

## **“DRITA-LUMINA”: A LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC PERIODICAL AT THE DAWN OF THE ALBANIAN PRESS IN ROMANIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the literary and scientific newspaper *Drita-Lumina*, published in Brăila between 1887 and 1888, the first newspaper issued by the Albanian diaspora in Romania. Drawing on the collection preserved as a unique copy in the National Library of Albania, the article clarifies several historiographical issues concerning the newspaper, explores the circumstances surrounding its foundation, the conflict between the Brăila branch and the central leadership of the *Drita* Society in Bucharest, and analyzes the profile and content of the periodical. The study demonstrates that the newspaper functioned primarily as a space for debate and self-organization within the Albanian community in Romania, rather than as a direct vehicle for the development of Albanian literature.

*Keywords: Drita-Lumina, Albanian diaspora in Romania, Albanian literature, written culture, Albanian National Awakening, public sphere*

### **1. Introduction: Bucharest as the Capital of the Albanian National Awakening Press**

At the Congress of Berlin, held in 1878, several Balkan states, such as Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania, gained full independence, while Bulgaria was granted limited autonomy under the sovereignty of the Sultan (Jelavich, 1983). In this political reconfiguration of the Balkans, Albania alone remained under complete Ottoman rule on the pretext that Albanians were Muslims and, consequently, Turks. This prolonged condition of Albania under foreign domination generated a new wave of emigration from all parts of the country, as people departed for neighbouring lands and beyond. This migration, driven by political, economic, and structural factors, led to the formation of Albanian colonies in several important centres of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, among which Romania occupied a particularly significant place.

The Romanian state, formed through the union of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia (1861), became, after gaining independence in 1878, the principal destination for immigrants arriving from various provinces of the Ottoman Empire, including Albanian emigrants. In Bucharest, Iași, Craiova, Constanța, Brăila, and other cities, industrial development accelerated, accompanied by the construction of roads and railways and the exploitation of underground resources. This development required, among other things, a substantial labour force (Myzyri, 2004). Many Albanians, primarily peasants but also merchants and artisans, settled in Romania, where they succeeded in accumulating considerable wealth (Clayer, 2009, p. 276).

Although the largest waves of Albanian migration to Romania are associated with the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, historical sources indicate that the Albanian diaspora in Romania traces its origins to much earlier migrations, perhaps not yet on a massive scale, dating from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Scholars provide evidence of Albanians who, during the Middle Ages, settled in several regions north of the Danube. By an ordinance issued in 1602, the ruler Simion Movilă exempted all Albanians living in the village of Călinești in Prahova from taxes and other obligations for a period of ten years (Chiachir, 1970, p. 91). This allows us to assume that, encouraged by the Albanian inhabitants of Călinești and perhaps of other villages, further waves of migrants from Albania were directed toward Romanian territories. Groups of Albanians continued to move northward into Romania, since favourable living conditions had already been established for their predecessors and because the upper Danubian regions lay beyond the sphere of Ottoman expansion. Over time, these migrants, originating from various regions of subjugated Albania, gradually spread and settled throughout many provinces of present-day Romania. Many of these Albanians did not seek merely to improve their economic circumstances; they also turned their attention toward their homeland, contributing to the construction of the political and cultural project of the Albanian nation. Romania thus became the principal centre for the development of Albanian cultural and national activity. Its transformation into the capital of the Albanian national movement resulted not only from the patriotism and vision of the Albanian diaspora, but also from the support extended by Romanian diplomacy to the Albanian national cause. According to Albanian scholars, this support stemmed from two principal reasons:

first, the traditional ties between the two peoples, and second, their shared political interests in the Balkans (Academy of Sciences of Albania, 2002).

The Albanian colonies in Romania, dispersed throughout Bucharest, Brăila, Constanța, Craiova, and other cities, developed into centres of cultural and organisational activity where societies, clubs, and press organs were established in the service of the Albanian National Awakening. According to Nathalie Clayer (2009), the Albanian diaspora in Romania played a significant role in the development of Albanian nationalism. It was within this diaspora that the first patriotic societies were founded. It was also there that the first schoolbooks and other publications were printed and where support was secured for the opening of the Albanian school in Korçë.

The seeds of the cultural and national movement within the Albanian colony of Romania were first sown in 1844 by Naum Veqilharxhi (Bredhi) (Poradeci, 1943). Veqilharxhi, who carried out his activity in the port city of Brăila, was the first ideologue of the Albanian National Awakening to produce a series of texts, but he entered national history above all as the author of the first Albanian-language primer, entitled *Fort i shkurtër e i përdorshëm Evetar shqip*. It was a booklet of only eight pages, composed in an entirely original alphabet of thirty-three letters that he himself had devised (Osmani, 2010). Indeed, considering that the organised movement for the Albanian cause would emerge only about two decades later, the efforts of Veqilharxhi and several other Albanian patriots in Romania mark the very area from which the Albanian national movement first originated. This is also affirmed by the historian Aleks Buda, who states:

“Starting from what we know about the activity of Naum Veqilharxhi between 1844 and 1846, we must wait a full twenty years, until the middle of the 1860s, when, according to the memoirs of Jani Vreto, some light begins to be shed on the efforts of a group of Albanians led by Kristoforidhi, and, on the other hand, of a group of Arbëresh in Italy—efforts aimed at moving beyond isolated individual actions and creating a nucleus of the Albanian National Movement. Only from these years onward can we say that the evidence regarding the activity of our national activists never ceases” (Buda, 1965).

In 1887, more than four decades after Veqilharxhi's primer, another important event took place in the city of Brăila: the publication of the first newspaper issued by the Albanian diaspora in Romania, the literary and scientific newspaper *Drita-Lumina*. This transition from forms of social and cultural organisation to the periodical press corresponds to what Benedict Anderson conceptualised as the formation of “imagined communities,” in which print culture and the written language play a central role in constructing a nation that transcends direct contact and the local boundaries of particular communities (Anderson, 1983). At the same time, the periodical press created a public sphere of communication in which issues of collective concern were debated and community opinion was shaped, in the sense that Jürgen Habermas attributes to the concept of the “public sphere” (Habermas, 1989).

Drawing upon the collection preserved as a unique microfilm copy in the National Library of Albania, this study examines the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the periodical, its profile and content, as well as several historiographical and bibliographical issues related to the history of its publication. In this way, the study seeks to reassess the place occupied by *Drita-Lumina* in the early development of the Albanian press in Romania and in the cultural activity of the Albanian diaspora at the end of the nineteenth century.

Methodologically, the study is based on the historical-philological analysis of the surviving issues of the newspaper and on the comparison of the data derived from them with the existing literature on the Albanian press of the National Awakening and the Albanian diaspora in Romania.

## 2. The Emergence of the First Newspaper in a Climate of Conflict among the Albanian Colonies in Romania

The Albanian colonies in Romania occupy an important place in the history of the Albanian national movement during the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly with regard to the support and extensive organizational work they carried out for the dissemination of the Albanian language and culture. Nevertheless, this patriotic activity did not develop within a harmonious environment, but encountered numerous difficulties, since it evolved within a complex social and political reality conditioned both by the organization of the Albanian diaspora in Romania itself and by its relations with the Romanian environment of the time. As Nathalie Clayer (2009) has pointed out, the Albanian diaspora in Romania developed within a multiethnic space inhabited by Albanian, Aromanian, Greek, and Slavic communities, while Romanian policy at the time showed a particular interest in the Aromanian question and in counterbalancing Greek influence in the region. According to her, different tendencies—pro-Greek, pro-Ottoman, anti-Ottoman, pro-Slavic, and pro-Aromanian—coexisted within the Albanian diaspora. The most structured groups, however, tended to evolve into Albanian-Romanian or Albanian-Aromanian groups, or were favoured by Romanian-Aromanian circles

(Clayer, 2009). Within this framework, the activities of the Albanians of Bucharest were also influenced by numerous political and cultural relationships, which often intersected with broader regional interests.

Alongside the common objective of strengthening Albanian national consciousness, there also existed different approaches regarding the manner of organization and the direction that this activity should take. These differences were sometimes related to attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire, sometimes to relations with Greek or Romanian circles, but also to the social and economic position of the members of the colony themselves. As a result, the organization of the Albanian diaspora in Romania was characterized by continuous processes of rapprochement and separation, by the creation and reorganization of associations, and by rivalries that in some cases went beyond ideological debate.

When Ibrahim Temo—an Albanian Muslim from Struga and founder of the Young Turk movement—arrived in Romania in exile in 1895, he found, according to his own testimony, the Orthodox Albanians of Romania divided into two groups: on the one hand stood the wealthy Grecophiles, who engaged in anti-Ottoman propaganda, while on the other stood the pro-Ottomans, who defended the newly arrived Albanian Muslims as well as those who came from elsewhere. Although the situation was in reality more complex, other testimonies, as well as the very existence of two rival associations, indicate that on the one hand there were those whom their opponents described as “Grecophiles” and “Slavophiles,” members of the “Greco-Slavic party” and “anti-Ottomans,” and on the other hand those who were described as “Ottomanophiles,” the “Turcophile party,” or alternatively as the “anti-Greeks.” The real distinction lay in the fact that the Albanianism of the latter was essentially anti-Greek, whereas this was not entirely the case with the former, among whom Orthodox identity occupied a central place. Furthermore, the former were less inclined to combine Albanian propaganda with Aromanian propaganda. Above all, the first group consisted largely of wealthy merchants, whereas the second was composed of those in more modest circumstances, generally apprentices (Clayer, 2009).

Against this background should also be viewed the first organized efforts of the Albanians of Bucharest in the early 1880s. The foundations of the organization and patriotic activity of the Albanians of Bucharest were laid precisely during this period, when the society “Drita” (“Light”)–“Dituria” (“Knowledge”) was established in the Romanian capital as a branch of the Istanbul Society. This process was closely connected with the activities of Jani Vreto, who had been sent to Bucharest by the Istanbul Society, as well as with the subsequent organization of a “Section of the Society of Albanian Literature.”

Subsequently, this society expanded and became organizationally consolidated, equipping itself with a programme and statute of a national character. In its fully developed form, it was established on 27 December 1884. The first article of its statute clearly stipulated that the purpose of the society was the advancement of national culture and the promotion of the teaching of the Albanian language, both in the diaspora and in the homeland. Within this framework, the society played an important role in creating the first Albanian cultural infrastructure in Romania. Through the contributions of its members, a printing press was purchased, and a series of works by authors of the Albanian National Awakening, such as Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Jani Vreto, and others, were published. These publications served as educational texts and were distributed among the Albanian colonies in Romania, other diaspora communities, and the Albanian territories (Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

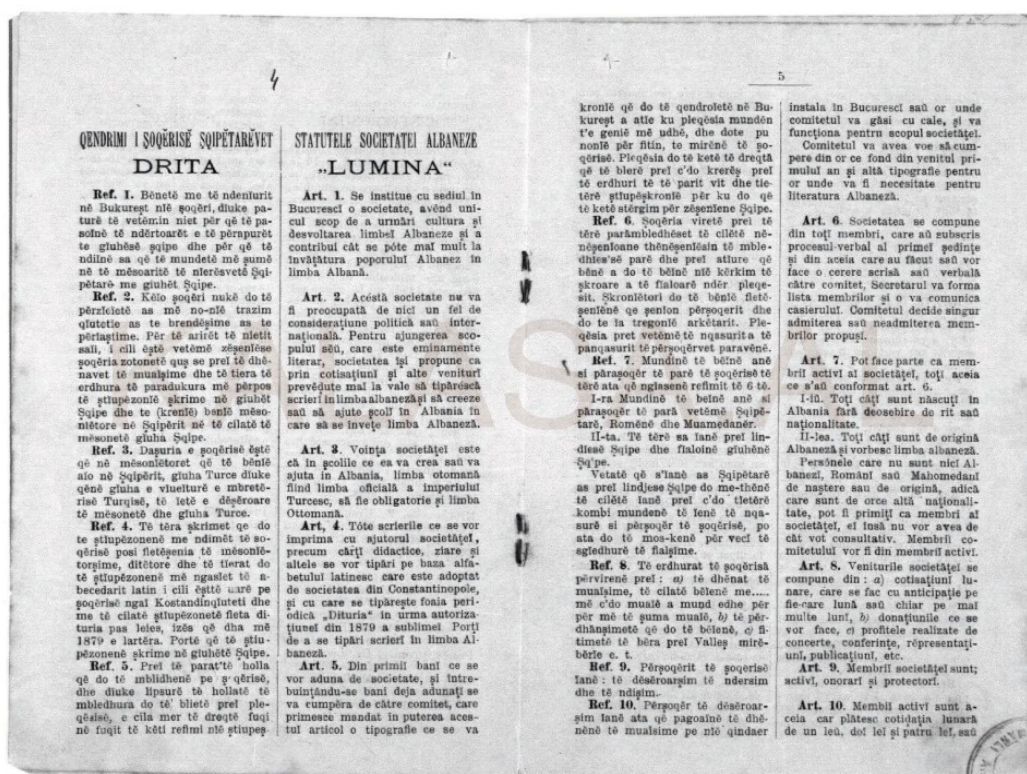


Figure 1: Facsimile of the Statute of the "Drita-Lumina" Society, December 1887.

The Statute of the "Drita-Lumina" Society, reorganized once again in 1887, provided not only for the internal organization of the society, but also for the creation of an infrastructure for the publication of the national press. Although it did not specifically include the idea of establishing a periodical organ, it nevertheless focused on publishing activity, which was intended to serve the dissemination of cultural and educational ideas throughout the diaspora. Specifically, Article 4 of this Statute stated:

"All writings that shall be published with the assistance of the society, such as educational books, dictionaries, and others, shall be printed on the basis of the Latin alphabet adopted by the society in Constantinople, and with which the periodical *Dituria*<sup>1</sup> is also being published, in accordance with the authorization granted in 1879 by the Sublime Porte for the printing of writings in the Albanian language" (See Figure 1).

Taking its cue from this article and from the specific characteristics of the "Drita-Lumina" Society, the first periodical in Romania came into being as the organ of the "Drita" cultural society of Bucharest itself. This periodical organ did not originate in Bucharest, the headquarters of the Society, but in one of its branches, namely in the city of Brăila. The initiative undertaken by a group of Albanian patriots in Brăila, instead of being welcomed and supported, was attacked by the Albanian representation in Bucharest. The attack was not merely an administrative disagreement, as it was officially presented, but concealed an open clash of interests between the two currents that existed within the colony itself. On the one hand, the centre in Bucharest was dominated by the elite of wealthy Orthodox merchants. For this group, Orthodox religious identity retained a central place, and they displayed a Grecophile tendency or a concern for maintaining peaceful relations with Hellenic circles and even with Ottoman ones. On the other hand, the Brăila branch represented the less affluent stratum, consisting mainly of apprentices and small merchants. This second current was essentially anti-Greek and supported Aromanian propaganda.

The scholar Nathalie Clayer interprets this conflict from precisely this perspective:

"In fact, the governing committee of this organization in Bucharest had not supported this initiative (the launching of the newspaper in Brăila, J.L.), since it could have been detrimental to the Albanians of the Empire,

<sup>1</sup> *Dituria* was the first Albanian journal published entirely in the Albanian language. It was published in Istanbul between 1884 and 1885 by Naim and Sami Frashëri, with the participation of other leading figures of the Albanian National Awakening, such as Jani Vreto and Pandeli Sotiri. The journal served to promote the Albanian language, the new alphabet (based on the Istanbul alphabet), and the ideas of the Albanian National Awakening. It was closely connected with the activities of the Istanbul Society, while for its publication and printing it made use of the network and the Albanian printing press in Bucharest.

while expressing its displeasure at not having been invited to take part in this undertaking. Moreover, this newspaper dealt above all with issues related to the city of Brăila” (Clayer, 2009).

It was precisely within this climate that the newspaper *Drita* began publication in Brăila on 15 May 1887, a climate that was reflected in almost all of the newspaper's editorials. From its very beginnings, the periodical became involved in this complex organizational reality and found itself faced with the need to define more clearly its profile and its place in relation to the existing structures of the Albanian diaspora in Romania. This situation also affected the change of the newspaper's very title, as from issue no. 3 onward the editors were compelled to change the Albanian title *Drita*, replacing it with the Romanian title *Lumina*. Without taking this context into account, it is not possible to understand clearly either the writings published in this newspaper or the debates that accompanied the Albanian diaspora in Romania, where, alongside efforts to organize around the same cause—that of Albanian national identity—there were also moments that sowed the seeds of division, and these moments emerged precisely during the phase when the periodical written press began its course in Romania.

### 3. *Drita-Lumina* (Brăila, 1887–1888) in the Light of New Historiographical Findings

*Drita* was a literary and scientific newspaper of the Albanian colony in Romania, published in Brăila. The first issue appeared on 15 May 1887, while the last issue was published on 13 June 1888. The newspaper's periodicity was not regular, although at the top of the page it was indicated that it appeared every Sunday evening (“Apare în fie-care duminică seara”), while the editorial office and administration were located at Bulevardul Carol I, no. 117, Brăila.

The newspaper appeared with the Romanian subtitle “ZIAR LITERAR SCIINTIFIC” (Literary and Scientific Newspaper), thus defining itself as a periodical of a cultural and scientific profile serving the Albanian colony in Romania. From a textual analysis of the editorials and administrative notices, it appears that the newspaper was directed by an Albanian Committee of Brăila (a group of intellectuals and local merchants from the diaspora). The name of a single editor-in-chief does not appear specifically on the masthead, which was common practice at the time when a patriotic society assumed responsibility for publication. Nevertheless, the central intellectual figure and the author of the newspaper's dominant articles (often occupying half of the available space in an issue), as well as the person responsible for the scientific section, was Dr. A. Grün. If one attempts to reconstruct his profile, as can be understood from his writings, Dr. A. Grün was a physician who lived and practised his profession in Brăila. He held the title “Doctor of Medicine” (*Dr. în medicină*) and possessed a solid European academic education, something that is evident from the rigour and precision of his advice, but also from the advertisements for French medical products that appeared in several issues of the newspaper. He did not merely translate medical texts, but adapted a form of medical pedagogy for the broader public, offering advice that remains remarkably relevant even today. His informative articles and advisory pieces (on female hygiene during puberty, eye health, and matters related to paediatrics) were written in a simple and clear language, with the aim of facilitating their application in everyday life. Likewise, he appears as an advocate of reason and scientific knowledge. In his writings, he openly opposed superstitions and the mystical practices of folk medicine, emphasizing the importance of scientific medicine while offering practical advice.

Other contributors to the newspaper, who published articles in various issues, included: I. Nicolescu, I. A. Ferechide, Sub-prefect, Al. V. Cocias, Nuelușa, and others. In issue no. 3, dated 1 June 1887, the names of the newspaper's governing committee were also made public. The presentation of these names came as a form of response to the attacks directed against them by members of the “*Drita*” Society in Bucharest. Specifically, on the second page of the newspaper, under the title “The New Committee of Brăila (The New Signatories),” it is stated:

“In order to demonstrate its independence from Bucharest, the new issue of the newspaper *Lumina* presents its governing committee:

- President: IOAN A. FERECHEIDE.
- Vice-President: Michalache Naum.
- Members: Tache Petrescu, Dumitru Constantin, Chiriao Demetriu, Dimitrie I. Peicioman.
- Secretary: D. Pappadopol” (*Lumina*, no. 3, 1 June 1887).

Although biographical information about these individuals is limited and fragmentary, their presence on the governing committee indicates that the newspaper *Drita-Lumina* did not rely solely on the circle of Albanian patriots, but also maintained connections with Romanian and Balkan circles in the Brăila of that period.

#### 3.1. A Clarification Regarding the Newspaper Collection

In Albanian historiography, it has so far been widely asserted that only eleven issues of the newspaper existed (Fjalori Enciklopedik Shqiptar, 2008; Skëndi, 2000). This assertion continues to be repeated even in

recent literature on the subject (Peza-Perriu & Kaceli, 2022). However, consultation of the microfilm collection of the unique copy preserved in the National Library of Albania reveals that there were not eleven, but twelve issues in total. In this collection, all issues have been preserved in full, with the exception of the first and the sixth issues of the newspaper.

The discrepancy regarding the total number of issues may be explained by several factors. First, the collection remains undigitized in Albania and, owing to its status as a unique archival copy (Fundi AR), it is preserved as a rare work under restricted access conditions. Consequently, this material has historically been inaccessible to the majority of researchers.

Second, the relatively long interval between issue no. 11, published on 12 October 1887, and issue no. 12, which was also the final issue and appeared on 13 June 1888, may have contributed to the perception that the series had ended with the eleventh issue. This interruption, together with the incomplete preservation of physical collections in various memory institutions, appears to have affected the inaccurate transmission of information in the subsequent scholarly literature.

### 3.2. The Change of the Newspaper's Title

The absence of the first issue from the collection used in this study makes a comprehensive analysis of the material more difficult, particularly with regard to identifying the editorial programme upon which the newspaper was founded. Nevertheless, a careful examination of issue no. 2 reveals that its publication was not welcomed by the central leadership of the "Drita" Society in Bucharest. The main reason was that the weekly newspaper appeared presenting itself as the organ of the "Drita" Society, since the Albanians residing in Brăila constituted a branch of this Society.

Through the articles published in the newspaper's second issue, it becomes clear that as soon as the newspaper entered circulation, the "Drita" Society of Bucharest sharply criticized the editorial board of the Brăila newspaper for the initiative it had undertaken. The scholar Vehbi Bala (1964) maintains that the principal figure behind these attacks coming from Bucharest was Nikolla Naço. He complained that the editorial board was giving the periodical a political colouring, contrary to the statute of the "Drita" Society headquartered in the Romanian capital. An examination of the newspaper's materials, however, shows that the letter was not written by Nikolla Naço himself (who may have acted behind the scenes), but bore the signature of the vice-president, D. Butculescu, while N. Naço appeared formally as a member of the governing board. Despite this directive from the Romanian capital, according to which the work of the colonists was to be "restricted and directed solely toward the advancement of national education and culture" (Bala, 1964), the response from Brăila was immediate. In a statement issued by the editorial board, it was emphasized that their newspaper no longer belonged to the "Drita" Albanian Cultural Society of Bucharest. Issue no. 2 opens with the headline "Clarification," in which the following is stated:

"In order to respond to certain voices that concern us and that have been raised against us without any justification, and indeed without any knowledge of our intentions, we openly declare that, beginning today, the newspaper *Drita* no longer belongs to the 'Drita' Albanian Cultural Society, but is the personal organ of the committee that edits it, and all materials published in its columns belong to us personally" (*Drita*, no. 2, 25 May 1887).

Although in this issue the editors insist on retaining the newspaper's title, arguing that the title *Drita* is not anyone's monopoly, we shall see that beginning with issue no. 3 and thereafter, this title was replaced by the Romanian title *Lumina*.

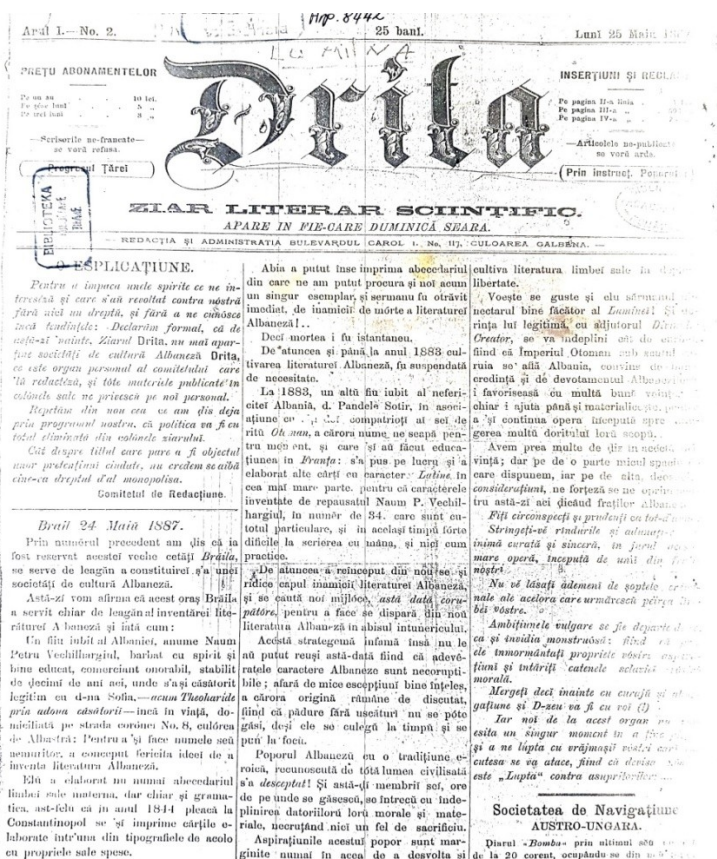


Figure 2: Facsimile of the front page of the second issue of the "Drita" newspaper, Brăila, May 25, 1887.

The change in the newspaper's title was announced at the beginning of issue no. 3, where the reasons for this decision were also explained: "Offended by the ingratitude of certain individuals with vulgar pretensions, to whom we believed we were doing an honour by adopting as the title of our newspaper the name of the Albanian Cultural Society 'Drita,' we have decided to change this title beginning with the present issue..." (Lumina, no. 3, 1 June 1887). It is further explained that, after reading with indignation a letter from the Bucharest Society published in the Romanian newspaper *Cooperatorul Român* (No. 21, 24 May), in which they were attacked, the Brăila Committee decided that the newspaper should bear the title *Lumina*. They declared that the newspaper's programme remained unchanged and that they would continue to defend the cause of their Albanian brethren regardless of the "unbridled appetite of certain Albanians from Bucharest" (Lumina, no. 3, 1 June 1887). Thus, they maintained that they were changing the name of the newspaper, but not its editorial line.

In the same issue of the newspaper, on page 3, and in the interest of transparency toward its readers, the full text of the letter that had provoked the major dispute between the Brăila branch and the headquarters of the "Drita" Society in Bucharest was published. The letter was signed by the leaders of the Society in Bucharest, among them V. Urechia in the capacity of president, D. Butculescu as vice-president, Anastase Sotir as treasurer, as well as the members Niță Sterie, C. Troteanu, D. Nicolau, V. Ionide, N. Nacio, and others. Through this letter, the Brăila branch was accused of violating the Society's statute and of exceeding its authority.

One of the principal issues raised in the letter concerned the publication of the newspaper itself. The leaders in Bucharest argued that the Society's statute did not permit the publication of newspapers or journals without the approval of the central leadership, but only the publication of didactic and schoolbooks in the Latin alphabet, intended to promote the development of national literature.

In addition, the editorial board in Brăila was criticized by Bucharest for addressing political issues that might endanger activities within the Ottoman Empire. In response to this accusation, the Brăila Committee reacted sharply and with irony in the newspaper's columns, replying to the leaders in Bucharest: "Nu cum-va este Turcia? Negreșit că nu!" ("Are we, perhaps, in Turkey? Certainly not!"), accusing them of attempting to impose upon the free Albanian press a form of censorship similar to that exercised by the Ottoman authorities.

Alongside the official letter received from Bucharest, the editorial board in Brăila accompanied its publication with a series of ironic comments, which clearly reveal the degree of tension that the conflict had reached. In

these notes, the leaders in Bucharest were accused of obstructing the development of the Albanian cause and of attempting to ignite an internal conflict among the colonies. The irony reached its peak when the Brăila editorial board directly attacked Vice-President Butculescu for having made this dispute public in the Romanian periodical press. In one of the comments, it was stated ironically in Romanian: “Suntem siguri d-le Vice Președinte că nu găsiți cam puțin cuviincios...” (“We are certain, Mr. Vice-President, that you do not find this action somewhat improper...”) (*Lumina*, no. 3, 1 June 1887), implying that the vice-president himself was acting in a shameful and anti-Albanian manner by exposing the Society’s internal disputes to the public.

Likewise, with regard to the alleged violation of the Statute, the representatives of Brăila relied precisely on Article 4 of the Statute (cited above in this study). Referring to this article, the newspaper’s editors interpreted the Statute as providing a legitimate basis for the publication of a periodical organ in the Albanian language as well.

At the conclusion of its response, the editorial board declared that the newspaper would continue to appear, now under the title *Lumina*, presenting itself as an independent voice of the Albanian colony of Brăila and as an organ that would continue to defend the national interests of the Albanians, regardless of the opposition coming from Bucharest (*Lumina*, no. 3, 1 June 1887).

Under the title *Lumina*, the periodical continued publication until its final issue, preserving the same literary and scientific profile and the same editorial line in support of the Albanian cause, despite difficult organizational and financial circumstances. The closure of the newspaper appears to have been foreshadowed when, after an absence of eight months, the editors published what would become the final issue, in whose editorial they wrote:

“The road we are following is exceedingly difficult and full of thorns, yet, in the face of such a delicate situation in which we find ourselves, there is imposed upon us, in an unavoidable manner, the obligation to emerge from our previous reserve in order to offer to our homeland and to our community our filial tribute, claiming nothing for ourselves personally, but acting entirely for the good and prosperity of the country in general and, in particular, of our own circle, which has been so greatly tried” (*Lumina* no. 12, 13 June 1888).



Figure 3: Facsimile of the newspaper under its modified title, "Lumina".

### 3.3. What Role Did *Drita-Lumina* Play for the Albanian Language and Literature?

Previous studies have asserted that the newspaper *Drita* was published in the Romanian language, but had as its declared objective the promotion of the Albanian cause, the support of the national movement, and the dissemination of Albanian culture and writing within the Albanian diaspora of Romania (Boriçi & Marku, 2007). An examination of the surviving issues of the newspaper reveals that this assertion is only partially accurate, because although the periodical was written entirely in Romanian, it contains no texts in Albanian and no parallel use of the two languages (Albanian–Romanian). In other centers of the Albanian diaspora, particularly among the Arbëresh of Italy — where Albanian journalism originally pioneered — the publication of periodicals in two languages was systematically employed as a means to maintain national identity within the diaspora (Boriçi & Lila, 2024).

Both the explanatory subtitle *Ziar literar scientific* and the articles, editorial notices, and other materials were written in the Romanian language of the late nineteenth century, displaying the graphic features characteristic of the period. This indicates that the newspaper was addressed primarily to the public of the Romanian cultural milieu of Brăila, within which the Albanian community also operated. In this sense, the newspaper's linguistic choice brings it closer to the Romanian cultural sphere than to the Albanian one.

More than the Albanian cause itself, the newspaper reflects the polemics and divisions that existed within the Albanian community in Romania. Announcements and responses directed against the “Drita” Society of Bucharest occupy the largest portion of the coverage whenever matters concerning the Albanian world are addressed. Perhaps it was the circumstances themselves that produced this shift of attention away from the central mission that the newspaper had initially assigned to itself. In issue no. 2, where the ideological orientation of the newspaper is presented in greater detail, its editors viewed it as the direct continuation of an earlier cultural tradition of the city of Brăila, one that began with Veqilharxhi and projected itself toward the Albanian national future:

In our previous issue, we stated that this old city, Brăila, was destined to become the cradle of the foundation of an Albanian cultural society. Today, we affirm that the city of Brăila has indeed served as the cradle of the birth of Albanian literature, and this is how: A beloved son of Albania, Naum Petro Veqilharxhi, a cultivated man and respected merchant who had been settled here for many years, where he also married and established his family, conceived the fortunate idea of creating Albanian writing in order to leave his name immortal. He composed not only a primer of the mother tongue, but also a grammar; and in 1844 he travelled to Constantinople to have these books printed at his own expense. Yet, as soon as he succeeded in printing the primer—from which we ourselves have managed to secure only a single copy—he was immediately struck down by the enemies of Albanian literature. The death of that endeavour was immediate.

From that time until 1883, the cultivation of Albanian literature remained suspended owing to necessity and circumstance.

In 1883, another son of unfortunate Albania, Pandele Sotiri, together with several of his compatriots who had come from the Ottoman Empire and had been educated in France, set to work and prepared books in the Latin alphabet. (...)

The Albanian people, with an ancient tradition known throughout the civilized world, have awakened. Their members, wherever they may be, are fulfilling their moral and material obligations without sparing sacrifices. The aspirations of this people are limited solely to the free development and cultivation of their language and literature. (...)

Rally and gather with pure and sincere hearts around this great undertaking initiated by one of our sons. Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by the voices of those who seek your division. Let base ambitions and envy remain far away. Advance with courage and patience. And we, for our part, shall not hesitate for a single moment to fight our opponents, for this is a struggle against oppression (*Drita*, no. 2, 25 May 1887).

Instead of giving prominence to the affirmation of the Albanian language and literature, however, the newspaper's attention became focused precisely on its opponents and on the internal tensions that accompanied the entire dynamic of the Albanian diaspora's activity in Romania. Thus, the conflict that emerged within this community directly influenced the orientation of the newspaper, distancing it from the original mission it had assigned to itself as a supporter of the development of the Albanian language and literature.

It is precisely the course followed by the newspaper that highlights the contrast between the programme proclaimed in issue no. 2 and the newspaper's actual content. On the one hand, there is a clear desire to present Brăila as a centre of Albanian culture and to connect the newspaper with the tradition of Albanian writing; on the other hand, issue after issue, the newspaper published texts that were more moralistic in nature than cultural or literary. These writings emphasized the importance of such virtues as honesty, gratitude, and

the combating of envy, malice, greed, and similar traits, characteristics that were evidently aimed indirectly at the Albanians of the Bucharest Society itself.

Taking into consideration both the language in which the newspaper was written and the content of its articles, it becomes evident that the Albanian cause—particularly the development and cultivation of the Albanian language and literature—remained an idealistic project expressed in the editorial of issue no. 2, one that found no practical implementation in any of the subsequent issues of the newspaper. In this sense, *Drita-Lumina* appears as the first newspaper published by the Albanian diaspora of Romania whose primary focus was the concerns of the Albanian community in that country rather than service to the Albanian national cause itself.

#### **4. The Content of the Newspaper “Drita - Lumina”**

The newspaper contains scientific, social, and polemical materials. Although it is presented as a “literary-scientific” press organ, we will see that literary sections do not exist at all in this newspaper. With the exception of cultural chronicles on theatrical performances in the city of Brăila, we do not find any other substantive element related to literature. The newspaper does not include literary creations such as poetry or artistic prose, and the designation “literary” does not find direct reflection in the published materials.

The only artistic element in the newspaper is the rich language used in journalistic writings, especially in the editorials on the front pages of the newspaper. The journalistic articles are mainly of a social, philosophical, and informative character. The pages deal with issues related to education, civilization, social morality, and the need for intellectual and cultural progress. The writings are mainly reflective and argumentative, with a journalistic tone and an educational aim toward the reader.

Very bold for the time is the article by I. Nicolescu against religious fanaticism, in which, among other things, he states: “Humanity has already begun to see clearly that until now, only religious fanaticism has been able to hinder the progress of civilization on a wider scale. The time has come for all peoples of the world to awaken and remove this obstacle. Religion must return to its true will, and harmony among people must be restored without any resistance” (“Lumina”, no. 3, 1 June).

As for the political character, the examination of the issues shows that there is no news or published information related to politics, with the exception of a short telegraphic notice in no. 4, where it is stated: Local Elections: The Permanent Committee announces that on 10 June Mr. Teodor Dobrescu was re-elected as chairman, and members Mr. M. Nicolescu and I. Filoti (“Lumina”, no. 4, 15 June).

In the newspaper issues, there are no political sections, no regular treatments of political developments, or party polemics. Even when topics of public interest are addressed, they are presented more as reflections on social and civic life rather than as political positions, as is the case with the chronicles on the port of Brăila or on the Ambulant Hospital of Ianca. Likewise, writings on navigation on the Danube, the condition of roads, and developments directly affecting the Brăila community are also reflected. These sections strongly connect the newspaper to the Romanian urban reality and place the Albanian colony within the concrete life of the city in which it operated. Through them, “Drita-Lumina” appears not only as an organ of a national diaspora, but also as an active part of the local public sphere.

The largest space of coverage is occupied by materials from the field of science, particularly medicine. In several issues, there are long series of advice on women’s hygiene, child care, nutrition, oral health, and the treatment of common diseases. These texts are signed by the physician A. Grün and are constructed in a didactic and practical tone, aiming at the dissemination of basic health knowledge to the wider public. Their content shows that the newspaper understood emancipation also as a process of social education and improvement of everyday life.

Overall, the content of “Drita-Lumina” demonstrates a broad and original conception of the press: as a means of civic education and as a space for articulating Albanian national consciousness in the diaspora. It is precisely this combination of practical knowledge, everyday chronicle, and public debate that makes this periodical an important testimony of the early phase of the Albanian press in Romania and of the role that the Albanian diaspora played in shaping written culture at the end of the nineteenth century.

#### **5. Conclusions:**

The examination of the preserved collection of the newspaper “Drita-Lumina” allows for a reassessment of the position this periodical holds in the history of the Albanian press. The study shows that the newspaper represents the first newspaper published by Albanians in Romania and implies the first organized periodical initiative of the Albanian colony in Brăila, and that its emergence developed in a climate of tensions among different groups of the Albanian diaspora in Romania. It is precisely these contradictions that influenced not

only the change of the newspaper's title from "Drita" to "Lumina," but also the subsequent orientation of its content.

The analysis of the preserved issues also provides a bibliographical clarification, since it turns out that the newspaper had a total of twelve issues and not eleven, as has been reported in most of the existing literature so far. Likewise, the study shows that, although the periodical presented itself as a literary-scientific newspaper and declared as its objective the support of Albanian culture, its content remained mainly focused on the debates of the Albanian community in Romania, on social, scientific, and educational issues.

In this sense, "Drita-Lumina" represents an important testimony not only for the beginnings of the Albanian press in Romania, but also for the way in which the Albanian diaspora at the end of the nineteenth century constructed its own spaces of public communication, simultaneously reflecting national aspirations and the internal divisions that accompanied this process.

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