

Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (ed.), *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*. London: Hurst & Company / Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002. Pp. xvii + 238. GBP 35.00 (hbk); 16.50 (pbk). ISBNs 1-85065-571-5, 1-85065-572-3, 0-253-34189-2, and 0-253-21570-6.

The question of identity is not simply an abstract topic for scholarly exchange but a primordial feature in and basic tool for understanding the six million Albanians in the southern Balkans. The primitive Stalinist regime which held sway in the Republic of Albania from 1944 to 1991 deleted from the hearts and minds of the population most forms of traditional identity and identification (social, cultural, religious, professional, etc.) in an attempt to create one great myth, that of the “new man” of pure socialist convictions. The attempt of course failed and when the long years of dictatorship, fear and oppression were over, the Albanian population found itself completely disoriented, left in a void which was soon to be filled by unprecedented social chaos. The Albanians compare their experience in the early 1990s to that of a hound unchained after years of confinement. When unleashed, the hound runs and runs, giving no thought to where it is going or what it is doing. It just runs.

Albanian Identities is a compilation of 19 papers read at and submitted to a conference on *The Role of Myth in History and Development in Albania* held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in London in June 1999. The main purpose of the conference was to deconstruct prevalent political or historiographic Albanian myths by analysing the political context of myth creation, the political use and control of myths and their social implications. The practical framework for the volume is laid by co-editor Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers. The theoretical background is set forth by George Schöpflin in *The Nature of Myth: Some Theoretical Aspects* (p. 26-30). The volume is thereafter divided into five main sections according to the approaches taken by the authors in question.

Albanian Identities thus covers a wide range of topics and should be of interest to an equally wide range of readers, from those investigating the sad story of contemporary Albanian party politics, to sociologists trying to fathom the collective psychology of the Albanians and what makes them Albanian, and historians and cultural historians of Albania and the Balkans. A parallel Albanian-language edition of these papers was published by Fatos Lubonja in his critical cultural periodical *Përpyekja* (Endeavour) 15-16, 1999, and is said to have provoked some controversy. Introspection and reflection are, at any rate, desperately needed in contemporary Albanian society after all the running and running.

Robert Elsie
Albanian Literature

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