

Cultural relations between Hungary and Albania during the period of Humanism and Renaissance

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Abstract

Cultural Hungarian-Albanian relations during the Middle Ages are characterized by a relatively poor intensity. Actually, relations between these two countries are more intense in the political field and especially through the partnership between Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and John Hunyadi. Regarding the origin, the Hungarian culture identity is rather distinct from the Albanian one. Lack of cultural contacts, among others, was conditioned also by the fact that these relations were held under war circumstances and their primary aim was the common defense from Ottoman attacks. Actually, the Albanian medieval culture remained a Mediterranean culture with elements of Byzantine influence in the continental and southern areas. Meanwhile, Hungary belonged to Central Europe, which, even though far away from Mediterranean cultural mainstream, sought to be influenced by this culture, namely by the Renaissance that emanated exactly in the Mediterranean region. It was Matthias Corvinus effort, regarding the cultural influence of the Mediterranean and Renaissance in Hungary but also the fact that Hungary possessed some of the most important towns of the Adriatic coast and particularly Ragusa. This city was the center where cultural relations between Albanian and Hungary started and became intensified in the religious, intellectual and human field.

Keywords: Albania ,Hungary, Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbeu, John Hunyadi.

Introduction

It was Matthias Corvinus greatest merit in respect of the cultural influence of the Mediterranean and the Renaissance in Hungary. He lacked the ingenuity and political sense of his father, John Hunyadi, as regards cooperation in combative field against the Ottoman Empire, but Corvinus embraced a pro-western policy to strengthen his dominant position and was not actively involved in the Balkans. Since his political commitment in terms of defense from the Ottoman Empire was highly poor, cultural engagement to carry the values of the Mediterranean culture in the court of Budim appears very large. During the reign of Matthias Corvinus, it was realized the Italian and European cultural Renaissance in the Middle Danube (Dragan, 1995, 96). A large part of Albanians exiled to Ragusa, Venice, Rome, Padua, Naples and other Mediterranean towns. However, on the other hand, we find also a group of Albanian cultural representatives, who were incorporated in the Ottoman Empire, that embraced the eastern values and made their way into the military hierarchy of the Ottoman Empire, and some of them even participated as military commanders in the service of the Ottoman Empire, or were connected in other forms with events that were taking place in Central Europe.

The Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom was still a backward country as opposed to

European centers of Christianity during Humanism and Renaissance period. Actually, Hungary was situated in the borders of Latin civilization, namely the edge where the Latin culture ended and the Byzantine started. Generally viewed, even Albania was in such a position, but Albanian territories benefited more from the Mediterranean values, because of the coastline. The dissemination of Renaissance values was prevented by the Ottoman conquest and the same goes for Hungary as well, although the Ottoman conquest lasted less, in comparison to Albania. Indeed, during the reign of Corvinus, efforts were made in Hungary to follow the path of humanity based on the European model, but this path posed its own difficulties incurred by the lack of a strong developing and cultural basis on the part of Hungary. There were a few Hungarian towns, while the nobility was poor and adequately uneducated, so that Corvinus sought to regulate this situation by bringing into the royal court humanists distinguished in the field of European art and culture of the time. Evidently, the most viable were humanists from the Eastern Mediterranean territories of the Adriatic and particularly from Dubrovnik, where many Albanian humanists had long ago migrated. Similarly, Ragusa was a constituent part of the political power in Hungary since 1358; therefore, even in this regard, it was a more appropriate town for cooperation. Hence, the Hungarian Renaissance was built up by various national elements. With the help of his teacher and friend Ivan from Srednja, Matthias Corvinus managed to create a strong cultural basis for his kingdom. In addition to political activity, Corvinus assigned himself with the task to transform the Royal Court into a cultural circle due to generate artists and scientists from all over Europe. King Corvinus was quite well informed through his supporters on the skills and preparations of the Ragusan humanist Gjin Gazuli of Albanian origin. Gazuli's family was originally from Albania (Drançolli, 1984, 31). In the cadastre of concessions, it is noted a village named Gazuli from where Gjin's family is believed to have derived (Zamputi, 1977, 167). The Croatian scholar V. Foretić (1980) emphasizes that Gazuli's father was Albanian and as such he felt himself too connected with Albanians against the Ottoman Empire during the war. In Ragusa, Gjin enjoyed high authority and Ragusan Government had charged him with diplomatic duties. Gjin had travelled to Hungary in the service of the Republic of Ragusa, while in 1436 he visited the "Ban of the whole Slavonia", Matko Talovec who was originally from Korčula (Foretić, 1980, 301). Gjin Gazuli had earned a doctorate degree in philosophy at the University of Padua and was also practicing his profession as a diplomat in the service of Ragusa, but also of Gjergj Kastrioti (Tadić, 1964, 431). It can be said with certainty that the bishop Ivan from Srednja had proposed to king Matthias to invite Gjin Gazuli on his own court. In February 1459, Gazuli received the invitation by a royal herald to go to Budim. The Ragusan Government was committed to help their own citizens with 100 golden ducats to cover travel expenses. But, Gazuli refused the invitation on the grounds of his old age and poor health. In April of the same year, the Ragusan Government wrote to Corvinus that they were trying to persuade Gjin to go to Budim (Gelcic & Thaloczy, 1887, 612). Although Gjin did not go to Budim, the invitation already offered, undoubtedly honored him and raised his reputation as a scientist. Given that he did not accept to go to Budim, he sent them some books required from the field of astronomy (Gelcic & Thaloczy, 1887, 612). His books made a real stir in Budim. His astronomical work left a great mark in the subsequent developments of this science in the Corvinus's court. The testimony for this assertion is found in a letter that the nephew of Ivan from Srednja, Jan Panonius (Ivan Kestenski) sent to Gjin in the

mid 1460-1465. Jan Panonius was also named Ivan Çesmički. He was the nephew of Ivan from Srednja, namely the son of his sister Barbara. He was a poet and translator of classical works from Greek in Latin, a diplomat and warrior, especially during the Ottoman invasion of Bosnia. He was also bishop of Pecuh and Ban of Slavonia. He was a respected friend of the King Matthias Corvinus. Nevertheless, as a humanist, he was against the absolute power of Matthias Corvinus as well as his uncle Ivan. His activity was threatened by Corvinus and this made him return to Croatia in Medved Grad. He died in 1472 and was buried in Remeta near Zagreb (Kurelac, 1998, 77)

Notifying on the receipt of books, Panonius urged Gazuli to do further research. In addition, Panonius earnestly begged Gjin Gazuli to pay special attention to the elaboration of astronomical tools needed for the Hungarian Royal Court and which would be worked out in Ragusa, certainly upon compensation. There is no evidence whether or not those required tools were ever produced, but it is a known fact that Gazuli was the builder of the instrument called "Astrolab" which served to measure the stars-related parameters and also to set the position on the ground. Gazuli died in 1465 leaving behind a great work with a significant influence on the development of astronomy in the 15th century. The Hungarian Royal Court showed special respect for the skills and values of the Dubrovnik handicrafts and especially for silversmiths and goldsmiths. Ragusan craftsmen of noble metals influenced in the formation of the material culture of the Hungarian Royal Court. On the occasion of Corvinus's victory in the Czech Kingdom in 1468, a delegation from Ragusa was dispatched with gold and silver vessels in order to deliver them to the King as a token of respect (Birnbbaum, 1986, 107).

With regard to the cultural influences between Hungary and the coast, it is revealed a range of craft products used in Ragusa with the Hungarian mark which implies that their origin, namely their form came from Hungary. Therefore, the Ragusan master of Albanian origin, Gjon Injaci, dealt with processing of Hungarian type wooden crates and beds during the middle of the 15th century (Drançolli, 1986, 221). Concerning the influence of the Hungarian culture in the Albanian territories, there is a fact that in one of the portraits representing the figure of Skanderbeg, he is presented with a garment quite different from the usual ones for the time. In this engraving, it is conspicuous that the helmet included a colback type cap with a buckle on the forehead holding a curved ostrich feather on the back. Apparently, this presentation with such a garment can be as a result of the connections that Skanderbeg had with Hungary (Frashëri, 2002, 70). Even the Croatian guard wears today such helmets, surely under the influence of common historical links with Hungarians.

Islamization of a certain part of the Albanian nobility and their involvement in political and cultural courses of the Ottoman Empire gave them the opportunity to make contacts with Hungary in various forms through their engagement into these structures. There was particularly a great number of Ottoman serdars (commanders) of Albanian origin who were engaged at different times into military expeditions against Hungary or even held important positions in these areas. Thus, Ibrahim Pasha 1493-1536, was the second grand vizier of Sultan Suleiman. There are different variants regarding his hometown, but his Albanian origin cannot be questioned. He took part in the Ottoman campaign against Hungarians in 1521. Sultan Suleiman engaged him as beylerbey (commander-in-chief) of the campaign against Hungary in 1526 as well. The victory of the Ottomans in the battle of Mohács was his merit (Thëngjilli, 2003, 18).

Despite the successes, he was executed by the Sultan on 15.3.1536. It is assumed that the reason for his execution was his great popularity and expenses incurred for the conquest of Iran. In the Ottoman literature there is a series of works in which the conquest of Budim is described and glorified in verses. One of these works was written by Prishtinali Buhari entitled "Fathname Budim" (book on the conquest of Budim). This work remained in the form of manuscript and is stored in Syleymaniye library in Istanbul (Kosova, 1973, 387).

Another Ottoman military of Albanian origin having a significant influence in the developments of the Ottoman Empire in the Hungarian territories was Hasan Sanjakbey of Elbasan, who conquered Buddha in 1529 (Zamputi, 1960, 3:31). Another military officer of Albanian origin who took part in the Ottoman expeditions against Hungary was Ajaz Pasha 1482-1539. His hometown was thought to be Vlora (Sertogly, 1958, 274).

Conclusions

This article gave an introduction of the cultural relations between Hungary and Albania, but also of the diplomatic and military relations. The support and service of the Albanian military officers in favor of the Ottoman Empire in expeditions against Hungary by no means diminished the memory on the common alliance between Albanians and Hungarians at the time of Skanderbeg. These military officers were identified with the Ottoman Empire from the perspective of individual interests, while in the minds of Albanians and Hungarians, the successful military cooperation in defense of the Balkans, was passed down in various forms of literature, art and oral tradition.

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