



Miss Edith Durham and Albanians on the eve and during the first world war

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Abstract

Mary Edith Durham was a British traveler, writer and artist who became known for her historical, anthropological and ethnographical writings dedicated to Albania. Her dedication to Albanian question on the eve and during the First World War influenced British diplomatic officials, international humanitarian organizations, prestigious press and influential personalities of the British public opinion. A great contribution was also her membership in the Anglo-Albanian Society, which appointed her an honorary secretary.

She reflected the suffer of Albanian population, which she personally witnessed, in her correspondences and articles published in magazines and newspapers such as: "The Manchester Guardian", "Near East", "The Nations", "Times", "New Times and Ethiopia News", "The Adriatic Review", etc.

During the First World War the support from Western Europe was more than necessary for Albania therefore the contribution of Mary Edith Durham for Albanians was viewed with admiration by her collaborators, historians, anthropologists and ethnographs. Although she went in Albania for the last time in 1921, she worked for Albanian question for the rest of her life. In Albania she was

called “Mbretëresha e Malësorëve” and was awarded the prize during the period of King Zog I and during the period of democracy of nowadays Albania.

Key words: Edith Durham, Great Britain, Albania during the First World War

Abstrakt

Mary Edith Durham, ishte një udhëpërshkruese, shkrimtare dhe artiste britanike, që u bë e famshme për shkrimet e saj historike, antropologjike, etnografike kushtuar Shqipërisë së fillimeve të shekullit XX. Duke qenë njohëse dhe mbrojtëse e denjë e çështjes shqiptare, ajo nëpërmes letrave e memorandumëve arriti të sensibilizonte qarqet qeveritare të Britanisë së Madhe, organizatat ndërkombëtare e humanitare, redaksitë prestigjioze të shtypit si dhe personat më ndikim në opinionin publik, për gjendjen e vështirë të shqiptarëve në prag dhe gjatë Luftës së parë botërore. Vuajtjet e këtij populli që ajo i kishte parë nga afër i shkroi në korrespondenca dhe artikuj të disa gazetave periodike të kohës, si: “The Manchester Guardian”, “The Near East”, “The Nations”, “The Times”, “New Times and Ethiopia News”, “The Adriatic Review”, etj . Një kontribut të madh paraqiste edhe anëtarësimi i saj në Shoqatën Anglo-Shqiptare, shoqatë kjo e cila e shpalli edhe për sekretare të nderit.

Shqipëria në kohën kur vepronte Mary Edith Durham kishte nevojë imediate për përkrahës të çështjes shqiptare nga Evropa perëndimore. Që këtej, për përkushtimin e Mary Edith Durham është shkruar me admirim edhe nga bashkëpunëtorët e bashkudhëtarët e saj, ashtu edhe nga historianë, antropologë e etnografë. Edhe pse për herë të fundit ishte në Shqipëri më 1921, ajo u mor me çështjen shqiptare me devotshmëri deri në fund të jetës. Jo rastësisht Mary Edith Durham u quajt, “Mbretëresha e Malësorëve” të Shqipërisë dhe mori shumë dekorata e mirënjohje, si në kohën e Zogut I-rë, mbretit të shqiptarëve, ashtu edhe në kohën e demokratizimit të Shqipërisë së sotme.

Fjalët kyçe: Edith Durham, Britania e Madhe, Shqipëria gjatë Luftës së parë botërore

Анстракт

Мари Едит Дурхам била патописец, писателка и британска актерка, која стана позната по своите историски, антрополошки и етнографски статии

посветени на Албанија од почетокот на XX век. Бидејќи била познавач и достоин бранител на албанското прашање, таа преку писма и меморандуми успеала да влијае врз владините кругови на Велика Британија, врз меѓународните хуманитарни организации, врз престижните редакции на печатот, како и врз влијателните личности за тешката состојба на Албанците пред и за време на Првата светска војна. Голем придонес претставувало и нејзиното членство во англо-албанската асоцијација во која била назначена за почесен секретар.

Страдањата на овој народ, на кои таа била сведок, ги пренесувала преку кореспонденциите и статиите објавени во неколку периодични весници од тоа време, како што се: „*The Manchester Guardian*“, „*The Near East*“, „*The Nations*“, „*The Times*“, „*New Times and Ethiopia News*“, „*The Adriatic Review*“ и др.

Албанија во времето кога дејствувала Мари Едит Дурхам имала потреба за поддршка на албанското прашање од Западна Европа. Оттука, за посветеноста на Мари Едит Дурхам е пишувано со восхит како од нејзините соработници, така и од историчарите, антрополозите и етнографите. Иако за последен пат била во Албанија, во 1921 година, таа работела на албанското прашање до крајот на животот. Мари Едит Дурхам во Албанија беше наречена „Кралица на планинците“ на Албанија и добила многу награди како во времето на кралот Зогу I, така и во времето на демократизацијата на денешна Албанија.

Клучни зборови: Едит Дурхам, Велика Британија, Албанија во текот на Првата светска војна

Miss Edith Durham, 1863-1944, started her first journey in the Balkans, respectively in Montenegro, in 1900 at the age of 37 and since then for the next twenty years she continued her journey, full of courage, through the Balkans alone, learning the cultures and languages and living in primitive life conditions threatened constantly by diseases and violence due to the outbreak of the First World War (Shaqiri, 1981a). During her journey she conducted historical, anthropological and ethnographical researches, with the results of which she wrote 7 books: *Through the Lands of the Serb* (1904), a description of her journey through Serbia and Montenegro, *The burden of the Balkans* (1905), a book which reveals ethnological and historical informations which were written by her unique style, *Upper Albania* (1909), a description of Albania and Kosova's traditions, social structure and religions, *Struggle for Scutary* (1914), a personal diary of Miss Durham on the struggle for Scutary, *Twenty yeas of Balkan Tangle* (1920), a description of the situation in the Balkans in the begining of the twentieth century, *The Sarajevo Crime* (1925), a description of the murder of Archduke Franc Ferdinand and his wife on 28th of June 1914, what preceded this act and its consequences; *Some Tribal Origins, Laws and Customs of the Balkans* (1928), a concise presentation of Balkan religions and rituals. All these books present an interweaving of antropology, history thus at the same time calling for the intervention of Great Powers for the self-determination of some Balkan people (Durham, 1998; Shaqiri, 1981b).

In the beginning of her journey, they were Slavs who drew her attention. Her first acquaintance with Albanians occured in Macedonia in 1903 during one of her cherity works. From that moment on, Miss Edith Durham will become a great contributor to the Albanian question even in the very decisive pe(Durham, 2001a). riod of its history.

Although on the eve of the First World War Great Britain did not have any particular interest in the Western Balkans, in the decision makin processe with other Great Powers the opinion of its repesenters was of a great importance. This is the reason why it was so necessary for Albanians to have a supporter of a British nationality such as Miss Durham who would support this nation to diplomacy officials and public opinion. British diplomats, being aware of her profound knowledge about Balkans, very often asked for her opinion or advices about different issues in the Balkans (Allcock & Young, 2000). In addition she often represented Great Britainas a non-official agent and her information were constantly published in daily British newspapers (Hayne, 1987).

On the eve and during the First World War Miss Edith Durham informed Great Britain officials and public opinion about the miserable situation of Albanians through letters sent to institutions, British Government, humanitarian organisations, prestigious press, and personalities with influence on public opinion. In all these letters she insisted on recognition of the historical and ethnical independence of Albanian nation. The suffer of Albanians which she personally witnessed, Miss Durham described in her correspondences and articles in certain newspapers: "The Manchester Guardian", "The Near East", "The Nations", "The Times", "New Times and Ethiopia News", "The Adriatic Review", etc (Fraseri, 2004). A great contribution was also her membership in the Anglo-Albanian Association, where she was appointed an honorary secretary. According to the historian J. Swire it was the contribution of this association, lead by Aubrey Herbert, which influenced the League of Nations to recognize the Albanian state (as cited in Allcock & Young, 2000, p.26).

The situation of Albania on the eve of the First World War was critical. After months of arguments, Great Powers chose Prince Wied the prince of Albanians. The feelings of Albanians were not considered at all. Edward Grey clearly emphasized that the crucial aim was not to deteriorate the relations between the Great Powers (Durham, 2001b). Albania would be governed by this Prince and would be given neutrality under the common supervision of six Great Powers that would be represented in the International Control Commission. Miss Durham considered the Prince as a short minded person with lack of sufficient knowledge about Balkans. The fact that he was the nephew of the Rumanian queen, was his only attribute he was chosen a Prince of Albania (Durham, 2001b). After the appointment of the Prince, the Great Powers represented in the International Commission of Control informed Greece to retreat from the territories already set to Albania. They comprehended the tricks that the Greek agents were using to deceive about the structure of population in Southern Albania respectively in the territories they aspired to gain. According to territorial arrangement of Great Powers Albania got less than she was hoping for but more than Greeks were expecting. After the order of Great Powers, the regular Greek army retreated from the occupied Albanian territories, but it left in Korqa a hospital full of wounded soldiers "not able to move" who were linked with telephone with the Greek border. Another part of Greek Army also remained in Southern Albania, concealing any of their identification signs. Korqa was officially delivered to Officers of Dutch Gendarmeri on March 1st 1914. This was the situation in Albania when the Prince Wied arrived in Durres on March 7th (Durham, 2001b). In The Near East on 13th March

1914, Miss Edith Durham wrote: “ Yesterday was certainly an historic day for Albania. No event could be more important than the arrival of a Sovereign in a country where he is so earnestly desired by the people and so urgently required by the political situation” (Durham, 2001a). In addition in this article she reflected the activity in Durres to welcome the Prince whereas the other places were being prepared to send their representatives to expect the Prince. Three days before the arrival of him the representatives of Albanian colonies of Calabria, Sicilia, America, Rumania, Bulgaria etc. already had arrived (Durham, 2001a). Commissioners of International Control delivered the power to the Prince who appointed Esat Pasha a War Minister, thus leaving all the armament on his possession. Very soon Korça was attacked by Greek troops who arrived with intentions to help “the sick ones” but they were defeated and returning home burned once more the Albanian villages. Not all the required munition delivered from Durres was sent to Albanians at Korça (Durham, 2001b). It was obvious that the delivery was stopped by Esat Pasha who was involved in Serbo-Greek intrigues. Prince, suspecting that the collected armament was dedicated to an insurrection against him, ordered the imprisonment of Esat Pasha. All these intrigues were in details described by Miss Durham. Esat Pasha, as an agent of the countries against Austria and Germany, including here Italy which would rather divide Albania between Serbia and Greece than allowing Austria to take the power there, was sent to Rome (Durham, 2001b). It was said to the peasants that the Prince meant to get rid of the Islamic religion from the country and support the incestuous marriages therefore he should be expelled from Albania. Among these people were the refugees from Dibra and Gostivari who were told that if the Prince Wied was expelled from Albania than Serbs would return the territories they had conquered. This is the path towards the insurrection and consequently the Prince’s departure from Albania. According to Durham (2001b): “we may criticize Wied for incompetence but only a person with an incredible character and a profound knowledge about the country would triumph over the Great Powers united against him” (p.281). On 11th of July 1914 a letter was sent to Miss Durham from the city of Berat which informs her that after two days of fight, Korqa fell in possession of the enemy. The letter was calling for help since the Greek troops were spreading further, killing Albanians and burning their territories (Durham, 2001b).

It was obvious that the insurrection was initiated by the enemies of Albania so that they could leave an open door for the entrance of Greeks. Only when Greeks started the destruction of Muslim villages, the latter ones understood the reality.

Immediately after the admission of the letter Edith Durham went personally to Vlora to see the miserable situation of the refugees (Durham, 2001b).

The news for the declaration of war to Serbia by Austro-Hungary was welcome in Albania. Albanians in general believed that new circumstances would help them overcome the miserable situation they were in. For nationalistic leaders Great Britain was the Power which supported them without any interest, a fact that was proved in 1913, Middle Albania was in a total anarchy whereas the population of Upper Albania, although on the Austro-Hungarian sphere of interest, being so thankful to Miss Durham, Mr. Herbert, Colonel Philips etc., started believing in Great Britain (Swire, 2005).

On the August 28th 1914 Miss Durham, as a correspondent from Albania wrote for the daily British newspaper *The Near East*: "Albania seems to have been entirely forgotten by the big world during the past two weeks. Since the outbreak of the general war no one has had time to give a thought to this country" (Durham, 2001a, p.62). These were the sentences she started her article titled "Albanian Letter", where she explained the miserable situation of Albanian state whose central part was involved in insurrections while only the city of Durrës and Vlora were under the Government's control. The situation was even harder because of the lack of armed forces in Albania. Regarding the insurgents Miss Durham had the impression that they were in fact urged by Serbian, Greek and Young Turks agents. From two optional actions which were the offensive against the insurgents or the defensive attitude, Durrës chose the latter one. On the other hand the population of Vlora and South Albania in general, according to Durham, is more faithful to the Prince and the parts which were under occupation of insurgents were not willing to be in such a situation (Durham, 2001a). The situation in Albania grew even worse when the Albanian refugees from Korça, Permeti, Tepelena and Kurveleshi, numbering at least 100 000 escaping from Greek atrocities spread through other districts of Albania. Regarding the Great Powers' attitude towards Albania, Miss Durham believed that Albanians were not only abandoned but also totally forgotten. Austria, which had been interested on the Albanian question, was engaged in the World War whereas Italy was trying hard to take advantage of Albania's difficult situation (Durham, 2001a).

Another very impressive article of Miss Durham dedicated to the departure of Prince from Albania was published on September 18th 1914 in the *Near East*: "I would not wish any nation – even an enemy nation – to have to witness the departure of its sovereign", she wrote (Durham, 2001a, p.64). In this article she expressed her surprise about the departure of the Prince Wied. It was true that

during the last three months insurgents were spread almost all over the country. Miss Durham still thought that even if they concentrated their forces against Durrës, it would be impossible to enter the city thanks to the fidelity of its garrison and the defensive forces that came mainly from Kosova and South Albania. In such a situation the insurgents would withdraw whereas the Prince would remain safe in the city. Even in this article Edith Durham emphasized the financial difficulties of Albania (Durham, 2001a). In addition she writes about the proclamation issued by the Prince before he left the country where he had declared the reasons he was forced to leave the country. The author could not predict in this article if the Prince would ever return in Albania or not (Durham, 2001a).

On September 23rd she wrote from Durrës about an anarchy that Albania was situated in after the departure of the Prince. The Commission of Control was not accomplishing the duties it had because of the disagreements of its members. On the other hand many foreign representatives left Durrës because of the situation created after the insurrections (Durham, 2001a) .

Miss Durham in lack of further humanitarian sources returned to London as well and the first thing she did was to return the prize she was given by the King Peter I. It was attached by a letter where she wrote that the previous year she heard Serbian people talk about the attack against Austria and she blamed him and his population for the greatest crime that humanity have witnessed (Durham, 2001b). In *Contemporary Review* she wrote in details about such Serbian conversations: "We, the Serb people are now a danger to Europe. We have beaten the Turk. We shall fight Austria next...We have the all of the Russian Army with us. We shall take what we please. We shall begin in Bosnia" (Durham, 2001a, p.116).

In April 1915 the Great Powers who ones guaranteed the independence of Albania signed the Secret Treaty of London with Italy. According to the article 6 of this treaty Italy will receive the property of Vlora, the islands of Sasseto and as much territory that is required to secure their military safety. According to Article 7 Italy would receive also territories with Italian population which had previously been part of Austro-Hungary. As compensation Italy would agree to divide the northern and southern parts of Albania among Serbia, Montenegro and Greece. In the Middle Albania would be created "a small autonomous and neutralized state" under the Italian protectorate (Puto, 2009). In her book *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle* Edith Durham analyses the consequences of this treaty. The first tragedy of it is the fact that the Great Powers, who entered the war because of the breach of Treaty of Belgium, now breached their own treaty according to which they guaranteed the independence of Albania. Another consequence was noticed very

soon after the treaty was signed. During the period when Entente Powers were trying hard to convince Bulgaria to enter the war on their side by promising the Macedonian territories, Serbia was against because it understood about the Secret Treaty of London. Prince Alexander told one friend of Miss Durham: "If we lost territories in West we will not loose anything in the East" (Durham, 2001b, p.299). In the autumn of 1915 Edith Durham received a letter from Sir Edward Grey who asked her to go to Northern Albania with other personalities who were familiarized with the country. The aim of this journey would be to recruit Albanians of North Albania . Unfortunately this plan was never realized since before recruiting Albanians Great Powers would have to guarantee their independence and nor Russia neither France were willing to do so (Durham, 2001b).

All through the First World War the situation in Albania was deteriorating. Bulgarian and Austrian troops entered in Northern and Middle Albania whereas Greek troops in the southern parts of Albania until Italian and French troops arrived there. French troops took Korça, which had been controlled by Albanians. The French Government declared the Republic of Korça on December 11th 1916. Very soon there was organized a government and a great numbers of schools were opened. According to Miss Durham the development of this Republic lasted until the entrance of Greece in war on the side of Entente Powers. Then the conflict started since Greece wanted Korça as an award for her entrance in the World War. To satisfy her many Greek schools were reopened (Durham, 2001b).

When the World War I ended Albania was in a very critical situation. The lost of Central Powers especially the desintegration of Austro-Hungarian Empire got rid of one of greatest supporters of Albania in international affairs. Three traditional predators of Albanian territories – Serbia, Greece and Montenegro – were on the side of winners. Albanians called for the realisation of Wilson's principle for self-determination. President Wilson even appointed a meeting between his envoy and Miss Durham. She immediately found out that the support of United States of America was the only salvation for Albania. Anyway the principle of self-determination was realised selectively, only in parts with strategic interests for Great Britain and France. If it was realised, according to Miss Durham than Albanian state would also include Kosova and Western Macedonia. Regarding the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes which was created, she thought it was an artificial formation which will never fulfill the conditions she should operate with (Durham, 2001a).

Miss Edith Durham wrote in different newspapers and magazines not only as a correspondent but often as an analyst and scholar. We should emphasize her articles

in The Near East, The Saturday Review, The Contemporary Review, Journal of the Central Asian Society, etc, where she reflected her views on Albanian population and its history. Of a great interest were also her lectures on the Albanian issue. The Near East published a lecture of hers held on December 14th 1916 in the society called Central Asian Society. She informed the members of society about the miserable situation in Albania. She also emphasized the data of an American missionary according to whom only from the beginning of the World War I approximately 150 000 Albanians, mostly women and children, were dead as a result of famine and misery (Durham, 2001a).

Then, Miss Durham would continue with the history of Albanians from Illyria on. According to Miss Durham the source of the hatred between Serbs and Albanians is found back to the occupation of Albania by Stefan Dushan who ordered the population to abandon the Roman Catholic Church and accept the Greek one. All those who refused to obey were condemned to death (Durham, 2001a).

A direct call for justice toward Albania Miss Durham made in her article "Albania and the Albanians" published in "The Saturday Review". She also offers a short history of Albanians to show to the public opinion that despite occupations and injustices through the history Albanians never lost the hope for justice. The Great Powers, according to the article, paid this hope and trust by sending to Albania an "incompetent" Prince. As all the other people of Balkans had the support of any Great Power to establish their independence, Albania should have a protector state and not be left on the administration of the International Commission of Control where each member would seek to benefit. She considered Italy to be the future protector of Albania because of Italian vital interests there (Durham, 2001a).

Journal of the Central Asian Society, vol. IV, 1917, published the study of Miss Durham titled "Albania Past and Present" and her lecture on the same issue in Central Asian Society. One Albanian was present there and talked with admiration about the contribution of Miss Durham for the Albanian question. Her work and dedication made Albanian people call her "Mbretëresha e Shqipërisë". The great respect Albanians dedicated to her was a subject of the famous journalist H. W. Nevins's speech as well. He explained that he was so welcome everywhere in Albania only if he mentioned the name of Edith Durham. He had the chance to meet in Thessalonica a group of British nurses who went there from Serbia through Albania. They were accepted with enthusiasm everywhere in Albania only that they were of the same nationality as Edith Durham (Durham, 2001a).

Mr. Nevinson wrote in his autobiography about Miss Durham's contribution for Albanian question (John, 2006). The courage and determination of Edith Durham to help Albanians is apparent in a letter she delivered on August 31st 1917 to the editor of *The Near East*. Aiming to disprove the statements of the Greek Government of spring and summer period of 1914 according to which they did not have any intention to occupy Southern Albania, she personally went on mountains near Tepelena to spy the Greek troops. Finding the Greek Military Forces there she immediately went to Vlora to alarm the Great Powers about the situation but it was too late. The World War had started and Great Britain has already declared the war. Even when she arrived in London it was impossible to draw the attention of public opinion about the miseries in South Albania (Durham, 2001a).

Miss Durham addressed another letter to the editor of the *The Near East* with a request to publish the resolution which was passed at a meeting held by the Anglo-Albanian Society on November 12th 1918. According to the resolution: "That inasmuch as the right of self-determination for the smaller nations of Europe has been solemnly agreed to by the United Kingdom and the United States, this meeting of the Anglo-Albanian Society trusts that those Governments and the Governments of the Allied Powers will secure the integrity of Albanian territory and will assure to the Albanian people the right to choose their own form of Government. It hopes that by these means the independence of Albania, accorded by Treaty in 1913, shall be firmly established" (Durham, 2001a).

During the period she was in London, Edith Durham constantly corresponded with Albanian famous personalities thus informing them about the policy of Great Powers toward Albania. In February 1914 she addressed a letter to Kol Baqi of Scutary, to inform him about her activity against Serbian and Montenigan atrocities toward Albanians and against the policy of Great Powers toward Albania (Frasheri, 2004). She addressed to Kol Balqi another letter informing that Hoti and Gruda were threatened by Montenegro (Frashëri, 2004). On June 14th 1916 Miss Durham wrote a letter to Mithat Frasheri regarding her initiative for the improvement of relations between Serbs and Albanians (Frashëri, 2004).

The letters and articles written by Miss Durham during the World War I prove that she supported an Italian protectorate over Albania. This attitude of her was clearly expressed in a letter she wrote to Kristo Dako. Then in a letter she sent to Sevasti Qiriazhi Dako she had encouraged the Albanians to be united and supported by a Power such as Italy (Frashëri, 2004). At the end of the war she started to favour the American supervision over Albanian population. She expressed these

views in her article “Albania and Powers” published in *Contemporary Review*, in July 1919. Among other reason why Italy should not be the Albanian protector according to Edith Durham was the fact that Italy would very soon fight with the Kingdom of Slavs and in such a situation Albania would be a battlefield between belligerents (Durham, 2001a).

Miss Durham went in Albania after the First World War, in 1921 and this was her last time there although she continued to work with devotion for the Albanian question until she passed away. She was named “Mbretresha e Malesoreve” and was awarded a prize during the period of King Zog I and the period of democracy in nowadays Albania (Frashëri, 2004).

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