


De Rada's Position in the Albanian Literature			Literature
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Abstract			
<p>The Arberesh literature affirmed itself as an artistic literature through the works of Jeronim de Rada. He was a renowned versatile figure, a figure of the poet, folklorist, publicist, philologist, esthetician, teacher... De Rada was an Arberesh from Calabria whose college education helped him to build up his personality of the poet, because it introduced him to the antique and modern literature, as well as the enlightenment ideas, by igniting his first scorches of his talent. De Rada was appreciated as the founder of the Arberesh literature (as well as a co-founder of the Albanian Renaissance Literature), as a patriot, rather than a great poet with a high aesthetic level (especially during the half-century dictatorship). De Rada should be appreciated in terms of the literacy (aesthetic value, originality). He was a poet of European values, implying that the Albanian literature is as such as well.</p>			

Introduction

This poet was one of the founders of our national artistic literature and furthermore a poet who brought this literature at a European level.¹ His originality can most clearly be seen in his masterpiece “Këngët e Milosaos” (“Milosao’s songs”), which is peculiar for its internal harmony and equilibrium as well as for its lyrical-epical romantic and modern character. This implies that De rada was an original romanticist at a national and international level, the latter being due to the fact that he relied on the creative manner on the Albanian popular poetry; he was not limited to the patriotic spirit and the idealism of Scanderbeg’s epics. His works include topics of love and death. De Rada employs a courageous and extraordinary fantasy that matches with a peculiar figurativeness, from apparently usual figures to those more complicated and rarer.

De Rada is a deeply lyrical poet; however, he was also a master in creating characters, especially those of women. His value and position in the Albanian literature cover many aspects, such as the artistic, literary, aesthetic, patriotic, scientific and historical aspects. He studied that Arberesh folklore in order to reveal the spirit of his nation by finding and examining the elements of the old Albanian tradition. He also studied the mythology of his own country by contributing in this specific field as well. As a lawyer, De Rada strived for regulating the courts of law and judicial norms in the new state.²

In a newspaper in Naples, he published several linguistic notes, trying to explain the names of gods from the Greek mythology through the Albanian language, whereas motivated by Kamarda, whom he met in 1845, the poet returns to the collection of the Arberesh folklore, which he had initially started in the early 1930s.³

In the second phase of the National Renaissance and exactly in the 1930s, the cult of the national flag of Scanderbeg would give a new spirit to the great Renaissance activist amongst the Italian Arberesh. The flag with the eagle on a red background, according to De Rada (1877), was a noble flag, being the perfect match for our country.⁴

¹ Klara Kodra, *Rrënjet e lisit*, Uegen, Tiranë, 2011, f. 88.

² Mahmud Hysa, *Veprimtaria publicistike e De Radës në revistën “Fiamuri arbë-rit”*, në: *Studime dhe kritikë letrare*, Shtypshkronja e Re, Tiranë, 1983, f. 113.

³ *Historia e letërsisë shqiptare*, vep. e cit., f. 250.

⁴ Muhamet Pirraku, *Transformimi i kultit të Shqiponjës nga totemi në simbol kom-bëtar shqiptar*, në: *Studimi etnografik i ndryshimeve bashkëkohore në kulturën popullore shqiptare*, materiale nga sesioni shkencor i mbajtur në Prishtinë më 7 dhe 8 dhjetor 1989, Prishtinë, 1990, f. 81-83. *Shih: Matteo Mandalà, *Studime filologjike për letërsinë romantike arbëreshe*, Naimi, Tiranë, 2012.

In addition, in the letter dated on January 8 1869, Elena Gjika wrote to De Rada that both would that long so as to be able to post Scanderbeg's flag at the top of Rozafa's towers, which she called the Albanian Acropolis.⁵

Based on the many letters that she wrote to the great poet, we can clearly see that E. Gjika had undergone a long itinerary and stopped at several important European and Asian centers at that time, sightseeing libraries, cultural and scientific centers, etc. where she believed she could find important documents related to the Albanian cause. In one of her letters, she notifies De Rada about the many places she had been to as well as the precious product she had found. You will see what amount of unknown documents I have discovered in Venice, Berlin, and Constantinople. It is about time our history was revealed, after having been dug deep into the soil by our enemies.⁶

In 1878, De Rada raised his voice in support of the Prizren League, by strongly protesting against the invasion of the territorial integrity of Albania.⁷ Since then, this young man began writing poems with *terzarimas* in Italian, but with an Albanian subject, including the *Odiseja* (1832) which would be published years later, i.e. in 1845. After 1860, De Rada began to publish a series of works with aesthetic, linguistic, political and folkloristic character, putting the emphasis on the Albanian cause, the recognition of ancient traditions of our nation and the development of culture in Albanian language: "Parimet e estetikës" (1861), "Lashtësia e kombitshqiptar" (1864), "Rapsoditënjëpoemearbëreshe" (1866). This was the time when De Rada established close relationships with the national movement in Albania, was interested in the current developments, exchanged letters with different Albanian compatriots and other friends of Albania. The name of the poet exceeds the boundaries of the Arberesh world as well as the Italian literary boundaries; he became famous in the European cultural and scientific circles, and was appreciated by renowned figures of the time, such as Dora D'Istria, the German philologists T. Stier, G. Majer, E. Buholc, Italian historians and scholars such as Ç. Kantuand N. Tomazeo, the French balkanologist, A. Dozon, etc.⁸

The great Arberesh poet, along with the majority of our Renaissance writers and activists, gave a great contribution in so many fields and his works played a crucial role in the patriotic and cultural movement at that time. There are three works which excelled in his rich poetic creation: "Këngët e Milosaos", "Skanderbekuipafan" and "Pasqyrë e jetës njerëzore". The poem "Këngët e Milosaos" is De Rada's first creation and the first work in our literature with great artistic values, taking an important position in the Albanian literary works.

The idea of the tragic destiny of the country, characteristic of de Rada's creations, is even more emphasized there. The essence of this work is the motif of the tragic passion of two youngsters who were prevented by the environment and the existing circumstances from not being happy and enjoy love and life. It is a motif used in the romantic and sentimentalist European literature, but the author in question just added some more freshness and originality to it.⁹

De Rada calls it a lyrical double, where two pieces of concern that determined the two major themes in the author's creativeness converge. The themes are related to the obstacles that social prejudices may cause to love and the liberation of the country from its occupiers. Both themes are responded to by two lines of conflict.

⁵ Muhamet Pirraku, *Transformimi i kultit të Shqiponjës nga totemi në simbol kom-bëtar shqiptar*, vep. e cit., f. 82-83.

⁶ Roland Zisi, *Elena Gjika dhe kultura shqiptare*, Konferenca VI Shkencore Ndër-kombëtare e Katedrës së Gjuhës dhe Letërsisë Shqipe, UEJL, Tetovë, Prishtinë, 2011, f.125.

⁷ Muhamet Pirraku, *Transformimi i kultit të Shqiponjës nga totemi në simbol kom-bëtar shqiptar*, vep. e cit., f. 252.

⁸ Po aty, f. 251.

⁹ Muhamet Pirraku, *Transformimi i kultit të Shqiponjës nga totemi në simbol kom-bëtar shqiptar*, vep. e cit., f. 255.

The first conflict is more evident and that is the one between the love of some youngsters and stratum and patriarchal prejudices of people that prevent them from getting married. The second line of the poem consists of the psychological conflict between feelings and duty, between Milosao's love for Rina and the love for his fatherland. This conflict extends along the whole subject of this work and determines the character's constant and permanent hesitations. The feeling of duty wins at first with the feeling of Milosao from the village to war, but later he indulges into family happiness and after losing his wife he still finds the strength to get engaged in another battle and sacrifice his life.

In the resolution of both conflicts there is some artificiality. The resolution of the first conflict, deriving from the unequal social position between Rina and Milosao emerges after a devastating earthquake destroys the city of Shkodra and impoverishes Milosao; the second conflict is ended with Rina's death. This event serves just as an excuse to manifest the feeling of patriotism, which had always been alive inside Milosao's soul. Through these two conflicts, de Rada expresses two ideas that emerge from his democratic and patriotic convictions. The main idea, regardless of how evident and obvious it may be, flows throughout the whole poem as an underground current and it is the patriotic idea we are referring to in this case.¹⁰ De Rada's work "Milosao" is overwhelmed by the metaphoric code, whose features include the following:

- The lack of clear distinction between the subject and the object
- The emphasis of their common emotional intercession
- The emphasis of the direct natural meaning of words
- The focus on the creator of the experience and past collective knowledge
- The lack of intuitive narration, etc.¹¹

"Këngët e SerafinaTopisë" ("SerafinaTopia's songs") take us back to the blurred romantic world in Albania in the middle of the fifteenth century. SerafinaTopia, the daughter of Arta, and BozdarStresa come from two rivaling families at the time - an Albanian version of the Romeo and Juliet, whose love would remain unfulfilled. The third greatest work of De Rada was "Skëndërbeupafat" ("Unfortunate Scanderbeg") which he himself considered it to be his masterpiece. Again, this series of romantic ballads was published in several turns and the picture the poet's spiritual state at different times.¹²

Another equally important work of de Rada is "Parimetëestetikës" ("Principles of aesthetics") which is not absolutely subordinate compared to his other works based on both aesthetic-philosophical ideas and linguistic elements. It contains the Arberesh's preoccupations and concerns; their hearts and minds worked for not forgetting their *Lost Fatherland* and their eyes were turned towards the Adriatic Sea, directing to Albania – the country of their forefathers. "Parimetëestetikës" ("Principles of aesthetics") is mainly an aesthetic treaty, but one can clearly see in it that the author is in search of philosophical, aesthetic, sociological, historical, ethical, cultural, political and religious arguments and facts in favor of the platform of national renaissance in Albania. Everywhere in this book, the target of dealing with essential problems in life, of the existence of the Arberesh community and the history of the Albanian nation and its future perspectives prevails.¹³ On the other hand, De Rada's aesthetic principles in the above-mentioned work represent a synthesis of the experiences from global aesthetic history and literature, of the ancient Greek-Roman classical aesthetics, alienated and enriched with

¹⁰ Po aty, f. 258.

¹¹ Persida Asllani, Kodet e ligjëritit të Milosaut, në: Letërsia si e tillë, Toena, Ti-ranë, 1996, f. 207-208.

¹² Robert Elsie, Historia e letërsisë shqiptare, Dukagjini, Pejë, 2001, f. 124.

¹³ Alfred Uçi, Jeronim de Rada-lëvruet i estetikës teorike, në: Studime filologjike nr. 3-4, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe Letërsisë, Tiranë, 2003, f. 7.

spiritual tendencies through medieval and renaissance periods, by absorbing the aesthetic imaginations related to French classicism and romanticism.¹⁴

Some Conclusions

De Rada is the founder of the new Arberesh literature. His works were of great importance for the development of the overall Albanian literature. De Rada is distinguished for his contribution in the liberation of Albania; he evoked the glorious times of Scanderbeg and thus left traces in the Albanian literature by reviving in the Albanian literature a tradition which was European as much as it was Albanian. De Rada's works maintain their general peculiarities that espy the romanticist literature; however, concrete historical conditions in which they flourished, gave them more original features. De Rada remains the greatest figure of the Arberesh literature of the 19th century and one of the most important figures of the Albanian art of words and the Albanian culture in general. De Rada emphasizes the origins of the Albanian and the vicar's heritage, in order to construct the patriot's figure with Christian moral. But, he immediately self-portrays by saying: "I never followed other people's minds".¹⁵ The great poet and explorer of the Albanian Renaissance, De Rada, would glorify the war of Scanderbeg's contemporaries through his work "Këngët e Milosaos" (1836). The research on De Rada's works takes a new dimension because, on one hand, they carry the limitations and values of different historical eras when they were achieved, and on the other hand, they become important elements in establishing the communication between the author and his readers. Finally, De Rada should be appreciated and valued from the perspective of literacy (aesthetic values and originality). He was a poet of European and global dimensions giving enough weight to the Albanian literature in general and making it part of the European literary circles.

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¹⁴ Po aty, f. 8.

¹⁵ Sabri Hamiti, Letërsia autobiografike, në: Albanizma, Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, Botime të Veçanta CIII, Seksioni i Gjuhësisë dhe i Letërsisë, Libri 42, Prishtinë, 2009, f.79