

Arbëresh songs on Scanderbeg as an Expression of Collective Memory, Longing, and Belonging



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ABSTRACT

Scanderbeg is the main constitutive figure in the collective memory of Arbereshs in particular and of Albanians in general. As such he also is the main figure in the history of Albanians that inspired many artistic and scholarly works in different disciplines including oral tradition, history, literature, ethnology, etc.

The main aim of this paper, as indicated in the title, is to see how songs on Scanderbeg could be ascertained as an expression of collective memory, longing, and belonging up to the present times. In order to comprehend better this process authors will give information on who was Scanderbeg, who were Arbëresh and how did they establish and maintained awareness on their distinctive cultural and ethnic identity. What was the role of Scanderbeg in this process? Beside this the role of folk songs and historical data on remembering Scanderbeg and in constructing Arbëresh/Albanian national identity will be juxtaposed. As a tool will be used three folk songs collected by Arbëresh intellectual Jeronim De Rada, which are related to two main events of Scanderbeg's life, namely marriage and death, and these will be compared with historical data as found for same events in the Harry Hodgkinson's historical book about Scanderbeg. This juxtaposition will be analysed in the context of Anthony D. Smith's concept on ethno-symbolism in order to enlighten the initiation of Arbëresh/Albanian ethnic identity.

The final attempt of this paper will be to theorize on how historical facts, transformed in both oral tradition and scholar interpretations, are used in shaping collective memory-(ies) that forge identity-ies of groups in different temporal and spatial levels, i.e. local, regional, ethnic and national, in which case construction process and selectivity are quite prominent.

The method used here is comparison of different literature resources (historical, literature, ethnographies) and interpreting them in different theoretical frameworks such as ethnosymbolism, collective memory and constructivis national building.

KEYWORDS

Scanderbeg, Albania, collective memory, identity, belonging

Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu (1405–1468) in Albanian historiography is a central figure of national hero, of a talented military leader which in the fifteenth century, a time when Ottoman Empire penetrated Balkan territory and beyond, succeeded to unite several Arbëresh/Albanian tribes i.e. principalities in order to fight Ottomans. This unity has enabled consolidation of Albanian people, initially as ethnicity and later as a modern nation.

In short, he was the fifth son of Gjon (John) Kastrioti, an Albanian nobleman based in Kruja (north central Albania), who according to the tradition of the Ottoman



Empire, was taken as a janissar to serve the Sultan.¹ During this service he was distinguished and praised for his skills and bravery so at one point he was honored with the name Skanderbeg. After many years of service and splendor in the Ottoman Empire, he leaves to return to his birthplace in Kruja, from where he resisted and fought back Empire forces. He achieves it quite successfully thanks to the alliance created with the other arbëresh tribes, but also due to the very stable alliance with King Alfonso of Aragon, and occasional assistance from Venice.

Many Albanian and foreign authors wrote about Scanderbeg's life. However, as a basic written book dedicated to the Scanderbeg's history is known the one written by Marin Barleti (Barletius, 1504), the priest from Shkodër, at the end of the 15th century, shortly after Skanderbeg's death. The first editions dedicated to Skanderbeg's life used as the source various forms of oral tradition devoted to his figure, such as: ballads, songs, stories, legends, and so on. Ramadan Sokoli, in his paper 'Figura e Skënderbeut në këngët popullore' 'Skanderbeg's Figure in Folk Songs' presents chronologically publications dedicated to Skanderbeg, written by both domestic and foreign authors, and among other things he highlights the importance the data of the oral tradition had in creating songs about his deeds after hero's death. Sokoli points out that Barlet for his work also used as a source popular songs and stories of people

1 In Hodgkinson (2004), comes out that the practice of taking young Christian boys to serve as janissaries was introduced by Sulltan Murat II, at the time when Scanderbeg was near 16 year old. See p. 53.



who had known him, or/and fought with him (Sokoli, 1982, pp. 260–276). Same opinion was expressed by Fan S. Noli in his work ‘George Castriot Skanderbeg’, published in New York in 1947, and by Harry Hodgkinson in his book ‘Scanderbeg’ published in 1999 (p. 53). This was also evidenced by Barleti himself when he pointed out that Skanderbeg and his mightiness has had everyone’s admiration, and according to him, ‘this is firmly testified by the fact that among other many the brightest braveries of the elders and the glories of the forefathers usually sung by our people at feasts, as required by an ancient custom, the young generation has introduced not without gratitude especially this event (Scanderbeg’s)’ (Ibid, pp. 260–76). Throughout Barleti’s work are mentioned the songs that were sang by Skanderbeg fighters after different victories over the Ottomans, and this, according to Sokoli, is also the proof that heroic epic among Albanians is quite ancient. A number of scholars who dealt with oral creations devoted to Skanderbeg have noted their importance both in terms of art and history of this period.

The importance of folk songs, as a recourse/support to the story of Skanderbeg’s life, was also stated by the researcher Qemal Haxhihasani in the volume ‘Tregime dhe këngë popullore për Skënderbeun’/ ‘Stories and folk songs about Skanderbeg’. It is a volume that has assembled and arranged almost all the creations/compositions of various oral forms for Skanderbeg, and in which is highlighted that ‘... at the time of the hero, as well as after his death, are created songs and stories, which depending on the war dimensions and popularity, were widely spread’ (Haxhihasani, 1967, p. 6).

These songs were also associated and part of the certain rites. Barleti’s assertion that ‘Albanians celebrated every victory with songs and dances’ was also supported by the travelers who visited these places many years after Skanderbeg’s death, such as, Sabeliko and Pouqueville, but of particular importance is the testimony of Frang Bardhi, who in his report in 1637 states that: ‘people of Dukagjini region², according to their old custom, during their parties and celebrations, as well as on the street and at work, sing loudly about the braveries of their great men and especially those of the invincible Gjergj Kastrioti, called Skanderbeg’ (Haxhihasani, 1967, p. 6).

Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg is not only a national hero of Albanians, but also a historical and political figure of European dimensions, who became important in certain periods of Southeast European histories such as that of Hungary and Italy, and beyond. In a series of medieval works by foreign authors, Skanderbeg’s figure appears as the hero of the wars against Ottoman armies, and therefore as the warrior and savior of Christian culture (Buda, 1969, pp. 33; Senkeviç, 1969, pp. 35). In addition to the historiographic writings on Skanderbeg, sometimes with greater and sometimes smaller intensity were also written works of other genres, of entirely fictitious character.³

All of these data together, i.e. folklore, historical and literary data, represent the memory about a certain personality, at a certain time, in a certain cultural, social, and

2 Dukagjini is a region in Northern Albania and western Kosovo, which contains the North Albanian Alps, an extension of the Dinaric Alps range. The highest point is Maja Jezerce (2693 m). <https://enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/5021505> [accessed 14 June 2022].

3 For example, entirely fictive is Benjamin Disraeli (1833).



political context. If, according to collective memory researcher Pascal Boyer, ‘memories sustain a distinctive identity, as something that social groups need, maintain, and transmit to further generations’ (Boyer, 2009, pp. 9), then we may ascertain that due to this memory (the topic of memory today is experiencing rejuvenation and an interest from historians, anthropologists, and general public, in building common collective past) it is not surprising that Skanderbeg’s figure after his death, primarily by his contemporaries, but later also by other generations throughout the centuries, became a source of inspiration for a series of publications about him and his glorious era.

ARBËRESHS AND ALBANIAN IDENTITY

If traditions of people and fates of civilizations are preserved and recovered through memories, then these memories of the past, transmitted through the time, can be read in the realm of the future through anthropological lenses, forms and concepts, as a national and/or broader identity (e.g. Christian) (Bruni, 2016). Arbëresh is the name Albanians used for themselves during medieval times. Later, Albanians started to call themselves Shqiptar, while the name Arbëresh was preserved to the present among people who migrated in different places during that period, such as in Italy and Croatia. Albanians remaining in the territories of Greece are called Arvanits.

Arbëreshs of Italy, known as Albanian historical diaspora, that started their migrations since the medieval times, overcame the assimilation by preserving identity for centuries, thanks to collective memory transmitted intergenerationally. Based on various archive documents it is acknowledged that there were seven waves of Arbëresh migrations towards the shores of the Apennine peninsula. Of these, the first three waves are directly linked to Skanderbeg. The first occurred in 1416–1446 and consisted of soldiers who were sent by Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg, to help King Alfonso of Aragon, with whom he had continuous and very good relations. The second wave occurred again as a result of the collaboration between Skanderbeg and Alfonso during 1459–1461, when other Albanian soldiers were sent to protect the Aragonese families. At that time a large number of residents arose against Ferdinand I, the descendant of Alfonso. The third wave occurred during the years 1468–1506 and is associated with the death of Skanderbeg (1468), when the Turks occupied almost the entire territory of Albania and in the meantime took quite repressive measures for their surrender.⁴

The survival of Arbëresh diaspora and the preservation of their identity for centuries up to the present time were strongly supported in the first place by the collective memory maintained firstly because of the reasons that affected their migration to the southern Italian coasts, mainly Sicily and Calabria, and secondly due to the isolated environments where they established their new settlements.⁵

4 For migration waves see more in Ibrahim (2008, pp. 13–14). For repressive measures after the death of Scanderbeg see Hodgkinson (2004, p. 217).

5 More on the migration waves and settlement of Arbëreshs in Italy see Bartl (2017, pp. 69–74) (original title *Albanien: vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Regensburg: Pustet 1995); Ibrahim (2008, pp. 13–14).

Certainly, the identity was preserved thanks to the Arbëresh language, which continued to be active within Arbëresh families and villages, but the key factor in the preservation and cultivation of the Arbëresh language was the permission Vatican gave them to use it since the 18th century as a liturgic language in the Arbëresh parishes. The need to prepare and educate young people for both religious and cultural purposes was accomplished with the opening of two Arbëresh colleges: Kolegji Korsini (1732) in Calabria and Seminari Arbëresh i Palermos in Sicily by Pope Clement XII (1730–1740). However, the permission of the Second Vatican Council to establish two Eparchies, that of the Arberesh Unger and Hora in the twentieth century, opened a perspective for institutional strengthening of language knowledge and its role within religious and cultural life (Ibrahimi 2008, p. 157); (Altimari 1980, pp. 53–79).

It should be noted that during the Middle Ages, for the displaced Arbëreshes, as well as the entire populations under the Bizantine Empire, the main identification was based on religion. Therefore, when they moved to Italy they were identified simply as Christians without any other cultural or ethnic emphasis. At that time, with the name Romanoi, were called Orthodox Christians (regardless of ethnicity) in the inner world of ‘Greeks/Greece’, while the same who lived outside, i.e. in the ‘Latin’ foreign world, if they followed the Eastern Orthodox Church (with a liturgy in the Greek language), they were called Greek, and if they attended the Western Catholic church, they were called Latinoi (Altimari, 1980, pp. 53). But, according to Altimari, with the raised awareness and activation of the Italian national movement (Risorgimento) as well as that of the Greek one, the need of Arbëreshs practicing Byzantine rite, ‘to be liberated once and for all from identification with the Greeks’ has been accentuated. Thus, in the second half of the eighteenth century, this situation ‘encouraged the strong interest of Arbëresh intellectuals and clerics, initially of Sicily and then Calabria, to highlight the cultural and linguistic features of their ethnicity, being called ‘italo-albanesi’, while the Greeks of Italy began to be called by the church “italo-greci” (Altimari, 1980, pp. 58–9). Since Arbëreshs, in order to raise identity awareness among them, used the same national construction trajectory as other nations did (i.e. ancient origin of the culture and language), the search for roots of origin (initially Pellazgian and later Illyrian) as well as the common culture and language were pillars of this construction. Meanwhile, traditional Arbëresh culture continued to be passed over from generation to generation, both with the canonical and moral norms, such as the concepts of: the neighbour (gjitoni), friend (miku), hospitality, besa/oath, as traditional and identifying elements for the Arbëresh and the Albanians in general, and with traditional women’s dress present and functional until later as Arbëresh’s distinctive clothing. As a result, Arbëresh literature represented by works of authors, such as Variboba, Keta, De Rada, Serembe, Santori, Dara, Skiro, etc., was elevated artistically based on that rich spiritual culture, becoming steadily an identification literature for Arbëreshs (Ibrahimi, 2008, p. 187).





DE RADA AND SONGS FOR SKANDERBEG

The work of Jeronim De Rada (1814–1903), as one of the greatest figures of the Albanian Renaissance in general and of the second Arbëresh Renaissance in particular (Altimari, 1980, p. 60), well known and highly regarded by the writers of European culture of the time, is of special importance for Albanian culture, language, and literature. In addition to his literary works, as well as those of theoretical-aesthetic and philosophical thought, he is also known in Albanian folkloristics as a collector of the Arbëresh oral works, published in ‘Rapsodie d’un poema albanese / Rhapsody of an Albanian poem’ in 1866, gathered in the colonies of the district of Naples. This publication is the most comprehensive and most important edition of Albanian oral literature. De Rada, directly inspired by Francesco Avati, the first Arbëresh folklorist, began collecting folkloric material, however when that material took the form of the fixed written text in special editions, it often prompted discussions about their authenticity. In this collection are also 8 rhapsodies which are related to the most prominent events in Skanderbeg’s life.⁶ Gustav Meyer, August Dozon, Dhimitër Shuteriqi, Ramadan Sokoli and Francis Altimari have discussed the issue of authenticity of De Rada’s rhapsodies. While the former doubt their folk origins (their genuinity), Sokoli debates on the issue of anonymity of popular rhapsodists and highlights the possibility that even the ‘rilindësit’⁷ themselves have acted as rhapsods. Altimari argues that despite the fact that in De Rada’s rhapsodies (and of the others) are obvious,

some historical elements (characters, events, etc.) that undeniably prove that the biographies of Skanderbeg and especially the works of Barlet, Biemm, [...] were taken into consideration by the collectors of these songs [...] we can not but emphasize that, besides these external elements, which show us a literary influence, the content of ‘rhapsodies,’ the various motifs that are reflected there, the language style, also show a simple popular/folk poetry model that has deep roots in the cultural traditions of the Arbëresh of Italy (Altimari, 1980, p. 74).

De Rada regarding these songs has stated: ‘From the songs that have been collected so far, it turns out that the basic idea of their entirety is so close to the historical reality that it seems that the fabrication is scarce and does not prevail’ (de Rada, 1983, p. 20). He also adds that ‘These songs brought by our forefathers here in Italy, have a great educational force especially for those families who live off the positive impact of cities. Moreover, these songs are for everyone most ancient monument of our language and a high model of simple, pure, powerful style’ (Kastrati, 2003, p. 177).

6 such as: ‘Trimi dhe vasha/Braveman and the girl’, ‘Motra e Skënderbeut/Scanderbeg’s sister’, ‘Skënderbeu dhe Miloshini Skënderbeg and Miloshini’, ‘Martesa e Skënderbeut/Scanderbegs marriage’, ‘Skënderbeu dhe Ballabani Scanderbeg and Ballabani’, ‘Vjehra e keqe/Bed mother-in-law’, ‘Skënderbeu dhe Vdekja/Scanderbeg and Death’ and ‘Scanderbegs death.’

7 Members of Albanian National Renaissance.



In these statements an antagonism can be clearly noticed. While recent scholars doubt the authenticity of popular songs due to the presence of accurate historical data on them, De Rada appreciates the historical presence and accuracy on them, on the one hand, and the lack of too many thrills in them (whose presence is however implicit), on the other. We will elaborate later in the text the distinction between historical and collective memory and their relevance in construction of ethnic and national identity in the context of Anthony D. Smith's concept on ethnosymbolism. Therefore it is important to highlight that as another important element in the deradian identity construction, is the fact that De Rada, the 25 year period of Skanderbeg's power in the Albanian lands calls *Moti i madh/ The Great Time/Age*, implying a period of happiness and freedom as called by Arbëreshs, which is identified by the figure of Skanderbeg as a symbol of freedom, resistance and existence as an ethnicity.

From the above data we see how Skanderbeg's figure as a historical reality comes as a sustainable fact used in constructing ethnic and national identity and also we see clearly the role of De Rada as a constructor in the process of building this identity consciousness. This is clearly and quite explicitly seen in the foreword of *Rhapsody ...* written by Nikola Jenő de Coronel who when speaking of the content and the structure of this collection states: 'why did he choose exactly these three moments: the victories, the marriage and the death of Skanderbeg? In order to not deviate from that concept that is the main point of his goal, namely the Nation. And indeed the victories show the time when liberty was held and was won by the blood of the citizens; the marriage shows the pertinent desire to continue that resistance, gathered around a common aim, with the descendants of Skanderbeg; death, shows the lost hope, freedom turned off, and so, by speaking in such a way about the individual, the poet finds the opportunity to express/explain the national development' (de Rada, 1983, p. 181).

Based on all of the above, it seems interesting and challenging the analysis, but also the illustration, of this Deradian selection and construction in the context of collective memory studies. We will try to do this by taking on the popular songs *Marriage of Scanderbeg*, *Scanderbeg and Death*, as well as *Scanderbeg's Death* from De Rada's *Rhapsody of an Albanian poem* as two important moments of the hero's and the community life, and juxtaposing them to the same moments as historical facts, as described in Harry Hodgkinson's historical book 'Scanderbeg', which was published in 1999 (Hodgkinson, 2004).

SCANDERBEG'S MARRIAGE AND DEATH IN FOLK SONGS, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY CONTEXTS

As is written in many historical books, Skanderbeg had returned from Ottoman Empire to Kruja in November 1443, when he had deserted the Turk combat against Hunyadi in the Battle of Nish (Hodgkinson, 2004, pp. 65-68). In March 1444 he summoned the Lezha⁸ Assembly and created an alliance with 9 princely arbëresh families. In this assembly he was nominated as the General Captain, or as a military leader/com-

⁸ Lezha is a town in Northwest Albania.



mander of all these tribes. It can be said that despite this success, this coalition was rather fragile considering the tribal medieval regulation and the desire for domination of tribes and their leaders, especially in the north (Dukagjini, Zaharia, Spani and Dushman — tribes). Perhaps precisely for this reason and the threat that these tribes may have felt toward Skanderbeg's domination, his position (though leader) was, as Hodgkinson says, 'more first among the equal than a general commander' (Hodgkinson, 2004, p. 74). Such a role can be considered in line with the internal social customary order of the Albanian families and tribes, where the role of the head of the family, the tribal chief, namely the patriarch, was described as 'primus inter pares — first among equals — in the council of the household' (Rrapi, 1995. p. 71; Rrapi, 2003).

Eventhough the establishment of the alliance was followed by numerous victories, Skanderbeg's status could not yet be considered very stable for some time. In Hodgkinson's book, it is alluded that (despite the insistence of his neighbors and allies) this might have been the reason why Skanderbeg had prolonged his decision to get married. A wrong choice could prompt the destabilization and even the unbundling of the alliance, but a good choice could get him closer to his major goal, namely the strengthening of a national community, for which Barleti had also spoken.⁹ At that time, arranged marriages between different tribes were common, calculated strategically to secure power and strengthen the political positions of the tribes. Ethno-cultural affiliation at those times was not the basis for the marital arrangement, considering that the present time consciousness about ethnicity and ethnic belonging was still almost nonexistent. In 1450 Skanderbeg had successfully resisted several battles against Sultan Murat II, so his heroism became more prominent, heard of, known, and powerful inside and outside the country. The pressure of friends upon him to marry was increased, but Scanderbeg's fear of the princes' jealousies was reduced, so he could afford to seek out the hand of Donika the daughter of the mightiest southern arbëresh prince Gjergj Araniti. (p. 114). Marriage had occurred in May 1451 in Kanina.

But in the folk song *Scanderbeg's Marriage* gathered by De Rada, Skanderbeg's dilemma for choosing the bride within the arbëresh tribes can not be distinguished.

Scanderbeg's Marriage

*Mblodhi n'Krujë Skënderbeu
bujarët edhe peshkopët
t'këshilloj me ata se nga ç'vend
ta mirrte nusen.*

*Bujari I
— Merre, zot, napuluitane!
Bujari II
— Po atje, në Anapul,*

*Scanderbeg in Kruja gathered
Noblemen and Bishops
To ask his bride where from should be*

*Noblemen I
— Take her, Lord, from Naples!
Noblemen II
— But there, in Naples*

⁹ For Scanderbeg's delay of marriage writes Hodgkinson (2004, p. 75, 103), his national motive and design was also implied by Barlet, Sabri Godo, etc. <http://gazetainfopress.com/historia_arkeologji/martesa-e-skenderbeut-deshmite%E2%80%A8-e-rralla-te-marin-barletit>. [accessed 25 May 2018]



fort të njoma, n'limonti
Zgjoheh vashat edhe ngrysen,
kurse puna e sh'pive tona i mërzit,
i bën të vrëjtura.

Bujari III

Janë në Pulje, më afër.

Bujari IV

bujaresha me plot hire
Kanë Bari dhe Taranti,
por, mësuar n'vend të hapur,
në sheshe gjithnjë me lule,
zemra cok do t'u ngushtohet,
n'rrethin e maleve tona.

Të dërgojm' në Sicili,

Atje i ka t'bijat mbreti.

Bujari II

Nga vapa e flladi detit,

Kur vjen ndër malet me borë zonja
vash' e humb shëndetin.

Skënderbeu

— E di un' se kë do t'marr.

Arbëresh' vashën e dua

Si nga gjuha e zakonet.

Prandaj, zotërinj, në doni,

Te pallati i Arianitit,

N'Katar i dërgojm te zonja

Te Donika Marineza!

(de Rada, 1983, p. 123)

very gentle, in apathy
girls wake up and go to sleep
Whilst chores in our homes make them tired,
frown

Noblemen III

Those from Pulje are closer.

Noblemen IV

Noble and full of grace are
the ladies from Bari and Taranti
but learnt to be in the open
in the squares filled with flowers
their heart will be strangled
by the heights of our mountains.

We will send in Sicily

Where the King has his daughters

Noblemen II

Coming from the warm seashores

To our snowy mountains girl will lose
her health.

Scanderbeg

— I know who I'm gone a take

Arbëresh' I want the girl

by the language and customs.

thus, you misters, if you like,

to Aranit's Pallace

we will send request to lady

To Donika Marineza!

Instead in those verses, friends propose him to marry a bride from powerful foreign allies, like Naples, Bari, or Taranto, while Scanderbeg's answer comes firm:

Arbëresh' vashën e dua

Si nga gjuha e zakonet

Arbëresh' I want the girl

by the language and customs¹⁰

But the question is whether one can imagine a popular/folk song created with this content then, when not only national consciousness, but perhaps even the ethnic one was not yet properly formed? If we make an interpretation of this state of affairs under ethno-symbolism based on the concept of Anthony D. Smith, the ethnic ties between the Albanian tribes of medieval times can be described to represent

10 For Scanderbeg hesitating to get married writes Hodgkinson (see p. 75 and 103), while for his conscious planning based on national motives aluded Barleti, Sabri Godo, etc. http://gazetainfopress.com/historia_arkeologji/martesa-e-skenderbeut-deshmite%E2%80%A8-e-rralla-te-marin-barletit [accessed 25 maj 2018]



the lowest level of ethnicity denominated as *ethnic category*¹¹ according to which ‘the population is designated by outsiders as a distinctive category on the basis of one or more cultural markers, usually language, customs or religion, and its members have no known myth of ancestry and little or no sense of solidarity’ (Smith, 2009, p 27). Viewed from today’s distance, the alliance between the tribes and its strengthening with this marriage can be considered (in Smiths ethnosymbolic context) a moment or a point of departure from *ethnic category* to the ethnic formation or the so-called ‘*ethnic nucleus*’. This level is known as that of ethnic associations, which are able to create common institutions, for example cultic centers, or mutual trading activities, (Smith, 2009, p 27) but in the case of Arbëreshs these were common military activities. However, Skanderbeg’s marriage can be considered the culminant point of reification of the bonds between the Arbëresh tribes, but also of the Alliance with Alfonso (because Aranit — Skanderbeg’s father-in-law already had strong relations with him) and others (Hodgkinson, 2004, p. 129).

Let us try to analyze this song in the context of collective memory. The complexity of collective memory shows Wertsch’s assertion that it is a concept that ‘is widely invoked and discussed, yet it is little understood’ (Wertsch, 2009) or Svetlana Baym’s assertion that it is ‘a messy, unsystematic concept’ (Blight, 2009, p. 239).

Although all studies aim better understanding of the memory functioning, with increasing studies often comes to the discrepancy of this concept, leading to its even higher complexity.

In order to simplify and comprehend better our aim in this paper we decided to focus in few main issues these studies elaborate on and were helpful for our analysis.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

Since the time when Halbwach, in 1920 has thought of the term ‘collective memory’, and claimed that it is differed from history, although both had to do with the past, this distinction and relationship between them became a concern of many authors (Wertsch, 2009, pp. 126–27; Roediger III at al., 2009, p. 140; Blight, 2009, p. 242–43). As a consequence of this difference, collective memory is often equated with memory in popular creativity, as a matter of intergenerational transmitted remembering without writing, and historical memory with memory registered in books. Many authors, dealing with this issue, refer to Peter Novic’s asssertion as put below:

To understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambuiguities, including moral ambiguities, of the protagonists’ motives and behavior. Collective memory simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythical archetypes

11 Two other levels are: ethnic associations and ethnic communities or ethnies. According to Smith, formation of ethnic communities was preceded by group awareness as ethnic category and ethnic associations.

(pp. 3–4) (Roediger III at al., 2009, p. 140) [thus], [t]ypically a collective memory ...is understood to express some eternal truth about the group — usually tragic. A memory, once established, comes to define that eternal truth, and, along with it, an eternal identity, for the members of the group (p.4) (Wertsch, 2009, p. 126).



So, the song transcribed by De Rada can be understood as such a simplification that conveys a truth of a group. And, explanation of this constructed truth as we will see can be illustrated with further elaboration.

Though different, the distinction between history and collective memory can not be as cut by knife and often they intertwine some common elements. After all, both of them are ways to remember, they have a mnemonic function. They are stories of important events for a community.

ACCURACY

Another matter of interest though quite difficult (Roediger III at al, 2009, p. 162–65) scrutinized in this context is the accuracy and inaccuracy in collective memory, which leads to what is or is not considered the truth. Given that even historical data, which are considered to be true, are subjected to selections and interpretations of the individuals, institutions, and policy makers, and thus the truths may differ from group to group, different authors suggest that accuracy even more in collective memory, which is considered as more emotional, has a secondary role and its purpose and function usually involves a greater picture of continuity, solidarity and group identity. Important, especially for the oral tradition is to ‘transfer the meanings and the values of the society that are embedded in the story’ (Karacan, 2016, p. 28).

Author David W. Blight regarding the differences between history and collective memory asserts that ‘if history is shared and secular, memory is often treated as a sacred set of absolute meanings and stories, possessed as the heritage or identity of a community. [...] Memory often coalesces in objects, sites, monuments; history seeks to understand contexts in all their complexity’ (Blight, 2009, p. 242–43).

INDIVIDUAL VS COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Another important element for collective memory is its relationship to individual memory. ‘Can there be any collective remembrance?’ asked Bartlett in 1932 while in contrary 60 years later Schudson (1992) had ‘questioned whether memory can be anything but collective’. (p. 141). In response, Wertsch and Roediger had provided a possible explanation that intertwined these two positions, as ‘agreement on the point that socially situated individuals are the agents of remembering’ (Roediger III at al, 2009, p. 141).

Based on this we could ascertain that in the song for Skanderbeg’s marriage, De Rada may have been or can be considered an agent for the preservation and transfer of a sense of social value, that is group unity and envisioned ethnic/national identity,



which is alluded to have been designed by Skanderbeg, for the purposes and interests of which are given us clarifications by historical data and insights. Dilemmas regarding the selection seem correct, but the selection of the narrative can be questionable. The simplicity of the text seems to be in line with folk creativity, and if Skanderbeg's project for reunion was really so conscious, then from 1451 to 1468, for how long Skanderbeg lived in marriage, such a story about the event could yet have become part of the then community's discourse, already united in an alliance, resulting in popular songs.

SKANDERBEG'S DEATH IN THE CONTEXT OF ETHNOSYMBOLISM AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

In Hodgkinson's book it is written that Skanderbeg on 16 January 1468, after he successfully retreated Sultan Mehmet's Turkish troops off of Kruja, had set off to Lezha, where he invited again all the noble princes, as well as representatives of Venice to talk about the dangers that were threatening from Sulltan, who was more determined than ever to expand his power further into Europe, and who saw region of Albania as a strategic point from where he would achieve his goal. Unfortunately, when he arrived in Lezha, he was overwhelmed by malaria fever and on January 17th he died. Hodgkinson had decided to bring in this section of his book De Rada's folk song about Skanderbeg's death, which he refers to as 'Dirge for Scanderbeg' and which was heard to be sung on the streets of Naples around the 1840s. He had found this record in the French magazine (MB Albini, Calabre, pp 266-74), where the French version was given. We cannot be sure if Hodgkinson was aware who original Collector was.

This song in De Rada's *Rhapsodies* looks like this, and below is the version brought by Hodgkinson:

'Dirge for Scanderbeg'

It was a day of mist, cheerless; and the heavens were ready to weep. Then the rainwashed dawn broke and a cry echoed around the hills throwing every heart and house into mourning. It was the voice of the chieftain Lek Dukagjini who, beating his forehead with one hand, tore his hair with the other. Arouse yourself, Albania! Come, warriors and women, orphans that you all are, you have lost the father who helped and advised and loved you. No one now will protect the honor of the virgin, the hapinnes of the citizen, because the Lord of Albania died this morning. Scanderbeg is no more.

The houses heard the cry and their foundation trembled. The mountains heard it and were rent asunder. The bells in the churches proclaimed their mourning. Scanderbeg, who had perished, was entering into heaven (p. 216).

Vdekja e Skënderbeut

*Shkoi një ditë megjullore
Mjegullore e helmere, thuia qielli do t'vajojë*



Pastaj duke gdhir' me shi
 Nga sheshi u ndi një gjëmë
 Që hyri dhe solli zinë ndër pallate
 Ishte Lekë Dukagjini
 Rrihte ballin me një dorë
 E me tjetrën shkulte flokët
 -Trandu, trandu Arbëri, eni zonja e bujarë
 Eni t'varfër dhe ushtarë, eni qani t'pikëllueshëm
 Sepse mbetët sot jetimë
 Pa prindin që ju k'shillonte
 Ju k'shillonte dhe ndihmonte!
 Dhe t'vashave bukurunë
 E të fqinjëve harenë
 S'ka se kush më t'jua mbrojë
 Prindi dhe zoti i Arbërit
 Vdiq ai, sot në mëngjes
 Skënderbeu s'është më!

After Skanderbeg's death, his wife Donika allowed Kruja to be invaded by Venice, who held the power there for 10 years. Many authors, including Hodgkinson, have noted that after Skanderbeg's death,

'[...] to keep the spirit of its great commander alive in the hearts of defenders, choirs of maidens, 'though surrounded by the din of battle and the clang of barbarians arms, assembled regularly every eighth day in the public squares of the cities of the principality to sing hymns for their departed hero' (Hodgkinson, 2004, p.217).

It is of interest to note that the description of Dukagjini's Dirge in the song, beating his forehead and tearing his hear, as well as summoning the words, is a well known tradition/custom of men lamenting named 'Gjama', and was part of the death rites in North Albania till late twentieth century, and maybe more.

Considering this we could claim that during this 10-year period Skanderbeg's figure was just starting to be deified and mythicized. This can be noticed much better in the second song, transcribed by De Rada, titled 'Skanderbeg and Death', in which the hero leaves among other things the blessings and the last will to his son:

But before you escape¹², when you arrive at the seashore, there is a beautiful stately cypress; there you hook up my horse ... Beyond the horse, affront the sea wind, open my flag and in the middle of this flag leave my sword to hang! When the north wind blows, the horse will neigh, the flag will vawe, and the sword will tinkle on the stately cypress. The Turks will hear this and frightened, remembering the death that is in my sword, will never go after you.

12 Son, wife, and their escort away from homeland.



Here we can notice element of his mythization and sacralization. In 1478, Kruja surrendered and an unprecedented massacre was made upon population. That his figure was mythicized speaks the fact that after the fall of Lezha the same year, Turk soldiers broke the Cathedral of St. Nicola, opened Skanderbeg's tomb and took pieces of his bones as amulets, hoping to gain/acquire his bravery and success.

After the death of Skanderbeg, a large number of people, in other waves have moved to Italy, and obviously carried the memory of these events.

In the context of ethnosymbolism it can be considered that at this stage Albanians begin to produce some symbols and elements, including myths, that later facilitate the transition to the third level of ethnic form, called *ethnic community* or *ethnie*, as the most complex and unified form of ethnicity (Smith, 2009, p. 27). For Blight myths are 'deeply encoded stories from history that acquire with time a symbolic power in any culture' (Blight, 2009, p. 241).

Given the above elements, it is not surprising that the historical period of Skanderbeg's time as an ethnic past with all possible narratives about it, including myths, is selected and named at the time of national revival as the 'golden age'¹³ of national history, or 'the great time' as De Rada calls it.

TRAUMA

Another inter-related and interesting issue for our topic is the issue of traumatic events in the context of collective memory.

Authors James W. Pennebaker and Amy L. Gonzales in their paper 'Making History: Social and Psychological Processes Underlying Collective Memory', also examine this issue by emphasizing that most of the historical events stem from traumatic upheavals (p.175) and that 'Historical events are generally historical because one large upheaval unleashes a series of subsequent events that change large groups of people for generations' (Pennebaker & Gonzales, 2009, pp.177). So it comes out that traumas associated with social upheavals are one of connecting points of history and collective memory. This explanation seems to be explicitly and easily associated with the Arbëreshs because Scanderbeg's death for most of Arbëreshs was two folded trauma; initially because the loss of their leader and protector, as Lek Dukagjini cries in the poem, presented an event of tremendous change, therefore trauma, and secondly this was followed by revenge of the winners, forcing many to flee from their homeland, in several waves, what consequently caused the experience of another trauma for a considerable part of them.

The need of the displaced to preserve and anchor the identity through practicing cultural rites, or any other form, no matter how fragmented, is proved also in present times by contemporary studies on transnationalism. One of the most powerful forms could be considered the practice of rituals, as acts of preserving cultural cohesion.

13 For relations between ethies, nations, myths, golden age, historical past see: Smith, 2009, pp. 36-39 and 95-97.



Since we are dealing with Skanderbeg's figure, we can bring here the data brought by Mustafa Ibrahimî from Frasnita, the Arbëresh village in the province of Kozenca, whose inhabitants were settled there around 1478–80, so after Skanderbeg's death and surrender of Kruja (p. 68). This community, the author writes, is one of the arbëresh speaking communities that specifically preserves Eastern customs. In Frasnita lives the ancient spirit of Arbëresh ethnicity. The Eastern Monday and Tuesday are the natural context of the original forms of identity representation. In these holy days a central place occupies the performance of Skanderbeg's Army and The Dance [...] during this celebration several young people wearing clothes of the time imitate Skanderbeg Army while one of them acts as Skanderbeg himself, seated on the horse and followed by his walking soldiers. The girls dressed in the precious traditional costume, led by 'curly locks', dance by 'drawing' inseparable spirals and singing verses of rhapsodies that glorify the fundamental values of the Arbëresh people and their heroes (Ibrahimî, 2008, pp. 70–1).

WAYS OF REMEMBRANCE

Some scholars see the importance of collective memory analysis and its relation with history in defining the ways of remembering and the phases of remembering. The author Jay Winter focuses, *inter alia*, on the 'sites of memory' who, unlike Nora, who by this term implied different texts from legends to fairy tales to concepts, uses it in the sense closer to implying physical places where commemorative acts or commemoration take place (Winter, 2009, p. 251). In order to clarify his position on ways of remembering I will bring here this paragraph: 'increasingly, over the twentieth century and beyond, the space between history and memory has been reconfigured. In between is a varied set of cultural practices that may be described as forms of "historical remembrance" (p. 254) Winter says that such a term makes it possible to avoid the pitfalls of 'referring to memory as some vague cloud that exists without agency, and to history as an objective story that exists outside of the people whose lives it describes' (p. 255).

The staging act of Arbëreshs in Frasnita resembles the ritual as a form of remembrance, which is in function of continuity and memory, where integration of more meanings, such as historical, cultural, identity, and where the ideology and power are not lacking.¹⁴

It is interesting to note that the various ceremonies of commemoration also have the importance of a ritual, especially when they are made on important anniversaries. Much of the rituals and enactments that strengthen the memory can be re-activated and practiced even after many decades or centuries, and in this case the importance of places of memory becomes very evident. In 2018, 550 years have passed since the death of Skanderbeg and this year was declared the year of Skanderbeg in all relevant Albanian institutions in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, and even wider, so to commemorate the 'golden age' of Arbëreshs and Albanians. Numerous artistic and scientific activities (conferences, exhibitions, etc.) were organized as a form

14 For enactments of the past see Lowenthal (1985, p. 295).



of remembrance of his figure. However, here I would like to emphasize the staging of the Skanderbeg's Wedding in Kanina, near Vlora, where Scanderbeg's actual wedding had happened. There were brought two actors who could according to Lowenthal be identified as 'human artifacts' that acted and were seen as Skanderbeg and Donika; there was a large number of folk ensembles, including Arbëreshs from Italy, and moreover among this group of Arbëresh were present direct descendants of Skanderbeg.¹⁵ It was a public event, which made great headlines; about it was written and it was broadcast by many media, and of course it was interpreted in different ways, some glorifying and some criticizing the way of its realization but not the action itself.¹⁶ This illustrates Winter's concept of places of remembrance as a 'materialization of national and [...] political identity' (p.257).

CONCLUSION

This paper offers a solid illustration of how important is the role of Skanderbeg's figure in identification of Albanians in general and Arbëreshs in particular, and why this seems to be so simple and undertsandable. This work also reflects on how complex is his — story and figure and historical, ideological, cultural, and religious implications of his life not only at local but also regional and even broader level (if his identification with europianism and chritianism is to be considered)¹⁷. It also offers an insight about the level or nuances of imagination and accuracy present in different narratives constructed about Scanderbeg and the ways they intertwine, negotiate and interplay. We can conclude that the figure of Scanderbeg as a prominent figure in national building of Arbëreshs and Albanians finds a solid ground in ethnosymbolic interpretation followed by modern constructivist patterns in which were involved numerous Arbëresh and Albanian intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Jeronim de Rada. The illumination of the process is facilitated by theory of collective memory, and especially is supported by the practices on the ways of remembering Scanderbeg in present times, which reify that the old songs about Scanderbeg are not only expression of collective memory but also expression of longing and belonging to the ancestral homeland.

15 'In the castle in Kanina, the parliamentarian Fate Velaj, realizes his old dream. In cooperation with the Municipality of Vlora, he organized for the first time in history, 'Scanderbeg's Wedding/Dasmën e Skënderbeut', same as could have been celebrated at their times. With delegation consisting of 60 participants, coming from the community of Arbëresh in Italy, among whom was also Loris Castriota Scanderbeg — the grandson of Gjergj Kastrioti, was celebrated the 567th anniversary of most historical wedding of Albanian nation as well as 590th birthday anniversary of Donika Gjergj Arianiti in Kanina.' In <http://www.batyoutube.com/watch?v=DxuEshnmV-4> [accessed 1 June 2018]

16 A critic writing on the way this celebration was organized; <http://www.shqiperiaime.info/dasma-e-skenderbeut-25-milion-lekeshe-qe-nuk-ju-pershtat-as-veshja-foto-57633/> [accessed 1 June 2018]

17 See more (Misha) 2002.

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