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**THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE HUNYADI-
SKANDERBEG ALLIANCE IN THE ALBANIAN
HISTORIOGRAPHY**

In 2003, a Swiss reporter produced a documentary in the Albanian-speaking world on the role Skanderbeg played in people's thinking. The interviews made in Albania and Kosovo were particularly interesting. Regardless of the fact whether the interviewees were Sunni, Bektashi, orthodox Christian or Catholic; soldiers or civilians, ministers or football players, the questions were answered in a similar fashion. In a large number of cases, even the vocabulary of those questioned was identical: Skanderbeg was tall, handsome, a brilliant strategist, a well-known diplomat, the ruler of the independent Albania in the Middle Ages, the defender of Europe against the Ottomans, a good father and a man with honour, an icon of all generations. Hopefully, it is not a grave mistake on my part to suppose that 15 years after this documentary was made, the place of Skanderbeg in the mental map of the people has not significantly changed in Albania and Kosovo.

Skanderbeg plays, however, a significant role not just in the contemporary Albanian thinking. The corpus of historical publications written on him is even more respectable. What is more, Skanderbeg does not only have a historical past, he was a beloved figure of the European literature as well. The book of Barletius on

Skanderbeg's life,¹ as a contemporary bestseller published in the 16th century was translated into many European languages and inspired a large number of literary and artistic works in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and England. These literary works (nativity plays, dramas, novels, heroic poems, epics or philosophical writings) made his name well-known in the old continent.

Why did Skanderbeg become the joint hero of Christianity in the 15th century? Why not János Hunyadi, who was a well-known strategist of this historical period as well? My lecture aims not to seek answers to these questions. My purpose is to respond to another question, namely when the thesis of the close friendship and alliance between Skanderbeg and János Hunyadi entered the Albanian historiography.

The historical view on Skanderbeg among the Albanians regained new importance in the early 19th century. The national movements of Europe made their impact on the arbëreshë minority in South-Italy, who, instead of becoming part of the unifying Italian nation, were initiators of the Albanian national awakening. Jeronim de Rada wrote his well-known epic on the 'Unfortunate Skanderbeg' ('Scanderbeccu i pafaan') in the 1830's which was published ten times up to 1844.² De Rada describes Scanderbeg in this epic as a brave patriot, a just, faithful and hospitable man, king and saviour of Albania, and as a strategist who made peace in Italy.

However, it was the foundation of the League of Prizren,³ not the epic of de Rada, that made a more significant impact on the altering cult of Skanderbeg. During the great oriental crises in 1878 the Albanians were forced to face with the fact that the Ottoman Empire was not anymore able to defend its territory against the

¹ Barletius, Marinus. *De vita, moribus ac rebus praecipue adversus Turcas, gestis Georgii Castroti*. Strasburg, 1537.

² De Rada, Girolamo. *Scanderbeccu i pafaan*. Napoli, 1844.

³ Prifti, Kristaq. 'Lidhja e Prizrenit dhe çështja e bashkimit kombëtar të shqiptarëve (1878–1881)' *Studime Historike* 63. Nr. 1-2 (1998): 135-147; Prifti, Kristaq red. shk. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar II. Rilindja kombëtare*. Tiranë: Toena, 2002. 134-228; Bartl, Peter. 'Die Liga von Prizren im Lichte vatikanischer Akten.' *Südostforschungen* 44 (1988): 145-186.

aspirations of the neighbouring Christian countries. To save the integrity of their ethnical regions, the Albanian representatives founded the League of Prizren in 1878 which set up its own military forces. Although the League was defeated in 1881, its foundation gave impetus to the national awakening, the *Rilindja*.⁴ The intellectuals decided to follow the European patterns and organize a modern nation from the Albanians. To form this new social framework it was inevitable to rethink the concept of the national awareness.⁵

Because of the four denominations, the two great dialects and the special geographical situation, the communication conditions were extremely poor among the society, and therefore the appearance of the written national history seemed to be an important joint value from a national perspective. This was the very moment when the members of the *Rilindja* began to communicate on the national past and this was the moment when Skanderbeg found his rightful place in the national pantheon. It was first of all the works of Naim Frashëri and Fan Noli that eternalized the history of Skanderbeg.⁶ They both highlighted the significance of the state-building virtues of the national hero, and his fights against the Ottoman Empire.

But when exactly did the figure of János Hunyadi appear in the cult of Skanderbeg? Since it is known, based on the research of Noel Malcolm and Peter Bartl, that the majority of theses of the Albanian historiography did exist at the turn of the century, the answer should be found in such works that were published prior to 1914.⁷

⁴ Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. *Az albán nemzettévalás kezdetei(1878-1913). A Rilindja és az államalapítás korszaka*. Budapest, ELTE BTK TDI, 2010. 117-244.

⁵ Prifti, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar II*, 204-215.

⁶ Frashëri, Naim. *Istori' e Skender-beut*. Bukarest: Drita, 1898; Noli, Fan Stilian. *Historia e Skenderbeut (Gjerg Kastriotit) - mbretit te shqiperise 1412-1468*. Boston: Dielli, 1921.

⁷ Kostandin Çekrezi, Kristo Dako, Faik Konica in: Malcolm, Noel. 'Myths of Albanian National Identity. Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century.' In *Albanian Identities: Myths and History* eds. Schwandner-Sievers, Stefanie / Fischer, Bernd. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. 70-87; Bartl Peter. 'Zum

In 2007, a young Albanian historian, Raim Beluli, following the research of Armin Hetzers and Nathalie Clayers,⁸ analysed a remarkable corpus of sources in the Austrian National Archive.⁹ After scrutinizing a number of archival documents Beluli wrote his book in 2008.¹⁰ In his monograph the author reconstructed the history of an Albanian reading published in 1898, which was addressed exactly to the members of the national awakening and which was written in a popular and readable style.¹¹ The reading entitled 'The history of Albania from a gheg who loves his country' was printed anonymously under the name of a fictitious printing house. The author of this mysterious reading was no-one else, but an outstanding member of the Austro-Hungarian albanology, the Hungarian Lajos Thallóczy.¹²

Geschichtsmythos der Albaner.' In *Mythen, Symbole und Rituale – Die Geschichtsmachtigkeit der Zeichen in Südosteuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* eds. Dahlmann, Dittmar / Potthof, Wilfried. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 2000. 119-139.

⁸ Clayer, Nathalie. *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais: la naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe*. Paris: Karthala, 2007. 416-419, 528-531, 590-591; Hetzer, Armin. 'Ludvig von Thalloczy dhe perpjekja e pare shkencore per nje Histori te Shqiperise.' *Hylli i Drites* 28, Nr. 4 (2008): 58-76.

⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA, XIV. Albanien, Kt. 20-22.

¹⁰ Beluli, Raim ed. *Ludwig von Thalloczy, Te ndodhurat e Shqypnis prej nji Geqe don vendin e vet*. Perktheu

nga gjermanishtja: Stefan Zurani. Transkriptoi, dokumentoi dhe komentoi Raim Beluli. Shkodra: Botime françeskane, 2008.

¹¹ *Të ndodhurat e Shqypnis prej nji Geqe që don vendin e vet*. Skenderie, 1898. (In reality: Vienna: Adolf Holzhausen, 1998)

¹² Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. 'Lajos von Thallóczy und die Historiographie Albaniens.' *Südost-Forschungen* 68 (2009): 205-246; Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. 'Ludwig von Thallóczy und die Albanologie: Skizzen eines Experiments zur Nationsbildung.' In *Lajos Thallóczy der Historiker und Politiker: Die Entdeckung der Vergangenheit von Bosnien und Herzegowina und die moderne Geschichtswissenschaft* ed. Gottmann, Andreas et al. Budapest-Sarajevo: ANUBiH – HAS, 2008. 141-164

The year of the edition, 1898, is a symbolic date. Austria-Hungary started its first political action in 1896 to support the Albanian national movement. The idea of writing a historical reading as part of this action stemmed from Theodor Ippen, the Austro-Hungarian general consul of Shkodra.¹³

Ippen, who was an eminent representative of the albanology as well, addressed his proposition directly to Agenor Gołuchowski, the joint minister of foreign affairs in 1897. According to Ippen, the reading should have been published for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it could demonstrate that the Albanian history is glorious and not identical with that of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, it could make a significant contribution to the creation of a unified Albanian alphabet. Since the historian Lajos Thallóczy had been collecting relevant historical data on the Albanians, argued Ippen in his letter to Gołuchowski, the archival sources of a reading were available.¹⁴

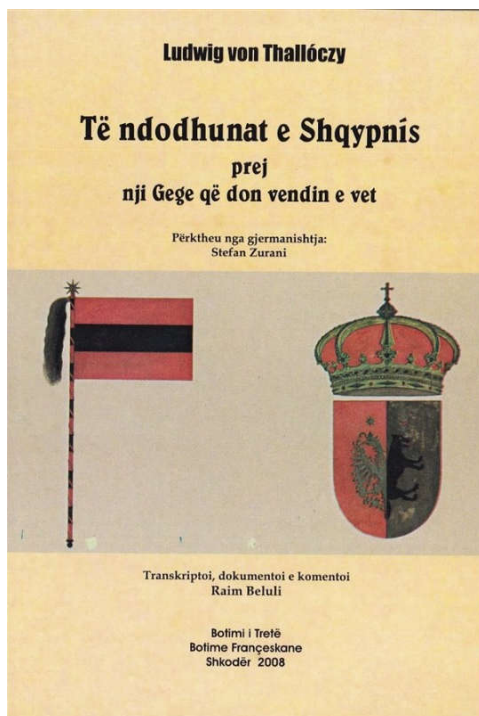
The reading of Thallóczy was re-published by Raim Beluli

The joint minister of foreign affairs agreed to the plan with two restrictions: the reading could not have anti-Ottoman attitudes, and the participation of the Monarchy in this project had to be anonymous. Thallóczy was glad to assume the task of writing the reading and not later than September of 1898 he completed his German-language manuscript. The reading of Thallóczy was translated into Albanian by Zef Curani.¹⁵ The first 600 examples of the book were printed in December of the same year. The publishing costs were covered, interestingly, not by the Ballhausplatz, but by the

¹³ Wernicke, Anneliese. *Theodor Anton Ippen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967.

¹⁴ ÖStA HHStA PA XIV. Albanien, Kt. 20, Letter from Ippen to Gołuchowski, Shkodra, 18. mai 1897, No. 14. Geheim, Politischer Gegenstand: Abfassung einer albanesischen Geschichte (published in Beluli, *Të ndodhurat*, 55-57).

¹⁵ Misja, Vladimir. *Stefë Curani: Jeta dhe vepra (1865-1941)*. Shkodër: Shtjefni, 2006.



joint ministry of finance led by the Hungarian Benjamin Kállay.¹⁶ The ‘History of Albania’ had a positive reception in the Albanian territories; the National Archive of Austria resides detailed statistics on the Albanian readership.¹⁷ The exact impact on the national movement calls, however, for a refined research. It is only known, that Thallóczy’s book was a popular reading: its style enriched the Albanian language and national ideologies with new terms and expressions,¹⁸ and it was the first publication which aimed to create scientific framework

for the Albanian historical theses and which was based on unpublished archival sources of Austria-Hungary and Italy.

¹⁶ Ress, Imre. ‘Versuch einer Nationenbildung um die Jahrhundertwende. Benjámin Kállays Konzeption der bosnischen Nation.’ In *Nation und Nationenbildung in Österreich-Ungarn 1848–1938. Prinzipien und Methoden* ed. Stagl, Justin et al. Wien: LIT Verlag, 2006. 59–72.

¹⁷ ÖStA HHStA PA, XIV. Albanien, Kt. 20, 1. Note des Gesamt. Finanzmin., 15. September 1897, mit Hofrat Thallóczys „Geschichte Albaniens, 2

¹⁸ Csaplár-Degovics, ‘Lajos von Thallóczy und die Historiographie Albaniens,’ 240.



Lajos Thallóczy (1857-1916)
historian, official of the joint
ministry of finance



Theodor Ippen (1861-1935)
Austro-Hungarian General
consul in Shkodra

In his reading Thallóczy wanted to stress three important statements: 1. the Albanians were always an independent national entity that insisted on its autonomy; 2. the Albanians have a glorious history; 3. the Albanians have a political future. On the whole, Thallóczy wrote a 'supra-denominational' book in order to facilitate the way of his Catholic, orthodox Christian, Sunni and Bektashi readers to identify themselves with the common Albanian past. His book contained many illustrations which could serve as basis for creating new national symbols of all Albanians (emblems, flags; sigils and helmet of Skanderbegs). 'The history of Albania from a gheg who loves his country' deserves attention from a number of reasons. The book was published with the intention of promoting the national idea and facilitating the birth of the unified Albanian historical thinking. To establish 'common knowledge' it was

inevitable to harmonise ‘the parallel histories’ of Christian and Muslim Albanians. If you like, the historical perspectives and traditions of Christians needed to be familiarized with the Muslims, and viceversa.¹⁹

Thallóczy solved this problem without presenting concepts of enemy for the Albanians. It means that the potential basis for Thallóczy on which the new national solidarity should have been built up was the corpus of positive values that bound the Albanians together, rather than the creation of historical enemies from the neighbouring nations. Such values were: the common origin, language, national virtues and the thousand-year-old common history.²⁰ Thallóczy’s work borrowed his vocabulary and style partly from the contemporary heroic songs (*këngë kreshnikës*), but the book was affected by the thinking, works and results of the *Rilindja* as well. Thallóczy’s reflections on the Albanian language strongly suggest that he was aware of the literary activities of the *arbëreshë* authors and of the Frashëri-families. The ‘supra-denominational’ perspective of the book is a clear illustration that the work of Pashko

¹⁹ „Na jena tue diftue si e ka shkue jeten i gjithë fisi i jone, pa da se c’fare besimi ka pase o ka njeni e tjetri. Ne dac i Krishten, ne dac Muhametan, na jena te gjithë nji gjakut, e prandej vllazen; e s’asht pune qe besimi mund te daje gjakun, vec gjithsecili e ka per shpirt te vet, e ne ket bote do te rrojme bashkarisht. Edhe Zoti i urdhnnon gjithëkuj me dasht t’afermin e vet. Pse mos te duhena pra na Shqyparet, Muhametane e te Krishtene, pse mos te mblidhena te gjithë bashke, me u mundue me i zgjate doren te dashtunit dheut t’one, qe na ka rrite me shujte te vet? Pse mos me ja fole na te drejten vllaznive t’one muhametana, tue thane qe keta kane diftue gjithmone burrnine e Shqypitarit ne sherbim ne Turkut? A thue do te na vije marre me kallzue se gjku i jone ka mbrrijte nder kambe e madhnite nalta ne Stamboll? Po te shikjojme holle, e shofim atehere qe Muhametanve t’one i dukena, sado kudo, ma te aferm na, se c’do tjetër komb i mbretnise se Turkut. Na e dijme te gjithë se jena te tane shka flasim Shqyp, bijte e nji nanës qe s’harrohet, te Arbnise se shkrete, qe ka mbete pa djelm te thuesh, pse te huejt na kane da per me rregullue punen e vet, tue na shti fjalën e tue rrite menine nder ne brez mbas brezit.“ Thallóczy, *Te ndodhunat e Shqypnis*, 142; Csaplár-Degovics, ‘Lajos von Thallóczy und die Historiographie Albaniens,’ 229, 232, 235.

²⁰ Thallóczy, *Te ndodhunat e Shqypnis*, 132-150; Csaplár-Degovics, ‘Lajos von Thallóczy und die Historiographie Albaniens,’ 241-242.

Vasa ('The Truth on Albania and the Albanians,' 1878)²¹ made an impact on Thallóczy as well. (It is a question, whether the reading of Thallóczy had its influence on the theoretical work of Sami Frashëri? *Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është e ç'do të bëhet*, 1899.)²² What were the real novelties of Thallóczy's reading? One of the novelties was the author's attitude towards the name changes of the ethnic territories over the centuries.



Të ndodhurat e Shqipërisë prej një Gege që don vendin e vet. Skenderie, 1898. (Wien: Adolf Holzhausen, 1898)

²¹ Vasa, Pashko (Wassa Effendi). *Albanien und die Albanesen. Zur griechische Frage. Eine historisch-kritische Studie*. Berlin, 1879.

²² Frashëri, Sami. *Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është e ç'do të bëhetë*. Bukarest: Drita, 1899; Kaleshi, Hasan. 'Sami Frashëri në letërsinë dhe filologjinë turke.' *Gjurmime Albanologjike* (Prishtinë) 2. Nr. 2 (1968): 72-104.

To Thallóczy's way of thinking the Albanians were always present in their territories. Irrespective of whether their territories were called Illiria, Arbanas, Arbëria, Tosknia or Geghnia (and they as Illyrians, Arbër or Shqiptar) behind these names was always to be found 'our field', 'our national territory', i.e. 'Albania' (*trualli jonë; territori kombëtar; Shqypnie*).²³

Another novelty was, as mentioned above, that Thallóczy was able to fit the Muslim and Christian historical perspective together. Among other things he harmonized the Christian and Muslim chronological orders in his book. His chronology follows basically the Christian perspective, but from the 7th century on, Thallóczy listed the Muslim chronology as well.

What is more, both the Muslim and Christian Albanians had their own world of heroes; it was Thallóczy's intention to break down the borders between these worlds. In order to strengthen the new national awareness, Thallóczy aimed to turn the hitherto Christian and Muslim heroes into common heroes. As Thallóczy formulated: 'we have to get to know who were our Christian and Muslim heroes of our heroic songs' (*burra idhujsh të Krishtenë a Muhamedana*).²⁴

The third novelty to be highlighted here was that the author paid a specific attention to the description of the points of contact between the Albanian and Hungarian national histories.²⁵ Thallóczy drew attention to the fact that the territories populated by Illyrians included the Carpathian Basin in ancient times as well. The second contact point to be investigated was when the Hungarian king, Louis I (the Great) from the House of Anjou occupied the Kingdom of Naples with two great campaigns (1348, 1350). The third contact point was of particular importance: the anti-Ottoman fights of János Hunyadi and his son, Matthias Corvinus were harmonized with those of Skanderbeg in a European context. Thallóczy drew more parallel between the activities of these national heroes (like their role played

²³ Thallóczy, *Te ndodhurat e Shqypnis*, 123-142.

²⁴ Thallóczy, *Te ndodhurat e Shqypnis*, 87.

²⁵ Thallóczy, *Te ndodhurat e Shqypnis*, 90, 136, 157, 160, 165.

during the siege of Kruja in 1454, and of Nándorfehérvár / Belgrade in 1456). All in all, it was the reading of Lajos Thallóczy, in which János Hunyadi and Skanderbeg became brothers-in-arms first time in the Albanian-speaking historiography. It must be stressed again: this book was the very first Albanian-speaking historical reading which was based on unpublished archival sources collected by Lajos Thallóczy, Konstantin Jireček and Milan Šufflay.²⁶ (Concerning the topics described above it is worth mentioning that Zef Curani translated the national name of Hungarians as ‘magjar’ into Albanian, and not as ‘hungarez’.²⁷)

It must be highlighted that the book of Thallóczy was far from being the unique source of the story of close alliance and friendship between Hunyadi and Skanderbeg. The story was broadly spread via the institutional activities of the Austro-Hungarian cultural protectorate over the Catholic Albanians and the so-called ‘Albanian actions’ of the Ballhausplatz.²⁸ As part of the cultural protectorate rights, Austria-Hungary supported the reconstruction and building of Catholic parishes and schools in Albanian territories in the late Ottoman period. In general, the costs were covered by Austria, and the technicians (master masons, fresco painters) were delegated from Hungary. It was the time of the turn of century that the Catholic Albanian churches were first decorated with ‘twin frescos’ of Skanderbeg and Hunyadi. One of these ‘twin frescos’ is today to be found in the cathedral of Prizren.

In addition to the above, text books used by both Catholics and Muslims in the schools of the cultural protectorate also promoted the idea of the Hunyadi-Skanderbeg alliance. As part of the ‘Albanian actions’ of the Ballhausplatz, the Albanian-language journals financed by Austria-Hungary (like the *Albanie* of Faik

²⁶ Thallóczy, Ludovicus / Jireček, Constantinus / Šufflay, Nicolaus eds. *Acta et diplomata res*

Albaniae mediae aetatis illustrantia. Vol.1-2. Vindobonae, 1913-1918.

²⁷ Thallóczy, *Te ndodhurat e Shqypnis*, 90, 136, 157, 160, 165.

²⁸ Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. ‘Österreichisch-ungarische Interessendurchsetzung im Kaza von Tirana.’ *Südost-Forschungen* (71) 2012: 130-135.

Konica in Brussels)²⁹ propagated the story of these heroes of the 15th century.

On the whole, as early as the independent national state was founded in 1912-1913, the idea of the Hunyadi-Skanderbeg alliance was part of the Albanian historical thinking. To illustrate this statement, let me refer to two facts. Fan Stilian Noli, as he delivered his opening speech at the conference of Triest organised by astrophile Albanian patriots in March of 1913 to find a duke for Albania,³⁰ based his train of thoughts on the idea of the Hunyadi-Skanderbeg alliance:

‘These were hard times of those of Skanderbeg, but he had an ally, the Hungarian Hunyadi. We have now [...] a more powerful ally, emperor Francis Joseph I.’³¹

On the other hand, another brilliant representative of the Austro-Hungarian albanology, the Hungarian Franz Baron Nopcsa propagated the story of Skanderbeg and Hunyadi as well.³² In doing so, he aimed to create his own personal cult among his Albanian friends. The Nopcsas were namely related to the historical Hunyadies. Both families had the right to hold the black raven with a golden ring in its beak in their coat of arms from the 15th century on.³³

²⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA, 19. Nachlasse, Nachlass Kral, Kt. 1, Memoire über Albanien 1901–1905, 14–16.

³⁰ *Resoconto e note sul Congresso Albanese di Trieste*. 1-4 Marzo 1913. Milan, 1913.

³¹ „Schwer waren die Zeiten Skanderbegs gewesen, aber er hatte einen Verbündeten gehabt, den Ungar Hunyady. Wir [...] haben einen noch mächtigeren Verbündeten, den Kaiser Franz Josef I.” Speech of Fan Noli. Kriegsarchiv in Vienna, Nachlaß Conrad von Hötzendorf, Akt. 82., Report of Manussi IV, Trieste, 2.03.1913, without no., Albanerkongress in Triest (day 2).

³² Nopcsa, Ferenc (1877-1933).

³³ Nagy, Iván. *Magyarország családai címerekkel*. 8. kötet. Pest: Ráth Mór, 1861. 162-163.



**Coats of arms (emblems) of
the Nopcsa Family (15th
century)**



**Coats of arms (emblems) of
János Hunyadi (1453)**

