



Research Article

The role, importance, and contribution of the Albanological Institute in the genuine and professional study of Kosovo's musical folklore and cultural

Albin Sadiku¹

Institute of Albanology in Pristina, Folklore Department, Ethnomusicology Section, Pristina, Kosovo

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Abstract

This study examines the institutional foundations of the discipline of ethnomusicology in Kosovo, its development process, and its contributions to the country's cultural identity. Founded in 1953, the Institute of Albanianology in Pristina (IAP) has played a pioneering role in systematically collecting, preserving, and scientifically studying Kosovo's musical folklore. Field research, melodic studies, and monographs conducted under the leadership of Prof. Rexhep Munishi and Prof. Bahtir Sheholli have highlighted the melodic structure, rhythmic diversity, and sociocultural functions of Kosovo's folk music. These studies have made significant contributions not only to the documentation of folklore but also to the recognition of Kosovo's cultural heritage at national and international levels. Today, a new generation of researchers, such as Albin Sadiku, Krenar Doli, and Visar Munishi, continues the scholarly legacy of the IAP and strongly represents Kosovo's ethnomusicology in contemporary literature. In this context, the study demonstrates that Kosovo's musical culture, by connecting with universal musicological theories, both strengthens local cultural identity and offers unique contributions to universal scientific discussions.

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Introduction

Seventy years ago, in 1953, the founding of the Albanological Institute of Prishtina (IAP) became undeniable evidence that this was the best and only path for the genuine, professional, and institutional study of our folkloric heritage in general, and of Albanian musical folklore in particular. Through the doors of this institution have passed countless times the names of renowned scholars, who with their work have left indelible traces in the study of our rich cultural, scientific, and national heritage. Quite rightly, the Arbëresh scholar Antonio Belushi expressed in an interview: "For me, the Albanological Institute is a small divinity of the Albanian people."

The success of the IAP is testified by the works accomplished and the countless books published each year by its scientific staff. Within the framework of the IAP, the Department of Folklore and Ethnology also operates, which includes the sector of ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicology is a social science concerned with the study of traditional folk musical heritage from the past up to the present day, with the aim of also forecasting its future directions. It studies all types of folk songs, both from the old rural and urban traditions, as well as from the newer rural and urban traditions. Ethnomusicology also studies folk musical instruments and folk dances with all their characteristics.

Ethnomusicology in general, and Albanian ethnomusicology in particular, is a relatively new science. As a first step in the melographing of our folk songs, we can consider two collections of songs published in the early 1940s: Pjetër Dungu (1940) published “*Lyra shqiptare*” (*Albanian Lyre*), which contains 50 folk songs (Sokoli, 1965), and in 1943, Gjon Kol Kujxhija published the first booklet titled “*Dasma Shkodrane*” (*The Shkodra Wedding*), which contains 50 sung dances (Kujxhia, 1943).

Besides these melographers and scholars, as the pioneer of collecting folk music and melographing folk songs in Kosovo is considered Lorenc Antoni, who published seven volumes under the title “*Folklori muzikor shqiptar*” (*Albanian Musical Folklore*) (Antoni, n.d.). In Albania, the pioneer and scholar of folk music was Ramadan Sokoli, who published the first book of an ethnomusicological character, also titled “*Folklori muzikor shqiptar*” (*Albanian Musical Folklore*) (Sokoli, 1965).

Organized work for the research and study of our cultural heritage became possible thanks to the establishment of relevant institutions, in which scientific workers were employed whose profession was the study of folklore in general and musical folklore in particular. Thus, in 1959 the Institute of Folklore was founded in Tirana, where the Department of Ethnomusicology also began its work, while in Kosovo in 1953, the Albanological Institute of Prishtina was established for the first time. In the IAP, within the Department of Folklore and Ethnology, in 1971 the Ethnomusicology Section was opened with the staff members Prof. Dr. Rexhep Munishi and Prof. Bahtir Sheholli. The scientific workers of these two institutions began their organized work of collecting folk musical material through individual and group expeditions carried out in various Albanian regions, both in Albania and in Kosovo. Thanks to the work of these two institutions, satisfactory results were achieved in the collection, preservation, study, and presentation of our cultural heritage in general, and of our ethnomusicological heritage in particular.

Undoubtedly, the professional study of Albanian ethnomusicology in Kosovo began with the IAP, with Prof. Rexhep Munishi and Prof. Bahtir Sheholli, and later continued with the next generation of employees, graduated ethnomusicologists, of this institution. Naturally, the work done by researchers outside of IAP should never be underestimated. It goes without saying that Lorenc Antoni carried out colossal work in collecting, transcribing, and publishing Albanian folk songs—his work is worthy of every praise. Nevertheless, one of the first studies conducted professionally, according to contemporary European methodology in Kosovo, is the monographic study of Prof. Rexhep Munishi, entitled *The Singing of Podgur Women* (Munishi, 1979). Since this work has more of a research character, it is divided into three chapters, within which the distinguishing elements are presented, as the author notes (Munishi, 1979: p.7).

The study is preceded by a brief introduction that gives a realistic overview of the course of this research. As mentioned above, the work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses the course of the work and the structure that the study took in its final stage. It provides data on the period of field material collection, the method of transcription of the melodies and the difficulties during the transcription-melography process, the general musical and textual characteristics of the singing style, as well as the thematic aspects of the songs of Podgur women.

The second chapter, which constitutes the core part of this monographic study, contains the musical elements presented in specific tables related to the structure of melopoetic verses and stanzas, the cadences of melopoetic phrases, the rhythms of melopoetic verses, as well as the tonal orders and ambitus within which these songs are created.

In the third chapter, which in terms of importance is very close to the second chapter—because without it everything stated in the second would not have been convincing or well-argued—are presented the melodic and textual examples of the collected songs, deciphered and transcribed by the author himself (Sheholli, 2020).

After these chapters follow: summaries in Serbo-Croatian and French, an index of the names of villages and singers, the alphabetical order of the songs, and finally the table of contents. The next study by Prof. Rexhep Munishi, also carried out according to ethnomusicological scientific methodology, is entitled *Albanian Highlander Songs* (Munishi, 1987).

The first stage of a scientific ethnomusicological study is the collection of the necessary material in the field. Mitad Shamiq, in his book *How to Write a Scientific Paper*, states: “A scientific paper has the greatest value if it treats material that has been collected first-hand.” This is precisely what Prof. Rexhep Munishi did in his monographic study entitled

Albanian Highlander Songs. In this study, the author has tried to view these songs from many perspectives: artistic-musical creativity, historical, ethnomusicological, sociological, etc. To achieve this successfully, he divided the work into three separate chapters.

The first chapter, entitled *Albanian Highlander Songs and Their Evolution*, discusses the themes and transformations of the songs, their social function, their origin and antiquity, the influence that highlander songs have exerted on other types of songs, etc. In short, this chapter provides a general overview of this type of song.

The central and main part of this monographic study is presented in the second chapter, entitled *Melopoetic Elements*. This chapter discusses the types and structures of melopoetic verses, melopoetic forms, cadences of phrases, rhythmic structures, tonal rows, ambitus of songs, etc.

In the third chapter of this work, the focus is on the individual, collective, ethnopsychological, and associative character of the songs, their symbolism, and their musical status. At the end of the study, professionally transcribed examples are presented. The work is also supplemented with photos, diagrams, tables, and other necessary data for a scientific ethnomusicological study.

In addition to these two research works, the author has also published other books such as *Ethnomusicological Problems* (Munishi, 1997), *Musical Identity* (Munishi, 2001), *Choral Singing in Yugoslavia*, as well as a series of research papers published in various scientific journals.

After Prof. Rexhep Munishi, in 1976, the ethnomusicologist Prof. Bahtir Sheholli was also employed at the IAP, in the ethnomusicology sector. Throughout his career as a researcher of musical folklore, he followed the methodology of professional ethnomusicological scientific work. Prof. Sheholli began his research with fieldwork on Albanian musical traditions, recording them on magnetic tapes and filming the creators and bearers of this tradition. He then transcribed and notated (melographed) the collected field material, making it available for further professional ethnomusicological study.

His research papers, published in the IAP's scientific journal *Gjurmime Albanologjike – Folklor dhe Etnologji*, were treated and analyzed from historical, ethnological, sociological, and especially melopoetic perspectives, the latter being the core work of a genuine professional ethnomusicologist. In his study entitled *The Lyric Love Songs*, the author states at the outset: “*Our love songs have always been an expression of the most subtle feelings. They encapsulate the purest erotic emotions and experiences*” (Sheholli, 2020). He then discusses the scientific and popular terminology used for these songs. As a professional ethnomusicologist, the author primarily focuses on the musical aspect. During his melorhythmic analysis of love songs, he discusses their vocal style, the development of melodic lines, rhythmic structures, the accompaniment of songs with various folk instruments, the structure of melopoetic verses, etc.

At the end of the study, songs notated (melographed) by the author himself are presented, including: *Mori çikë në drras të gurit; E mirë boll ma shtrove shtratin; N'drras të vekut kush po kanë; Mos u en' more djal natën me cigare*. It is particularly impressive that, alongside the vocal melodies, the melodic lines of the *çifteli* and *sharki* are also notated when they accompany the songs.

With the same methodological approach, Prof. Sheholli also addressed other research works such as: *Folk Songs as a Constant Strengthening of the Patriotic Activity of Isa Boletini; On the Musical Tradition of Llap; Sht'ism: Ilahi in the Tradition of the Dervishes; On the Lyrical Poetic-Musical Creativity of Arshikëria*; etc. Prof. Bahtir Sheholli was a profound connoisseur of Albanian folk musical tradition; for a long time, he was also a selector and curator of singers and dancers for the Folkloric Festival of Gllogovc as well as for the Folkloric Festival of Gjirokastër. He was equally knowledgeable about Albanian folk instruments and a critic of acculturated phenomena that attempted to infiltrate authentic Albanian musical folklore.

Based on the methodology of scientific ethnomusicological work, today's researchers at the IAP—employees of the ethnomusicology sector and professional ethnomusicologists—also continue the work of collecting, researching, and studying folk musical traditions. Among them are: Albin Sadiku (author of this study), who, in addition to various papers published in scientific journals, has published the ethnomusicological monographs *The Art of Children's Singing in Bujanoc and Preshevë – Play, Song, Dance* (Sadiku, 2017) and *The Role, Function, and Use of the Sharki in Kosovo*

(Sadiku, 2020); Krenar Doli, who so far has published the ethnomusicological monographs *The Wedding Ceremony in the City of Gjakova* and *The Tradition of Sofiste Music in Kosovo* (Doli, 2023), as well as several articles in various scientific journals; and Visar Munishi, who, in addition to various journal articles, has published the ethnomusicological monograph *The Dances of Karadak* (Munishi, 2018).

To remain objective, it must also be acknowledged that some researchers outside the IAP, such as Behar Arllati, Arnisa Rexhepi, Bekim Ramadani, etc., are also doing commendable professional ethnomusicological work. Nevertheless, it has now been convincingly proven and argued that the best and most reliable path for the study of folk musical tradition is the institutional one—the path paved over decades by the Albanological Institute of Prishtina.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the development of ethnomusicology in Kosovo, and in particular, the central role played by the Institute of Albanianology in Pristina (IAP). Founded in 1953, the institute has been a pioneering institution for the systematic collection, preservation, and scientific study of Kosovo's musical folklore. The work of Prof. Rexhep Munishi and Prof. Bahtir Sheholli has made significant contributions to the recognition of Kosovar musical culture not only locally but also regionally and internationally. Their field research, melodic studies, and monographs have highlighted the historical roots, melodic richness, and sociocultural functions of Kosovar folk music. Today, researchers such as Albin Sadiku, Krenar Doli, and Visar Munishi continue this institutional and scientific legacy and strongly represent Kosovar music in modern ethnomusicological literature. Thanks to the work carried out by the IAP, Kosovo has not only preserved its musical folklore, but also strengthened its cultural identity and made its own unique contribution to international scientific debates. As a result, the discipline of ethnomusicology in Kosovo has played an indispensable role both in preserving national culture and promoting it internationally.

Biodata of Author



Dr. **Albin Sadiku** was born on March 10, 1974, in Bujanoc. He completed his primary education in his hometown and pursued his secondary music education in Prizren. He graduated from the Faculty of Music in Prishtina, specializing in General Music Pedagogy. He later earned a second degree in Ethnomusicology from the same faculty. He continued his postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Music in Tirana under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Vasil Tole. In June 2006, he was awarded the title of Master in Musicology. Since 2003, he has been working as a researcher at the Albanological Institute of Prishtina, in the Department of Folklore, Ethnomusicology Section. He has published scholarly articles in various journals across Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and other countries. On October 23, 2014, he defended his doctoral dissertation at the Center for Albanological Studies in Tirana. In 2017, he published the monographic study "The Art of Children's Singing in Bujanoc and Presheva: Play, Song, Lullaby." In 2020, he released another monograph titled "The Role, Function, and Use of the Šarkija in Kosovo." Most recently, in 2023, he published "Female Singing in Albanian Wedding Traditions in Bujanoc and Presheva."

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