

Culture of Albania in Years (1928-1938)**Cultural Studies**

Keywords: Cultural development, eradication of illiteracy, press, art, theater, music, sculpture, film, and the Albanian Sports Federation.

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Albania in the years 1928-1939 was marked by a period of great cultural development. Many Albanians who studied overseas in developed countries brought back best practices. There were developments in social and cultural affairs. Importance was given to reducing illiteracy by opening schools across the country. Literary and scientific books were written, translated, and published. The press played an important role in the revival of cultural life. During this period, newspapers and magazines were published across the country. Music and theater played a major role in cultural revival, with singers Marije Kraja e Tefta Tashko, as well as art and sculpture with the great sculptor Odhise Paskali. In June 1930, the Sports Federation was established.

“We must make quick steps and strides towards Western culture and civilization. One thing imposed on us by history, geography, our political position, and the character of our people”³⁹

Ahmet Zogu**Civilization and culture in Albania during the monarchy**

Despite the social and economic challenges of Albania, cultural progress occurred. This development was thanks to the cultural heritage of the National Renaissance, which in years since has served as an inspiration for all current intellectuals.

Albania had numerous intellectuals who were educated abroad and who were thus equipped with progressive Western culture. Despite difficult conditions, during the monarchy Albania again emerged in areas such as philosophical thought, politics and culture, popular culture, education, publications, literature, and art, etc.⁴⁰

A great effort was made in the field of education, because approximately 90% of the Albanian population was illiterate in 1928, and because cultural development could not occur without educational advances. But progress was not very simple, because in the early 1930s, work in the field of education was scarce as the education system had to be built from the ground up. To establish a good education system was very difficult, because the educational infrastructure was lacking and there were few qualified teachers or printed textbooks. In Albania, the schools that remained were: Lyceum of Korça, Elbasan Normal, Qiriaz Institute, Fultz Technical School, and the Schools of the Catholic Clergy in Shkodër. During the period of monarchy, several schools were cultivated: Tirana High School, “Mother of Kings” School, agriculture schools that reopened in Lushnja and in Kavaja, as well as several primary and secondary schools in several towns and villages across the country. Special attention was paid to the Elbasan Normal school, which prepared teachers professional to instruct in schools across Albania and the Albanian territories. In order to facilitate the opening of schools across the country, Zogu, wrote Bernard Fischer, “undertook an ambitious reform program, which had as objective the introduction of a whole network of primary schools in the entire country, built on the basis of the boarding system, for all those children living in remote areas”.⁴¹

³⁹ Bernard J. Fischer, *King Zog and the struggle for stability in Albania*, Çabej, Tiranë 2004, p. 180

⁴⁰ Science Academy of Albania, “History of Albania” vëll. III, Toena, Tiranë 2007, p. 375

⁴¹ Bernard J. Fischer, *King Zog and the struggle for stability in Albania*, Çabej, Tiranë 2004, p. 183

In 1934, the Albanian government decided to nationalize all schools in the country. This move was more political than education. This government undertaking was unable to silence neighboring states that protested to the League of Nations. Responding to Italian leaders of the opposition, the Albanian Minister of Foreign Culture responded: “The need of the state is that our country’s youth attend only Albanian school, because its purpose is to instill in them a love for the homeland, a sense of national unity”.⁴² Forced by international pressure, after some time the Albanian government dropped the ban on foreign schools within the country. A significant emphasis was placed on primary and compulsory schools. A group of teachers at an esteemed school, Alexander Xhuvani, designed and printed textbooks in plain language, the Elbasan dialect. This was a major service towards advancing education because this dialect from the middle of the country was understood by residents throughout the country. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Independence, the Ministry of Education made an attempt to collect all the treasures of folklore. Material collected in 1937 was published in two volumes and includes the most famous ballads and fairytales that have been passed down through generations for centuries.⁴³

Growing demands for publications after the Declaration of Independence provided the impetus for the establishment of printing houses in Albania. The first printing houses were Catholic religious institutions who had long developed printing activities. The first public publishing activities were performed by the Government of Vlora and were called the “Albanian State Printing House” and later the printing house “Vlora.” Throughout the 1930s, multiple presses were opened in other cities of the country: Gjirokastra, Elbasan, Shkodra, Durrës, etc. In these printing houses, numerous presses published over 400 titles. During this period, numerous instructional books were brought from Italy and later from France, Greece, and Turkey. Professional scholastic literature came from England and the United States.⁴⁴

Of great importance was the establishment of libraries in multiple cities (including Elbasan and Shkodra) and the enrichment of the inventory at the National Library with books in English, French, and Italian in order to impart readers with western values⁴⁵. Thanks to the initiative of Lumo Skëndit in 1938, the Albanological Institute was built, housing over 20,000 volumes.⁴⁶

The press played a key role in the revival of cultural life. In the 1930s, journalism flourished. Newspapers and magazines, published in Tirana and numerous other cities throughout the country, addressed a variety of problems facing Albanians. In this time period, a number of magazines of a religious nature were also published. Their pages held religious propaganda and the suggestion of the special role of religion in achieving human perfection⁴⁷. Catholic clergy were known as “Hylli i Dritës” while Muslim clergy were “Zani Naltë.” The press published works by celebrated cultural authorities such as: Vangjel Koca, Jorgji Meksi, Branko Merxhani, Ismet Toto, Nebil Cikës, Kostë Çekrezi, Tajar Zavalani, and Petro Marko, etc.⁴⁸

During this period of cultural development, literary activity continued to increase and many authors contributed to this revival: Fan Noli, Gjergj Fishta, Faik Konica, Asdreni, Andon Zako Cajupi, and Ndre Mjeda, etc. With their pens, these fathers of Albanian literature began to write about the thorny issues of Albanian society and its shortcomings, all without leaving behind Romanticism. Their works included publicity, history, literary studies, poetry, prose, etc.

⁴² Science Academy of Albania, “History of Albania” vëll. III, Toena, Tiranë 2007, p. 376

⁴³ Zavalani Tajar, *Histori of Albania*, Phoenix, 1998, p. 301

⁴⁴ Science Academy of Albania, “History of Albania” vel. III, Toena, Tiranë 2007, p. 402

⁴⁵ Shehu Eugen, *Albania Moranchy, Urtësia*, Tiranë 2010, p. 421

⁴⁶ Newspaper “Përpyjekja Shqiptare”, p.149

⁴⁷ Valentina Duka, *History of Albania 1912-2001*”, Kristalina –KH, Tiranë 2007, p. 202

⁴⁸ Iljaz Gogolja, *Cultural Development in Albania of year ‘30, Monarkia Shqiptare, Albania Monarchy, Albanological Studies Center, Institute of History, Tiranë: Toena, 2011, p. 190*

Two poets, Migjeni and Lasgush Poradeci, were at the forefront of the modernization of Albanian literature. Giving special attention to the field of translation, Fan Noli masterfully translated a number of masterpieces of world literature such as Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, the famous novel *The Ingenious Don Quixote of La Mancha*, the dramas *Enemy of the People* and *Rubaiyat*, etc., and *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo.⁴⁹ A distinguishing feature of the literature of this period is the fact that prose was less developed than poetry. Main authors of prose during this period were Ernest Koliqi and Mitrush Kuteli.⁵⁰

An attempt was made by a group of intellectuals to pave the way in the field of social transformations, to allow for the freedom of opinion and expression in the public press. Two philosophical and political schools of thought emerged: "The New" and "The Old." The former was represented by Ismet Toto, Nebil Cipa, Seit Qemali, and Ferit Vokopola. Their ideas appeared in the following newspapers: "Arbëria", "Rilindja e Arbërisë", "Vullneti", "Ylliria", etc. This school of thought was actually a strong political regime, which they called "enlightened dictatorship," and was headed by Ahmet Zogu. "The New" claimed that "the Old" were usurpers of power and degraded the quality of the Oriental state.

The school of thought of "the Old" was represented by Teki Selenica, Terenc Toci, and Abdurrahman Dibra. Their ideas appeared in newspapers such as "Fidelity," "Light," "The People's Sweat," and "The Korça Journal," etc. Their ideology was centered on the monarchical cult and Ahmet Zogu, and they were against communism, calling it the "Red Dragon." "The Old" protected the Beys, the usurers, and Italian merchants. They were strong proponents of an Italo-Albanian alliance⁵¹. In the years 1928-1938, there was progress in musical and theatrical developments. Many cities saw the opening of cultural associations such as "Rozafati" and "Bogdani" in Shkodra with an orchestra and choir, "Lyra" with an orchestra and choir, and "Korça Youth" with a choir and mandolin. Beyond singing and Albanian folk music, their repertoires included Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Verdi, etc. Recognition must be given to the professional singers who studied abroad and returned to perform concerts throughout the country: Tefta Tashko, Marije Kraja, Kristaq Antoniu, etc. Albanian music was becoming a favorite in important musical capitals throughout the world, such as Vienna, Paris, and Berlin, etc.⁵²

In 1928 in Tirana, the theatrical group "Tirana" was established, performing both dramatic and comedic content. But, within theatrical society, pieces of patriotic content were also performed: "Flower of Remembrance," "Curse of the Albanian Language," "Death of Pyrrhus," etc. Moreover, foreign dramas were performed: "Doctor without Mittens," "Marriage Gone Awry," and "The Tricks of Skapenit."⁵³ It should be mentioned that men played the roles of women.

Further developments included the screenings of films and world cinematic masterpieces, but only in Tirana, which had three cinemas. Moviegoers could attend back-to-back showings of dramas penned by local authors and modern foreign films.⁵⁴

Another artistic field that saw development was the fine arts. There were two main generations of artists: the generation of the Renaissance period and the generation of the several young artists who had returned to Albania after completing their studies abroad. During this era, the kingdom opened two schools: one for drawing and one technical institute, both in Tirana.

⁴⁹ Newspaper "Populli", 1935, p. 14

⁵⁰ Valentina Duka, *History of Albania 1912-2001*, Kristalina –KH, Tiranë 2007, p. 204

⁵¹ Iljaz Gogoja, *Cultural Development in Albania of year '30...*, p. 192

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 194

⁵³ Science Academy of Albania, "History of Albania" vel. III, Toena, Tiranë 2007, p. 407

⁵⁴ Heselne Nigel, *Scarred background: A Journey through Albania*. London: Lovat Dickson Limited, p. 15

Students of these schools held many expositions of their work, beginning on 24 May 1931, as well as participating in exhibitions abroad such as in Paris. In that exposition, Albanian art was represented by 12 works, created by drawing students, and the subjects donned traditional Albanian costume.⁵⁵ Famous artists of this period included Korçar Vangjush Mio and Shkodran painter Zef Kolombi.

Developments in sculpture and are best represented by the great sculptor Odhise Paskali. The bulk of his work consisted of memorials or monuments of prominent national figures. Notable works include the statue of Cerciz Topullit in Gjirokastër, e Themistokli Gërmenjit, the “Unknown Soldier” monument in Korça, and the “National Warrior” tomb of Ismail Qemalit in Vlora.⁵⁶

Albanians are descendants of the Illyrians, one of the most civilized nations of the Balkans, and the country is rich with yet-to-be-unearthed archaeological artifacts. The promise of archeological discovery attracted not only Albanian scholars but also foreign archeologists. One important group of foreign archeologists in Albania was led by the Italian Luigi Ugolini in Butrint (Unione Italia Albania). Other groups included an Austrian mission headed by Karl Prashniker and a French mission headed by Leon Rey, both of which undertook excavations at Apollonia. Albanian archeologists deserving recognition include Hasan Ceka and Shtjefën Gjecovi, among others. Artifacts discovered in Albania were determined to be of high value and were often the subject of international conferences, such as one at the Sorbonne: “Archaeological discoveries in Albania, beautiful natural vistas, and tourism”.⁵⁷

During the period of monarchy, sports development took off. Under the auspices of Colonel Aqif Përmetit, a national sports federation was created whose function was to control football, volleyball, and other athletic activities. the Albanian Sports Federation was created by a decree-law in June 1930. Initially, the Federation organized football matches in a few cities such as Tirana, Vlora, and Shkoder, and later on such arrangements were made in each prefecture. As the Colonel himself was not a sports expert, he founded the Albanian Arbitrary Technical Committee (KTASH). KTASH was headed by Darell Oakley-Hill who at the time was one of the British experts employed in Albania to reform Albanian gendarmerie. Later, the Federation of Cyclists was created by the initiatives of Shkodran cyclists, and this Federation organized the first championship of the sport.⁵⁸ Other sports were not widespread or met with enthusiasm in Albania. However, KTASH directed Albanians to other leisure pastimes as well, such as automotive tourism. The Committee of Tourism and Royal Automotives was created. Under the auspices of the King, this committee had a fruitful cooperation with KTASH, creating links with the Automotive Association of London. The Albanian Committee was registered internationally, and in accordance with customs procedures, instituted models for driving licenses. Although Albania welcomed foreign visitors leisurely driving throughout the country, Albanian roads left much to be desired and drivers were often forced to abandon their tours unexpectedly in northern areas.⁵⁹

The Royal Tennis Club was another entertainment option for posh fans. Its headquarters was located on Mussolini Boulevard behind the French Legation. It served only those members who could financially afford to abide by the dress code. Inside the Club was as large dance hall, a bar, and two tennis courts. Club members were mainly diplomats, foreign teachers who came to teach in Albania, and even some Albanians who had learned tennis thanks to their stays abroad.⁶⁰ Cultural development was one of the priorities of King Zog.

⁵⁵ Interior Ministry, 10 years Monarchy, Tiranë, 1938, p. 291

⁵⁶ Iljaz Gogoja, Cultural Development in Albania of year '30 ..., p. 196

⁵⁷ Newspaper “Korça”, p. 1

⁵⁸ Eugen Shehu, Albania Monarchy, Tiranë: Urtësia, 2010, p. 428

⁵⁹ Hill D.R. Oakley, An Englishman in Albania: Memories of a British Officer 1929-1955, London: The Center for Albanian Studies, p. 50

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 51

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