

Azem Shkreli
I know a word of stone. Poems
[*Ich weiß ein Wort von Stein. Gedichte*].
Hans-Joachim Lanksch, transl.
Klagenfurt. Wieser. 1993. 105 pages

The town of Klagenfurt in southern Austria is regarded by many western travellers as the gateway to the Balkans, the last outpost of civilization before express trains slow to a snail's pace and lug intrepid passengers over into Europe's savage southeast. It is perhaps no coincidence that a small publishing company here has been doing its utmost to present Balkan literature and culture to the Central European public (and receiving the occasional letter bomb for its efforts). After three collections by Ali Podrimja, the Wieser Press has now published the volume 'I know a word of stone' by his fellow Kosovo Albanian poet, Azem Shkreli.

Like Podrimja, Azem Shkreli (b. 1938) is from western Kosovo, born in the shadow of Albania's Dukagjin highlands, in a region which the Serbs contrivingly refer to as Metohija. Shkreli was first introduced to the international public as a major contributor to the anthology *Roads lead only one way. A survey of modern poetry from Kosova*, Prishtinë 1988, and subsequently by his collection *The call of the owl*, Prishtinë 1989, English translations in both cases by John Hodgson. The present German-language edition of his works is a compilation of seventy-nine poems written and published from 1960 to 1993. The range of this volume is sufficient both to savour the particular style of the poet and to sense something of his lyric development over the last three decades. In his mature works, Azem Shkreli remains a writer of elliptical, syllabic solitude, - a pensive, lone shepherd in the rocky highlands of his native land.

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the volume 'I know a word of stone' should conclude with a pilgrimage, undertaken in March 1993, to the Bavarian grave of exiled Albanian poet Martin Camaj (1925-1992). Here Azem Shkreli muses at the headstone of the master, which was offered him posthumously by the inhabitants of his native Dukagjin mountains:

*"For stones and poets must be
Scattered on earth, so be this one too belonging to us,
We bear no grief, yet never in vain
Is pain felt at Martin's stone."*

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