

Martin Camaj

Albanian Grammar

Otto Harrassowitz · Wiesbaden

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FOREWORD

The present *Albanian Grammar* was originally conceived as a second edition of my *Lehrbuch der albanischen Sprache* (Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1969), which is now out of print. During more than a decades' use of this latter work as a textbook for my classes in Albanian (in my capacity as Professor of Albanian Studies at the University of Munich), I came to recognize certain weaknesses and shortcomings in it, some of which were also drawn to my attention by the remarks of students and colleagues. The elimination of such inadequacies and the incorporation of new material led to a change in the arrangement and consequently in the methodological process involved. As a result of this new conceptual approach, a completely new work resulted in which I have incorporated grammatical forms derived from the literary tradition, as well as from older Albanian texts and grammars, which were omitted from the *Lehrbuch*.

In view of the fact, therefore, that the *Albanian Grammar* and the *Lehrbuch der albanischen Sprache* represent two different aims and modes of presentation, the publishing firm of Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, is preparing a second edition of the *Lehrbuch* which will include corrections and a few minor additions.

This restructuring was, to a certain extent, also influenced by the language reform in Albania, begun in 1952 and officially completed in 1972. The results of this reform are incorporated in the present work, without regard to the personal opinions of the author respecting certain aspects of the "unified language".

The aim of this *Albanian Grammar* is to present a complete picture of the language in its three most important variants: Geg, Tosk and Arbëresh. Viewed methodologically, the contrasts among the three are presented here not only in the lexicon, but in all elements of the grammar, in order that an insight into the basic structure of the language (here also termed Common Albanian) may be obtained. The formation of the standardized literary language has, of course, also been based upon this procedure.

The following are presented in **notes**:

- a) particulars of Arbëresh;
- b) older linguistic phenomena documented in early authors and in archaic or peripheral dialects.

The **notes** attempt to complete the presentation of Albanian grammar by giving a diachronic dimension which will be of undoubted interest to linguistic historians.

In this *Albanian Grammar*, the Tosk variants are given in parentheses (cf. the *Lehrbuch*), as the Geg variants are more numerous and have all been included herein. It should be noted, however, that the occurrence of a variant outside of parentheses or **notes** does not imply any priority on the level of the standardized forms of the language.

In the interests of completeness, I did not want to omit either Tosk or Geg lexical variants which frequently occur in both the spoken and written language; they are presented with the sign ~ between them. Such doublets often arise in the plural, as e.g.: sg. *kopsht-i* 'garden' — pl. *kopshte* ~ *kopshtije* (Tosk *kopshtinj* ~ *qipshte*) 'gardens'. From among these variants *kopshte* was finally chosen as the standard form — in the glossary of the present work it is given in *italic*.

Taking account of the process of standardization, the exercises are translated in the *Key* from English into the contemporary official, normalized form of the language whose foundation is Tosk.

This *Albanian Grammar* is divided into three basic sections, aside from the Introduction: (I) **Phonology**, (II) **Morphology** and (III) **Syntax**. In the **Phonemic Changes** part of Section (I), dialectal transformations are given as well, in order to facilitate learning the spoken language and also for those who happen to speak one or another Albanian dialect with which they wish to compare the standard variants.

The **Morphology** is divided systematically into 19 chapters. Form and function are conceived as a unity, based upon which rules are constructed and illustrated by examples. At the end of each chapter or 'Lesson', exercises and texts in the normalized language are presented (together with appropriate Geg and Tosk variants, if any), so that clear access to the results of the language reform as expressed in the contemporary literary language is made possible. An attempt has been made throughout to bind together all the parts and phenomena of the language by means of copious examples in order to explain typologically, as well, the correlations of the language. In the morphological section of the book, great care has been taken with the word order in syntagms, as the order of words and their linkage by means of prepositive and postpositive elements or articles are fundamental characteristics of the language. In this manner, one part of the syntax is *de facto* built into the morphology in order to elucidate the analytical mechanism of Albanian directly in the structure of the syntagms.

The **Syntax** is comprised in one chapter or 'Lesson' and provides the essential structure of **clause construction**. The **Chrestomathy** which follows includes samples of the three variants of Albanian, as well as of the contemporary literary language. Finally, there is a **Glossary** to the whole

book *exclusive* of the Chrestomathy, and an Index which refers to paragraph numbers, rather than page numbers.

The material, form and divisions of this *Albanian Grammar* are naturally geared to the practical requirements of students interested in the language. At the same time, this book is also intended for young people of Albanian ancestry in the United States, Australia and elsewhere who have perhaps learned Geg or Tosk at home and who wish to master the contemporary literary language; this applies, as well, to the Italo-Albanians (Arbëresh) of Southern Italy who, for the first time in any Albanian grammar, will be able to compare the particular characteristics of their written or spoken dialect with those of Common Albanian. The interests of specialists and university students have, of course, also been taken into account. The author has always been closely connected with the latter and without their collaboration this grammar would never have been written.

I wish to thank Mr. Leonard Fox for translating this work from German, for preparing the *Key* by translating directly all the Albanian exercises, and for adapting various grammatical rules, explanations and vocabulary definitions to accommodate the special requirements of English-speaking students.

I am gratefully obliged to the publishing firm of Otto Harrassowitz, with which I have worked for many years, and especially to its Director, Dr. Helmut Petzolt, for their continual harmonious cooperation. I would also like to thank the Otto Harrassowitz Verlag for its fine typographical work, as well as for the handsome appearance of this book.

Munich, October 1983

Martin Camaj

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE USE OF THIS GRAMMAR

This book contains the fundamentals of Albanian differentiated into two aspects: the **grammar** of the language and its **application**.

The **grammar** comprises twenty sections, each with a series of rules and paradigms, as well as examples to illustrate the rules. From the very outset, the variants should also be noted, together with the specific correlation between these variants, in order that the total structure of Albanian be viewed as a whole.

The **application** is represented by the **exercises** at the end of each section, which are given in the most recent normalized variant, and a text in literary Geg. These are a preparation for the subsequent mastery of the complicated texts of the chrestomathy and their various vocabularies.

Those who are only interested in the contemporary official variant of Albanian should concentrate on the exercises and their translation into English. Once this is accomplished, they should be retranslated into Albanian. The *Key* to the exercises should be used in an intelligent manner, i.e. only as a check on comprehension. It should be borne in mind that the current variant of the language being used in Albania is young and still in the process of formation, so that forms and variants presented in this grammar may well be reactivated.

In order to maintain the proper dynamic connection between grammar and application, particularly at the beginning, it will be necessary for the student to refer back frequently to material already studied. In order to find words and linguistic phenomena more rapidly, the vocabulary and the index, which refers to the paragraphs into which the book is divided, will be quite helpful.

In studying this grammar, it is of major importance to take note of the formal combinations of small and large parts of speech and their order in the syntagms. Through these, paradigmatic markings and semantic differentiations take place.

A note on the exercises. In working through the exercises, the student will notice that some words used in these have been omitted from the vocabulary which immediately precedes them. This has been done deliberately with a view to encouraging active memorization of the words employed, all of which are to be found in the **Glossary** at the end of the book. In many cases, words used to illustrate grammatical rules in the body of the lesson are utilized in the exercises, but not repeated again in the vocabulary. The author's intention at all times has been to stimulate an active, rather than a passive, participation in learning Albanian.

INTRODUCTION

I. The Albanian language (**gjuha shqipe**) is the language of the Albanians (**shqiptarë** as they call themselves). Albanian is spoken primarily in the Socialist People's Republic of Albania (**Shqipëria—Shqipnia**). This country extends along the western part of the Balkan peninsula on the south-east coast of the Adriatic Sea between Epirus and Montenegro, and borders Greece and Yugoslavia on the south, east and north, while the sea forms its western boundary. As of 1980, the estimated population of Albania (28,748 square km.) was 2,670,400.

As may be seen from the map, the inner part of the country is mountainous (average altitude 708 meters) and on the coast, mostly level. The northern Alps are over 2,000 meters high (cf. Jezerca — 2,693 meters).

The climate is mediterranean with hot summers (up to 44° C) and a great deal of sun; the winters are marked by abundant rainfall (1300 mm. per year).

The largest rivers are Drini, Buna, Mati, Shkumbini, Semani, Vjosa, etc. Drini (285 km. long) is particularly important, as three large hydroelectric stations — Fierza, Komani and Vau i Dêjës — have been built on it during the last decades.

In earlier times the major sources of the economy were products of cattle breeding (dairy products, wool and, especially, leather for export) and agriculture. Due to the configuration of the country with its rich pastures in the mountains (**bjeshka** = the Alps) and almost evergreen valleys in winter (**vërria** = the winter places), a combination of agriculture and cattle breeding was developed. The outline (skeleton) of this economic structure was partially retained even after total collectivization and the building up of light and heavy industry.

II. Outside of the Socialist People's Republic of Albania, Albanian is spoken in Yugoslavia, i.e. in the Kosova Autonomous Region, in the republics of Macedonia and Montenegro, and in the settlement of **Arbë-nësh** (Arbanasi) near Zadar. The Albanians of Yugoslavia (1,730,000 in 1981) are Gëgs and use their mother-tongue in schools, in literature and science, on the stage and in mass media. Albanian-speaking people live scattered in various areas of Greece, in approximately 60 communities spread from the Abruzzi to Sicily in southern Italy, as well as in Turkey and the USA. The Albanians of southern Italy and Greece speak an archaic form of Tosk. The Italo-Albanians call themselves **arbërësh** (the rhotacized form of **Arbë-nësh** 'Albanians') and many of them maintain their language, customs and dress. Important authors have written in this idiom,

e.g. Jul Variboba (1725-1788), Nikola Keta (1742-1803), Jeronim De Rada (1814-1903), Zef Schirò (1865-1927) and others.

III. Approximately until the invasion of the Turks, the differences between the two major dialects (Geg and Tosk) were not as marked as today, as may be seen from the old religious texts. The independent development of the dialects was strengthened by the lack of contact among the inhabitants during the period of Ottoman domination.

Geg is spoken in the north of the country and Tosk in the south. The river Shkumbini is considered as the approximate dividing line. The essential differences between Tosk and Geg are:

1. The presence of nasal vowels in Geg and their absence in Tosk: **zâ** G.: **zë** T. 'voice', **pê** G.: **pe** T. 'thread'.
2. Intervocalic **n** is retained in Geg and transformed into **r** in Tosk (rhotacism): **zani** G.: **zëri** T. 'the voice', **peni** G.: **peri** T. 'the thread', **vena** G.: **vera** T. 'the wine'.
3. The Geg diphthong **-ue-** corresponds to **-ua-** in Tosk: **grue** (**grua**) 'woman', **shkue** (**shkuar**) 'having gone'. Both **ue/ua** derive from a long **-ō-** (***grō**, ***shkō**).
4. Initial **vo** in Geg corresponds to Tosk **va**: **voṭër** G.: **vatër** T. 'hearth', **voṫfën** G.: **varfër** T. 'orphan', **voj** G.: **vaj** T. 'oil'.

There exist other differences too, particularly in the morphology, e.g. the different forms of the future: **kam me shkue** G. (auxiliary verb **have** + **infinitive**) and **do të shkoj** T. (**I want** + **subjunctive**) 'I will go'. These differences, however, are gradually diminishing in the literary language and common forms are progressively coming into use in both dialects.

Notes

1. Arbëresh, in its conservative elements, i.e. aside from innovations developed in the course of its history on Italian soil, belongs to the Southern Albanian dialect group. The differences between Arbëresh and literary Tosk in phonology (cf. the contrast short/long in vowels) and morphology are not inconsiderable.
2. Arbëresh has its own future form, constructed with *ket* ~ *kat* (*ke, ka* 'you (sg.) have, he, she, it has' + *të* conjunction) + *present subjunctive*: *ket* ~ *kat qell* 'I will bring'.
3. In many Arbëresh dialects (cf. Maschito and Ginestra in the province of Campobasso) there is also a periphrastic form of the infinitive constructed with *pet* (*për të*) + *participle*: *pet qellur* 'in order to bring', as the Tosk *për të sjellë* ~ *sjellur* 'in order to bring' with consequent function.

IV. Aside from glosses in various texts and documents of the Middle Ages, the oldest examples of Albanian known until now are two sentences from the second half of the 15th century: the **baptismal formula** of 1462 and a sentence from the comedy 'Epirota', written in Latin by Thomas Medius in 1483.

The first books in Albanian begin with *Meshari* (missal) of Gjon **Buzuku** (1555) in Geg, followed by *E mbsuame e Krështerë* of Luka **Matranga** (1592) in Sicilian Arbëresh. Next in chronological order come the works of Pjetër **Budi** (1618-21): *Rituali Roman* (Rituale Romanum) and *Pasëqyra e t'Rrëfyemit* (Speculum Confessionis); then the Latin-Albanian dictionary (Dictionarium latino-epiroticum) of Frang **Bardhi** (1635) and later the monumental work, *Cuneus Prophetarum*, by Pjetër **Bogdani** (1685). Documentation in the Tosk variant begins later, also with translations of ritual books and texts. From Theodoros A. **Kavalliotis'** book, *Protopiris* (1770), in which there is a trilingual glossary, Albanian - Modern Greek - Aromun, we learn that some of the aforementioned Geg books were also known in the South of the country. The same holds true for the Arbëresh authors: they were acquainted with Buzuku's *Meshari* and other Geg ritual books up to Bogdani and Bardhi, so that communication among the three written Albanian variants — although in only one direction — is documented.

Albanian literature traces its origin, together with its linguistic and stylistic forms, to the rich oral literature of the people. As indicated above, Albanian belletristic writing begins with Bogdani's work *Cuneus Prophetarum* (1685) and with folk-poetry of religious content in the works of Budi in the North of the country, as well as with *Gjella e S. Mëriis* (1762) by Jul **Variboba** in Calabria (Italy). The latter works, although religious in content, are original compositions, i.e. not translations, like Gjon Buzuku's great work *Meshari* (1555). Albanian was artistically developed in oral literary creations. In the oral tradition, particularly in folk-ballads with fixed linguistic forms and metrics, super-regional *koinē* were developed in the course of time, e.g. the Geg of the epic songs in the Shkodra region, which later influenced belletristic writing. It should also be noted that the poets of the Arbëresh variant, especially Jeronim De Rada, who achieved recognition in Europe for the high quality of their work, proceeded from the form and language of the folk-poetry of the Albanian villages of Southern Italy.

Less well known is the literature of oriental character, written in Arabic script, which reached its high point at the end of the 18th - beginning of the 19th centuries, especially with **Nazim Berati** (d. 1760), **Hasan Zyko Kamberi**, **Muhamet Kuçyku** (1784-1844) and others. The centers of this literary movement were the then important trade and administrative cities of Berat, Korça and Shkodra, as well as the cultural centers of Kosova, such as Gjakova.

V. Albanian is an **Indo-European** language and forms a special branch within that family. In the earliest phase of research, it was classed with Balto-Slavic, due to its *satem* character. From the beginning, Albanian was connected with Illyrian, Thracian or Dacian, for which languages no