Beyond the Known Dimensions of Edith Durham
by Majlinda Ziu

Introduction
Journey in Albania

Mary Edith Durham (1863-1944) was the eldest daughter of the well-known London surgeon, Arthur Edward Durham. She finished her first studies in Bedford College. Later she was registered in the Royal Academy of Arts.

After her father’s death in 1885, Edith had to take care after her mother Mary for years in succession, because she was ill. Taking care of her mother for many years caused Ms Durham to experience chronic fatigue. She was suffering from health problems as well. As a consequence, at age 37 sh was advised by her doctor to take a break. In order to satify her sense of adventure and give her an opportunity to recuperate, she acquiesed. It was a sea journey from England to the Balkans. This journey, which later was repeated, did not only serve improve her health, but it made in indelible impression on her, changing the course of her life. During her time spent in various Balkans countries she gained significant noteriety as an artist, as an antropologist and as a writer. Her journey towards Balkans started in Dalmatic sea line from Trieste in Kotor, continued towards Cetinje, (capital of Monte Negro) and arrived in Albania.

PHOTO OF EDITH DURHAM 1886

1 Doctoral School of Geography, Faculty of History & Philology, Tirana University. Address: Lagja Ali Demi. Rr Hodo Beg, Pallati Konuda, Tiranë, Cel. 00355692476241, e-mail: ziu_linda1@yahoo.com;
2 Note: She was named Mary as her mother and as her grandmother and Edith as one of the characters of Litton’s novel “Harold”, published in 1843. The note was taken from the summary of Durham’s publications published by “8 Nëntori” Publishing House in 1990. Page VIII under the title (in Albanian):
“Brenga e Ballkanit dhe vepra të tjera për Shqipërinë dhe shqiptarët”.
Impact of Albania

During a period of 20 years, from the end of the 19th century up to the beginning of the 20th century, Durham travelled continuously through Balkans. During this period she gained a comprehensive and in-depth experience related to Balkan issues. She authored 7 books based upon her travel experiences. During all the time of the Balkan War she remained in the Balkans, especially in the Northern Albania. Even though she was educated and had grown up in a different environment than the Balkan one, years of residing in Albania helped her to know the country and people well. She also became a most dedicated advocate of the Albanian Independence movement and of the union of the Albanian regions. Her focus upon these very important issues for Albanians, especially in a period when Albania was one of the most isolated and backward areas of Europe, made Durham well known all over the Albanian regions. She became a revered figure in the public life of Albania and was given the title “The Uncrowned Queen of Albania” by the populace of the Northern Albania.
Beyond the Known Dimensions of Edith Durham
by Majlinda Ziu

Some of her most influential books for Albania and Albanians are: “The burden of the Balkans 1905”; “High Albania 1909”; “The struggle for Scutari 1914”; “Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle (1920)”.

In the beginning of World War I, Durham left Albania. She was committed for a certain time to her humanitarian activities in France and in Egypt. Last time that she visited Albania was in 1921. After that visit she never came back in Albania, but she never disconnected her relations with Albania and Albanians. Her house in London became the center of the English-Albanian Association. Durham was elected as the Secretary of Honor of said Association in 1918.
Beyond the Known Dimensions of Edith Durham
by Majlinda Ziu

Durham’s dimensions

Edith Durham is not only well-known for her publications related the Balkan issues, but she made notable contributions in other fields of life related to her education. She is mentioned as a historian, a painter, a collector and as a very good ethnographer. Through her different paintings and drawings she contributed to the gathering and presenting the folkloric values of the regions where she crossed.

Many of Durham’s works were donated as collections to different Academies after her death. Nowadays, her documents are kept in the Museum of Mankind and in the Royal Anthropological Institute in London, while the collection of jewels, of clothing and handcrafts gathered in the Balkans (from Albania as well) is kept in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and in the Bankfield Museum in Halifax. Bankfield Museum also has collections related to her life and activity.

Another Durham dimension

One of her most distinguished books is “The Burden of the Balkans”. The impression you have after reading this book happen to be exactly the same even if you review it for study purposes. It comes out quite clearly the fact that Durham has a perfect knowledge on the Balkan reality, especially of the Albanian reality. Her writing style is easily distinguishable due to her

---


5 “The burden of the Balkans”, Author: Mary Edith Durham, published in 1905.
Beyond the Known Dimensions of Edith Durham
by Majlinda Ziu

This page contains a text discussing Edith Durham's work and its geographical dimension. It highlights her descriptions, analysis, and treatment of facts which are revealed with veracity and coherence. The author has reviewed her books several times, not just as a reader but also for study purposes, and as a geographer, she has detected another dimension of Edith Durham. Through her work, she has given a very important contribution in geography as well.

The geographical dimension of her literary contribution is related to these main aspects:

1. Physical & Geographic Aspect.

The descriptions that Durham has realized in her works to characterize her travels in different territories of Albania reveal as a matter of fact an overview of the physical & geographical characteristics of such territories. In these descriptions, she has used almost the same elements that are used by career geographers in professional geographical expeditions. Notwithstanding the fact that Edith Durham didn’t have a specific education/qualification in Geography or that the purpose of her travels was not related specifically to geographical expeditions, her descriptions always gave a clear and vivid picture of the relief, of the climatic conditions, of hydrography, of the soil, of the fauna and flora of the places where she visited. In order to illustrate this opinion, the following excerpt is a reference to some fragments taken from the book “The burden of the Balkans” where it is clearly seen that apart from the context and the aim, the description contains in itself scientific elements characterizing a physical & geographical terrain. e.g.:

...Korce (Korça)... it lies high on a mountain-ringed plain, over 2000 feet above sea-level, is healthy and has a good water-supply; ...;

...Postenani, a small village, lies very high, with a valley below it and a huge and almost perpendicular cliff towering at the back; ...Down, far, far below lay the valley of Vjosa, green and fertile, all a blowing and a growing and the heights beyond were fierce blue;...

..Tepelena is a wonderful place, the wild heart of a wild land. Walled and buttressed it stands on a high plateau around which tower snow-clad mountains. Just above the town, the torrential Drinos dashes into the Vjosa and spreads wide between great shingle-blanks, the bare bones of the land it has devastated. The plateau ends in a rocky crag, scooped to a seat which commands a huge view... We headed to Shoshi the next day ... we went down towards the river and crossed it over a wooden bridge. We followed the right bank of Shala river. After a while we climbed high
up the hill through a marvelous chestnut forest. Shala...with plenty of water, coming down the cliffs … there is a lot of timber, and fertile soil...\textsuperscript{10}. Durazzo (Dyrrachium) formerly an island is joined to the mainland by a huge marsh, partly salt, where the Government saltworks are and partly fresh and haunted by/

\textsuperscript{6} “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter X- “Monastir to Tepelena”, page 252
\textsuperscript{7} “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter X “Monastir to Tepelena”, page 260
\textsuperscript{8} “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter X “Monastir to Tepelena”, page 264
\textsuperscript{9} “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter X “Monastir to Tepelena”, page 286
\textsuperscript{10} “Brenga e Ballkanit dhe vepra te tjera”, Kapitulli “Bjeshket e Namuna”, faqje 158 (Albanian edition) storks, frogs and fevers ...
\textsuperscript{11} Lezha ... stands over the river Drin....it rises in Lake Ohrid, but it is here a shrunken, dwindled Drin. In 1858 it suddenly forced for itself a new cannel and the mass of its waters now pour into Buna just below Shkodra and by blocking the current of water from the lake causes dire floods every winter\textsuperscript{12}. 


Beyond the Known Dimensions of Edith Durham
by Majlinda Ziu

2. Demographic Aspect.

In the description of the places where she had crossed and lives, besides other things, Durham “took a snapshot” of the demographic panorama of that period of time. In a lot of her descriptions there is data on the number of the population, on the density, on the religion of the population and peculiarities characterizing the local population. In order to illustrate this idea, as follows, I am referring to some fragments: Elbasani has about 10,000 inhabitants, rather more than half are Muslims. The Christians are Orthodox...Elbasan’s struggle for knowledge is very pathetic. You may find people who are bravely wrestling, unaided, with French and even German grammars. The number of well-informed and educated persons is very remarkable...A large number of Vlahs live in and near Elbasan... 13. Durazzo (Durresi) is in Shkodra vilayet. Roman Catholicism begins here, but out of the 1000 houses only 120 are Roman Catholic... 14.

3. Defines characteristics of different living centers, of the administrative organization and of the most typical forms of the economy

During her travels, Durham, describes types of different Albanian living centers, by revealing elements of the architecture, of the infrastructure and of the economy of such centers. In order to clarify this idea I shall again refer to some fragments of the same book:

..Korche (Korça) is a surprising town. It is clean, really clean – the cleanest town I know in the Turkish Empire with straight, well-paved streets that are quite free from dogs and garbage. In the mountains hard by interior coal is quarried and the town actually boasts a stream flour-mill. Were Korche (Korça) connected by a railway with the coast, there is no doubt it could develop rapidly, for the coal is good enough. Even with the present difficulties of communication there are surprising number of foreign goods and shops. Much of its wealth has been made abroad, for though under present circumstances the Albanian finds it difficult to progress at home, he shows great business capacity in other lands and proves his patriotism by spending his earnings in his native land... 15. Tirana (12,000 inhabitants) having a good road to the port is remarkably flourishing. A fine bazar was in full swing, crowded with country folk in costumes all different from those of Elbasan. Tirana was founded in 1600... 16 Modern Kruja consists of 700 houses, scattered up and down the slopes among olive-gardens... 17 Berati is in an extraordinary lovely situation and scrambles down hillside all bowery and flowery to the brink of the Berat; quaint wood-and-plaster houses overhang the river; the ruined fortress crowns the height above. The huge mountain range of Tomor (alt. 2416 metres) towers square-headed, barren and snow-clad on one side and the slopes of the neighbour-hills are gray with olives....Berat’s chief trade is in hides “opanke” (the local leathern sandal) and saddlery. It has a fascinating bazar... 18

11 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XII- “Elbasan to Shkodra”, page 350
12 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XII- “Elbasan to Shkodra”, page 362
13 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XII- “Elbasan to Shkodra”, page 331
14 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XII- “Elbasani to Shkodra”, page 349
15 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter X- “Manastir to Tepelena”, page 252-253
Conclusions

- Through her work Edith Durham, alongside the contribution given in other fields of life, has given a precious contribution for the Geography of Albania, especially through descriptions and analysis developed for Albania in the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century.

- The author gives a in-depth geographical contribution through vivid panoramas produced by her on the characteristics of the relief, on climate peculiarities, on hydrography, on the types of soil, as well as on the flora and fauna in the Albanian territories where she traveled.

- Durham’s contribution in geography is used as a source material. Her work is used as a source of information and reference related to accurate data on the number of the population, the density of the population, the religion of the local population and its characteristics, as well as related to the elements of the architecture, infrastructure and forms of economy in different centers of the Albanian territories.

- The descriptions and findings of Edith Durham serve not only as a source of knowledge for an overall panorama of that period, but her work can serve as a point of reference to compare and analyze the evolution happened so far. Her work is a point of reference to differentiate and point out the changes that have happened in the Albanian territories from the point of view of physical, economic and human developments in the course of 100 years of time after her travels.

Bibliography

- A summary of six works of Edith Durham under the title (in Albanian language):
  - “The burden of the Balkans” published in 1905
  - “High Albania” published in 1909

---

16 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XII- “Elbasan to Shkodra”, page 352
17 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XII- “Elbasani to Shkoda”, page 355
18 “The burden of the Balkans”, Chapter XI- “Tepelen to Elbasan”, page 317-321