

An examination of the historical, cultural, and social aspects of Catholic missions in southern Albania during the Italian occupation (1939–1943)

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Abstract

From the perspective of religion, Albania is a tiny country with a majority of Muslims, Orthodox, and Catholics. Geographically speaking, the Christian population's settlement produced a split between the Orthodox south and the Catholic north, but in practice, this was not entirely clear-cut because there were Orthodox people in the Catholic area and vice versa. In the north of Albania, where the missionary process had started early during Ottoman occupation and continued under the Austro-Hungarian protectorate, leading to the establishment of Jesuits and Franciscans, the Catholic Church's attention was concentrated until 1939. Concrete measures were launched to establish Catholic missions in the southern part of the country in April 1939, right after the Italian invasion. This study intends to examine the Vatican's attempts to expand the activity of missionary priests in a region where the majority of the population was not Catholic and where there was a shortage of local clergy, necessitating their importation from other nations, using Albanian archival sources, historical literature, and a portion of the funds of the Central State Archives. The establishment of administrative-religious structures that would make missionary work easier, the activities of foreign priests' missions from Italy and Albanian sisters' settlements in some of the major southern cities, the attempts of Italy to expand its influence in that region through them, the financial challenges they faced, and the hostility and indifference of the Orthodox population, which viewed their mission with suspicion, are all given particular attention.

Keywords: *Apostolic Delegate; Italo-Greek war; orphanage; Orthodox population; Vicar Jacomoni*