

The Christian Saints in the (Micro)toponymy of Albania



Hagio-toponymy

Keywords: name, Saint, St., toponym, microtoponym, variant.

Albert Riska

Department of Linguistics
“A. Xhuvani” University, Elbasan, Albania.

Abstract

This study lists a group of Albanian toponyms that derive from the names of the Christian saints. The presentation of such toponyms includes the geographic location as well as the variants in which they appear. The different variants of these toponyms together with the different phonetic composition are of great interest from a dialectical and historical–linguistic stand point. The large number of the toponyms and the variety of their forms present a number of problems. However, by way of introduction, we have limited our research to a few linguistic and ethno cultural issues such as dialectical differences between the variants of the toponyms, the phonetic developments of the Saints’ names vis a vis the Latin forms, (taking into consideration that most of them have come into the Albanian language through Latin) and the short form of the Saints’ name, etc. The linguistic analyses indicate that the conversion to Christianity of Albanias is a very ancient process.

Introduction

Toponyms derived from the names of cult objects in sites where Christianity was practised, i.e. Sao Paolo, Saint Etien, Sanremo, etc. This happened in Albania (where Christianity is about two thousand years old) with its specific characteristics. Common nouns indicating the category of the cult objects, such as *qelë* (a small priest abode), *kishë* (church), *manastir* (monastery), have resulted in toponyms like *Qelëz* [qɛləz], *Kishtë* [kiʃtə], *Qishbardhë* [qiʃbarðə], *Munështir* [munəʃtir]. What we have here is a metaphor: the name of the object is transferred to the place where the object was situated. This metaphor would normally happen if for different natural or historical reasons, the cult object would disappear.

Whatever the category of the cult object, i.e. whether it was a small priest abode, a basilica or a monastery, the object of the Christian cult was associated with the name of the Saint they were dedicated to: *Shën Pjetër* [ʃən pietər] (Saint Peter) for “monastery of Saint Peter”, or *Shën Kolli* [ʃən kɔlli] (Saint Nicholas) for “church of Saint Nicholas” etc. This is a case of a metaphor: the name of the Saint becomes the name of the object. And as mentioned above, if for different reasons the cult object disappears, the name of the Saint continues to be used as the name of the place.

So, in this study we will only list as toponyms names linked to the name of a Saint, in sites where signs of the cult object are not found anymore, and the recollection of the object is long lost. The toponyms we will list below are not all/completely unknown to the linguists or historians, some of them denote inhabited centres or important geographical objects, such as *Shëngjin* [ʃəngjin] (port and town in the North), *Shijak* [ʃijak] (a town near Durrës), *Shëngjergj* [ʃəngjɛrgj] (an area near Tirana), *Shmil* [ʃmil] (an area near Elbasan), *Shëndëlli* [ʃəndəlli] (a mountain in the South) etc. They have always been mentioned as evidence that the Christianity has been spread early in Albania (Domi, 1970; Xhufi, 1994; Mansaku, 1999; Sinani, 2010). Above all, they are important as information sources for the history of the Albanian language, considering that Albanian has a very late historic document (century XV). So that it can enlighten the early pre-written stages of the Albanian, the historic-linguistic knowledge has to make use of alternative

information sources. One of the most important sources is the onomastics data (Demiraj, 1999), and the main role in this is the toponomastics. Almost all the Saints' names in Albanian have arrived from the Latin, and comparing the present form of the name (as found in the toponym) with the Latin form, can identify the changes that the word has gone through during its usage in Albanian.

The toponomastics material

Below we will list the name of the Saints and the toponyms related to them, based on where they are spread and the number of variant in which they are found.

Saint Mary, Shën Mëria, the mother of Jesus Christ. Shën Mëria [ʃən məria] (Saint Mary) is one of the most widespread cults in our country and this becomes obvious if you notice the large number of churches dedicated to her (Elsie, 2000).

It appears as a toponym all over Albanian territory: in Kukës, in Lezha, Gramsh, Elbasan, Librazhd, Pogradec etc. It also appears several times in Çamëri (Haxhihasani, 1975).

It comes in the following variants: Shënmëri [ʃənməri], Shëmëri [ʃəməri], Shëmri [ʃəmri], Shërmëritë [ʃərməritə], Shumrije [ʃumrijɛ] and two diminutive forms: Shëmrizë [ʃənmrizə], Shumrizë [ʃumrizə].

Saint Elijah, Shën Ilia, prophet. Toponyms linked to this Saint are found all over Albania. It might be the most widespread Saint together with Saint Mary.

One mountain of the mountainous range in the Southern Albania is called Shëndëllia [ʃəndəllia].

Another mountain in Janjar of Konispol, Çamëri, is called Shëndëlli [ʃəndəlli] (Haxhihasani, 1975).

It appears in some occasions in the microtoponymy of Mokra, Pogradec, in Petresh, Elbasan, in Librazhd, in Laç, in Hot (Daka, 2008: 134) etc., in the variants: Shëndëlli [ʃəndəlli], Shënlli [ʃənlli], Shlli [ʃlli], Shllin [ʃllin] and Shllinza [ʃllinza].

Saint Demetrius, Shën Dhimitri/Mitri – a very honoured Saint. It is found in the area of Dajt, near Tirana, in the vicinity of Elbasan, four times in the area of Mokra, Pogradec and in Çamëri (Haxhihasani, 1975). The Arberesh who moved to Italy took with them the name of the Saint, as in the toponym Shënmitër [ʃənmitər] Korona.

Variants: Shmitër [ʃmitər], Shmetër [ʃmɛtər], Shimitër [ʃimitər], Shënmitër [ʃənmitər], Shëmitër [ʃəmitər], Shëmitra [ʃəmitra], Shëmbitër [ʃəmbitər].

Saint Martin, Shën Martini. Very known in some South-East areas: almost in the microtoponymy of every village in Mokra, and in the surroundings of Librazhd, Kolonjë, Elbasan, Tiranë, etc.

Variants: Shëmtirë [ʃəmtirə], Shëmtirat [ʃəmtirat], Shëmërti [ʃəmər̩ti], Shëmërtin [ʃəmər̩tin], Shënmërtiri [ʃənmər̩tir̩], Shumtini [ʃumtini].

Shën Premti/Shën Prenda (there are no related names in other languages). It appears as a toponym in the district of Gramsh, Lushnjë, near Divjaka, in the surroundings of Elbasan, Librazhd, and Mokër of Pogradec.

Variants: Shënepremte [ʃənɛprɛmtɛ], Shënepremti [ʃənɛprɛmti], Shëpremtë [ʃəprɛmtɛ], Shepremtë [ʃɛprɛmtɛ], Sheprente [ʃɛprɛntɛ].

Saint Theodore, Shën Tódrri. It is found as a toponym in some instances in Montenegro, in the surroundings of Shkodra (Armao, 1933: 142), twice in the surroundings of Elbasan, and in Kavaja, Lunxhëri of Gjirokastra ((Bërxfholi, 2007: 19) and in Konispol.

Variants: Shëntodhër [ʃəntɔðər], Shëndodhër [ʃəndɔðər], Shtodhër [ʃtɔðər], Shëntod [ʃəntɔd], Shtodër [ʃtɔdər], also maybe as Shtoj [ʃtɔj] (Sinani, 2010: 64).

Saint George, Shën Gjérgji. It has remained as the name of an area in Tirana, and as a toponym in many places in Mirdita, Kavaja, Mokër of Pogradec, Gramsh, Vlora, Çamëri etc.

Variants: Shëngjergj [ʃəngjɛrgj] dhe Shingjergj [ʃingjɛrgj], Shëngjerth [ʃəngjɛrθ].

Saint Nicholas, Shën Nikólla. It often appears in the shortened form Koll and throughout almost the whole territory: in the river Buna bank, in Lezha, Mat, Tirana, twice in Elbasan, in Mokra of Pogradec, and twice in Çamëri near the village Shulash (Haxhihasani, 1975: 289)

Variants: Shënkoll [ʃənkɔll], Shënkollas [ʃənkɔllas], Shinkoll [ʃinkɔll], Shinikoll [ʃinikɔll]. Saint Athanasius, Shën Thanási. It appears in Montenegro (Valentini, 1944), in the surroundings of Kavaja and Elbasan, in Polis and Pishkash of Librazhd, in Përrenjas, twice in Mokra of Pogradec etc.

Variants: Shtáne [ʃtʌnɛ], Shtanáš [ʃtanʌs], Shtanáž [ʃtanʌz], Shtanáškë [ʃtanʌškə].

Saint John, Shën Gjóni, apostle. This Christian name appears in Albanian in some variants, as Jon, Gjon and Jan. In toponymy: Shijon [ʃijɔn] - twice in the surroundings of Elbasan; Shinjan [ʃinjʌn] -near Delvina; while Gjon appears without the attribute Shën in the variants Gjonm [gjɔnm] and Gjorm [gjɔrm].

Shën Gjíni (no related names in other languages). The name of this Saint is found in Mirditëa (Beci, 1982: 28), twice in the surroundings of Tirana and in Elbasan.

Variants: Shëngjin [ʃəngjin] and Shnjin [ʃnjin].

Saint Blaise, Shën Vlášhi. The Saint's name appears in the name of a village between Elbasan and Gramsh, another village in Durrës, and one in Çamëri.

Variants: Shënavlash [ʃənavlaʃ], Shuvlash [ʃuvlaʃ], Shulash [ʃulaʃ].

Saint Matthew, Shën Matéu, apostle. It is found in the name of a village in Gramsh, in a microtoponym in the village Petresh of Elbasan, and in the village Kastriot of Dibra e Poshtme.

Variants: Shëmbërdhe [ʃəmbərdɛ], Shamathe [ʃamaθɛ], Shamatë [ʃamatə].

Saint Matthias, Shën Tish, apostle. It is found in the name of a village near Tirana, one near Belsh, and one in Lubinjë near Gramsh.

Variants: Shtish [ʃtiʃ] (Shtish-Tufina) [ʃtiʃ-tufina], Shtith [ʃtiθ], Shëmtith [ʃəmtiθ].

Saint Stephen, Shën Stefáni/Shtjéfni. The name of this Saint appears in the gheg form Shqéfën [ʃqefən] in Prell, Mat, and in the Tosk form Shqefër [ʃqefər] in Konispol. The microtoponym Lukshqefën [lukʃqefən] (The Mountain Pass of Shqefën) found in Petresh, and the Shjefër [ʃjefər], a bank in Kamiçan, Zavalinë, Elbasan, must also be linked to the name of this Saint.

Saint Peter, Shën Pjétri, apostle. It is found near Divjaka of Lushnja, and twice in the area of Fier. G. Valentini (1944: 195) says that he has found it near Pojan and in the Eastern side of mountain Tomor.

Variants: Shëpjetra [ʃəpjɛtra], Shimpjetri [ʃimpjɛtri], Shëmbetra [ʃəmbɛtra], Shënbieri [ʃəmbjɛri].

Saint Michael, Shën Mëhílli. It is found twice in the surroundings of Elbasan (as the name of an area and of a village), and once near Divjaka of Lushnja.

Variants: Shënmhill/Shënmill [ʃənmhill / ʃənmill], Shëmhill [ʃəmhill], Shmil [ʃmil].

Saint Paul, Shën Páli, apostle. A name of an area in Mirdita - Shpal [ʃpʌl]; and the name of a village near Tirana - Shupal [ʃupʌl] are related to Saint Paul's name.

Saint Sergius, Shën Shírgji. In toponymy we will first mention the name of the village Shirq [ʃirq] near Shkodra. The name of the Saint is also found in the microtoponym Kodra e Shírgjit [kɔdra ɛ ʃirgjit] in the village Balëz, very close to Elbasan.

There is also a village named Shírgjan [ʃirgjan] very close to Elbasan, which seems to have been formed by adding the suffix –an, very much in use in villages' names in the area of Elbasan (Kajan, Gjergjan, Lleshan, Kuqan, Shelcan etj).

The following appear as single occurrences:

Saint Thomas, Shën Thomái, apostle: a village near Mamli, Elbasan, called Shtëmaj [ʃtəmɔj], or more developed Shmaj [ʃmɔj] (we have noted that the pronunciation is optional).

Saint Thaddeus, Shën Tadéu, apostle: a place called Shëntat [ʃəntat] near the village Funar of commune Orenjë, Librazhd.

Saint Symeon, Shën Simóni, apostle: a place called Shmóni [ʃmɔni] in Labinot-Katun, Elbasan.

Saint Jacob, Shën Jáku, apostle: appears in the toponym Shiják [ʃijak], a town near Durrës.

Saint Alexis, Shën Lléshi: a valley called Shënallësh [ʃənallɛʃ] in the village Muhurr in Lower Dibra.

Saint Basile, Shën Vasíli: a village called Shënvasí [ʃənvasi] near Saranda.

Saint Donato, Shën Donáti: a village called Shidhonát [ʃiðɔnat] in Çamëri. This toponym is used alongside the variant Ajdonat [ajdɔnat], where can be noticed that the agglutinated form comes from Greek αἰτο.

Saint Bartholomew, Shën Bartoloméu, apostle: the village called Shilbátër [ʃilbatər], near Elbasan.

Saint Lazarus, Shën Llazári: the village Shulláz [ʃullaz] / Shllaz [ʃllaz] in the Bregu i Matës.

Saint Eleuterio, Shën Leftéri. It may also be that his name has been conserved in the name of village Ftërrë [ftɛrrə] in Kurvelesh.

Saint Geronimo (Ieronymus), Shën Jerónimi. Of all the toponyms we have found, the microtoponym Shëngjéra [ʃəngjɛra] found in Shalës of Konispol, Saranda, will be accepted as the one which most surely relates to the Saint's name.

Saint Bacchius, Shën Báku. There is a toponym in Shkodër Shubák [ʃubak] derived by the name of the saint.

Saint Babila, Shën Bábli. It is found in the microtoponym Shubablla [ʃubablla] in Griqan near Elbasan.

Saint Euphemia, Shën Mija. It is found in the microtoponym Shmija (Sinani, 2010).

Linguistic approach

It is notable that almost all toponyms result from the agglutination of the word shën [ʃən] with the name of the Saint it precedes. The word shën is today normally used as an apposition (Shën Gjergji, Shën Martini, Shën Mëria etc); but it is also used as agglutinated with the name of the Saint, thus forming names of churches, as in kisha e Shmrijs (church of Saint Mary), kisha e Shleshdrit (church of Saint Alexander), kisha e Shëndëllisë (church of Saint Elijah); names of festive religious days, as in dita e Shëngjergjit (Saint George's day), dita e Shëndreut (Saint

Andrew's day), dita e Shumurtirit (Saint Martin's day), dita e Shniritatit (Holy Trinity day); and especially the toponyms Shëngjin, Shëngjergj, Shijon, Shijak, Shullaz, Shumurtin, Shmil, Shpal etc. It should be stressed that the general form Shën appears mostly as an apposition, while it changes phonetically when it is in the body of the toponym. Below the phonetic versions of Shën: shënd- [ʃənd]. It is only found in the Tosk dialect in toponyms related to the name of Shën Ilia: Shëndëlli. In the Gheg dialect it is reduced to Shënlli (nd>n);

shën- [ʃən]. Apart from being the generic form of the apposition, it also appears in toponyms like Shënmhill, Shëngjin, Shëngjergj, Shënepremte, Shëndodhër, Shëntodhër, Shënlli, Shëngjin, Shënvasi, Shënkoll, Shënmitër, Shëntat, Shëngjera, Shëndekla, Shënavlash, Shënallesh (the last two have a supporting a);

shëm/shim-[ʃəm/ʃim]. It appears as a combined variant of shën/shim when the name of the Saint begins with a labial consonant: Shëmbitër, Shimpjetri, Shëmbetra, Shëmbieri;

shë- [ʃə]. It appears when the name of the Saint begins with /m/, as in: Shëmhill, Shëmri, Shëmrizë, Shëmërtin, Shëmtirë, Shëmtith, Shëmbërthe, Shëmtin (maybe from the development nm>m, and also Shëpjetra);

sh- [ʃ]. This is the most phonetically reduced version: Shpal, Shmil, Shtëmaj, Shtish, Shtith, Shtanas, Shtodër, Shtoj, Shtodhër, Shlliu, Shllini, Shnjin, Shllaz etc. In many cases the unstressed vowel /ë/ - (ə) is transformed into another vowel, creating other versions, as in: shu- [ʃu] (Shupal, Shumtin, Shulash, Shullaz, Shumrizë, Shumrije, Shubak); shi/shin- [ʃi/ʃin] (Shijak, Shidhonat, Shijon, Shinikoll, Shinkoll; Shinian, Shingjergj); sha- [ʃa] (Shamathe).

The transformation of the unstressed /ë/ - (ə) into /u/ and /i/ are not uncommon in the Albanian dialects: it is transformed into /u/ in Shkodra, Elbasan, Berat and Gjirokastra when it is next to labial consonants /m/ dhe /p/: mënafsh/munafsh, mëshjtjell/mushtjell, mëzat/muzat, mërzitem/murzitem, sëpat/supat etc.; and it is transformed into /i/ when it is next to palatal consonants, in general in the Gheg talk, and also in the area Berat-Myzeqe-Mallakastër: njëzet/njizet, ndëgjoj/nigjoj, gënjej/ginjej etc. (Gjinari and Shkurtaç, 2009: 191-192). The transformation to an /a/ only appears once in the Gheg area, and rather than a dialect development, it must have happened for the sake of vocal harmony: Shamathe. Xhuvani and Çabej (Çabej, 1976: 163) have acknowledged these phonetic transformations, and when they talk about the prefix lë-, they mention three different historical developments: “Variants of lë- are the prefixes la-, li-, lu-, with the transformation of the before stress ë- into a, i, u, or with the development of one of these vowels after the l-, latredh..., livare..., luqerll...”

Even proper names of the Saints, which have become part of toponyms, appear with developed forms. In the most part they were introduced into Albanian from Latin, and comparing the Albanian and the Latin forms makes it clear that they have been subjected to important phonetic developments, as with other borrowings from the Latin language. So, just to create an idea, we could just analyse these toponyms: Shëmrizë has –mri- as root morpheme: (Shë–mri–zë), which is the developed form of the name Maria. The same with Sh-todër (todër<Teodoro), Sh-mil

(mil<Mëhill<Mihail), Sh-tëmaj/maj (tëmaj/maj<Tomaso), Sh-(ë)lli (lli<Elia/Ilia), Shu-lash (lash<Vlash), Sh-tish (tish<Matias), Shën-tat (tat<Tadeo) etc.

The different transformations of the word shën on one hand, and the name of the Saint on the other hand, have caused a great number of the toponyms to appear in different versions. Sometimes this has been conditioned by the “age” of the toponym, e.g. Shmil [ʃmil] dhe Shënmhill [ʃənmhill] both relate to the name Mëhill, but the first one is much more reduced and must have been much longer in use than the latter. The same can be said for the doubles Shulash [ʃulaʃ] dhe Shënavlash [ʃənavlaʃ], Shtane [ʃtʌnɛ] e Shtanás [ʃtanʌs] etc.

Sometimes the forms are so different from one another that the connection between them can only be told by the in-between forms. It would be difficult to say that the form Shëmtirë [ʃəmtirə] is obtained by agglutinating the word shën with the name Martin Martinit (Shën+Martini=Shëmtirë), if we didn't have the in-between forms Shëmërtin [ʃəmərtin], Shënmërtir [ʃənmərtir], Shumtin [ʃumtin], Shëmërti [ʃəmərti]. Also, it would be difficult to connect the first and the last form in “Shënmëhill, Shënmhill, Shëmhill, Shëmil, Shmil”, if it was not for the in-between forms.

Another interesting toponym comes from Çamëria (Haxhihasani, 1975; Muça, 1978), a territory now belonging to Greece: Shulash [ʃulaʃ], an Albanian village near Igoumenitsa. Today the village is called Αγιοβλασι (Agiovllasi). Of course the official name is the relevant name in Greek, but the Cham population has preserved until today the name Shulash [ʃulaʃ], which is undoubtedly the developed variant of Shënvlash [ʃənvlaʃ], from Sanctus Blasius or Sanctus Vlasios. The historian P. Xhufi (1994) mentions another variant of the toponym: Shuvlash [ʃuvlaʃ], but does not say where he has found it and we do not know if it is related to the same toponym of Çamëri, or if it is another one. Anyway, it's the phonetic form in which he brings the toponym that is of interest to us, as it may serve as link between Shënvlash and Shulash.

Sometimes the versions have been defined by the dual borrowing: from Latin and Greek, which can be distinguished by the phonetic features, such as Shtodër [ʃtɔdər] and Shtodhër [ʃtɔðər], Shijon [ʃijɔn] and Shinjan [ʃinjan], Shmetër [ʃmɛtər] and Shmitër [ʃmitər] etc. But even when we do not have dual borrowing, the phonetic features of the name can tell the name's origin, e.g.: the different versions of the toponyms related to the name of Shën Thanas appear with the /t/ and not with the /θ/: Shtane, Shtanas, Shtanaz, Shtanaska, which indicates that they have derived from the Latin Athanasius, and not from the Greek Αθανάσιος.

In some cases the differences have been defined by the geography of the toponym, as they follow the dialect developments in Albanian. Doubles like Shumtini [ʃumtini]-Shëmtira [ʃəmtira], Shqefën [ʃqefən]-Shqefër [ʃqefər], and Gjonm [gjønm] dhe Gjorm [gjørm] prove the rotation (/n/>r/) – one of the most important phonetic features that make the difference between the two dialects of Albanian. The Tosk forms prove the rotation n>r and must have been in use before the Albanian language came into contact with Slavonic languages, or at least before 10th Century (Demiraj, 1996; Topalli, 2007). Also, Shëndëlli [ʃəndəlli]-Shënlli [ʃənlli], Shëmbetra [ʃəmbɛtra]-

Shëpjetra [ʃəpjɛtra] reflect dialectal differences, and appear respectively in the North (the first ones) and in the South (the latter ones).

We also encounter diminutive Albanian suffixes in the toponyms. For example, the forms Shtith [ʃtiθ], Shëmtith [ʃəmtiθ], Shëngjerth [ʃəngjɛrθ], Liqeth, Bokth, Ujth have been prolonged with the diminutive suffix –th [θ], which is not uncommon in Albanian. The diminutive suffix - zë [zə] is found in Shëmrizë [ʃənmrizə] and Shllinzë [ʃllinzə]. The diminutive suffix - kë [kə] is found in Shtanaskë [ʃtanaskə].

It has become a norm for proper names in Albanian to be used in shortened forms. Although the shortened form is used to indicate familiarity, it has been used even with Saints' names, and their shortened form, rather than the full one can be found in toponyms. The form Shëmtith [ʃəmtiθ] seems to contain the full form of the name Matias, while the forms Shtish [ʃtiʃ] and Shtith [ʃtiθ] have the shortened form Tish [tiʃ]. A toponym found in Selca e Poshtme needs to be discussed: there is a place in this village called Shëmbiéri [ʃəmbjɛri], possibly related to the name of Shën Pietri [ʃən piɛtri], but not in the form Pjetër [pjɛtər], but Pjero [pjɛrɔ], which is the shortened form of Pietro [piɛtrɔ]. The phonetic transformations of this word (from Sanpiero [sən piɛrɔ] to Shëmbier [ʃəmbjɛr] are not impossible in Albanian, they even are quite normal.

The chronology of the toponyms would be of interest for the history of Albanian and of the Albanian language. This is not easy, although historical or cultural facts can be found to help have an idea for specific cases.

The Monastery of Shën Gjon Vladimir in Shijon was built around the year 1380, according to the inscriptions found there. One of these inscriptions (in Greek) says that it was built in that time on the ruins of an older church, four times bigger than it used to be (Demiri, 2006: 30). So the toponym Shijon is not related to the existing Monastery –Shën Gjon, but to the ancient church – Shijon, and is more ancient than 1380.

Special attention needs the case of a village near Kavaja, which is known by two names: Rrakull [rrakull] -and also as a patronym Rraklli [rraklli] - and Shinjergj [ʃingjɛrgj]. The first one must be linked to Oraculum in Latin, like Uraka [uraka] in Rrajcë, Librazhd, or Frakulla [frakulla] in Fier. The name Rrakull [rrakull] might have remained from some cult object from the pagan era before the spread of Christianity, and a church dedicated to Shën Gjergj might have been built on this temple after the spread of Christianity, giving the second name to the place.

Also of interest, although of another kind, is the toponym related to Shën Lefteri. Elefteri is mentioned as one of the most ancient preachers of the Christianity in Illyria. It is believed that he served in the area of Vlora, and was martyred together with his sister Anthia, between years 117 and 120 (Elsie, 2000). It may also be that his name has been conserved in the name of village Ftërrë [ftɛrrə] in Kurvelesh, part of Lukova commune in the county of Saranda. It is noted that the toponym does not have traces of the attribute shën [ʃən] and this can only be explained with the fact that this toponym must be from the time when Christianity was not legal and, therefore, was spreading illegally.

It is known that the name of the Village Ftterrë is mentioned in an old Ottoman Turkish language document in 1431 Efterane [ɛftɛrɒnɛ]. The name of the village is also mentioned two more times in Ottoman Turkish language documents during the XVI century, and both times in different versions, one of them Iftera [iftera] in 1583 (Memushaj, 2004: 45). It is believed that both versions Eftera [ɛftɛra] and Iftera [iftera] are different forms of the Ottoman Turkish language perception for Ftterra [ftɛrra]. It is obvious that since the XV century, the name of the Saint appears in a much evolved form therefore we can assume that this was introduced at a very early stage in the Albanian language.

Two Saints of the Albanian folk tradition, Shën Gjini and Shën Premti, do not have relevant names in other languages.

The Catholic clergy identifies Shën Gjini [gjin] with Shën Gjon [gjon]. Such an idea has gained a stand in the Albanian linguistics. Prof. Sh. Demiraj (1999: 117-118) says that the name Gjini is an issue in itself, which in general is considered a version of the name Gjon. Then the author refers to Prof. E. Çabej (1996: 336), who wrote: “The historic relation between the two names Gjon [gjon] and Gjini [gjin] is not clear. They both have been popular since ages”.

There are reasons to believe that the noun Gjini [gjin] has no etymological relation to the name Gjon [gjon].

Firstly, in the vicinity of village Shijon [ʃijon] near Elbasan which is undoubtedly linked to Saint John, there is a village called Shëngjini [ʃəngjin]. It would have been difficult to have two churches dedicated to the same Saint, so close to each-other.

Secondly, in the religious tradition of the village Valsh, in Shpat, Shën Gjon [ʃən gjon]/Shijon [ʃijon] and Shën Gjini [ʃən gjin] are two Saints, who are celebrated in different dates: Shën Gjon [ʃən gjon] on 21 May, and Shën Gjini [ʃən gjin] on 24 June.

Based on these data, it would be appropriate to consider what H. Krahe has said about the origin of the noun Gjini [gjin], which seems to have been forgotten by our linguists, although it was supported by M. Lambertz: “Gjini must not be a Christian name, but it can be an ancient name, a form of Gentius [gɛntius] (H. Krahe, PN, 53)”, writes M. Lambertz (1986).

The name of Shën Premti has an unknown etymology. According to E. Armao (1933), it is an old pre-Christian name accepted by the Catholic clergy, used to commemorate a Roman martyr with a dark history – St. Veneranda, who is celebrated on 26 July, the Day of St. Anna. Maybe the name of our Saint - Prenda/Premti, might be related to the second name of the Latin God Anna Perenna. Çabej says that Premte is the Albanian equivalent of Aphrodite (Çabej, 1976).

Conclusions

The names of more than thirty Saints are found in the (micro)toponymy of Albania, in transformed phonetic forms: Gjoni [gjonni], Premti [prɛmti], Gjini [gjini], Lefteri [lɛftɛri], Ilija [ilija], Todri [todri], Jeronimi [gjɛra], Vlashi [vlɒʃi], Mateu [matɛu], Tish [tiʃ], Mërtini [mɛrtini], Shtjefni [ʃtjɛfni], Thanasi [θanɒasi], Mëria [mɛria], Pali [pali], Pjetri [piɛtri], Tekla [tɛkla], Gjergji [gjɛrgji], Shirgji [ʃirgji], Baku [baku], Thomai [θɒmai], Tadei [tadɛi], Simoni [simɒni],

Nikolla [nikɔlla], Dhimitri [ðimitri], Mëshilli [məhilli], Jaku [jaku], Bartolemeu [bartɔləmɛu], Vasili [vasili], Lleshi [lɛʃi], Llazari [llazari], Donati [donati], Babilla [babilla] etc.

The names of eleven apostles are found among them: Gjoni [gjɔni], Mateu [matɛu], Tish [tiʃ], Pjetri [pjɛtri], Pali [pali], Thomai [θɔmai], Tadei [tadɛi], Simoni [simɔni], Jaku [jaku], Bartolemeu [bartɔləmɛu] and Ndreu [ndrɛu]. The names Marku [marku], Filipi [filipi] and Luka [luka] (maybe appearing in the toponym Lukan in Shpat, Elbasan) are missing. They are certainly not unknown as Saints, but we have not found them as toponyms yet (for example, Andrea was luckily encountered in the name of a village near Saranda, we assumed it was only preserved in the name of the month December: Shëndre [ʃɛndrɛ]).

Apart from the apostles, we also find the name of Mary [məria], the mother of Jesus Christ, and that of the prophet Elijah, which are both among the most widespread cults. These Saints' names have eventually adjusted to the phonetic norms of Albanian, and have changed significantly, which clearly proves that they have been in use for a very long time, from many centuries, and reflect the dialectic features of the Albanian language. The phonetic development of the names may be easily noted by comparing the popular Albanian forms to the Latin ones.

The Albanian forms Jon/Gjon [jɔn /gjɔn], Gjergj [gjɛrgj], Shtjefën [ʃtjɛfɛn], Llesh [lɛʃ], Pal [pal], Vlash [vlaʃ], etc. seem to be very different from the respective in Latin: Johannes, Georgius, Stefanus, Alessio, Paulus, Blasius; but the differences are more obvious when the Saints' names are found as part of toponyms.

Based on the data offered in linguistic materials, we come to assume that some of the Albanian toponyms deriving from the names of the Christian Saints are very ancient, probably from the second half of the first millennium AD. The archaeological data seem to support this, if we consider that "Albania is a territory among the richest in ancient Christian cult monuments." (Muçaj, 2000)

Bibliography

- Armao, Ermano. 1933. *Localita, chiese, fiumi, monti e toponimi varii di un'antica carta dell'Albania Settentrionale*. Istituto per l'Europa Orientale, Roma.
- Beci, Bahri. 1982. E folmja e Mirditës, *Dalektologjia Shqiptare IV*, ASHRPSSH, Tiranë, 26-139.
- Bërxfholi, Arqile. 2007. *Lunxhëria*, Tiranë.
- Çabej, Eqrem. 1976. *Studime etimologjike në fushë të shqipes II*, ASHRPSH, Tiranë.
- Çabej, Eqrem. 1976. *Studime gjuhësore III*, Rilindja, Prishtinë.
- Dakaj, Nikollë. 2008. *Koineja e gjuhës shqipe*, Shtëpia botuese "Naim Frashëri", Tiranë.
- Demiraj, Shaban. 1996. *Fonologjia historike e gjuhës shqipe*, Toena, Tiranë.
- Demiraj, Shaban. 1999. *Prejardhja e shqiptarëve nën dritën e dëshmive të gjuhës shqipe*, Shkenca, Tiranë.
- Demiri, Shyqyri. 2006. *Histori e shkurtër e trevës së Elbasanit*, Egnatia, Tiranë.
- Domi, Mahir. 1970. Mjete dhe burime për gjurmimin e shqipes së shekullit XV, *Konferenca e dytë e studimeve albanologjike*, ASHRPSH, Tiranë, 101-106.
- Elsie, Robert. 2000. The Christian saints of Albania, *Balkanistica 13*, 38-40.

- Gjinari, Jorgji; Shkurtaj, Gjovalin. 2009. *Dialektologji*, SHBLU, Tiranë.
- Haxhihasani, Qemal. 1975. Nga toponomastika e Çamërisë, *Dialektologjia Shqiptare III*, ASHRPSH, Tiranë, 270-310.
- Lambertz, Maksimilian. 1986. Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit dhe emri Lekë në gjuhën shqipe, *Studime për nder të Aleksandër Xhuvanit*, Tiranë, 429-431.
- Mansaku, Seit. 1999. Përhapja e krishterimit tek iliro-shqiptarët në dritën e të dhënave gjuhësore, *Studime Filologjike 1-2*, ASHRSH, Tiranë, 39-56.
- Memushaj, Rami. 2004. *Historia e Kurveleshit I*, Toena, Tiranë.
- Muça, Fatmir. 1987. E folmja e krahinës së Konispolit, *Dialektologjia Shqiptare V*, ASHRPSSH, Tiranë, 281-358.
- Muçaj, Skënder. 2000. Krishterimi në shekujt V-VI dhe roli i tij në proceset integruese në territoret e Ilirisë së Jugut, *Kristianizmi ndër shqiptarë*, Konferenca Ipeshkvnore e Shqipërisë, Shkodër, 137-144.
- Sinani, Shaban. 2010. *Midis dy Rilindjesh*, Naimi, Tiranë.
- Shkurtaj, Gjovalin. 2001. *Onomastikë dhe etnolingistikë*, SHBLU, Tiranë.
- Topalli. Kolec, 2007. *Fonetika historike e gjuhës shqipe*, Dituria, Tiranë.
- Valentini, Giuseppe. 1944. I santi dell epoca cristiana comune nella tradizione agiografica albanese, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica 10*, Roma, Italia: Pont. Institutum Orientalum Studiorum, 179-201.
- Xhufi, Pëllumb. 1994. Ndjenja fetare në Shqipëri gjatë Mesjetës, *Studime historike 1-4*, 5-14.

Notes

¹ For every saint's proper noun the position of stress (accent) has been marked when mentioned for the first time (*Shën Ilía*). In general the nouns of the saints also retain their stress when they are part of the compound toponyms (*Shëndëllía*); therefore stress has been marked only when there is stress displacement in the compound toponym or when it is considered necessary.

¹ Because the name of the Saint begins with the consonant /s/ we cannot tell whether this toponym has come down to us with or without the apposition *shën-* [ʃən-]; the same can be said for Shirgji [ʃirgji], Shotiri [ʃotiri], Shmóni [ʃmoni] etc.