

Preface
Rusana Beyleri
Albanian Literature as a Mirror of the Nation's Spirit

Throughout the twentieth-century, the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula lived more beside one another than with one another. The twenty-first century will be decisively different. The nations of southeastern Europe, like elsewhere on the continent, are learning to live as a family in one European house, and the sufferings of the past will soon recede into memory.

At present, it must be said that these peoples, though neighbours for centuries, do not know one and other well. It is perhaps symbolic that, until recently, in order to fly from one Balkan capital to another, one had to change aircraft in Vienna, Rome or Zurich.

Trade and commerce are of course great motors of rapprochement, but so is cultural exchange. Trade is certainly on the rise, but it cannot be said that much cultural exchange has taken place within the Balkans. Let us hope that things will change. Languages, admittedly, do form a seemingly invincible barrier and can prevent peoples from getting to know one another. Cultural exchange can therefore only take place with translation, with the help of translators who possess the divine gift of making people from various language groups aware that they are not so different from one another after all.

The Albanians have long suffered from political and cultural isolation, more so than other Balkan peoples. This is not because they did not want contact or because are too small a linguistic community - after all, there are six or seven million individuals speaking Albanian in the Balkans - but rather because their history was characterized by underdevelopment and by politically motivated attempts to keep them in a cosmos of their own. Translators from the Albanian therefore play an extremely important role in spreading an accurate image of Albania and the Albanians in the outside world and in helping to make the country better understood.

I note with some surprise that more Albanian literature has been translated into Bulgarian recently than into any other Balkan language, indeed in the last decade, probably more has been translated into Bulgarian than into all other Balkan languages combined. This is due to a dedicated group of Bulgarian-language translators and scholars who, often with great personal sacrifice, and certainly not much financial reward, are striving to make the best of Albanian culture known.

In view of the many existing translations that have recently appeared in books, periodicals and in particular on the internet (especially www.albanian.dir.bg), the time has come for a reliable, scholarly study of Albanian literature, which has been lacking up to now in Bulgarian. Rusana Beyleri, who is a major figure of Albanian studies, not only in Bulgaria itself but in the Balkans in general, offers readers here an excellent overview of Albanian literature, both written and oral, that will enable them to put their perhaps rudimentary knowledge of the subject into proper perspective. It is the type of work I love, a book full of concrete details and accurate information, and I can recommend to anyone who is interested in learning more about Albanian culture and literary traditions.

Robert Elsie
The Hague, Holland
November 2008

[Preface. in: Rusana Beyleri, *Albanskata literature - kato ogledalo na narodnata duševnost* (Balkani, Sofia 2009), p. 222-223]