

## DARDANËT DHE DARDANIA: NJË HISTORI E RRËFYER NGA AUTORËT ANTIKË

(Emine Hajdari & Arben Hajdari, *Dardanët dhe Dardania: Një histori e rrëfyer nga autorët antikë*, Instituti i Historisë “Ali Hadri”, Prishtinë 2025)

The volume *Dardanët dhe Dardania: Një histori e rrëfyer nga autorët antikë* constitutes one of the most important efforts of Albanian historiography in recent decades to restore to the centre of scholarly attention the Greek and Roman sources that mention the Dardanians and their territory. It places this people within the core of a long narrative tradition that extends from the Homeric epics to the authors of late Antiquity. Built upon a clear and rigorous methodology, the book unites in a single work both the corpus of ancient testimonies and a thorough analysis. It constitutes a precious sourcebook for scholars of the classical world. Although it stands in continuity with earlier works in Albanian, such as *Ilirët dhe Iliria te autorët antikë*, this historical study distinguishes itself through its philological precision, methodological discipline, and the fact that it is the first systematic collection, translation in Albanian, and commentary of Greek and Latin literary sources on the Dardanians.

The authors situate their study within a broad historiographical framework and offer an essential clarification on the nature of ancient sources. These texts, they emphasize, are narratives shaped by the political, cultural, and literary contexts of their respective periods, marked by subjectivities, interests, and inherent limitations. With methodological precision, they argue that Greek and Roman accounts must not be treated as straightforward factual reports but as testimonies requiring critical and comparative analysis. This scholarly awareness elevates the monograph above earlier, often idealizing interpretations of the Illyrian peoples. A significant merit of the work lies in its avoidance of modern political projections, maintaining instead a strictly academic tone grounded in objectivity and supported equally by ancient narratives and archaeological evidence.

Among the book's valuable contributions is its treatment of Dardanian mythology and origins. The figure of Dardanus, his association with Zeus, and the position of the Dardanians in the Homeric tradition are carefully examined as elements of legitimizing discourse employed across different historical stages to reinforce political and dynastic identities. The authors convincingly demonstrate how the Romans, particularly in the first two centuries of the Roman empire, used the genealogies of Aeneas and Dardanus to construct symbolic links between Troy and Rome. Within this interpretive framework belongs the recently discovered dedication of Justinian in *Iustiniana Secunda*, in which the emperor, together with Empress Theodora, appears as founder of a new *urbs Dardaniae*. This gesture placed Justinian within the lineage of the legendary founders of Troy and Rome, Dardanus and Aeneas, highlighting a symbolic continuity between the legendary Dardanians of Troy and the historical ones of the Balkans. This dimension deepens the interpretive horizon of the work.

Although not primarily focused on epigraphy, the monograph skillfully integrates several inscriptions that enrich the study of what we could call a Dardanian consciousness under Roman rule. The mid-second-century funerary epitaph of M. Aurelius Paulus, a member of the mounted imperial guard, the *equites singulares Augusti*, an elite corps, explicitly identified as *nat(ione) Dardanus*, "Dardan by origin", illustrates the persistence of a local consciousness alongside a proper Roman identity. Dedications to the local goddess *dea Dardanae* by Roman officers in *Moesia superior*, even shows how Roman army chose to pay homage to a local pantheon. In other words, in the Roman empire, there was no conflict between Roman identity and the Dardanian one, that could continue to flourish by using the Latin language. The dedication of Justinian from *Iustiniana Secunda*, we recently published with Professor Arben Hajdari, adds another layer of evidence for the intertwining of Dardanian traditions with imperial ideology in late antiquity. These inscriptions provide valuable supplementary insights into the continuity of Dardanian awareness throughout antiquity.

The authors also offer a careful analysis of the geographical extension of the Dardanians and the territorial definition of Dardania. Drawing on Strabo, Livy, Pliny, Ptolemy, Hierocles, and others, they present a balanced reconstruction while underscoring the limits and inevitable inconsistencies of ancient accounts. Their discussion avoids imposing artificial borders and respects the dynamic nature of ancient territorial configurations. The evidence indicates

that the region inhabited by the Dardanians encompassed modern-day Kosovo, parts of southern Serbia, North Macedonia, and northern Albania.

The sections devoted to the Dardanian-Macedonian and Dardanian–Roman wars provide a detailed and nuanced examination of the political and military role of the Dardanians in the third and first centuries BCE. Drawing on Polybius, Livy, Diodorus, Plutarch, Justin, and others, the authors show that despite their relatively modest numbers, the Dardanians constituted a significant power capable of challenging Macedonia and engaging directly with the geopolitical forces of their time. These chapters restore the Dardanian Kingdom to its rightful place in the military history of the region.

The monograph further distinguishes itself through its treatment of Dardanian social, economic, and cultural organization. Although the sources are scarce, the authors construct a coherent portrait of daily life, settlements, customs, and material culture, relying on every available testimony and exercising commendable methodological restraint. This section of the book stands out for its clarity: the authors consistently respect the limits of the evidence and avoid speculative excess.

The corpus of ancient texts, which forms the bulk of the volume, is an invaluable scholarly contribution. The translations are accurate, clear, and standardized, and the commentaries provide sufficient contextualization without overwhelming the reader. As such, the work establishes itself as a foundational reference for historians, archaeologists, and students of ancient history.

Taken as a whole, *Dardanët dhe Dardania: Një histori e rrëfyer nga autorët antikë* is a carefully crafted and methodologically rigorous study that meets contemporary academic standards. It fills a long-standing gap in Albanian scholarship and establishes a solid point of reference for future research on the Dardanians. The book possesses all the qualities necessary to be regarded as a significant and enduring contribution for forthcoming generations of scholars.

**Christophe J. GODDARD**

