

## **ABBOT PREND DOCI, AN EXEMPLARY FIGURE IN THE ALBANIAN NATIONALISM**

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### **Abstract**

Prend Doci was born on 7th February 1846 in the Bulger village of Lezha. He was one of the first students in the Papnuer Seminar in Shkoder which began on the 2nd of August 1859 and after a short while, in 1861 he was sent to Rome at the Urban Propoganda College. Upon completion of his theological studies in 1871 he returned to Albania where he became a local priest in Korthpule (one of the poorest church in Mirdita). He then went on to become Chaplain for Archbishop Gasper Krasniqi and Abbot for She Lleshari in Orosh. In 1876-1877 he became a priest in Kalivare where he organized and influenced events during these years.

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### ***Prend Doci on his nationalistic act***

Speaking to the "Hylli i Drites" magazine (year XVIII, 1942, pg. 3-4), Father Pashke Bardhi O.F.M, gives a detailed talk on Prend Doci's religious acts, his literary and cultural work and political doings. Prend Doci always believed that Mirdita could be an independent entity during a tumorous time in Albania. He believed that the moment that Albania was free, the citizens would recognize that they could choose their own political powers. At the same time Prenk Bib Doda (Bib Doda's son) the elected chief in Mirdita, started to act so that he could form a Catholic Unity in Mirdita. This common interest united them in working together and fighting the oppresors which were then present in Albania. Prend Doci met with the Prince of Montenegro in order to unite powers and prepare for the upheaval against "High Gate". This decision for up heaval in December 1876 was made upon consulting 3000 local armed men which were then part of the consultation group in Mirdita. However the Montenegroen promise to assist in this movement remained just a promise.

It also became apparent that the Arberesh community and nearby Shkodra were not able to beat the Osman military present, meaning that the Revolutionaries in Mirdita were left few and lacking in weapons. The Osman military during this time were not fighting the Serbs or the Montenegroes as they feared a wider war within this region so they concentrated all their efforts in Albania. This meant that the Mirdita Resistance group failed to win over the Osman military.<sup>1</sup>

Upon this failed attempt to free Mirdita, Francesk Malcynski (Austrian born but head of Dioceses church in Lesha) expels Prend Doci from his duties in the church<sup>2</sup>. They had failed, the Turkish Army penetrated Mirdita and the members of the movement as well as Prend Doci were forced out of the country. On his journey out of Albania nearing Montenegro,

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<sup>1</sup>Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by: Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.21.

Dom Doci was surrounded by the Turks<sup>3</sup>. He put up a fight and resisted but was finally beaten and he had to surrender to them.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Prend Doci immigrates***

After spending a short while in prison in Guçi together with the other members of the movement, they were then sent to Salonik and later to Istanbul in prison. His friendly relations with father Azarian (also a childhood friend) who was well connected to the Turkish Sultan Abdyl Hamiti, he managed to get freed out of prison. He was freed from prison very quickly as during this time in Istanbul, they were waiting for the arrival of Dervish Pasha who would object to this. Upon being informed that Prend has been freed he is said to have been angry "*What, he be released? Did not know that he have seen the insurgent cause of Mirdita?*"<sup>5</sup> This statement ensured that Prend Doci was then never allowed in Albania again meaning that he was left roaming abroad for the next 11 years.

From Istanbul he went on to Rome, where the Propaganda Congregation sent him on as a missionary to Newfoundland in Canada, as a result staying on for a number of years.<sup>6</sup> After this he returned to Rome in April of 1882, and he attempted to return to Albania with the help of his friends, but he failed. On 5th May 1883, the secretary of the Propaganda Congregation sends him as a missionary to Tivar, however the church was then occupied which meant that he had to be sent to Ulqin which was the closest city to Shkodra and his own city Lezha. Based on the autobiography of Dom Doci written by Father Pashk Bardhi, on his elongated stay in Montenegro, he met with King Nikola who informed Dom Doci that he planned to take Albania near enough the river Drin. Upon hearing this Dom Doci responded "*Excellences, you probably will be able to conquer all over Albania, but be aware that the Albanian would not have a friend ever*"<sup>7</sup>.

Upon some accusations that were found against Dom Doci, he was forced to flee Europe by being named the secretary of the first Apostolic Delegation in East India which he had to replace Cardinal Anton Agliardi. Dom Doci replace Cardinal Anton and ensured that his job in East India was done to the highest standard. Even though he had a bright future in Albania, he never attempted to return although he maintained contact with his friends. In 1885 he wrote a letter to De Rada in which he expresses his gratitude and his willingness to help him in his work for the good of the homeland.<sup>8</sup>

In autumn of 1886 he is named in Rome and later on becomes the head of Priesthood in Vatican. During this time he encounters an Anti-Albanian movement from a Patriarchal group from Istanbul. On a memoir written to the Cardinal Simeon (Head of the East Missions) he makes it clear that this Patriarchal group wants to open up schools in Albania which teach only Greek in order to put a stop to the Albanian descentastry. In this memoir, he argues that both Muslims and Christians in Albania "*The driving force of every Albanian, Muslim or Christian, is the love for the homeland and the sense of preserving his nationality and his language.*"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to Father Pashk Bardhi O.F.M., Dom Doci think because if they would leave all together will be dictated, so it was left alone with an old faithful. Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.108.

<sup>4</sup> Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.25.

<sup>5</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.115.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Jacques, *Shqiptaret*, Karte e Pende, Tirane, pg.335.

<sup>7</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.116.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by: Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.40.

<sup>9</sup> Cited by: Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.41.

During his stay in Rome, he searched the archives and the Vatican library for documents. He managed to gather enough documents on the history of Mirdita which make Mirdita seem as a separate Catholic entity. This was enough to make him pursue this matter and ask the Religious Institutions to recognize this and therefore separate Mirdita from the Diocese in Lezha.

### ***Prend Doci as the Abbot of Orosh***

The Monastery of Orosh was maintained with the help of the Gjomarkaj in its original state and not allowed to be penetrated by the Lezha Bishops although they tried to take ownership of it.<sup>10</sup> However on Preng Bib Doda's exit, and the clear weakening of Gjomarkaj left the monastery in a vulnerable state. The arrival of Dom Prend Doci ensured that the monastery was once again maintained and protected unlike other ones at the time. Dom Doci never gave up on re-entering his beloved country, Cardinal Agliardi recognized this and managed to convince the Turkish Sultan so that he could return to Albania as the "Abbot of Mirdita". His only conditions were that he would never again participate in political acts.

At the same time, with the blessing of Pope Leon XIII on the 25th October 1885, the Monastery of She Lleshari was once again reinstated, independent of The Diocese of Lezha. The Monastery of She Lleshari was declared as directly dependent on the Vatican and new church additions were made to this monastery, amongst them the Orosh and Spaci.<sup>11</sup> Doci was then named Abbot of Mirdita and that is how he finally made his way to Shkodra.<sup>12</sup>

On his arrival to Orosh he was praised by many of the locals in Mirdita. The Monastery of Orosh expanded in a short space of time and managed to gain 16 different church communities in 1894. The changes that he made to this monastery made it seem like "*...residence that had shades in every city in Europe.*"<sup>13</sup>

Abbot Doci was characterized as always being willing to visit the different church communities, always ready to help out people in need therefore reaching out to everyone.<sup>14</sup> His compassion really touched the local communities and this in turn eradicated many of the vices that were then present. Vices as such illegal weddings, eye for an eye revenge and many more started to disappear. His persistence and hard work saw to it that the number of clerks who had been educated was on the rise in the Monastery of Mirdita. He intended Mirdita to have cultural improvements and he ensured that 3 schools were opened in his own Monastery. (Orosh, Spac, Kashnjet)<sup>15</sup>.

He never stopped thinking of Albania as a whole although he spent a lot of time assisting his own local community. The fact that he was banned from political activism made it even harder to get involved in the dealings of Albania at the time. An English writer, Edith Durham, "Queen of the highlanders" as the Albanians called her, describes Prend Doci as "*a very intelligent man*"<sup>16</sup>. She based this on his political acts and his ideas for the future of Albania. According to Doci, it was not worth fighting the Turks at the time as Albania was also threatened on the other side by the Serbs and this posed the biggest threat at the time. There would be a time when the Turkish Empire would fall and the Albanians would then have to watch out for the Austrians and Russians.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.117.

<sup>11</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.118.

<sup>12</sup> "Imzot Abat Preng Dochi", LEKA, X/1938, Nr.1-3, pg.73-75 (675-677).

<sup>13</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.119.

<sup>14</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.121.

<sup>15</sup> "Imzot Abat Preng Dochi", LEKA, X/1938, Nr.1-3, pg.73-75 (675-677).

<sup>16</sup> Edith Durham, *Venti anni di groviglio balcanico*, Felice le Monnier, Firenze, 1923, pg.221.

<sup>17</sup> "E uno sbaglio, ora come ora, accarnici contro i Turchi. I Turchi ci possono poco danneggiare. In passato ci fecero molto male; pure, non ci distrussero. Ci minaccia ora un altro pericolo, che si fa sempre piu grande ogni giorno: il pericolo slavo. Io dico la Russia, con la sua religione fanatica, con le orde selvagge dei Serbi, con le

There came a time of unsettlement in Mirdita during the Constitution of Turks at this time. The people of Mirdita did not go to Shkodra to do their loyal ritual as they usually did.<sup>18</sup> The Vizier questioned Doci on this however they were unprepared for the intelligent response he gave. Firstly he had returned to Albania on the condition that he was to stay away from political wars and secondly he was not the head of Mirdita people as Preng Bib Doda was, who at the time was integrated in Turkey. This was a way of removing doubt from him as the accusations were many against him as the political activist and influence amongst many. This response was also an intention to return Preng Bid Doda to Albania.<sup>19</sup>

During the events of 1910-1912, he was active in the most critical of moments for Mirdita and local cities although he was sentenced to spend his time in Shkodra as per his conditions.<sup>20</sup> According to a studier (Pal Doci) who spent time researching Prend Doci and his achievements writes that Prend Doci was actively involved with other famous figures at the time. He write to Ismail Qemali congratulating him on gaining Independence for the country. Doci had followed the works of Ismail Qemali and Luigj Gurakuqi very closely and regularly exchanged letters with each other often discussing the trials and tribulations of the country at the time. On the 16th December 1912 in the Orosh Abbey, there was an assembly in which 12 chiefs turned up and during this meeting they formed a bond which they hoped would stretch out across the country. All the attendants vowed that they would “*in the shadow of the flag they swore to die or to live.*”<sup>21</sup>

The danger that Albania was under attack ensured that Prend Doci was placed as the head of all assemblies in order to keep the country united against the threat by the neighboring countries, the bigger powers and Esat Pashe Toptani. He had an indifferent approach upon the arrival of Prince Vidi to be announced as the King of Albania although during the events in Albania in the summer of 1914 he supports him.

### ***Prend Doci as the founder of the "Bashkimi" movement***

Doci has written various poems but only two of those have been published.<sup>22</sup> His literary contribution is linked to the formation "Bashkimi"<sup>23</sup>. In 1899 Abbot Prend Doci founded the cultural and literary formation "Bashkimi", where many known clerks in the literary world participate such as: Archbishop Lazer Mjeda, Archbishop Jak Serreqi, Father Gjergj Fishta, Dom Ndoc Nika, Father Pashk Bardhi, Dom Mark Shllaku, Dom Dode Koleci and the famous patriot Luigj Gurakuqi. The formation of these famous clerks in this

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*bande dei Bulgari. Essa adocchia Albania e sogna travolgere gli Albanesi tutti, cristiani e mussulmani, nella rovina...*

*... Mussulmani e cristiani sono pieni d'amore per la patria albanese, indistintamente, e il popolo domanda perche noi altri non dobbiamo liberamente governare il nostropaese, come i Serbi e i Bulgari governano il loro. Certo che prima bisogna imparare ad organizzarci, e ci vorra del tempo. Se ora c'ingaggiassimo in un'altra guerra gli Slavi ci travolgerebbero. Badiamo ora ad intensificare la nostra propoganda e a far comprendere all'Europa che un altro popolo, oltre il bulgare e il serbo, aspetta la liberazione. Per ora il Turco e la nostra sola difesa contro l'invasione slava. Noi non dobbiamo cercare d'indebolirlo finche non saremo in grado de poter fare da noi ed essre riconosciuti anche dell'Europa. Verra giorno che l'impero turco andra in frantumi, deve venire; ma noi dobbiamo gurdarci quel giorno dal cadere in balia dell'Austria o della Russia. Bisogna aver fiducia nel tempo, il migliore dei maestri in questo genere di politica!"*. Edith Durham, *Venti anni di groviglio balcanico*, Felice le Monnier, Firenze, 1923, pg.221-223.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Swire, *Shqiperia. Ngritja e nje mbreterie*, Dituria, Tirane, 2005, pg.83.

<sup>19</sup> Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.66-67.

<sup>20</sup> For more see: Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.63-78.

<sup>21</sup> Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtepia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.84.

<sup>22</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Drites, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.125-126.

<sup>23</sup> "Imzot Abat Preng Dochi", LEKA, X/1938, Nr.1-3, pg.73-75 (675-677).

movement was not meant to be a religious stand but it was formed as a result of the conditions by a Turkish invasion where the Albanian language was prohibited. The only city that had any religious books in the Albanian language was Shkodra and this was the only way that this Bashkimi movement would go under the radar of the government. There were other members of this movement that would not be able to openly admit it due to fear.

In the course of 7 years, this movement worked very hard on a joint alphabet as it was clear that the South would use the Istanbul alphabet and the north would use an old Catholic one.<sup>24</sup>

This is the alphabet that the magazine "Albania" used which was based in London, "Shpresa e Shqypnis and "Kombi" based in Boston. The system of this alphabet followed the journals "Shqyptari ne Bukuresht", "Perlindja e Shqyptarvet", "La Nazione Albanese" (albanian version), "La Nuova Albania"- "Shqypnia e re", "Toska", "Besa", "Pellazgu" etc. Many famous cultural figures have used this same alphabet such as: Azdreni, Cajupi, Faik Konica, Sotir Peci, Fan Noli etc.<sup>25</sup>

This movement published 32 pieces of work, the most important one being "Fjalori i ri i Shqipës". During his trials and tribulations abroad as well as in Albania, Doci never gave up on the Albanian language which he saw as an important element in order to wake and educate the Albanian population. Together with his most trusted ally Dom Dode Koleci and with the help of other church members, he managed to gather names of all the rare breed of flowers, animals and then translating them in Italian as well as Latin. The movement had decided at the beginning that Dom Dode Koleci would be responsible for the composition of the text, it could even be said that he was the author. The dictionary which contained 14.000 words was published in the Printing House of the Shkodra Jesuit, in two languages being Albanian and Italian.<sup>26</sup>

The Constitution of the Young Turks allowed some kind of freedom on the cultural side in Albania. During 14-22 November 1908, the most famous intellectual figures at the time gathered so that they could decide on a singular alphabet to be used in Albania. The "Bashkimi" movement had two representatives such as father Gjergj Fishta and Luigj Gurakuqi whereas "Agimi" movement had Don Ndre Mjeda and Mati Logoreci. The "Bashkimi" movement opened up with a declaration during the Congress.<sup>27</sup> The common thoughts and interest was that the alphabet should be Latin based and after many discussions and compromise, the Congress decided that 2 variations of the alphabet would be accepted. The Istanbul alphabet which was then widely accepted throughout Albania and the latin based alphabet as created by the "Bashkimi" movement<sup>28</sup>. On a telegram addressed to Prend Doci on the 22nd November 1908 it was written "Alphabet issue was resolved. It was agreed at the same time with little change Frasheri and society "Bashkimi" alphabets. Each other was expelled."<sup>29</sup> Therefore it is clear that the contribution that this patriot has made to Albania has greatly influenced the history of the Albanian population.

Prend Doci spent his remaining days in solitude, prisoner in his own home as an order had then come from the Austrian Council in Shkodra. A small army garrison would be monitoring his every move. On the 22nd of February 1917, he had severe ill health and as a consequence, the legendary and nationalist founder of the Mirdita Monastery died.

<sup>24</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Dritës, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.126-127.

<sup>25</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Dritës, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.127.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Gurakuqi, "50 vjetori i Fjalorit Bashkimi", Shejzat, II/1958, Nr.7-8, pg.223-226

<sup>27</sup> Ate Pashke Bardhi O.F.M., Hylli i Dritës, "Emzot Prend Doci", Vjeti XVIII, 1942, Nr.3-4, pg.128.

<sup>28</sup> For more see: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë. Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e popullit shqiptar II*, Botimet Toena, Tirane 2002, pg.391-396.

<sup>29</sup> Cited by: Pal Pjeter Doci, *Prend Doci, Abati i Mirdites-Jeta dhe vepra-*, Shtëpia Botuese "Naim Frasheri", Tirane, 1997, pg.129.

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