

SKANDERBEG'S FIGURE IN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Skanderbeg's figure is present in Albanian literature almost as much as any other historical figure that has appeared in the literature of any European or world country. Since the beginning of Albanian literature, Skanderbeg's figure is present. At times, it appears as a central figure and as a figure that inspires writers to write about the struggle of the Albanian people for freedom.

Among the first authors who dealt with the Scanderbeg's era is the great poet Jeronim De Rada. One of the most prominent works of De Rada, which in the center of attention has the Albanian hero and describes the deeds and wars of Skanderbeg and Albanians for freedom, is "Unlucky Skanderbeg". This is one of De Rada's greatest works, both in terms of the thematic breadth and the social value that is dealt with in it. Indeed, this is a collection of 32 poems with a beautiful tendency of a historical-romantic epic.

Among other writers who have taken on Skanderbeg's figure and have left an indelible mark in Albanian literature is definitely Naim Frashëri. With his work "Scanderbeg's History", Naim Frashëri elevated Scanderbeg's monumental figure in accordance with the liberation ideas and fundamental concepts of the Renaissance.

Although there are few Albanian writers who have not written about Skanderbeg or his age, we have focused only on these two authors. By making a comparative look at these two works, we will highlight the features that Skanderbeg recognizes, as described in these two works, and will consider the essential elements that distinguish these two works, which are also elements that recognize the period of Albanian Romanticism.

Keywords: Skanderbeg, De Rada, Naim Frasher, Romanticism, figure, poem

Skanderbeg and his wars constitute a living phenomenon, and every era of our history has looked at and conceived of it, bringing something new, something of its own, to its understanding. And this is natural, because the importance of the giant wars that he waged for almost a quarter of a century for the land, freedom, and political union of the Albanian people, exceeded the goals of his era. In the difficult centuries that came for the Albanians after the death of the hero, in the successive uprisings that they developed against the Ottoman invaders, the name of Skanderbeg became a flag and a symbol of the fight for freedom. For these reasons, the figure and era of Skanderbeg inspired Albanian writers, who from early on, created works permeated by love and ardent admiration for the fate of Kruja.

In one word, as the well-known Albanian writer Ernest Koliqi writes, "The figure of Kastrioti symbolizes the unity of Albanians."¹

The name and memory of Skanderbeg was preserved first in the popular tradition, of which the hero became a part during his lifetime. Later, through an entire literature, starting with the work of Barleti, the echo of Skanderbeg's heroic deeds not only did not die out, but gained a special strength and resonance.

"From Marin Barleti to Ismail Kadare, the figure of Skanderbeg has been treated, connected with the fate and deeds of Albanians in certain periods of their history. The dimension of the national ideal is strengthened in the works of historians as well as in the works of writers."²

From the middle of the 19th century, when the efforts of the Albanians to shake off slavery were renewed with an unprecedented momentum, when Albania was swept by a powerful wave of uprisings and the liberation movement recognized wide proportions and acquired a conscious character, the figure of Skanderbeg took on a meaning especially important and new echo. Under these conditions, the figure of Skanderbeg not only symbolized national unity against feudal, provincial, and religious disunity, but also marked the path to victory over the enemy. Therefore, the National Renaissance turned to the figure of the 15th century hero as a symbol of invincible resistance against the foreigner.

This reason explains the interest and the great place that the figure of Skanderbeg occupied in the literature of the Renaissance, which was inspired by the ideals of the war for the national liberation of the Albanian people. Taking the great patriotic theme of the 15th century epic and its immortal leader, Gjergj Kastriot - Skanderbeg, the Renaissance writers laid the foundations of a new literature, which had a national content and was an expression of the aspirations and concerns that characterized most Albanians in that time.

Romantic poets, meanwhile, imagine that period as "The period of independence, freedom and happiness of the Albanians."³

Among the first authors who dealt with the topic of Skanderbeg's era is the great Arber poet Jeronim De Rada. In his poems "Skenderbeu i pafan", "Pasqyra e e nje jete njerezore" and "Gjon Huniadi", the figure of Skanderbeg is created with quick dashes; he appears to us as a symbol of insurgent Albania, as an invincible knight and an outstanding leader.

One of De Rada's most outstanding works, which focuses on the Albanian hero and describes the exploits and struggles of Skanderbeg and the Albanians for freedom, is "Skenderbeu i pafan" (Unlucky Scanderbeg). This is one of De Rada's greatest works, both in terms of thematic breadth and the social values it deals with. In fact, this is a composite collection of 32 poems with a beautifully pronounced tendency of a historical-romantic epic.

¹ Ernest Koliqi, *Fishta interpreter of the Albanian spirit*, Franciscan Assembly, Gjakovë, 1997, page 81.

² Sali Bashota, *Skanderbeg of history and Skanderbeg of literature*, Albanology 9, Institute of Albanology, Pristina 2019, page 84.

³ Rexhep Qosja, *History of Albanian literature, Romanticism I*, Rilindja, Pristina, page 184.

De Rada, for weaving this work, of course, in addition to the oral literature of Arbëresh, which was rich with many data from the era of Skanderbeg, also used Barleti's History of Skanderbeg, therefore the reflection of many situations also coincides well with the historical data of development of events. Thus, this work now appears to us as a conglomeration of events of the fifteenth century, be it war or social relations in general, where Albanian heroes and heroines such as Radovani and Bosdari, Astiri and Gjekoviti, Ganeta and Serafina, Agata and Imatea and many other faces form the richest gallery of types that Albanian romanticism created for the era of Skanderbeg, to which De Rada dedicated almost the entire literary work. This is a great merit of De Rada, since he was the first to shine artistically the face of our legendary fate, whose era later became a source of inspiration for our renaissance.

Among the other writers who dealt with the figure of Skanderbeg and left an indelible mark on Albanian literature is undoubtedly Naim Frashëri. With his work "Histori e Skenderbeut" (Skanderbeg's history), Naimi exalted the monumental figure of Skanderbeg in accordance with the liberating ideas and basic concepts of the Renaissance.

Addressing the great subject of our national literature with a lively poetic language and a dedicated spirit, Naim, both in terms of artistic strength and resonance, far surpassed what was written before his work. Naim's poem gained great popularity and played a prominent role in the formation of the national consciousness of our people, in the conditions when he was preparing for the decisive match with the hundred-year-old conqueror.

Naimi tried to speak to his compatriots, through the time and the figure of Skanderbeg, with the voice of the homeland worn out by five centuries of captivity, to remind them of their duties towards him, to give light to Albania from the bright spirit of the hero, to sound the trumpet for the complete liberation of the country.

Naim's Skanderbeg is the personification of the heroic spirit of the people of his century - a source of inspiration for heroism in the coming war. With the high awareness of the work he performed before history, with the precious virtues of patriotism, bravery, and wisdom, Skanderbeg should serve as a model to help Albanians understand the historical tasks of the time and become masters of them. The great influence exerted by that work had its source in the strong patriotic ideas it carries, in the actual sound that the poet has given them, as well as in his skill to create a beloved hero close to the spirit of the Albanian.

It is known that European romantics, to escape the reality in which they lived, turn to the past, be it mythology or history. As researcher Osman Gashi explains, "The history of world literature is inextricably linked to myths."⁴

Putting him in the center of the work for the first time, Naimi, relying on Barleti, presented Skanderbeg as a popular hero, loved, and respected by all. He is an example of moral and physical perfection. Alongside bravery and manliness, there are simplicity, goodness, magnanimity and wisdom, traits that make him an ideal leader, in accordance with the

⁴ Osman Gashi – Myth and European Romanticism, Kosovo Pen Center, Pristina, page 36.

requirements of the European Renaissance for the hero, as well as with the Enlightenment beliefs of the poet.

Although he adheres to a systematic presentation of the story of Skanderbeg's life and warriors, although he presents it mainly through action, the poet has also paid attention to the discovery of the inner world of the hero. The confession that Skanderbeg makes to the old man Hasan in a foreign land, through which he pours out the voice of his heart saddened by longing for his motherland, the pangs of conscience he feels after the reproaches of his father's shadow, the feelings that boil inside him when he finds out for the sorrows of the homeland and the family, the bitter tears he swallows when he hears about the betrayal of Moisi Golemi and the emotions he feels when he forgives him with patience, are some of the elements that enrich the spiritual world of the hero.

Conclusion

In the works of Jeronim De Rada and Naim Frashëri, the figure of Skanderbeg is elevated from a historical leader to a powerful literary and national symbol. De Rada presents Skanderbeg through a romantic and idealized lens, emphasizing heroism, sacrifice, and the collective spirit of the Albanian people. His portrayal reflects the Romantic movement's tendency to mythologize history in order to inspire national consciousness.

Naim Frashëri, on the other hand, offers a clearer and more didactic image of Skanderbeg, portraying him as a moral guide and a unifying figure for the nation. In *The History of Skanderbeg*, Naim transforms the hero into an embodiment of freedom, wisdom, and patriotism, directly addressing the needs of the Albanian National Awakening.

Together, De Rada and Naim Frashëri shape Skanderbeg as a timeless symbol of resistance and identity, demonstrating how literature plays a crucial role in preserving historical memory and strengthening national awareness.

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