

<b>ITALIAN TRAVELERS IN ALBANIA</b>		<b>Literature</b>  <b>Keywords:</b> Albania, Italian travellers, traveller's texts, typology.
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**Abstract**

Albania has been visited by lots of foreign travellers ever since ancient times. The Balkan country's strategic geographical position, as well its economic, political and social development over centuries have attracted the attention of foreign trekkers, both from neighbouring and distant countries. Travellers who visited Albanian-inhabited regions as diplomatic emissaries, religious missionaries, war strategists, special envoys, scientists, artists and so on, occasionally, also for mere travel purposes in order to visit exotic countries and peoples, left behind a legacy of quite impressive travel writings. Those kind of writings are not pure texts, from a genre (literary) viewpoint, accordingly, the same traveller, namely their travel writings, may be a study "property" of the historical, geographical, literary, ethnographical sciences, among others. On the other hand, descriptions in the travel writings feature the traveller's own personal experiences, thus, unfolding them through the traveller's subjective and fictional prism. The subject matter of travel writings is also quite important nowadays to Albanians due to the mere character of historical information that travellers impart, having known and understood Albania and the Albanian society first-hand, and also from the viewpoint of shaping Albania's image in the eyes of foreigners. The research was triggered by *Udhëtarët e huaj në Shqipëri (gjer në fund të shek. XIX) [Foreign travellers to Albania) (until the end of XIX century]*, a book written by Albanian author Lumo Skëndo (also known as Mit'hat Frashëri), whose publication was prepared by Albanians scholars L. Malltezi and Sh. Delvina, Tirana, 1999. Intending to further enrich and complement that publication, this research paper targets to create a typology of travels undertaken by Italians who visited Albania, from the earliest treks on record until 1912, when Albania declared its independence after almost five centuries under Ottoman rule.

Since ancient times, our country has been visited by many foreign travellers. Due to its geographical position, as well as its economic, political, and social development, the attention of many travellers from other countries, both close and far, has been drawn. Travelogues have come down to us from Greek-Roman geographers of the antiquity and from those of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Numerous pilgrims who have come to our lands either as diplomatic or religious missionaries, war strategists, as well as scientists, artists, etc., and sometimes, just as travellers, to visit exotic places and people, they have all contributed with very interesting travelogues. These types of texts are not pure texts of the genre in the (literary) sense of the word. Travelogues share boundaries with ethnography, geography, religion, psychosocial sciences, scientific literature, and other fields of science,<sup>1</sup> therefore the same travel text may be the study "property" from different scientific perspectives.

<sup>1</sup> For more information refer to: Domenico Nucera: *I viaggi e la letteratura*, - at: *Letteratura comparata* /a cura di Armando Gnisci/ B. Mondadori, Milan, 2002.

Therefore, to discuss travelogues nowadays, one must first consider this statement of the (integration) multiple levels of their creation. Still, the travelogues are also informative texts, which provide a testimony for both a certain state of the travel, in the physical sense of the word, and for the diachronic, cultural, scientific, geopolitical, urbanization aspect and beyond.

This applies to Albania and Albanians, too, at least until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where the means of communication were quite limited. Most of these texts are equipped with maps and sketches, which outline the itinerary of the trip, photos of places and people, personal graphics, and other data, thus enriching the verbal information with the visual one.

The fact, that with the traveller's return to ones country, the publication of these books was expected quite well, this is undoubtedly related to the informative or discovering function of the "other" country, of the "foreign" country and which is different from his own, i.e. by creating the image of the "foreign" country and people.

And, basically, this is the characteristic relationship between the travelogue texts and the readers.

The paper aims to introduce two of the main models of Italian travellers, who have visited Albania, including their earliest travels that have been passed down until 1912.

The study was inspired by the book of Lumo Skendo, *Foreign travellers in Albania (until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century)*<sup>2</sup> and intends to enrich it further. Based on a careful examination, it was observed that only the Italian traveller Lorenzo Bernardo is included in the book of L. Skendo, and more specifically with his book *Viaggio di un ambasciatore veneziano da Venezia a Costantinopoli nel 1591*<sup>3</sup>.

Bernardo describes the journey through Albania like a diary and brings geographical, historical, economic, and commercial information for cities, such as Lezha, Shkodra, Elbasan, Tirana, Struga, Manastiri, etc.

The research shows that from the earliest times until 1912 - the period under consideration - there are 82 voices of Italian travellers. The first trip to Albania was made by Benedetto Ramberti, in 1585, six years before that of Lorenzo Bernardo.

The author of the book *Delle cose de turchi*, B. Rambert describes in three books the journey from Venice to Constantinople where, among other things, we encounter ancient and contemporary toponyms.

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<sup>2</sup> *Foreign travelers in Albania (until the end of 20th century)* –written for publication by L. Malltezi and Sh. Delvina, - Tirana, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> *Journey of a Venetian ambassador from Venice to Constantinople on 1591*. Venice, Stabilimento Tipografico Fratelli Visentini, 1886. Pg. 92.

With a view to having a more complete typology of Italian traveller voices, which are not found in the above-mentioned edition, the scope of the research field was extended to include Albanological publications,<sup>4</sup> accompanied with the study of archives and browsing hundreds of pages of secondary sources, thus, significantly enriching the voices of Italian travellers in Albania. However, they are not included in this paper since they are not part of the object of this paper.

Among the Italian travellers who have travelled through and stayed in our country, we can single out Antonio Baldacci, who undertook dozens of trips and left us a series of scientific studies in the field of botany, history, geography, ethnography, politics, economics, etc. Considering him as one of the most important representatives of this period, the main features of his works will be discussed below.

Antonio Baldacci (1867-1950) was born and lived in Bologna. His attention was focused on the Balkans and among the first trips to be mentioned was that of Dalmatia and Montenegro, where he closely studied the flora of these countries.

Since the year 1888, he turned his attention to Albania and Greece, whose flora was the key to understand the phytogeographical relations (geographical botany) between Italy and the Balkan countries, Asia Minor and North Africa.

Initially these trips, which were devoted to the botanical exploration, had a purely scientific character. They enriched the flora of our country with many new species, and some rich botanical collections, which were prepared by Baldacci, still constitute the precious treasure of foreign museums, mainly the *British Museum*.

Based on the experience gained, Baldacci appreciated the territorial importance of our country, since Albania was under the Turkish rule and it “was terribly difficult to cross”, as well as Italy’s policy towards the Adriatic.

As a patriot of his country, Baldacci became a passionate defender of the Italian idea of “Mare nostro”. An independent Albania - according to him - would not be possible except under the protection of Italy, because Italy is the only power that can protect Albania from the greed of its neighbours.

Prior to publishing them as separate works, the author had presented the main findings of his explorations as study papers since 1890. *Itinerari Albanesi*, 1892-1902 (Albanian Travels), published in 1917, is his first book about our country, which was offered to the reader as a personal experience bearing a whole world, which was little known or rather unknown to the receiver. In fact, it involves the attraction or fondness for these types of texts by the foreign reader, and it explains the very good reception of this book in Italy.

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<sup>4</sup> We mean: 1. *Albanica I.*-Tirana, 1998; *Albanica II.*-Tirana, 1987; A. Sharrexhi, N. Basha: *Works of Italian and Albanian scholars about Albania and Albanians* (15th – 20th Century), Tirana, 1995.

The manuscript dedicated to Albania, developed the Italian Military Geographic Institute, and is considered as a precursor to the main work of Baldacci, *Albania*, which could be considered a political treaty - due to its diversity and content.

Baldacci's numerous research expeditions were summarized and published in three major works entitled *Studi speciali Albanesi*, published in Rome, in 1932, 1933, and 1937. Its content is divided into three main independent parts: historical-political, economic, and scientific.

In the first work, *Rrugëtime Shqiptare*, (*Albanian Journeys*) Baldacci writes "In the bay of Albania, I was not only attracted by the botanical research; the thirst to study this strong surviving heir of the great ethnic tree of the Adriatic, isolated and characteristic in its primitive social condition, guided me throughout the Albanian journeys, but without examining it, as it should normally be for a botanist, to provide a solution to this very intriguing problem, about which neither historians, nor ethnographers, archaeologists and sociologists have not been able to satisfy our hopes."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, descriptions of the journeys are personal experiences of the traveller, thus layering an emotional-subjective plane, i.e. a *fictional* one.

Beyond botany, Baldacci, in personal discourse, considers Albania as one of the deep African countries, where anarchy reigned, with proud people and oriental and primitive customs, such as blood feuds; a place with rich and beautiful nature, but it was also a place with unexploited land, without roads and means of communication.

Travelogues, as good sources of information about the country and the people they describe, have served a great deal in establishing their image. Regarding the professional character of Baldacci's publications, we can not say whether the image conveyed by these studies to his fellow citizens matched with the perceptions and knowledge that Italians had about our country, however, what it is known is that that the popularity of Baldacci's publications, drew the attention of Albanian personalities, such as Dom Ndoc Nikaj, who wrote:

"...Por Baldaçi i shtrént ë sa Baldaçia tjer qi shkrujn per në nuk ë diftojn ghymértin ë Shqyptarvé ë bukdhanen t'on... É Baldaçi, mmasi ghét ghith kah shkoj sofren ë Shqyptarvé t' shtrumé, na thrét ñérz t' éger ë t' pa far marifétit n' védi."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Baldacci: *Rrugëtime Shqiptare (Albanian Journeys) (1892-1902)*, Tirana, 2004, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Albania, - Brussels, 1898, 1-15 August, pp. 71-72.

A special model of travelogues of scholars, who came to Albania until 1912, represents the one written by Father Vincenzo Coronelli, one of the greatest Italian cartographers,<sup>7</sup> an author of about a hundred volumes, thousands of maps, plates, plans and views, founder of what can be held as the world's first geographical society.

Italian cartographers, especially those of Venice (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries) can be considered as giants of world cartography, thus, present scholars rightly state: “the fact that 90% of the content of the maps of Gastaldi, Kantelli, Coronelli were used by European cartographers, until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, testifies to the high authority of Venetian cartographers as well as the many values that their maps contained”<sup>8</sup>.

Kantelli and Coronelli are the two most prominent representatives of Venetian cartography, who, supported by the Albanian clergy, have carried out expeditions, mostly in Northern Albania; this is related not only to the fact that Catholicism was more widespread in these lands, as compared to other parts of the country, but there were also very important and vital trade routes for many countries of Western and Central Europe.

The work of Coronelli, which had a geographical content,<sup>9</sup> consists of 37 volumes and it consists of 2000 maps, plates, and pictures. Father Coronelli displays Northern Albania in six geographical maps, engraved and printed in Venice between 1688-1691.

They appear in one or more of the first works of the cartographer, all in the format (60/43 cm) of the so-called imperial leaf (*foglio imperiale*), which we briefly describe below:

1. *The flow of the rivers Drin and Buna in Dalmatia*, 1688- from the Kotor Ridges to the Drini estuary in Lezha. Approximate scale 1: 300000.
2. *District of Dalmatia divided into its villages*. Eastern part - undated, but probably from the year 1678 or 1688. From Split to the Buna estuary. Approximate scale 1: 600000.

<sup>7</sup> The history of Albanian cartography has been written in detail by two authoritative scholars, Prof. R. Almagia and Baron F. von Nopcsa. Prior to the invention of the press (mid-1400s) there were only a few navigation maps of Albania, and some schematic sketches of itineraries and outlines of the Balkan Peninsula, with a few names of localities, attached to manuscript reproductions of Ptolemy's great geographical work. The toponyms of these maps are limited in number. Navigational and Ptolemaic maps - the two sources of modern cartography-poor in detail, being scattered in many specimens, attracted the attention of scholars, and encouraged them to research and delineate new, more accurate and hand-drawn and complete maps. In Venice, a series of geographical maps of the Adriatic coast, the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkan Peninsula until the year 1560 appear, a new map of the Balkans, which is much more perfect than its predecessors, that of the great Italian cartographer of the 1500s, Giovanni Gastaldi, (with about twenty toponyms of Northern Albania), which gives a special presentation of Northern Albania, especially in hydrography and marks an important step in the historiography of Albanian maps.

<sup>8</sup> A. Shehu, P. Nikolli: *Historia e hartografisë shqiptar* (History of Albanian cartography) Tirana, 2001, pg. 82.

<sup>9</sup> We know that Coronelli was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1650 in Ravenna; he lived in Venice and passed away in 1718. At a very young age, he put on the robe of St. Francis. He studied theology at S. Bonaventura College. We do not know in what year the friar began to be interested in cosmography, travel, and cartography. The time he spent in Paris, where he was invited for work purposes, gave him the opportunity to establish relationships with the most famous geographers of the time. Coronelli returned home in 1685 and founded the Argonaut Academy, where the most prominent personalities of Venice and other cities in Italy and Europe were enrolled.

3. *Dabun stream and adjacent sites*, second sheet. Undated, but engraved between 1688 and 1691. From Kotorri Ridge to the south of Cape of Rodon. Approximate scale 1: 700000.

4. *Gulf of Venice*, 1688. From the Kotor Ridge to the Island of Corfu. Approximate scale 1: 700000.

5. *Greece between 1688 and 1691*. It includes all of Albania from the Kotor Ridge to Epirus. Approximate scale 1: 2300000.

6. *The Eastern part of the Mediterranean*, probably between 1687 and 1691. It includes all of Albania. Approximate scale 1: 5000000. Coronelli's maps were not unknown to Albanian scholars. Almagia and Nopcsa had discussed about their main features. Ermano Armao, in the book *Locations, churches, rivers, mountains and various toponyms of an ancient map of Northern Albania*, expanded, completed, and corrected the cartographic configurations, giving detailed information about them.

Being certain for most of them, he identified them, in addition to the well-known churches and Coronelian sites such as, Darda di Scutari Murici dello Zem; the houses in the village of the bishops of Shkodra and Lezha, the Franciscan refuge between Gruda and Kelmendi, the church of St. Demetrius of Dajc, St. Mark of Mjeda; Berracho rivers and streams etc. "Despite the identifications presented by me", notes Armao, "of Kotor, Letaj, Vraka, Asonta of Kirit, Shenkolli, Prron That, of St. Paul, of Puka, of Mount Kallogjer, I must say that they still provide for some points of doubt. In the 600s, the flows and inflows of the great rivers of Albania were different from today: this has led me to discuss about the historical changes of the Drini, the Drinas, the Buna and the Kiri, to provide data, which were previously unknown or erroneously known about the level of Lake Shkodra and the depth of the Buna ridge."<sup>10</sup> The publication of Coronelli's book was well received in Albania. Nikolle Gazulli,<sup>11</sup> Dom Ndre Mjeda, and other personalities wrote about it in the press of the time as an important event for Albania. "Among the ancient geographical maps of Shqipërisë (Albania)", observed Mjeda, "or better to say, of the Northern Albania, undoubtedly the Map takes the first place", *Corso delli fiumi Drino e Boiano nella Dalmatia, descritto dal P. Mro Coronelli*, *Cosmografo della Seren, Republica di Venezia* etc."<sup>12</sup>

Mjeda acknowledges the role of E. Armao in completing and refining a series of toponyms, microtoponyms and other Coronelli data. As a good connoisseur of his country, he also points out mistakes related to certain toponyms (for example: Balldrê vs. Baldrê), specifying the geographical location and population of the area. Coronelli's map, published in 1689, with a scale of 1: 300000 can be considered as the first topographic-demographic map for Northern Albania.

<sup>10</sup> Ermanno Armao: *Locations, churches, rivers, mountains, and various toponyms of an ancient map of Northern Albania* (Original title: *Località, chiese, fiumi, monti e toponimi varii di un'antica carta dell'Albania Settentrionale*, Roma, 1933), - Tirana, 2006, pp. 202-203.

<sup>11</sup> For more information refer to: *Oroena mbi një hartë të Shqipërisë*. - Hylli i Dritës, Shkodër, 1938, no. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ndre Mjeda /Aut. Gelasius (pseudonym): *Bibliografi*. Leka, Shkoder, 1934, no. 1, p. 30.

It depicts all the human settlements of this part of the country, accompanied by the number of buildings and inhabitants according to religious affiliation.

Furthermore, the construction of bridges, the hydrographic and road network, which connected the human settlements, the vegetation etc., are all presented in detail. The mountainous draft presented with the perspective method is denser and for the first time our Alps appear on the map. Coronelli's other merit lies in the fact that the map shows *white spots* for locations lacking reliable sources, a method used by other authors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Coronelli's maps published in *Atlante Veneto* (12 volumes) are accompanied by decorative drawings by the most famous painters of the time such as Michelangelo, Da Vinci, which shows the importance of the maps at that time, as well as their aesthetic values. It is also worth mentioning that the geographical elements of Coronelli maps are presented in different colors, which have resisted time and are being used in contemporary maps as well. They provide us with rich information on the state and events of our society during that historical period on several planes: from the political aspect, Venetian maps have played an important role in the fates of our people and nation; in the social aspect they thoroughly reflect the human settlements, and most importantly, for the first time we notice the names of the regions and their extension in the territory. On the other hand, Coronelli's maps constitute a golden collection not only of Albanian cartography, but also of the country's cultural heritage.

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