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Plants in the Albanian culture

L. Dinga¹, L. Topuzi², A. Onuzi³, S. Kongjika²

Summary

The study deals with the role plants play in the Albanian traditional culture, especially in anthroponomy, toponymy, sayings, etc. It is interesting to look at the people's names (names and surnames), called after Albanian names of nearly 45 plants and Latin names of almost 30 kinds. With regard to toponymy there is a connection between the area where the plants grow and the names of the inhabited geographical units. About 40 units hold the names of plants, mainly trees, amongst which walnut (*Juglans regia* L.), peanut (*Quercus* spp. div.), apple (*Malus* spp. div.), plane (*Platanus orientalis* L.), etc. dominate. The study is the first endeavor to analyze the flora elements of the Albanian folk costumes that are distinguished by their originality, variety and beauty.

Key words: anthroponomy, toponymy, ethnobotanical traditions.

1. Introduction

Ethnobotany, i.e. the science that deals with the ways people use plants in the traditional society, is almost unknown in Albania (Cotton, 1996). Attempts were made by some physicians who mainly described how to use the medicinal plants (Kokalari, 1980; Papadhopulli, 1976).

Being among the most ancient peoples in the Balkans and settled in between the mountains and the Adriatic Sea, the Albanians have survived against the storms of different times and the risks for assimilation. In a rough territory, geographically and self isolated, the Albanian people have transmitted an originally and wealthy spiritual and material culture. Considered as a treasure for the ethnographers and botanists, plants assume a significant place in that culture.

Just like the other peoples, the Albanians were often in the midst of severe and dangerous crossroads. According to their choice, at times they lost and won, at times they got poor and rich. We are of the opinion that their richness was their culture. As time passed by, the Albanian culture became various, profound and wise and the Albanians cultivated and preserved their identity thanks to that development. The last century stirred up even the Albanians. They won their independence after 500 years of invasion,

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were part of two world wars, experienced 45 years of totalitarianism and changed the system within a week. They found themselves facing the virtual gates that separated them from the rest of the world. The change was nice, bright and rich to the eyes of those who were used to an excellent uniformity. Whereas their culture is rich, beautiful and original just like the culture of other peoples. But the uncontrolled movement of people in and outside Albania, the absence of good motifs to live in their motherland, the obsession to get rich in a very short time, are some of the major risks that may cause the loss of traditions and identity. The objectives of this paper have been:

- to identify the cultural wealth of the Albanian people for the knowledge of plants, their characteristics and the ways of their sustainable cultivation and use.

- to encourage the initiatives of studying the traditional use of plants and assisting the sustainable knowledge.

- to raise the awareness of the public opinion on the necessity to preserve and enrich the ethnobotanical traditions of the Albanian people, as a right to benefit from their wisdom.

- to identify the necessity to preserve the ethno-botanical traditions as an important means of preserving the cultural identity of the Albanian people.

2. Materials and methods

We have made use of the following documents for this study:

- registers of students attending the branches of biology, biology-chemistry and pharmacy over the last twenty years.

- telephone manual.

- register of the names of the geographical units and the inhabitant places.

- ethnographical publications.

- authors' own experience.

3. Results and discussion

According to the statistics, until 1990, about 80% of the Albanian people lived in villages, working in agriculture and practicing pasture, or making use of the forests. Those were the traditional jobs of the Albanians that determined their special relations to the plants, by using them for food,

clothes, construction and tool production. Plants were observed with a view to learning their cropping requirements and identify their medicinal, re-generating and aromatic properties. The beauty and variety of flowers, colors and combinations of plants are sources of inspiration and models to ornament dresses, houses and altars. Flowers and trees symbolized everything that was beautiful and positive in the legends, tales and songs. In order to illustrate these observations, we'll give below some examples.

Anthroponomy. People's names and surnames. Besides names of religious origin, pagan names, combined and created names, etc., there are people that hold Albanian and Latin names of plants (Tab. 1).

The observations allow to conclude that: mainly girls hold plant names; the ratio is 9:1, revealing the parents' will so that their daughter becomes as beautiful as the flower she is named after. Only plants outstanding for the beauty of their flowers, fruits and body have been selected, like violet, pomegranate and cypress. For boys, plant characteristics, like size, are preferred: Rrapi (*Platanus orientalis* L.), Lisan (*Quercus* sp.). The same observations refer to both the Albanian and Latin names.

Toponymy. Since the Albanians were closely related to plants, they studied the total area of plant cultivation. Based on that study, they have given certain names to residence places, geographical units as shown in tab. 2.

The table indicates that out of 2,500 residence centers in Albania (anonymous, 1997) nearly 140 hold plant names, which are mainly trees and shrubs of 35 species, predominantly walnut (*Juglans regia* L.), oak (*Quercus* spp. div.), apple (*Malus sylvestris* Mill), Oriental plane tree (*Platanus orientalis* L.). Herbaceous plants are also used, mostly some types of Labiates that are called *cajes* and *orizi* (*Oryza sativa* L.) which is a new name given after it was considered a crop.

Separate plants or groups of plants used to be meeting points or places for public assemblies, religious ceremonies, serving as references for activities and sources of inspiration for songs, legends, etc. We could mention for example: Rrapi në Mashkullorë (The plane tree of Mashkullora), Gështenja e Bajram Currit (Chestnut of Bajram Curri), Namazgjatë (Moslem prayers of Tirana and Elbasan).

Sayings. Sayings and proverbs provide an interesting source to draw valuable conclusions for plant biology. Our people say: "When mulberry dresses: man undresses"; which means that man should take his winter clothes off when mulberry tree blooms, something which happens after the late spring frosts.

Tab. 1. Names and surnames in Albanian language and their Latin origin

Albanian	G	Name		Surname	
		Latin	Albanian	Latin	
Blertha	f		Arreza	<i>Juglans regia</i> L.	
Blerina	f		Blerimi		
Blerim	m		Borziloku	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	
Bajame	f	<i>Amygdalis communis</i> L.	Bushi	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i> L.	
Borziloke	f	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	Dardha	<i>Pyrus</i> L.	
Burbuqe	f		Driza	<i>Paliurus aculeatus</i> Mill.	
Dafina	f	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L.	Dushku	<i>Quercus</i> L.	
Erbilin	m	<i>Tilia</i> L.	Ferra	<i>Rubus</i> L.	
Gonxhe	f		Frasheri	<i>Fraxinus</i> L.	
Hurma	f	<i>Diospyros kaki</i> L.	Gramo	<i>Agropyrum(repens)(L.)P.B.</i>	
Ide	f	<i>Ziziphus jujuba</i> Mill.	Gorica	<i>Pyrus amygdaliformis</i> Vill.	
Karafil	f	<i>Dianthus</i> L.	Hudra	<i>Allium sativum</i> L.	
Karfile	f	<i>Dianthus</i> L.	Hidhri	<i>Allium sativum</i> L.	
Kumbull	f	<i>Prunus</i> L.	Hoshafi	<i>Prunus domestica</i> L.	
Kajsie	f	<i>Armeniaca vulgaris</i> L.	Kerpi	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L.	
Kulumbri	f	<i>Prunus spinosa</i> L.	Kajsia	<i>Armeniaca vulgaris</i> Lam.	
Lila	f	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i> L.	KArafil	<i>Dianthus</i> L.	
Lisan	m	<i>Quercus</i> L.	Lulezimi		
Lule	f	<i>Flores</i>	Lisi	<i>Quercus pubescens</i> Willd.	
Luljeta	f	<i>Flores</i>	Lajthia	<i>Coryllus avellana</i> L.	
Lulezim	m	<i>Flores</i>	Lakra	<i>Brassica</i> L.	
Lulezime	f	<i>Flores</i>	Manaj	<i>Morus</i> L.	
Limonie	f	<i>Citrus limon</i> (L.)Burm.fil.	Mani	<i>Morus</i> L.	
Lejmone	f	<i>Citrus limon</i> (L.)Burm.fil.	Molla	<i>Malus domestica</i> Borkh.	
Lajthie	f	<i>Coryllus avellana</i> L.	Mara	<i>Arbutus unedo</i> L.	
Manushaqe	f	<i>Viola</i> L.	Misri	<i>Cheiranthus cheiri</i> L.	
Menekshe	f	<i>Viola</i> L.	Margariti	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i> Lam.	
Mare	f	<i>Arbutus unedo</i> L.	Oambuku	<i>Gossypium</i> L.	
Misire	f	<i>Cheiranthus cheiri</i> L.	Pema		
Mane	f	<i>Morus</i> L.	Plepi	<i>Populus</i> L.	
Marina	f	<i>Tamarix</i> L.	Piperi	<i>Capsicum annuum</i> L.	
Mersin	m	<i>Myrtus communis</i> L.	Piperku	<i>Capsicum annuum</i> L.	
Molla	f	<i>Malus communis</i> L.	Qafmolla	<i>Malus domestica</i> Borkh.	
Portokalle	f	<i>Citrus sinensis</i> (L.) Osbeck.	Qarri	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.	
Pambuke	f	<i>Gossypium</i> L.	Rodhe	<i>Xanthium</i> L.	
Rrap	m	<i>Platanus orientalis</i> L.	Rrapi	<i>Platanus</i> L.	
Selvie	f	<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> L.	Rrapaj	<i>Platanus</i> L.	
Shege	f	<i>Punica granatum</i> L.	Rrapsi	<i>Platanus</i> L.	
Shegushe	f	<i>Punica granatum</i> L.	Rrjepaj	<i>Platanus</i> L.	
Trendafil	m	<i>Rosa</i> L.	Rrushu	<i>Vitis (vinifera)</i> L.	
Trendafille	f	<i>Rosa</i> L.	Rigoni	<i>Origanum vulgare</i> L.	
Trendeline	f	<i>Trigonella corniculata</i> L.	Sallata	<i>Lactuca sativa</i> L.	
Vjollca	f	<i>Viola</i> L.	Shkoza	<i>Carpinus (betulus ose orientalis)</i>	
Zambake	f	<i>Lilium</i> L.	Shkarpa		
Zerdeli	f	<i>Prunus armeniaca</i> L.	Shega	<i>Punica granatum</i> L.	
Zymbyle	f	<i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i> L.	Shalqini	<i>Citrullus vulgaris</i> Schrad.	
			Tershana	<i>Avena sativa</i> L.	
			Trendafili	<i>Rosa</i> L.	
			Tapa		
			Trefila	<i>Trifolium</i> L.	
			Thana	<i>Cornus mas</i> L.	
			Thekra	<i>Secale cereale</i> L.	
			Ulliri	<i>Olea europea</i> L.	
			Urovi	<i>Vicia ervilia</i> (L.) Willd.	
			Vishnja	<i>Ceresus vulgaris</i> L.	
			Vidhi	<i>Ulmus campestris</i> L.	
			Zhabina	<i>Ranunculus</i> L.	

Tab. 1 continued

Names of Latin origin	Latin names
Ami	<i>Ammi</i> L.
Anisa	<i>Anethum</i> L.
Artemisa	<i>Artemisia</i> L.
Flora	<i>Flores</i>
Floran	<i>Flores</i>
Florika	<i>Flores</i>
Floresha	<i>Flores</i>
Florinda	<i>Flores</i>
Genciana	<i>Gentiana</i> L.
Gentian	<i>Gentiana</i> L.
Gentiana	<i>Gentiana</i>
Gladiola	<i>Gladiolus</i> L.
Iris	<i>Iris</i> L.
Jasmina	<i>Jasminum</i> L.
Laura	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L.
Laurens	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L.
Manjola	<i>Magnolia</i> L.
Marsilia	<i>Marsilea</i> L.
Menta	<i>Mentha</i> L.
Ortis	<i>Orchis</i> L.
Orkida	<i>Orchis</i> L.
Prunela	<i>Prunella</i> L.
Roza	<i>Rosa</i> L.
Rozmari	<i>Rosmarinus</i> L.
Rajmonda	<i>Ramonda</i> L.
Rajmond	<i>Ramonda</i> L.
Sueda	<i>Suaeda</i> L.
Trinia	<i>Trinia Hoffm.</i>
Viola	<i>Viola</i> L.
Violeta	<i>Viola</i> L.
Valeriana	<i>Valeriana</i> L.
Veronika	<i>Veronica</i> L.
Verbena	<i>Verbena</i> L.

Or the saying: *“July rain, corn gain; August rain, corn in vain”* is a useful advice for the corn farmers, according to which the irrigation should be made in July in order to have high productivity, otherwise August is very late.

The following instruction sounds very good: *“Daughter-in-law of good family is like an oak tree”*. Or the observation: *“Put the barrier at the cornel tree”* which in Albanian means do not allow others poke their nose into your affairs⁴.

Comparisons. People are attentive and accurate observers, given that men like beautiful things. Everything that attracts them is compared to an object they judge to be the most perfect one. Plants have helped them a great deal.

⁴note of the translator in italics

Beauty is compared to plants and flower buds: body (Cypress, Yew); eye (Grape, Almond, Olive); lips (Rose, Pomegranate, flower bud); long life (Oriental plane tree, Oak).

Even the reactions of people are compared to plants, and the reference objects change in positive and negative cases. When a person blushes from shame we say: he/she blushes like a red poppy or rose, while, when he/she gets red for a negative action we say: he/she reddens like a red pepper (*Capsicum annum* L.).

The people's spiritual wealth is revealed in their linguistic richness. In this context plants have been used to express the variety of object characteristics, by specifying them and avoiding misunderstandings. A significant example is the use of plants for colours. While plants are not used for the white and black colours, as they have no nuances, for the other colours the following plants are used: red (pomegranate flower, red pepper, dark cherry, jujube); violet (violet, lilac, mallow); green (grass, bean, leek, olive); brown (chestnut, egg-plant, walnut); yellow (saffron crocus, nasturtium, lemon, quince, orange, banana, Japanese persimmon, pycneus "straw").

Folk costumes. The Albanians are amongst the oldest inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula. They are descendants of the Illyrians and successors of the Medieval Arabs, whose territory, language and essential cultural features they have inherited. Clothes make up one of these features. The Albanians were distinguished by their outer appearance and the clothes they wore. Clothes symbolized their nationality. These were the reasons why the Albanians, mostly villagers, wore folk costumes until the first quarter of the XX century (Anonymous, 1976; Anonymous, 1993).

Besides the ethno-differentiating role, clothes were the object of a number of studies on their function, models, variety and ornaments. It's a well accepted fact that the best part of the Albanian traditional clothes were decorated with vegetation elements (Anonymous, 1999). The analysis of the vegetation elements led to the following observations: flowers are dominating decorative elements. They mainly belong to the families of Rosaceae, Compositae, Caryophyllaceae. This is confirmed also by the names of different clothes like: vest with roses, pinks, etc.

The flowers of Rosaceae and Compositae families have even-numbered petals (usually 6-8), and are embroidered so that they give the impression of ball-like forms (Fig. 1).

Flowers are similar to the Star of Alps (*Leontopodium alpinum* Cass.) because even the thread has got silver colour and is a little bit furry. In case

of embroiders of pinks, as people say, they show the calyx of flowers rather than corolla (wreath) and often look like Lilacs. Only golden thread is used for embroidering, that's why the flowers and leaves have only one colour.

Leaves are also frequently used. In most cases they are compound, pinnate and odd. They are coggged with full-sided lobes, which resemble the rose leaves (*Rosa* spp. div.) or Compositae (Fig. 2). In other cases leaves are embroidered all over the clothes. Out of simple leaves, those which have a different size, with coggged or lobed sides, like the oak leaves (*Quercus* spp. div.), are most favorable.

On some clothes (Fig. 3 and 4) flowers and leaves of four or mostly 3 parts dominate. People call them "clothes with clover" (*Trifolium*). In cases of three parts, it is linked with the asymmetry, just like the shawls and blouses are decorated. In cases of four parts, it is linked with the belief that "a fourleaved clover brings good luck".

The vegetation elements are used not only as decorative elements but also as messages of certain desires. Fig. 5 shows that clothes are embroidered with husks of wheat to reveal wealth.

A widespread phenomenon is the drawing of cypress (*Cupressus*) on the clothes. Due to its ornamenting characteristics (a high and straight tree), evergreen, growing spontaneously in Albania, it has always been used to decorate the religious institutions, both Christian and Moslem, cemeteries, etc. It is also used to decorate clothes. In other clothes the lengthwise drawing of cypress tree (flowers and leaves) prevails so as to resemble it perfectly well. It adds to the impression of a tall body.

There are also intresting situations in which you can find plants with flowers in a pot (Fig. 5). The presence of a bundle of flowers is the indication that those were cultivated and used as cut flowers along the centuries.

4. Conclusions

The Albanian culture is very rich in vegetation elements. The study of the country and the relations between plants and the Albanian traditional folk culture make up an indispensable contribution for the development of agriculture and the identification of the national identity.

Since the traditional Albanian society is developing quickly, but uncontrolled, the application of projects on ethnobotany should be considered a priority. That needs cooperation between botanists and ethnographers.

Tab. 2. Index of toponymy (geographic names of plant origin)

Residence Localities			Geographic sites	
Albanian name	F	Latin name	Albanian name	Latin name
Arrez	10	<i>Juglans regia</i> L.	Bari (qafe)	<i>Herba</i>
Arras	1	<i>Juglans regia</i> L.	Buza e bredhit	<i>Abies</i> sp.
Bathes	2	<i>Vicia faba</i> L.	Cajes (mal)	<i>Sideritis</i> L.
Blerim	1		Cuka murrizit	<i>Crataegus</i> L.
Blerinas	2		Dafinas (gjiri)	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L.
Baldushk	1	<i>Quercus</i> L.	Dege(gryke,lugine)	
Caje	1	<i>Sideritis</i> L.	Dushkut(qafe)	<i>Quercus</i> L.
Dardhas	2	<i>Pyrus domestica</i> L.	Grames(gryke,perrua)	<i>Agropyrum repens</i> (L.)B.P.
Dardhe	3	<i>Pyrus domestica</i> L.	Geshtenjas lugine,mal	<i>Castanea sativa</i> Mill
Dellinje	1	<i>Juniperus</i> L.	Kakise(maje)	<i>Diospyrus kaki</i> L.
Drize	3	<i>Paliurus aculeatus</i> Mill.	Kumbulles(grope,qafe)	<i>Prunus</i> L.
Dushku	2	<i>Quercus</i> L.	Lajthize(maje)	<i>Coryllus avellana</i> L.
Ferraj	1	<i>Rubus</i> L.	Liqeni i luleve	
Ferras	3	<i>Rubus</i> L.	Lisit(Liqen artificial)	<i>Quercus pubescens</i> Willd
Firz	5	<i>Pteridium</i> Kuhn.	Livadhesit (mal)	
Fikas	2	<i>Ficus carica</i> L.	Luadhi (qafe)	
Frasher	4	<i>Fraxinus ornus</i> L.	Melleza	<i>Ostrya carpinifolia</i> Scop.
Fushe -Arres	1	<i>Juglans regia</i> L.	Mersini (perrua)	<i>Myrtus communis</i> L.
Geshtenje	1	<i>Castanea sativa</i> Mill.	Murrizi(kenete, qafe)	<i>Crataegus</i> sp.
Gorice	2	<i>Pyrus amygdaliformis</i> Vill.	Pishe(qafe)	<i>Pinus</i> L.
Hardhias	2	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> L.	Pjeshkez (maje)	<i>Persica vulgaris</i> Mill.
Kashnjet	1	<i>Castanea sativa</i> Mill.	Pragu i Qarrit	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.
Lis	3	<i>Quercus pubescens</i> Vill.	Qafa e barit	<i>Herba</i>
Luadh (livadh)	2		Qafe molle	<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.
Lulezim	1		Qafe Thane	<i>Cornus mas</i> L.
Mollaj	2	<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.	Qafa qarrit	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.
Mollas	4	<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.	Qarrishte(mal,gryke)	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.
Mollekuqe	1	<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.	Qeparo(fushe,mal,perrua)	<i>Allium cepa</i> L.
Murriz	3	<i>Crataegus</i> L.	Qershiz (mal)	<i>Cerasus avium</i> L.
Orizaj	1	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.	Rapit(koder)	<i>Platanus orientalis</i> L.
Pishaj	1	<i>Pinus</i> L.	Rapes (perrua,qafe)	<i>Platanus orientalis</i> L.
Plepas	1	<i>Pupulus</i> L.	Rapun (lume)	<i>Platanus orientalis</i> L.
Qafe dardhe	1	<i>Pyrus domestica</i> L.	Rrushkull(koder,kenete)	<i>Ruscus Tourn.</i>
Qafe molle	1	<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.	Shtogu (qafe)	<i>Sambucus</i> L.
Qarr	2	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.	Thanes (ujembledhes)	<i>Cornus mas</i> L.
Qarrishte	1	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.	Tershane (pellg)	<i>Avena sativa</i> L.
Qershiz	1	<i>Cerasus avium</i> Moench	Theknes (perrua)	<i>Secale cereale</i> L.
Rrapaj	1	<i>Platanus orientalis</i> L.	Vishnje (maje)	<i>Cerasus vulgaris</i> Mill.
Rrushkull	1	<i>Ruscus Tourn.</i>	Zalli qarrishtes	<i>Quercus cerris</i> L.
Selvias	1	<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> L.		
Shegas	2	<i>Punica granatum</i> L.		
Shelg	1	<i>Salix</i> L.		
Shkoze	5	<i>Carpinus orientalis</i> Mill.		
Shelqet	1	<i>Salix</i> L.		
Tejmolle	1	<i>Malus domestica</i> L.		
Teršana	1	<i>Avena sativa</i> L.		
Verri	1	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i> (L.)Gaertn.		
Zalldardhe	1	<i>Pyrus domestica</i> L.		

F - frequence



Fig. 1 Plants in the Albanian culture



Fig. 2 Leaves are frequently used in folk costumes



Fig. 3 Vegetation elements are not used only as decoration, but also as messages of human wishes. Clothes are embroidered with husk of wheat to reveal wealth.



Fig. 4 Drawing of cypress on the clothes



Fig. 5 Clothes with flowers in pot (planted and cut flowes)

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