



## ***Letters from Niš about Harems in the Albanian Language***

*Letters from Niš about Harems* by Jelena J. Dimitrijević<sup>1</sup> were published this year in Albanian by the *Aureli* publishing house from Priština. In a brief conversation with Naile Mala Imami, the translator of this book and a professor of Albanian at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology, we learn why she decided to translate this work, which was first published in 1897 in Belgrade and discusses the lives of Muslim women in Niš at that period.

*What sparked your interest in Jelena J. Dimitrijević, and how did you decide on this particular book?*

As I am a feminist, Jelena Dimitrijević has always been interesting to me because of her interest in women. That drew me to this book, along with the specific language in which it was written.

*The language of this book is a combination of the Niš dialect of that time and the Turkish dialect. Was it difficult to translate it?*

The language of the *Letters* is a richer blend of languages. It is filled with Albanian words, as well as Macedonian and Bulgarian, in addition to Serbian and Turkish, of course. I hope that one day some of my students will conduct a detailed analysis of that language or, at least compile and classify the origin of those words so that it can be seen more clearly what kind of wealth it is.

<sup>1</sup> <http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/en/authors/jelena-j-dimitrijevic>

*How did you convey that diversity into Albanian and what did you find the most difficult while translating this book?*

The problem was understanding many of the words. The Glossary at the end of the book, which was also included in the first edition, was very helpful, but not always. Many words were missing, some were even incorrectly translated. I consulted experts and friends from Novi Sad, Skoplje, Priština, and Belgrade. Sometimes, my older relative was the most helpful since she remembers the forgotten, disappeared words which were never recorded anywhere, dialectics from ancient times. The most difficult for me was to translate the names of clothing parts, wedding clothes and others.

*In the book, there are illustrations that do not exist in the original edition.*

I tried to find pictures that correspond to the descriptions in the book and I took care that they were from that period and from that region.

*You were with the book for a long time, did you “become one“ with the author?*

I spent a year intensively translating this book and became so close to Jelena that I began to use her phrases and adopt her point of view. This has been the most difficult translation for me so far after sixty books that I have signed as a translator. I believe that there will be no more difficult translations for me since I managed to translate *Letters from Niš*.

*The book has been on the market for some time now, has it been read?*

The translation met with great interest, there were a lot of announcements in the press and the first edition of 500 copies was sold out. Soon, a new edition should be released.

*Would you translate Jelena Dimitrijević again? And if the answer is yes, have you already chosen the book?*

I want to and I plan to translate all of Jelena Dimitrijević's works. I am still considering which book should be next, perhaps *Letters from Thessaloniki*.

Interview conducted by Biljana Dojčinović  
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