

The Contribution of the Frashëri Brothers to the Unification of the Albanian Language

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Abstract

The Frashëri brothers Sami, Naim and Abdyl represent one of the most significant pillars of the Albanian National Awakening in the 19th century. At a time when the Albanian language was endangered by the lack of institutional use and by foreign cultural pressures, they undertook multifaceted efforts for its development, standardization and promotion as a national language. Their contribution was not limited to literature but extended to education, politics, journalism, and the defense of national identity. The National Awakening, as an ideological, political and cultural movement, considered the Albanian language as the foundation for the development of education. This article aims to highlight the values and contributions of the Frashëri brothers to the standardization of the Albanian language. Among the key figures who played a decisive role in this process are: Konstandin Kristoforidhi, Naim Frashëri, Luigj Gurakuqi, Ismail Qemali, Sami Frashëri, Pashko Vasa, Abdyl Frashëri, Jani Vreto and others. These patriots, along with many more, contributed in various ways to the formation and standardization of the Albanian language, turning it into an important tool of identity on the international stage. This intellectual and patriotic collaboration was crowned with the *Congress of Manastir* (1908), where the foundations of the unified Albanian alphabet were established.

Keywords: *Frashëri brothers, contribution, Albanian language, standardization*

1. Introduction

The Albanian National Awakening represents the most glorious period of our cultural and political history, where the Albanian language was placed at the center of efforts to build national identity. At a time when Albania was politically and linguistically divided and foreign influences threatened to erase the autochthonous elements of culture, the revivalist intellectuals saw language as the foundation of the existence and future of the nation. As Ismail Kadare expresses: "The National Awakening was the first voice of a

nation that sought to remember itself.”¹ In this context, the Frashëri family became a symbol of efforts for the development of Albanian, combining political engagement, literary and linguistic creativity in service of a common ideal. The three brothers, Sami, Naim and Abdyl, did not settle for theoretical or patriotic visions alone, but acted in concrete fields to secure the place of Albanian as a literary language. Sami, with his linguistic and didactic projects, laid the foundations of standardization; Naim, with his poetic creativity and translations, elevated Albanian to the level of an artistically rich and beloved language for the reader; while Abdyl, with his political activity, gave social and organizational dimensions to the language issue. Their interaction, reinforced by other contemporaneous intellectuals, shows that the process of linguistic unification was not an isolated act but part of a national strategy aimed at the cultural and educational emancipation of Albanians.

The study of the works of the Frashëri brothers shows that language was not merely a tool of communication, but an essential sign of nationhood. Through writings, texts, articles, poetry and political activity, they treated language as a symbol of identity and as a condition for the historical survival of Albanians. In this framework, the analysis of their contribution has not only historical importance but also offers a perspective on how the intellectual elites transformed language into an instrument of national unity. This paper aims to examine in greater depth the contribution of Sami and Naim Frashëri in the process of standardizing Albanian, while also highlighting the supportive role of Abdyl Frashëri in the political and social dimension.

Sami Frashëri is one of the most well-known writers and personalities of the Albanian National Awakening. His literary and linguistic work covers a wide range of themes and styles, revealing his commitment to the development of the Albanian language and the defense of the cultural identity of Albanians. He was also a renowned patriot and a participant in the League of Prizren, recognized as one of the great scholars of his time and he contributed to the standardization of the Albanian language. He was one of the main figures on the international stage who worked for its protection and one of the most distinguished intellectuals who worked for the development of our language.

Sami emphasized the idea of creating a common language that would transcend the dialectal and sub-dialectal divisions of Albanian. Two of his most valuable works in the field of linguistics are “Dictionary of the Albanian Language” and “Primer of the Albanian Language,” in which he tried to systematize grammatical rules and the structure of the language, aiming to create a unified standard for its use. Sami Frashëri also promoted the use of Albanian in schools and institutions, encouraging contemporary

¹ Ismail Kadare, “The Autobiography of the People in Verse,” Onufri, Tirana, 1999, p. 43.

writers and intellectuals to write in their mother tongue. He also wrote the school textbook "Alphabet of the Albanian Language" (1886) and a geographic textbook about the world, "Dheshkronja," in which he devotes a special place to the geography of Albania and describes it as one of the most beautiful countries of the Balkans.

At the end of the 19th century, the patriots and scholars of the Istanbul Society saw the urgent duty of the time to be the writing of the Albanian language and the creation of its alphabet and Sami's alphabet was evaluated as the most suitable. With it, the works that constitute the wealth of the Albanian National Awakening were written and published. Sami Frashëri was aware of the great importance of creating the alphabet and writing the Albanian language. In the primer published in Istanbul he wrote: "Nations are with languages; a nation that loses its language is lost and forgotten; with the loss of its language it itself is lost."²

In the texts and articles of the time, Sami unfolded democratic ideals for the political and social development of the country, for the development of education, culture and science. Sami Frashëri also compiled a dictionary of the Albanian language which remained unpublished; he also left in manuscript a collection of Albanian folk songs. As a linguist and intellectual, Sami played an extraordinary role in shaping Albanian national identity and strengthening our language. He worked to standardize Albanian, making it more understandable and unified for all Albanians, and emphasized the importance of a common linguistic norm. In his writings, S. Frashëri urged Albanians to love, preserve, develop, defend and enrich the Albanian language, which is one of the oldest and most beautiful languages. Sami Frashëri wrote poetry and prose in Albanian, furthering the development of our literature and encouraging other writers to write in Albanian. One of his best-known and most valuable works in Albanian literature is "Albania What It Was, What It Is and What It Will Be," where the author emphasizes the role of the Albanian language as a necessary tool for the union of Albanians and the preservation of national identity. This work is an added value to Albanian literature and to the formation of national consciousness, emphasizing the role of language as a key element of Albanian culture and identity. "The sign of nationhood is language; every people is held together by languages; those people who forget or abandon their language and speak another tongue, in time become the people of that nation whose tongue they speak and depart from their own nation."³

² Zija Zholi, "Sami Frashëri," Publishing House "8 Nëntori," Tirana, 1978, p. 42.

³ Sami Frashëri, "Albania — What It Was, What It Is and What It Will Be?," Publishing House "Mësonjëtorja e Parë", Tirana, 1999, p. 25.

Holding the Congress of Manastir on 14–22 November 1908 was the manifestation of the National Awakening's aims for the standardization of the alphabet of the Albanian language. Sami, although not physically present, appeared through his works and ideology that were conveyed to the delegates of the congress; he can be called one of the "invisible inspirers" of the Congress of Manastir. The standardization of the alphabet of the Albanian language, as one of the greatest achievements of the National Awakening, was also made possible thanks to his contribution to education and the Albanian cause.

Naim Frashëri, Sami's older brother, also contributed to the study and development of the Albanian language, particularly through his literary works which influenced its standardization. He was a poet and intellectual engaged in cultural and linguistic matters, a supporter of the use of the Latin alphabet for Albanian and he lobbied strongly in the discussions that led to the holding of the Congress of Manastir in 1908. In his literary production Naim used simple and clear language, making it dearer to the masses. Some of his best-known poems are "Hymn to the Flag," "The Homeland," "Our Language" and the poetic collection "Summer Flowers"; these are written in a pure and comprehensible language that served as a model for other writers. The romantic and iconic poem "Herds and Agriculture" (Bagëti e Bujqësi), dedicated to the homeland, is one of the most beautiful hymns where Albanian nature, tradition and rural life are described. In his poetic work Naim handled patriotic lyricism, meditative poetry, didactic poetry, epic poetry, fable, etc.

Naim Frashëri also translated important works of world literature, bringing new models of writing and terms that enriched the lexicon of Albanian and the development of a new literary and cultural style. He made numerous efforts to create a large number of new words, notions and terms, which he used during his poetic creation to enrich the lexicon, grammar and phonetics of Albanian, although some of these did not come into use later. Thanks to his work and love for Albania and Albanians, Naim Frashëri greatly enriched our language with new stylistic, semantic, philosophical, aesthetic and regional expressions. In his work we find mostly words from popular and folkloric lexicon, which later became part of the artistic literary language. Professor Rexhep Qosja, in the monograph on Naim Frashëri's work "The Great Message," emphasizes the idea that: "Naim Frashëri is completely convinced that the Albanian language can be developed, enriched and perfected by relying on its own sources, without borrowing words from foreign languages."⁴

The use of these words helped promote a new literary style that was closer to the language of the people. In the poem "Albania" he addresses issues of national identity and the importance of preserving the language. The author argues that language is one

of the most important elements of a nation and that it must be preserved and further developed. Naim Frashëri also wrote numerous essays and articles where he discusses the importance of education and culture, stressing the need for a unified and standard language to promote the values of Albanian culture. Although Naim Frashëri was not a linguist in the narrow sense, his contributions in literature and his engagement in linguistic and cultural matters make him an important figure in the history of the development of the Albanian language. Albanian literature gained high artistic values with the authors of the National Awakening period and was further enriched by Naim Frashëri's creativity, where instructional and moralizing texts predominate.

Abdyl Frashëri, the eldest brother of Naim and Sami, was also one of the ideologues and fighters of the Albanian National Awakening, as well as an activist in the defense and promotion of the Albanian language. He was one of the main leaders of the League of Prizren and one of the political personalities who worked for the union and independence of the Albanian people. His contribution to the language includes several aspects: participation in the National Awakening, where he believed that the Albanian language was one of the main elements of national identity; cooperation with patriots and writers of the time for the standardization and dissemination of Albanian; and support for the use of Albanian in schools and institutions, considering language as an essential tool for the education and enlightenment of the Albanian people. Abdyl Frashëri raised the problems and concerns related to the lack of writing of our language even before the Great Powers, through articles and correspondence dated 17 May, published in Vienna on 31 May 1878, from which we quote: "The Albanian language is a very beautiful and very rich language, it can be written with great ease [...]." ⁵

Abdyl Frashëri expressed the conviction that once Albanian was officially written, with the spread of Albanian writing throughout Albania and with the opening of Albanian schools everywhere, the Greeks and Slavs would no longer have schools in Albania. Abdyl Frashëri wrote several works and articles aimed at promoting the Albanian language and culture. He was engaged in translations and the creation of textbooks that would help in teaching Albanian. Abdyl Frashëri was also one of the founders of the society "Bashkimi" which aimed to promote education and the development of the Albanian language.

Conclusions

The Frashëri brothers Sami, Naim and Abdyl appear as key figures in the process of unifying and standardizing the Albanian language during the National Awakening. Through theoretical and practical works, Sami contributed to the drafting of the alphabet, to efforts to systematize grammatical rules and teaching in Albanian. Naim, through his

literary creativity and translations, offered the model of a clear literary language close to the people, enriching the lexicon and style, while Abdyl acted in the political and organizational field to promote the teaching and official use of Albanian. The union of these contributions, together with the work of other scholars and organizations, resulted in the consolidation of alphabetic and standardizing solutions at the Congress of Manastir, which served as a basis for the formation of the national language norm.

The importance of their work is not only historical but also theoretical: they combined cultural, literary and political engagement to create the necessary conditions for affirming language as an identity and educational factor. The legacy of the Frashëri brothers lies in strengthening national consciousness through language, in educational materials and in the literary model they left behind. The Frashëri brothers remain important personalities in the history of Albanian literature; their works continue to be studied and valued today.

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