

**International Journal of Albanian Studies.** Volume 1, Issue 1. Fall 1997. New York. ISBN 0-9622141-8-3. 134 pp.

Since the suspension of *Studia Albanica* (Tirana 1964-1990) and *Recherches Albanologiques* (Prishtina ca. 1984-1986), and the demise of the short-lived periodical *Albanica, a quarterly journal of Albanological research and criticism* (Washington 1990-1992), of which only three issues ever appeared, there has been no academic periodical in a Western language devoted exclusively to Albanian studies. This is particularly distressing now that Albania and the Albanians are making their presence felt in Europe and the world as never before.

One result of the opening of Albania has been that, for the first time, talented young Albanians are being given a chance to study abroad and to acquire specialized training and the sound education which their people were so long denied. One now finds Albanian students doing masters and doctoral degrees in New York, Boston, Moscow, Rome, Istanbul, Cairo and many other surprisingly exotic venues. Among the initial and laudable achievements of this first generation of post-graduate students is the present *International Journal of Albanian Studies*, the first and, for the moment, only scholarly journal devoted entirely to Albanian affairs. IJAS is also the first Albanological periodical to be available on paper and online.

Chief editor Shinasi A. Rama, scholar at the Department of Political Science of Columbia University, explains the reasons which led him and his colleagues to found the present periodical in his introductory editorial *Why a new journal on Albanian issues?* (p. 3-4). The journal is designed among other things "to develop and disseminate scholarly research on topics that contribute to a better understanding of Albanian political, social and cultural affairs from the remote past to the present." As Rama rightly stresses, there is an enormous gap between Western perceptions and evaluations of this people and how the Albanians perceive themselves. The periodical sees itself as a "non-partisan and non-sectarian tribune for a fruitful exchange of ideas for the community of scholars of Albanian issues," and "is open to articles and research notes from the fields of politics, history, economy, sociology, literature, anthropology and geography."

The first issue of IJAS contains six articles and four book reviews. The first of the articles, *Standard Albanian and the Gheg Renaissance, a sociolinguistic perspective* (p. 5-20) by Ardian Vehbiu, surveys the recent linguistic conflict over standard literary Albanian (*gjuha letrare*), the 'official' form of Albanian which was agreed upon, or imposed as some might say, at the Tirana Orthography Congress in late November 1972. This standardized form of the language, based to about eighty per cent on the southern Tosk dialect, has been challenged in recent years by scholars and writers from the north, in particular from the Gheg intellectual stronghold of Shkodër. Albanian scholar Vehbiu, who studied in Rome and has taught at the Oriental Institute of the University of Naples, already presented an Italian-language paper on the language controversy in the aforementioned *Albanica* (Vol. 3-4, 1992, p. 165-170).

The eminent Rexhep Qosja (b. 1936) is a member of the Kosova Academy of Arts and Sciences and is Director of the Albanological Institute in Prishtina (the building of which has been confiscated and is still occupied by the Serbian authorities). His article, *The Albanian problem and/in the Serb political programs during 1937-1944* (p. 21-38), gives ample proof that ethnic cleansing is by no means a recent phenomenon, but rather that it has been a cornerstone of Serbian policies from the very start. The infamous memoranda of Bosnian Serb scholar Vaso Cubrilovic (1897-1990), member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, for the expulsion and annihilation of the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia read like watered down versions of the minutes of the Wannsee Conference of 1942 on the

extermination of the European Jews. Also of note is the 1939 *Draft on Albania* by Bosnian Serb writer and Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andric (1892-1975) written during his years at the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Qosja brings these documents to light and puts them in their proper perspective, i.e. in the context of the will of the people of Kosovo for freedom and self-determination.

In *Reflections on the current situation of Albanian law and the challenges for the next century* (p. 39-54), Agron Alibali, a former employee of the Albanian Ministry of Justice and now a graduate of Boston University Law School, suggests that in order to have a viable democratic justice system, the Albanian government must take measures to introduce laws that take into account the psychological makeup of the Albanians.

Isa Blumi, in his lucid article on *The question of identity, diplomacy and Albanians in Macedonia - Has the rain come?* (p. 55-68), concentrates on the situation of the 25-35% Albanian minority in the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). It is evident from the article that the apartheid situation of this substantial ethnic group can only lead to further conflict in an already tense region.

In *Albania and the United Nations: two case studies from a diplomatic history perspective* (p. 69-81), Giovanni Armillotta, editor-in-chief of *Metodo*, an Italian-language journal of international relations, reviews the role played and the strategies pursued by Communist Albania at the United Nations during the 1960s and 1970s.

Finally, editor Shinasi Rama devotes a paper to the subject of *Transition, elite fragmentation and the parliamentary elections of June 29, 1997 in Albania* (p. 82-125). The victory of the Socialist Party after half a decade of rule under Sali Berisha, which culminated in disaster and in the virtual disintegration of the country in March 1997, marks a new phase in Albania's political development. To what extent the open revolt against Berisha in southern Albania can actually be termed a "Communist uprising" or "Communist revolution" (p. 93) should perhaps be the object of further consideration and analysis by the author. Time will tell.

The main section of the journal is followed by reviews of the following publications, all of sociopolitical significance: *Shekulli 21: mendime dhe opinione* [The 21st century: thoughts and opinions], New York 1996, published by Dino Asanaj (reviewed by Sokol R. Muja, p. 126-127); *La scoperta dell'Albania* [The discovery of Albania], Milan 1996, by Ardian Vehbiu and Rando Devole (reviewed by Nereida Katrini-Rama, p. 128-129); *Çështja shqiptare - historia dhe politika* [The Albanian question: history and politics], Prishtina 1994, by Rexhep Qosja (reviewed by Erkanda Bujari, p. 129-131); and the controversial *Realitete shqiptaro-amerikane* [Albanian-American realities], Tirana 1997, by Tirana journalist Mero Baze (reviewed by Mirdit Toska, p. 132-134), a book which has since been published in an English-language version: *Albanian-American realities* (Koha, Tirana 1997).

From the first issue of the *International journal of Albanian studies*, it is evident that the periodical has a clear profile, concentrating for the moment at least on sociopolitical studies and current affairs, and will be in a position to contribute to the objectives it has set out to achieve. It is to be hoped that IJAS will be able to maintain a good scholarly level and will not decay into party politics and superfluous polemics on the pet peeves of its editors, as most Albanian periodicals tend to do. One wishes it, at any rate, a longer lifespan than the average Albanian journal.

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