

Cultural issues in the activity of Albanian league of Prizren

Mirela Lazimi

*Department of History; History – Philology Faculty
L. 4, Str. Egnatia, 1020; Durres, Albania*

Abstract

Albanian League of Prizren was a revolutionary patriotic organization, with a political and military character, which developed its activity in the years 1878 - 1881. League led the Albanian people for three years in the military, diplomatic and cultural aspect. During the years of League, Albanian National Movement appeared with the rapid development in political, philosophical and social thought, and in literary and scientific journalistic activity. Cultural Movement of this period was led by the same patriots, who also elaborated the political platform of League of Prizren, such as: Abdyl Frashëri, Pashko Vasa, Jani Vreto, Sami Frashëri, Thimi Mitko, etc., who, with their activity as ideologues, activists and organizers, occupy an important place in Albanian National Renaissance's history. Cultural Movement in the years of League of Prizren gave concept of homeland a new political content, not only as a provincial community of homeland, but also as a community of all native lands or as a sacred ideal, where all Albanians should strive for his protection. Cultural Movement further enriched the political and social culture by treating concept of Albanian autonomy from the position of Albanian national interests. It conceived the culture not as an ornament, but as a weapon to strengthen the national unity of Albanians. Renaissance ideologues of these years gave the Albanian cultural movement a secular content.

Keywords: Albanian National Renaissance, Albanian League of Prizren, Albanian Cultural Movement.

Introduction

Albanian League of Prizren was an ideological-political, cultural and educational, historical and contemporary continuation of the Albanian Renaissance, which can be considered as another stage of ideas and communication that has been made with Albanians and their demands. The creators of League, whether inside or outside, from North or South, from Kosovo and other Albanian lands had a strong connection; they had absorbed the ideology and cultural educational commitment of Albanian Renaissance. Due to the status that the League created for itself, which stemmed from its program, its activity and project affected all areas of social activity, being at the same time a political-military movement. Based on the cultural and historical platform of Renaissance, being not a random event, but an important development in economic, social, political, ideological and cultural processes, the League of Prizren showed that the struggle to liberate itself from the Ottoman occupation is an indicator of struggle for culture and national ideology.¹ Thus, the League raised at the national level the

¹ Alfred Uçi, *Albanian League of Prizren as a cultural factor in National Renaissance*, in National Study Conference for Albanian League of Prizren 1878-1881, Tiranë, 1979, p. 67.

cultural, ideological and social demands that the National Renaissance put forward in various forms and means of communication during the nineteenth century.

The League emerged as a political-military and diplomatic activist, but cultural issues occupy an important place in its activity, giving this movement a historical meaning. In the preamble of the League, which is one of the nodes of its program, is a reflection for national cultural development, which runs parallel to its autonomous territorial administrative program. In these documents assess the traditional national culture, which had to be preserved. While in the Memorandum of June 1878, among other things, regarding the context of cultural development, it is noted: "Albania can't join Greece; profound differences of nationality, language, customs and culture make union impossible. Albania will never tolerate Slavic occupation, whether it comes from the Bulgarian borders or from the Montenegro's borders. Albania will never be Turkish and this proved four centuries of war to preserve intact the national character, traditions and physiognomy. Its religion may have moved, in part, from orthodoxy to islam and from this to catholicism, but whether orthodox, muslim or catholic, Albanians never denied their homeland and, standing firmly loyal pride for their descent, they have always and everywhere remained Albanians."²

Despite the need to research and interpret cultural developments on their own specificity, can't be set separate and specific boundaries between culture and education, because they constitute each other in this context, just as no time intervals can be set between the National Renaissance and the League of Prizren.

At this time, the League of Prizren was an important concentration in creation and active activity, as a single national center of directing and organizing to the movement for national culture, which had activated the enlightened minds of the National Renaissance. Ideologue of the Renaissance, at the same time one of the political and cultural leaders of the League, Sami Frashëri, at this time wrote: "*The brotherhood of Albanians and the revival of Albania is work of the League, which has started work healthy and is always going well; the revival of Albanian language and the unification of its dialects, the enlightenment of our nation, which is a sacred work, is work of our society*"³

Being an important extension of previous developments, when the movement for national liberation began, with the emergence in the Balkans of countries such as Greece and Serbia, where was clearly seen their nationalist movement for hegemony in Balkans, the renaissance Albanians strongly turned to the culture movement, where the issue of the Albanian language remained the most important during the League of Prizren.⁴

The researcher of Albanian culture and literature, prof. Dh.S. Shuteriqi finds embodied the cultural cohesion of the League of Prizren in a constellation of writers, poets and people of elite of the time who comes from the (pre) time of the League of Prizren, but their contribution found them among its developments. In the constellation of well-known authors such as Vaso Pasha, Sami Frashëri, Naim Frashëri, Thimi Mitko, Jeronim De Rada, Anastas Kulloriti, Nikolla Naço, who are known as the most

² Stefanaq Pollo, Selami Pulaha, *Acts of Albanian National Renaissance, 1878-1912*, Tiranë, Institute of History, 1978, p. 24-25.

³ Social Science Bulletin, 1954, nr. 2, p. 115.

⁴ A. Uçi, *Albanian League of Prizren as a cultural factor in National Renaissance...*, p. 69.

important people of the call for Albanian writing and culture, he distinguishes an important creative and intellectual product of time, which has been mostly studied by scholars as an activity of national Renaissance, but which are essential products of time of the League of Prizren.

Shuteriqi brings back to attention the important publication of Thimi Mitko "Albanian Bee" (1878), the well-known conditional poem "My Albania" by Pashko Vasa, one of the hymn creations with many meanings of this time (1879-1880), the well-known work De Rada's "Unfortunate Skanderbeg" (1872-1884), Naim Frashëri's famous poem "Albania" (1880), which constitute one of the important funds of communication and culture to keep Albanians together, whether as need of time, whether as a tradition of strong connection with the homeland.⁵

As extremely important elements of communication at this time, prof. Shuteriqi mentions a considerable number of authors and literary product, which was natural and constituted a required and expected prelude to the whole renaissance "conquest", where come to mind Jubani, Kamarda, Dara i Riu, Kristoforidhi, De Martinoja, Serembe, who occupy a space of time until 1869, when for the first time the author tells us about Mitko as a poet, until that of 1881.

Thimi Mitko's poetry, although modest artistic and aesthetic values, it had an internal movement related to time, mainly the Albanian League, where he highlights the call to take up arms, but which doesn't forget to return Albanian Pelasgian past, time of Alexander, Pyrrhus and Skanderbeg through the poem "Encouragement on Albanians to write their language".⁶

The well-known poem "My Albania" is fully inspired by the events of this time, during the activity of League of Prizren, especially with the events that took place in Hot and Grudë, Plavë and Guci, Ulqin and some other place. Montenegro and the Great Powers insisted to seizing Albanian lands in north, according to decisions of the Berlin Congress. Pashko Vaso is one of the prominent ideologues of the National Renaissance, who was one of the most important leaders of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Albanian Nation, but also of the Society of Letters. He is also one of the intellectuals and patriots of time, who had a great contribution in the creation of the Albanian League. Erudite, politician, diplomat, poet, writer, brilliant polemicist with an extremely great western culture. All the while he wrote in Italian, French.

Prof. Shuteriqi, in relation to the poem "My Albania" writes: The elegiac tone of poem doesn't serve merely to present Albania as "miserable" and "tramples it with feet", to mourn the homeland in the dark days, in those critical and tragical moments, but the issue is to shake the hearts of many Albanians, for example of Shkodra bourgeoisie, to call on the national conscience at this moment when the people have snatched the rifles to defend their homeland ..."⁷ The poem "My Albania" is a strong real call and with a traditional historical argument of Albanians, with national character for nation and homeland. The pathetic but strong constellation "the religion

⁵ Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi, *On Albanian literature in Albanian League's years (1878-1881)*, in National Study Conference for Albanian League of Prizren 1878-1881, Tiranë, 1979, p. 173.

⁶ Ibid, p. 176.

⁷ Ibid, p. 178.

of the Albanian is Albanianess", is one of the lapidary attitudes of Pashko Vasa, but also of the time, that Albanians shouldn't be divided due to religious divisions, the homeland belonged to everyone.

In the vocals of the Albanian League couldn't be missing the voice of national poet, Naim Frashëri. The poem "Albania" was discovered in 1880 by Jani Vreto, which although it doesn't have the pathos of Pashko Vasa's poem, it has an important extension in the depth of time. Starting with a credo of national pride, he deals with the poignant themes of time; Pelasgian origins, the time of Alexander the Great, Skanderbeg, to return to the poignant theme of time "he addresses his compatriots's sensibility, who fought more for others than for themselves, that inner sighing expressed by Thimi Mitko and Pashko Vaso, which will be generally expressed by the poets of Renaissance, in the verses "Why do I love bravery, / when I don't care about Albania?"⁸

The atmosphere of poem shows that Naim Frashëri had full knowledge and was within the Albanian developments. And although not very consolidated in his profile as a poet of universal Albanian national proportions, as happened in later times, he gives the national message in this poem, a message which he will convey throughout the theme of his poetry until in 1900, when he died. During this time he will write a very poignant poem, with a pathos and an inner world expressions to a symbolic sacrifice, a poem which conveys in the historical context of the dramatic and tragic events of country, but which evoked a important cultural communication to all Albanians, who were required by the homeland before the massacre being committed by the Ottoman Empire, its neighbors and with the support of the Great Powers. This is "significance" of poem "Words of the Candle" (1881), a theme which would be expanded in the future in the poem of 1884 entitled "Pelasgians - Albanians". Naimi believed in poetry, its power, so the motives brought by his poetry at this time was a necessary cultural resource to build the true mission towards the Homeland.⁹

The League of Prizren's activity, all the time, was in attention of knowledge personalities of the time such as Pashko Vasa, Sami Frashëri, Hasan Tahsini, Koto Hoxhi, Jani Vreto and other prominent ideologues, through whom they reflected a contemporary and new concept of culture, as a new social ideal, the ideal of an independent and free Albania. Progress, civilization, enlightenment, the ability for active attitudes, creators of historical values, in which stands out the active tendency of Albanian nationalism, that is, the idea of Albanianism¹⁰, which raised to the most active possible level the anthem of Pashko Vasa "My Albania" considered as the Albanian "La Marseillaise" of the time, in addition to within this whole "block" of ideas, it was also a struggle for national culture in which the concept of independence, freedom and the progress of the Homeland were embodied.

Being a continuation of the ideas of the National Renaissance, with its ideologues, since Sami Frashëri and Pashko Vasa, Being a continuation of the ideas of the National Renaissance, with its ideologues, since Sami Frashëri and Pashko Vasa, League was an important act of emancipation of the nation, an act of self-knowledge of man and

⁸ Ibid, p. 180.

⁹ Dh. S. Shuteriqi, *On Albanian literature in Albanian League's years...*, p. 181.

¹⁰ A. Uçi, *Albanian League of Prizren as a cultural factor in National Renaissance...*, p. 72.

people, a national call and activity to recognize the Albanian world through a new and accepted notion by all, national notion, as never before.

Albanian League was permeated by great events in a very short time, almost four years. But, because of these important events, practically tangible by a large part of the Albanians, not as in the idealism of the Renaissance, it gave it real dimensions, even as a reflection of the time with a secular, civil, civilizing and supra-religious character, in the conditions of a presence of three different religious cultures of the country, where the struggle for homeland and nation stands out.¹¹

Despite the penetration of Albanian Renaissance ideas, at the time of League of Prizren there was a painful presence of cultural backwardness, so this moment was a call, an important opportunity where interest and study of Albanian national history and culture appeared, being based mainly on the cultural traditions of the past, interest and reflection that appeared since Jeronim De Rada, who published "Rhapsody of an Albanian poem" (1866), Mitko with "Albanian Bee" (1878), Zef Jubani with "Collection of folk songs with Albanian rhapsody" (1871), where there is an important respect for all these values that were very important in this time packed with activities and the need to communicate with the past and values of the Albanian people.¹²

League of Prizren gave all its activity, especially that related to culture, popular character, embodying quite well the concept of spokesperson of popular aspirations, which turned into a strong content of its patriotic character. This influenced in the issues of political culture, due to the activation of the masses in its political activity, since the participation in the war, the evaluation of Albanian's diplomatic activity, as a result of raising the awareness of the people, which appeared through the phenomenon and practice of national self-government. Regarding this important cultural and political phenomenon of the time, the researcher prof. Alfred Uçi writes in his announcement of the 100th anniversary of the League: "*The ideologues of the Albanian League emphasized that it was not an artificial creation of an elite, of a primacy, but had its roots in the people, it was a political organism of the people themselves*",¹³ and: "*Those who proclaimed the Albanian League, - wrote Pashko Vasa at the time, - were neither leaders nor influential people. They spoke on behalf of the Albania people, because they were the people themselves ... and after announcing it, they disappeared, re-entering the bosom of the people from whom they had come out.*"¹⁴

League of Prizren was the most important organization in history of the country, because it created a horizontal communication on all four sides of the country and in all segments of the population. Her prominent people turned into important values, into political figures, spokespersons of popular aspirations at the international level such as Abdyl Frashëri, Pashko Vasa, Ismail Qemali, Jani Vreto, Zija Prishtina, Sulejman Vokshi, Iljaz pashë Dibra, some of whom published important books and wills of thought, politics, cultural and educational knowledge, where New social concepts such as "equality", "freedom", "justice", "independence", "national

¹¹ Ibid, p. 75.

¹² Zija Xholi, *National Renaissance thinkers*, Tiranë, 8 Nëntori, 1987, p. 69.

¹³ A. Uçi, *Albanian League of Prizren as a cultural factor in National Renaissance...*, p. 79.

¹⁴ S. Pollo, S. Pulaha, *Acts of Albanian National Renaissance*, p. 67.

interest", "autonomy" etc. were launched.

At time of League of Prizren, the time gave full right to the platform of the Albanian National Renaissance, which had considered important, even fundamental in awakening the consciousness of a people the cultural development of country, which was involved for several centuries in a denationalization project of the Ottoman Empire, which had done the most damage to the country, related to culture and cultural identity of the Albanians.

References

- Pollo, Stefanaq. Pulaha, Selami. *Acts of Albanian National Renaissance, 1878-1912*, Tiranë, Institute of History, 1978.
- Social Science Bulletin, 1954, nr. 2.
- Shuteriqi, Dhimitër S. *On Albanian literature in Albanian League's years (1878-1881)*, in National Study Conference for Albanian League of Prizren 1878-1881, Tiranë, 1979.
- Uçi, Alfred. *Albanian League of Prizren as a cultural factor in National Renaissance*, in National Study Conference for Albanian League of Prizren 1878-1881, Tiranë, 1979.
- Xholi, Zija. *National Renaissance thinkers*, Tiranë, 8 Nëntori, 1987.