about the Italo-Albanian minority and literature (in Polish), hence there may be a convergence in some points with the following: A. Katolo (2015). *Arbëreshë – albańska mniejszość historyczna we Włoszech południowych*, W: M. Bodziany (red.). *Spółeczeństwo a wojna. Kryzysy społeczne i konflikty kultur*. Wrocław: Wyższa Szkoła Oficerska Wojsk Lądowych. 149–161; A. Katolo (2016), *Kolumbowie literatury arberisht. Potęga słowa pisanego w zachowaniu własnej tożsamości kulturowej na obczyźnie*, in: *Naukowy fermuar: ponowoczesne dyskursy edukacyjno-kulturowe z książką w tle*. W: A. Bzymek (red.). Gdańsk: Ateneum Szkoła Wyższa. 267–279; A. Katolo. (2018). „Ludowe pieśni paraliturgiczne Arbereshów”. *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 2018, T. 171, z. 3. 525–535.

Translations of poetry in the text of the article from Arbërisht into English are my own.

From the history of Albania

The cultural identity of the Italo-Albanians is marked by Byzantine influences: religion, economy, culture and military. This was possible thanks to the famous communication route called *Via Egnatia*, built by the Romans in the 2nd century BC, leading from Durres and Vlora, through Edessa, Thessalonica, Heraclea to Constantinople and Nice (in present-day Turkey). Durres and Vlore were connected by crossings across the Adriatic Sea with the ports of Bari, Brindisi and Otranto on the Apennine Peninsula. The route retained its great importance until the 13th century (cf. Vaccaro 2006: 19–21).

In 330, Albania opted for Constantinople (otherwise known as New Rome) as the capital of the Roman Empire; the cultural and military influence of Byzantium increased. These influences became even stronger from 491, when Anastasius I (reign: 491–518) – previously governor of Durres – sat on the imperial throne (Vaccaro 2006: 21).

With the capture of Bari in 1071 by the Normans – the last Byzantine stronghold on the territory of the Apennine Peninsula – there was an increase in mutual contacts between the two Adriatic coasts. Roberto il Guiscardo (1015–1085) and his successors intended to move to the Balkans. However, in October 1081, the city of Durres, deprived of its army due to its participation in the anti-Byzantine uprising organized by Nikifor Briennio and Nikifor Basilace, was occupied by Norman troops. After the conquest of Durres and then Larissa (in 1082), Albania fell under the rule of the Normans. In 1185, the Normans under Guglielmo II (1154–1189) occupied Thessalonica and began to threaten Constantinople directly (cf. Vaccaro 2006: 21–22).

In the 12th and 13th centuries, Albania came under the rule of Naples. It was the period of the greatest development of this state, thanks to lively contacts with the Maritime Republics of Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa and Venice. At the beginning of the 13th century, Charles I d'Angiò (1226–1285) established the Kingdom of Albania for the first time, recognizing Albanians' customary rights, ancient statutes and privileges. In this way, Albania changed from a social and organizational structure based on kinship to the structures of the European states of that time (the central authority of the king, the political role of the royal court, the judiciary, church and educational structures) (cf. Vaccaro 2006: 23).

At this point, it should be emphasized that the Albanians, despite the changes mentioned above, remained faithful to their own customary laws, called Kanun ("ancient code of the Albanian mountains"). Common law, Kanuni and Malevet, has been passed down orally for centuries. It regulated all aspects of Albanian life. Also today, in the 21st century, among Italo-Albanians it remains a point of reference for the entire customary legal culture (*ibid.*).

At this point, let me mention two Kanun attitudes: *vellamja* [spiritual brotherhood] and *besa* [fidelity to one's word]. Particularly important is the *besa*, which obliges regardless of the circumstances – it is a kind of initiation of social maturity. From *besa*, *vellamja* is born: one cannot become a spiritual brother to someone who cannot keep his promise (Vaccaro 2006: 24).

Naples' reign in Albania did not last long. In the years 1331–1335, the Serbian tsar Stefan Dusan of the Nemaja dynasty invaded and annexed Albania to Serbia. After his death, in the mid-fourteenth century, as a result of bloody struggles for succession, Albania separated from Serbia. The territory was divided between the aristocratic families: the Topia family (dukes of Durres) and the Balsha family (dukes of Zeta) (*ibid.*).

In 1453, Muhammad II (1429–1481) captured Constantinople. Turkish troops began to threaten Albania. Some princely families paid feudal homage: Balsha, Spata, Topia. Others tried to oppose the Ottomans: Giovanni Castriota and Giorgio Arianita, but they both failed. Turkey took over Albania. Only Giorgio Castriota, known as Skandenberg (1405–1468, son of Giovanni Castriota), achieved some success in the war against Turkey. It is worth taking a brief look at this figure

in order to better understand the historical and patriotic context of Arbëresh literature (cf. Vaccaro 2006: 24).

Giorgio Castriota, as a young boy, was sent by his father to the court of Sultan Murat II (1421–1431) as a hostage-guarantor of peace, where he adopted the Muslim faith (which he later abandoned when he reverted to Christianity); his name was changed from Giorgio to Alexander (Skander). In 1438, at the behest of Sultan Murat II's successor, Muhammad II, he returned to his homeland with the title of *Bey* (or *Beg*) [captain general]. Hence, the nickname Skander-Berg can be translated as “Captain-General Alexander”. In the city of Kruja, he assumed the office of *vali* [administrator] (cf. *ibid.*).

Taking advantage of the victory over the Turks by the Christian League, led by the Hungarian Istvan Hunyadi, in the battle of Niš (1443), Skandenberg and 300 soldiers started an uprising against the Turkish occupier (Vaccaro 2006: 24–25). These struggles against Turkish domination gained great recognition in the eyes of Europe at that time; an expression of this was the title of *athleta Christi* given twice to Giorgio Castriota Skandenberg by popes Calixtus III and Pius II (Leo 1988: 32–33). Even his death of malaria (1468 in the fortress of Alessio) did not put an end to the uprising that lasted for 25 years. In 1487, as a result of the peace concluded between Venice and Muhammad II, Albanian territory was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire (cf. Rotelli 1988: 8).

Albanian settlement in southern Italy

Groups of Albanian refugees were welcomed by the people of Naples as heroes and defenders of the faith. In addition, Irena Castriota – a cousin of Giovanni and Giorgio Castriota – married the Duke of Bisignano, Pietroantonio Sanseverino. The establishment of Albanian colonies was also favoured by the Dominicans of Altomonte, who, in this way, wanted to settle the monastic estates depopulated after the earthquake in 1456. In 1478, a group of Albanians received land in the vicinity of Plataci, near the city of Cerchiara (the so-called Ionian Calabria) (Barone 1982: 207).

In Calabria Citra, the first groups of Albanian refugees began to settle between 1467 and 1471. Initially, they were around the city of Acri, and then – S. Giorgio, Vaccarizzo, S. Cosmo, Macchia and S. Demetrio. The Albanians, however, had to fulfill one condition: the cultivation of land and gardens to ensure their livelihood (Capalbo 1997: 123).

Albanian military colonies were present in the territory of Calabria as early as 1444, when a revolt broke out in Calabria led by Antonio Centelles in Marchesato di Crotona. Those who contributed to its suppression were Albanian mercenary soldiers. In a document issued in Gaeta (September of 1448), one can find the following mention: “Demetrio Reres, brave captain of the *Epiriots* [Albanians],

commander of the three Albanian colonies, contributed greatly, with great military sacrifice, to the capture of the entire province of Lower Calabria [*Calabria Inferiore*], together with his sons Basilio and Giorgio” (Leo 1988: 33).

According to P. De Leo, the first Albanian colonies appeared in 1444 in Amato, Andali, Arietta, Vena, Zangarona, Caraffa, Carfizzi, Pallagorio, S. Nicola dell’Alto and Gizzeria. These areas were actually depopulated, as evidenced by *Liber focorum* from 1443. Therefore, Albanians were willingly welcomed in these areas (cf. Leo 1988: 33–34).

Relations between Calabrians and Albanians were peaceful. The Albanians from Plataci, the so-called *toskë* [from the south], went to Cerchiara to sell food and settle matters at the notary public and in the Prefecture. A similar situation as in Ionian Calabria occurred in Calabria Citra, where the so-called *gegë* [from the north] settled (cf. Barone 1982: 207; Capalbo 1997: 123).

Over time, however, this peaceful coexistence ended. As the Calabrian historian G.M. L’Occaso writes: “The Albanians, who come to our area, do not bring any art. Semi-barbarians, poor farmers, speaking a different language, stubborn in their rites and customs, could not fraternize with other inhabitants. And there were constant fights [...], thefts and insults”. Eventually, the animosity between Albanians and Calabrians reached such a point that a saying was born: “if you meet a wolf and an Albanian, let the wolf go free and kill the Albanian” (Barone 1982: 207–208).

The opinion of G.M. L’Occaso, according to V. Barone, is very exaggerated and not entirely true. The Albanians of Plataci and Civita never came into conflict with the Calabrians of Cerchiara. The *Toschi* had a reputation for being conscientious workers: they were very good farmers and shepherds. They proved to be very skilled in the production of wheat, oil, and wine. They developed lands that no one wanted to cultivate because of the steppe or too much forest cover. Marriages between Albanians and Calabrians were also not uncommon. Moreover, the marriage of Irene Skandenberg and Pietroantonio Sanseverino (the Duke of Bisignano), contributed to the peaceful coexistence of the two nations. This marriage was able to keep peace between these two ethnic groups that were so different both economically and politically. In Ionian Calabria, Albanians enjoyed great respect among the local population (cf. *ibid.*).

The beginnings of Arbërisht literature

The centuries-long and hard Turkish occupation of Albania contributed to the cultural stagnation. The Albanians in the territory of the Ottoman Empire were deprived of all rights, including the right to use their own language and profess their own faith (Eastern Catholicism, the so-called Greek-Albanian Byzantine rite). Teaching Albanian, as well as teaching in that language, and all publications were banned. The only language allowed was Turkish (cf. Camaj 1985: 201–202).

In this situation, the few Albanian humanists were the descendants of immigrants who were educated in Ragusa, Padua or other Italian research centers. Educated Albanians initially wrote in Latin or Italian; never in Albanian, which was only spoken at home. One of the Italo-Albanians, Papas [priest] Nicoló Chetta, said that his *Arbërisht* language was the language of the home and that in official contacts he used *lëtire* [literary language] – Italian or Latin (cf. Camaj 1985: 202).

The author (or rather, the translator) of the first work written in arbërisht was papas Gjon Buzuku, a native of northern Albania and living in Venice. From March 22, 1554 to January 5, 1555, he translated *Missale Romanum* into the North Albanian dialect – *gegë*. This 188-page work was published under the Albanian title *Meshari*. In it we can find liturgical prayers and very freely translated fragments of the *Bible*. For historians of Albanian literature, spelling forms and religious terminology with numerous original abstract concepts are of interest (cf. Camaj 1985: 201). *Meshari* by Gjon Buzuku was accidentally discovered by the Archbishop of Skopje – Archbishop Gjon Nikollë Kazazi – and donated to the Vatican Library (the only surviving copy of this book is kept there).

The creator of Albanian literature, in the strict sense of the word, is Papas Lekë Matrënga [Ital. Luca Matranga], who lived in the years 1567–1619. He was born in Piana degli Albanesi (name in the 16th century: Piana dei Greci) in Sicily. He studied at the Collegio di San Atanasio in Rome. After the priest ordination (1591 or 1592), in 1601 he was appointed as parish priest in Piana degli Albanesi, where he founded the first school for Italo-Albanians. In this way, he wanted to preserve the linguistic and ethnic identity of the local Arbëresh community.

The work from which the creation of Albanian literature is officially dated was the book *E Mbësuarë e Krështerë* [Christian Science] published in Rome in 1592. It is the oldest document of Albanian literature, written in the South Albanian dialect – *toskë*. It should be mentioned that Matrënga used the spoken language of the Arbëresh community in Piana degli Albanesi (cf. Camaj 1985: 202–203).

Another important figure for Italo-Albanian literature was *papas* Pjetër Budi [It. Pietro Budi] who lived in the years 1566–1622. He studied at the Collegio Illirico in Loreto. After being ordained a priest at the age of 21, he was sent to Macedonia and Kosovo. He stayed there for 12 years. He took a very active part in the formation of Albanian resistance groups against the Ottoman Empire.

In 1599 he was appointed a General Vicar of Serbia. He was the highest official representative of the Catholic Church in the Balkans, occupied by the Turks at that time. One can imagine how much political and social pressure he was subjected to. In 1616, for helping the Albanian insurgents, he was forced to leave for Rome, where he described for the Pope the situation of Christians in Albania under Turkish occupation. On July 20, 1620, he was appointed a Bishop of Sapa and Sarda in Albania, where he resumed his activities to maintain the cultural and religious identity of Albanians. In December 1622, he was drowned in the Drin River while crossing.

Budi's first literary work was a translation of the *Catechism of St. Robert Bellarmino*. This translation was published in Rome in 1618 under the title *Doktrina e Kërshtenë*. From a literary point of view, the most interesting part is 58 pages long, where we can find the first poetry (religious poems) written in the *gegë* dialect – almost 3,300 four-syllable lines with alternating rhymes. Other works by the aforementioned author are *Cusc zzote mesce keto cafsce i duhete me scerbyem* and *Pasëqyra e t'rrëfyemit*. The first is a brief explanation of the meaning and course of the celebration of the Holy Mass; the second is a translation and adaptation of a theological treatise on confession written in Latin, *Speculum Confessionis* by Emerio de Bonis (cf. Camaj 1985: 203).

The philosophical and theological work *Cuneus Prophetarum* by archbishop Pjetër Bogdani [it. Pietro Bogdani] (1630–1689), which was published in Padua in 1685, is the most well-known piece of Italo-Albanian literature. It should be observed that it has numerous digressions from geography, astronomy, physics, and history. It is interesting to note that the original Arbërisht version of *Cuneus* was translated into Italian (cf. *ibid.*).

In the Arbëresh settlements, particularly in Sicily, there was a great resurgence of cultural activity in the 17th and 18th centuries. Intellectuals are becoming more interested in Albania's historical past and gathering testimonials about its folklore, traditions, and customs, notably among the clergy of the Greek-Albanian Byzantine rite. Folk poetry with historical and religious undertones also came into being. The following Italo-Albanian authors and intellectuals should be mentioned: Fr. Nilo Catalano (1637–1694) of Mezzojuso; Fr. Giuseppe Niccolò Brancato (1675–1741) of Piana degli Albanesi; Fr. Giorgio Guzzetta (1682–1756) of Piana degli Albanesi; Paolo Maria Parrino (1711–1765); Fr. Nicola Figlia (1693–1769) of Mezzouso (1717–1800); Fr. Nicolò Chetta (1740–1803) of Contessa Entellina, author of the first *Italian-Arbërisht dictionary* (nearly 5,000 words and terms of everyday Arbërisht in Sicily); Francesco Avati (1717–1800) of Macchia Albanese.

The *Gjella e Shën Mërisë Virgjër* [*Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*] poem by Fr. Giulio Variboba (1724–1788), which was released in Rome in 1762, is considered to be the genuine gem of Italian-Albanian literature. It should be mentioned that Variboba served as the rector of the renowned Collegio Corsini in San Benedetto Ullano (Calabria) for a significant amount of time. This institution served as a training ground for individuals wishing to become Byzantine Greek-Albanian priests (cf. Camaj 1985: 204).

The aforementioned poem tells about the lives of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus and describes the Magisterium of the Catholic Church; it also contains the various celebrations of the liturgical year. The piece begins with a description of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and ends with her Assumption into heaven. The background of the novel is the reality (traditions and spirituality) of the town of San Giorgio Albanese, where the author was born. Fr. Variboba immerses the reader in the Italo-Albanian reality to the point where he may feel as if he is a participant in the events and experiences of the Albanian nation.

It is interesting that, by emphasizing the cultural identity of the Arbërëshes, and wanting to reach their mentality, Variboba often strayed away from theological truths in his poem. For example: the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Anne and St. Joachim, participated in the Holy Mass, celebrated with the intention of conceiving a child; Blessed Virgin Mary was reciting the rosary; shepherd children from the village of San Giorgio Albanese (whose names appear in the poem) went to Bethlehem to offer their gifts to Baby Jesus.

When it comes to the life and activity of Jesus, *Gjella* recalls all the most important events in a very specific perspective: the emphasis was placed on those moments that intertwine with the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For example, the miracle at Cana in Galilee was performed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Jesus' death on the cross was described through the suffering and pain of His Mother. The poem ends with a description of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the reader is given joyful news: the Mother of Jesus is the Mother of all people, who always intercedes for her children and helps them (*cf.* Variboba 1762).

It is interesting to note that several liturgical hymns (like the *Stabat Mater*), have been written in the *gegë* dialect. While the Latin version of the song opens with the lines "*Stabat Mater dolorosa*", the *gegë* version of the poetry in question begins with the words "*Shën Mëria ruan t'biir*" (*Saint Mary looked at her Son*). It is still customary for Italo-Albanians to sing *Shën Mëria ruan t'biir* throughout Holy Week and during funerals in all of their communities (then it is performed using the recitative method) (*cf.* Camaj 1985: 204).

Folk paraliturgical songs of the Italo-Albanian community in Lungro

The Italo-Albanian musical heritage, both secular and religious, is rooted in Byzantium's ancient musical and liturgical traditions. From the end of the 15th century, the Greek-Albanian Catholic Church became the sole institutional repository of the Arbëresh people's entire spiritual and cultural heritage. Priests performed not only religious functions, but were animators of the entire cultural and social life of the Italo-Albanian communities. It was they who wrote most of the paraliturgical songs that refer to the Byzantine liturgical, theological, and hymnological tradition (*cf.* Rennis 1993: 9–10).

Folk paraliturgical songs were (and are) more than just a form of prayer for the faithful of the Greek-Albanian rite of the Catholic Church, through which Byzantine spirituality, theology, and liturgy are assimilated. The texts of the songs also have didactic and educational purposes: to keep the native language alive, to preserve customs and traditional laws. Therefore, as P. Toschi stated in 1935, "folk poetry, especially religious poetry, is the most important because of its origin, text, and identity" (Toschi 1935: 2). And all this is thanks to its simplicity and beauty.

There are two types of paraliturgical folk songs: those with an open structure and those with a closed structure. Songs with an open structure. These are songs that are considered modern, i.e., those created in the period from the second half of the 19th century to the first years of the 20th century. This type of song developed thanks to secular songs of a lyrical nature, which, however, preserved the old vjershe texts of Albanian poetry. The musical form took on a more “modern” Western character. An example of an open-ended song from Lungro is *Shin Frangjisku e Paullit* [Saint Francis of Paola] (*Shin Frangjisku e Paullit* 1993: 40):

“*Shin Frangji sa mirë na do*

[Saint Francis, your love is great for us]

Të lipmi graxje e ngë thua se jo.

[We ask you for grace, and you have never let us down].

Me at bastum ti atën çë nget

[With the stick you hold in your hand, touch whatever you want]

Edhe vdekjen e siell ndë jetë!

[You bring death back to life!]

Ece ndë dejtët llargu vajte

[You have crossed the sea to go far]

Shkove Ungir e duart i lajte.

[You stopped in Lungro and washed your hands].

Me ata duar ujtë na bekove

[You blessed the water with your hands]

Na le pjot graxje e na shirove.

[You have given us your grace and healed us].

Povirjel më se Inzot

[Poorer than our Lord]

Ndë parrajsit nani ke duart pjot!

[You now live in prosperity in paradise!]

Nat e dit na të parkalesmi

[We beg you day and night]

Mos na harró njera çë vdesmi!

[Do not forget us until death comes]!

Parkalesmi Atin e Birin

[We praise the Father and the Son]

Shpirtin shënjt e ashtuqoft!

[And the Holy Spirit. Amen]!”

A few words of explanation. The song mentions the miracles performed by St. Francis of Paola: reviving a dead boy, crossing the Strait of Messina on a cloak, and causing water to gush out of a rock when touched with a stick. The third stanza talks about the saint’s journey to France. According to tradition, he was to stay in Lungro for a few days in the Italo-Albanian monastery of Santa Maria delle Fonti. All the inhabitants of the town went to the monastery asking for a miracle because there was a huge drought (there had been no rain for many months). St. Francis touched a rock with his staff, and water flowed out of it. The song, as can be seen, refers to the historical experience of the inhabitants of Lungro.

Songs with a closed structure. These are songs that were created in the 17th and 18th centuries. They refer, from the musical structure and the way of performance, to the oldest Christmas celebrations in the town of Lungro (e.g., a feast in honour of St. Nicholas, St. Elijah, and St. Leonard). These songs have not survived in their original form to the present day, but they have retained their Byzantine musical and liturgical character. Their characteristic feature is their performance in two voices: a leading voice and an accompanying voice. It should be noted that the accompanying voice is not identical with the second voice, but works on the principle of maintaining the tone with some arbitrary variations and intervals. Even in modern times, it is not possible to accurately record this accompaniment voice (*cf.* Rennis 1993: 21–22). An example of a folk paraliturgical song with a closed structure is Shin Linardi [Saint Leonard] (*Shin Linardi* 1993: 29–30):

“Shin Linardi me katin

[St. Leonard with handcuffs]

Librarin gjindjat ndir graminit.

Save people from treacherous roads].

Nd’është njeri çë ka bëzonj

[If someone is in trouble]

Ka shin Linardi e të ver të shkonj.

[Let him go to the Chapel of Saint Leonard].

Bën kapelen anë e mbanë

[It was built next to the road]

Udhin e ashpir mbjatu na lamë.

[And we were given grace not to fall into sin].

Nat e dit ruaj sallinelt

[Day and night, you protect our salt miners]

Çë kan shurbein me hihelt.

[Who work in the mine with lamps].

Nd’është e bie ndënj spolë

[When boulders of salt fall on us]

Del shin Linardi e vë një dorë.

[Saint Leonard appears and stops them with his hand].

Se gjith jetin Ti ripararin

[The whole world loves you]

Ndir katinat na skatenarin.

[You free us from the shackles of evil].

Ëmrin tënd u maj harronj

[I’ll never forget your name]

„Shin Linard” zëmëra ime këndon.

[“Saint Leonard”, my heart will always call.]

Shin Linard mos na harró

[Saint Leonard does not leave us]

Prëzë t’Inzoti ti na pënxo!

[Close to the Lord always thinks of us]!

Nat e dit vet tij u thërres

[Day and night, we only call you]

Ka ato graxje edhe u të kem pjes!

[Give us a share of your favors!]"

The text of the song refers to the image of St. Leonard, which is located in a tiny church in Lungro dedicated to this saint. He is depicted with broken shackles, which symbolizes the evil that destroys man. You can see a reference to the reality of everyday life for some Lungro residents: hard and dangerous work in a salt mine. Religious themes are intertwined with secular themes. As G. Rennis writes, “the way of performing this song refers to the liturgical songs of the Holy Week of the Byzantine rite; the song is performed in two rhythms: a solemn rhythm and a restrained rhythm, which symbolize the struggle of the Lord (good) with the devil (evil), the struggle of the resurrection with death” (Rennis 1993: 30).

Conclusion

It is difficult to demonstrate the wealth of this historical and ethnic minority in Europe in a single article. Let me express a wish that research on the Arbëreshë people should be undertaken from the point of view of various scientific disciplines.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the words of Fr. Prof. R. Netzhammer, rector of the Pontificio Collegio Greco S. Atanasio in Rome, who in 1905 described his experiences related to visiting Italian-Albanian towns in Calabria: “I only knew that in Calabria there are places where one does not speak the language Italian, but in some foreign languages [...]. The fact that Albanians are so little known, even in southern Italy, made me very sad already in Monteleone and Mileto. [...] In fact, nobody knows anything about this small but very interesting nation; no one even knows about their capital. Perhaps this ignorance is due to the fact that the Albanians [in Calabria] live in places far from the main transport routes; many of whom have already become heavily Italianized. [...] However, despite being surrounded by Latins, these Albanians maintained the Greek rites of their homeland” (Netzhammer 2003: 9–10).

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