

# ALBANIAN LITERATURE IN GREEK SCRIPT: THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORTHODOX TRADITION IN ALBANIAN WRITING

Robert Elsie

## 1. A schism of cultural identity

Before the Turkish incursions of the late fourteenth century, Albania had often been the frontier between the spheres of influence of Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy. Though in the wake of the Crusades certain areas of northern Albania and in particular the Adriatic ports under the growing influence of the Serenissima had come to look to Rome, most of central and southern Albania remained derivatively Byzantine. To this day, the double-headed eagle of Byzantium, a symbol of this heritage, adorns the Albanian flag.

As in antiquity, the Byzantine Greeks themselves never showed any exceptional interest in the non-Greek-speaking ‘barbarians’ of the Empire, and there can be no doubt that the wild mountain inhabitants of Albania constituted a prime example of what they must have considered barbarians beyond the pale of Hellenic civilization. Even after the Ottoman invasion of Europe and the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, the Greek population in the southern Balkans was not completely divested of the imperial heritage of two millennia of which it was so proud. Despite forced submission to Turkish rule, a certain continuity of ideas and customs reigned among the Greeks, fostered in particular by the Orthodox church, that very quintessence of languishing Byzantine grandeur. In southern Albania and Epirus, which throughout the centuries of Turkish rule and up to the present have had a mixed population of Albanian, Greek and Aromunian speakers, the Orthodox church remained an expression of Greek civilization and was exclusively devoted to the Greek language as a cultural bulwark against the invading hordes of Islam. To be of Orthodox faith was to be Greek, just as to be of Islamic faith was to be Turk. There was little room in either culture for the gradually awakening aspirations of Albanian nationalism. Albanians educated in the Orthodox tradition were thus of necessity oriented to the Greek language and culture. Using Greek script to write in the vernacular language of the Albanians was regarded by the Orthodox church as eminently superfluous and in later years quite often as a heretical menace.

## 2. Albanian in Greek and other scripts

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we nonetheless find a number of Albanian-language documents written and preserved in Greek script, which show that interest in writing Albanian was by no means extinct in this mixed culture. These works, few of which were ever published, comprise translations of Orthodox religious literature, dictionaries and grammatical notes on the Albanian language. Though not a creative literature *per se*, they might, under other circumstances, have laid the foundations for a new literary tradition in Albania.

The Greek alphabet was the creation of the ancient Greeks, influenced at an early stage of their history by the Phoenicians, and was modelled to fit the sound system of their language. It

continued to be used for modern Greek although many of the letters of this alphabet had become redundant at the synchronic level as a result of phonological change over the centuries. When adapted to Albanian, this writing system did not have too many letters, but simply the wrong ones. It is cumbersome in Greek script to distinguish between *s* and *sh* or between *z* and *zh* for instance, and to express the Albanian consonants *c*, *xh*, *gj*, *q* or the neutral vowel *ë*. But where there is a will, there is a way, of course, and many Orthodox scholars of the eighteenth century did endeavour to use the Greek alphabet as the only means they could conceive of for putting Albanian into writing.

The earliest record of Albanian in Greek script is the so-called Easter Gospel or Pericope<sup>1</sup>, no doubt from the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, fifteen lines translated from the Gospel of St Matthew (27: 62-66). It was discovered by the Greek historian Spyridon Lampros (1851-1919) in 1906 in a Greek manuscript<sup>2</sup> preserved in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. The text, whose author is unknown, is in Tosk dialect, though not well translated. This work is somewhat of an exception to the Orthodox tradition, firstly in that it is two hundred years earlier than all other Albanian texts of substance in Greek script and secondly in that it was found in northern Italy. At any rate, we must wait a whole two centuries for the Albanians to rediscover Greek script for their writing.

About 1949, a manuscript was found near Elbasan at the monastery of Saint John Vladimir, established in 1381 by Charles Thopia, which also contains Albanian translations of part of the four gospels. Known in Albanian as the *Anonimi i Elbasanit*<sup>3</sup> (Anonymous manuscript of Elbasan), this Elbasan Gospel Manuscript, now preserved in Tirana, was written not in standard Greek script but in an original alphabet of forty letters, the oldest known example of an original Albanian alphabet. The author of the manuscript is no doubt Gregory of Voskopoja (d. 1772), known in Albanian as *Grigor Voskopojari* or *Grigor i Durrësit* (of Durrës) and in Greek as *Grêgorios ho Dyrrakhiu*. Gregory was an Orthodox cleric and teacher in Voskopoja who is remembered as the author of several hagiographies published there in Greek. Later in life, he was elected Archbishop of Durrës (1768) and died in 1772, probably at the monastery of St John Vladimir in Elbasan which seems to have been the see of the archbishopric at the time. We know that Gregory of Voskopoja made translations of the Old and New Testaments in an alphabet which he invented himself and we may safely assume this Elbasan Gospel Manuscript was part of his work. Dhimitër Shuteriqi, nonetheless, believed the author of the text to be one Papa Totasi, an Orthodox priest from the Shpat region, whose name may appear in another script on the inside cover of the manuscript. There is no concrete evidence for the existence of such a priest or writer though.

From the year 1731 comes an engraving of the Virgin Mary that was acquired in 1950 by the Archives of the Institute of Sciences, forerunner of the Academy of Sciences in Tirana. On

---

<sup>1</sup> N. Borgia, *Pericope evangelica in lingua albanese del secolo XIV da un manoscritto greco della Biblioteca Ambrosiana* (Grottaferrata 1930).

<sup>2</sup> Codex 133, f. 63. cf. *Martini-Bassi Catalogus Codicum Graecorum*; S. Lampros, *To Christos anestê albanisti*, in: *Neos Hellênomnêmôn*, 3 (1906), p. 481-482.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Dh. Shuteriqi, *Anonimi i Elbasanit*, in: *Buletini i Institutit të Shkencave* (Tirana 1949), 1, p. 33-54; Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850* (Akademia e Shkencave, Tirana 1976), p. 91-93; I. Zamputi, *Dorëshkrimi i Anonimit t'Elbasanit*, in: *Buletini i Institutit të Shkencave* 3-4 (Tirana 1951), p. 64-131; M. Domi, *Rreth autorit dhe kohës së dorëshkrimit elbasanas me shqipërim copash të ungjillit*, in: *Konferenca e parë e Studimeve Albanologjike*, (Tirana 1965), p. 270-277.

this engraving<sup>4</sup>, which stems originally from the recently restored monastery of Saint Mary of Ardenica set among the cypresses on a hilltop near Lushnja, is the text ‘Virgin and Mother of God pray for us sinners’ written in three languages: Greek, Albanian and Aromunian, plus a slightly different Latin text *Regina Mater et Virgo auxiliare Servis suis*. The Albanian text in Greek script reads *Virgjin ë Mame eperndis uro prë nee faj torëte* and is ascribed to one Nektarios Terpos, a cleric of no doubt Aromunian origin from Voskopoja. Terpos, known in Albanian as *Nektar Tërpo*, was abbot of Ardenica and author of a Greek religious work entitled *Bibliarion kalumenon pistis*, printed in Venice in 1732 and 1750, which, albeit without the above-mentioned Albanian text, does contain a similar engraving.

Orthodox culture in eighteenth-century Albania is intimately linked to the rise of the city of Voskopoja<sup>5</sup>, now a village of five hundred inhabitants in the mountains twenty-five kilometers west of Korça. In the eighteenth century, Voskopoja, known in Greek as *Moschopolis* and in Aromunian as *Moscopole*, increased tremendously in size to become one of the largest cities in the Balkans and a flourishing centre of trade and urban culture. At its zenith, before the city was pillaged for the first time in 1769, it is said to have had a population of ca. 20,000, greater than Athens, Sofia or Belgrade at the time, with an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 buildings, including 24 churches, a hospital, an orphanage, a library, the only Greek printing press in the Balkans, which published at least nineteen religious works, and the so-called ‘New Academy.’ The New Academy or *Hellênikon Frontistêrion* was a centre of learning founded in 1744, similar to academies known to have existed in Bucharest, Iasi, Constantinople, Metsovon, Janina (Iôannina), Mt. Athos and Patmos. Many Greek scholars of note came to teach at Voskopoja among the Aromunians, who made up the majority of the population, the Albanians and the Greeks. The New Academy was not an exclusively theological institution. It enjoyed a good reputation for its teaching in ancient Greek, philosophy, mathematics and physics, and produced many a writer and scholar of repute. Between 1769 and 1789 Voskopoja was pillaged several times and came to lose its vitality and significance as a commercial centre on the trading route between Constantinople and Venice. It was finally destroyed in 1916 in fighting during the First World War and, with the exception of four or five beautiful Orthodox churches, the historical buildings which did survive were razed during partisan warfare in 1943.

---

<sup>4</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850*, p. 107; A. Hetzer, Der sogenannte Kodex von Berat, II: Untersuchung zu einer anonymen griechisch-albanischen Handschrift vom Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: *Südost-Forschungen*, 41 (1982), p. 140-141.

<sup>5</sup> On the history of Voskopoja, cf. K. Skenderês, *Historia tês archaias kai synchronu Moschopolêos* (I. Bartsos, Athens 1928); Ph. Michalopoulos, *Moschopolis: hai Athênai tês Turkokratias 1500-1769* (Periêgêtikês Leschês, Athens 1941); I. Martinianos, *Hê Moschopolis 1330-1930*, Epimelia Stylopônos P. Kyriakidou, Hetaireia Makedonikôn Spoudôn, Makedonikê Bibliothekê 21 (Thessalonika 1957); S. Adhami, Të dhëna rreth fizionomisë urbanistike dhe arkitektonike të qytetit mesjetar të Voskopojes, in: *Monumentet*, 3 (1972), p. 95-118; S. Gkatsopoulos, *Moschopolis* (Hidryma Voreioêpeirôtikôn Ereunôn, Iôannina 1979); M. Peyfuss, Die Akademie von Moschopolis und ihre Nachwirkungen im Geistesleben Südosteuropas, in: *Studien zur Geschichte der Kulturbeziehungen in Mittel- und Osteuropa 3, Wissenschaftspolitik in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Berlin 1976), p. 114-128; M. Peyfuss, Voskopoje und Wien, Österreichisch-albanische Beziehungen um 1800, *Albanien-Symposium 1984, Referate der Tagung “Albanien: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Volkskunde, Geschichte und Sozialgeschichte” am 22. und 23. November 1984 im Ethnographischen Museum Schloss Kittsee (Burgenland)* (Kittseer Schriften zur Volkskunde, Veröffentlichungen des Ethnographischen Museums Schloss Kittsee, Heft 3, ed. Klaus Beitzl, Kittsee 1986), p. 117-132; A. Hetzer, Das dreisprachige Wörterverzeichnis von Theodoros Anastasiu Kavalliotis aus Moschopolis, gedruckt 1770 in Venedig; neu bearbeitet, mit dem heutigen Zustande der albanischen Schriftsprache verglichen, sowie mit Einführung und Register, in: *Balkan-Archiv, Neue Folge*, Beiheft 1 (Helmut Buske, Hamburg 1981), p. 20-25.

One noted student of the New Academy in Voskopoja was Todhri (Theodor) Haxhifilipi<sup>6</sup> (ca. 1730-1805), also known as *Dhaskal Todhri* from Elbasan, who, after training in Voskopoja, taught at the Greek school in his native Elbasan, hence the name Dhaskal (teacher). The German-language scholar Johann Georg von Hahn (1811-1869), who visited Albania in the first half of the nineteenth century, refers to him as having translated not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament and other religious works. Most of his writings were unfortunately destroyed by fire during an epidemic in 1827 such that we can neither confirm nor disprove Hahn's assertion about the Bible translations. Among the surviving fragments ascribed to Haxhifilipi, preserved both in the Central State Archives in Tirana and in the Austrian National Library in Vienna (Ser. Nova 3351), are Albanian translations of an Orthodox Book of Hours and of *Mesha e Shën Jon Gojarit* (The liturgy of St John Chrysostom). Haxhifilipi wrote his works in a particular alphabet of fifty-three letters based most likely on a Greek cursive script (some see Glagolitic influence in it), which he appears to have invented himself. This so-called Todhri alphabet, never used for publication, was utilized by other authors in the Elbasan region at the time and sporadically, it seems, even up to the 1930s<sup>7</sup>. It is uncertain what Haxhifilipi actually wrote himself. Also preserved in this script for instance are two of Aesop's fables.

Constantine of Berat (ca. 1745 - ca. 1825), known in Albanian as *Kostandin Berati* or *Kostë Berati*, is thought to have been an Orthodox monk and writer from Berat. Some experts doubt his existence, as an author at least. He is said to have possessed a manuscript from 1764 to 1822, presumably the 154-page work now preserved in the National Library of Tirana (An. S/22F). This so-called Codex of Constantine of Berat, or Codex of Berat for short, is in actual fact a simple paper manuscript and must not be envisaged as an illuminated parchment 'codex' in the Western tradition. It seems to have been the work of at least two hands and was completed around 1798 at the earliest. It contains various and sundry texts in Greek and Albanian<sup>8</sup>: biblical and Orthodox liturgical texts in Albanian written in the Greek alphabet, all of them no doubt translated from Greek or strongly influenced by Greek models; a forty-four-line Albanian poem with the corresponding Greek text known as *Zonja Shën Mëri përpara kryqësë* (The Virgin Mary before the cross); two Greek-Albanian glossaries comprising a total of 1,710 entries; a short passage containing another original alphabet; various religious notes; and a chronicle of events between 1764 and 1789 written in Greek. Some of the religious texts in this manuscript later

<sup>6</sup> cf. Dh. Shuteriqi, Dhaskal Todhri, in: *Buletin për Shkencat Shoqërore*, 4 (1954), p. 35-55; Dh. Shuteriqi, Shkrimet e Dhaskal Todhrit, in: *Buletin për Shkencat Shoqërore*, 1 (1959), p. 165-198; Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850*, p. 156-159; A. Hetzer, Der sogenannte Kodex von Berat, II (see note above), p. 148-149; A. Hetzer, Armenier und Albaner: philologisch-historische Materialien zur Stellung zweier Minderheiten im Osmanischen Reich, in: *Balkan-Archiv, Neue Folge*, 12 (1987), p. 71-89.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850*, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> N. Ressuli, Abecea e dorëshkrimit Beratas dhe Abecea e Thodhër Haxhi Filipit, in: *Leka* 10, 1-3, Shkodra, (1938), p. 81-185; Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850*, p. 121-122; A. Hetzer, Der sogenannte Kodex von Berat, Teil I, in: *Balkan-Archiv, Neue Folge*, 6 (1981), p. 125-195; A. Hetzer, Griechisches in Südalbanien im Zeitalter der Aufklärung: Untersuchung zu der einem Priester namens Konstantin zugeschriebenen Berater Handschrift vom Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: *Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde*, 4 (1981-1982), p. 169-218; A. Hetzer, Nachlese zu: Der sogenannte Kodex von Berat I (BA 6, p. 125-195), in: *Balkan-Archiv, Neue Folge*, 7 (1982), p. 57-75; A. Hetzer, Der sogenannte Kodex von Berat, II (see note above), p. 131-179; A. Hetzer, Zur Textüberlieferung des albanischen Gedichts 'Maria vor dem Kreuz' aus der einem gewissen Konstantin zugeschriebenen anonymen Berater Handschrift, in: *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie*, 22 (1986), p. 11-36; A. Hetzer, 'Maria vor dem Kreuz' (Parastamenê tôi staurôi): die Textüberlieferung eines Gedichts als Beispiel für das Einwirken des byzantinischen Erbes in Südalbanien (Toskëria) über Venedig und seine griechischen Territorien (Kreta und Heptanêsos) am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: *Balkanica Posnaniensia, Acta et Studia IV*, Adam Mickiewicz University Press (Poznan 1989), p. 275-287.

circulated for teaching purposes among the Orthodox communities of central and southern Albania. From a linguistic point of view, the codex provides useful information about the dialect of late eighteenth-century Berat.

Of literary significance in the Codex of Berat is the above-mentioned ‘Virgin Mary before the Cross’, written in so-called Greek ‘political’ verse (*stichos politikos*) of fifteen syllables. It is an unaffected though sincere and not unmoving description of the horror felt by the Virgin Mary on seeing her son nailed to the cross. The work derives from a Greek original by Akakios Diakrusês of Cephalonia, published in 1730. The poem begins as follows (transcribed here in standard Albanian script):

<i>Zonj'e Shën Mëri ardhurë, e mbretëresh'e engjëjet, e kur e pa mbërthyerë, e qante ngashëryerë, Judha i mallëkuarë, e erdhë e të rrëmbyenë, të shpunë të të gjykonjënë, qiturë shahit jallanxhi, të ndyninë e të pshtyninë, me të math zë thërrisinë, Vallë ç'u pate bër' o bir, që mbë kryq të mbërthyenë, o biri im i dashuri, qysh i duron mundimetë,</i>	<i>e ndenj përpara kryqsë zonjë e gjithë dynjasë shpëtimn'e njerëzisë me mallëngjim thërriste: që kallëzoi çifutë si ujqër të pandieshm ndë avlli të Pillatit që të të turpërojnë e të rrah e të shanë atij Pillatit: vra-e! a ç'të lig u punove e vdekë që të dhanë e djali im i ëmbli rrahur'e përcmuarë.</i>
--	---

(Lady Saint Mary arrived, and stood before the cross,  
The queen of the angels, mistress of the whole world,  
And when she saw him nailed, the saviour of mankind,  
She wept in distress, with emotion she cried out:  
Damned Judas, who called upon the Jews,  
And they came and seized you, like heartless wolves,  
And took you to be judged, at the court of Pilate,  
They bore false witness, to put you to shame,  
They defiled you, spit upon you, beat and insulted you,  
In a loud voice they call out to Pilate: slay him!  
What have you done, oh son, what evil did you commit  
For them to nail you to the cross, and give you to death,  
Oh, my beloved son, my sweet boy,  
How can you withstand the suffering, beaten and reviled.)

A copy of portions of the Codex of Berat was made about 1822 by one Kostandin Cepi<sup>9</sup> (Greek *Tzepês*), an Orthodox writer from the mountain village of Vithkuq twenty-six kilometres southwest of Korça in southeastern Albania, who is said to have had some sort of function among the Orthodox community in the Korça region. We know of him in particular from a

<sup>9</sup> Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850*, p. 176; A. Hetzer, *Der sogenannte Kodex von Berat*, II, p. 146 (see note above).

Greek inscription at the entrance to the 17th-18th century church of St Michael in Vithkuq which reads: “I, Kostandin Cepi, the teacher (*dhaskal*), arrived from Berat and found this place in ruins, the houses abandoned and in ruins...” Cepi’s manuscript, a copy of which is preserved in Tirana, consists of 174 pages of religious texts, of which 22 are in Albanian.

The growing awareness that liturgical texts could be written in Albanian, with the help of Greek script, led as a matter of course to an awakening of interest among Orthodox scholars and clerics in southern Albania to the possibility of Bible translations. This interest was substantially furthered in the early nineteenth century by the activities of the British and Foreign Bible Society with its headquarters in London.

We have noted above the early Bible translations in the Elbasan Gospel Manuscript and the assertion made by German-language scholar Johann Georg von Hahn that Todhri Haxhifilipi had translated the Old and New Testaments into Albanian in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The first substantial Bible translation to have survived and been published in Greek script was undertaken by Vangjel Meksi (d. ca. 1823), known in Greek as *Evangelos Meksikos*, from Labova near Gjirokastra. With the help of a letter of recommendation from Ali Pasha Tepelena (1741-1822), he was sent to Italy in 1803 to study medicine. After finishing his studies in Naples, he returned to Janina (Iôannina) and served at the flourishing court of Ali Pasha. Meksi travelled in Europe and is known to have been to Istanbul and Salonika. He died a bachelor at the age of about sixty in Tripolis, Greece. Meksi finished a translation of the New Testament into his native Labian dialect for the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1821 but he never lived to see the publication of his work. Robert Pinkerton, the Society’s representative in Istanbul, reported in 1819 that Meksi had also written a grammar of the Albanian language in Albanian. In addition, he is said to have translated a religious tract by Abbé Claude Fleury (1640-1723), though neither of these works seems to have survived. It was Gregory of Gjirokastra (d. 1829), known in Albanian as *Grigor Gjirokastriti* and in Greek as *Grêgorios Argyrokastritês*, Bishop of Euboea and from 1827 Archbishop of Athens, who edited and published Meksi’s translation of the Gospel of St Matthew (Ionian Bible Society, Corfu 1824) in a bilingual Albanian/Greek version and, three years later, in a vastly improved orthography, the whole of the New Testament (Ionian Bible Society, Corfu 1827), again in a bilingual version.

Subsequent Bible translations were undertaken in the second half of the nineteenth century by Kostantin Kristoforidhi Nelko<sup>10</sup> (1826-1895), known in Greek as *Kônstantinos Christoforidês*. Kristoforidhi was the son of a silversmith from Elbasan where he went to school. From 1847 to 1850, he attended the Zosimaia secondary school in Janina and collaborated there with the Austrian vice-consul Johann Georg von Hahn on the latter’s monumental *Albanesische Studien*, Vienna & Jena 1854 (Albanian studies). The following years took him to Athens, Durrës, perhaps to London, Izmir, Istanbul, Malta and Tunis, where he married and taught at a Greek school. It was during the 1860s that he began working for the British and Foreign Bible Society, for whom he translated the New Testament into a Gheg version (1872 in the Latin

---

<sup>10</sup> S.Shuteriqi, *Jetëshkrimi i Konstantin Kristoforidhit* (Monastir 1911); Dh. Shuteriqi, Konstantin Nelko-Kristoforidhi (1830-1895): monografi mbi jetën dhe botimet e tij, in: *Buletin i Institutit të Shkencave*, 4, 1-2 (Tirana 1950), p. 3-37 and 4, 3, p. 3-22; R. Qosja, *Historia e letërsisë shqipe: romantizmi* (Rilindja, Prishtina 1984), vol. 2, p. 375-420.

alphabet) and a Tosk version (1879 in the Greek alphabet) and several books of the Old Testament<sup>11</sup>. These translations helped serve as a basis for the creation of a modern literary language, in two dialect variants. He also wrote a grammar of the Albanian language in Greek *Grammatikê tês albanikês glôssês*, Istanbul 1882, and compiled an Albanian-Greek dictionary *Lexikon tês albanikês glôssês*, Athens 1904. The latter, regarded as one of the best Albanian dictionaries until recent times, was transliterated and republished by Aleksandër Xhuvani (Tirana 1961). Kristoforidhi was also the author of children's works, such as *Historia e shenjtësë shkroyë për dielmt*, Istanbul 1870 (History of Holy Script for children) and of the tale *Gjahu i malësorëvet*, Istanbul 1884 (The hunt of the mountaineers), viewed as one of the earliest works of modern Albanian literary prose.

Kristoforidhi's versions of biblical texts conclude the list of translations of religious literature into Albanian made with the help of Greek script. What remains in this tradition of Albanian writing are a number of dictionaries of significance and some minor works on grammar.

### 3 Dictionaries and grammars

Theodor Kavaloti<sup>12</sup> (ca. 1718-1789), known in Greek as *Theodôros Anastasios Kaballiôtês*, was an Aromunian scholar from Voskopoja who made an important contribution to Albanian writing in the field of lexicography. Kavaloti studied mathematics, theology and philosophy in Janina (Iôannina) between 1732 and 1734, familiarizing himself with the works of Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz. He returned to his native Voskopoja, which was itself beginning to flourish in the mid-eighteenth century, and became director of the New Academy in 1746. He is the author of several works of philosophy written in Greek, of an elementary grammar of Greek and of a scholarly work entitled *Prôtopeiria*, Venice 1770 (Primer), which contains a three-language lexicon in Greek, Aromanian and Albanian of about 1,170 words. A copy of the work is in the possession of the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest. This lexicon was republished by the German scholar Johann Thunmann (1746-1778) from Halle with a Latin translation in 1774<sup>13</sup> and is of linguistic interest for students of both Albanian and Aromanian. Thunmann tells us:

“The book in which this lexicon appears was printed in Venice in 1770 by Antonio Bortoli. Its author is the Protopapas or most distinguished preacher in Moschopolis in Macedonia, Mr Theodor Kavalliotis. He is a learned man, the most learned among his people, who has benefitted from his studies of languages, philosophy and mathematics.

<sup>11</sup> cf. T. H. Darlow & H. F. Moule (ed.), *Historical catalogue of printed editions of Holy Scripture in the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London 1911, repr. New York 1963), vol. 2, p. 45-48.

<sup>12</sup> I. L. Qafëzë, *Revista e shtypit, Rrëfenja e njej libri, Protopiria e Kavalljotit Voskopojarit, Venetik 1770*, in: *Leka*, 10, 8-9 (Shkodra 1938), p. 383-394; M. Peyfuss, *Die Akademie von Moschopolis* (see note above), p. 117-118; A. Hetzer, *Das dreisprachige Wörterverzeichnis* (see note above); A. Hetzer, *Neues zu Kavalliotis' 'Protopeiria'* Beobachtungen am Bukarester Original und einigen Nachdrucken des dreisprachigen Wörterverzeichnisses aus Moschopolis, in: *Balkan-Archiv, Neue Folge*, 8 (1983), p. 99-158.

<sup>13</sup> J. Thunmann, *Untersuchung über die Geschichte der östlichen europäischen Völker*, 1. Theil (Leipzig 1774); J. Thunmann, *Über die Geschichte und Sprache der Albaner und der Wlachen. Nachdruck der Ausgabe von 1774 herausgegeben und mit einer Einleitung versehen von Harald Haarmann*. Romanistik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Band 4 (Helmut Buske, Hamburg 1976) [= reprint of p. 169-336 of 1774 edition].

Since he understands and speaks Greek, Aromunian and Albanian as his mother tongue, his compatriot Mr George Trikupa, also called Kosmiski, a patriotic merchant and friend of scholarship, persuaded him to write this Protopeiria for the benefit of the Greeks and had it printed in Venice at his own expense.”<sup>14</sup>

Another work in this vein is the *Eisagôgikê didaskalia*, Venice? 1802 (Introductory study), a four-language lexicon in Greek, Aromunian, Bulgarian and Albanian. It comprises about 1,000 entries, plus 235 freely translated everyday phrases which are not without interest for the study of Albanian historical morphology and syntax. The author of this second multilingual lexicon in Greek script, compiled in 1793-1794, was Daniel of Voskopoja<sup>15</sup> (1754-1825), also known as *Master Daniel*, in Albanian as *Dhanil Haxhiu*, and in Greek as *Daniël Moschopolitês* or *Daniël Adam Chatzis*, a no doubt Aromunian scholar from Voskopoja and student of Kavalioti, who hoped with this work to persuade the Albanians, Aromunians and Bulgarians to abandon their ‘barbaric’ tongues and learn Greek, the ‘mother of knowledge’.

Marko Boçari<sup>16</sup> (1790-1823), known in Greek as *Markos Botzarês*, a Suliot hero from the Greek wars (after whom a Paris metro station is named), was also the author of a Greek-Albanian lexicon which he compiled in Corfu in 1809 at the urging of François Pouqueville (1770-1838), author himself and the French consul in Janina (Iôannina). The lexicon containing 1,484 Albanian lexemes, while not of any particular literary significance, is important for our knowledge of the now extinct Suliot dialect of Albanian. It is preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Supplément grec 251).

Another lexicon, this time a 2,000-word Greek-English-Albanian dictionary, was the result of the work of Jani Evstrat Vithkuqari<sup>17</sup> (d. 1822), also known as *Eustratios of Vithkuq*. He studied at the New Academy in Voskopoja and in Janina. A scholar well versed in both Greek and Albanian, he is known to have taught in Arta, Voskopoja, Përmet and Janina, and was a school director in Gjirokastra. Vithkuqari is the co-author of the material on the Albanian language which appeared in the work *Researches in Greece* (London 1814) published by British scholar William Martin Leake (1777-1860). In a preface to his section on Albanian grammar, Leake writes: “The greater part of the information upon which the following remarks are founded, was derived from Evstratio of Viskuki, who holds the rank of Hieroceryx in the Greek church, and had been many years school-master in Moskhopoli.”

Of early grammatical works in Greek script, we have reference to a grammar of the Albanian language by one Germanos of Crete<sup>18</sup> or *Germanos Hieromonachos* (d. 1760), said to have been preserved at the time at the monastery of the Holy Trinity at Olympus; to an Albanian translation by Nikolla Ikonon Postenani<sup>19</sup> (ca. 1748-1838) of an excerpt from the grammar of

---

<sup>14</sup> op. cit. p. 177-178.

<sup>15</sup> cf. W. Leake, *Researches in Greece* (London 1814); J. Kristophson, Das Lexikon Tetraglosson des Daniil Moschopolitis, in: *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie*, 10 (1974), p. 7-128.

<sup>16</sup> cf. T. Jochalas, *To hellêno-albanikon lexikon tu Marku Mpotzarê. Filologikê ekdosis ek tu autografu hypo Titu P. Giochala* (Pragmateiai tês Akadêmias Athênôn, 46 (Athens 1980).

<sup>17</sup> cf. W. Leake, *Researches in Greece*; T. Jochalas, *Stoicheia hellêno-albanikês grammatikês kai hellêno-albanikoi dialogoi: anekdoto ergo tu Iôannê Bêlara. Filologikê ekdosê apo ton autografo kôdika tês Ethnikês Bibliothêkês tôn Parisiôn* (Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessalonika 1985).

<sup>18</sup> cf. Dh. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet shqipe në vitet 1332-1850*, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> cf. Dh. Shuteriqi 1976, p. 216-217.



the Byzantine humanist Manuel Chrysolaras (ca. 1350-1414); and to a grammar of Greek written in Albanian by the former's brother Stefan Postenani<sup>20</sup>.

What we do possess in this Greco-Albanian tradition of scholarship are Greek-Albanian grammatical notes by Jan Vellara<sup>21</sup> (1771-1823), also known in Greek as *Ioannis Vilaras* (*Iôannês Bêlaras*). The son of a doctor, Vellara studied medicine in Padua in 1789 and later lived in Venice. In 1801, he became the physician of Veli, son of Ali Pasha Tepelena. He is remembered primarily as a modern Greek poet and does not seem to have been a native Albanian speaker at all. His eighty-six pages of bilingual grammatical notes, dated 1801, were designed no doubt to teach other Greek-speakers Albanian. The Albanian in question is a Tosk dialect written in an original alphabet of thirty letters based on Latin and to a lesser extent on Greek. The manuscript of the work was donated to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Supplément grec 251, f. 138-187) in 1819 by François Pouqueville. Pouqueville was aware of its value, noting: "Je possède un manuscrit, une grammaire grecque vulgaire et schyve qui pourrait être utile aux philologues," but chose not to publish it in his travel narratives. Appendixed to the grammatical notes is also a letter dated 30 October 1801, written in Vellara's handwriting in Albanian from the village of Vokopola, south of Berat, where the physician had been obliged to follow Veli during the latter's military campaign against Ibrahim of Berat. In it, Vellara complains of his difficult living conditions: "*Kam tri muai qe fle mbë dhë; as shtratë, as paploma, as sëndonë, qe një gur më dënonë si jastik*" (For three months I have been sleeping on the ground; neither a bed nor a quilt nor a sheet, only a rock serves me as a pillow.)

#### 4 Conclusion

The predominance of Greek as the language of Christian education and culture in southern Albania and the often hostile attitude of the Orthodox church to the spread of writing in Albanian made it impossible for an Albanian literature in Greek script to evolve. The Orthodox church, as the main vehicle of culture in the southern Balkans, while intent on spreading Christian education and values, was never convinced of the utility of writing in the vernacular as a means of converting the masses, as the Catholic church in northern Albania had been, to a certain extent, during the Counter-Reformation. Nor, with the exception of the ephemeral printing press in Voskopoja, did the southern Albanians ever have at their disposal publishing facilities like those available to the clerics and scholars of Catholic Albania in Venice and Dalmatia. As such, the Orthodox tradition in Albanian writing, a strong cultural heritage of scholarship and erudition, though one limited primarily to translations of religious texts and to the compilation of dictionaries, was to remain a flower which never really blossomed.

[published in: *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Birmingham, 15 (1991), p. 20-34.]

---

<sup>20</sup> cf. Dh. Shuteriqi 1976, p. 179.

<sup>21</sup> cf. T. Jochalás, *Stoicheia hellêno-albanikês grammatikês kai hellêno-albanikoi dialogoi. Anekdotò ergo tu Iôannê Bêlara, Filologikê êkdosê apo ton autografo kôdika tês Ethnikês Bibliothêkês tôn Parisiôn* (Thessalonika 1985).