

Arberian artists during the 15th and 16th centuries

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Abstract

Through this work, the author aims to touch on some important issues for the medieval Arberian cultural history. In fact, the role of painters and masters of art who belonged to the Arberian nobility can be seen more clearly here. It should be said that this paper, among other things, aims to give a more complete picture of culture as an integral part of medieval Arberian history in general. Culture as an important element of spiritual life, through these artists, complemented our history with important works. To illuminate this study, we have consulted the relevant literature and various sources which complement this historiography work. We have used various scientific methods to breed this text as synthesizing and descriptive in order to provide generalized conclusions as meaningful as possible.

Keywords: Artists, Andrea Aleksi, Mark Bazaiti, etc.

Introduction

From the early centuries, our country was the cradle of masters of construction of houses, bridges, castles, shrines with a high construction technique and a perfect architecture. Albania was the place of masters and artisans who processed gold, silver, coral, ivory, mother-of-pearl, who worked and carved stone, marble, wood, etc. With these beautiful and durable objects, Albanian artisans, builders and artists decorated the cities as well as the houses and the premises. These Albanian artisans, being skilled workers, with talent and creative fantasy, with self-initiative, were in great demand in other parts of the Balkans and in the Mediterranean Basin. Only from Northern Albania in the 14th century, there were forty Albanian architects, sculptors and painters who went to work in Dalmatia, and who became famous through their works created with taste and endurance.¹ A series of documents, contracts, agreements of Albanian artists can be found in the works that speak of the Medieval Age in Dalmatia². Among the Albanian artists of this time, Miho Tivarasi stands out. As a highly skilled architect, stonemason and sculptor, he decorated cult institutions in Ragusa and provided them with works of art, including his architectural schemes, ornamental motifs, decorations, etc. Crafted with different styles and exclusive of the influences of religious styles, they gave Ragusa a new look and artistic development at a time when the ideas of the European Renaissance and the human art of this era had not yet emerged with the necessary force and influence, which they had later in the progressive development of mankind. Albanians have special merits in the development of art in other Balkan countries, especially in Dalmatia. On the Dalmatian coast, still preserved are many works of art made by Albanians and this is because Dalmatia, less than other areas of the Balkans, was damaged by the destructive

¹ Prenushi, Kontribut shqiptar për Rilindjen Evropiane, Tiranë, 1980. 177-190.

² Prenushi, Kontribut shqiptar, 178.

momentum of the Ottoman invaders in the 15th and 16th centuries. The works of art that have remained here from the time of the Medieval Age are witnesses of this extensive creativity of Albanians and speak of the development of art in medieval Albania. In the Dome of Milan, there is an altar made with rare artisanship and art, adorned with numerous and very beautiful capitals. The Milanese still call this altar the "Albanian altar", because it was the work of an Albanian. It was completed in 1430 by Alex Turketa from Albania (Alexio Tarcheta de Albanis) who has both dated and signed the work. The greatest Albanian artists of the Renaissance era include Andrea Nikollë Aleksi from Durrës, Viktor Karpaçi from the districts of Korça, Mark Bazaiti, Onufri and his son Nikolla from Neokastra (Elbasan), three generations of Albanian artists of a family surnamed The Albanians, in Vicenza, Italy and others.³

Viktor Karpaçi and Mark Bazaiti

Thousands of Albanians that the sea route of exile had gathered in Venice, in the second half of the 15th century, after the heroic resistance of Albanian castles and the conquest of the country, lived in hardship and uncertainty about their future. Above all, they were tormented by the pain of the enslaved Homeland. Aiming to preserve everything Albanian valuable in their customs, rites, language, etc., the Albanians of Venice formed a stable community and with their own forces erected a building as the headquarters and centre of their brotherhood. Their participation in the economic activity, at the beginning of the 16th century, had given them the opportunity to open a school of their own, a school of more crafts, where both knowledge and classical culture were taught. Albanians also had their own hospital in Venice. They had also created opportunities to help each other financially. The main motive of the life and activity of these Albanians was "For the honour and glory of the Homeland", a deeply patriotic motive. A well-known painter of Albanian origin lived in Venice at that time, Viktor Karpaçi. This artist was entrusted with the completion of the central building of the Albanians with works of art. The creative artistic work he developed here with such inspiration gave him an immortal name. Along with Viktor Karpaçi and almost his age, the other Albanian artist, Mark Bazaiti also lived there and created paintings. Both are considered among the geniuses of Renaissance painting. Their works have spread today in many European capitals and are highly valued for their humanistic spirit and high artistic value. Viktor Karpaçi was born in Venice in 1455.⁴ His parents were from Albania, from the district of Korça, moved to the Republic of Lagoons (Venice) in the 15th century. His family lived in the brotherhood of Venice; however people from the Karpaç tribe had also moved to Romania. Karpaçi is an Albanian adjective, which is still preserved today and has its origin from the Albanian word *karpë* (rock, crepe, stone).

The Albanian origin of this great artist is confirmed by his whole life and artistic activity. He was a contemporary and close collaborator with the great artists of the Italian Renaissance, Gentile Bellini (1429-1507) and Giovanni Bellini (Ghambelini) (1430-1516). The first is thought to have worked directly on the sketches of the portrait of Skanderbeg, when our Hero was in Italy. Viktor Karpaçi considered Gentile Bellini as his honoured teacher. Various scholars have listed Viktor Karpaci together with

³ Prenushi, Kontribut shqiptar, 178.

⁴ Dubrovnik State Archive (AHD). Fund: Diversa Cancellarie, fol.146v.

Dubrovnik State Archive (AHD). Fund: Diversa Cancellarie, fol.147v

the geniuses of Venetian Renaissance painting, such as Andrea Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini, Gentile Bellini, Carlo Crivoli, Lazaro Bastiani, etc., but have forgotten his Albanian origin and his creative work as an Albanian.⁵ He is considered unjustly a Venetian painter. His entire life and work clearly show that he was Albanian and a great patriot. In "Larousse" (the great universal dictionary of the 19th century) the following lines read: "When one sees the works of this simple, talented and attractive painter, he really regrets that he does not know anything exact about his biography". A writer, Luigj Korreja, had noted in his work "Eloge de Carpaccio", read at the Venice Academy, the difficulties that arise related to the biography of the painter. In fact, there are only a few rare documents on Karpaci and even those have also been scattered here and there. His talent illustrated the second half of the 15th century, which ushered in the golden age of painting. Zanetti (Italian art critic - MP) said, "Karpaci had the truth in his heart".⁶ Art critics and historians in Italy and elsewhere have always written about his works and given reviews, of course very positive, but nothing about his life and his Albanian origin at a time when they have given details about the lives and deeds of much less important and famous contemporaries and painters. Throughout centuries, it seems that his Albanian background has been disguised deliberately. In the studies and publications of the pre-liberation era, made in Albania, the activity of Viktor Karpaçi in the Albanian brotherhood of Venice was noted. In Venice, since the beginning of the 16th century, Viktor Karpaçi was one of the most active members of the fraternity "Scuola degli albanesi" (School of Albanians). This Albanian cultural centre worked for the benefit of the liberation of the Homeland and for the preservation of our good, freedom-loving and cultural traditions. There were many Albanians in exile in Venice. Six neighbourhoods of the city bore Albanian names and the political, economic and especially the cultural activity of the Albanians was alive. Even today, in this city, the name of a street has been preserved in memory of the Albanians who lived there (*Calla degli albanesi*). There are many paintings, billboards with large proportions, created by Karpaçi's brush, but, among them, the works of art with Albanian theme occupy the main place. Thus, when the School of Albanians was built in 1502, he carved an Albanian-themed bas-relief on the main façade, between the two windows, a very significant memory of the Homeland. It presented the siege of Shkodra: in the centre, there is the castle that symbolizes the Albanian resistance and, opposite just below, you can see Sultan Mehmet and the grand vizier with their glorious weapons. Above the bas-relief the year XCCCCLXXIII (1474) has been engraved; that is the year of the first conquest and heroic defence. This bas-relief, preserved to this day, is considered one of the rarest and most precious works of the Renaissance, echoing the great events of the time.⁷ He proved his Albanian origin with the marble cover on the facade of the Albanian School and especially with the decoration he made of it with his magnificent paintings, these works of art, which clearly show traces of motifs from Albania. It should be noted that Viktor Karpaçi was a well-known painter, but for the needs of the Albanian fraternity, he also worked as a sculptor in the bas-relief we mentioned; he also worked as an architect and director of works for the marble facade of the school.⁸ Of the six paintings of this Albanian painter, made tastefully and with inspiration

⁵ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 180.

⁶ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 180.

⁷ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 182.

⁸ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 182.

for the aims of the School of Albanians in Venice, when he was at the height of his maturity as an artist, the best two were taken by order of Meternik, when the Austrians conquered Venice and they have been preserved in Vienna to date, while others are in the Venice Academy as well as in other cities of Italy. In addition to these six paintings, Viktor Karpaçi has many other creations with artistic values. In his creativity in painting, in addition to non-religious themes, we also have religious themes as in his contemporaries' works of art. However, his art, regardless of the theme, is human, and wonderful. He belongs to the beginnings of the golden age in painting. Viktor Karpaçi is also known as the painter of the stories of St. George in the cult institutions of the same name in Venice, where Albanians, mainly from Albania gathered. In the gallery of the Venice Academy and elsewhere, there are other paintings of him that, although with a religious theme, with their realistic, vital presentation gave a blow, just like other great works of Renaissance art, medieval religious ideology, mysticism, generally obscurantist religious art. Comparing Donatello, the great artist of the Italian Renaissance, with Victor Karpachi, an art critic wrote, "Remember the Donatellian hero, closely created with the Olympic clarity of the Christian saints ... Look, on the contrary, at the frantic cavalry treated by Karpaci's brush. The horse is a fiery, warlike, and black horse, and the whole composition as a whole resembles our imaginations of the simple, fearless knights so popular in the visions of our fantastic dreams. Of course, this is a very decorative figure ..." This assessment is given for the picture of Saint George who kills the dragon, in which V. Karpaçi has presented, with real features, the fight against evil, against the ugly and the triumph of the positive, of course through a semi-legendary allegory. In the centre, he has put the figure of a warrior with all his vivacity and fighting ability. In his paintings with religious themes he also knew how to choose the most comprehensible and popular ones.⁹ Very positive opinions have been given about the paintings of this Albanian painter. Thus, related to Viktor Karpaci's painting of an easel entitled "Orsola" (semi-fabulous figure), we have this assessment: "Even the light that enters from the open window has something from the real sky. Delicate colours sing..." Another painting by Viktor Karpaçi, with large dimensions and with a non-religious theme is "Departure", which is still preserved today in the Venice Academy.¹⁰ In it, the artist has painted with vivid colours, pleasant colours, with realism, the departure of a group of citizens from the coast. Perhaps this is something of his longing for departure from the other side of the Adriatic, from his beloved Homeland that was in captivity. In this picture, we have a festive look. In the beauty and harmony in expressing people, in the presentation of the means of navigation, characteristic for this city surrounded by the sea, as well as in other details of this picture, we can see the rare abilities and creative fantasy of this painter, his expressive and vivid humanism, his mastery in the use of colours, etc. Karpaçi is also known as a finished master of landscape. There are many works in painting by Viktor Karpaçi, some of which are considered as a living reflection of the Venetian life of the time, but the works in painting and sculpture for the School of Albanians are undoubtedly his best creations. He worked for them in around 1502-1510. A portrait of a young man in a red hat is also highly regarded among Karpaçi's works. In one of his paintings, he has painted the drum, which as it is known, was brought to Italy for the first time by Albanian and Greek strategists. Viktor Karpaci

⁹ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 182.

¹⁰ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 183.

died in Venice in 1526, when he was 71 years old. He worked tirelessly in the last years of his life. In all publications of the history of Renaissance art, in special and universal encyclopaedias, his name is mentioned with special reverence and his paintings have been reproduced as models of advanced realistic Renaissance art. Some of his frescoes in the ducal palace of Venice have disappeared, but the main works have still been preserved today in the Art Gallery of this city as well as in the province of Venice, in Chioggia, Ferrara, in the city's bookstore, in Milan and up to the Zadar Cathedral. Works by the Albanian painter Viktor Karpaci are also available in several European capitals, in Berlin, Vienna, Paris (Louvre) etc. Moreover, they are regarded as rare masterpieces of 16th century art. Karpaci's works have been featured in many international exhibitions as far as New York and Philadelphia. With this early and talented painter, Albania was worthily represented in the art of the European Renaissance. On the same line with Viktor Karpaci, stands as an artist another Albanian painter, Mark Bazaiti. They both have a lot in common. They were almost peers. They lived and worked far from home, in Venice, and created dignified works in painting. The theme of their works is similar and both are considered among the painting geniuses of the year 1500. Mark Bazaiti is considered a student of Alvise Vivarin (1451-1502), a prominent painter of the 15th century, also considered a follower of the art of Giovanni Bellini and Viktor Karpac. The Albanian background of the painter Mark Bazaiti is primarily dedicated to the scientific research of the famous German orientalist Frans Babinger, an albanologist, and scholar of the Albanian Medieval Ages. We have little information about his life. Some people think that he lived between 1470 and 1525, but the most general opinion is that he was born around 1460 and died in 1530, though we do not know his birthplace, the time of his or his parents' departure from Albania and the Albanian province where he originated.¹¹ As a painter in Venice¹², Bazaiti first appears at the beginning of the 16th century, when after the death of the famous painter Alvisa Vivarin, in 1502, he was entrusted with the painting of the altar in the church of St. M. of Friars. This happened in 1503. He must have worked before as a student and assistant to the painter Vivarini. From this time, this young painter, with an Albanian surname, becomes more and more famous. This monumental work as well as his artistic paintings and portraits between 1510 and 1521, gave him great fame as an artist and made his name immortal. In 1530, he was on the list of the corporation of painters in Venice (Fraglia dei pittori). This has made scholars to designate 1530 as the year of his death.¹³ From 1503 to 1510, he completed the decoration of the above-mentioned church. Of the works done there, the painting of St. Sebastian and that of St. Jerome are especially appreciated; the first is located in the church of St. Mary of Health (SM de la Salute) in Venice, the second is in the Art Gallery in this city. In 1510, Bazaiti completed his famous large-scale painting "The Inspiration of the Sons of Zebedee" (biblical theme), which has been preserved in the Vienna Art Gallery. It is held as his masterpiece for the realistic power of the reflection of the characters, all simple and poor people, for the painting of rocky environments, for the use of colours, for the landscape and the background. Five paintings and frames of Bazait are also preserved in the Venice Academy. Among them, the "Last Supper" has a special artistic value - a large picture with an

¹¹ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 186.

¹² Lucia Nadin, *Shqiptarët në Venedik, Mërgim e integrim 1479-1552*, Tiranë, 2008, 174-184.

¹³ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 186.

ensemble of very vivid figures.¹⁴ In the Correr Museum, there is still one of Bazaiti's precious paintings entitled "Madonna with the child" in the Munich Pinacoteca (Germany). Another painting, "Madonna with the saints" can be found in the Berlin Museum; a third with a religious theme is the painting preserved by the National Gallery of London. Bazaiti's original painting and his portraits are available today in the Museum of the city of Padua, while reproductions of Bazaiti's works can be found in various cities in Italy. The work of this painter entitled "St. George killing the dragon" (Venice Academy) belongs to 1520, which just like the work of V. Karpaci, represents the victory of man over the evil, the ugly, through a well-known allegory and symbolism. M. Bazaiti's latest work of art is considered the painting "Portrait of a man" (*ritratto virile*), which is one of his rare works with a non-religious theme. It dates from 1521 and is still preserved today in the Academy of Bergamo (Italy), in the Moreli collection. All of Bazaiti's creations speak of his realistic concepts, of the acquisition and implementation of Renaissance ideas. His painting has artfully reflected the spiritual state of the figures, has presented scenes of environments with calorific truth. Of all his works, "Inspiration of the sons of Zebedee", it seems, is the picture, which has more elements of the Albanian nature - mountains and of the common people. Even in other paintings and portraits, he reveals vital truths, expressions and liveliness, which make his art very close and communicative. In his paintings, we find portraits of people he has known in life. As a master of large-scale paintings and scenes and figurative ensembles with a real natural background, Bazaiti has been admired as one of the geniuses of Renaissance painting. In a number of publications, his wonderful creativity has been exalted, cultivated at a time when in many European countries there were not yet such great artists.¹⁵

Andrea Aleksì

Andrea Aleksì is one of the greatest Albanian artists of the 15th century. For 60 years, he worked as an architect, sculptor and painter, decorating many cities on both shores of the Adriatic with works of art of a high standard. Inspired by the humanist art of the era, he gave this progressive movement worthy, immortal deeds. He is known worldwide as an Albanian. He was originally from Durrës, but his activity was mainly carried out in Dalmatia and Italy. The life and artistic activity of this Albanian renaissance artist are well known for the fact that even today, construction objects and works of art made by his hand have been preserved. In these works as well as on documents of the time, he has always signed with his original surname "Andrea Aleksì from Durrës". Several studies by Albanian and foreign authors have been published about him. We have a rich documentation for the artist Andrea Aleksì, which has been partially published.¹⁶ Born in our coastal city of Durrës in 1435, he emigrated at a very young age together with his father, Nikolla from Durrës. This city in the Medieval Ages had relatively good economic, political and social development, developed trade and navy. In the workshops of craftsmen and artists there was a solid production of goods, which is also confirmed by trade exchanges.¹⁷ He was

¹⁴ Prenushi, *Kontribut shqiptar*, 186.

¹⁵ A. Venturini, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, VIII, IV, Milano, 1915, 35-45.

¹⁶ Ramadan Sokoli, *Jeta dhe vepra e Andrea Aleksit nga Durrësi, skulptor dhe arkitekt i shek.XV*, "Nëntori", 1957, nr.4, 172-177.

¹⁷ Sokoli, *Jeta dhe vepra*, 172.

born at a time when, after the first attacks of the Ottoman invaders, the free Albanian principalities had fallen under the rule of the sultans and our coast, including Durrës, as well as that of Dalmatia, for the most part, were under the rule of the Republic of Venice. During this period, there was constant emigration of Albanians, especially to Dalmatia. The father, along with his son, Andrea, settled in Split, Dalmatia. They probably left to avoid the captivity in which the city of Durrës had fallen and the new dangers that awaited it from the Ottoman occupation. It is also possible that they made this trip with the real intention of learning the art of the sculptor and of the architect. His father, Nikola, placed his son as an apprentice in the workshop of the stonemason Amark Pjetër Troja from Pula in 1435. In this small workshop, he learned the art of stone carving for a period of eight years. Since childhood, Andrea had displayed a penchant for the arts. In the notary archive of Zadar, the text of this contract can be seen, signed by Nikolle Alekski and Mark Pjeter Troja.¹⁸ "In 1435 ... on the last day of March, in the presence of Mr. Pjetër Civiç and Domenik Sinkovic, merchants, and having as witnesses the citizens of Zadar, Andreas, the son of Nikola from Durrës, with Nikola's will and consent, promised Master Mark of the late Peter of Troy, that he will remain near him and voluntarily accept to live and reside (Andrea) as his (Mark) pupil, to learn the art of stonemasonry for the next eight years, and not to leave him, nor to steal from him, or to cause him any harm, but rather be good, faithful, just and submissive to him in all permissible and honest deeds. For this reason, for his part, master Mark promises to keep Andrea with him in his home, to feed him, to clothe him, and at the same time to teach him the art in question, and, at the end of eight years, to give him 6 gold ducats, his clothes and the main tools of the art in question, according to the custom for payment and rewards." From this document, it is clear that the Alekski family was poor, who could not properly afford the upbringing and art education for Andrea, and so he places him as an apprentice. Workshops in medieval times were job and trade places, there were also schools where crafts and arts were taught going through several stages up to the title of Master.¹⁹ In his apprenticeship, he acquired the habit of carving and sculpture, and general artistic culture. Those years became for him a real school, an incentive to enter the secrets of the profession mainly in sculpture and architecture. When the contract expired, he was 18 years old. Young, he set to work with the tools he had received from the master.²⁰ In those years, the famous sculptor and architect Gjergj Orsimi from Shibenik worked in the Dalmatian cities as an entrepreneur of artistic and architectural works. Andrea quickly made friends and collaborated with this skilled master, first as his assistant and later as collaborator. In a document from 1452, we see them as collaborators in the works of Baptister and the Duomo of Shibenik, while in the years 1452-1454, in the statues of the Lodge of Merchants (Loggia dei Mercanti) of Ancona in Italy. As early as 1448, Andrea Alekski had his own studio in Split; he also had his assistants, but he had to walk and take over architectural constructions and sculptural works of art in other cities. His life in Dalmatian cities connected him even more with the people of this province. Thus, at the beginning of 1448, he was in Shibenik, but when he learned that Split wanted to build the town hall, he returned and set to work with great zeal. Split declared Andrea Alekski an honorary citizen in 1451 and donated to him a plot of land to build the house. His first

¹⁸ Moikom Zeqo, *555 vjet më parë*, Rilindja, 24.01.1981, 12.

¹⁹ Sokoli, *Jeta dhe vepra*, 173.

²⁰ Sokoli, *Jeta dhe vepra*, 173.

works, made entirely by him or independently, are those of 1448 and later. Such are the chapel of St. Catherine in St. Domenik of Split and the chapel in the church of St. John the Baptist on the island of Arbe (Arbi), dating to 1454.²¹ The theme of these works is religious, as for many other Renaissance artists, but our artist created based on the beauties of earthly life, especially man, in his physical and moral beauties. Thus, it is clear that he has acquired the ideas of Renaissance art as his own. In the cult institutions of Split, only fragments of his works of art are preserved today. The paintings, sculptures, architecture of the great artists of the European Renaissance left deep impressions on him from his first contact with them. He researched the works of ancient authors, and discovered new values of this art that had not only aged through the centuries, but had given it a new splendour. Thus, he is perfected as an artist and representative of the era he was living. On the Dalmatian coast, there were many works of art from antiquity, such as corpses, arches, marble pillars, sarcophagi and other monuments, which he studied with great attention. From ancient art, he had the chance, in particular, to admire the great palace of Diocletian at Split, a monumental work of the fourth century AD; he was especially influenced by realism and the force of reflection of reality in ancient art. In 1456-1460, A. Aleksi worked the chapel in Zudenik, which is today a baptistery. Other important works that gave him an immortal name were created in shrines, villas, town squares, in the cemeteries of Rabbi, Traut (Trogir), Zara, Tremiti islands (Italy) in Ancona, Venice, in Braca, etc. In Braca he carved body pillars together with the master Gjergj Orsimi; in Rab, he worked in churches, while in Venice he decorated the house of the wealthy Venetian Ventura Maravilla and the town hall. From 1481 to 1466, he was in Italy, in Tuscany, where he became closely acquainted with well-known artists of the Italian Renaissance and with wonderful works of art of the time. Tuscany had become the cradle of Renaissance art. The Albanian artist's contact with these values of the new Renaissance art was a real school for him. Andrea Aleksi's name as an artist, sculptor and architect became more and more famous. Various cities on the Adriatic coast invited him for works of art. He received such an invitation from Trogir (Trau) in 1466. The nobleman of Trogir, Korolian Çipiko, who was the mentioned humanist of the Renaissance, had a special sympathy for the war of our people against the Ottoman invaders and he showed this in the work of his "De Petri Mocenici", published in Venice in 1478. This work speaks mainly of the heroic defence of Shkodra, but the sympathy of this humanist was addressed to all our people. This is how his generous behaviour towards Andrea Aleksi is understood, whom he valued as an Albanian and as an artist. He entrusted him with the construction and decoration with works of art of his palace in Trogir.²² In Trogir, Andrea Aleksi completed the Baptistery of Traut in 1467, which is considered his masterpiece. With pride, even in this masterpiece, he signs for his Albanian origin. One of the first documents that shows Andrea Aleksi being in Trogir, is also a contract signed for sculpture works on December 24, 1466. In 1468, the citizens of Traut, seeing the great changes that their city was undergoing with new works of Renaissance art, thought to also call the Italian artist Fiorentini, student and follower of Donatello, prominent artist of the Italian Renaissance. Both sculptors and architects, Aleksi and Fiorentini, worked together. The prominent Albanian and Tuscan artists, under an act signed on January

²¹ Petrit Imami, *Serbët dhe shqiptarët ndër shekuj*, vëllimi III, Beograd, 2017, 276.

²² Ramadan Sokoli, *Andrea Aleksi nga Durrësi*, "Zëri i Rinisë", 8.9.1962, nr.6, 45-53.

4, 1468, undertook to build and decorate the Duomo of Trogir and the chapel of St. Orsin there. The work was completed in 1472.²³ During this time the two artists, Nikola Giovanni Fiorentini and Andrea Alekski, did a series of works in the churches of Trogir, in the palace of Jak Torloni, in the tomb of Ivan Sobotic, built the portico of the municipal loggia of the city, etc. Their creations preserved, developed, and strengthened the secular spirit of Renaissance works even in compelling religious themes. They dealt with designs, construction applications, sculptures, etc. Although he worked in different cities, he did not forget Split. He took the Tuscan artist with him and together they completed the 1472 bell tower of Split. Their cooperation is fruitful even in the Tremit islands of Italy, etc. In the Tremiti islands, their main work is the facade and port of the church of St. Mary, in 1468-1471. There are many documents from Andreas' five-year period in Trogir, which are stored in the archives of this city, from the records of the notary Petrus Brockardi, kept for 1466-1473.²⁴ "Master Andrea Alekski the stonemason, resident in Trogir, was satisfied that he had received from the honourable man Mr. Alexander de Rubeis, Venetian, resident in Trogir, on behalf of his workshop, 151 books and 18 other art pieces, which make 5 ducats, given on behalf of the master Andrea by the noble citizen of Trogir, Mr. Korolian Ćipiko. The latter gave these from his side and these had to be taken by Andrea as a master for works in Trogir".²⁵ This is just one of the many contracts of documented financial relations that Andrea Alekski had with representatives of Trogir. As it results from the documentation, he was an entrepreneur and as an architect and sculptor he had multifaceted economic relations with the citizens of Trogir. Many documents of the archive of this city speak of the joint work he has done with the other Tuscan artist Nikola Fiorentini as well as of the cases when he was called as a witness in contracts and other agreements written by the notaries of this city.²⁶ In 1474, Andrea was about 50 years old. From this time, he leads rather a quiet life close to his family in Split. Here he works in the years 1474, 1477, 1491, 1494, 1503, etc. A document from 1488 (January 29) informs us that he was also in Venice, where he carried out the decorations of the gate at the church of St. Maria (S. Maria della Carita - today: Sagrestia della Salute). He is known as a skilled and valuable architect and sculptor, but various scholars have also noted some of his works in painting. In a church on the island of Arbe, sculptural works as well as some mural frescoes are attributed to him. Living for a long time in Split, the title "Honorary Citizen" he held, and the house he had built there, made him even more connected, at an old age, to this Dalmatian city. Thus, when in 1488 the city was threatened by a possible attack of the Ottoman armies, he was not spared, but together with other citizens and alongside them he worked for the defensive walls of the city and for other defensive works and was ready to fight against the invaders. Andrea Alekski worked tirelessly until close to the age of 80. His last work of art is considered the tomb he prepared for himself in 1503. This tomb is still preserved today in Split. The year of his death is accepted as 1505, but more precisely it should be marked 1504-1505. Numerous are the works he left. The best is the Baptistery of Traut (Trogir) in 1467. In Dalmatia and Italy there are preserved works of his, which are world-famous. Some scholars have dealt with his life and work. He was a multi-faceted artist; used chisel, compass,

²³ Sokoli, *Andrea Alekski*, 46.

²⁴ Gussepe Gelcich, *La Zeda e la dinastia dei Balsidi*, Split, 1899, 334-335.

²⁵ Sokoli, *Andrea Alekski*, 47.

²⁶ Sokoli, *Andrea Alekski*, 48.

paintbrush. The themes of his works were religious and secular, but their content was always humanistic, outside the influences of lifeless religious art and ascetic and mystical influence. This is where the value of this progressive artist lies. In Dalmatia, in the medieval centuries, many other well-known and unknown Albanians have made outstanding contributions with works of art. Albanian cities also had such works of art in the Medieval Ages, but the Ottoman invaders managed to destroy them for the most part. A foreign scholar wrote, "The Albanian with his intelligent nature is known for his very fine taste. He has decorated his cities with very precious artistic monuments."²⁷

Conclusion

Mark Bazaliti and Viktor Karpaçi created at a time when our country, after a heroic resistance, was going through the great drama of the Ottoman occupation, when our people, not enduring captivity, either made their way to the mountains or chose the difficult path of exile. In both cases, the Albanian resistance against the policy of assimilation and denationalization was strong in every aspect of life, along with the heavy burden of this active resistance. Albania, through its worthy representatives in science, art and culture, gave a valuable contribution to the European Renaissance movement. The best artisans were forced to flee forever to the Dalmatian coast, where they found fraternal hospitality and pursued their continuous and worthy work. Many families, who today call themselves Dalmatian families, originate from them. Many objects, which today are considered as works of Dalmatian art, are nothing but works of the creative genius of the Albanians". Andre Aleksii's name has remained immortal in these parts thanks to his artistic creativity. The contribution of these Arber artists remains undeniable and deeply ingrained in the artistic and spiritual memory of the Albanian people. Arberia and the Arberian people were further affirmed towards Europe by the culture and works of the aforementioned artists.

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²⁷ Shyqyri Nimani, Onufi dhe piktor të tjerë mesjetarë shqiptar, Prishtinë, 1987, 62-72.