

Literary Patronage of the Albanian Vlora Dynastic Family, 1670-1764 _____

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Abstract

The powerful Albanian Vlora dynastic family, during the 17th and 18th century built a cultural and literary patronage system, which was inherited from one generation to the next. This hereditary patronage reflected both, the features of the time and the personality of the powerful members of this family. Hysen Pasha Vlora (d. 1672) demonstrated a new perspective of urban life; he oriented the urban elite towards a new cultural model, which offered strong links with the public, but outside the umbrella of religious institutions. His son Mahmut Pasha (d. 1738), reflected his benevolent nature in his relations with poets. He contributed to the installation of the professional poet's status and the development of a court literature in Albanian language. After him, Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti, d. 1764), being a poet himself, manifested a higher sensitivity to the literary environment and to the Albanian language in particular. He took on the role of the moderator in the public and cultural life in the city of Berat. This attention and support from the Vlora dynastic family towards writers and poets in particular, caused Berat to be differentiated from other Albanian cities of the time. Just like that Berat was transformed into the most important literary center of the Albanians during the 18th century. When Vlora family ruled in Berat, the Albanian literature knew great poets like Nezim Berati, followed by Sulejman Naibi. Apart from them, there were other numerous poets, such as Fejzi, Irzi, or Ismail Pasha and Ahmet Kurt Pasha themselves.

Keywords: *Vlora dynastic family, literary patronage, Albanian literature, Nezim Berati, vernacular Albanian, Berat city*

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Introduction

The powerful Albanian Vlora dynastic family, whose beginnings we find since the end of the 15th century², had a strong influence both in the sandjak of Vlora, and in the center of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul. This powerful connection with the center provided political power and constant local authority. The connection of the Vlora family with the city of Berat traces back to the transfer of the administrative center of the sandjak from Vlora to Berat, as the result of the Ottoman-Venetian rivalry in the Adriatic Sea. In this regard, the Ottoman Empire, facing a permanent risk coming from the sea, during the first half of the 16th century, was forced to reorganize the sandjaks in the Albanian coasts of Adriatic and Ionian Seas (Egro 2012: 213-4). This is the reason why the name of Vlora sandjak in 17th century and beyond is not the same with the name of its center, as is common in the Ottoman Empire, where the name of the center serves to identify the sandjak itself. This decision changed the fate of the city of Berat during the Ottoman Period. Thanks to Vlora household, a symbiotic connection was established between the two cities, Vlora and Berat, that remarked until the eve of Albania's independence, where in turns, Ismail Qemali and Syrja Bey Vlora used to be representatives of Berat in the Ottoman Parliament, during 1908-1912.

The first track of the Albanian Vlora dynastic family in Berat we find in the 17th century. This evidence is mostly related to the fact that the Berat Sharia Court (*Sicili-i Şer'iyye*) from the Ottoman Period dates to the beginning of this century.³ This collection, along with political documents related to the appointments of the members of this family in the post of sandjak-bey of Vlora or the problems they had during their rule, also includes documents on inheritance lawsuits opened by members of the Vlora household, documents of marriages, but also of the quarrels that arose during the division and administration of their properties. Due to the last documents, all the members of the Berat branch of Vlora dynastic family in 17th and 18th century are accurately identified up to the construction of a complete genealogical tree (see the *Appendix*). Besides this document's collection of special importance, for the enlightenment of the cultural policy pursued by the powerful members of this family, I also used the *Seyahatname* of the Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi that he kept during his visit in Berat in 1760, the literary work of Berat poets living and writing under the literary patronage of these rulers, and also the inscriptions on the cult institutions, built by them.

² The first historical personality of this family is mentioned in the *Memoirs of Gjon Muzaka* (Musachi 1873: 286) and in the *Suret-i Defter-i Arvanid*, 1331-2 (İnalçık 1954: timar no. 150). It is Sinan Pasha Vlora, the son-in-law of the sultan Bajazit II and the holder of several high positions in the Ottoman state hierarchy: the *beylerbey* of Anatolia, the *beylerbey* of Rumeli, the commander of Ottoman fleet (*kapudan-ı derya*). In 1485, by the order of the sultan he was appointed the *sandjak-bey* of Vlora, with special attributes to control the shores of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (Zamputi 1967: doc. no. 112).

³ This collection is preserved in the Central State Archive of Albania (AQSH, Tirana), fondi 128.

For the “Vlora” origin/identity of this family, we are informed by the documentations about the murder of Ismail Pasha Vlora, known with *Velabishti* nickname, in 1764 where his relative link with Kapllan Pasha Vlora becomes evident (Naçi 2002: 631).⁴ Likewise, the Vlora identity of this family has been confirmed by Syrja bey Vlora, who prepared the genealogy of the Vlora family, and the Berat branch is a part of it.⁵ This genealogy is fully compatible with the data offered by the Berat Sharia Court on this matter, except the fact that he presents Mehmet Kapllan Pasha, as the father of Hysen Pasha. According to the Ottoman documentation the father of Hysen Pasha appears to be Ahmet Pasha.⁶ The family connection with Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti) has been confirmed also by Eqrem Bey Vlora in his memoirs (Vlora 2003: 37-8; Vlora and Godin 2010: 177). The surname Velabishti for this family has been used in Albanian historiography, firstly for Ismail Pasha due to his strong link with Velabisht, a village so close to Berat where the summer mansions of his family were located.

In the records of the Berat Sharia Court, the first to be mentioned is Hysen pasha Vlora, the son of Ahmet Pasha and the grandson of Kara Murat Pasha (Prime Minister/ *Vezir-i Azam* of the Ottoman Empire, 1549, 1555).⁷ Hysen Pasha was killed in 1672 in the Siege of Kamenica during the Polish-Ottoman War.⁸ The leadership of the Vlora sandjak was taken over by his sons. It was first Xhaferr Bey and then Mahmut Pasha.⁹ Even the governing of the Vlora sandjak by this family passes to the third generation, to Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti).¹⁰

The Berat branch of the Vlora family for three generations in succession and for almost a century and a half has been regularly in the direction of the Berat centered Vlora sandjak. This continuity in the government, accompanied by the strong connection they had with the center (Istanbul), strengthened its political and economic power. At the same time, it strengthened the noble consciousness of

⁴ Concerning the date of Ismail Pasha's death, Stavri Naçi offers a contradictory attitude. In his *Pashallëku i Shkodrës* [The Pashalik of Shkodra], the date of Ismail Pasha's assassination is given August 3rd, 1674; while, *Historia e Shqipërisë* [History of Albania] gives August of 1762 (Naçi 1964: 90; Naçi 2002: 631). The year 1764 is also confirmed by the *Codex of Berat*, written by the monk Konstandin Berati: “in 1764, in August, on Tuesday, Ismail Pasha was killed in Vlora.” (Demiraj 2019: 369).

⁵ AQSH, Fondi Syrja Vlora, dosja nr. 5.

⁶ AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 3: 99b, 195b-196a, and 220b-221a.

⁷ The fact that Kara Murat Pasha was the brother of Ahmet, Hysen Pasha's father, is confirmed by the Ottoman documents (See: *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Osmanlı Saray Arşivi*, doc. no. 1289). This fact is also confirmed by Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 308.

⁸ AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 15: 37a.

⁹ The other two sons of Mahmut Pasha, Bajram Pasha and Sulejman Bey, respectively enjoined the positions of the *sandjak-bey* of Delvina and the *mytesellim* of the sandjak of Vlora (AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 17: 88a). Whereas Mahmut Pasha's two daughters, the eldest Rukija is married to Sulejman Pasha Biçakçiu (Elbasani), while the second one Emine, was married to Ahmet Kurt Pasha Ngurza (AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 5: 30a; Naçi 1964: 105). Eqrem Bey Vlora has an inaccuracy in his memoirs; according to him, Emine is the daughter of Ismail Pasha Vlora/Velabishti (Vlora 2003: 584).

¹⁰ AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 3: 41b, 141b; nr. 8: 19b, 32a.

their origins, as well as the responsibilities closely associated with it. On the other hand, the inheritance of power from father to son created opportunities for them to build and apply their own policy regarding the urban and cultural development of the city of Berat.

Berat, a public domain in the zoom of Hysen Pasha Vlora

When Evlija Çelebi visited Berat in 1670, he found the Murat Çelebi Quarter in an intensive urbanization process. Hysen Pasha Vlora¹¹ had just finished building a mosque, a clock tower, and a modern bazaar. These constructions, together with the mansions of Hysen Pasha and of the other leading elite families of the Vlora sandjak, constituted the first generation of constructions that shaped this quarter.¹²

Murat Çelebi quarter manifested a new expansion of this urban center from the western slope of the castle to the plain near the river Osum.¹³ The new leading elite of Berat began to build there their mansions surrounded by gardens due to the field terrain of this area.¹⁴ Vexhi Buharaja expressed the opinion that the founder of this new quarter known as Murat Çelebi, was Kara Murat Pasha (Buharaja 1995: 149). Kara Murat Pasha is the uncle of Hysen Pasha Vlora, who ruled the sandjak of Vlora during the middle of the 17th century. This data sheds light on the fact that the Albanian *Dev Kara*¹⁵ *Murat Pasha*, as quoted by Ottoman sources, was a member of Vlora family. This quarter called *Murat Çelebi* proves that it was created in the first period of Kara Murat's life. The term *çelebi* in Ottoman Turkish was attached mainly to the names of the members of distinguished households, who were known for their education, but also for their noble style of life.¹⁶ Indeed, Kara Murat Pasha

¹¹ Rhoads Murphey mistakenly identified Hysen Pasha Vlora. He confused him with the Deli Hysen Pasha, who also succeeded to reach the post of Prime Minister/ *Vezir-i Azam* in 1656 (Murphey 1996: 185). Deli Hysen Pasha (d. 1659) and Hysen Pasha Vlora (d. 1672) are contemporaries, but two different historical personalities.

¹² Construction in the Murat Çelebi Quarter continued even after the death of Hysen Pasha (1672). Only a few years later, Mrs. Aisha, together with her husband Sali Bey Bobrati, one of the dignitaries of the city of Berat, sponsored the construction of a madrasa in front of the mosque of Hysen Pasha, which was known as the *Madrasa of Sali Bey* (AQSH dosaj nr. 16 (1674-79): 57b, and 58a-60a).

¹³ Murat Çelebi Quarter is not mentioned in the cadastral register of Vlora sandjak, 1583 (Duka 2001: 176-7). During his travel in Berat (1670), Evliya Çelebi lines up the Murat Çelebi quarter the first of the "great varosh/suburb of the city of Berat" (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 307). Accordingly, the expansion of the city outside the castle walls would be occurred at the beginning of the 17th century.

¹⁴ Architect Gani Strazimir says: "despite its special character, this quarter stands in full unity of composition, both urban and architectural point of view, with the city as a whole" (Strazimiri 1962: 558).

¹⁵ *Kara* in Turkish has many uses: as an adjective it means „black“; as a name it means „land, soil“ In addition, it appears in the word formation and is used in the role of the prefix which intensifies the meaning as for example *karakış* (strong winter). While, when it is used as a nickname of proper nouns, it describes the quality of the character of the person in question: "persistent, crazy man".

¹⁶ For the uses and semantic stratifications of this word during the Ottoman period see: Pakalın 1971: 343.

had a successful military and political career; he had been the head of the Janissary Corp (*yeniçeri ağası*), admiral of the Ottoman navy (*kapudan-ı derya*), and was twice promoted to the post of Prime Minister of the Ottoman Empire in 1649 and 1655. It was an imperial and local practice that the high Ottoman dignitaries contributed to their homeland by building religious buildings, or even more, by establishing new quarters. For the city of Berat, this tradition was continued by the first of the Köprülü (in Albanian, Qypri) dynasty, Mehmet Pasha, who, like Kara Murat, founded another quarter, leaving behind his traces in the city. During the 17th century, the expansion outside the castle of the city of Berat, had a dynamic of very active construction. As much as it had been necessary for the city to have an urban office (*mimar ağası*), which dealt with the processes of the urbanization and architecture (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 306).

Hysen Pasha is the person mentioned most in Evliya Çelebi's description, due to the fact that the constructions he had built have impressed the famous traveler. Evliya Çelebi describes them in detail and mostly sets them apart not only for their refinement and elegance in construction, but also for the harmonization of the modern architecture with their functions.

The mosque stands out for the high minaret and the combination of colors, providing a calm and relaxing environment.¹⁷ The clock tower is special for its architecture. The clock was brought from Transylvania, while the power of its bell could be heard up to a day away.¹⁸ The market stands out for the combination of several spaces, which brought the intertwining and harmonization of commercial functions with social and cultural functions.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Amma bir nazûk ve musanna' ve seramed ve şeşhane kargir minare ve bir kase-i nilgun misal müdevver kubbesi üzre la'l-gun kiremit ile mestur bir cami'-i ma'murdur. Zarafet ve letafet ve ilm-i mi'maride misli yok bir bi-bedel ve müferrih ve dilküşa cami'-i zibadır* (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 308). Nowadays this mosque is called *the Mosque of the Clock* (Xhamia e Sahatit), due to the clock tower situated near it. About the history of this mosque see: Tütüncü 2017: 83.

¹⁸ *Bu meydanda, Der asar-ı ibretnuma-yı acaibat: Ol çarşu içre bir saat kulesi var, evce ser çeküp anda Erdel diyarından gelme bir sa'ati var. Nakusu içinde on adem oturur. Vakt-i zuhr oldukda on iki kerre darb edüp sadası bir konak yerde istima olunur. Ta'bir ü tavsif ile olmaz, ta ki görmeğe muhtac bir sa'at-i ibret-nümadır* (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 309).

¹⁹ *Ammâ nehir kenârında henüz nev-binâ bir sük-ı rânâyı Hüseyin Paşa bina etmiş. Cümle bir kâide bir tertib bir bâzâr yeridir kim mecmeü'l-irfândir kim yüz aded dukkân-ı cedidlerdir kim esnâf-ı mütenevvie anda mevcûddur. Ortası bir meydân-ı azîm olup gûnâ-gûn eşcâr-ı sâyedârlar ile ârâste olup sâye-yi zull-ı himâyelerindeki soffalarda cümle erbâb-ı sanâyi ve erbab-ı maarif birer gûne kârgerlik ederler. Bu meydanda, Der asar-ı ibretnuma-yı acaibat: Ol çarşu içre bir saat kulesi var* (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 308-9). Dankoff and Elsie edition of Evliya Çelebi (2000) has some inaccuracies concerning the description of the urban domain created by Hysen Pasha Vlora.

The translation of Dankoff - Elsie: Along the river is the beautiful bazaar recently constructed by Hüseyin Pasha with 100 shops, all on the same plan. It is a gathering place of the cognoscenti. Here, in porticoes under the shade of various trees, one finds all sorts of skilled tradesmen and handicraftsmen busy at work in their various professions. In the middle of this bazaar there is a large square with a marvel – a lofty clock tower. (Dankoff and Elsie 2000: 117).

My translation is as follow: "Along the river is the beautiful bazaar recently constructed by Hüseyin Pasha. It is a bazaar, entirely arranged [according to] a system and a plan. It is a gathering place of the

In fact, the mosque and the bazaar are among the main elements that formed an urban center in the Ottoman Empire (Ergenç 2012; see also Cerasi 1999). With the construction of the mosque and the bazaar, Hysen Pasha clearly articulated his ambitions to design an urban center in the Murat Çelebi quarter. The modern architecture of the buildings, together with the functions that they were foreseen to perform, proved that this space would serve as a new important center for Berat.²⁰ His political power, authority and ambition, Hysen Pasha demonstrated mostly through the project of his mansion with the garden, built in the Murat Çelebi quarter. Evliya Çelebi lines it up the first among the important and beautiful mansions of Berat.²¹ This mansion, even after the death of Hysen Pasha, served as the place where the ruling caste of the city of Berat held official meetings.²²

According to Evliya Çelebi, Hysen Pasha Vlora had projected the new bazaar with several centers. Besides 100 shops for manufacturing and sales, the bazaar had a square with a clock tower, a space with trees and benches and 6 coffee-houses at the exit that, alongside the indoor environments, provided space for people looking to fish or swim in the Osum river.²³ This concept transformed the bazaar in a meeting place for people of different social groups. Among them Evliya Çelebi distinguished well-educated people and scholars of Berat, who preferred especially two places: stone benches in the square and coffee-houses at the exit of the bazaar, by the river Osum. So, the bazaar had acquired a clear social and cultural function. Due to the spaces that foresaw non-genuine commercial activities, the bazaar created an environment for an interaction of different strata of society (Cerasi 1999: 64). In addition, commercial activity also helped the development of the communication between the city and the surrounding rural areas.

That Hysen Pasha was founding a new center for Berat is reinforced by the construction of a high clock tower with a large bell. The tower according to Çelebi was the miracle of Berat. It ruled the panorama with its height, but also with the powerful ringing that was heard one day away. In a dominant position, it

men of knowledge [and] there are 100 new shops [and] where there are different guilds. There is a large square in the middle, decorated with imposing trees. Thanks to their shadows of stony benches, everyone, craftsmen and men of knowledge talked to one another [about different topics]. In this square, among the marvel buildings/institutions: in the middle of this bazaar there is a clock tower.”

²⁰ On the connection between architecture and urbanization see Lefebvre 1996 and 2003. On the relationship between urbanization, ideology and power in the Ottoman cities, see Biermann 1991.

²¹ During his stay in Berat, Evliya Çelebi was stationed in the Palace of Osman Pasha. He did not meet Hysen Pasha in person. At that time, Hysen Pasha was the sandjak-bey of Hamid (Anatolia). He died two years later, in 1762, in the Siege of Kamenica during the Polish-Ottoman War. (AQSH, fondi 128 (Sixhilet e Beratit), dosja nr. 15 (1603-1687): 37a.

²² AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 15 (1603-1687): 13.

²³ *Ve bu çarşu kurbunda cümle altı aded kahvehaneleri var. Cümlesi birer güne nakş-ı bukailemun-ı ibret-nümun kahavilerdir kim her biri birer güne nakş-ı nigarhane-i Çindir. Bir kaç şehir içre cereyan eden nehr-i [Osum] kenarına vaki' olup ba'zı yaran suda şınaverlik ederler. Ba'zılar mahi-i guna-gunlar sayd ederler. Ba'zılar niçe güne ahab u asdika ve erbab-ı maârifler ile görüşüp bilişüp mübahase-i ilm-i şer'iyye ve fûnun-ı şîriyye görürler* (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 309).

communicated not only with the people living in the Murat Çelebi quarter, but also with other residents of the city and its surroundings. This form of communication gave to the tower a symbolic value, but also a unifying function. It placed the quarter in the focus of the city, and distinguished Berat from other cities that did not have a public clock. The clock tower at that time was also a novelty for the Ottoman Empire itself. The clock tower of Berat ranks among the first in the Ottoman Empire, after the clock tower of Prizren, Banja Luka and Skopje. Although the clock as a technology was discovered in the East, the concept of the clock tower as a giant gauge of time, is developed in Europe. For this reason, clock towers in the Ottoman Empire first appeared in the Balkans, then spread during the 18th century, throughout the Ottoman Empire (Acun 2008: 325-6).

On the other hand, this new center intended to combine the commercial activities with meeting places for all social groups, aiming to set in motion the cultural and intellectual potential of the city. Evliya Çelebi distinguished the well-educated people of Berat as a clearly profiled group, consisting of “poets, orators, those who deal with rhetoric and authors of books,” a good part of whom had completed “full studies and knew the sea of meanings” (*şu'arası ve fuseha ve bülegası ve musannifin ü müellifinden tekmil-i fünün etmiş bahr-i umman-ı ma'ani kimesneleri gayet çoktur*) (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 309). A particular characteristic of the learned people of Berat was that they “did not bother about religious doctrine; were given to morality; they were delicate, noble, and intelligent people” (... *mezheb kaydında değillerdir. Ancak meşreb kaydındadırlar. Zarif ve necib ve reşid zekiyyü't-tab' ademleri vardır*) (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 309). The elite members of Berat produced local personalities, like Hysen Pasha Vlora and a few decades later poets like Nezim Berati and Sulejman Naibi, while at the imperial level it became the source of the ruling caste with powerful personalities such as Kara Murat Pasha, the Köprülü (Qyprili) dynasty and Architect Kasem. This fact will be pointed out by Çelebi himself, who claims that from the elite of Berat “people have emerged viziers, statesmen, scholars and wise people” (*bu şehirden çok a'yan-ı vilayet vüzera ve vükela ve ulema ve suleha kimesneler kopmuşdur*) (Evliya Çelebi 2011 (8 kitap): 310).

The bazaar, clock tower and coffee-houses signaled that the final ambition of Hysen Pasha was to sparkle the urban life of the city, focused in urban elites. Such a new reality formalized and encouraged a new trend towards a cultural model providing strong links with the public, outside the direct umbrella of religious institutions. In this way, well-educated people began to orient themselves towards the public, while through intermediary social institutions such as coffee-houses, they were given the opportunity to communicate not only with each other, but also with the public. The new relationship of urban elite with these environments and social institution has had its effects on literary communication. The literature

produced here was oriented towards the vernacular Albanian used in everyday public life. Vernacular Albanian begins to become part of the literary discourse first in the city of Berat, and then in the urban areas inhabited by Albanians, in all their territories. The urban poets start to treat topics related to human life. This initiates the beginning of a new literary process in Albanian literature: writing of original literary works with clear aesthetic functions which will culminate a few decades later with the poets Nezim Berati and Sulejman Naibi (see also Myderrizi 1955).

Through the new urbanization process of the Murat Çelebi quarter, Hysen Pasha Vlora brought a new dynamic in the development of the cultural potential of Berat. He expressed his ambition to pay a special attention to the people of knowledge and culture. This cultural patronage would be further developed and perfected by his descendants, his son Mahmut Pasha Vlora and after him, his nephew, Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti).

Literary Patronage of Mahmut Pasha Vlora

The poet Nezim Berati, in his poetry publicly announces that he has a patron: Mahmut Pasha Vlora, the son of Hysen Pasha. He calls him *my lord* (imzot), and proudly claims to be in his service.²⁴

Mahmut Pasha is the youngest son of Hysen Pasha. When his father died (1672), he was a minor and grew up under the care of his older brother, Xhaferr Bey. Xhaferr Bey also governed the sandjak of Vlora, in the '70s and '80s of 17th century.²⁵ Contemporaries introduce him as: “a man of power and from the great family, but also a man of value, fame and of great capability”.²⁶ However, there are no surviving documents proving any of his expressed activities in the field of urbanization and urban culture in the city of Berat.

Mahmut Pasha, at the beginning of 18th century started to govern the Berat centered Vlora sandjak²⁷ and will continue to preserve the administrative local authority, the political power and the great name of his family until the end of his life (1738).²⁸ Like his father, Hysen Pasha Vlora, he also demonstrated

²⁴ *Se si janë kasidetë, /zemëret dalënë vetë/për timzot, nër të dy jetë* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 5): 25-6); *Të ja bënj med'h këtë iz'har/ati që i jam hyzmeqar*, (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 6):61-2).

²⁵ AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 16 (1674-9): 115b, and nr. 18 (1646-1715): 32.

²⁶ An order, dated April 24th, 1688, issued by Sulejman Pasha, sandjak-bey of Shkodra (AQSH, fondi 128, dosaj nr. 3: 281).

²⁷ Mahmut Pasha Vlora had been appointed several times as a sandjak-bey of Vlora: in 1711, 1713, 1717... (AQSH, fondi 128, dosja nr. 18: 42; nr. 8: 19, 31).

²⁸ In the epitaph dedicated to Mahmut Pasha, Nezim Berati announces that he died in Hijri 1151 (1738/9). This epitaph (4 verses) we find in the autographed copy of his *Turkish Divan* (90b), preserved in National Library of Albania, Tirana (Dr. 6/28 D). The scholar Vexhi Buharaja says that the date of the Mahmut Pasha's death according to the inscription of the mosque of Velabishti village, close to

a special attention and interest for the scholars and poets of Berat. Everyone is happy with him, but especially the savant people, says Nezim Berati in the *Albanian Divan*.²⁹ However, beyond the sense of pleasure evoked to people, this relationship was based on a patronage system, which meant a special relationship between the literary master and the poet who wrote on his behalf.³⁰ First of all, this is a relationship of control and belonging. The poet writes on behalf of the patron, while the patron financially supports him. From the poetry of Nezim Berati three poems dedicated to Mahmut Pasha have survived when he was alive³¹ and a poem after his death, as a sign of respect, honor and remembrance.³² In these poems, the poet explains and lauds the personality of Mahmut Pasha, shows the respect and reputation he enjoyed and especially the skills he displayed as an administrator. Nezim Berati has praised Mahmut Pasha as a statesman, a savant, a famous commander, but also a great philanthropist. In the favor of such qualities, speak of Ottoman documents³³ but also the inscription of the mosque he built in Berat.³⁴

The truth of praises and the sincerity of prayers has been very important in the relationship between the poet and his patron. In his poetry, Nezim Berati emphasizes that the panegyric poetry about Mahmut Pasha Vlora “is the truth of the poet”, which must be transmitted to the world/people.³⁵ It is precisely the lack of the truth in prayer and praise that has damaged the relationship between the poet and the later patron, Ismail Pasha Vlora/Velabishti, the son of Mahmut Pasha. In a panegyric poem sent to Ismail Pasha, Nezim Berati seeks to guarantee his patron especially to tell him that the prayers addressed to him are true, in terms of the truth of the praises and the meaning of the poems (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 7)).

Mahmut pasha has rewarded the poet for his panegyric poems. Up to now, we have no concrete data on the payments or the nature of the financial benefits the

Berat, is Hijri 1140 (1727/8). This inscription is written with ink; it is not engraved. That is enough to be suspicious about historical accuracy. On the other hand, the date given by Nezim Berati in his *Turkish Divan* bears the accuracy of a historical document.

²⁹ *Hoshnut gjithë jeta prej ti/ më përpara ylemaja* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 5): 39-40).

³⁰ On literary patronage and its dynamics see: Korshin 1974, and Griffin 1996. On the complexity of the relationship between poet and his patron in the Ottoman Empire see: İnalçık 2003, and Durmuş 2009.

³¹ Two poems are published in the *Albanian Divan* (Nezim Berati 2009: poem no. 5, 6), while the third poem is in the manuscript of Namik Ressuli (fol. 25a), made public by Ettore Rossi (Rossi 1946).

³² This poem is ranked second in the *Turkish Divan* (3b). In this manuscript the poet has recorded the epitaph written on the occasion of the death of this personality (90b), and a dedication poem (10 verses) on the construction of a bridge ordered by Mahmut Pasha (90b).

³³ (AQSH, fondi 128, no. 8: 19b).

³⁴ In the inscription of his mosque in Velabisht (Berat), Mahmut Pasha is described as a man possessing “the master of generosity and compassionate”. In addition, the poet informs us that when Mahmut Pasha died, the eyes of people shed blood. See: Vexhi Buharaja, *Mbishkrimet turko-arabe*, 3: 43.

³⁵ *Le ta shohë çarhi devar/ hakikatn e sanatqarit* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 6): 63-4).

poet Nezim Berati has received. From his poems we learn that his patron [Mahmut Pasha] has fulfilled “everything [the poet] asked for” and this has made him very happy.³⁶ However, this support has not been just a simple exchange of values or an act of charity. Along with continuous income, it provided the poet with social status and public protection. Nezim Berati clearly declares that he feels safe from the different kind of attacks, as he was under the protection of his patron (Mahmut Pasha): “My Lord is like a mountain, so I have never had any problem even the Çapari’s son is barking”. The poet spent these words addressing to one of his rival poets.³⁷

The financial and public support Mahmut Pasha gave to the poet testifies that writing poetry in this period was gaining the status of an esteemed profession. Through writing poetry the poet Nezim Berati was able to ensure his living. According to historical data, writing poetry remained the only preoccupation of the poet in his entire life. Even the writing of poems upon request has been a widespread phenomenon. In the *Albanian Divan* of Nezim Berati we find a category of poems dedicated to certain individuals. He clearly says that these poems were written upon their special request.³⁸ On the other hand, the literature and his patron gave the poet a respectful status in society.

Such a status was reflected even in the official documents of that time where he is mentioned as *Nezim efendi Ibrahim bej* (Abazi-Egro 2013). Nezim is the literary pseudonym; while Ibrahim is the name of birth. So, the poet’s identification in the official documents is made of two parts differentiated by the use of two different titles. It is clear that the title *efendi* attached to the literary pseudonym refers to his social status as a professional poet; while, the title *bej* provides the status enjoyed by his family.³⁹

This new status of poets was determined by many factors, but the most important were the relationship of poet with his patron and the impact of his poetry on the public. In this context, the use of vernacular Albanian played an important role in the communication that poets established with the public. So, the literature began to be widely written in the vernacular Albanian, besides the dominant languages

³⁶ *Hakikatnë ma dëgjove/ zemërënë ma gëzove/ prej tyt Zoti çdo kërkove /me t’<u> dëgjua rixhaja* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 6): 93-6).

³⁷ *Madem që të ka sa një mal / zotërinë tate ky avdall/ kurrë nukë ka atë hall /pse leh i bir i Çaparit* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 6): 145-148).

³⁸ Poem no. 15; 16; 17; 18 (Nezim Berati 2009).

³⁹ The titles *efendi* (borrowed in Turkish from Byzantine Greek) as well as *bej* (derived from Old Turkish) are civil titles meaning “gentleman” which had a very high frequency of usage throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire. However, these titles, depending on the dynamics and socio-cultural phenomena have undergone semantic changes, reducing or expanding the space of use. During the 18th century, the title *efendi* was used to mark the people of letters and clerics, thus differentiating them from the military caste. The use of the title *bej*, on the other hand, is closely related to the social status of the individual and was used both for the class of nobles and for people who had a certain influence and social authority (Lewis 1999: 687a and Köprülü 1993: 579a).

of the Ottoman Empire (Turkish, Arabic, and Persian). Thus, Albanian language became an important instrument of literature communication providing a very complex relationship with all strata of local society. In this framework, the literature responded to all the different levels and types of requirements that readers had. Poetry became part of people's lives, thanks to the vernacular Albanian they used, but also to the human themes they dealt with, such as love, friendship between people, or the pleasure of daily coffee consumption. On the other hand, this new relationship of people with literature, under the influence of the literary patronage as well, brought about the birth of new literary genres.

The genre of *divan* began to be written in Albanian literature at the beginning of the 18th century. The poet Nezim Berati, thanks to the support of Mahmut Pasha Vlora, is the first professional poet who tried to experiment with this genre in the Albanian language. He had consciously undertaken this initiative for linguistic and literary motives, articulated clearly in the introductory poetry of his *Albanian Divan*. The poet considers that writing this royal literary genre in Albanian such as the Divan is a literary challenge to other poets. This would strengthen his status as a professional poet. The second reason, according to poet, is the Albanian language. Nezim Berati is fully concerned about the situation of his native language, Albanian, being under the pressure of Ottoman Turkish; such a situation also affected the quality of his poetry. In this context, he attempts to realize the codification of literary Albanian language through writing of this genre. Nezim Berati expresses loudly this public mission through his verses, making readers part of his deep concerns and innovative ideas. In the poem dedicated to Mahmut Pasha Vlora, the poet goes further. Nezim Berati seeks to be a missionary of Albanian language as well. He claims to be so significant for Albanian language as the poet Hafiz was for the Persian and the poet Urfi for the Turkish.⁴⁰ This differentiation of poets according to the languages they used indicates a high degree of awareness toward the native language, especially a strong sense of linguistic belonging.

However the most successful, and longest-lived genre that gained a new dynamic in this period were the urban songs. Some of the poems to be liked by the audience were accompanied by melodies, and became part of the songs sung during various festive ceremonies (Mehqemeja 2004). Moreover, *Mahmudeja e stolisurë* (Adorned Mahmude) of the poet Sulejman Naibi has continued to be sung until the middle of the 20th century. During this process of transition these poems faced a transformation. In his anthology of Albanian literature,⁴¹ Albanian intellectual Zef Jubani calls them: “poems made rhymed verses (*poezi të bamun bejt*)” (Abazi-Egro 2016).”

⁴⁰ *Në kaside të farsisë, / makbul bejdet e Urfisë, / të Nefiut në të turkisë, / në shqipet zar-u-nizarit* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poem no. 6): 161-164).

⁴¹ See *Raccolta di canti popolari e rapsodie di poemi albanesi tradotti nell'idioma italiano da Giuseppe Jubany albanese*, Tipografia del Lloyd Austriaco, Trieste, 1871.

Seeking for a control on the literary life: Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti)

The literary patronage of Vlora family continued even after Mahmut Pasha's death. All members of this family established their relationship with the poets and writers of Berat, and became part of the court literature. The poet Nezim Berati dedicated poems to all sons of Mahmut Pasha,⁴² however, as a literary patron he only declares Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti). The poet calls him *My Lord* (imzot) and has elaborated a rich dedication rhetoric towards him. Since the poet had both father and son as literary patrons, the rhetoric of dedication is a sufficient source to ensure the sketches of their profiles, and also some of the features of their literary patronage. In fact, the poet Sulejman Naibi is also proven to have a relationship with Ismail Pasha Vlora,⁴³ but because his literary work has failed to survive, it is difficult to understand of what kind this relationship was.

Ismail Pasha Vlora built the personality of a generous but authoritative patron. He also took the position of the judge of literary works, thanks to his capacity as a poet himself, and the great sensitivity he expressed towards poetry. According to Nezim Berati, Ismail Pasha appreciated the poets according to the quality of the poetical product. This practice, and especially the order he established has been appreciated and welcomed by all the people, mostly the savants of Berat.⁴⁴

Based on Nezim Berati's poems, we understand that Ismail Pasha Vlora developed a more complicated patronage system than his predecessors. He added a new dimension to the traditional master-poet relationship; he took on the role of the moderator of the public and cultural life in the city of Berat. In his perspective, patronage besides a financial and a public support for poets, was also an institution of public responsibility. Based on this, Ismail Pasha acknowledged himself the right to intervene even through official orders in the literary life of the city. According to the poet Nezim Berati, Ismail Pasha Vlora issued an order addressed to poets misusing the word and to poets using the poem for vulgar and offensive attacks. According to this order, he demands that poets who violate the limits of satire should become the object of satirical poetry by the rest of city poets.⁴⁵ Nezim

⁴² In the *Albanian Divan* the poet dedicated a poem to Bajram Pasha, on the occasion of 'Eid (Nezim Berati 2009: poem no. 10) and two panegyric poems in the *Turkish Divan* (42b and 71b); and to Sulejman bej a panegyric poem in the *Turkish Divan* (71b). Nezim Berati dedicated an epitaph to Mahmut Pasha's daughter, Rukije, in the *Turkish Divan* (93b).

⁴³ In the urban song collection of Elbasan, collected by Lef Nosi (AQSH, fondi Lef Nosi, dosja *Dokumente të grumbulluara*) there is also a song whose text is written by Sulejman Naibi, dedicated to Ismail Pasha Vlora (p. 6b).

⁴⁴ *Duaxhi gjithë dynjaja/ zotërinj e fukaraja/ ale-l-husus ylemaja/ daim për të bënë izqar; and Punë e ti gjithë në usul/ daj te ylemaja makbul/ sikundër të kenë mahsul/ binaen ju bënë itibar* (Nezim Berati 2009 (poezia 8): 17-20, and 37-40).

⁴⁵ Nezim Berati, *Türkçe Divanı*, p. 7b.

Berati was enforced to react to this order, which seems to have affected him as well. Through poetry he sends direct messages to his literary master and offers guarantee to him related to the responsibility he possessed concerning the use of the word. According to him, “a good poet does not need to contaminate his mouth.” Closely related to this, the poet has also clarified his perception about the art of poetry and poetry writing mastership. In fact, the art of poetry, the word, and the meaning as a philosophic category are issues that intrigued the poet throughout his work. These reflections, with a clear poetic awareness mark the beginnings of theoretical-literary thought in Albanian letters (Rugova 1996: 38-41).

Ismail Pasha advanced further the relationship Albanian literature had established with the community in this period. From the literary work of Nezim Berati we understand that the recitation of his poems in Albanian had become part of ceremonies organized in Sandjak-bey Palace on the occasion of various celebrations. Nezim Berati has dedicated an Albanian poem to Ismail Pasha when he left for war at the head of the military troops, praising his skills as a commander, but also as a leader (*Divani shqip*, poem no. 9). This was Ismail Pasha's first military mission as the sanjak-bey of Vlora and on this occasion the poet expressed to him congratulations and prayers. Along with this, the Albanian poetry is proved to have been part of the celebrations even during religious holidays (*Divani shqip*, poem no. 10). These cases reflect a new trend in the development of literary communication in vernacular Albanian. The new relationship of Albanian language with the official ceremonies is an indicator signaling the extension of the Albanian language functions; at the same time, it testifies the weight it was gaining in the territories administered by the Albanian local authorities.

Concluding Remarks

During the 17th and 18th century Albanian dynastic family of Vlora built a cultural and literary patronage system, which passed through from one generation to the next. This hereditary patronage reflected both, the features of the time and the personality of the powerful members of Vlora family. Hysen Pasha Vlora (d. 1672) demonstrated a new perspective of urban life; he oriented the urban elite towards a new cultural model, which offered strong links with the public, but outside the umbrella of religious institutions. His son Mahmut Pasha (d. 1738), reflected his benevolent nature in his relations with the poets. He contributed to the installation of professional poet's status and the development of a court literature in Albanian language. After him, Ismail Pasha Vlora (Velabishti, d. 1764), being a poet himself, manifested a higher sensitivity to the literary environment and to the Albanian language in particular. He took on the role of moderator in the public and cultural life in the city of Berat.

Thanks to the patronage institution, the Vlora family became the heart of cultural and literary changes in Berat during the 17th and 18th centuries. The impact of this active role appears clearly in three aspects:

- the factorization of the Albanian language;
- the development of a classical court literature;
- the institutionalization of the professional poet's status.

During the literary patronage of the Vlora family, vernacular Albanian began to gain special attention and its usage began to gain a certain linguistic and literary conscience. Moreover, the concern about the situation of Albanian language is one of the main reasons pushing the poet forward to write a *Divan* in the native language. Nezim Berati, with his *Albanian Divan*, attempts to give authority and prestige to Albanian language. This initiates the beginning of a new literary process in Albanian literature, the writing literature with clear aesthetic ambitions. Albanian was written for liturgical and religious services by Albanian Catholic authors of the 16th and 17th centuries (Buzuku, Budi, Bardhi and Bogdani), whereas Albanian in Vlora's period acknowledged another level of its usage: the poetic and literary level. In the middle of 18th century Albanian further advanced its status. The recitation of Albanian poetry began to be part of official ceremonies in Berat, such as the launch of troops to military campaigns or religious celebrations.

Secondly, the installation of the patronage institution brought the development of a classical court literature (*divan literature*) in the Albanian language. In this period, poets wrote *Divan* in Albanian, they also wrote poems with clear social functions such as *qasida*, the emergence of which necessitates the presence of a ruler to whom the poems are dedicated. Along with these genres, a rich dedication rhetoric appeared and developed, which with the poet Nezim Berati gains its highest expression. The cultivation of these genres became a clear expression of the practices of charity, but in turn they enabled poets to openly show the problematics of relations with their patrons.

Thirdly, sponsoring the poets' creativity by the patrons brought the birth of the professional poet who ensured his living by writing poems. During the period of literary patronage of the Vlora family in Berat a dynamic literary environment is created through poets of all levels. In addition to great poets such as Nezim Berati, and after him Sulejman Naibi, there are also many other minor poets, such as Fejzi, Irzi, or Ismail Pasha Vlora, and Ahmet Kurt Pasha (Ngurza). This literary dynamic life differentiated Berat from the other Albanian cities, and transformed it to the most important literary center in Albanian lands, in the 18th century.

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Appendix

Genealogy of Vlora family, Berat branch

