

THE GREEK ELEMENT NOWADAYS AND IN THE DICTIONARY OF GUSTAV MEYER¹

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Abstract

The Greek elements, as well as the Romans, Slavic, Turkish etc. in Albanian language have their own history. The history is as ancient as the relationship between these languages. The studies about their penetration in Albanian language are many and diverse. The overflow in the Albanian language, has gained a considerable space in studies with etymological character. One of the most important and valuable works in etymological Albanian field is “*The Etymologic Dictionary of Albanian language*”, of Gustav Meyer, published in Strasburg in 1891. This dictionary constitutes the roots of etymologic analysis in all the branches of explanation of the words in Albanian language. The study aims at rising to a new degree for the multiple times the great values carried by The Etymologic Dictionary of Meyer, as well as to give a site of the Greek elements involved there. Meyer himself through this dictionary aimed at describing the etymologic description of all the words in Albanian language. Famous and well-known linguists and researchers, foreigners and Albanians, have paid the right attention to Meyer’s dictionary and simultaneously have spotted lacks in his etymologic analysis. The implementation of the Greek elements, etymologically called this way by Meyer, until recently, is another important issue in this study. According to the comparative method with the Albanian language dictionary we will be able to see how many of them have endured the time ageing. Anyway, Meyer’s dictionary still remains a study of its time, which even though has a lot of opportunities for more mature interpretations, will be one of the works that will help generations of researchers in Albanian language field.

Keywords: Greek, borrowings, dictionary, etymologic, research.

I. The Albanian language and other languages

Albanian language is one of the oldest autochthonous in Balkans. Its relations with the other languages, neighbors or ruling are as ancient as their history. The studies about their penetration

¹ Gustav Meyer (1850-1900). The well-known Indo-European, who gave a special attention to the Albanian language and its history. His well-known publications are: “*Albanian studies*” (1883-1897), “*Contracted forms of Albanian grammar*” (1888), “*The Etymologic Dictionary of Albanian language*”, (Strasburg 1891).

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in Albanian language are many and diverse. The overflow in the Albanian language, has gained a considerable space in studies with etymological character.

Various scholars like Thurman, Malte-Brun, Pouqueville, Xylander and Hahn have dealt with etymological issues of the Albanian language long before the implementation of Indo-European linguistic principles. Their work consisted in drawing comparisons at a large scale, some of which are still valuable today. Nevertheless, before these scholars appeared, the genius Leibniz had established the criteria that in judging the character of the Albanian language some native elements should be distinguished from the borrowed ones. By so doing he had indicated a common route that linguistics still follows.

In this research area, the works of Rasmus Rask² and Franz Bopp³ laid the foundations of comparative Indo-European linguistics through a systematic work and with the implementation of genuine scientific methods. In defining the linguistic character of the Albanian language, Franz Bopp considered principally the grammatical forms and his work made it possible that the source of many words, mainly within the Indo-European depository, was once and for all ascertained. The well-known Slav F. Miklosich in his work *Albanische Forschungen* examined the Slav and Romanian elements as well as the form of borrowed verbs in Albanian language. In his various Slav and Romanian dictionaries and researches, for the first time it was emphasized the influence of the Albanian language on the neighboring languages. Later on (1884 – 1890) he studied even the Turkish borrowings by considering in a larger perspective “The Turkish Elements in Languages of South-East and East Europe”, which he afterwards supplemented with some “annexes”. The work of this scholar was followed and specified by H. Schuhard and F.V Kraeliz-Greifenhorst, who dealt particularly with the influence of Albanian language in Latin-Roman languages and the Turkish-Ottoman borrowings, respectively.

II. The Etymologic Dictionary of Albanian Language

The central figure of the etymological study of Albanian language so far is Gustav Meyer with his Etymological Dictionary⁴ and Albanian Studies I-IV (1883 – 1897), which were supplemented with appropriate annexes in Neo-Greek studies I-IV (1894-1895) and in Turkish Studies (1893).

The Gustav Meyer’s “The Etymologic Dictionary of Albanian Language”, in the history of the Albanian language, is one of the foundational works in Albanological studies. The recent initiatives undertaken in Tirana and Pristine to translate and publish the works of the notable Albanologists of the 19th and 20th century such as Hahn, Pedersen, Cimochofski, Ippen etc., and the most recent G. Meyer, are to be praised and supported as they pay honor to those who

²Rasmus Rask, in full Rasmus Kristian Rask (born Nov. 22. 1787, Braendekilde, Den.—died Nov. 14. 1832, Copenhagen), Danish language scholar and a principal founder of the science of comparative linguistics.

³Franz Bopp (14 September 1791 – 23 October 1867) was a German linguist known for extensive comparative work on Indo-European languages.

⁴Strasburg 1891

dedicated their life to our language, history and culture and left a precious heritage in the field of Albanologic sciences.

The study of one fundamental work in the field of Albanian language etymology such as the Gustav Meyer's Etymological Dictionary of Albanian language is a merit and duty of any scholar wishing to know the first steps of the Albanian etymology and its history. This is one of the first works to have guided the further and valuable development of Albanian etymology and its history. Although some sporadic studies – aimed at dealing with the history of the Albanian lexicon – existed before the publication of this work, none of them managed to leave remarkable traces as did the Meyer's work on etymology and history of the Albanian lexicon. The etymological dictionary, published in Strasburg in 1891, represents a strong stone in the foundations of Albanian language etymology, whose values are promoted in many later studies of national and international character. Albanian and foreign scholars such as Pedersen, Jokli, Xhuvani, Çabej, Demiraj, Mancaku, etc, have paid great attention to this work by giving it the deserved medal. However, there is a distinguished scholar to have studied more rigorously the Meyer's Etymological Dictionary to better enlighten the Albanian language background, and he is Eqrem Çabej, with his multivolume collection "Etymological studies in the field of Albanian language"⁵.

The Albanian etymological dictionary not only is one of the first dictionaries of the kind, but it is also the one to have served as a basis for other later works and studies. Although a two-century old dictionary, his values will never fade. However, one should not forget that any work belongs to a given time and it must be considered in the context of its time. In spite of its values as the first Albanian etymological dictionary, Meyer's dictionary contains many shortages, which ruin the historical and lexical image of Albanian as a language with its own potential. My assertion is based on a study I made on the Greek elements and their extension in the Albanian language. So, I found out that basic Albanian words made a very small number compared with the loanwords from other languages. How is it possible that only 400 from 5140 words mentioned in the dictionary belong to the Albanian original source? It seems impossible for such an ancient and autochthonic language as Albanian.

Albanian language derives from Illyrian, among the few languages spoken in the Balkans. In addition to the lack of Albanian original words, the first etymological dictionary includes a great number of loanwords. For centuries, the Albanian lands have been a target of foreign invaders, who, besides slavery, brought with them many elements of their historical and cultural tradition thus invading even the Albanian linguistic territories. Because of these unpleasant facts, nowadays the Albanian language contains many loanwords such as Romanian, Latin, Greek, Turkish, Slavic, etc. Whatever the facts, it cannot be justified the presence of so many loanwords in such an ancient and independent language as it is the Albanian. The question then arises: how is it possible that foreign elements outnumber original ones in such an ancient and heroic language as Albanian? This question comes naturally considering the data provided in the Albanian etymological dictionary, where 1420 of 5140 words are of Romanian origin, 540 of

⁵ Eqrem Çabej, *Etymological studies in the field of Albanian language, I-III*, Tirana 1976.

Slavic origin, 1180 of Turkish origin and 840 of Greek origin. Such numbers would astonish everyone, for it is unacceptable that the personal fund of such a language as Albanian be made up of only 8-9% of the words. It is worth mentioning here a great number of words, whose origin has never been specified due to explanatory difficulties.

These inaccurate and strange data make us consider the Albanian etymological dictionary a valuable work on one hand and a “lame” one on the other. There are different factors to have contributed to the damage and deformation of the Albanian language data. One is the time this dictionary was prepared, which coincides with a dark period as far as knowledge on the Albanian language is concerned. Until the nineteenth century no important study on Albanian lexicon and its history existed. The works of our old authors - a distinguished treasure within the Albanian language fund – were not popular yet, and above all, the first Albanian etymological dictionary was written by a foreign scholar, who was not an expert of Albanian language and most data were collected from different inaccurate sources.

Meyer’s premature death has maybe deprived the Albanian language from many other studies, which could have been better than the first one. This Çabej’s opinion is supported by many linguists and scholars who appreciate the Albanologist Gustav Meyer’s research work.

From the selection of Greek elements in the Albanian etymological dictionary and their comparison with the Greek elements in the Albanian language dictionary⁶, it has been concluded that the number of Albanian lexicon words originating from Greek in Meyer’s dictionary is approximately 840. Such Greek elements in a comparative perspective with those Greek elements, which so far have resisted time as part of the Albanian lexicon in the Albanian dictionary of 2006 and are subject to adaptation and formation of new words, are only 274 in number.

Greek words in Albanian language, in their long and difficult journey, have gone not only through phonetic changes but also through semantic ones bearing new shades and colors. In this perspective, it’s worth mentioning the continuous efforts of the Albanian language to enrich its lexicon fund with original Albanian words to substitute loanwords from foreign sources. Even Greek loanwords could not avoid this trend and they were substituted with original Albanian words.

The above data, especially those extracted from Gustav Meyer’s first Albanian etymological dictionary, have been considered even from the critical perspective of such scholars as Eqerem Çabej. A careful study on most volumes of “Albanian etymological studies” showed that the number of loanwords was smaller compared with the number of loanwords in Meyer’s dictionary. Many Albanian words inherited by its “mother” were dealt etymologically wrong in favor of other languages. This was true even for “Greek loanwords”, where 1/3 of such loanwords were in fact original Albanian words. The careful analyses described in this paper are strongly based on the arguments of such Albanologists as Pederson, Jokli, Mann, and of such Albanian scholars as Kristoforidhi, Xhuvani, Çabej⁷ and Demiraj⁸.

⁶ A publication of the Albanian Science Academy, Tirana 2006

⁷Eqerem Çabej, *Linguistic studies I, II*. Pristine 1976. *Etymological studies v. I-IV, VI-VII*

III. Conclusions

“The etymological dictionary of Albanian language” by Gustav Meyer represents strong basis in the history of etymological Albanian development, which helped many researches of Albanian language in the deepest etymological studies. Çabej looked at Meyer’s contribution in the field of etymological of Albanian studies like an unrepeatable monument, of which it started to rebirth and develop the strong basis of the discipline of etymology of the domain of Albanian words.

Meyer’s etymological study on Albanian language words took the first step to the naissance and development of Albanian etymology as a linguistic discipline that deals with tracking and explaining the origin of words, which make up a language lexical fund. The Albanian etymological dictionary shall always be a reference point for the Albanian scholars and etymologists.

The ratio of foreigner elements, respectively those of Greek source, with the native element in the lexicon of Albanian language was the result of an inappropriate study from Meyer. The methods and the non contemporary principles, the deep ignorance of Albanian language, as well as the extraction of words from non-convincing sources make the Meyer’s dictionary a “half” study. These are some of the reasons that Meyer’s himself has treated as a real obstacle in the strict explanation of etymology of Albanian words. I am convinced, like the immortal linguist Çabej, that the above reports would turn in favor of dough of Albanian language if Meyer would live longer.

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