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**THE MEMORY OF SKANDERBEG AND THE
BEGINNING OF THE ALBANIAN CATHOLIC NATION
BUILDING**

The researches about the origins of the nations and of the nationalism underwent a considerable change of paradigm in the last ten years. Earlier, the scholars regarded the nations and the nationalism as the product of the industrial revolution in the 19th century and did not study their precedents.¹ However, several contemporary historians reduce the genesis of the nationalism to the Middle Ages and consider the medieval nations as the early versions of the modern ones.² In this

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¹ As a token reference to what is now an enormous body of literature, I mention the three most influential books, often cited by authors of Central European history: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London–New York: Verso, 1983; Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983; Hobsbawm, Eric. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

² Here, too, I refer to only three important texts: Armstrong, John. *Nations Before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982; Gorski, Philip S. “The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism,” *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (2000): 1428–1468; Hirschi, Caspar. *The Origins of Nationalism. An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

presentation, I propose to connect these contemporary nationalism theories with the early modern history of the Balkan nations who lived under the Ottoman rule. As a matter of fact, the early modern nationalism registered in the case of the occidental nations can be found in the Balkan nations too. In Europe, both protestant and catholic denominations, and especially the ecclesiastical intelligentsia plaid a significant role in these processes, mostly in Central Europe.³ In the case of the Balkan Catholics, it was the Holy See and her organ for the missions, the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith who promoted, with her nation-focused mission conception and strategy, the formation of the ideas about the national identities.⁴

Propaganda Fide's nation-oriented mission strategy had a formative effect on the missionaries' intellectual outlook and their relations with their own communities. Young people coming to Rome or other Italian colleges from the mission areas developed a sensitivity to their native language and culture and an awareness of their ethnic community's historical and political identity. Returning to their homelands, they retained this sensitivity in their mission work,

³ Molnár, Antal. "Autonomia ecclesiastica e identità nazionale in Croazia nel '600: il sinodo diocesano di Zagabria (1634)." *Incorrupta monumenta ecclesiam defendunt. Studi offerti a mons. Sergio Pagano, prefetto dell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano*. Collectanea Archivi Vaticani 106, a cura di Andreas Gottsmann, Pierantonio Piatti, Andreas E. Rehberg. Vol. I. *La Chiesa nella storia. Religione, cultura, costume* Tomo 2. Città del Vaticano: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2018. 1129-1140.

⁴ Pizzorusso, Giovanni. "Agli antipodi di Babele: Propaganda Fide tra immagine cosmopolita e orizzonti romani (XVII—XIX) secolo." In *Roma, la città del papa. Vita civile e religiosa dal giubileo di Bonifacio VIII al giubileo di papa Wojtyła*. Storia d'Italia. Annali 16, a cura di Luigi Fiorani e Adriano Prosperi, Torino: Einaudi, 2000, 479–508; idem. "I satelliti di Propaganda Fide: il Collegio Urbano e la Tipografia Poliglotta. Note di ricerca su due istituzioni culturali romane nel XVII secolo." *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 116, no. 2 (2004): 471–498; Pizzorusso, Giovanni, Sanfilippo, Matteo. *Dagli indiani agli emigranti. L'attenzione della Chiesa romana al Nuovo Mondo, 1492–1908*. Archivio storico dell'emigrazione italiana. Quaderni 1. Viterbo: Sette Città, 2005, 7–22; Pizzorusso, Giovanni. *Governare le missioni, conoscere il mondo nel XVII secolo. La Congregazione Pontificia de Propaganda Fide*. Studi di storia delle istituzioni ecclesiastiche 6. Viterbo: Sette Città, 2018, passim, particularly 125–163.

representing their flock in their letters to Propaganda Fide not only as endangered Catholics, but also as members of the ‘Illyrian’, Bosnian, Bulgarian or Albanian nations. They therefore wished to help their communities preserve their national identity, which was closely related to their Catholic faith. To do so, they naturally had to make a systematic study, both for themselves and for Rome, of the definitively national characteristics of their communities. In the reports and letters they sent to Propaganda Fide, they described in increasing detail their nations’ language, customs, geographical boundaries and key historical events, and made proposals for ways and means of giving them pastoral and cultural assistance.⁵

My study focuses to the Albanian case. By the Albanians, as by the Bosnians and the Bulgarians, there were the Catholic priests,

⁵ Cordignano, Fulvio. “Geografia ecclesiastica dell’Albania dagli ultimi decenni del secolo XVI alla metà del secolo XVII.” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 36 (1934): 229–294; Tacchella, Lorenzo. *Le antiche sedi episcopali latine, greche e bulgare dell’Albania etnica e della Macedonia*. Milano: n.p., 1990. (Biblioteca dell’Accademia Olubrense 4.) The two-volume corpus published by Injac Zamputi is the most comprehensive collection of sources on the Albanian Catholic church in the seventeenth century: Zamputi, Injac. *Relacione mbi gjendjen e Shqipërisë veriore e të mesme në shekullin XVII*. Burime dhe Materiale për Historinë e Shqipërisë 3. Vol. I. (1610–1634). Vol. II. (1634–1650). Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror, Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë, 1963–1965. A new edition of the corpus was published in 2018: Zamputi [Zamputi], Injac. *Relacione dhe dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë (1610–1650)*. St. Gallen – Prishtinë: Albanisches Institut – Faik Konica, 2018. The page numbers quoted below are those of the new edition. An important complement to this corpus is a posthumously-published book, a continuation of Zamputi’s previous three-volume corpus (*Dokumente të shekujve XVI–XVII për historinë e Shqipërisë*. Vol. I–III. /1507–1621/. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Rps të Shqipërisë, 1989–1990) based on his manuscripts: Zamputi [Zamputi], Injac. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë (1623–1653)*. St. Gallen – Prishtinë: Albanisches Institut – Faik Konica, 2015. Peter Bartl has explored the Catholic church geography of Albania in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries as part of his corpus of visitation and mission reports: Bartl, Peter. *Albania Sacra. Geistliche Visitationsberichte aus Albanien*. Vol. I. *Diözese Alessio*. Albanische Forschungen 26, 1. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2007; Vol. II. *Diözese Durazzo*. Albanische Forschungen 26, 2. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2011; Vol. III. *Diözese Sappa*. Albanische Forschungen 26, 3. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2014; Vol. IV. *Diözese Pulati*. Albanische Forschungen 26, 4. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2017.

mainly the missionaries and the prelates educated in Rome and in the Illyrian College of Loreto, who created the early modern national identities.⁶ They used the Italian humanist patterns forged by the Albanian exiles in Venice.⁷ The most important part of this catholic national tradition was the cult of Skanderbeg, which survived in the humanist milieu as well as among the Albanian Catholic highlanders.⁸

The central figure in the formation of Catholic Albanian national identity was Pietro Massarecchi (Pjetër Mazreku) from Prizren, apostolic visitor in 1623 and Archbishop of Antivari from 1624 to 1634. He drew his national ideology from two sources. Firstly, he clearly saw that Albanian Catholicism could survive only if it connected into the main current of international Catholicism and distinguished itself from Illyrian – meaning South Slav – Catholicism. His activity clearly manifests the duality of Propaganda Fide's mission strategy, which pursued the strategic principle of universality and a practical pastoral strategy focusing on the special needs of the nations.

Mazreku was constantly concerned with the special pastoral and cultural needs of his own people, the Albanians, and called on the Holy See to address these needs.⁹ His report on the Serbian missions of 1634 covered the Albanian situation and included a proposal for a full mission programme to assist them. Mazreku saw the only chance of preserving to lie in the training of a highly-qualified church intellectual elite. Another important new element for Mazreku was to raise the protection of Albanian identity to a matter of Balkan, indeed European significance. He considered it to be the key Catholic ethnic

⁶ Demiraj, Bardhyl. “Rishtarë shqiptarë në Kolegjin Ilirik të Loretos. Klasifikimi i dokumentacionit arkivor.” *Shejzat – Pleiades*, Series Nova 2, no 1–2 (2017): 22–55.

⁷ Elsie, Robert. *History of Albanian Literature*. Vol. I. East European Monographs 379. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. 27–31.

⁸ Zamputi, Injac. “Le nom et la tradition de Skanderbeg dans les efforts des Albanais pour la liberté durant les premiers siècles de la domination ottomane.” *Studia albanica* 4, no. 2 (1967) 85–94.

⁹ Molnár, Antal. *Le Saint-Siège, Raguse et les missions catholiques de la Hongrie Ottomane 1572–1647*. Bibliotheca Academiae Hungariae–Roma, Studia 1. Rome–Budapest: Accademia d’Ungheria in Roma, 2007, 192–198, 233–255.

group in the Balkans, with a military strength that could be crucial in fighting the Ottomans.¹⁰

Mazreku had done an inestimable service to the Kosovo Albanians with the education of Andrea Bogdani in the Illyrian College in Loreto. Andrea Bogdani became Archbishop of Ochrida, and later of Skopje, and compiled an Albanian grammar, which has not survived.¹¹ Like his uncle before him, he also sent several Kosovar students to Loreto. His nephew, Pietro Bogdani, became Bishop of Scutari and later Archbishop of Skopje, and was the author of the foremost seventeenth-century Albanian-language religious book, *Cuneus Prophetarum* (Padua, 1685). It was the first original Albanian-language book, and as such, the most important record of literary Albanian and Albanian thinking from the seventeenth century.¹² Thanks to Pietro Mazreku's national mission programme and support for the training of priests, Kosovo became the cradle of Albanian

¹⁰ Archivio storico della Sacra Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli o de „Propaganda Fide” (=APF), Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali (=SOCG) vol. 263, fol. 266r–284v. Full publication of the report: Zamputti, *Relazione*, 350–371. Excerpts published in: Јачов, Марко. *Стуси Конгрегације за пропаганду вере у Риму о Србима 1622–1644*. Зборник за историју, језик и књижевност српског народа. II одељење XXVI. Београд: САНУ, 1986, 212–216; Bartl, *Albania Sacra*, III. 114–118.

¹¹ Premrou, M.[irosavl]. “Katolički nadbiskupi u Skoplju.” *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva* 1 (1926): 329–334, 329–330; Redžepagić, Jašar. “Život, rad i pedagoški pogledi Andrea i Pjetra Bogdanija.” *Gjurmime Albanologjike* 2 (1965): 151–166, 151–154; Gasper, Gjini. *Skopsko-prizrenska biskupija kroz stoljeća*. Teološko radovi 19. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1986, 187–189.

¹² Bogdani, Pjetër. *Cuneus prophetarum a Pietro Bogdano. Patavii MDCLXXXV*. Beiträge zur Kenntnis Südosteuropas und des Nahen Orients 24. München: Rudolf Trofenik, 1977; Bartl, Peter. “Pjetër Bogdani und die Anfänge des albanischen Buchdrucks in Italien.” In idem. *Die Albaner in der europäischen Geschichte. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*. Albanian Studies 28, hrsg. von Bardhyl Demiraj und Robert Elsie. London: Centre for Albanian Studies, 2016, 177–199. Many of the sources on Pjetër Bogdani have been published: Marlekaj, Luigi. *Pietro Bogdani e l'Albania del suo tempo. Con la riproduzione fotografica di centotrentadue documenti*. Paolo del Colle: Liantonio, 1989; Marquet, Odette. “Bogdani à la lumière des documents réexaminés.” *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 27 (1991): 26–44; idem. *Pjetër Bogdani Letra dhe dokumente nga Arkivi i Kongregatës “de Propaganda Fide” si dhe nga Arkivat Sekrete të Vatikanit*. Shkodër: Shtëpia Botuese “At Gjergj Fishta”, 1997.

national identity. Kosovar Albanian prelates were instrumental in shaping the Albanian national discourse, developing the Albanian language and literature, and organizing the Albanians into a military force. Taken together, this was a great contribution to the process by which ethnic, linguistic and cultural phenomena evolved into Albanian nationalism in the early modern sense.

The missionary bishops making use of the humanist legacy created the historical framework of this national consciousness. It was very important, because the imperialism of the other nations, especially the “Illyrian” (South Slave, later Croat) national thought tried to encompass the Albanian one.¹³ Frang Bardhi, bishop of Sappa¹⁴ compiled a very exhaustive polemical treatise against Ivan Tomko Mrnjavać, bishop of Bosnia and famous impostor and falsifier of documents, who tried to prove that Skanderbeg was his ancestor as well as a genuine Illyrian.¹⁵ In his work published in Venice in 1635,

¹³ Of the abundant literature, I mention only the two most recent monographs: Fine, John V. A. Jr. *When Ethnicity did not Matter in the Balkans. A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006; Blažević, Zrinka. *Ilirizam prije ilirizma*. Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2008.

¹⁴ For Bardhi’s life and work, see the proceedings of the conference held in Pristina on the 400th anniversary of his birth: *Frang Bardhi. 400 – vjetori i lindjes*. Prishtinë: Institutit Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 2007. See also: Çobani, Tonin. *Frang Bardhi dhe Relacionet e tij. Botohet me rastin e 400-vjetorit të lindjes*. Zagreb: Misioni Katolik Shqiptar në Kroaci, 2006. 21–65, 155–157. On the literary programme of the Albanian mission directed by Propaganda Fide, see: Bartl, Peter, “Albanischer Buchdruck in Italien (16–18. Jahrhundert).” *Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde* 5 (1983–1984): 113–119; Elsie, *History*, 41–84 passim; Genesin, Monica, Matzinger, Joachim, “La pubblicazione dei primi testi in lingua Albanese nel contesto dell’attività editoriale della Polyglotta.” In *L’Albania nell’Archivio di Propaganda Fide*, 33–47.

¹⁵ [Mrnjavać Tomko, Ivan.] *Indicia vetustatis et nobilitatis familiae Marciae, vulgo Marnavitiæ Nissensis, per Joannem Tomkum, ejusdem gentis, collecta*. Romae: Typis Vaticanis, 1632. Still the only thorough biography of Tomko: Galla, Ferenc. *Marnavics Tomkó János boszniai püspök magyar vonatkozásai*. Budapest: Római Magyar Történetkutató Intézet, 1940. Latest on his work as a historian: Tvrtković, Tamara. *Između znanosti i bajke. Ivan Tomko Mrnjavać*. Biblioteka Hrvatska povjesna, Monografije i studije III/39. Zagreb–Šibenik: Hrvatski institut za povijest – Gradska knjižnica “Juraj Šižgorić”, 2008.

Bardhi recuperates Skanderbeg to the Albanian nation, enumerating a long series of historical, geographical, political and ethnographical evidences. His book, the *Georgius Castrottus Epirotus ...* is the first historical work in which the Albanian nationality of Skanderbeg is presented and defended.¹⁶ In his dedication to the readers, he claimed that he had been obliged to take up his pen when the invincible leader of the Albanians was being detached from his nation and put up as a member of another nation.¹⁷ He wrote the book after his appointment as a bishop but before his return to Albania from Rome, for the honour of his homeland and his love of his compatriots. He sent a copy to Propaganda Fide,¹⁸ and Francesco Ingoli, the secretary of the

¹⁶ [Blancus, Franciscus.] *Georgius Castriotus Epiroensis vulgo Scanderbegh, Epirotarum Princeps fortissimus, ac invictissimus Suis et Patriae restitutus. Per Franciscum Blancum De Alumnis, Collegii de Propaganda Fide Episcopum Sappatensem, et Sardensem, necnon Pulatensium, aliorumque Albaniae Populorum Administratorem*. Venetiis: Typis Marci Ginammi, 1636. An Albanian translation has been produced in four editions between 1957 and 2007. Bardhi, Frang. *Skënderbeu. Apologji*, perktheu nga latinishtja Stefan I. Prifti. Tiranë: Ndërmarrja Shtetërore e Botimeve, 1957. Several Albanian authors have recently analysed his apologia: Shpuza, Gazmend. “Veprat humaniste të Frang Bardhit – shprehje e evropianitetit skenderbegian të epokës.” In *Frang Bardhi*, 157–178; Lajçi, Lulëzim. “Lufta e Kosovës (1448) në «Apologjinë» për Skënderbeun të Frang Bardhit.” *Ibid.*, 201–217; Culaj, Lush. “Batleti si burim historiografik i Bardhit.” *Ibid.* 219–228; Bramo, Elvis. “Means of Linguistic Expression in Frang Bardhi’s Apology of Scanderbeg – On the Occasion of the 550th Anniversary of the Death of the National Hero.” *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 4, no. 3 (2018): 23–30.

¹⁷ “Porro quam graves me ad stringendum calamum incitaverint causae, cum fortissimum ac invictissimum Epirotarum seu Albanensiorum ducem Scanderbegum nationi suae Epiroensi denegari, alienaeque adscribi viderem, tibi benigne Lector, considerandum omitto. Quare si conatus mei inanes et irriti prorsus evaserunt, temerarii certe nullo pacto censendi sunt; cum scribendi desiderium reprimere nequaquam potuissem, nisi et mihi et Patriae meae deesse turpiter voluissem.” [Blancus,] *Georgius Castriotus*, 7.

¹⁸ “Essendo Giorgio Castriotto detto per li suoi fatti illustri Scanderbegh, nato nell’inclita città di Croia metropoli dell’Albania da progenitori Albanesi, secondo che attestano li scrittori di quei tempi e doppio, et secondo che corre opinione commune del volgo, con ragion vien ad esser Albanese. Si che vedendolo con falsi fundamenti da monsignor Giovanni Tomco vescovo di Bosna ascritto alla nazione Schiavona, mi spinse tanto l’honor della Patria e natural affetto de paesani, che mi

Congregatio liked the book but found Bardhi's attack on Mrnavić to be coarse, and in general disapproved of two bishops quarrelling over such questions.¹⁹

In the first fifty pages of the book, Bardhi set Mrnavić's claims and falsified documents against the findings of the humanist historians, not unreasonably repudiating his opponent's credibility as a historian. He claimed that Mrnavić had turned against the whole previous historical tradition, and that his information was completely false and did not stand up to the most trivial historical criticism. In the final third of the book, he systematically covered all of the contemporary sources, historians and even poets who had mentioned Skanderbeg and his family as Albanian.²⁰ Dalmatian and Ragusan historians who vociferously proclaimed the glory of their own nations, such as Mauro Orbini, mentioned him as being Albanian rather than Illyrian.²¹ Bardhi also quoted the oral tradition of the inhabitants of Pulati and Dukagjini, mountainous Albanian regions inaccessible to the Ottomans.²² They remembered the Castriota family has being from their area. Bardhi claimed that the memory of Skanderbeg lived on among the Albanians, who sang of his heroic deeds whenever they came together, and called him the Dragon of Epirus.²³ He concluded

posi a legger tutti quelli scrittori possibili, che a tempo del detto Scanderbegh e doppo notavano l'huomini illustri, quali unitamente dicono Scanderbegum nostrum Epirotam seu Albanensium fuisse, et aggregari in modo d'appologia o historiola, che qui in Venetia con la charità di questa Serenissima Repubblica la posi in presente forma, accioché apponesse la verità." Bardhi to Francesco Ingoli, secretary of Propaganda Fide, Venice, 1 June 1636. APF SOCG vol. 15, fol. 350r. On the same subject, see: *ibid.*, fol. 348r, 349r.

¹⁹ APF SOCG vol. 15, fol. 353v.

²⁰ This of course does not mean that Skanderberg was not related to the Serbian dynasties: the Castriotas and Brankovićes had several common strands. This certainly did not make them Serbian-oriented, and they were not the ancestors of Ivan Tomko Mrnavić. Schmitt, Oliver Jens. *Skanderbeg. Der neue Alexander auf dem Balkan*. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009, 45.

²¹ [Blancus,] *Georgius Castriottus*, 53–76.

²² Dushi, Arbnora. "Historia gojore si mjet argumentimi në apologjinë për Skënderbeun të Frang Bardhit." In *Frang Bardhi*, 277–286.

²³ [Blancus,] *Georgius Castriottus*, 70–71. "Nec leve desumi potest argumentum ex incredibili amore Epirotarum erga Scanderbegum, qui profecto non ita eum

that either his opponent or everybody from the great authors and monarchs down to the entire Albanian people were mistaken.²⁴ Bardhi's work clearly shows the interaction between the humanist scholarly records nurtured by Albanian exiles in Venice and the oral tradition of the Catholic population of North Albania.²⁵

The constructions of the Skanderbeg story in these very far removed registers jointly constituted one of the most important points of reference for early modern Albanian Catholic national identity. It was in the Bardhi-Mrnavić dispute that Skanderbeg's national affiliation first came to the surface, presaging the Serbo-Croat-Greco-Albanian polemics surrounding his ethnic identity in the nineteenth-century.²⁶

supramodum dilexissent, ni Epirota ipse fuisset Scanderbegus. Constat hoc, quia non libenter sub alienae nationis duce Epirotae militant. Quod autem eum summe amaverint, patet quia saepissime eius milites (ut in historiis legimus) maxima subibant pericula ob eiusdem Scanderbegi conservationem, et usque ad hodiernum diem assidue nostrates colluquuntur de ipso, eiusque res gestas in conviviiis alta voce (ut diximus) canunt, atque praecipuo nomine, per antonomasiam, Scanderbegum nostrum, *Culscedra e Arbenit*, id est Draco Epiri appellant, quae voces, cum pronuntiantur, ipse solus Scanderbegus intelligitur." Ibid., 74–75. He mentioned the song extolling the heroism of Skanderberg and Leka Dukagjin in a report of 1637: "Hanno assai de costumi gentilli, et così more antiquorum nei loro convivii e per le vie e nel lavoro cantano con alta voce li fatti illustri dei loro huomeni grandi, e specialmente dell'invitissimo signor Giorgio Castriota detto Scanderbegh e dell'illustrissimo signor Lecha Ducagino lor prencipe e signore." Zamputi, Injac. "Mbi disa materiale të reja dokumentare të shekullit XVII." *Buletin i Universitetit Shtetëror të Tiranës. Seria Shkencat Shoqerore* 12, no. 3 (1958): 170–215, 204–205; Bartl, *Albania Sacra*, III. 125.

²⁴ "Ex quibus omnibus necessario sequitur, quod si non errat Tomcus, dum dicit Scanderbegum fuisse Slavum, errant tot scriptores, principes ac reges, dum asserunt Scanderbegum Epirotam seu Albanensium fuisse. Utrum autem errent tot gravissimi et celeberrimi scriptores, tot illustrissimi excellentissimique principes, tot serenissimi atque potentissimi reges adducti, ac univeralis praesertim nostrae gentis existimatio, Tomcus, an qui pro suo instituto laborat, nemo est, qui non videat." [Blancus.] *Georgius Castriottus*, 75.

²⁵ Grajçevci, Fadil. "Frang Bardhi, vazhduesi i traditës humaniste të Marin Barletit." In *Frang Bardhi*, 245–252.

²⁶ Schmitt, *Skanderbeg*, 301–309.

Mazreku's mission programme and the Mrnavić-Bardhi conflict set the conceptual framework and substance for how Catholic prelates and missionaries thought about Albanian national identity in the seventeenth century. Finally, we must face the question of why this development stopped. The Catholic Albanian national identity failed to endure into the nineteenth century, when – like the Serbian Orthodox religious national ideal – it could have formed a kind of base or substrate for modern secular national consciousness. Neither did the late-nineteenth-century Albanian national awakening draw on this tradition. An explanation for this clearly demands further research.

One thing we already know is the cataclysm suffered by the Balkan Catholics, especially the commercial middle class and the church organization, at the end of the seventeenth century: the depredations of the Great Turkish War effectively wiped out the economic, social, military-political and intellectual force of the Balkan Catholics.²⁷

In the eighteenth century, the European powers and the Holy See, including the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, showed less interest in Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire, partly because of the failure of military plans in previous centuries and partly because of the dwindling of the Catholic population itself.²⁸ Emigration, reprisals and forced Islamization rendered the people unable to sustain their national pride.²⁹ The Albanian Catholics, like the Bosnians and Bulgarians, suffered very serious losses, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, faced with the rising number and economic and social power of Muslim Albanians, they were unable to present a real Catholic alternative as the modern Albanian nation was being built.

²⁷ Molnár, Antal. “Le missioni balcaniche durante il pontificato di Innocenzo XI (1676–1689): dall’apogeo alla rovina.” In *Innocenzo XI Odescalchi. Papa, politico, committente*, a cura di Richard Bösel et al. Roma: Viella, 2014, 193–207.

²⁸ Heyberger, Bernard. *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la réforme catholique. (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles)*. Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 284. Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994, 185–207.

²⁹ Bartl, Peter. Die katholische Kirche im Mittelalter und unter osmanischer Herrschaft. In: idem. *Die Albaner*, 557–575.

Nonetheless, as when examining the genesis of European nationalism, we cannot ignore the early manifestations of Albanian and other Balkan national consciousness, because without them we will be left with a deficient and one-sided view of its development in modern and recent times.

