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Polish Literature in Albanian

ABSTRACT

Albania is a small country in Europe, which was under Turkish occupation for nearly five centuries. It did not regain its independence until 28 November 1912. During the occupation there was almost no foreign literature translated into Albanian, as more than 85% of the population were illiterate and in general there were no scientific institutions or schools. The first primary school was opened in 1887. Only in the 1920s, with the emergence of intelligentsia, world literature started to be translated into Albanian, which included Polish literature. However, the translations were not done from the Polish language but from Italian translations of it. The first Polish literary work translated into Albanian from Italian was the Nobel prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel, *Quo Vadis?* (in 1933). The book was translated for the second time in 1999. The translation of Polish literature into Albanian gained momentum after World War II, and especially after 2000. So far, nearly 55 books by 34 Polish authors have been translated into Albanian, including Adam Mickiewicz (among them his great work, *Pan Tadeusz*), Henryk Sienkiewicz, Bolesław Prus, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Olga Tokarczuk, Ryszard Kapuściński, Tadeusz Różewicz, Witold Gombrowicz, Fr. Marcin Czerwiński, and others. At the same time, 8 Albanian authors wrote books on Polish topics in Albanian. Apart from the Albanian translators from Albania, Polish literature has also been translated into Albanian by Albanians from Kosovo. In comparison with other European countries, Albania is a leader as far as the number of Polish books translated is concerned. Polish literature in Albanian is generally popular among Albanian readers. Some of the books are published for the second, or even after the third time.

KEY WORDS: Polish Literature, Albania, Albanian-Polish Friendship Society, Ryszard Kapuściński, Wisława Szymborska

STRESZCZENIE

Literatura polska w języku albańskim

Albania jest małym krajem europejskim, który przez prawie pięć wieków znajdował się pod okupacją turecką. Swoją niepodległość uzyskała dopiero 28 listopada 1912 r. Podczas tej okupacji prawie nie istniała literatura obca tłumaczona na język albański, ponieważ ponad 85% ludności było analfabetami; nie funkcjonowały też instytucje naukowe i szkoły. Pierwsza szkoła podstawowa została otwarta w roku 1887. Dopiero w latach 20. XX w., wraz z wyodrębnieniem się warstwy intelektualnej, w Albanii rozpoczął się przekład literatury światowej na język albański, włącznie z polską literaturą, lecz nie z języka polskiego, ale przeważnie z języka włoskiego. Pierwszym dziełem literatury polskiej przetłumaczonym na język albański z języka włoskiego w roku 1933 była książka noblisty Henryka Sienkiewicza pt. *Quo Vadis*. Powieść ta została przetłumaczona po raz drugi w roku 1999. Rozwój tłumaczeń literatury polskiej na język albański rozpoczął się jednak dopiero po II wojnie światowej, szczególnie po roku 2000.

Do tej pory przetłumaczono na język albański prawie 55 polskich książek napisanych przez 34 autorów, m.in. Adama Mickiewicza (np. jego wielkie dzieło *Pan Tadeusz*), Henryka Sienkiewicza, Bolesława Prusa, Czesława Miłosza, Wisławę Szymborską, Olę Tokarczuk, Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego, Tadeusza Różewicza, Witolda Gombrowicza, o. Marcina Czerwińskiego i innych. Jednocześnie ośmiu autorów albańskich napisało w języku albańskim książki o polskiej tematyce. Oprócz albańskich tłumaczy z Albanii literaturę polską na język albański tłumaczą nadal również Albańczycy z Kosowa.

W porównaniu z niektórymi innymi krajami europejskimi liczba polskich książek przetłumaczonych na język albański jest znaczna. Literatura polska w języku albańskim cieszy się popularnością wśród czytelników albańskich. Niektóre z książek są wydawane po raz drugi, a nawet trzeci.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: literatura polska, Albania, Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Albańsko-Polskiej, Ryszard Kapuściński, Wisława Szymborska

Albania is a small country in Europe, which regained its independence in November 28, 1912, after nearly five centuries of Turkish occupation. The country came into the inheritance of a great backwardness, not only in the economy where poverty predominated, but especially in the cultural field. The first primary school teaching in the Albanian language was established only in 1878 and there were no high schools or universities.

During the Turkish occupation, Albanian literature went a long and winding road. Before independence, there were no translations of foreign literature into Albanian.

Only in the 1920s, with the emergence of intelligentsia, world literature started to be translated into Albanian, which included Polish literature. However, the translations were not done from the Polish language but from Italian translations of it, because there were no Albanian translators from the Polish language.

The first Polish literary work translated into Albanian from Italian was the Nobel prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel, *Quo Vadis?* (in 1933). The translator of the book was bishop Vincens Prennushi. For the second time, the book was translated in 1999, also from the Italian translation, by Hajro Babameto.

After World War II, the translation of Polish literature into Albanian passed through two stages. The first stage falls on the years 1945-1962, and the second stage started in 1990 after the fall of the communist regime in both countries and has lasted until today. The first stage coincides with the years when Albania belonged to the so-called socialist camp of countries which were dominated by the Soviet Union. In Albania, mainly Soviet literature would be translated, and there was little literature translation from other socialist countries, while the number of translations of Western literature was very limited. Out of Polish literature, a few poems by Adam Mickiewicz were translated by our famous writers and poets, Lasgush Poradeci who worked with its Italian translations and Ismail Kadare who used the Russian renderings. The first translator of Polish literature into Albanian was Qevqep Kambo, who completed his studies at a Polish university in the 1950s. In that decade, he translated a collection of poems by Adam Mickiewicz. In 1957 a book was published with five stories by Boleslaw Prus, titled *Damnable Happiness* translated by Hamit Kokalari from the Russian language.

After 1962, Albania's state relations with the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries worsened and Albania broke away from them. At that time, there was nothing interesting about translating Polish literature into Albanian.

The translation of Polish literature into Albanian gained great momentum after the 1990s. In this context, the Nobel Prize awarded to Wislawa

Szyborska in 1996 and to Czesław Miłosz in 1980 had a great impact. This caught the attention of the Albanian publishing market, as well as Albanian writers and translators. Thanks to their commitment, some of their works were translated into Albanian. At that time a group of translators of Polish literature was established in Albania: Qevqep Kambo, Astrit Beqiraj, Leonard Zissi, Edlira Lloha, Pandeli Cina, Arqile Teta, Petrit Doll and others who worked directly with the Polish source texts as they mastered the language while studying in Poland.

So far, more than 50 Polish books by 33 authors have been translated into Albanian, and currently about 8 books on Polish issues have been published by six Albanian authors. In comparison with other countries of the former Eastern Bloc, Albania is a leader as far as the number of Polish books translated is concerned.

Translations of Polish literature into Albanian have been accompanied by several phenomena.

As has been mentioned, the Albanian reader has access to books by Polish literary Nobel Prize winners. The first one is *Quo vadis?* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, first translated from its Italian translation by Bishop Vincens Prennushi. From 1940 to 1947 he was an Archbishop and Primate of the Catholic Church in Albania. In 1947 he was arrested by the communist regime in Albania and died in prison in 1949. He was awarded the medal of “Martyr for Democracy” and in February 2018 he was canonized as a Saint of the Holy Catholic Church by Pope Francis.

Another book by another Nobel, Wisława Szymborska, *Neither the end nor the beginning* was a translation by Qevqep Kambo in 1997, a year later after its release in Poland in 1996. The book was translated parallelly in Kosovo into Albanian by Mazllum Seneja, also in 1997. The collection of Wisława Szymborska’s poems, *Poezi të zgjedhura*, was translated by Pandeli Cina together with Ben Andoni in 2015.

In Albania, books by another Polish Nobel Prize winner, Czesław Miłosz, are very popular: *Miasto bez imienia* [City without a name] was translated by Mazllum Saneja; *O podróżach w czasie* [On time travel] was translated by Astrit Beqiraj; *The Captive Mind* was translated by Bashkim Shehu, and *Na brzegu rzeki* [Facing the River] was translated by Ben Andoni and Pandeli Cina.

In 1998, Jorgo Gjirkondi made a translation of the masterpiece by Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*.

Astrit Beqiraj translated four works by Ryszard Kapuściński: *The Emperor* (1999), *Imperium* (2000), *Travels with Herodotus* (2013), and *The Other* (2017). Other translations by Astrit Beqiraj include the books by Polish authors: Andrzej Stasiuk’s *On the Road to Babadag* (2006); Adam Michnik’s *In Search of Lost Meaning* (2011); Władysław Szpilman’s *The Pianist* (2016);

Janusz Korczak's *King Matt the First* (2017); and Tadeusz Różewicz's *Selected Poems* (2018), together with translator Ben Andoni.

Books devoted to the two largest Polish figures of culture and science: Fryderyk Chopin and Maria Skłodowska-Curie have been published in Albanian. In 1997, Qevqep Kambo translated a book by the brothers Antoni and Albert Grudziński titled *Kult Chopina w Polsce* [The cult of Chopin in Poland]. Meanwhile, Leonard Zissi, translated a book by Antoni Grudziński, *Fryderyk Chopin – Przewodnik po życiu i twórczości* [Fryderyk Chopin. A guide to his life and work] in 2010. In 2018, Leonard Zissi translated Iwona Kenzler's book, *Maria Skłodowska-Curie. Złodziejka mężów, życie i miłości* [Marie Skłodowska-Curie. A thief of Husbands. Life and Loves]. In 2014, Leonard Zissi also made three translations by Polish journalist and writer, called *the father of Polish missiology*, Marcin Czermiński's books, titled *Albania. Zarysy etnograficzne, kulturalne i religijne* [Albania. Ethnographic, cultural and religious outlines, published in Krakow in 1893]; in 2016, his book titled *W Dalmacji i Czarnogórze* [In Dalmatia and Montenegro] published in Krakow in 1896; and in 2017, another one, *Z podróży po Bośni i Hercegowinie* [On the trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina] originally published in Krakow in 1899. The translation of Czermiński's book about Albania had a particularly strong impact, as it was Czermiński's first book to be translated into a foreign language almost 120 years after it was printed in Krakow in 1893. On the other hand, the Apostolic Nuncio of the Vatican in Albania, Archbishop Ramiro Moliner Inglès, handed over a copy of this book to Pope Francis during his visit to Albania in September 2014. This event in was called by a Polish Internet news website as "the final of a story."

At the same time, Leonard Zissi is a translator of books by other Polish authors: Stanisław Cieślak's *Ndre Mjeda i inni jezuiti z Prowincji Weneckiej w Krakowie* [Ndre Mjeda and other Jesuits of the Province of Venice in Krakow] (translated in 2018), and *Dwa opowiadania o Skanderbegu* [Two stories about Skanderbeg] an Albanian national hero (translated in 2018 as well). The author of the first story, titled "The Little Prince" is anonymous and the piece is devoted to the young Skanderbeg taken hostage by the Turks around 1415. The second story is by Mieczysława Ślęczkowska. Her book titled *Z orląt, orły* [From Eaglets to Eagles] published in Lviv in 1906, contains passages devoted to secret talks in Buda (Hungary), between Skanderbeg, the Polish king Władysław III and the Hungarian regent János Hunyady in 1444. As part of these talks, an alliance was formed between Skanderbeg and the Polish-Hungarian Union, which resulted in victory over Turkish troops during the Battle of Nisa (Serbia) in the autumn of 1444.

Simultaneously, Leonard Zissi translated three Polish plays: Stanisław Mrozek's *the Émigrés*, Ingmar Vilqist's (Jarosław Świercz) *Noc Hevela*

[Hevel's Night] and Janusz Głowacki's *Antigone in New York*. The first two dramas were staged at the National Theater in Tirana and Prishtina (Kosovo) in 2012.

The work of Witold Gombrowicz is also well-known in Albania. Edlira Lloha translated three of his works: *A Guide to Philosophy in Six Hours and Fifteen Minutes* (2012); *Ferdynand* (2014), and *Diaries* (2019). She also translated Marek Antoni Nowicki's *Wokół Konwencji Europejskiej* [Around the European Convention] (2003). The translation of Gombrowicz's book *Ferdynand* by Edlira Lloha was nominated by the Ministry of Culture of Albania as the best translation of foreign literature into Albanian in 2014.

Another translator of Polish literature into Albanian is a Kosovo Albanian Mazllum Saneja, who lives permanently in Warsaw. His best known translations of Polish literature into Albanian are: Karol Wojtyła's *Spokojny brzeg* [Safe Shore] (1989); Tadeusz Różewicz's *Opowiadanie traumatyczne* [Traumatic story] (1991); Zbigniew Herbert's *Mr. Cogito* (2000); Ewa Lipska's *Study Death* (2000) and *I* (2006); Adam Zagajewski's *Going to Lviv* (2002); and Stanisław Jerzy Lec's *Unkempt Thoughts* (2001).

Other Polish writers translating into Albanian are: Adam Zagajewski: *Miasto w którym chcę mieszkać* [The city in which I want to live] (2012), writer and translator Bardhyl Londo; Zbigniew Herbert: *Relacja z oblężonego miasta* [Report from a Besieged City] (2015), translator Romeo Çollaku; Marcin Bielski: *O Skanderbegu Macedonim Albańskim Książęciu* [About Scanderbeg Macedonian Albanian Prince] (2018), published in Poland in 1564, translated by Arqile Teta; Leszek Kołakowski: *Religion: If There Is No God ...* translated by Bashkim Shehu; Stanisław Lem: *Solaris* (1996), translated by Jorgji Dhoksani; Ewa Stachniak: *Pałac zimowy* [Winter Palace] (2011), translated by Edlira Mulla.

In 2014, *A Concise History of Poland* by Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki translated from English by Erblin Kërçisht was published in Albanian.

In addition to translating Polish literature written by Polish authors into Albanian, there are Albanian authors writing books on Polish subjects. Arqile Teta put a tremendous effort into preparing two dictionaries: (Polish-Albanian) (2007), and Albanian-Polish (2018), each containing 30,000 entries. Such dictionaries, with so many entries, were developed for the first time in Albania and Poland. The issue of these dictionaries has been a great help for translators of Polish literature into Albanian and vice versa.

Arqile Teta and is the author of the monograph *Profesor Stanisław Zuber-Życie i dzieło* [Professor Stanisław Zuber. Life and Work] (2010), devoted to the outstanding Polish geologist, explorer and oil driller in Albania. From 1927 to 1947, Stanisław Zuber worked in Albania in search of

oil and other minerals. He was arrested by the communist authorities in 1947 on charges of spying on behalf of Western countries and died in prison in 1947. In 2018, the book was translated into Polish.

Other Albanian authors of books about Poland in Albanian are: Mazllum Saneja and his two anthologies: *Only Ithaca will remain* (1993) and *Children of our age* (1997); Spiro Theodhosi: *The Fryderyk Chopin Society on its tenth anniversary* (2005); Bajram Karabolli: *Tales of two times* (2010); Shefqet Gjana: *Golgotha of Love* (novel) (2008); Xhevat Mustafa: *Polka* (novel) (2015); Leonard Zissi: *Albanian-Polish Friendship Society – Memories* (2016). The *Europa* magazine published by the Institute of International Studies in Tirana, in its 16/2017 issue, published three articles devoted to Józef Piłsudski, the outstanding 20th century Polish statesman and military commander, written by Andrzej Stawarz, Mariusz Wołos and Tomasz Stańczyk. In 2018, the Supreme Chamber of Control of Albania published an album titled: *Polish Symbols – 100 places, characters, events, and achievements important for Poland, Europe and world* (Multiple Polish authors: Jerzy Besała, Marcin Jankowski, Jacek Marciński, Katarzyna Sołtyk, Piotr Wierzboński and Wieńczysław Żaczek).

Arqile Teta, Leonard Zissi, Astrit Beqiraj, Pandeli Çina, Gjergj Sinani, Genc Luarasi, and Petrit Dollani are the authors of many articles about Poland, or various translations of Polish literature into Albanian, published in the Albanian press.

Another characteristic of translations of Polish literature into Albanian is that some of them are translated not from Polish originals but from other foreign translations, mostly Italian, English, French, Spanish, and Russian. Their translators are: Vinçens Prennushi, Lasgush Poradeci, Ismail Kadare, Hajro Babameto, Edlira Mulla, Bashkim Shehu, Erblina Kërçishta, Hamit Kokalari, Ben Andoni, Bardhyl Londo, Romeo Çollaku, and Jorgji Dhoksani.

Polish literature in Albanian, is generally popular among Albanian readers. Books sell and do not stay on the shelves of bookstores for too long. Some of them are published for the second or third time, such as Ryszard Kapuściński's books or Wisława Szymborska's poems.

For their contribution to the dissemination of Polish culture in Albania, the Polish state authorities awarded some of the Albanian translators. The President of the Republic of Poland awarded Mr Arqile with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland (2011); the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland awarded the Bene Merito Medal of Honor to Mr Leonard Zissi (2011) and Mr Pandela Çina (2013); the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland awarded the Gloria Artis Silver Medal of Honor to Mr Astrit Beqiraj (2013) and to Spiro Theodhosi (2016). At the same time, the translator

Astrit Beqiraj is the laureate of the Book Fair in Tirana in 2013 for his translation of the book by Ryszard Kapuściński, *Traveling with Herodotus* and the winner of the *Distinction of the Polonicum Center* at the Warsaw University for 2018.

In publishing Polish literature in Albanian, a large financial contribution was made by the Polish side, mostly the Book Institute in Krakow, the Polish Embassy in Tirana, the Province of Southern Poland of the Society of Jesus based in Krakow, for the publication of books by Marcin Czermiński, and the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. At the same time, the Polish Embassy in Tirana provided valuable assistance in financing the erection of the bust of Fryderyk Chopin in Tirana in 2003, the bust of Professor Stanisław Zuber in Kuchova in 2011, the bas-relief of Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Tirana in 2015, and the monument of Pope John Paul II in Tirana in 2018. At the same time, the name of Stanisław Zuber was given to one street in Tirana and Kuchova. With so many statues and monuments of famous Poles erected in Albania make it a country like no other outside Poland.

Albania is a small country, more than a thousand kilometers away from Poland, but Polish literature and culture is very close to it and present there.

From what has been achieved so far in the dissemination of Polish literature and culture, lovers and friends of Poland in Albania feel honored, respected and aware of their contribution to these achievements.



Monument of Pope John Paul II in Tirana



Bust of Prof. Stanislaw Zuber in Kuçova



Bust of Fryderyk Chopin in Tirana



Bas relief of Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Tirana

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Online resources

Annex

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Leonard Zissi – graduated from high school in Tirana and completed graduate studies in Poland in 1956-1961 at the Warsaw University of Technology. After returning to the country he worked in various institutions: the General Directorate of Albanian Railways, for many years in the Ministry of Transport (1983-1992 – Director of the Department of International Cooperation), and educator at the University of Tirana. In 1973-1979 he was a diplomat at the Albanian Embassy in Warsaw, in 1979-1983 he worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, and in 1992-2003 he was a Representative of the Józef Piłsudski Gdansk Shiprepair Yard at the Durres-Gdansk Shipyard SA in Albania. Retired since 2003. His passion is translation of Polish literature into Albanian. He translated seven books and three plays from Polish, among others, one about Chopin and one about Marie Skłodowska-Curie. He is one of the founders of the Albanian-Polish Friendship Society, founded in 1991, and the Society of Fryderyk Chopin in Albania, founded in 1995. Since its foundation of 2015, he had been President of the Albanian-Polish Friendship Society, and since 2015 he has been the Honorary President of the Society. He holds the *Bene Merito* Badge of Honor issued by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland awarded by Radosław Sikorski, No. 150/2011, dated 21 February 2011, “For activities that strengthen Poland’s position in the international arena.”