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Interview with Shaban Sinani about *Dossier K*



Interview by Fiqiri Sejdiqaj in »*Trepça Net*«,
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Introduction

In December 2003 and the following years, the author Ismail Kadaré donated several manuscripts-for his novels »*The Shadow*«, »*Agamemnon's Daughter*« and »*The City without Advertisements*« to the Albanian National Archives (ANA), under the direction of Director General Shaban Sinani.

The manuscripts started the Ismail Kadaré Fund, the ANA's repository of Ismail Kadaré's documents. As part of the Ismail Kadaré Fund, Shaban Sinani decided to create what he called »*The K Dossier*« by digging into the ANA files to find documents related to political investigations of Ismail Kadaré himself. The interview concerns the so-called K Dossier.

Interview

Question: Why such a long delay for an author who is so well-known, who has been writing for more than a half century?

Shaban Sinani: The same is true for all post-war authors. There is a disturbing general lack of manuscripts and documents in the ANA. Many manuscripts have disappeared, excepts those that were attached to political investigations, like Ismail Kadaré's poem »*One Afternoon the Political Office Held a Meeting*« [[»The Red Pashas«](#)].

Political figures were more important than cultural ones under the ideocratic state. Cultural activities were neglected during the upheaval of the 1990s.

Manuscripts disappeared because there was no law forcing them to be archived. The practice among publishers was to notify authors that the »manuscript will not be returned«.

Question: What does the Ismail Kadaré Fund currently consist of?

Shaban Sinani: The Ismail Kadaré Fund was started because Ismail Kadaré wanted to donate the three manuscripts.

»*Agamemnon's Daughter*« and »*The Shadow*« had been in a Paris bank vault during the 1980s to avoid political consequences to the author and because they were originally not written for publication in Albania. They were later published as the political times changed.

Now the manuscripts are important for textual research.

Question: Can you explain in more detail where this importance stems from?

Shaban Sinani: Manuscripts are a national treasure. Also, they are a basis for research into the »literature between two eras« on a deeper level than just the significance of, for example, instances where one geographical name in the manuscript was substituted by another name in the published version.

It is important to compare the manuscript and the published work not just for differences in wording but also for the artist's vision in a repressive society as compared to a free society. This has broader significance than just the literary one.

Question: Has it been technically difficult to compare the manuscripts with the books?

Shaban Sinani: Comparison of two of the three manuscripts has been very difficult. »*Agamemnon's Daughter*« contains supplements and additions on the reverse of the pages. The pages of »*The Shadow*« was intentionally written confusingly and the pages misnumbered to destroy the logical sequence, so that the meaning could not be deciphered.

Question: What is still lacking from the Ismail Kadaré Fund in terms of documentation?

Shaban Sinani: In archival science, a literary or personal repository ought to include several categories of documents, a number of which are missing from the Ismail Kadaré Fund. These categories are works, official or public acts, correspondence and bibliographical items.

The Ismail Kadaré Fund now contains:

- Manuscripts of the three novels mentioned above
- The poem mentioned above
- A long section that was to have been added to the novel »*The Great Winter*«
- Unimportant discussions about Ismail Kadaré in Parliament
- Self-critiques that were politically motivated
- Very little correspondence other than a letter from Ismail Kadaré to an important politician in support of the Lasgush Pogradeci family

Documents pertaining to Ismail Kadaré are found all over the world in the possession of many different people and organizations, even his former political enemies.

Question: So, is there a »Kadaré Dossier«, or »K Dossier« as you have called it, in the ANA?

Shaban Sinani: There is no »K Dossier« as such in the archives. That is just a descriptive name I invented for the media in order to explain the concept. It was a take-off on the name of Ismail Kadaré's novel »*Dossier H*«, later republished under the title »*A Dossier on Homer*«.

Question: What is the significance of the fact that you have created such a dossier?

Shaban Sinani: The ANA is not creating any such dossier. We are just making literary historical research easier by managing documents. It is the cultural responsibility of the ANA to preserve unpublished administrative/political documents, starting with the complaints about the publication of »*Princess Argjiro*« and up through the late 1990s and later.

Question: Do you believe that after the publication of the »K Dossier« Ismail Kadaré's works will be evaluated differently by students and readers? Why have you undertaken the publication of these sources?

Shaban Sinani: The primary reasons are for literary and cultural history. It would be depressing if the K Dossier would be seen as a kind of democratic payback for Ismail Kadaré. ANA must respect individual rights according to the new law on the state archives. People have a right to know what is written about them.

Question: Are there legal or other obstacles to making these documents public?

Shaban Sinani: There are few legal obstacles for documents older than 25 years, and there are exceptions for newer documents. The ethical obstacles can be overcome by identifying only the office or institution of the document's author, not the individual names. It is important that the debate not be personalized.

Moral obstacles are the most difficult to deal with, because the documents about Ismail Kadaré written by specialists, and it can't be said that their intellectual viewpoint was »wrong« for trying to prevent the publication of certain works because they were »disparaging of events or personalities«. Still, the use of terms such as »decadent literature«, »psycho-freudian influence«, »antagonistic activity«, »deformation of history and reality«, »surrealistic novel«, etc. must be questioned in the political context of the times during which Ismail Kadaré's books were published.

Question: Do you think that this book will complicate Ismail Kadaré's relations with his writer-colleagues?

Shaban Sinani: I don't think so at all. Ismail Kadaré knows about everything in the documents and has lost interest in taking it further. He has never talked about people by name, but about the need for Albanian literature to recognize the difficulties of the post-war period. Other literary figures cannot avoid this confrontation, because without it Albanian literature cannot be understood.

Question: Can you mention some of the writers who have made unpublished official evaluations of Ismail Kadaré?

Shaban Sinani: This is not important to the whole process. Refer to the harsh discussions in the 1970s at the Writers' Union plenum concerning the banning of Kadaré's poem.

Question: The history of Kadaré and the ANA?

Shaban Sinani: When he left Albania in 1990, Ismail Kadaré made a special request to the then-President that care be taken for his archives in the ANA. This wish was respected and encouraged him to donate the three manuscripts (as described earlier in the interview) later in the 1990s.

During the donation ceremony, Ismail Kadaré mentioned the need to respect one's country and its institutions, even if not all of them are serious. He also mentioned his concern for what would happen to the manuscripts, for example if he died while in France, they would likely be published abroad. Since the communist regime fell, there is no reason they should not instead be published in Albania.

About the donation of the manuscript of his first novel, Ismail Kadaré said the first work of any author is of special interest. »*City Without Advertising*« was written in Moscow and the first 30 pages were published but immediately banned after his return. He hid the rest in his house and never spoke of them again because it was too risky. Drago Siliqi, who read part of it, told Ismail Kadaré that it was foolish to print even 30 pages and that he should not say that there was an entire novel.

Ismail Kadaré said that he was giving the manuscripts to the ANA because they would be safe there, and as a sign of respect for the importance of the institution to the nation, and to encourage other authors to do the same. He believes that an author's emotions behind the published work can be judged by reading the manuscript. The tracks of writing are like fingerprints. Through them, one can identify the individual's character.

Question: »Princess Argjiro« was a text Ismail Kadaré was »spied on«?

Shaban Sinani: For several years I have been working on a text concerning the town and region of Gjirokastra, but a few days ago I was surprised to notice that Ismail Kadaré as a young poet published the poem »*Princess Argjiro*« whose title is completely wrong. Gjirokastra was not founded by her and did not take her name. Archival sources, history and well-preserved writings contradict the legend as it appears in the poem. Gjirokastra comes from the year 568 A.D. and did not take the name of Argjiro in the 15th century, since the Turks came at that time, not to mention the fact that the Turks would not have allowed a town to name itself after one of its military enemies.

If the poem had been based on solid history and writings, and the poet had consulted historical scholars, it would have come out without any flaws. Moreover, even the State Publishing Enterprise, if asked, would not have allowed the publication of a poem not based on historical fact. Besides that, I can say about Albanian geography that on the contrary Gjirokastra appears to have been built by Gjin Bue Shpata. This is also in error, so that by presenting different versions the history of the country is damaged.

- Links:**
- [Ismail Kadaré. Biography in Danish Wikipedia](#) [PDF]
 - [Article about Ismal Kadaré](#)
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