

Alexandre Zotos.

Anthologie de la poésie albanaise.

Chambéry. La Polygraphe, Edition Comp'Act. 1998. 388 pp. ISBN 2-87661-162-7. 170 FRF.

After years of gathering the exotic blossoms of Albanian verse and translating them into a more widely understood idiom, Alexandre Zotos, professor at the University of Saint-Etienne, now presents us with what is one of the most comprehensive and enjoyable anthologies of Albanian poetry to have appeared in any language (including Albanian) up to the present day.

Zotos, among France's leading translators from the Albanian, has published prose versions of Ismail Kadare and Dritëro Agolli, as well as a number of anthologies of Albanian literature, including *Anthologie de la prose albanaise*, Paris 1984 (see WLT 59:3 p. 472), *La poésie albanaise, Les cahiers de poésie-rencontres 26*, Lyons 1989, and *Voix albanaïses dans la nuit, Aires 13*, Saint Etienne 1991. The present collection would seem, however, to be the crowning achievement of his many years of dedication to an as yet underestimated European culture.

In its nine chapters, the *Anthologie de la poésie albanaise* offers an extremely wide spectrum of Albanian verse from the beginnings to the present day, including an introductory text to each section and author. The first chapter, *Au commencement était le peuple*, is devoted exclusively to oral verse (41 poems) from Albania, Kosovo, southern Italy and Greece, including the heroic Songs of the Frontier Warriors (*këngë kreshnikesh*), historical and legendary verse, poems of conscription and emigration, of love and marriage, popular ballads on birth and funerary chants.

Chapter two, *Les pères fondateurs*, provides a good selection of the early Catholic authors of the 17th and 18th centuries: Pjetër Budi, Pjetër Bogdani, Nikollë Brankati, Nikollë Filja, Nikollë Keta and Jul Variboba. Chapter three, *La tradition islamique*, focuses on the so-called Aljamiado literature of the *Bejtexhinj*, whose verse in Arabic script infused with Oriental tradition is now little appreciated in Albania: Nezim Frakulla, Hasan Zyko Kamberi, Zenel Bastari and Muhamet Kyçyku. More within the mainstream of the Albanian tradition are the 19th century writers of *La Renaissance nationale* in chapter four: Jeronim De Rada, Gavril Dara i Riu, Zef Serembe and of course Naim Frashëri, whom most Albanians regard as their 'national poet.' Early twentieth-century verse *Dans les affres de l'indépendance* is represented in chapter five by the classic poets: Filip Shiroka, Andon Zako-Çajupi, Ndre Mjedja, Gjergj Fishta, Asdreni and Fan Noli, and in chapter six in *La vague des années trente* by Ali Asllani, Lasgush Poradeci, Migjeni, Petro Marko, Shevqet Musaraj and Veli Stafa.

What could be called modern Albanian verse is presented in chapter seven *Vers l'Albanie nouvelle* with the works of the long persecuted Dhora Leka, of Aleks Çaçi, the late Arshi Pipa, Mark Gurakuqi and Lllazar Siliqi, and in chapter eight *Les miraculés du communisme*, by the classic writers of the communist period, among whom some political prisoners: Fatos Arapi, Dritëro Agolli, Dhori Qiriazi, Ismail Kadare, Jorgo Bllaci, Frederik Rreshpja, Adem Istrefi, Ndoc Gjetja, Ndoc Papeleka, Xhevahir Spahiu, Natasha Lako, Bardhyl Londo, Moikom Zeqo, Rudolf Marku, Visar Zhiti, Agim Isaku, Ilirian Zhupa, Besnik Mustafaj and Mimoza Ahmeti.

Equally impressive is the selection offered in chapter nine, *D'au-delà les frontières*, of contemporary Albanian verse production from outside Albania itself: the exiled Martin Camaj, Vorea Ujko, Vangjel Leka, Zef Skirò di Maxho, Kate Xukaro, and the delightful poets of Kosovo and Macedonia: Esat Mekuli, Enver Gjergjeku, Murat Isaku, Abdylaziz Islami, Din Mehmeti, Fahredin Gunga, Azem Shkreli, Rrahman Dedaj, Ali Podrimja, Resul Shabani, Agim Vinca, Eqrem Basha, Edi Shukriu, Sabri Hamiti, Nehas Sopaj, Shazim Mehmeti, Shkëlzen Halimi and Daut Dauti.

What is particularly notable in an anthology of this scope is that the poets are not, as is often the case, represented by one or two poems, but by a more substantial number (average of five), which enables the reader to appreciate the particular style of each writer somewhat better. Albanian poetry is diverse, not only in its historical and geographical development (Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, southern Italy and the diaspora), but also in the preoccupations and concerns of its contemporary writers. This innate diversity has now become eminently visible, palatable and savourous in Zotos' new representative anthology.

Robert Elsie
Olzheim / Eifel, Germany