

## Historical –Political Aspects of Development of the Albanian Alphabet Until 1870

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**Abstracts:** The first known and oldest publications have been written in Latin alphabet.<sup>i</sup> Our authors of XVI – XVII century, starting from Buzuku, used Latin letters supplemented by some special signs of a more Slavic - Cyrillic source, as well as some combinations of some simple letters.<sup>ii</sup> This alphabet, which, from one writer to another one also knew some kind of an evolution, being more available and more accurate, which was called “the north alphabet”, “continued even in the coming centuries, without going out of the community where it was born.”<sup>iii</sup> A bit more than 20 years after publication of the work, Pjetër Bogdani’s “Çeta e Profetëve” (Coneus Prophetarium) (1685), another work was published, a summary of documents in Albanian Language called “Kuvendii Arbërit” (Arbëri’s Convention) (1706).<sup>iv</sup>

This publication is the first document in Albanian that belongs to XVIII century. Another important element for the history of the Albanian Alphabet is the first Grammar of our language which is preserved even nowadays in the Library of the Grottaferrata Monastery near Rome.

The author, anonymous in this case, has used the Latin – Italian alphabet supplemented by some Greek letters.<sup>v</sup>

**Key words:** Albanian, Alphabet, Voskopoja, Monastery

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### I. Introduction

#### 1. The history of special alphabets of Albanian authors of XVIII century

The old tradition of the XVI-XVII centuries, to write in the native language, was followed by Gjon Nikollë Këzazhi, discoverer of the first Gjon Buzuku’s book, in Albanian, “Meshari”. This prelate, from Gjakova region, is known for a work of a religious character published in Rome in 1743, which appears to have had a wide knowledge of orthography from other Albanian writers of the North.<sup>vi</sup>

The slow awareness process of Albanians, through projects to cultivate an Albanian alphabet, be it with borrowed letters from foreign letters, will follow further, during the XVIII century. This is the time when the Ottoman Empire had started to face a deep political crisis losing little by little its old-time extraordinary power over the enslaved people, thus over the Albanians as well.

It is the time when the process of independence had started, even though incomplete, of some feudalists in Albania. In this context, “Pashallik of Bushatllij (family)” is created in the north whereas the Pashallik of Ali Pashë Tepelena in the South, with its residency in Janina. These two autonomous *princedom*s were ensuring economic and political union between them. Consequently, the cities started to experience a belated Renaissance in the field of development, handicraft and trade. The bearers of this development were the cities: Shkoder, Prizreni, Elbasani, Berati, Gjirokastra, Janina etc.

In fact, besides economic development, a wider movement for writing the Albanian in cultural, educational and religious life started, even in economical practice.<sup>vii</sup> An effort is noticed to disunite from the influence of foreign cultures, mainly from the ottoman and Greek culture. The *Bejtexhinj* literature of, though in Arabic -Turkish alphabet, started to treat Albanian subjects in Albanian languages as well, expressing in this way the growth of national awareness. Albanian, at this time, started to be written also in special alphabets, and translation of church practices and gospels started to be translated as well. From the educational aspect, some cities are more developed such as: Voskopoja, Elbasani, Berati, Janina etc.

Voskopoja in XVIII century marked its bloom and its decline at the same time. In this city, the economy, trade, handicraft and culture marked a boost.

The school of Voskopoja was remarkable for its level over other existing schools of that period in Albanian language, though the lessons were developed in Greek language.<sup>viii</sup>

In 1744, the main school of this city was advanced in the level of a secondary school, and in 1750 it was named “Akademia e Re” (New Academy).<sup>ix</sup> Among the students and pedagogues of this school, “efforts were made for the preaching to be done in the native language and the Orthodox Church in Albania to be given the Albanian character, which comes out of the Grigor Voskopojari’s and Teodor Kavalioti’s efforts in translations of testaments. It was searched after ways for development of the Albanian language as well as later

publications in an Albanian alphabet”.<sup>x</sup> The most famous representatives of this school were TeodorKavalioti and Daniel Hexhiu, who performed the teaching of the texts of religious and pedagogical works in Greek language. Albanian language was written in Voskopoja as well, as it is thought, and it was represented by GrigorVoskopojari, known as Grigori from Durrës. GrigorVoskopojari wrote the Albanian with the special alphabet, which has not been known so far.<sup>xi</sup> It is said that when he died, in 1772, he had left some manuscripts in Albanian language, in the Monastery of saint Vlladimiri in Elbasan.<sup>xii</sup>

TeodorKavalioti gave an important contribution at the school of Voskopoja. He was the rector of the “Akademia e Re” (New Academy) of this city, whereas he became famous with his masterpiece “Protopiria” (First lessons), published in Venice in 1774. This book contains materials, not very much known until that time for the contribution in the field of onomastics, Kavalioti is also well known for drafting a small three language dictionary: Greek-Rumanian – Albanian, composed of 1170 words. This author is of a special importance because he contributed especially in a deeper presentation of the subject of lexicography, as well as for the history of writing the Albanian notably with Greek letters.<sup>xiii</sup> More concretely, we encounter here for the first time the Albanian written widely, but in the Greek alphabet.<sup>xiv</sup>

Cultural movement in Elbasan, differing from, we would say, illuminist movement of Voskopoja, was distinguished especially in the use of Albanian with special alphabets. We understand that the cultural movement in the central city of Albania was deeply nationally colored until that time, because it was trying to throw away the Influence of the Patriarchate of Istanbul, translation of religious services in church practices. In this context, the work of “AnonimiiElbasanit” (Anonymous of Elbasan) as well as the national activity of DaskalTodri (Theodor HaxhiFilipi) should be distinguished.

Berat was represented by KostaBeratasi, from whom, beside the pieces in Greek, as well as other materials in the Greek alphabet, we also have two small Greek – Albanian dictionaries of 1170 words, where we encounter a special alphabet. In this way, from those who followed the school of Voskopoja in writing the Albanian language, we notice two directions: the first is writing the Albanian language with special alphabets, and the second one, with the Greek alphabet.

According to ShabanDemiraj, the writers of this period from Middle and South Albania are divided into two groups: the first group is composed of writers such as the so called Anonious of Elbasan, DhaskalThodri from Elbasan, Theodor Kavalioti and Daniel Hexhiu from Voskopoja, KostëBerati etc., who wrote and translated religious and educational works which generally remained unpublished. In the second group are the authors that used the Arabic alphabet, and who wrote poetry of various laic and religious topics, such as NazimFrakulla and Hasan ZykoKamberi.<sup>xv</sup>

In the Northern Albania, during this period, there is a decline in relation to the publishing activity, excluding 2-3 works belonging to the years of XVIII century. The Latin alphabet will be applied for the Albanian for foreigners in those few segments that write about Albania, as well as any small dictionary or grammar notes that will be published.

The situation appeared to be complicated as a consequence of feudalist disintegration of Albanian territories and foreign rule. There was a lack of learning of alphabets more than ever, as there were a couple of systems of writing in use. This difficult situation reflected economic social-economic conditions of the time, the lack of unity between the provinces of Albania, religious disunity and anti Albanian policy itself that the ruler as well as a part of clergy, especially the foreign one, applied also in the field of culture. Thus, the followers of the Albanian school of Voskopoja used special alphabets or the Greek alphabet in writing the Albanian.

The year of 1949 gave us something new for the history of the Albanian alphabet as well as further national political awakening. By pursuing on a pile of manuscripts, an alphabet, unknown until that time, was found out. These are incomplete translations, fragments of four gospels, for liturgical needs, written in a special alphabet. During the observance and analyses, neither the name of the author nor the accurate year of when it had been written was found. Therefore it was named anonymous and was identified as a document of XVIII century.<sup>xvi</sup>

The authorship of the manuscript is questionable. We will stick to the opinion of the beginning, when it was found out, by calling it anonymous. Previously, Dh. Shuteriqi thought that the author is Pope Totasi,<sup>xvii</sup> but later on he admitted that this anonymous was in fact Theodor Bogomili.<sup>xviii</sup>

As to MahirDomi, the author of translation of these evangelic fragments ‘appears to be Grigori, the metropolitan of Durrës, before being the head of publications of the Voskopoja print house,<sup>xix</sup> the opinion which was supported also by Robert Elsie.<sup>xx</sup>

The Anonymous’ alphabet of Elbasani is the oldest original alphabet of the Albanian language we have known so far. It is of a special value for the history of the Albanian language and its alphabet. From this time, an effort starts for the Albanians who did not want in their scripts to use known foreign alphabets, on the contrary, they made efforts to create alphabets themselves, stylizing the existing ones or by drafting new scripts, free from every kind of influence. One of the greatest figures of the XVIII century for the South Eastern European historians was Theodor HaxhiFilipi, known by the name DhaskalThodri. He would draft his alphabet that seems

to have had elements of Slavic Glagolitsa, where he exposed his affinities.<sup>xxi</sup> Theodor HaxhiPhilippi's alphabet echoed in Elbasani and, according to Hahn, in Berat as well,<sup>xxii</sup> but here it did not take mass participation in. This alphabet came into use not only in church services, but will also be used in every day's life, mainly by traders from Elbasani in their activities, in their correspondence, mainly at the end of XVIII century. Theodor Haxhi Philippi's alphabet played a role in the spread of the Albanian language, particularly in Elbasani at the end of the XVIII century and at the beginning of the XIX century as this were the best known alphabet and the most comprehensive of all the special alphabets until that time. Trying to replace the Greek with Albanian in the Orthodox Church, he performed in this way a noble mission in favor of the Albanian language and his people. He did not open a new path, but the path that followed and the activity that he performed was most effective at the time that marked the subsequent years, approaching the ideals of our national Renaissance.

One manuscript of Costa Berati is preserved in the National Library in Tirana. This Berati's 152-page text is written in Greek and Albanian. Two things are worth in this manuscript: the Albanian part, which summarizes some blessings, a religious poem, excerpts from the Gospel, prayers and two Greek-English dictionaries of 1700 words, as well as the special alphabet.

Considering that there is no date when this manuscript was written, therefore opinions are not the same, and then we can accept something approximate. The general opinion is that this manuscript belongs to the second half of XVIII century. This view is supported by M. Domi.<sup>xxiii</sup>

As to its prevalence, it is likely that it could be used in Berat as well, until the end of XVIII century, and then was replaced by the Greek alphabet.<sup>xxiv</sup> The value of this manuscript lies in trying to introduce Albanian in religious services and in school, but not with a special alphabet. It is precisely the XVIII century, especially its half that is distinguished for the work that was done in the design and use of special alphabet for writing the Albanian language.

Albanian writing in Ottoman Arabic alphabet took a spread especially in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, where a literature, called the *Bejtexhinj* literature, flourished as a result of economic, political and cultural at the time. In this long period of the use of the Arabic-Ottoman alphabet, we encounter two groups: the first, Albanians, those who write in oriental languages and secondly, those who use the Arabic-Ottoman alphabet, but with Albanian letters.

The XVIII and XIX century know a constellation of Albanian literary representatives, who in their writings in Albanian language used the Arabic-Turkish alphabet. This tradition of writing in some areas was more widespread, such as in the Kosovo and Manastiri Vilayets. This writing system was used in several cities: Berat, Elbasan, Shkodër, Pristina, Tetovo, Prizren, Filat, in Cologne, in Gjakova, Frasher etc. In the XVIII-XIX centuries, the following writers are distinguished in this respect: N. Frakulla, S. Naipi, H. Z.Kamberi, M. Kyçyku, T. Boshnjaku, M.H. Dobraçi, etc.

## **II. Albanian pashalliks of Janina and Shkoder, centers of awareness and values of the national culture**

Besides falling the feudal-military system apart and weakening the central Ottoman rule, the state administration of the Empire fell apart as well. This gave an opportunity to powerful Albanian feudals, as well as other great feudals of the other provinces of the Ottoman Empire to misappropriate high positions they occupied in the administration and get economically and politically consolidated. In this way, during the first half of XVIII century, the rapport of forces that existed before, when the feudal 'spahis' of Albania were completely dependent on the Sultan, began to change. Now, some great feudal governmentals became more powerful and began to feel themselves less dependent on Istanbul. These ruled as mytesarifs or myteselims relying rather on the strength of their economic, political and military power than the central ottoman rule. Little by little, the Istanbul functionaries ceased to exist and were becoming semi-autonomous governmentals. Sanxhaks were disintegrated into small and large possessions. These semi-autonomous feudal possessions (regions) were called Pashalliks.

When Mehmet Bushatliu came into power, the almost 75 year (1757-1831) period of *Bushatllijrule* began for the regions of Shkodër and other provinces of northern Albania.

The high degree of integration of Albanian culture by the end of the XVIII century gave the spirit to the growth of the Albanian national awareness. At that time, thanks to the spiritual and material culture sufficiently developed, the degree of national awareness was higher than that of other peoples under ottoman rule<sup>xxv</sup>. Even in the early 90s of XVIII century, one could talk about a factual disintegration of the Ottoman government and the rule with the government and the rule of Kara Mahmut Pasha and Ali PashëTepelena<sup>xxvi</sup>.

DimoStefanopoli in his report on Napoleon, in 1797-1798, was forced to accept, "not to assume that there are no people among Albanians who know how to defend their rights" and pointed out the "proprietors" that Catholic Christians "create the unlimited power" of Shkoder, while in southern Albania, Ali Pasha Tepelena "is trying to become the absolute Ruler of Albania"<sup>xxvii</sup>. Kara Mahmud showed such aspirations since the 80's of the XVIII century. This is seen from the information by the French Consul in Ragusa, who noted that the

Albanian pasha considers himself "that he derives from Skanderbeg and proudly proclaims that he wants to follow his footsteps."

The Serbian and Croatian press of the 30s and 40s of the XIX century assessed beautifully the Albanian demands and conscience during the *Bushatllij* and *Tepelanasve* period. According to this press, the *Bushatllij (family)* and Ali PashëTepelena endeavored for Albania's independence and also contributed to the organization of liberation uprisings in Greece and in Serbia<sup>xxviii</sup>.

Ali Pasha Tepelena and *Bushatllij (family)* had understood the role of the Christian religion for the reviving Albanian political momentum, as a political means and thus to connect, through it, Albania with the Christian Europe, so that the religion does not become the cause for conflicts of the Albanian nation with neighboring European peoples. In the Balkans, especially with the Albanians, there was a certain transition from the illuminism of the renaissance as a period of formation to a high degree of the main features of the nation in the Renaissance, as a period continuing efforts, at least, one and a half century, in wars for realization of political union and independence of Albania.

What were important to ascertain was the religious feelings of Muslim Albanians for protection of the religious community of Islam and the sense of ethnic and fraternal Albanian Muslims relationship with Christian minority, who, on the other hand, since the early 30s of XIX century, have been under the strong influence of European Christian propaganda. ZefJubani, in relation to the literary activity in Shkodër with its surroundings, spoke with admiration and respect for the literary activity of MullaHysenDobraci and MullaSaliPashës, whom he has known closely. In fact, his grandfather Ilia and father Ndoku were contemporaries of these two mentioned authors, meanwhile Jubani's predecessors and important personalities in the headquarters of *Bushatllij (family)*<sup>xxix</sup>.

In the period of Ali PashëTepelena, Janina became the main economic, political and cultural centre of Southern Albania. This governmental led a reviving philo-Greek loyal and tolerant politics against the illuminist culture of Hellenic provenience, by opening way creation of cultural orthodox Greek –Albanian development<sup>xxx</sup>, the college Maruci of *Bellanëve* and the college of *Kapllani*. A very close relative of the Albanian governmental of Janina was AthanasPsalidha, the Greek member of renaissance, the "leading teacher" of "Kapllani" college, follower of Kant's philosophy and the warrior for the popular Greek language, then the Albanian from Çamëria, EugjenVulgari, the follower of Volter's, Lok'sLajbnici's philosophy and the teacher of the college of Maruci, who is considered as 'one of the most remarkable predecessors of the Greek national renaissance.<sup>xxxi</sup> It is believed that Ali PashëTepelena, a governmental, teacher and illuminist, put powerfully the Albanian people at the start of the Renaissance, because he was not a member of renaissance only for foreigners, and a separatist feudal and without renaissance perspective for his people, which are shown in the literature of historiography.<sup>xxxii</sup> For the Albanian culture at the beginning of the Renaissance, very much important are the grammar notes in Albanian language by M. Liku, which, as far as we know, while being published, were processed by the Albanian Jani Strati. It is also important for the Albanian culture at the beginning of the Renaissance the scientific activity the Ali PashëTepelena's doctor, and the member of the "Greek Heteria", VangelMeksi from Labova of Gjirokastra. This literary and scientific author, probably, in 1814, published two religious pamphlets in Albanian. Based on an agreement with Pinkerton, the representative of the "Shoqëria Biblike" (Biblical Society), in Istanbul, in 1821 Meksi translated "Dhjatën e Re" (New Testament).<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Publication of "Dhjata e Re" (New Testament) was of a great importance in the field of arousing the love to the masses in communicating to God. Translation was supported in the popular language and that this work will serve later as a source for studying the Albanian language. This served even to NaumVeqilharxhi and especially to Kristoforidhi, on the occasion of translation of Gospels. Generally, then, the Albanian pashallik of Janina with its potential of a cultural network was undoubtedly an affirmation of our national history in almost European dimensions.

### **III. Veqilharxhi'sËvetars and political and national messages for the Albanian alphabet.**

Until the beginning of Renaissance, in Albanian territories inhabited by Albanians, there are some alphabets that were used in different cultural and religious circles, and where the writing of Albanian was characterized for an obvious lack of the unit. This was an overview of the social-political situation of our nation, which was determined by historical condition of feudal order, foreign rule and religious discord. This was another huge task for the members of renaissance to give the Albanian language the color of common, national alphabet for all the Albanians.

In the first half of XIX century, a new writer, far from homeland, would become the drafter of a special Albanian alphabet. This was NaumVeqilharxhi, who since in his childhood immigrated to Moldova, in the city of Galac, some kilometers far from Brailes. Due to his political, linguistic, pedagogical and educational activity, Veqilharxhi is included in that group of our members of the Renaissance that gave a distinguished contribution in the field of school history, of textology, of language and writing in Albanian, of the political and pedagogical thinking. N. Veqilharxhi is the drafter of the first Albanian language ABC book which, until that time had not

been done by any Albanian patriot and that not a single alphabet of Albanian language had existed, and where, as a consequence, there had been no schools in native language. There should be some other factors and motives that encouraged N. Veqilharxhi to deal with such a work. Living in Balkan environments, where the more the movement from the Ottoman Empire was coming, the more was political conscience of the oppressed nations growing and getting strengthened day by day in order to get rid of it. As a priority, he would be committed for drafting of ABC books. Historic- social environments, revival of national movement of the Balkan peoples created favorable conditions to encourage drafting and publishing the first book for Albanian students. Thus NaumVeqilharxhi's *Ëvetar* belongs almost to the same period of publication of ABC books of DimitërDaruvvari (in Greek), of Giorgi Lazori in (Rumanian), of Peter Berani 1824 (in Bulgarian) and of VukKaraxhic, 1827 (in Serbian).<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Now, there are two books by N. Veqilharxhi. The first ABC book was published and polygraphed in 1884, titled "*Fort I shkurtër dhe i përdorshim Ëvetar shqip për çdo secillë që do të mposhnë të kënduarit dhe të shkruarit bukur shqip*" (Very short and useful *Ëvetar* in Albanian for everyone who would learn to read and write beautifully in Albanian). It is a small book with 4 sheets or 8 pages that N. Veqilharxhi, in the introduction of the publication in 1845, writes: "...Don't consider it as a small one, time will show its size and importance" This long introduction was a real manifest of our National movement.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The alphabet N. Veqilharxhi started in 1824 became a weapon in the hands of Albanians in 1844 on the occasion of publication of first *Ëvetar*. *Ëvetar* of 1844 is a rear and a very precious book for the history of Albanian education. It is known to have been published in three copies.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

It is understandable that the *Ëvetar* was published to be spread out in Albania to serve as an educational text, first of all, for the students of schools of the country. We know that an amount of copies were sent by NaumVeqilharxhi to Korça, by the help of NaumHaxhiVasili with the order that they get distributed not only in Korça but in Permet and Berat as well.

We get to know from a letter that the Korça leadership sends to NaumVeqilharxhi from Korça, with how much enthusiasm the *Ëvetar* was welcomed to Korça. The letter was dated 22 April 1845, which according to Julian calendar and that belongs to today's calendar, dated 5 May 1845, was published for the first time by professor Viktor Papakostea in the magazine "Balcania" 1, Bucharest, in 1938.

Regardless of the letter with Rumanian Cyrillic letters, brought out by Viktor Papakostea, starting from the affirmation of the people from Korça themselves... we managed to read by having a correspondence with letters as if the *Ëvetars* were a source of miracle..."

The letter of the Korça people pointed out the great value of this ABC book: "Please, Sir, in case you have *Ëvetars*, from those you have sent us, send us as much as you can, because our co countrymen continually ask for more from those *Ëvetars*... we got used to read and write..."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The letter proves that NaumVeqilharxhi has had a regular correspondence with the co countrymen and that the other Albanians- immigrants in Rumania have been in contact with him and his activity. It is obvious that the Albanian bourgeoisie had started to become active in the movement for the national cause; that the love for the native language and culture in Albania was growing. The letter shows that a part of leadership of the Albanian orthodox community was supporter of NaumVeqilharxhi's idea.

The enthusiasm that was caused by the publication of the ABC book shows that NaumVeqilharxhi was fully aware of the situation in Albania, and he knew how to respond to the situation and the demands at the right time with the right work. "Only one ABC book of four sheets", the patriots from Korça write "without the help of school teachers", made it possible "to awaken and enlighten a nation". Our nation will be enumerated, through this beginning, among the most enlightened nations of Europe"; whereas his name, Veqilharxhi's name, as the co countrymen from Korça wrote on April 1845 "will remain immortal until the end of centuries." This enthusiasm encouraged him. That's why, instead of a simple publication, he drafted a new text, six time bigger than the first *Ëvetar*, which, though it was called the second print, it was a book on its own. The second *Ëvetar* was published in 1845. The full title is "*Fare I ri Ëvetar në shqip for djelm nismëtar nxjerrë e dhënë mbë dritë tani herën e parë për djelm të vegjëlme një të zgjidhur nga disa gjë të mirash e të fitimëshme prej Naum P. Veqilharxhit-Bredhi nga Bythkuqi i Kolonjës moti i dytë 1845*"<sup>xxxviii</sup> (Quite new, the *Ëvetar* in Albanian, for young initiators, made and put into light for the first time for young boys with a selection of some good and useful things by Naum P. Veqilharxhi-Bredhi from Bythkuq of Kolonja, 1845".) Additionally, his work was of a great value for the thoughts expressed, for development of the national language and education.

In the "*Ëvetar*" he also gave advices for the young people, some of which are of a deep national and educational content: Everybody is obliged to love his country; there is nothing more important than learning in this life; whoever does not learn or work, he should not eat, etc. at the end, he gives some parts from the "Old testament".

NaumVeqilharxhi, this predecessor of our National Renaissance, who was the first to formulate the cultural demands of the movement for national liberation, would give priority to the spread of writing of native language, when it was known that the Albanian had fallen behind, comparing to other languages. Under these

circumstances, the spread of the Albanian language was of the first hand importance. Failure in education would only fulfill the enemies' desire of the Albanian nation and would push it into a greater oppression and backwardness. Given that cultivation of the language, according to NaumVeqilharxhi, "honors people", he advises his co countrymen that, "There is nothing more beautiful when every country has its own language and writing".<sup>xxxix</sup> Albanian language had had things in writing, but only few of them, and they could disappear, if that was not written, therefore, he wants that writing and reading is spread out as soon as possible towards boosting its cultural level of the Albanian nation. Few people knew, according to the author, to read and write in Albanian. His desire was to achieve, for a short time, "I don't say that, in five thousand houses, there are one hundred persons who know to read and write in their language..."<sup>xl</sup>. This could be spread out only through development of education, where Albanians would be educated and this should be done as soon as possible. In the age-long backwardness of long invasion that prevented every initiative and activity related to the national culture and language, they should look into the future, to look into their perspective. Let's write our own language, claimed Veqilharxhi, as "through writing, we understand better with all the people of the world", communicate our thoughts and create relationships in accordance with cases, without which life would be impossible".<sup>xli</sup>

#### **IV. Efforts in Istanbul for drafting of a national alphabet before 1879**

In the second half of XIX century, we are witnesses of increased Albanian efforts against the long Ottoman rule. Under these circumstances the members of our renaissance saw the spread of education and knowledge as a means of awakening of national conscience and that's why they dealt with organization of a wide movement with clear political objectives. Also, in the Albanian persistence of migration, Albanian co countrymen were each trying to give their contribution in relation to the Albanian culture as well as in development of national education. In the XIX century, Istanbul, Bucharest, Sofia, Alexandria became important patriotism centers where Albanians were getting together, from where they strongly influenced over raising the Albanians' conciseness and national cause as well. The immediate problem, the members of the renaissance were continuously concerned about, was the lack of a common alphabet in Albanian language. Consequently, the XIX century marks the beginning of a sensational period of time to finally solve this problem.

N. Veqilharxhi, who was the first to open the way for a single alphabet in Albanian language, and one of the first ideologists of our national movement, in his encyclical letter, in 40's of XIX century, comparing with slaves those peoples and nations that remained ignorant, writes: "from their shameful situation and misfortune, when they begin to cultivate their native language, but this cannot be gained in another way but with the special national letters, which had been started earlier than I did".<sup>xlii</sup>

At the beginning of the second half of the XIX century, the efforts for cultivation of the Albanian language as well as opening of schools were important. "An important step in this regard was made in 50's on the occasion of establishment of a cultural society in Istanbul, the aim of which was to accumulate the necessary means for printing books and keeping schools operating."<sup>xliiii</sup> There is no data which that society was and what its concrete activity was. In some publications, it is said that in 1864 K. Kristoforidhi together with Pashko Vasa, I. Qemali, H. Tahsini, in cooperation with other co patriots, had organized a series of meetings for revival of the national society. In those meetings, it was discussed not only for the need of providing financial means for the letters and the Albanian language, but also for creating a single alphabet for all Albanians.<sup>xliiv</sup> From 1858-1875, Vaso Pasha, Konstantin Kristoforidhi, HoxhaTahsini, Ismail Qemali, JaniVreto, Abdyl, Sami and NaimFrashëri,<sup>xli</sup> appeared on the political and national scene, who each separately or altogether intended to form a common Albanian alphabet<sup>xli</sup> as well as cultural societies.<sup>xlii</sup>

MahirDomi expressed his doubt regarding the accurate chronology of the meetings held. It is likely that these meetings were convoked in 1867. Based on the archival materials, it comes out that in 1864 neither K. Kristoforidhi nor I. Qemali or any other, were in Istanbul<sup>xliiii</sup>, which means that that the meeting was not held that year, or there have been other patriots who took part in it. JaniVreto too, in his memoirs is contradictory. In a letter he addressed to S. Kolea, on 23 October 1893, he writes 1864 as a date of the beginning of meetings, whereas in his memoirs gives the year of 1864.<sup>xlix</sup> Perhaps, in 1864 there have been thoughts spread out in relation to the organization of such meetings or efforts have been made in respect of this objective, but which has been realized later. It needs to be said that Porte (the central government of the Ottoman Empire) had prevented those efforts and had not been interested to solve such a vital problem for the existence of a nation, trying in this way to maintain the status quo. Discussion about the common Albanian alphabet would remain during all the second half of XIX century, a problem that should be solved.

In 1867, on the banks of Bosphorus, in Istanbul, Albanians who were working there, got together to solve this important issue. Thus, JaniVreto wrote that, "the need for the use of one common and single alphabet which would have one form simple letters as many as our Albanian language has vowels and consonants, was felt in 1867, by remarkable personalities of our nation who were living in Istanbul, such as Ismail Beu...from Vlora, a well cultured person, very much familiar with Greek, French, English, Arabic and Persian languages, P,

Vasa; a catholic from Shkoder... of a European culture and a good speaker of Latin, Italian, French, English, the speaker of Turkish and Greek as well...; the lecturer Hasan Tahsini from Filati, a personality of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and French culture, and K. Kristoforidhi from Elbasani, who was mentioned above.<sup>1</sup> There are some other Albanian pashas and functionaries that participated in this meeting. With the aim to easily get together and not to face any problems by Turkish government, it was requested from Ali Pasha, the prime minister of the Ottoman Empire of that time, to allow the activity of the group. Based on JaniVreto's testimony, which relied on what K. Kristoforidhi had said, different thoughts emerged about how to draft the Albanian alphabet, which did not go so smoothly, but were passionately discussed without having a concrete conclusion. It was discussed about Arabic, Latin, Greek alphabets etc., the idea to use the Arabic alphabet for the Albanian language, but supplemented, was opposed by I. Qemali, P. Vasa and K. Kristoforidhi. Then, supporters of this proposal withdrew from it, and this task remained to be continued by Hasan Tahsini,<sup>li</sup> I. Qemali, P. Vasa and K. Kristoforidhi.

It is possible that this was the first commission to be established regarding this objective.<sup>liii</sup> Based on the Ottoman newspaper "Muneyiz"<sup>liiii</sup> a commission was established for drafting of the Albanian alphabet since in 1869, it means ten years before the "Society for Publication of Albanian writing"

Ali Pasha, following an approachable policy with Albanians, in order not to increase the enmity towards the Ottoman Empire,"authorized and encouraged the commission to continue its meetings".<sup>liv</sup> But the Turkish prime minister soon changed his mind and started to create obstacles to the members of the commission, so later on prohibited the activity of the group. The Greek Patriarchate also witnessed the anti Albanian stand. It exercised pressure over the orthodox Albanians to abandon the national movement and the activity in favor of the national culture, which achieved its goal for a certain time, but the spark had remained indistinguishable in the conscience and heart of Albanian patriots, who, even after this blow, they would get organized and get together in the coming years.

Two years later, in 1869, there is a new effort. This time, K. Kristoforidhi is also among the participants for selection of the common alphabet, representative of "Biblical Society of London". According to a letter, sent from Istanbul, on 22 November 1869, A. Tomson notifies that a proposal had been made and, it seems, he had got support in the higher circles to create a new alphabet for the entire country and to put it into use. "But I think, - Tomson writes, that all, excluding fanatic Muslims, do not like this proposal."<sup>lv</sup>

For the endeavors of 1870, there is unconnected evidence from Dh. Kamarda, A. Dozon, Dora d' Istria etc. Kamarda wrote that from the beginning of 1870 the Ottoman government had established a commission to make an alphabet that will be used by Albanians.<sup>lvi</sup> August Dozoni, referring to the Turkish newspaper "Courrier d' Orient" dated 2 March 1870 notified for a mixed commission that has been operating at that time.<sup>lvii</sup> Dora d' Istria would write to De Rada (4 April 1870) that the "Istanbul Commission had finished the job in relation to creation of the Albanian language alphabet."<sup>lviii</sup> It's time when Albanians no longer would hope that this problem can be solved by the Ottoman government.

The demagogic politics that Istanbul was exercising is seen with the Prime Minister Ali Pasha, who according to JaniVreto, had told to his opponents: "In this way, by being tolerant, we would make them like us, let's throw away and forget hatred and enmity caused by the rule and let them consider us as a common father who shows love for them."<sup>lix</sup>

Regarding this, the polemic of 1871 between the Istanbul newspaper "Basiret" and the newly edited weekly newspaper "Prizreni" in Turkish and Serbian language cannot be bypassed. In this case, the author of the article in of the newspaper "Basiret", who is likely to have been Sami Frashëri, requested from the editors of the newspaper "Prizreni" to write in Albanian language as well. As to the alphabet, this newspaper expresses the opinion that an alphabet of another language should be taken into consideration; it means to find a new alphabet. However, the editorial office of the newspaper "Prizreni" refuses this request with motivation that the Albanian language is not yet a literary language and that there would be huge expenses if it were edited with a new alphabet.<sup>lx</sup>

Based on these data, and evidence for getting the Albanian patriots together in order to solve the problem of the common alphabet, it is thought to have been an effort by the end of 1869 and which continued until the beginning of 1870, but which ended unsuccessfully. In 1871 there is another tendency in the function of establishing of a patriotic Albanian organization.<sup>lxi</sup> K. Kristoforidhi and H. Tahsini should have had, here, the leading role. JaniVreto participates here for the first time. It is said that the 21 year old, Sami Frashëri, is a participant as well,<sup>lxii</sup> but according to different bibliographic publications for him, it appears that he had come to Istanbul in 1872. Hasan Tahsini, according to JaniVreto, was inviting Albanians into his room of madrasah to give new opinions about writing the Albanian language. In these meetings, it is obvious that there were four courses about how to draft the Albanian alphabet. The course for the Arabic alphabet was supported by the pashas that were participating in the commission and being encouraged by the Porte (Central Ottoman Government), but was opposed by majority of members of the commission. Scientific, political, practical and

geographical arguments were brought in order to throw away the Arabic alphabet, as Albanians were Europeans, they should embrace an alphabet from the Old Continent. The course that had more supporters, and that, later, played the key role to solve the issue of the unified Albanian alphabet, was the support in the Latin alphabet, as the historical-political and practical circumstances were in favor of this alphabet. The most passionate supporters were: P. Vasa, K. Kristoforidhi, I. Qemali etc. Another solution for a new alphabet, that represents a new course, was proposed by H. Tahsini, just the same as the other compatriot N. Veqilharxhi did 20 years ago. The alphabet, according to H. Tahsini, had to be a special one which would accurately give the sounds of our language. Jani Vreto represented another group that supported the Greek alphabet, but that was not supported by the members of the commission.

Another effort for the unified alphabet was made also during 1872. The initiator for this was K. Kristoforidhi. He had meetings with Mithat Pasha's Vezier as well, as it comes out in a note from Shahin Kolonja. After having ensured the support of Muhammedans, asked for the support of the Vezier. He got this response from him: "It's not good for Muhammedans to get involved in this issue, ensure to do the job with Christians."<sup>lxiii</sup>

Another effort regarding this issue was made by the end of 1877, but again unsuccessfully. This was also mentioned in the letter written by Thimi Mitko, dated 15 February 1878, sent to Dhimitër Kamarda. "I want to tell that, Th. Mitko wrote, -some Albanians, Turks (Muslims) and Christians, toshks and ghegs, were in Konstantinopojë two months ago who were trying to create Albanian letters, but single ones, being neither Hellenic nor Latin... Now, just as the war got closer, I believe that those Albanians, language colleagues, will have run away from there, and I know nothing more".<sup>lxiv</sup>

## Reference

- <sup>i</sup> "Latin alphabet, based on the information to date, appears to be the oldest alphabet to write the Albanian language, therefore the opinion expressed with no evidence by H. Bariçi, that the Cyril alphabet was used before the Latin Alphabet in Albania, even when it was written in the people's language, does not appear to be correct. See more about this in "Vreme", Belgrade 01.I.1941, 5.
- <sup>ii</sup> Eqrem Çabej, Gjon Buzuku's Meshari, Tirana, 1968, 60. Mahir Domi, Alphabet of the Albanian Language and the Manastiri Congress (14-22 November 1908), Tirana 1971, 9.
- <sup>iii</sup> M. Domi, a cited work, 9-10.
- <sup>iv</sup> Justin Rrota For the History of Albanian Alphabet, Shkodër, 1936, 16-17, 36.
- <sup>v</sup> Tomor Osmani "Udha e shkronjave" (The journey of the Albanian letters), Shkodër 1999, 70.
- <sup>vi</sup> T. Osmani, "Udha e shkronjave" (The path of the Albanian letters, Shkodër, 1999, 76.
- <sup>vii</sup> History of the Albanian Literature (group of authors), Tirana, 1983, 48.
- <sup>viii</sup> History of Albanian Literature, I, Tirana, 305.
- <sup>ix</sup> Sotir Adhami, Voskopojë, Tiranë, 1989, 88.
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xi</sup> For this, compare; M. Domi, about the author and time of the manuscript from Elbasani in translation of fragments of the gospel, in "The first Conference of Albanian Studies", Tirana, 1965, 271.
- <sup>xii</sup> S. Adhami, cited work, 67-68.
- <sup>xiii</sup> "Udha e shkronjave" (The journey of the Albanian letters)...90.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Petro Janura, From the history of the Albanian Alphabet, Shkup, 1968, 39.
- <sup>xv</sup> Shaban Demiraj, Albanian language and its history, Tirana, 1988, 256-25
- <sup>xvi</sup> T. Osmani, Cit. work; 93.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi, Albanian writings in 1332-1850, Tiranë 1976, 91.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, In search of origins of the written Albanian, in "On Barleti and other writings, Tiranë, 1979, 21, Dh. Shuteriqi, Dhaskal Thodhri and his time, in "The teacher", 22. X. 1980, 4.
- <sup>xix</sup> M. Domi, About the author and the time of the Elbasani manuscript..., 271.
- <sup>xx</sup> Robert Elsie, History of Albanian literature, Tiranë - Pejë 1997, 95.
- <sup>xxi</sup> M. Domi, The alphabet of Albanian language..., 12.
- <sup>xxii</sup> T. Osmani, cit. work 102.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> History of Albanian Literature, Tiranë 1959, 313.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> M. Domi, cit. work., 314.
- <sup>xxv</sup> "Albania" No. 8, Bucharest 23.VI.1897.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Muhamet Pirraku, Albanian national culture until the Prizreni League, Prishtinë 1989, 258.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> "Euridition" No. 7 Tiranë 1927, 247-248.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> "Serbobran" Narodni Srpski Kalendar, Zagreb 1905-3-15.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Jup Kastrati, Zef Jubani (Ndokilia), No.2 Tiranë 1980, 122-144.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Shkelzen Raça, Janina during the time of Ali Pashë Tepelena, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 9.IX.1984.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, Evstrat Vithkuqari, On Barleti and other writings, 159-169; Sh. Raça, as in the note.30.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> History of the Albanian People I, Prishtinë 1969, 416-447.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, Albanian writings (1332-1850), Tiranë 1976, 174-175, 177-179.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Rexhep Qosja, Importance of N. Veqilharxhi for development of Albanian language, Our language", nr. 2, Tiranë 1996, 27.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, N. Veqilharxhi, "Literary traces" Tiranë 1974, 219.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Petraq Pepo, One letter of Korça natives in 1845, sent to N. Veqilharxhi in Rumani, in " Filologic studies no. 1, Tiranë 1966, 203.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> For the letter signed by Athanas PASKALI and others from Korça city, more widely: Myslim Islami, Naum Veqilharxhi, Prishtinë, 1978, 80.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, Bibliography of the old Albanian literature, in "Bulletin of social sciences", no. 1,2,3, 1962 and no. 1, Tiranë 1963.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> T. Osmani, cit. work, 178.

- <sup>xi</sup>Ibidem.
- <sup>xii</sup>Myslim Islami, N. Veqilharxhi, Tiranë, 1977, 148.
- <sup>xiii</sup>M. Islami, N. Veqilharxhi, Tiranë, 1977, 148-149
- <sup>xiiii</sup>Albanian History (Publication of the Accademy of Sciences of PSR of Albania Vol.II, J Tiranë
- <sup>xv</sup>M. Islami, Encicyclal letter in publication of “Naum Bredhi-Veqilharxhi”, Tiranë 1977, 297.
- <sup>xvi</sup>Iliaz Rexha, Albanian Leage of Prizren in Ottoman documents 1878-1881. Prishtinë 1978, 184
- <sup>xvii</sup>Necip Alpan, Arnaut Alfabeti nasildogdu, Ankara 1979, 52-54.
- <sup>xviii</sup>Ahistory of Albanian People II, Prishtinë 1969, 117-120.
- <sup>xix</sup>In respect to this meeting, Xhevat Lloshi writes: This last document indirectly shows that 1865 Kristoforiidhi has not been in Istanbul before 1865, and this matches with suspicions expressed by M. Domi, regarding the efforts for the Albanian alphabet, in 1864”. T. Osmani, Efforts of he members of Renaissance for unification of the alphabet of the Albanian language. “ Filologic studies ” 4, Tiranë, 1978, 48.
- <sup>xx</sup>Jani Vreto, Selected works, Tiranë, 1978, 268-313
- <sup>xxi</sup>J. Vreto, Selected works, Tiranë...268.
- <sup>xxii</sup>Ibidem, 277.
- <sup>xxiii</sup>Alfred Uçi, Jani Vreto, Tiranë, 1965, 19-20.
- <sup>xxiv</sup>Gazeta “Myneyz” nr. 79, Istambul, nr. 79, viti H. 1286 (1869).
- <sup>xxv</sup>Albanian History II, Tiranë, 1984, 170.
- <sup>xxvi</sup>Xhevat Loshi, Documents..., 143.
- <sup>xxvii</sup>Dmetrio Camarda, A. Dora d’Istria gli albanesi, Livorno 1870, 21.
- <sup>xxviii</sup>August Dozon, Manuel dela lingua chkiye au albanaise, Paris 189, 169
- <sup>xxix</sup>Albanian Archive(hereinafter A. A), Dora d’Istria’s letter, sent to De Rada on 7 7.04.1870, Fondi 24.
- <sup>xxx</sup>J. Vreto, cit. work, 271.
- <sup>xxxi</sup>Stjepan Antoljak, Prilog Historiatu albanaca za svoj alphabet, “Albanological Researches”, no.1, Prishtinë 1969, 26.
- <sup>xxxii</sup>J.Vreto, Ibidem, 271 Albanian History II..., 172.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup>Albanian History II..., 172.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup>Shahin Kolonja: Writing, reading, Albanian language ABC book, “Albanian alphabet and the Manastiri Congress”, Tiranë, 1972, 174.
- <sup>xxxv</sup>On letter by Thimi Mitko, sent to Dhimitër Kamarda, cited by Dh. Shuteriqi in “On Marin Barleti and other writings, Tiranë 1979, 217.

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