

# Albanian Literature Written in the Arabic Alphabet

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**Abstract:** Albanian literature of Baytajes appears as a new stream of Albanian pre-renaissance literature. Here, once again, we must emphasize that this literature was developed by many talented poets and literary consciousness formed by the intertwining of Turkish-Arab-Persian culture with the Albanian folk culture. All this undoubtedly shows the high level and awareness of religious, ideological, national and human thoughts of the Albanian literary elite of Baytajes that used the Arabic and Ottoman letters in their literary work for almost two hundred years. Those Albanian Baytajes used the form of thick chorus, to reach a greater ideo-emotional effect. However, this feature was also under the influence of poetry and poets of the Islamic East.

**Keywords:** Literature, Albanian, Arabic, Influence, Language, Thought

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## 1. Introduction

Albanian literature of Baytajes is an expression that was formed in ritual and Islamic religious schools. In this context, the Albanian poets, who had taught in madrassas and wrote diwans in Turkish and Persian, (including Arabic, author) begun writing Albanian poetry. This literature was not more extensive in communication with the masses but it was inherited only through manuscripts and verbally and never had the opportunity to be published.

We have the right to ask the question: Why did this happen, ie the non-publication? Failure to publish the original and translated works of Albanian Baytajes when they were created, excludes a greater influence through their works. If we accept the theory that literary art nourished by the objective reality and it must be returned to the same reality through influence of actions. This is because printing in Arabic script at that time was very rare, although during the Ottoman Empire existed the Arabic printing in the eighteenth century, but they were inaccessible.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, given that much of this creativity, was written by hand and learned by heart.

## 2. Literary Meaning of Baytaje Concept

Poetry of Baytajes was written in Arabic script, namely the

Arab-Ottoman graph. It is natural that Baytajes used in their writings Arabic alphabet as they had been taught and studied in schools, both inside and outside the Albanian space, where learning and knowledge were given in Arabic, Ottoman or Persian, but the writing, however remained Arabic. It was named by this special nomination according to the Arabic word: “ Bayt shi’r” (versus of poem), and in Ottoman language it is used by the name “ Baytaje”: “ People of poems”, “ Poets”, “People that professionally say poems”.

This alphabet, in some way, although it does not include all phonemes of Albanian, has had several advantages because the 28 consonants and three diacritical marks of the Arabic graffits on consonants “*dh*”, “*th*”, and the vowel “*ë*”, have offered the opportunity to write in Albanian with less difficulty.<sup>2</sup>

Albanian literature of Baytajes ran in all territories where Albanians lived, within Albania and abroad. Albanian literature of baytajes words ran across ethnic Albanian areas, but also beyond, in different cities or tekkes where Albanians were living and acting, such as Istanbul, Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Tehran etc. In this context, it must be said that this literature in Kosovo appeared very early as the nineteenth century has been connected to the national movement. This branch deserved and deserves more serious approach and study,

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<sup>1</sup> Mahmud Hysa, (2000), *Alamiada shqiptare* II, Logos-A, Shkup, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.2

whether in meeting text material, which in most cases are distributed in personal libraries and therefore, it is a greater risk to be lost or remain anonymous.<sup>3</sup>

Many poets of Albanian origin had made reputation in civilization of Turkish culture, some of them even were completely assimilated. However, most of them lacked the national conscience, but with high pride boasting claimed their origine from Albania and the Albanians.<sup>4</sup>

Sami Bey Frashëri, in his "Albanian personalities in Kamus Al - A'lâm" mentions the names of Dukagjin-Zade, Mesih from Prishtina, Sersem Ali Dede, Suzi from Prizren etc.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Inspiration of Poetry

The Baytaje poets think that poetry is born as an act of inspiration that comes from outside the poet as a "hidajeti haqq", as a "divine gift" or as a divine inspiration. We see that all idealistic concepts of Baytajes were based on the act of inspiration, eg Ibrahim Frakulla says that the divine inspiration is a God's gift. He says that poetry is an inspiration from God, not something simple.<sup>6</sup>

In each poem, the poet emphasizes his own name, once in the beginning and once at the end of the poem. They also write in other cases the year when the event occurred. They mostly have created mostly autobiographical poems because of the fact that their poetry can be constructed in a vital way by its creators.<sup>7</sup> No doubt that this tradition of highlighting the name is taken from oriental poetry, namely from Islamic poets and eastern mystique thoughts.

The Baytaje poets more like taking part in human life that it is in compliance with religious norms, it is in the constellation of conscience and religious thought. So, they rather leave the description of that world for the eternal world, despite being educated in religious environments, guided in life by the teachings of Islam, using the Arabic alphabet, the majority of them are even wearing the clothes of imam, the sweat, the grand mufti...

The well known German scholar from Harward University, the orientalist Annemarie Schimmel, speaks about the impact of the event of Karbala in various literatures of the world and says:

"I still remember the deep impression left on the first Persian poem... This poem, in its marvelous style of question and answer, conveys much of the dramatic events and feelings of a pious Muslim experiences..."<sup>8</sup>

We have seen that during the nineteenth century were built important Tekkes centers, as in Korca, Konica, Frasher,

Djakovica, Orahovac, Kruje, Durballi, Gjirokastra, Tetovo etc. The masjid was considered as a center of creative and patriotic activities. Bektashi poetry was distributed by Zyko Kamberi, Hasan Ethem Mullai, Hysen Bitri, Nasibi of Frasher, Tahir Efendi Gjakova, Muharrem Mahzun, Dalip Frashëri, Zenel Bastari etc.<sup>9</sup>

### 4. Social Literary Ideas

In the world of ideas there is nothing that can exist outside reality because such act would be considered only theory. Thinker who thinks outside reality called utopian and his deluded world always tends to create something that is outside the parameters of mind. Such a view cannot be taken as a way of addressing the real problems because it does not act within the framework of real social problems.

Baytaje thinkers lived within society and not in the palaces, were thinking about the problems and tried to provide their contribution to solving them. They knew that life is full of vicissitudes and problems are interconnected and must be resolved.

Their world was much more complicated because any problem in a specific area promoted hundreds of problems in other spheres.

How could they say that they can solve any problem if they could not apply their thoughts at all?!?! Could they elaborate something with something nonexistent?!?!

They were pride of the achievements of their time, but unfortunately, we do not see any happiness in their society. Even if we think that there was happiness, they faced numerous problems of different nature.

People's opinions about various issues have limited opportunity to own them because the human brain is limited. Every discovery in any sphere affects the emergence of many things unknown, and so, in any discovery we find worlds unknown.

The man's thought is the same as the universe, the more expanded, the more noticed inability forward things that are even more gigantic than those disaggregated.

Baytaje thinker is not surprised by such reality because he does not create a theory to live outside reality into a fantastic world of illusory.

Impact mass is the reason of any writing, whether prose or poetry. It would not have any concrete impact all unwitting and failed contribution. So, no literary does not want to write something for itself but for the measure and therefore tries to be as accessible to more people.

Their opinions were not complicated because every person, whether intellectual or trite, understood them without any problem. In order to understand such thoughts, people did not feel the need to have higher education. Baytajes belonged not only to the intellectual elite.

Features of Albanian literature of Baytajes addressed social aspects. In most cases, social and social content found within, or combined with patriotic and political

3 Mahmud Hysa, (2000), *Alamiada shqiptare I*, Logos-A, Shkup, p. 112

4 Qazim Qazimi, (1996), *Ndikime orientale në veprën letrare të Naim Frashërit*, Prishtinë, p. 43

5 Sami Frashëri, (2002), *Personalitetet shqiptare në Kâmus al-A'lâm*, Logos-A; Shkup, p. c

6 E. D. Dzavelide, (1981), *Pesnicka rec i simbol, Sufizam*, Darko Danaskovic i Ivan Shop, Beograd, pp. 176-177

7 Mahmud Hysa, (2000), *Alamiada shqiptare I*, Logos-A, Shkup, p. 55

8 Annemarie Schimmel, (1986), *Qerbelaja dhe imam Huseini në letërsinë persiane dhe indomuslimane*, University of Harward, Al-Serat Journal, vëll.XII.

9 Mahmud Hysa, (2000), *Alamiada shqiptare I*, Logos-A, Shkup, p. 214

content, to some extent the content of national enlightenment, and rarely to those of religious enlightenment.

Hajdar Salehu has investigated three ways of observing, experiencing and, finally, reflecting social life in writing poems:

- Social poetry which reflected the spirit of realism and criticized social systems.
- Description of difficult social position as a result of political situations.
- Social poetry that describes the social life through feelings, emotions and dispositions. These aspects have been distributed primarily through personal religious content of the poems.<sup>10</sup>

Vejsel Jalalud-den Guta has written a poem with social themes in 1942, just few days before the collapse of the Yugoslavian Kingdom, to arouse patriotic feelings. The author reminds listeners and eventually his readers of the difficult social position, poverty, discrimination and assimilation.

However, social theme dimension reaches deeper and wider in Zenel Bastari's poetry, for which, we can say that poetry is a precursor of advanced social ideas throughout our literature. On the basis of his works, we read his spiritual, meditative, social enlightenment and poetic spirit. Zenel Bastari speaks without any complex about the reality of his time, oppression and exploitation, cynicism and sadism, lust and debauchery, arbitrariness and anarchy...

Finally, I think that the social literary treatment of Baytajes should be concluded with the words of the researcher Mahmud Hysa: "The theme of migration, as a social topic, has entered our literature through Albanian literature of Baytajes indirectly from Nezim Frakulla, partially from Hasan Zyko Kamberi and more integrally from Muhammad Kyçyku Cami through his poem "Gurbetlitë"- (Foreigners)".<sup>11</sup>

They have directed their ideas to the people through poetry with sincere hopes that they would have influence on them. Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku says: "Many people, especially women and the children, live in darkness because they do not understand Turkish or Arabic, but they listen to poetry for the masses and youth. So, I had to translate the Mawloud of the Prophet." <sup>12</sup> This translation used the same original Arabic and Ottoman graphics in Albanian language, or better said, it was an Arabic script with the Albanian significance. Even today we are witnessing the high impact of it, especially during different events or celebrations. Their poetry was easily spread, memorized, and even sung in religious gatherings. They worshiped the Creator through the poetic modes that came from its message. Baytajes were aware of the fact that it would have a better affect if their poetry gets memorized and, in this way, it would be better to be

transmitted from generation to generation and to keep its tradition alive and away from forgetfulness. "This poem was unable to be published, and therefore, it entered the language and memory..."<sup>13</sup> Albanians decided to write this kind of poetry with Arabian alphabet but in Albanian meaning because they wanted to communicate through their poems with the people that could understand only that Arabic and Ottoman alphabet. "The reason for this creativity must be viewed from a religious meaning and the extent to which they communicate through their poetry".<sup>14</sup> The nature of this poetry was different and they attempted to illuminate the mass mind with their poetic creativity by using this way of expression. The social content can be found within the texts, or it can be combined with patriotic and political content, to some extent the content of national enlightenment, and rarely to those of religious enlightenment. In a special way, we see social content in poems with religious content.<sup>15</sup>

Also must say that "the literary period of Baytajes freely can be attributed as a part of the wider world's literature because of the fact that its precision and rare beauty of the chosen words can be compared with the works of world-known German poet Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe".<sup>16</sup>

Results of their life, in a way, were amazing on the other hand, such results opened the door to infinity because everything has a close link between cause and effect.

Baytaje thinker was not isolated from the life directions but was part of them and refused anything that was not positive. He had no prejudice because the thought of the sound can come if the principles are sound.

We often listen to their thoughts, but such opinion could not be fruitful for their society because they had to change the analytical methodology. They started from the principle that knowledge can be gained from a worldview that is based on the launch of the principles that later will be supported by methodology of knowledge. They knew that if knowledge does not precede thinking process, then neither can talk about the issues.

They could not talk about the issues if they had not based their opinion on sound elements and such experience should be formed on their own knowledge. They were thinking according to their time principles forms. The human mind is capable of evolving its capacity within the frame of possible horizons of the because the human nature itself depends on its development. This man, who thinks this way and walks through the life processes based on this principle cannot be against the correct thinking and reasoning. It is impossible to say that such act is outside the framework of sanity for moving and creating within the nature that was provided by the Almighty Creator. Such action is very common, and I do not know how to define any action that is outside this principle, because it does not belong to the sound human

13 Hajdar Salihu, (1987), *Poezia e bejtexhinjve*, Prishtinë, p. 24

14 Abdullah Hamiti, (2000), *Tematika e misticizmit islam në poezinë e bejtexhinjëve*, Studime orientale Nr. 2, Prishtinë, p. 61

15 Hajdar Salihu, (1987), *Poezia e bejtexhinjve*, Prishtinë, p. 40

16 Mustafi, Muhamed, (2016), *Mongrafi për nocionin arabo-osman të bejtexhinjëve*, Tetovë, p. 67

10 Ibid., p. 85

11 Mahmud Hysa, (2000), *Alamiada shqiptare I*, Logos-A, Shkup, p. 156

12 Faik Luli – Islam Dizdari, (2005), *Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku, jeta dhe vepra*, Logos-A, Shkup, p. 31

with the sound brain.

The function of the human mind under the influence of current outside trends loses its authenticity because it begins thinking under scenarios that lead the mind to move out of its instinctive nature. Someone can have a sound thinking and acting if he walks by this Creator's principle, and this way of developing, within the changing trends by time and place, can help him to play the role that was given to him by the Almighty God in this world.

Such large changes in thoughts engulfed the human mind and not letting him gradually develop normally and without inducing mental pressure, which can freely be called mental violence. Baytaje thinking tried to make people see the world differently because such an option would offer to that time a broader outlook than the existed opinion which could hardly be characterized by any specific identity. According to them, thinkers can use their potential for induction of undisclosed terms in the Quran. Baytaje texts recognize the highest value of the intellect because through it we can notice the epiphany of the basic principles of the society and people should continue their development and their scientific social and economic progress within the frame of these horizons.

Baytaje thinker did not think outside of those principles. The man who refuses such a divine principle thinks people are far apart and separated by geographical and political boundaries. Their way of thinking originated from the Eastern thoughts but mixed with their own experiences and views.

## 5. Conclusion

This symbiosis of oriental thoughts with folk tradition is of particular importance and, of course, it has a special significance. Far from being biased conclusion of some that this must indeed be purely religious literature, but the Albanian literature of Baytajes is quite advanced with artistic values and it appears as a new current of the literature to distract it from the topic of the old religious topics that initiated creating typological new works of art, creating a new poetic figuration and a new school of metrics, which come as a result of the oriental fusion. Deformation of the human mind affects the distortion of the principles and values. The human mind today has not the appropriate place according to its instinctive rules but under the outside and dynamic rules that affects opinion in every sphere of life.

Their thoughts were comprehensive and they did not act only within an area but in the framework of many fields, and this extensive knowledge kept the power of their thoughts and ideas so many years even if they passed away.

This new branch has created a new poetic figuration with different pedagogical, philosophical and poetic inspiration and has created a new school in Albanian literature with mystical Sufi spirit, too. We can conclude that they were not only literary but were poets, professors, prominent philosophers and mystics. They were genuine connoisseur of Islamic oriental literature and philosophy, even at the same time they were writers, philosophers and professors because their poetic creativity was a poetic symbiosis of doctrinal and rational skills.

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