

# FRANCISCAN CONTRIBUTION IN THE ALBANIAN CULTURE AND EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

The Franciscan Seminary foundation in Shkodër had a great influence in the cultural and educational development of Albania, for the historical and cultural period in which they developed their activity. I want to present here the scientific activity of some of the icons of this school that have left precious trace on the Albanian culture and education. Among many others as the backbone of the province of the Franciscans, but also of education, Albanian culture and science, I would mention Father J. Rrota as grammarian, Father Gj. Fishta as Leader of the Franciscan Literary, Bishop V. Prennushi as the poet of his city, Father Sh. K. Gjeçovi as historiographer, Father D. Kurti as folclorist and translator from Latin to Albanian, Father P. Margjokaj, Father M. Sirdani as historians, Father A. Marlaskaj, Father Gj. Shllaku and Father A. Harapi as philosophers, Father M. Gjoka, F. Mazreku as musicians and songwriters, Father L. Kabashi as professor of visual Arts. The research and publishing activity of the Franciscans embraces a period of nearly half a century, during which they have carried out their duties as clericals, as real scientists and as native language teachers. The description and the reflection of their values brings the origins of literature, art, philosophy and the Albanian science of the first half of the twentieth century, into the eye of the young generation, to meet the portrait of that cultural period about the biography of the Albanian nation.

**Keywords:** *Franciscan, Albanian, contribution, culture, education*

## **Preface**

The Franciscan Seminary foundation in Shkodër had a great influence in the cultural and educational development of Albania, for the historical and cultural period in which friars developed their activity. Describing patriotic, scientific and literary contribution, of Franciscan friars during very difficult years for our people, I wanted to represent in this paper according to the description method the scientific activity to some of the icons of this school that made their mark in Albanian culture and education. The Franciscan foundation dates back from 14 July 1882 firstly in Troshan and then in Shkodër, but when the communists took over, began the sufferings and persecution of all clerics, firstly the Catholic Church in Albania. When the persecutions began, the Albanian province physically ceases to exist until in 1992 when democratic processes began, the Franciscan Friars activity resumed. Those who survived the cruelty of the anti-national communist system, the devastated assembly gathered in Shkodër and their church was restored in Arra e Madhe. (Mirdita, 1998, pg. 217, 270-271). The activity of Franciscan friars in the development of educational institutions in Albania dates back from 1830 until 1855 when there were private schools in Shkodër. The Bishop of Shkodra in 1855, Gjon Topiqi entrusts school teaching to Franciscan Friars, who in two rooms in Gjuhadol neighborhood, that previously the people of Shkodra gave to them, began to teach. In 1875 was signed an agreement between Rome and the Bishops of Shkodra, through which the friars take a new residential building in 1884 and opened a college in Shkodra. Up to 1902, teaching is stated in Italian, but with the appointment of Gjergj Fishta as the headmaster of the school, Italian language was removed and replaced by the Albanian language. School programs were compiled by the national spirit and interest. It is worth mentioning that on 24 March 1912 the Minister of Internal Affairs of Turkey, during his visit in Albania praised the school for the work performed. (Gurakuqi, 1928, pg.92-95). In civil schools and in Franciscan Seminary were created offshoots of the Albanian intellectual creativity without which Albanian culture, literature, art, philosophy and science cannot be understood for that period of cultural history.

Among the most prominent is the grammarian father **Justin Rrota**, author of many works, the value of which is to this day impassable. (Kastrati, SF 2/1964, pg. 204-206). This personality of Albanian literature, was born in Shkodra, and was a distinguished scholar and promoter of the Albanian language and studies. His scientific activity embraces a period nearly half a century, performing his duties as chaplain, as a genuine scientist and a mother tongue teacher. An important problem for the language of a nation, which he studied, was the history of the Albanian alphabet. One such work began publishing several articles in the journal "Hylli i Dritës" "since 1931-1936 which he collected in a volume in 1936 entitled "For the history of Albanian alphabet". Even though several decades have passed since the publication of this study the contribution was very valuable because he knew how to represent his work with objectivity and preciseness in this field, opening a path which will be continued by other scholars. (Osmani Standard Newspaper 16.02.2009). The Scientific publishing activity of J. Rrotës is reflected in these titles:

- "Monumenti ma i vjetër i gjuhës shqipe – Gjon Buzuku" (1555), botuar më 1930, në Shkodër
- "Shkrimtari më i vjetër italo-arbëresh, Lukë Matrënga", (1592), botim I më 1932, II më 1939, në Shkodër.
- "Hulumtimi dhe shënjime mbi Gjon Buzukun", botuar më 1956, në Shkodër.
- "Gjuha e shkrueme ose vërejtje gramatikore", botuar në 2006, në Shkodër.

- “Rreth gramatologjisë shqipe”, 1923-1933, në Shkodër.
- “Analyzimi i rasavet t’emnit e zhvillimi historik i tyreve”, Shkodër, 1931.
- “Sintaksi i shqipes” -Doracak për shkollat e mesme të Shqipërisë, Shkodër, 1932, 1942, 1944.
- “Për historinë e alfabetit shqyp” - Pasqyra e shembuj për shkolla të mesme, botuar nga Shtypshkronja e Françeskanëve, Shkodër, 1936, many other works. (Albanian Studies 4, 1995, pg. 57-64; Malaj, 1982, pg. 284; Mirdita, 1998, pg.278; Pllumi, 1997, pg. 48-53).

The leading figure of Franciscan literary is father **Gjergj Fishta**. He and Shtjefën Gjeçovi contributed to convert the Gomsiqe Church into a scientific research institute. Fishta is known in history as well as a literary and a politician. Fishta, after the famous binomial "For faith and fatherland", we can say that he created another binomial very powerful: "Everything about Albanian language and education". While in the first issues a major alarm to give lives for the freedom of the Albanian lands in the second requires everyone's commitment to the protection of Albanian culture, language and education. We can say that both these calls complement each other and clearly formulate its pedagogic creed: "It is not enough to recover Albania but also the Albanians should recover to become master of their own selves to defend Albania." This Fishtian conclusion of educational philosophy has been and will remain the ultimate goal of our nationwide school. The visionary poet struggles to serve the progress of nation by giving all intellectual potential and for this purpose he supports every cultural and educational movement created at that time. (Wikipedia, Gjergj Fishta). In 1908 Fishta headed the commission for drafting the alphabet, which was approved by Monastery Congress as the only Albanian alphabet. Gjergj Fishta made a valuable contribution to the creation of a unified Albanian language. Its activities include literary satire, lyrical drama and translations. With his masterpiece “Lahuta e Malcisë” Fishta is called "The Homer the Albanians". Father Gjergj Fishta is the author of these works:

- “Vjerrsha të përshpirtshme”, Shkodër, 1906 .
- “Anzat e Parnasit”, Sarajevë, 1907.
- “Pika voeset”, Zarë, 1909.
- “Sh’Francesku i Azizit” (melodrama), Shkodër, 1912.
- “Mrizi i zanave”, Shkodër, 1913.
- “Jerina ase Mbretënesha e Luleve” Poem, Shkodër, 1920.
- “Juda Makabe” (melodrama), Shkodër, 1918.
- “Gomari i Babatasit” (satirë), Shkodër, 1923.
- “Shna Ndou i Padues”, Shkodër, 1927.
- “Sh’ Luigj Gonzaga” (melodrama), Shkodër, 1927.
- “Odisea, Ifigenia n’ Aulli” (melodrama), Shkodër, 1931.

He is the founder of the international magazine "Hylli i Dritës " in 1913 and daily newspaper "Posta e Shqypnisë" during 1916-1918. This commitment had positive scientific results; since he was 28 years old showed that in the field of language, culture and education was entering a new scientific force, in the Albanian intellectual world, able to face the major problems of the time in important issues of the nation, which at the time was engaged in the struggle for freedom and independence. It is known that without language there is school and without school the modern

development of the language can't occur. For Fishta Albanian language is a living passport that proves the identity of being an Albanian. Although Enverian Communist regime tried to wipe out Fishta from the mind and memories of people he failed to do so because across the generations Fishta even though unnamed, has been present in Albanian school textbooks. (Nekaj, 1961, pg.487 – 489).

The Archbishop **Vinçens Prennushi** is distinguished by his humility, eloquence, piety, for what he has been called "The Angel of Shkodra", while father J. Rrota pronounces in this way for him "father Fishta is called the poet of Gheg because he knew how to express his thoughts in the most beautiful way so Prenushi can be considered as the poet of his city because he knew to find grace in phraseologies of the dialect and put in his own writings". (Albanian writers, II, 2008, pg. 347). Professor Arshi Pipa pronounces for archbishop V. Prennushi: "When I closed his tired eyes that were in search of light it looked like his face had an unusual lightening..... (PIPA, 1997, pg.78-82). The activity of Archbishop Vinçens Prennushi is manifold. After finishing school for theology and philosophy in Tyrol, Austria, returned to his native country, where experienced one of the worst events of his hometown. In 1913 Shkodra was invaded by Montenegrins and a few days after winning the freedom and the union of the city with the independent Albania in 14 March 1914, he was the elected friar, who would hold a speech on the occasion of flag-waving at the Rozafa Castle accompanied by cheering of the people of Shkodra. In 1917, he was a member of the "Albanian Literary Commission" in Shkodra, where were set the spelling rules of the Albanian language. He was the most prominent literary and scientific feather in the notebooks of Catholic clergy. Archbishop Vinçens Prennushi was the leader of the "Hylli i Dritës", "Lajmëtari i Zemrës së Krishtit", "Zani i Shna Ndout" but he was also one of the co-founders of the most important group of Albanian opposition, and in 1923-1924 developed their political program called "The clock of the Mountains", where father Vinçensi, is one of the most valuable literary feathers of democracy that was recently born in Albania. Following Fishta lessons, which were based on popular models, he made possible that through his writings to flow the sweet language of his hometown. With a graceful style managed to create a detachment of the writers who imitated him. Prennushi collected the songs and dances of "Dasma Shkodrane" and that's where he showed better than anywhere else sweet Shkodran words. In fact, the traits belong to Shkodra, but its content is nationwide. He has written and translated many works:

- "Visari Komtar", Sarajevë, 1911.
- "Nji lule miradije mbi lter t' Shna Ndout", Shkodër, 1916.
- "Fjala e Zotit", Shkodër, 1918.
- "Grueja shqyptare", Shkodër, 1918.
- "E trathtuemja", dramë, 1919.
- "Ndër lamijet e demokracisë së vërtetë", (Pamphlet), 1924.
- "Prej robnije në liri", dramë, (translation).
- "Fabiola" apo "Kisha nën dhe e mbi dhe" e Kardinalit Visseman (translation).
- "Quo Vadis" (where are you going?) novel of E. Sienkiewicz-it (translation), 1933.
- "Burgjet e mia" novel of Silvio Pellico-s (translation), 1939.

On May 19, 1947 archbishop Prennushi, is arrested and like others his sufferings begin. On March 19, 1949 dies because of the inhuman tortures he suffered in the prison of Durrës. On May 8, 1993 in Durrës is declared as a "Martyr of Democracy." (Wikipedia, Vinçens Prenushi).

Father **Shtjefën Konstandin Gjeçovi** is the author of many literary and historical works especially known as a collector of Albanian social mores and customs, which he arranged them in its capital works:

- "Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit" published in Shkodra in 1933 and 1985 in Prishtina in 1972. (Valentine, 2008, pg.212-224, I-IV work, Tirana, 1985; Malaj, 1982, pg. 280; Mirdita, 1998, pg. 280).
- "Dashtunia e Atdheut" (1901 – dramë).
- "Agimi i Gjytetnisë" (1910- a moral and didactic work).
- Are unpublished the works:
- "Shqiptari ngadhnjyes" (1904).
- "Princi i Dibrave apo Mojs Golemi" (1904).
- "Mënera e Prezës" (1902).
- "Përkrenarja e Skënderbeut".
- "Parradija e Popullit ase Kryengritja e Dheut.." 1903-1906 manuscript.

He also left numerous writings about Albanian habits and customs, greeting proverbs, but mostly he dealt with the customary law of our people. In his work he attempts to link the ancient myths and beliefs of our indigenous people with the Illyrian-Pelasgian Thracian. The impact of the circumstances on which he grew up, resulted in overcoming the limits of religious ideology so far that he boasted of his efforts against medieval divisions.

Father **Donat Kurti** is known as a philologist, folklore translator and he had a good knowledge of Latin. He is known among the Franciscans as the most distinguished scholar and is aligned among other scientists that emerged from the cradle of the Albanian culture. Together with, Father Bernardin Palaj, he published the best-known cycles of epic poetry in "Legjenda dhe këngë kreshnikësh", in 1937. Songs like "Orët e Mujit", "Martesa e Halilit", "Ajkuna vajton Omerin", "Gjergj Elez Alia" etc.. are regarded by scholars as the pearl of the Albanian folklore. To achieve this publication was needed multi-tracer work. It also marked on the preface of the act, stating that given a collection of 342 songs, collect valuable material with great difficulty for almost 40 years of Franciscan. As a distinguished comparative scholar, he owned very well the work of foreign researchers in this field. He knows in detail German fairy tales (collection of Grimm brothers), Russian ones (by Afanasiev), Danish (by Grundtvig), French (by E. Cosquin), Norwegian (from Asbjornson), Italian (by G. Pitre) etc. . . . He even knows the root of Arabian and Indian fairy tales etc... Appreciating Gurren Albanian folk rightly points out that: "The motives of our tales are quite early because we often find them in Indian and Arabian Celtic fairy tales". Comparing these tales he notes that tales like: "Njeriu që ndjen gjithçka", "Pashmanga arit", "Ora e gjysë kungulli" have similarities with Indian tales, while entitled tales like: "Ali Senjefi", "Unaza e Ujku i butë", "Shtatë majë gjuhë", have similarities with Arabian tales. Some of them have been compared with

the ones of Grimm brothers, but there are also others that have similarities with Greek and Roman tales. Father Donat Kurti is the collector and publisher of works like :

- “Gramatika latine”, Shkodër, 1937
- “ Sintaksa latine”, Shkodër, 1939
- “Lojet kombtare”, Shkodër, 1936-1939
- “Prralla kombëtare” I-II, Shkodër, 1940, 1942 and 1943.

The collection of his folkloric creative work was not random, during its registration he was in search of authentic values. For almost ten years, everything about his life and works was vanished . Even though his tales were published several times, his name wasn't not even mentioned, rarely you could see his initials D.K, but the worst thing happened when in his work “ Kangë Kreshnikësh dhe legjenda” was not mentioned his name and the title of the work , but only “ Visaret e Kombit”1937.

Father **Paulin Markgjokaj** dealt with problems of the national history. Among his works with national importance I mention: “Beitrag zur albanischen kulturgeschichte ( Eine bericht uber neuere Literature) ”, “Paper about the history of Albanian culture”– news about new literature. The problems of national history father P. Margjokaj represented even correspondence. The work “The correspondence (1947-1958) Kruja- Margjokaj” represents his cultural and patriotic contribution. (Çuni, 2008 ).

Father **Marin Sirdani** dealt mainly with historical problems an, documents and data about the life and the work of Gjergj Kastrioti . In relation to this it is worth mentioning his paper published in 6 following articles in “Hylli i dritës” entitled “Në shka fajiset Skënderbeu”. In 1926 published the book “ Skanderbegu mbas gojëdhanash”. In 1941 published the work “Shypnia e shqyptarët” wihich is about the origin, the spread and the Albanian rights . The work “ Shqiptarët e hartet” is published in 7 following articles in “ Hylli i dritës” (Albanian writers, II, 2008, pg. 385-388 ; Pllumi, 1994, pg. 201-202; Mirdita, 1998, pg. 281).

Among the Albanian friars of the Franciscan order we mention the philosophers :

Father **Ambroz Marlaskaj** who contributed , when he worked as a professor in Antoninianum in Rome in 1923. (Malaj, 1982, pg. 282; Ahmeti, 1994 , pg. 201).

Father **Gjon Shllaku** was a philosophy professor in Paris. He is the author of the studies and the contradicts raised from philosophy. His most important works are:

- “Filozofija e ditunitë” – 1934.
- “Problemi i njohjes” – 1938.
- “A po kuptohemi” - 1938.
- “Shqypitari, Frati, Shqypnija” – 1941.
- “Katolicizmi në Shqypni e anmiqt e tij para gjykatores së historis”- përgjegje N. Ivanaj- 1944. (Malaj,1982, pg. 286-287; Ahmeti, 1994, pg. 205).

Father **Anton Harapi** is known as a philosopher and a writer. Father Anton Harapi is the author of many philosophical studies, tales, political speeches, preaching all in function of the human evolution and of the boost of the national feeling among Albanians. All this is presented in his psychological novel about life and traditions of highlanders in Gruda near the entitled Tuz : “The dream of Pretash – a contribution for Albanian culture”.

Among Franciscan fathers are mentioned : **Martin Gjoka** , **Filip Mazrekun** , as musicians and composers. The manuscripts are found in the state archive of Tirana. Franciscans are represented in the figurative art with **Leon Kabashin** as a professor of many others, who in difficult conditions achieved to save the cultural, European entoidentity of Albanians .( Mirdita, 1998, pg. 285 ).

## **Conclusion**

The scientific publishing activity of Franciscans belongs to a half century period, during which they have performed their duty as clerics, Scientists, teacher of native language, musicians, and representatives of the figurative Albanian art. Describing and representing their intellectual values I tried to bring into attention the origin of literature, art, philosophy and Albanian science of the first half of the XX century, for the young generation in order to complete the portrait of that cultural period of the Albanian nation. The seminar of the Franciscan friars during the first half of the XX century set up a national movement to help developing the educational institutions in Albania. The seminar of Franciscan friars is like a research scientific institution, which stands still today as a successful model. Following the credo of Franciscans “without language there is no fatherland” we should be try to protect the Albanian culture, language and education.

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