

The “Discovery” of Albanians and Their Culture from Western Europe

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Abstract

Although Albanian inhabited areas are almost at the gates of Western Europe, historically, this country's fate, identity and culture were ignored by Western Europe for almost five centuries, a period when Albanian territories existed as the periphery of the imperial Ottoman domination. The incipience of modernity, in the nineteenth century, was the time to restore the attention of Western Romantic Europe to Albanians and their culture, to their particular language, to the multifarious folk art, to the many crafts, the “magnificent” clothing and the archaic customs of this nation, as well as to the geography of the “majestic” and “virgin” landscape, the “impressive” architectural typologies of cities and dwellings. Interest in Albania at that time was related to the awareness (although delayed) that the Western Europe had to regain this Orientalised territory, which previously belonged both administratively and culturally to it. Albania's destiny, to some extent, was linked from its beginnings, to European chancelleries and primarily their political and economic interests, and certainly their cultural interests as well, over this precious “threshold” territory (or “at the border”). The territory inhabited by Albanians was crisscrossed from the beginning of this century and on from all the categories of visitors. The first Europeans who reached the Albanian territories were diplomats, politicians, soldiers, merchants, and simultaneously many exploration anthropologists, historians, linguists, geologists, archaeologists, botanists, poets, painters and even thrill-seeking adventurers. This paper aims to provide evidence on the growing interest shown by Europe to Albania in the XIX century, an interest that will be examined in this case, focusing on its cultural and ethnological components rather than its political element. In particular, attention will be paid to how these foreigners explored and identified the autochthonous characteristics, intertwined with many influences from the foreign Ottoman culture. In the landscape geography, in the typologies of architectural constructions, urban organisation of inhabited centres, in the traditional crafts, traditional costumes and in the overall lifestyle, there aren't represented straight aspects of cultural production and architectural creativity, but idiosyncratic phenomena generated by cultural interferences and a mix of superimposed or layered factors such as in a “palimpsest”, that are all mixed together representing the wealth classified nowadays as the material culture of our nation in that particular historical period, when Albania more than ever was perceived as a “frontier” territory, culturally more “East” and geographically more “West”.

Keywords: Europe, Albania, ideology, orientalism, east, west, material culture, influence, centre-stamp, structure-trace.

Introduction

Some explaining about the terms “Orient” and “Occident”, or “East” and “West”

In the Europe of late XVIII century and beginning of the XIX century, the West “discovered” the East by giving birth to a new branch of science called “Orientalism”. Everything is connected with the travellers, scholars, researchers, but especially of particular importance in these explorations, it was the discovery of the Rosette Stone¹, the translation of Sheherazade's tales “One Thousand Nights”, the translation into English of Omar Khayyam's poems and many other elements of exotic and exhilarant Eastern culture, first contacted by the West, that generated a previously unknown admiration and interest towards this Oriental culture. Likewise the discovery of ancient Mesopotamian and Hittite

¹ The so-called Rosetta Stone was discovered in Egypt in 1799 by the French soldier Pierre-François Bouchard. The orientalist Champollion was the first to decipher the hieroglyphs of this chiselled artefact.

civilisations, the deciphering of the "cuneiform" script, of the "Epic of Gilgamesh", the reading of the Egyptian hieroglyphs by Champollion¹, etc., would open up to the West a vast and unknown world of miracles and wonders, which encompassed an equally vast space of thought and belief, of exotic, fabulous and peaceful colours, as well as regressive, dogmatic, violent and colonising.

The East, which at the time was defined as the great Anatolian-centered Ottoman Empire, since the XV century stretched, in addition to other remote territories of Asia and beyond, also in eastern Europe and throughout the Balkans (including all the territories historically inhabited by Albanians). The centre-stamp of the Ottoman power dictated or reflected on these numerous peripheral territories, which were dependent or militarily colonised by it, the same way of organisation of all the components of life, the same economic and cultural superstructure-trace as imposed by the Ottoman centre. As a result, all these territories, though often geographically distant from each other, resembled each other and simultaneously showed diversity, while displaying idiosyncratic phenomena generated by cultural interferences and a mix of overlapping factors. These phenomena appear to be scalable, while being unified in relation to the Ottoman centre model, but varied in their regional typologies, and with pronounced autochthonous features in small, deep and isolated areas.

The term Orientalism seems distant and unrelated to the Western modernity, but it was for sure a culturally conditioned study area of the latter. It was during the Modern Age, after the Industrial Revolution, as new land and sea trade routes opened up, which marked the beginning of the modern colonisation process, a period when many Western study centres, universities, and museums became interested in studying and collecting objects and artefacts from the distant Orient, which especially since the period of Romanticism, had so strongly excited the imagination and desire of Westerners to escape, explore, pursue adventure and discover exoticism, in these geographical and cultural realities almost entirely different from their own.

Western Europe and Eastern Europe, or "Occident" and "Orient", as they were once called, were located opposite each other at that time, not only as two different geographical territorial spaces, but primarily as two different spaces (often contradictory) of ideas, beliefs, religions, cultures, existences, actions, lifestyles, behaviours, mindsets, etc. The main cultural difference between them, without going into too much detail, lies in the fact that the Orient or the East, unlike Occident or the West, did not face such revolutionary experiences as the European Renaissance, though it indirectly or directly influenced its development. The Orient was not exposed, in the XVII century, to the Age of Reason, did not have its Descartes and its theory of "Cogito", of the "I", the thinking subject that precisely existed because of it, neither did Orient have the Atheistic Enlightenment, nor Voltaire and neither Rousseau, nor the popular revolutionary movement nor the beheadings of monarchs, experienced neither the Reign of Terror of Jacobins, nor the Republic, the parliamentarism and constitution, nor the Commune of Paris, nor the 'Capital' of Marx in the nineteenth century. It did not experience the Industrial Revolution and the technological and cultural modernity, the "-isms" in the arts and free life, as they were experienced one by one and strongly by the West. Especially the political culture and history of the Orient differs from that of the West because it has always given little or no space to the individual, the thinking subject, too far from Descartes's "Cogito Ergo Sum".

The Orient stands out, as well, because under the example of the West, but much later, it began its Industrial Revolution later, enjoying behindhand the technological advantages or reflecting later on Western cultural influences.

Due to the pronounced aniconism and many other reasons, on which I will not elaborate further for the moment, the Orient, while it can be proud of its amazing architectural tradition and ornamental decorative art, did not experience any of the periods that the Western art went through, from the ancient Greco-Roman golden age to the many trends of contemporary art. Likewise, the Orient did not experience any of the developments and changes brought to Western culture by philosophy, from ancient pre-Socrates philosophers to the opportunist Derrida and Foucault in the XX century, although until the XII century, the Eastern and Western philosophers followed and were widely involved in philosophical debates between them.

Since, throughout this essay, there is a simultaneous presence in the Albanian cultural tradition of its contacts with the two great cultures, that of the East and the West, we find it appropriate to first clarify that the terms in question have various cultural and ideological content and hues, and their defining function as terms of guiding points in the geographic space, plays only a secondary role in this classification.

¹ Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832) researcher, philologist, orientalist, decipherer of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Awakening of the Europe's interest on the Balkans and Albania during the Romantic period

"What is this country"? Viola asked herself, looking around, while fascinated but also frightened (one of the main characters of Shakespeare's comedy "Twelfth Night"), as she curiously reached one of Illyria's shores, where she had just found rescue after her ship capsized. Two centuries later, Byron, not a sailor but as a visitor to Albania, in his famous poem "Child Harold", tried to answer the above question himself, showing openly and wholeheartedly (perhaps the first among the famous European artists) his great admiration for the nature of this country and the customs and culture of Albanians.

One of the aims of this essay is to try to highlight the importance of Europe's growing interest in Albanian culture and its situation under the Ottoman rule, to the nineteenth century Albania. The West's interest in Albania during this period was manifested in a number of areas: political, diplomatic, linguistic, archaeological, ethnological, etc., and particularly in exploring and identifying indigenous idiosyncratic features, which were mixed with numerous cultural influences of the invading Ottoman culture.

Starting from centuries ago, many western Europeans (politicians, military, diplomats, bureaucrats of imperial administrations who served here, travellers, traders, wealthy rich men, and outstanding figures of culture and science such as numerous historians, ethnologists, biologists, geologists, or adventurers and artists, romantic poets attracted by the Eastern exoticism, painters, photographers, etc.), have often asked the same question "what is this country?!" when, for various reasons, they reached these waterfronts or high mountains, and were confronted with the natural beauties or the harsh social reality of those times, still stunned sometimes by the almost medieval isolation and backwardness of these territories inhabited by the Albanian population, and at times fascinated by the unusual wealth and diversity of folklore, clothing and material culture in general, created and inherited for centuries and centuries by these indigenous inhabitants.

Many foreigners visited the Balkans throughout the XIX century, inspired by the fashion of the "Gran Tour", which was a predecessor of the later elite European tourism. Albania also became part of this exotic exploration route, at that time a forgotten place (as part of the periphery of the expansive Ottoman empire), almost unknown to them. The aforementioned people visited our country in search of different opportunities and interests, of new emotions and information, a phenomenon well known in the XIX century, inspired by the atmosphere of romanticism and progress in general, underpinned by technological modernisation of the communication, and the increase of the exploratory and commercial travelling, increased interest to know and study, and also to benefit from these new territories.

The foreigners are the source of much of the information we have today about our country's past. Numerous travellers and scholars, who travelled through Albania over the years, wrote papers and documented data of great interest to us today. During this period, Albania was in the eye of the European foreign policy, of the foreign diplomats, historians, but especially to the anthropologists, photographers and painters, involved in some kind of trend towards the "anthropology of preservation" (which was interested in studying or preserving in archives and museums traditional cultures that were significantly changing as a result of contact with modernity) institutionalised "the memory on people" as an important phenomenon of modernity.

Verbal evidence of that urban geography and social and cultural typologies of that period, newly "discovered" by some Europeans of the time, is found in many descriptions of these foreigners who crossed or stayed in Albania at that time, as was the case with the English historian E. Gibbon (1787), of the French Consul at Ioannina, Puccell (1829), of the French geologist A. Boue (1840), of the French diplomat H. Hecquard (1858), of the Austrian anthropologist, J.G. von Hahn (1863), of the English geographer, Tozer (1869), French scholar, L. Hugonnet (1886), etc.

On this study approach of the European cultural circles towards the unknown or little-known cultures (such as the Albanian culture, and the interest on it as a cultural territory, ancient as well as medieval Ottoman), Robert Elsie, an albanologist and anthropologist, writes: "*Since the XIX century, the Highland of Northern Albania, accessible only with great difficulty on mule trails, and the particular tribal culture of its inhabitants, had fascinated foreign travellers. The first stories told by courageous explorers and travellers, including women, amazed the European public of the time. Among these travellers of the late XIX and early XX centuries, who arrived in this enigmatic area, are French baron Alexander Dogran, Austrian-Hungarian diplomat Teodor Ipen, Ernesto Kozzi a missionary from Tyrol, Austrian engineer Karl Steinmec and the well-known Austro-Hungarian Albanologist Baron Franc Nopcsa, Marin Bizi, Hahn, Holger Pedersen, Italian botanist Antonio Baldacci, Georg Stadmueller, etc., which are just some of the prominent names*".

Of significant value, as visual information, are the works of numerous painters who elaborated Albanian motives, among them, the most numerous and perhaps, the most truthful, those of the English painter Edward Lear (Edward Lear 1812-1888). The rich creativity of this renowned painter, painted during his journey to Albania between 1848-1849, is as much artistic, as well as documentary and of great value, as the most complete visual documentation of the atmosphere of the time, of the nature, the rural or residential landscape, the Albanian clothing and architecture, all of which were characterised mainly by the spirit and phenomena of a strong Eastern oriental influence.

In the mean time, in 1856, the "magic" of modern photography arrived in Albania, brought from the West by the Italian Pietro Marubbi. The photographic documentation of the landscape, environment and characters of the time by Austro-Hungarian Josef Szeleky belongs almost to the same period.

But Pietro Marubbi, this foreigner from the West would stay in Albania forever, and soon become a very important and unique figure of the Albanian culture, generously establishing the legacy of the Marubi dynasty.

These many foreigners coming from the West to the Albanian land for various missions and purposes, would document one after another, and in parallel, for nearly a century, the Albanian history, culture and society as they evolved, throughout the most important historical period of Albania, that of the XIX century, when the Ottoman Empire was coming to an end in the Balkans. But Albania would wait the beginning of the next century to say goodbye to its long association with the East, when with the victory of independence in 1912, this country and this culture would now be wholly oriented towards the West, so much missed and long desired by the Albanians.

The following three sections of the this essay will focus exactly on this period of the XIX century and the cultural phenomena we encounter along it, as well as on some European artists, in particular two of the most prominent figures, London painter Edward Lear and Piacenza born photographer Pietro Marubbi, who came from the modern West to an oriental Albania, and become an important part of the visual documentation of our culture.

Evidence of the growing interest of some European artists in the material culture of Albanians

Albania, as the Europeans called this vast territory, inhabited by an indigenous population, descendant of the early Illyrians, was defined by its geographical position as the most western corner of the Orientalised Balkan Peninsula, but also as a connecting "gateway" closest to the Western world in the Apennines Peninsula. Foreign travellers started to enter this country, the farthest and most unknown of the continent for the time, which English historian Edward Gibbon (Edward Gibbon 1737-1794)¹ described as "*a country within sight of Italy less known than the interior of America*" (Gibbon 1787).

At that time (the beginning of the nineteenth century and throughout) many European artists undertook trips to get acquainted with the Oriental culture, including the Albanian one, thus becoming part of Orientalism, this cultural and anthropological study trend focusing on these Eastern cultures (while being autochthonous, they were influenced by their long colonisation from the Ottoman Empire), and who made them extensively subject of many of their works (figs. 1and 2).

One of the European painters, known as the founder of Orientalism in the West, is the French Alexandre-Gabriel Decamp (1803 – 1860). Born in Paris, the young man travelled a lot in the East, exploring Oriental cultures, but also painting it. Decamps was one of the founders of the discipline of Orientalism in the West, having exhibited works on subjects of Oriental life in many exhibitions in Paris. He was one of the first European painters to present in his works the true nature of Oriental culture, since he had direct and constant contacts with this culture. During his trips, he created numerous art works inspired by this culture, including the Albanians, their clothing, traditions and customs, environment and the physiognomy of this cultural ethnicity. "Albanian Soldier in Turkish Dress", "Albanian Family in Turkey", "One Albanian and one Turk", "Albanian Dancers" (fig. 3) and "Albanian Fight" (fig. 4) are some of these art works produced in 1830s. Its subjects and rich ethnographic style, combining the intense contrast of the diversity of materials and clothing decorations, as delicate, transparent and light in some parts, as well as complex and heavy in decorations in others, became reference point to painters of the time. He was the most influential painter to other authors dealing with Oriental subjects, though his painting style typically belongs to French romanticism.

Other western artists in search of new emotions travelled to Albania, mainly entering through Greece to the southeast part of our country, i.e. to Ioannina, Kastoria, Bitola, Struga, and Ohrid and further down to the Albanian territories, where Ali

¹ Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), English historian, author of "The History of the fall the Roman Empire", Strahan & Cadell, London, 1787.

Pasha Tepelena ruled at that time. The Albanian "rebel" Ali Pasha, through diplomacy, as well as terror and shrewdness, seized from the 'jurisdiction' of the Ottoman "High Gate", a part of the imperial territory, called the "Pashalic of Ioannina", a large Albanian area inhabited by the Albanians (Ushtelenca 1983).¹ The "Rebellion of Ali Pasha of Tepelena" had a great impact and influenced the expansion of the revolts against the Ottoman occupation to the other Balkan people, and particularly influenced the outbreak of the Greek Revolution of 1814, which brought the independence of neighbouring Greece.

Amid years 1822 and 1825, three albums of paintings and illustrations on Albania were published in London, Paris and Rome. Unlike previous paintings and drawings of Albanian character, which treated elements of the everyday life or historical themes, these albums featured only images of people in national costumes. Through these paintings, the Europeans became better acquainted with the Albanian world, discovering the manner and style of the men and women of this remote Balkan country in the XX century. Some of these original illustrative and / or exemplary images of festive costumes and everyday clothes of Albanians of that time were exhibited in various European cultural salons or venues. Through the lithographs of the album entitled "Selected Costumes from Albania and Greece", J. Cartwright (Koçollari 2011) published in London in 1822, presented the first "catwalk" with the Albanian clothing, in Europe.² Various types of costumes, with all their accessories, were shown from several regions of the country, especially from the southern part. The other two albums, presenting a larger number of images, and numerous people shown in traditional costumes, complemented the information on the wide range of Albanian fashion, at the beginning of the XX century. At this time, the painting "Byron in Albanian costume" was just created, and that influenced the artistic environment for many years. But if that painting was painted at the studio of the painter Thomas Phillips' in London, and presented a non-specific but customised Albanian costume, the lithographs and water-colour paintings published in the albums mentioned above, were painted directly in their natural environment, precisely in those lands and places where Albanians lived and who wore their own real clothing. The Europeans of this time were able to increasingly admire a full and true range of models from the variety of Albanian costumes and appreciate the richness of their endless shapes, colours and especially ornamentation.

Out of specific research and studies on European painting of the XX century, with subjects from the Oriental Albania, it is noted that some renowned painters, unable to travel to Albanian lands, borrowed figures from the published albums (which we mentioned above), reproducing them almost unchanged in their paintings. Among the first, and the most important one referring to these paintings, was Delacroix (Eugene Delacroix), the leading light of French romanticism.

In the 1920s, the painter and collector Robert Ogyst, along with his precious collection of clothing and artefacts from Albania and other Eastern countries, settled in Fontainbleau, where, among the most renowned artists of the time, painters like Camille Corot, Alexandre Decamps and Ary Scheffer created their masterpieces. It was during this period that the paintings "Albanian Dancers", "Albanian Woman with Children", "Albanian Captain", "Albanian Merchant" (by A. Decamps), "Albanian and Haideja" (by C. Corot), "Suli Women" (By A. Scheffer), were produced, as well as some other works, where the characters are all in characteristic Albanian costumes of the time. In the case of the painter Delacroix, his several paintings with the same theme created during this period, makes more credible the existence of Albanian costumes as stage clothes in the studios of these artists. The so-called "Monsieur August" had just returned from trips to Albania, Greece and Egypt, bringing costumes, weapons, ornaments and other objects from these countries to Paris. Apparently Delacroix borrowed some of them, drawing them in detail (figs. 5 and 6), making notes of the colours and composition of their textiles. During the careful study of these dresses, the prominent painter was equally interested in the areas they belonged to, as well as the name of the Albanian provinces. He even commented on the originality of the dress from Mirdita region and especially the fustanella costume of Gjirokastra.

Amongst the Albanian dresses of the time, visually depicted both by Delacroix and also by many other painters, there are noted the common elements of the early native or Balkan costume tradition, adapted or mixed with motifs and patterns from the later Oriental culture. The most common element in men's clothing is the white, long and multi-pleated fustanella, widely known as the garment, used centuries before the Ottoman occupation, by a large population living in the Albanian

¹ Ferid Hudhri: cituar I. Ushtelenca, Diplomacy e Ali Pashë Tepelena, Tiranë, 1983, f. 23.

² J. Cartwright having the rank of colonel, was commander of the British garrison of Parga in 1817. But he is also known as a painter who has created paintings, landscapes and portraits from Albania in the early XX century. - Irakli Koçollari, Unknown papers about foreign painters in the Ioannina Pashallek, Art studies. Centre for Albanological Studies, Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies, Science, Tiranë, p. 213.

territories lying in the Balkans. The Albanian fustanella, which was highly favoured among the Balkan populations themselves, was imitated by many other people still further afar. (fig. 7. a, b). The spread of the fustanella, of this national dress of Albanians, among other neighbouring populations, such as by the Greeks, and the Turks, as well, comes to us through the testimony of historians of the time. British historian George Finlay, on a journey throughout the Ottoman Empire, including Albania, Macedonia, Greece, etc., observed that Albanians' clothing and customs were especially valued and imitated by other neighbouring peoples, or even further. He says "... even the Turks, who have always influenced with their military tastes and customs, became imitators of the Albanians." Speaking about the great role and importance of some elements of Albanian dress for the time, he mentions: "A trifling but striking mark of the high position which the Albanians had gained was exhibited by the general adoption of their dress. ... It became then not uncommon, in Greece and Macedonia, to see the children of the proudest Osmanlees dressed in the fustanello, or white kilt of the Tosks. ... even young Greeks of rank ventured to assume this dress, particularly when travelling, as it afforded them an opportunity of wearing arms".¹ (Finlay 1817 p.39)

Several foreign travellers in the XVIII-XIX centuries noted that the bodyguards of the princely courts of Moldova and Wallachia were dressed with this costume. Also Major William Martin Leak, representative of England at Ioannina, who had the opportunity before Byron to visit these areas, wrote as early as 1805 that: "The Albanian dress is daily becoming more customary, both in Morea and in the rest of Greece: in the later, from the great increase of Albanian power. ... The dress is lighter and more manageable than the Turkish or Greek."² (Leak 1830 p.209-210)

Meanwhile, apart from the particular ethnographic elements of the clothes or costumes, in general the whole culture, history, landscape and lifestyle of the Albanians were of interest to foreigners at this time, and not only to the genre of painting but also to other expressions of art.

"... while it was forgotten by states and their chancelleries, Albania was not forgotten by European literature and art. Byron, Vivaldi, Delacroix and dozens of well-known writers, composers and painters continued to search and find unrepeatably motifs in the drama, sounds and colours of this country [...] with dozens of painters travelling around Albania and taking with them, to revive latter in canvas, the complex colours and faces of nature and of the Albanians. Others who, for various reasons, could not come physically, came with their minds and imaginations, borrowed Albanian costumes from colleagues, hurried to their studios and there, with the help of unforgettable colours, based on what they had heard and on intuition which characterises the real artists, created paintings of undisputable value. Kamil Koro's "The Albanian" and the "Haideja" are published in many albums that collect the masterpieces of world painting. Alexander Dekasa's "Albanian Dancers" is considered the most beautiful painting of the Brest Museum [...] and so one after the other, the paintings and drawings by Ari Schefer, Leon Jerome, Nicholas Pusen, Carlo Krivel and others, are a complex and valuable artistic evidence, an act of love for the Albanians and Albania", writes renowned writer Ismail Kadare in the preface to the 1987 edition of the book "Albania and Albanians in the Works of Foreign Painters" written by researcher and art historian Ferid Hudhri.

Paintings, portraits and engravings, as well as works of other genres of art, are dedicated to Albania and Albanians. Besides the painters, prominent figures in world literature are associated with Albanian-themed works. At the forefront stands the poet George Byron who is also "baptised" as the discoverer of the "Albanian theme". Many masters of painting, to appreciate his interest in dealing with the Albanian theme, have immortalised him in several artworks wearing Albanian national costume. He (Lord Byron) visited Greece³ in the early 1800s and on the voyage to the north-west he visited the Pashalic of Ioannina, where he was received with special honours as a friend of Ali Pasha Tepelena.

The Pasha of Ioannina had attracted the attention of foreigners at that time, since he was opposing the Ottoman "High Gate", had cut off from its dependence by fighting a war against the Ottoman Empire, but also challenging the Great Western Powers over the southern Balkans. During the years of his reign, many visitors came to the Great Pashalic of the

¹ George Finlay, A history of Greece, volume VI, Macmillan and Co, London, 1817. f. 39.

² William Martin Leak, Travel in the Morea, volume I, London, 1830, f. 209-210.

³ The publication of the "Ali Pasha Tepelena Archive" provides information on visits of various personalities in pashalak, from kings, nobles, writers, monks, scholars, scientists, painters from various countries of Europe, such as Italian, German, Swedish, Danish, French, English, etc. - Irakli Koçollari, Unknown Documents about Foreign Painters in Ioannina Pashalik, Art Studies. Center for Albanological Studies, Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies, Science, Tirana, 2011, p. 213

South (Koçollari 2011), including many foreign painters, who, besides depicting exotic Albanian nature and drawing varied costumes and scenes from Oriental daily life, also painted many portraits of Ali himself (fig. 8).¹ (Koçollari 2011)

“... we think that the extensive treatment of Albanian subjects in works of art was also fuelled by the fact that the Pasha of Ioannina was very sympathetic to art and science. His court was openly discussing artistic, historical, literary and scientific issues. In 1814 he also allowed theatrical performances, making his Pashalic the first place to enjoy the right to this kind of art among all the countries ruled by the Ottoman Empire.”² (Hudhri 1987 p.3)

In addition to painting historical themes from the resistance of the Albanian people to the invaders or those with exotic and costume subjects, foreign painters, impressed by the magnificent views of an untouched nature, both epic and lyrical, immortalised the beauty of the Albanian nature of that time in artworks.

The work of English painter Edward Lear on Albania

Documentary authenticity of Lear's artwork, its romantic as well as realistic spirit

Many of the foreign artists, who while passing through Albania, treated the genre of landscape painting, providing us with wonderful works displaying the diverse Albanian nature, mostly wrapped in a romantic to idyllic cloak. One of the most famous painters who pursued this artistic genre is Edward Lear (1812-1888). He came from England, which with France were the most developed art centres of the late XVIII and XIX centuries.³ (Gombrich 1995) The impact or influences of the artistic and intellectual atmosphere of that time, but in particular that of certain artists, such as Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851), John Constable (1778-1837), Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863), Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875), etc., will be noted both in the shape and spirit of this author's work in general, as well as in the landscapes of 1848-49 with subjects from lands inhabited by Albanians at that time. This English poet and painter, well known for his time, was not the first artist, but he may have been the only one who completed a full trip across Albania at that time. The British ambassador to the Ottoman capital managed to procure for him a travel permit to these areas of the empire, described as "wild". His travel diary, published in 1851 entitled "The Diary of a Landscape Painter in Albania" is a book of wonderful descriptions. (Hudhri 1987)

Eduard Lear's journey to Albania dates between 1848 and 1849. During this period of intense and highly inspired creativity, he created over a hundred works, mostly landscape paintings with the technique of pencil and monochrome sepia ink, watercolour or lithographic print colours. In his travel notes, he will say with exultation: *"It was difficult to turn away from this magnificent mountain view — from these chosen nooks and corners of a beautiful world — from sights of which no painter-soul can ever weary"*. (Lear 1851)

Judging by his interest of moving around, leaving or escaping from an important centre (as developed but also as conservative in all directions, including those moral, cultural and artistic) such as England of the XIX century, toward other organic or "uncivilised" cultures, Lear resembles or recalls to us, many intellectuals and artists with an adventurous spirit who undertook such initiatives, similar to that of his compatriot, the prominent poet and intellectual Lord Byron in his famous travels in Italy, Greece, Albania or even the famous romantic painter, the French Delacroix, with his "escapes" in Algeria and Morocco. So Lear was an experimental artist, one of the most emancipated of his time, seeking to lead a free and

¹ Colonel J. Cartwright was commander of the British Parga garrison in 1817. But he is also known as a painter. He is also known for the friendships and interests that connect him with the pasha of Ali Tepelena, whom he has painted during one of his many visits to Ali's baths in Ioannina. - Irakli Koçollari, Unknown Documents about Foreign Painters in Ioannina Pashalik, Art Studies. Center for Albanological Studies, Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies, Science, Tirana, 2011, p. 220.

² Ferid Hudhri, Albania and Albanians in the Works of Foreign Painters, US 8 November, Tirana 1987, p. 3.

³ E.H. Gombrich, The Story of Art, Phaidon Press Limited, 1995, p. 476. The Modern Age as the Age of Reason had begun with the French Revolution of 1789 for Europe. Just as this great revolution is rooted in human reason, so are the changes in the conceptions of time for Art. The first change concerned the painter's attitude to what is called "style". In the art scene of the time there were changes regarding the release of the artist's dependence on the artist by the order of the artistic product, according to the conditional preferences of the latter. Artists feel free and open to choose the subject of everything, anything that really awakens their imagination and arouses their interest, such as historical or biblical themes or of free imagination and dreamy visions, but as well as those that depicted ordinary people's lives or mere depictions of nature. Among the genres of painting, which benefited from this new freedom of choice of reflective subject, was the landscape, which until then was seen as a minor branch of art. This distinction was changed by the romantic spirit of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when many renowned romantic painters elevated the dignity of the genre, treating it extensively in their creativity.

unprejudiced life. He sincerely embraced the Romantic Movement and managed to escape the social norms of the conservative society of that time and outdated rules of art, liberating the experiences of his free, adventurous and artistic soul at the same time.

The landscape paintings of Lear demonstrate that they pursue a romantic or exotic direction, known in early nineteenth-century art history and represented by many artists, well known in the period they lived but equally valued today. Lear seems to know well the landscape genre and the more prominent painters who pursued this genre before him (several of whom we mentioned above) or the contemporary painters, who were following this genre as an important part of their artistic production.

From the conceptual point of view, most of his landscapes are thought to be sensory perceptions and experiences derived directly from nature, completely free of the need to be scrupulous, stocktaking, or mediocre imitations of their subject. No effort was made to hide the used processes and tools, on the contrary, those were openly declared, such as the very expressive execution of human gesture, as well as the rich technique or texture of the materials used, characteristics which are distinctive to several of the most famous romantic and realist painters as well, of that time, especially in their artworks depicting nature, painted using the drawing, watercolour or oil techniques.

The works of painter Eduard Lear transmit to us artistic images of Albania's urban landscape of the XIX century, and thanks to their truthfulness, they simultaneously inform us precisely on many objects of our early and modern construction culture. Among the many other material culture evidences, the landscapes of Lear show urban and architectural traces or layers, starting from the early to the modern civilisation, from the bright Arbëria period before the Ottoman conquest (XII-XIV centuries), that of occupation of the settlements, and simultaneously of their demolition and suffocation (XV-XVI century), or the phenomena that followed the normalisation of urban life in the XVII-XIX century, but now with a new Oriental typology, influenced and forced by culture of the Ottoman occupier. Some of these residential centres, such as Durrës, Vlorë, Berat, Shkodra, arrived in the XX century from a bright past in their development that started in the XII century and reached its flourishing peak in the XIV century (the time of Arbëri's principality).

Many of lithographs presenting our cities with mixtures and layers of medieval and oriental architectural features, such as Shkodra, Durrës, Krujë, Gjirokastra, Berat, have in their centres medieval castles and characteristic residential neighbourhoods that "hang" down to the foothills at the stone bridges with their arches connecting the surrounding shores (fig. 9 and fig. 10).

While in other lithographs, with views of Vlorë, Elbasan, Tirana, Ohrid, etc., the construction typology is somewhat of latter period, typically oriental, more expansive and with drawings of mosques, bridges, roads and houses scattered more straight-lined and horizontally (figs. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Greenery is particularly present as an element in all Lear's landscapes, which seems was very present and really lashing in the Albanian nature at that time.¹ (Hurdhi 1987)

With the subsequent Ottoman occupation lasting five centuries (XV-XX), the objects of the Muslim religion, mainly mosques, became decisive in the birth of new city centres. They were built in the most active urban area, near the markets and other important public buildings.

"Tirana is striking, first and foremost, with its elegant and ornamented mosques, which give an unprecedented attractive appearance to the sanctuaries of these lands." Lear wrote in his diary of drawings and notes of "Travel to Albania" during 1848, published in London in 1851 under the title: "Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania."² (Lear 1851). There are many works of this author created directly in nature, which besides the mastery of the artistic organisation and the virtuosity and skill of the pictorial gesture, inform us at length with their authenticity, of the faithfulness held by this author to the multifaceted relief of the landscape, to the rich architectural typology and numerous variations of clothing and social phenomena of the time. (Comparison of some of these Lear's paintings with photos of the same subjects made later by other authors, demonstrates Lear's approach to his work. He sketched directly in nature and was interested in both artistic perfection and work, as well as with the authenticity of the description of the architectural, landscape and ethnographic subjects, as well as the spirit or atmosphere of the time that enwrapped them).

¹ Ferid Hudhri, Shqipëria dhe shqiptarët në veprat e piktorëve të huaj (Albania and Albanians in the works of foreign painters), SHB 8 Nëntori, Tiranë 1987, f. 102

² Edward Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania, London, 1851.

At the beginning of the XIX century, the largest Albanian cities were Shkodra in the north and Ioannina in the south. They each numbered over 30,000 inhabitants, and had intensified their development since the end of the XVIII century, becoming the centres of two biggest provinces (pashalics): Shkodra and Bushatli pashalic and Ioannina and pashalic of Ali Pasha Tepelena. The first decades of this period relate to the degradation of feudal order and the beginnings of new capitalist relations connected to production and commerce.

Verbal evidence on these urban typologies and evolutions of that time can be found in many descriptions of travellers, historians or foreign diplomats, who travelled through or stayed in Albania. However, the numerous works of foreign painters are of great value as visual information. The artworks of English painter Edward Lear, in this regard, are distinguished as some of the most truthful and complete ones.

The "magic" of the modern medium of Photography arrived in Albania in the middle of the XIX century, as a precious "gift" from the West

As mentioned in the introduction above, at the beginning of the XIX century, the Albanian lands and their inhabitants increasingly attracted the attention of Europe and were visited by many European intellectuals. When German geologist Ami Boue (1794-1881) in 1842 gave to Europeans with his work "La Turquie d'Europe" descriptions of stunning views of nature and the beautiful features of the Albanian race, he did not have the opportunity to really or visually illustrate these impressions.¹ (Elsie 2000) The work of painter Edward Lear of 1848-89 with subjects from Albania is perhaps the most complete and true visual documentation of Albanian culture until the mid XIX century. But despite its rich information and its truthfulness, Lear's pictorial work is nonetheless artistic, wrapped in the artist's creative subjectivity, and even more so in the case of this artist, who dressed his subjects and the general miljø with a romantic and at times idyllic veil. The complete and true discovery or better to say the real documentation of Albania will start with the beginning of the Age of Photography.

The technique of "writing images with light", as the photography was rightly called in its beginnings, came to Albania in 1856 as a precious gift from the West, only a few years after Europe itself had invented and recognised this "miracle" of art and science (about twenty years after its simultaneous invention by W.F. Talbot in England and Daguer in France, around the 1830s).

While we would consider Lear's rich pictorial work as the first complete (although subjective) artistic documentation of the Albanian landscape of the XX century, the first true and complete documentation (in terms of technical and objective evidence) without a doubt, is the invaluable wealth of photographic work of the Marubi dynasty of Shkodra, whose activity started only a few years after the middle of the XIX century, and extended uninterrupted over a hundred years, until the middle of the XX century.

The first of the Marubbi's, or the founder of the dynasty, was Pietro Marubbi (1834-1903), an Italian from Piacenza, who was persecuted politically in Italy as a "garibaldist", and who came in the XIX century to reside in Albania, in the city of Shkodra, establishing in 1856, in Shkodra, the first photographic studio in our country, and even in the Balkans, originally called "Studio Marubbi", and later to be known as "Marubbi light-writing".

"The city had openheartedly welcomed a magician, who inflamed some dust and liquids, and then handed to you a piece of thick paper where there were you exactly," wrote the chronicles of the time for Marubbi's sudden appearance and magical process of photography in Albania.²

¹ According to Robert Elsie, noted by Bajram Peçi in <http://gazeta-shqip.com>

² National Photo Gallery "Marubi", Njerz në Za e sende të kujdesshme (Renowned People and precious objects), album, 2012 edition, Shkodra, p. 16.

This foreigner from the West, with a unique personality, would soon become a true Albanian thanks to his work, behaviour and generosity, even would be called "*Peter Marubi, a Shkodra citizen among Shkodra citizens*", who is mainly known for documenting historical and other events, as well as popular figures of the time. From this outstanding author of photography, and thanks to his "light-writing" that we inherited as an invaluable asset, especially the scholars have the opportunity to examine Albania's rare historical, cultural and social moments through the second half of the XIX century, generally characterised by the features of a "closed society".

The dichotomy between the technical evolution of Western modernity of that time and the Albanian oriental heritage is very evident in the subjects of photography at that time. The Marubbi studio with its many "light-writing" would document this cultural dichotomy perhaps more than anyone else.

The earliest photography, and at the same time the first in the history of Albanian photography, is thought to date back to 1858, and depicts an imposing man in national dress and holding a traditional weapon of the time. That will be followed by an abundant production of photographic works, showing us the daily life, almost extinct nowadays, a reality that had started to fluctuate culturally more and more between East and West, the development of citizenship, the rural life, or even the penetration of technological modernity in these areas, the most remote of the Balkans.

The introduction of the camera, a modern and a fascinating innovation for the Albanian citizens of that time, contributed to the change of relations between the social strata, while especially, testifies the tension between the technological and the cultural civilisation of Albania at that time. An example of this is the photo, done in the Marubi studio, of the Shkodra women with covered faces (fig. 16, a and b).

The clear dichotomy between the different mind-sets that coexist in such a photo image is truly impressive. The temptation and magic of the idea to leave a trace of personal existence on a silver-plated tile, using that modern technology of the time, encounters the inability to transcend the un-appealed rule of the conservative Oriental tradition, i.e. that the women should cover the face in the presence of a stranger. The picture of a woman posing with a covered face demonstrates such a tension. Photographs on this occasion convey not so much the resemblance or physical image of the subject, but more the mental image of these women as well as that of the conservative society itself at the time.

Thanks to this artist and its photography, which came as precious "gifts" of the civilised west to the Oriental Albania of that time, we have today a documented testimony of the first urban and landscape images of Albania at that time (fig. 17, a and b) although the number of these photos is smaller than those documenting other subjects, such as historical events, human events and rites of passages, especially the real people dressed in traditional costumes (fig. 18).

Whereas the dresses of people of the urban suburbs, of the villages and especially of the deep highlands reached the XIX century, preserving much of their early tradition (such as in the case of women's xhubleta, a typical and very old dress used only by the Albanians) or had undergone a limited evolution within their type and style (fig. 19), the traditional urban outfit of this time, while being moderate, presented a wealth of foreign layers and elements, especially of oriental culture. Men's hats and felt caps and the scarves held around women's faces, wide "brenavek" or "brekushe" pants, which were worn by

men and women depending on the cloth cut and decorations, men's vests and traditional "xhamadan", women's xhubleta and jackets, etc., have borrowed sometimes the cut and sometimes the form of Oriental clothes of the time (fig. 20).

In fig. 20, it is shown a couple of wealthy citizens from the city of Shkodra, and in the man's clothing, who belongs to the Catholic religion, we clearly see clothing pieces that came as Oriental influences, especially the silk panties or the tail-hat (called "festanuz"), as it came from Tunisia and was widespread in all the Balkan cities at that time).

Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that:

The foreigners are the source of most of the information we have today about our country's past.

If compared, the documentary as well as the artistic works of this period, produced by numerous foreign authors (but in particular two prominent figures, the London painter Eduard Lear and Piacenza born photographer Pietro Marubbi, who came from the moderate West to the oriental Albania and became an important part of the visual documentation of our culture), often complement each other, match and are interconnected among themselves, thus providing us with accurate evidence, demonstrating the presence of material culture and showing the general and specific features of that material culture, conveying in a material form the face of that cultural reality that marked the XIX century Albania, characterised mainly by Eastern oriental influences and phenomena.

As the first most complete artistic documentation of the Albanian landscape of the XX century, we would consider the rich paintings of Lear, while as the first true and complete documentation (in terms of technical and objective evidence) we have the invaluable wealth of photographic work of the Marubi dynasty of Shkodra.

From these visual evidences of that time, and especially in the landscape geography, in the typologies of the architectural constructions, urban organisation of residential areas, traditional clothing and the overall daily life, there are displayed idiosyncratic aspects and phenomena generated by significant interferences of the invading Ottoman culture and regional inter-Balkan exchanges with our indigenous culture inherited from an ancient past.

Until the end of the XIX century Albania would be defined as a "on edge" territory, culturally more "East" and geographically more "West".

The cultural interests and investments of some European intellectuals of that time for Albania, were most fortunate for our history, especially for our cultural heritage, its documentation through the unique writings and images, and make this material documentation increasingly more important, at a time when we witness the physical disappearance of the references.

At the end of this essay, while interpreting metaphorically the ancient myth of Prometheus, brought back by Plato's, the father of philosophy, we can say that the myth can serve well to illustrate the cultural relations of the Albanians with the Orient and Occident.

In donating the *technologies*(which, like the ancient Greeks yesterday and we today are defining as the survival skills to produce objects using work tools), the Orient, like Epimatreus, "forgot" the Albanians, failing to provide to them any of the achievements of the Industrial Revolution, for the simple reason that Orient himself benefited these much later from the West. But while the Orient contributed to Albania's backwardness and violently framed it as a "closed" society, keeping it away from the contemporary Western developments, for about five centuries, the West has played for us Albanians the role of Prometheus, this donor of the "light" of civilisation, this donor of technology, of visual documentation, of material development, of improving our livelihoods, of cultural emancipation, of the presence of modernity, guiding us towards of an "open" society. This long-time denied reality would only be possible for Albanians in the first half of the 20th century, thanks to national efforts and the support of Western Europe.

Figures



Fig. 1. Jean Baptiste Vanmour, "An Albania woman".

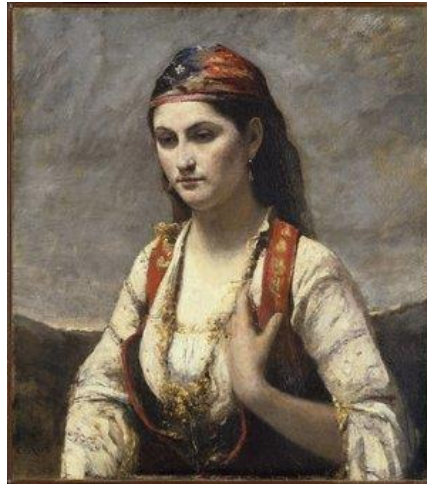


Fig. 2. Camille Corot, "The Albanian"



Fig. 3. and 4. Alexandre-Gabriel Decamp, "Albanian dancers "and "Albanian Fight", works accomplished circa the 1830's.



Fig. 5 and 6. Delacroix art works created circa 1830's, for an Albanian knight figure dressed in fustanella and for an Albanian folk dancer



Fig. 7. Illustrations of contemporary clothing where many elements are borrowed from Albanian clothing, especially fustanella

a) Greek guard in fustanella.

b) Turkish guard in fustanella.



Fig. 8. Portrait of "Ali Pasha" and "Soldier dressed with fustanella" painted by J. Cartwright circa the 1810-20's



Fig. 9. Edward Lear, "Castle of Kruja", - 1848



Fig. 10. Edward Lear, "Castle of Berati", - 1848.



Fig. 11. Edward Lear, "Tirana", - 1848



Fig. 12. Edward Lear, "Ohri", - 1848

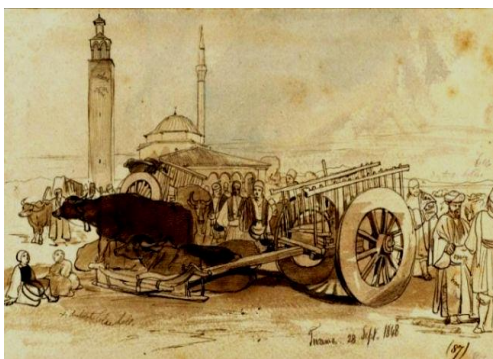


Fig. 13. Edward Lear, "The market place of Tirana", - 1848



Fig. 14. Edward Lear, “Shkodra (Scutari) in northern Albania, with a view of the fortress and the old Bahçellëk (Gardens) Bridge (1768-1880) over the Drin River, 4 October 1848.



Fig. 15. Edward Lear, “Aquaduct and Castle of Gjirokastra”, - 1848



Fig. 16, a and b. Photo "Marubi" Studio, "Covered Catholic Women", photo circa the 1900's.



Fig.17. Photo "Marubi" Studio, circa 1900's."



Fig. 18. Photo "Marubi" Studio, circa 1900's



Fig. 19. "Highland Couple from the North Area" and Fig. 20. "A couple of citizens from Shkodra".

Photo "Marubi" Studio, circa 1900's

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