

THE CONTRIBUTION OF KOSTANDINKRISTOFORIDI'S WORKS TO ALBANOLOGY

Lonora HYSOLLI¹

1 Department of Language and Literature, Faculty of Education and Philology, University "Fan S. Noli" - Korçë*

**Corresponding author e-mail: lhysolli@yahoo.com*

Përmbledhje

Gjuha shqipe është themeli i shkencës së albanologjisë. Ndër emrat më të vyer të gjuhëtarëve shqiptarë për kontributin e tyre në këtë shkencë, veçojmë atë të Kostandin Kristoforidhit. Ai është leksikografi, dialektologu, përkthyesi, shkrintari, gramatikani, atdhetari i shquar, arsimitari i nderuar, njeriu, intelektual i shumëplanësh. Nisur nga kontributi që dha në çdo fushë të gjuhës, me veprën e tij sasiore e shumë cilësore, Kristoforidhi mbetet një gjuhëtar i madh. Këtë e dëshmojnë jo vetëm veprat origjinale, Gramatika, Fjalori dhe dy Abetare, por edhe përkthimet, të cilat së bashku përbëjnë një thesar të vërtetë për historinë e gjuhës letrare të shkruar, si edhe për dialektologjinë shqiptare.

Veprat e Kristoforidhit e bëjnë shqipen gjuhë kulture, duke dokumentuar para botës se shqipja është një gjuhë si edhe gjuhët e tjera europiane, me sistem gramatikor e leksikor të plotë e të pasur. Të gjitha veprat e tij shërbejnë si fakte gjuhësore, historike, kulturore etj, por edhe për studime e analiza të gjithanshme në fushat e albanologjisë. Pikërisht këtë synon të sjellë ky punim: Rëndësinë e veprës së këtij gjuhëtari lidhur me historinë e albanologjisë në shumë fusha e drejtime të saj dhe vendin që ka ajo në fondin albanologjik. Metodologjia e përdorur në punim është një ndërthurje e hulumtimit të veprës, përshkrimit të saj, analizës dhe sintezës.

Fjalë kyçe: Albanologji, fond albanologjik, histori e albanologjisë, intelektual, Kostandin Kristoforidhi, kontribut.

Abstract

The Albanian language forms the cornerstone of the field of Albanianology. Among the most notable Albanian linguists who have significantly contributed to this science, Kostandin Kristoforidhi stands out prominently. He was a lexicographer, dialectologist, translator, writer, grammarian, distinguished patriot, esteemed educator, and a multifaceted intellectual. Due to his extensive and high-quality contributions across various linguistic fields, Kristoforidhi is recognized as a seminal figure in Albanian linguistics. His legacy is evidenced not only by his original works, such as the Grammar, the Dictionary, and the two Primers, but also by his translations, which together constitute a valuable resource for the history of written literary Albanian and Albanian dialectology.

Kristoforidhi's contributions elevated Albanian to a language of culture, demonstrating to the world that Albanian possesses a comprehensive and rich grammatical and lexical system, comparable to other European languages. His works serve as linguistic, historical, and cultural documents, and provide a foundation for extensive studies and analyses in Albanianology. This paper aims to elucidate the significance of Kristoforidhi's work in relation to the history of Albanianology, exploring its various fields and directions, and its place within the Albanianological corpus. The methodology employed in this paper includes research, description, analysis, and synthesis of his work.

Keywords: Albanology, Albanological corpus, history of Albanology, intellectual, Kostandin Kristoforidhi, contribution

Introduction

Chapter 1: Kostandin Kristoforidhi as a Forerunner of the Unification of the Albanian Language

Kostandin Kristoforidhi as a Forerunner of the Unification of the Albanian Language
The unification of the Albanian language resulted from the persistent and sacrificial work of patriots, activists, intellectuals, writers, linguists, and journalists both within and outside Albanian territories. Among the prominent figures who strove tirelessly for a unified nation, language, and flag is Kostandin Kristoforidhi. Kristoforidhi lived during a pivotal period (1827-1895) that marked the peak of efforts by National Renaissance patriots. Unlike many others, he was a multifaceted figure, serving as a teacher, writer, translator, linguist, researcher of the Albanian language, scientist, and judge. He is one of the national personalities with a tremendous contribution to Albanian linguistics. His work encompasses phonetics, grammar, dialectology, lexicography, and translation mastery. Kristoforidhi remains a subject of study for both national and foreign researchers.

Chapter 2: Kristoforidhi's Contributions to Albanian Linguistics

As a multidimensional figure, he is aptly described by the linguist Bahri Beci, who states, *"I believe that much work is needed to uncover the truth about this personality, as our understanding is still not fully illuminated and explored by contemporary Albanian linguistic science."* Various linguists have provided definitions and descriptions of Kristoforidhi. Tomor Plangarica, a linguist from Elbasan, refers to him as *"the colossus of our culture"* based on the comprehensive values contained in his work. Dhimiter Shuteriqi, acknowledging Kristoforidhi's contributions to the Albanian language, defines him as *"the man who succeeded in making the Albanian language a true language of writing and reading."*

Linguist Qemal Murati adds, *"Kristoforidhi embodied Martin Luther's dictum 'to see how the mouth of the people speaks,' and from their mouths, he collected and preserved beautiful words and phraseology throughout his life. These included proverbs, curses, blessings, and wishes, clear as crystal mountain springs, with which he created the golden Albanian nationwide Dictionary and built a magnificent monument for himself and for all of Albanology."*

Chapter 3: Kristoforidhi's Works and Legacy

Based on Kristoforidhi's contributions in the field of translation, A. Thomson states, *"the excellent translator, motivated and with fundamental evangelical ideas,"* while William Ash writes, *"Kristoforidhi is a talented translator, an outstanding writer, storyteller, a tireless teacher, and a scientist of the National Renaissance."* When we examine the entirety of Kristoforidhi's work and the value he brought to Albanian linguistics, a value that continues to resonate even after many years within the linguistic tradition of Albanian studies, we inevitably arrive at the conclusion that Kristoforidhi is **"the father of the Albanian language."**

"Without fearing that we are wrong," asserts Beci, *"we can say that K. Kristoforidhi, with his intuition founded on solid linguistic training, managed to propose in 1872 solutions that Albanian linguistic science only achieved in the 20th century through the application of modern methodologies of functional linguistics."* Although this appraisal may seem overly visionary and enthusiastic, the truth is that Kristoforidhi offered solutions that anticipated the

most advanced contemporary thought regarding the phonetic system of the dialectal macrosystem, particularly the Gheg¹ dialect and the Albanian language in general².

Chapter 4: Kristoforidhi's Notable Works

Some of Kristoforidhi's notable works include:

- Memorandum for the Albanian Language (1857)
- Notes on Albania, the Language, and Translation of Scriptures (1860)
- Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (translation, Gheg dialect, 1866)
- Psalms (translation, Tosk dialect, 1868)
- New Testament (translation, Gheg dialect, 1869; Tosk dialect, 1879)
- To Do and To Go Out (translation, Tosk dialect, 1880)
- The Second Law (translation, Tosk dialect, 1882)
- Proverbs of Solomon and the Book of Isaiah (translation, Tosk dialect, 1884)
- The Creature (manuscript, Gheg dialect)
- ABC Primer (Gheg, 1867; Tosk, 1868)
- The Albanian Language Grammar (according to the Tosk dialect, 1882)

The foundational work of Kostandin Kristoforidhi, to which he devoted his entire life, is *The Dictionary of the Albanian Language*. Additionally, he authored the first prosaic and original narrative in the Albanian language³, as well as the first narrative for children⁴, "The Prey of Highlanders" (Tomori's Shade), written in both major dialects in 1884 and first published by Faik Konica's "Albania" in London. In November 1896, Kristoforidhi was selected as a member of the Commission for the Albanian Language⁵. He was also a member of the Biblical Association in London.

Chapter 5: Kristoforidhi's Role in the Albanian National Movement

The rapid development of capitalist economies in parts of Europe and the social backwardness of Albanian society under Ottoman feudal rule exerted significant influence on the growth of the national movement in Albania, known as the "Renaissance." During this Renaissance period, alongside cultural and economic advancements, there arose a pressing need for the development of a standardized Albanian language. Kostandin Kristoforidhi is celebrated as an activist of this national movement, a champion of education and culture.

In his work "Notes on Albania, the Language, and Scripture Translation" (1886), he echoed the ideas of Renaissance figures advocating for Albanian autonomy, extolling the ancient virtues of Albanians, and highlighting the state of education and Albanian dialects. Alongside Hasan Tahsin and others, Kristoforidhi endeavored to establish the first Albanian schools. His contributions extended to scholarly books for children, reflecting his belief in the transformative power of the new generation.

¹ Gheg or Geg (Gheg Albanian: gegnisht, Standard Albanian: gegë or gegërisht) is one of the two major varieties of Albanian. The other is Tosk on which Standard Albanian is based. The geographic dividing line between the two varieties is the Shkumbin River, which winds its way through central Albania.

² Bahri Beci, *Sistemi i zanoreve të gegërishtes në "Abetar shqip" të Kostandin Kristoforidhit, në Përmbledhje me studime për Kristoforidhin*, Universiteti "Aleksandër Xhuvani", Qendra kërkimore-shkencore, sektori i Albanologjisë-Balkanologjisë, Elbasan, 2002, f. 111.

³ Ermenji A., *Kostandin Kristoforidhi punëtori i parë i gjuhës shqipe*, Flamuri, prill 1950.

⁴ Ermenji A., *Kostandin Kristoforidhi punëtori i parë i gjuhës shqipe*, Flamuri, prill 1950.

⁵ Lloshi Xh., *Rreth alfabetit të shqipes: me rastin e 100-vjetorit të Kongresit të Manastirit*, Shkup: Logos-A, 2008, fq. 14-15

Chapter 6: Kristoforidhi's Impact on Albanian Language Standardization

This conviction is palpable in a letter he wrote to patriot Nikolla Naco, where he asserted, "If the Albanian language is known and taught in our schools, we can hope to gain recognition as a nation and secure our place among the societies of Europe." Kristoforidhi tirelessly planted seeds of national identity and love for the motherland. Armed with his ABC primer, he traversed every corner of the country to teach his compatriots the Albanian language. His texts not only served children but also adults, laying a solid foundation upon which entire generations would learn to write their mother tongue⁶.

The publication and dissemination of these texts constituted a momentous and invaluable contribution to the history of education, schools, and national culture. Kristoforidhi's legacy endures, particularly for his substantial and enduring contribution to cultivating, developing, and studying the Albanian language of his era. He is revered as the founder of the Albanian national language school. Together with other Albanian patriots, Kristoforidhi participated in the Commission for the Alphabet and Education held in Istanbul in 1876, continuing joint efforts thereafter. He illuminated numerous linguistic values from different regions, especially contributing to the purification of the language and demonstrating that Albanian dialects were not significantly divergent. His work, both theoretical and practical, underscored the unity of the Albanian language and thus, the unity of the Albanian nation itself.

Chapter 7: Kristoforidhi's Linguistic Contributions and Legacy

Kristoforidhi advocated that the two dialects of Albanian were closely related, likening them to English and Scottish dialects. He made substantial strides in bridging these dialects with written language and establishing writing standards. Uniquely, he wrote proficiently in both dialects, drawing from his Northern roots and Southern education in Tosk-speaking areas. His engagement in translation was a pivotal means of familiarizing himself with Albanian dialects and collecting necessary materials firsthand. His translations of religious texts were particularly impactful, bringing the word of God to the Albanian people. According to Professor Rexhep Qose, "The translation of religious manuscripts itself enhances the dignity of the Albanian language as a literary, scientific, and cultural language, and ultimately as a language of profound aesthetic and intellectual expression."⁷

Chapter 8: Kristoforidhi's Scholarly Endeavors and Achievements

Kostandin Kristoforidhi undertook multiple scientific endeavors to bridge the two literary variants of Albanian, Gheg (Gegerisht) and Tosk (Toskerisht). These efforts enabled him to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of both dialects.
- Establish scholarly and literary standards for each variant.
- Develop ABC primers for each literary variant.
- Formulate the grammar of Toskerisht while incorporating information about Gegerisht.
- Compile a dictionary of Albanian words gathered from all Albanian-speaking regions, which he regarded as a treasury of Albanian literary language.
- Create a prose work, "The Hunting of Highlanders," in three literary variants.
- Translate religious manuscripts into both literary variants.

⁶ Kujtim Bevapi, *Vështrim i përgjithshëm rreth abetareve të Kristoforidhit*, Revista pedagogjike 1, Tiranë, 1984, f. 114.

⁷ Rexhep Qosja, *Historia e letërsisë shqipe*, Tiranë 2000, f. 441.

Kristoforidhi did not undertake these works alone, as their scope made collaboration essential. He worked closely with foreign scholars (such as Hahn and Dozon) and local Albanologists. Furthermore, he esteemed and acknowledged the contributions of authors he was familiar with, including the "four Bs" (Buzuku, Budi, Bogdani, and Bardhi).

Chapter 9: Kristoforidhi's Influence on Albanian Alphabet and Literature

Kristoforidhi's works remain a crucial and central bridge between the past and future of the Albanian language. He was among the linguists who employed original alphabets, at times utilizing Greek and Latin letters, in efforts to elevate Albanian to a language of culture. The alphabet he developed served as a primary source for subsequent alphabets created by other Albanian linguists and N. Mjeda.

Actively involved in the Commission for the Alphabet of the Istanbul Society in 1879, Kristoforidhi initiated numerous meetings aimed at resolving the issue of a unified Albanian alphabet. His efforts extended to purifying the literary language of foreign influences and enriching it with expressive means, words, constructions, and sometimes innovatively coined expressions. Many authors have lauded Kristoforidhi for his significant contributions. He has been described as *"competent"*, *"a man of scientific culture"*, *"the highest authority in linguistics"*, *"the most skilled researcher of the nation's native language"*, and *"the sole proficient researcher of Albanian"*.

Such accolades naturally stem from his accomplishments.

Through primers, translations, and other works, Kristoforidhi demonstrated that Albanian is a rich and pure language. He argued that the two dialects of Albanian do not differ substantially; rather, they are closely related and can move towards unification, potentially establishing a standardized literary language. **The crowning achievement of Konstantin Kristoforidhi's lifelong dedication is the Albanian Language Dictionary, containing 11,675 Tosk lexemes written in a Greek-based alphabet, published in 1904 in Athens.**

This dictionary serves as a comprehensive reflection of the language during that era, showcasing the rich lexical diversity of Albanian. It documents methods of word formation, dialects and dialectical forms, and the contextual use of words at the time. Kristoforidhi initiated a new era in the scholarly examination and scientific treatment of Tosk as a literary standard, while also meticulously studying and elaborating on literary Gheg. Through his development of grammar based on the Tosk dialect, he laid the groundwork for creating a standardized written language derived from this dialect. Across all his works and translations, Kristoforidhi demonstrated a rigorous scientific approach to the Tosk literary dialect.

Kristoforidhi pioneered the establishment of standardized Albanian writing, the dissemination and unification of the Albanian literary language, the collection and study of dialectal linguistic materials, and advancements in Albanian grammatical analysis and lexicography. Additionally, he initiated the tradition of studying and evaluating the works of ancient authors. Central to his legacy is his pivotal role in harmonizing the two literary variants and advancing scientific methodologies in language studies. Kristoforidhi's contributions to Albanology span various domains and were acknowledged and praised by eminent foreign Albanologists such as Dozon and Hahn.

Mehmet Çeliku aptly summarizes Kristoforidhi's unparalleled impact: "To this day, we Albanians have no other linguist who has developed writing standards for the Albanian language in two literary variants".

His monumental achievements include:

- Developing primers for both literary dialects
- Formulating grammar
- Compiling dictionaries

- Scientifically studying both dialects through extensive material collection across Albanian-speaking regions
- Simultaneously promoting and publishing original works and translations in both variants⁸

This colossal body of work was entirely self-initiated by Kristoforidhi, spanning over two decades under challenging conditions, driven by his personal language policies and national aspirations. Throughout his endeavors, particularly in Albanology, he consciously aimed to construct and establish literacy, grammatical rules, and lexical norms for the Albanian literary language. Through his translations, teaching efforts, and original compositions, Kristoforidhi equipped his compatriots with essential linguistic tools necessary for implementing his language policies.

His adherence to the scientific principle of inclusivity in vocabulary, regardless of origin, facilitated the unification of the Albanian language's alphabet, its standardization in writing and dissemination, and the enrichment and refinement of its literary lexicon. By rigorously studying literary variants and dialects, Kristoforidhi significantly contributed to the harmonization of the Albanian language across its phonetics, morphology, word formation, and syntax. In this profound manner, Kristoforidhi stands as the architect of linguistic convergence, thereby laying the foundation for the formation of a national Albanian literary language.

Conclusions

The idea for selecting the topic of this paper arose from the promotion of the publication of the book "Psalms in Geg and Tosk Albanian" by the scholar and linguist Xhevat Lloshi (Kostandin Kristoforidhi), Vernon Publishing, Sh.p.k., Tirana, Albania, 2015, in the city of Pogradec, in December 2015. This publication was highly esteemed by readers, scholars, enthusiasts, and participants, not only for Kristoforidhi's quality translation but especially for the parallel presentation and arrangement in both dialects of Albanian, which seemed to suggest a need for in-depth linguistic study (primarily comparative on the dialectal level).

The aim of this study is related to the various scholarly approaches offered over time by prominent Albanologists such as Kristoforidhi. These approaches may include:

1. Reassessment of Kristoforidhi's work and publications whenever they are published or republished, ensuring his comprehensive contributions are not forgotten.
2. Deeper and more extensive understanding of this intellectual's work products through a rich and commendable bibliography.
3. Highlighting the historical, cultural, artistic, and national linguistic values evident in Kristoforidhi's work.

His achievements in all these aspects serve as a call to respect all dedicated researchers in various fields that inspire generations to preserve and transmit established traditions. Kristoforidhi is recognized as a lexicographer, dialectologist, translator, writer, grammarian, distinguished patriot, educator, and multifaceted intellectual. His profound contributions across various facets of the Albanian language, characterized by both qualitative depth and quantitative volume, establish him as a seminal figure in linguistics. His seminal works, including the Grammar, Dictionary, and two ABC primers, collectively represent a significant repository for the history of the Albanian language and its dialectology. These works are particularly invaluable for studying the evolution of the Albanian writing system⁹.

⁸ M. Çeliku, "Çështje të shqipes standarde", Tiranë, 2014, SH.B "Ilar", fq 97

⁹ M. Çeliku, "Çështje të shqipes standarde", Tiranë, 2014, fq. 108.

Through his efforts, Kristoforidhi elevated Albanian to a language of culture, demonstrating to the world its status as an Indo-European language with a comprehensive and rich system of grammar and lexicography. His works serve as pivotal linguistic, historical, and cultural landmarks, providing foundational material for comprehensive studies and analyses. As one of the missionaries of the National Renaissance movement, Kristoforidhi emphasized the importance of the national language in spreading knowledge and enlightenment. Hailing from Elbasan, he became a central figure in Albanian national culture, envisioning and advocating for linguistic and national unity.

Symbolically encapsulating his vision, Xhevat Lloshi's translation of Psalms into both dialects signifies the convergence of two dialects into one language for one nation, echoing Kristoforidhi's aspirations. Kristoforidhi's contributions are indisputable, yet his legacy continues to provoke discussion, admiration, and critique. Confronted with formidable challenges throughout his career, his resilience and determination profoundly influenced his work. From the perspectives of those who have studied him, Kristoforidhi retains the enduring title "*The Father of the Albanian Language*," a testament to his unmatched stature and influence in Albanian linguistics.

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