The book ends by a convoluted colophon composed by Shimon Iakerson himself in two main languages used by him in this book, in Hebrew and in Russian. This indispensable book, which represents a first attempt of a comprehensive analysis of Jewish manuscript treasures kept in St. Petersburg, needs to be translated into English so that not only Russian, but also Western readers will get a chance to get acquainted with the multifaceted treasure kept in the northern capital of Russia.  

— M. Kizilov


The news of publication of the dtwín of Nezim Frakulla in the series of “Divan” of Macedonian-Kosovar-Albanian publishing house “Logos-A” arose obvious interests. Among all arabographic literature in European languages Albanian literature is the least explored. The manuscripts are scattered all over the world, various countries and various depositories, including private collections. Its joint catalogue does not exist. And we do not have any slightest idea which texts we actually have in our possession these days. And it is even worse when it comes to the manuscript publications. Unfortunately, modern practice of publishing arabographic manuscripts in European languages understandably boils down to their latinization; to see an original appearance is a rarity. Unlike the case is with the texts in Spanish and Belarussian-Polish languages, no research of the system of communicating Albanian words in Arabic graphics is done, even though the phonetics of Albanian language implies abundant diacritics, which is not always identical in various manuscripts.

Unfortunately, once acquainted with the book reviewed, it disappoints you in many aspects. None of the aforementioned problems is given an answer in the current publication. We see only a photograph of a small leaf of the original manuscript, specifically the cover of this book. Even though A. Hamiti had a chance to see the manuscripts fundamental for the publication of this text (Albanian State archives, F 43, D 2—3, F 32, D 2), the latinization is not carried out by him. Thus, his role is that of a researcher and not a publisher. And in regards to the orthography of the original text, the author mentions vocalization and diacritics, but without any particularities. Therefore, all of the numerous puzzles emerging in respect to this or that latinized fragment in the published dtwín text remain without comments.

It is only natural to open the series of dtwín publications with this one, since its author, who goes by a poetic pseudonym (mahkja) Nezim and is known by his personal name Brithim and nisho Frakulla or Berati (Brith), was the first one in laying claims to compiling an Albanian dtwín.

The book is divided into three parts: the first 145 pages are dedicated to the research; pages from 147 to 399 are given to the text of the dtwín; and pages from 401 to 481 are allotted to the vocabulary.

In his foreword A. Hamiti remembers how during the Marxist times the mystical level of this poetry needed to be disguised. Then he examines the phenomenon of arabographic Albanian literature. The word that in Albanian language designates authors of arabographic texts, hejtëshi, is offered a variety of modern versions — “Albanian literature in Arabic graphics”, “the albanised literature”, “Albanian literature of Islamic origin”, “Muslim Albanian literature”, etc. Actually, hejtëshi implies poetic art, and Arabographic Albanian literature in its overwhelming majority is indeed poetry. However, isolated prose texts are also introduced every now and then. Further the researcher moves on to the history of acquaintance with Nezim’s texts, beginning with the publication of J. G. von Hahn in 1854 (Hahn used Greek transliteration) and certain biographical data, among which there is a great deal of hypothetical, including the date of his birth (the 80s of the 17th century), his studies in madrasa in Berat (Brith), continuation of his studies in Istanbul, his return to Berat and his forced wanderings between Istanbul, Hotin in Bessarabia (in modern-day Ukraine) and Berat. He died in 1760 (all dates and events in his life are pressumed due to the lack of reliable sources). Apart from an Albanian dtwín, Nezim also compiled an Arabic one fragment of the original manuscript on the cover of this book. Even though a. Hamiti had a chance to see the manuscripts fundamental for the publication of this text (Albanian State archives, F 43, D 2—3, F 32, D 2), the latinization is not carried out by him. Thus, his role is that of a researcher and not a publisher. And in regards to the orthography of the original text, the author mentions vocalization and diacritics, but without any particularities. Therefore, all of the numerous puzzles emerging in respect to this or that latinized fragment in the published dtwín text remain without comments.

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Manuscripta Orientalia. Vol. 15 No. 2 December 2009


At the foundation of the monograph of Rafael Arnold from Institut für Romanistik of the University of Paderborn is a doctoral thesis which he defended in 2002 in the University of Heidelberg. The author does not specify whether the thesis text was altered in the process of reading the book for publication.

In his preface, where the author defines tasks, sources of his research work and also level of exploration degree of the problem he is interested in, he fairly notes that in spite of growing interest in Sephardim— including those in Spain — their activity on the territory of the Ottoman Empire is much more known than on the Italian soil.

The book is divided into two parts: "Cultural Historical Background" and "Research Language Patterns."

In the first chapter of the first part of the book, "Historical Background," the author writes about etymology of the word "Sephard"; about "golden age" of the Jews in Spain (10.-12. centuries); about the language of Sephardim in Spain before the exile (Latin before the conquest, and later Arabic-Romanic bilingualism, even though there are no remaining texts in these languages); about the term "Maranos"; about assumable number of exiles from the Iberian Peninsula (their exact number is unknown, and the hypotheses cited differ extremely; the number of those who fled to Italy is fixed at 15,000); their settling in various cities are also discussed; and so is the meaning of the word "ghetto". The issue of what the Jewish community in Italy looked like before Sephardim does not qualify for the author's sphere of interest and is touched only in passing.

The next chapter speaks of the Jewish multilingualism and the testimonies of those languages, which were used by Sephardim, and later on it raises the issue of transferring other languages by means of Hebrew script. With no excuse R. Arnold uses the term "ajamiado" although at first this word would describe Spanish texts written with Arabic graphics, and later in a much wider sense — arabo-Semitic texts in Bosnian and Albanian languages. Is it legitimate to use this term that has specific Muslim connotations for Jewish literature? Answering the age-old question — "Why did Sephardim use Hebrew script to record Spanish texts?" (which has already been answered succinctly and irrefragably: "Because they were Jews") — the author highlights the Sephardim's dislike for Latin script as the Christian one, and Christians, requiring like for like, were distrustful for Hebrew letters, fearing their magical powers. The fact that Sephardim turned to Latin in the 20th century is not explained with internal reasons, but with the fact that Latin was the only "legal" script in the Republican Turkey. Further, the author speaks of book-printing in Italy in Hebrew (including Christian publications), of publishing activities of the Jews (including publications in Latin script), of special role that Sephardim played, of the towns where printing offices were located (and what kind those offices were), of book trade and smuggling (since not only reader's demands of local communities were complied with but also those of the whole Sephardic world). There are also testimonies of personal book collections. The testimonies are few, and mainly they are the inquisition protocols; and sometimes — owners' wills. And the books in one's personal library could be in Hebrew, in other Judean languages or they may not belong to a Judean family at all. And finally he speaks of translations and methods of translation, including a "word-for-word" translation, using the author's terminology, although the term "call" is more accurate and common. Interestingly, R. Arnold himself uses this term in the second part of the book. And as the author fairly notes this is not a proper Sephardic or Jewish phenomenon.

The second part of the book begins with the problem of transliteration. R. Arnold rightly observes that no common rules have been developed. What the author uses for the system in his book is also uncertain; for instance, the form b = v is given for "b", but for transliteration purposes b is perfectly enough. And in regards to "v," he writes that they are very rarely used to communicate half consonants. As it becomes clear from the texts cited subsequently, such usage is not so rare after all.
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IN MEMORIAM


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Notes to Contributors

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Submissions

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Efim A. Rezvani, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, 3 Universitetskaya nab., 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia, e-mail: rezvani@kunstkamera.ru.