

THE MEMORY IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC TYPOLOGIES OF MARUBBI

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Abstract

Marubi wrote with light year after year bringing us precious photographs in historic, social, cultural, anthropological aspects. They realized photographs with artistic affinities as with a documentary and witnesses sense. All these photographs affirm the idea that there cannot be in their work only one basic concept about photography. Among the various types of photographs in Marubi we find: *Outstanding people* of our history that pose alone or in a group in the photographer's studio or in other environments. The register entitled "Wellknown people" from Kel Marubi is dedicated to them. *Various buildings and landscapes*: from public to private, from the secular to the religious ones. From their various architectural situation in different times we understand how did the socio-political situation of Albania change from a feudal to a protocapitalist country. Along with the changes of socio-political situation through constructions we find the technological changes that photography incurs in years. *Ceremony and important social and political phenomena* and *natural phenomena*. This was done personally by them when it was possible to be present where the phenomenon occurred and it went till the altruism of filling the gaps in the archive for a chronological sequence in the chain of historical events through photographs "get" or borrowed from other authors. The fact emerged from this gesture is very significant because highlights their opinion on the status of photography as a witness. What is impressive about the archive are photographs of different *documents*, some of very particular importance for Albanians. These photographs indicate us about a photograph with a legitimate character. Through their photographs Marubi presented the life of a country and at the same time their own life.

Keywords: *to get, to do, to take a photograph, invited, uninvited photographer, inside, outside the photographic studio.*

The History of Dritëshkroja Marubbi is of great interest for the historical circumstances of the time. It started by the initiative of a stranger arrived from Italy, exiled for political motives out of his native country, sank into the fevers of independence (Risorgimento), then finding himself in a country which was fighting for the similar ideals but in a different context and circumstances. Pietro Marubbi has had the intelligence of introducing and “planting” the photography in the spirit of illumination to the city of Shkodra. This city became the place where Marubi came to a halt his migration or runaway. Marubi’s history initiated on 1856 with this Dritëshkrojë (writing with light) which came in life at the same time with the other photographic ateliers over the world. This atelier has the attraction of something new and mysterious, arriving from the western world, which made possible fixing the reality in a ‘magic’ process.

All this treasure-house, seems to have been initiated in a very “casual” way.

Marubbi found shelter in Shkodra finding more possibilities in the implantation of this invention. That seems to have been the right decision. A city located on the edge of the ottoman empire, was the “separation” point of that empire, and at the same time the connection of it and the rest of the world. Shkodra enjoyed the advantage of the desire of its people for communication, openness and, of course, the benefits of its geographical position with rivers, lake, sea, mountains and ...neighbours. Everything was about borders. Shkodra was a city where apart from well established oriental influence there were also the new occidental tendencies taking place . It was a city with civilisation rooted in traditions, customs, ancient rituals grafted and pursued faithfully. A city where human relations derive from different fields: handicraft, commerce, navigation, agriculture. People would be coming into the city of Shkodra for various reasons, to sell and buy various articles and goods, for doctor visits, for searching an opportunity, or looking for work even for just a single day, meeting friends to escape from the isolation and daily deeds.

Except for the immigration from the area around, Shkodra also prove to be an open city for people coming from far away. First of all, Marubbi opened a dialog with the people of the place he chose to live in, abridge the distance with them, confronting and facing them and their reality. The medium he choose to work with, was more direct by the means of communicative possibilities. He offered the art of photography as something more tangible and accessible. To contemplate a photograph isn’t necessary to have an education or a precursory preparation.

Together with the other inventions of this époque such as railway and telegraph which brought faster and greater communication in between people, photography became the language which was understood by all and acted as a link of nations and culture.

At the verge of the discussions and debates over which would be the writing language Albanians would use to communicate, to document and administrate, over which would be the alphabet or

the grammar for their writing, Marubi offered a new language of expression, not only for us Albanians, the new language of photography. It was a long-awaited bestowal from the Albanians as a new genre of memory or as a re-gestation of this early memory from a age-long hibernation. Embracing the art of photography was a sort of rebellion against the non iconic world in which Albanians were included, it was a desire to go toward another world, maybe forgotten temporarily but inclined towards it. Such invention brought by Pietro Marubbi from Western Europe in the eve of the great events for Albania during that époque has important repercussions for nowadays Albania, concerning the wish and efforts to be part of European family.

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In the archive of the Phototeque one could find what Marubbi wrote with light year after year: such as precious gems in photography in the historical, social, cultural, anthropological aspect. So, here one could find photos with artistic tendency as good witnesses of a scientific, documentary and testimonial attitude. By the esthetic point of view one meets what is known as a standart visual composition or others more unusual impacts, with artistic and symbolic pretences. From the archive we understand that in different times there has been different praxis and exposures. And each of them confirm the idea that there is not only one fundamental concept on photography. So, one finds at Marubbi, different typologies of photography:

- a) *Individuals*, Well known people of our history, pose alone or in group at the photographic atelier or other environments to whom is dedicated the register of Kel Marubbi “Famous people”.

Pietro Marubbi photographed famous or ordinary people owing to the attraction of this invention and making them feel his attitude towards them as one of their friends. The fact that Marubbi decides to settle in Shkodra permanently is very important and this gives him a lot of confidence in the eyes of other fellow citizens. Now seen as a part of the community and he did not feel there was a distance as in the case of those foreigners who would leave in a matter time. Shkodra becomes for him the habitat which transforms the eyes of a newcomer into the eyes of a native, even to the point of inheritance. The insemination of photography has had its fruits. ‘The elected’ to continue and develop it are in single file two simple young fellows, gardeners, the sons of Rrok Kodheli, Mati e Mikel. They continued as in the previous job taking care about something that could live owing to the light. Light was and remains forever their basic element of life and work. It is impressing to notice the persistence of this family line to pursue the adventure in the field of photography. After the precocious death of Mati the photography goes on by the youngest brother, Mikel. The magic force of such a “ritual’ has had its effects on them. The follower have had sensed that photography had taken its path and that it had a future. This was an opportunity not to be missed by a young man from the area of Zadrima, chosen to be the recorder of a certain time and reality. This was a sign that photography had already settled well after its fragile initial period and it would continue in its way.

Kel Marubbi (Kodheli) inherited from the master and from his blood a sense of patriotism. He had an admirable and sociable character that made him close friend of the

most outstanding leaders, intellectuals, writers and artists of Albania. All those became the subject of his camera and he knew how to define them. In a way the title and the content of his photographic oeuvre remember that of Nadar in Paris at the end of XIX century. We notice that Kel Marubbi makes an essential reconstruction of their history and job inside the studio, in compositions with great aesthetic ability, such as in garments, gestures and symbolic characters of his subjects. This tradition is followed by his son, Gegë Marubbi (Kodheli) with a different approach, less narrative and symbolic. As a matter of fact they were called the Marubbi of the gentlemen, (not that the other members of society were rejected as photographic subjects). In their archive, together with known images of well known people we get many more of common people (poor men, beggars, etc) that tell us about a wider vision of Marubbis. It is moving, the fact that all, starting with Pjetri to Kel, Gege, and his sister Bernardine, there is a distinguishably significant patriotic involvement in the political life of the time in the country.

- b) *–Different buildings:* In their repertuar, there are public or private buildings, the laic edifices or those of cult (municipalities, banks, fabrics, hotels, houses, churches, mosques and so on). From their architectural situation in different times we understand how changes took place step by step, and what was the political situation in Albania, from a feudal in a protocapitalist country and so on. Along socio-political changes herewith we find also technological changes that photography undergoes in years. After photographs of monumental buildings under a natural light of Kel Marubbi, we find nighttime photographs of Gegë Marubbi realized with infrared rays (mosque by night, the castle).
- c) *- Ceremonies and important socio-political phenomenon* (events, insurrections, wars, parliamentary and monarchic proclamations, meetings, encampments, feast-days, exequies, sport competitions) including the natural phenomenon as inundations, earthquakes. The subjects of these photographers illustrate the problems and emotions of the time, and the emotional experiences of the affliction, poverty, social injustice, war, privation, misfortune.

All these photographic genres, with all their difficulties, and the problem of the approach to the particular subject had its own with a “camera that has its own conscious eye”.

Not pretending that the lens are a neutral eye and the human eye is an eye influenced by the feeling and the taste of the person, the photographer shows his aesthetic and psychological tendencies in the choice of motifs, in expectation and lighting, in framing. It's a long debate between photographers about the use of the word 'to take' or 'to do' a photograph. However, you can not 'take' or 'do' a photograph in a passive way. Such is the case with Marubbis, we can see again the meaning of those two verbs.

All the three generations of Marubbi, starting with Pietro, then Kel and in the end Gege, are the authors of a series of photographs 'done' of the important personages, realized with a evocative composition, with significant gestures, under a certain light, and with different demonstrations. In a way their photography is an image realized consciously by a 'camera with conscience'.

There are the very same persons, whom beside artistic, fictiv, theatral tendencies, developed by them as the artistic photography in the studio, the images of the important moments with their accompanying rituals like birth, marriage, death etcett., they 'take' photographs also as the reportage type. The photography of Marubbi, with its qualities, such as dimensions, black and white, temporality, bears a clear and precise relation with the reality which they confront. If we refer to the history of photography the testifying direction is practiced at reportage and therefore many people identify as reporters excellent photographers (Evans, Capa etcett.). Together with the well-known names we can align also the Marubbis as reporters. It is confirmed by their work outside of their atelier in public spaces, also their work as photographer by foreign newspapers.

Till the beginning it is said that photography came in life from pictorial as from scientific impulses. Both of them have had a final common aim, the grasping of reality. A photograph is not only an image, a commentary or an interpretation of the reality, it is also a trace, something taken or reproduced directly from the reality, as once upon a time the fingerprints in the prehistoric caves, the shadow silhouettes and the funeral masks in antiquity. It is the recording of an original. It offers an witness, confirms a presence, an event, a moment. The conservation of a moment, the stopping of the flow of the time it was a powerful temptation. The capacity of the photograph to catch and keep the details that evade from eye is considered till the beginning a munificent act.

Marubbis photographed each of them in their own time, their particular times, and have had productivity in accordance with the circumstances and possibilities that were offered. They photographed this reality keeping so the memories of the natives and foreigners, gentlemen and poor men, merchants and craftsmen, highlanders and villagers, priests and imams as also of the buildings, bazaars, streets. Together with them also the events that ran starting from the second half of 19th century till beyond the half of 20th century. It was done by them in person when it was possible for them to be where the phenomenon was happening and it goes till the altruism of fulfillment of the lacunas of the archive for a chronological continuity of the link of historical events via photographs (re-photographed) 'taken' or borrowed from other photographers. Marubbis photographed (reproduced) photographs of other authors, natives or foreigners, but also of themselves (when they have lost the negatives) with an intense attention about our history and its explications. By the other side it seems they want to reduce this artistic, esthetic, cultural research of the photography showing its neutrality. This fact emerging from such a gesture it is very significant because highlights their opinion about the status of the photography as a witness. They pay attention to the recording of these important moments of history and via the eyes or the 'conscience' of other photographers as if they want to tell that the photography as a neutral medium, overcomes even the authorship. In this case their photography gives the idea of a candid registration. It's strictly an exercise of non-knowledge, in a continuous colliding from a side to another, not with one and unique reality, but with the changeable and uncomfortable truths. A witness doesn't make propaganda or give information but offers us what he has seen with the greatest care for the real and with the least care for the reality. Also about this I think that Kel Marubbi means when entitled his register except "'Outstanding people' and *cautious things*". After that, is up to the viewer to see. Simply to view the photograph as eyewitness of the data as a minimal effort of the intentional photograph. It can be said that this attitude is more suitable for the nature of the photography as a neutral recorder of the images.

Just for this reason, for a certain event or ceremony we will find in archive not only one but several photographs. This was due to avoid the misunderstanding that could happen when we see only a frozen momentarily image, from a certain event or ceremony where the characters sojourn temporarily or by chance according to a certain hierarchy but we could conceive it as immutable. If we could see only one photograph we will create a hierarchy of the location of the people as in a painting. But a photography could be sometimes the appearance of a moment which might have been longer than a fleeting instant and sometimes only the appearance of a casual moment. In this case it is important to see as much as possible moments of events. (It's the case of the photography of the burial ceremony of Ç. Topulli and M. Quilli where E. Hoxha once appears in center [known version] and the next time in the corner [unknown version]).

Among the different genres that sums up the word photograph is conspicuous that of the documentary. The meaning of 'document' is evidence, the medieval term '*documentum*' intends an official paper, an incontestable sign supported by the authority of the law. This genre, the clearest of all the categories, is used as a real and objective presentation of what has happened. Suchlike is the work of Marubbi commissioned by the Municipality of the city to document by photographs the situation of the streets before and after the rehabilitation. They fulfilled with love and humility the function of photograph that document as in the case of photographic expedition of father Zef Valentini s.j. with Gegë Marubbi on ancient Albania. Where they photographed epoch-making monuments of culture, different buildings and objects (churches, mosques, wells, fire-places, ancient paintings, etc.).

What impresses from archive are also photographs of different documents, some of a particular importance for the albanians. Those testify on photography with a legitimate character. It is the case that today we don't have in any of our museums an authentic document of the proclamation of independence but we have the photograph of it that works as a witness. We can find also the photograph of the request of the Committee on a b c, "Vrojtori" of the Club "Albanian Language", the signatures of the Committee for the border-lines, the permission for the magazine "The voice of Shkodra", the act of the marriage of king Zog, etc.. Those photographs remain inside the frame of the authority and the meaning as a document of the document.

As choice and technical possibilities, at Marubbi's we neither meet the photographer that extorts from the life an act furtively, nor the confidential photographer such as to become a transparent or an absent presence. Nor the photographer that doesn't intervenes but only assist on what's happening, waits to happen, let it happen. It has nothing to do with a neutral, silent presence that waits to get pronounced only during the moment of the publication or exposure of the picture. It's true that Marubbi loved this reality and tried to immortalize it by "*taking*" on photography, but we have to affirm that was not missing the will and the collaboration of the Albanians "*to give*" it to them. Rarely happened to me to see any their picture made to people without knowing they were 'get' photographed.

It seems they rarely passed unnoticed. Always in the photography of Marubbi you can feel this mutual relation photographer-subject starting from the way of posing in the studio to those on the street. Even when the picture has to be as a reportage one, which I mean that is the photographer going at the people, sometime happens the other way around... there are people who went at the photographer. It is the case of the insurgents of Hoti and Gruda whom during their march in Shkodra, felt the calling to go and stop in front of Dritëshkroja to get documented by the ritual of photography.

In their photographs Marubbi introduced the life of a country and at the same time their own life awakening today the exultation of the elders, the curiosity of the youths and more. This is such a treasure for the wide public interested about history and longing for its adjourment by this informing instrument able to offer precious data feeling the obligation to make experience what happened. It is also for the fanciers of the photography bringing back the emotive, physical and psychological intensity of its adventure.

However, following the chronology during the life of Marubbi, the photography does not undertake to cover all this period, on the contrary it shows some personages, institutions and important events (actually too much). All, what we find in the archive of Phototeque, for its own variegation, it's not only the technologic and historic evolution of the photography but also seems to be sometimes an emotive trip of Marubbi. It is an interesting journey through important and essential crossroads of Albanian people and affairs. Marubbi photographs remind that is more important to see what the photograph discovers and expose in front of us instead of what we ask from it.

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