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THE ALBANIAN TERRITORIES AND THEIR REGIONAL TIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

I. The territory inhabited by the Albanians and the Mediaeval National Name of Arberia

The formation of the Albanian people and its economic, social, political, and cultural development was a result of sustained relations among the different regions of the entire Albanian-inhabited area. Linguistic and archaeological studies show that this area was extremely large in the early Middle Ages. Professor Eqrem Cabej long ago emphasized that "The Albanians have not expanded into their present-day area, but have been reduced to it, as a result of its incessant erosion throughout Albanian history"¹. Cabej also indicated that in ancient times the coastal area from Ragusa to Arta², was part of the Albanians's homeland, while the eastern Albanian regions included such cities as Nis, Shkup, and Ohër³. It should be added that this area was inhabited by the Albanians throughout the Middle Ages.

Mediaeval documentary sources prove that the Albanian territories extended to the northwest as far as the Gulf of Kotor, while there was even a compact mass of Albanians near Ragusa⁴. According to these sources, Dioclea (or Zeta) constituted a geopolitical entity and a part of Arberia⁵. Meanwhile, there were areas beyond Nis in the northeast that were mainly inhabited by Albanians⁶. Historical sources indicate that in the east Macedonia was considered part of Arberia, and these two names turn out to be synonymous⁷. Local traditions show that the concept of Macedonia did not exist, and that central Arberia was bordered on the east by Thrace⁸. The situation is similar in the case of Epirus. According to mediaeval historical sources, Epirus was a part of Arberia and synonymous with it⁹, while the name Epirus was not used even in local traditions¹⁰. Documents even define Kosturi and Konica as part of Arberia¹¹. Thus, southern Arberia (Epirus) extended from the Ionian Sea to the Pindus mountains. Friar Mauro's map of 1459 also testifies to the vast extent of Arberia as an ethnic and geographical entity during the Middle Ages. In this map, "Albania" stretches from the Bay of Corinth in the south to the Gulf of Kotor in the north, and in the east includes what is now central Macedonia¹².

Beyond this territory, compact masses of Albanians also lived in other regions of the Balkans. Ottoman land registers of the 15th century record 155 of the 198 villages in northern and central Peloponnesus as Albanian¹³, while a majority Albanian population lived alongside other peoples on the coast of Thessaly¹⁴. It was the Albanians who during the Middle Ages controlled the Via Egnatia from Durres to Salonika, as is evident from as early as the 10th century by the appointment of David Arjanit as defender of Salonika¹⁵. In 1185, a unit of soldiers from Kunavia in Arberia defended Salonika from the Normans¹⁶.

The Albanians emerge in the Middle Ages as one of the largest peoples in

the Balkans, inhabiting for centuries a vast, mountainous area alongside other peoples of the Byzantine Empire. This markedly affected their economic, cultural, political, and administrative life and led to the appearance of the mediaeval national name of Arber and Arberi in historical sources.

Under the circumstances of the Byzantine Empire, ethnic names could not be used in order to distinguish military and administrative areas and their inhabitants, or for the Albanians who were distributed among several of these areas. Usually, the administrative names of well-known cities and provinces were used, and scholarly works often use the names of Epirus, Macedonia, etc. Initially, the national name appears in those mediaeval documents whose authors did not know the above names. It is therefore not accidental that, with the decay of the Byzantine Empire, the mediaeval national name of Arberia¹⁷ and the Arbers¹⁸ emerge almost simultaneously in the north (for Pult in 1198), with the inclusion of some northern Albanian territories in the state of Stefan Nemanja, and in the south (for the population of the Ionian coast opposite Corfu), with the inclusion of southern territories in the state of Mihail Komneni. The simultaneous emergence of this name over a huge geographical area at the same time shows that it was a very ancient, centuries-old national name for the local population¹⁹.

The earlier use of this name by the 11th century Byzantine authors Ataliati and Komnena for a restricted area of the Albanian lands²⁰ traversed by the busiest roads linking the Byzantine capital with Durres, the empire's most important coastal city in the west, was connected with local political events that had attracted the capital's attention. The real spread of the Albanians' mediaeval national name can therefore not be judged from their data. Historical sources also prove this. Other sources besides the documents of 1198 and 1210²¹ show that this name covered a large geographical area over a long period of time. As early as the 11th century, some version of the Song of Roland mention Kanina as a part of Arberia²². The name of Arberia was well known in mediaeval France, and was used in the romance Florimont, written by Aimon de Varennes in 1188²³. K. Porphyrogenitus, a 10th-century Byzantine author, shows that our country's mediaeval national name was known in his days²⁴.

2. Regional Ties and the Road Network in Mediaeval Albania

During the Middle Ages, the inhabitants of the various regions maintained economic and cultural ties with each other. In some ways, these ties were of vital importance for them, and were therefore intensive and long-lasting, influencing the country's political life. They mainly resulted from the regions' special economic roles in meeting each other's demands for cereals, salt, meat, metals, etc. The overwhelming majority of the Albanian population lived in the fertile plains of the east, which were the area's granary²⁵. Various data from the Ottoman land register for the sancak of Shkoder in 1485 illustrate this. According to this register, the kaza of Peje, which extended as far as Prizren, accounted for 63.99 percent of the sancak's population, based on the number of families. The kaza of Shkoder accounted for 15.6 percent, and the mountainous areas between the two kazas (Petershepani) accounted for 2.15

percent²⁶. The prices of cereals and wine were higher in the kaza of Shkoder than in that of Peje²⁷: wheat was 33 percent more expensive, rye 25 percent, barley 56 percent, and wine 20 percent. This price difference shows that the cereals produced in the plains of the east and the minerals extracted there were carried west-ward by trade routes, to be exported to the many cities of the Adriatic coast and to other countries²⁸. Meanwhile, salt, a necessary trading commodity for the inhabitants of every region, was produced on the Albanian coast²⁹. With their ties with other countries of the Adriatic coast and the Mediterranean and their favorable position as mediators for trade with the eastern regions, the western Albanian territories played a primary role in cultural development and the spread of religious institutions to the country's interior. An example of this was the spread of Catholicism to the Plain of Dukagjin and Kosova, which shows these areas' close ties with the western regions.

These western regions influenced the development of not only the Albanian people but also of other peoples, such as the Serbs, who were without access to the sea. Attempts to gain access to the Albanian coast were prominent in the politics of the mediaeval Serbian state. The Serbs' urbanization, and consequently their development, began as they drew nearer the coast and established their administrative and religious centers in Shkoder, Prizren, and Decan.

A general survey of geographical territory and economic and political life shows that the Albanians' inter-regional ties developed on an east-west axis, following the road network³⁰. There were four main east-west caravan routes in the north: the first led from Ragusa to Nis via Cernice, Novi Pazar, and Zvecan (Mitrovice); the second from the coastal cities of Kotor, Budva, and Tivar to Kosova via Breskovo (Plave) and Peje; the third from the coast to Kosova via Shkoder and the Plain of Dukagjin; and the fourth from Lezhe and Shufade to Kosova via Fan and Prizren. Forks then led from Kosova to Shkup and Nis. Two arteries also passed through the central regions, one ran from the coast to Shkup via Shkalle e Tujanit, Bulqize, Diber, and Tetove, and the second was the Via Egnatia from Durres to Ohri, Salonika, and Constantinople. This last was the most important of all as the only road carrying wheeled traffic to the center of the empire. The Via Egnatia had many branches linking it to Albania's north-south roads. Several east-west roads traversed the southern territories: One led from the coast to Berat, the Plain of Korce, and Kostur, with a branch from Berat to Permet and Janina; a second led from Vlore up the Vjose to Janina; a third from Butrint to Gjirokaster and Janina; and a fourth from Arta to Janina.

The Albanian-inhabited territories were also traversed by north-south roads. One passed through the coastal regions, which were also linked by sea. However, the best and most important north-south overland route passed through the eastern regions, linking such important centers as Nis, Shkup, Arta, etc. The fork from Shkup down the Vardar to Salonika was an important part of this route. The central and northern regions were also linked by north-south roads along the valleys of the rivers Drin and Mat, across the Plain of Dukagjin, and through Kosova and Zeta.

The main road arteries connected all the regions, and every village and settlement was attached to a network of local roads.

An awareness of the road system and the density of its traffic makes it possible

to shed light not only on problems of ethnography, dialects, and sub-dialects, but also on the country's political life.

1. E. Çabej, *Problemi i autoktonisë së shqiptarëve në dritën e emrave të vendeve*, in: "Buletini i Universitetit Shtetëror të Tiranës", Seria e shkencave shoqërore, Tiranë, 1958 (further BUSHT), No.2, pp.54-67.

2. E. Çabej, *Vendbanimi i hershëm i shqiptarëve në gadishullin ballkanik në dritën e gjuhës dhe të emrave të vendeve*, BUSHT, 1962, No.1, pp.219-220.

3. E. Çabej, *Problemi i autoktonisë...*, p.55.

4. *Acta et Diplomata res Albaniae Mediae Aetatis Illustrantia*. Collegerunt et digesserunt D. Ludovicus de Thalloczy, Dr. Constantinus Jirecek et Dr. Emilianus de Sufflay. Volumen I, Vindobonae, 1912, No.527 (further ADA).

5. ADA, I, No.529, Friar Mauro's map of 1459 also marks the areas above Shkoder (Zeta) as "Albania". See note 12.

6. In a letter written after the Battle of Nis on 3 November 1443, J. Huniadi notes, "The army grew from day to day, and many Bulgarians are joining us". An extract from the letter is published in Szucs Jenő, Huniadi Janos, Budapest, 1956, p.28. Huniadi's letter mentions the Bulgarians first, because his army was marching in the direction of Bulgaria, while the mention of the Albanians before the Serbs and Bosnians shows that the numbers of Albanian volunteers joining Huniadi's army were greater than those of other peoples. It must be recognized that this was because of the greater number of Albanians living in the Nis area, through which Huniadi's army passed, in comparison with Serbs and others.

7. J. Radonic, *Gjuragj Kastriot Skanderbeg i Arbëria u XV vjeku*, Beograd, 1942, No.226; M. Barleti, *Historia e jetës dhe e veprave të Skënderbeut*, Tiranë, 1964, p.62.

8. A living testimony to this is the word *frac*, meaning "dry cold", and used in Elbasan for the cold easterly wind. Çabej writes that "*frac* may stem from *thrac* or *thraq*" (BUSHT, 1962, I, p.106; and "Studime Gjuhësore", I, *Studime etimologjike në fushë të shqipes A-O*, Prishtinë, 1976, p.194). The word *frac*, used for a natural phenomenon, is very ancient and must stem from the name of the province of Thrace. This is shown by the fact that the word is "mainly used in southern Geg" (E. Çabej, *op.cit.*) and especially by the inhabitants along the western section of the Via Egnatia and its branches (Card index of Albanian lexis in the Lexicology and Terminology Department of the Institute of Linguistics and History). It must consequently be recognized that the inhabitants of the central Albanian regions, who were connected by the Via Egnatia and its branches, recognized only Thrace as their eastern neighbour, and that the geopolitical concept of Macedonia did not exist. Traces still remain of the mediaeval national name of Arberi, which as a geopolitical concept extended far to the east in the Middle Ages. For instance, a mountain named Arbi exists northeast of Ohri and east of the village of Sllatine (*Harta fiziko-politike e Republikës Popullore të Shqipërisë*, Tiranë, 1973), and a settlement named Arbine is to the west of this village (Map of "Regno d'Albania, pub. by Istituto Geografico Militare, Firenze, 1939).

9. J. Radonic, *op.cit.*, No.199; M. Barleti, *Historia*, p.92, 94, 95, (Barletius writes

that some of the Albanians "have settled in the Peloponnesus, some in Macedonia or Arberia, and the others in Epirus"); M. Barletius, *Rrethimi i Shkodrës*, Tiranë, 1967, f.32; *Dokumente të shek.XVI-XVII për Historinë e Shqipërisë*, vol.I (1507-1592), përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi, Tiranë, 1988, p.190; J.Cemerarius, *De rebus Turcicis commentarii duo accuratissimi*, Francofurti, 1598, p.44 etc.; Epirus is also identified as Albania on other different maps. The map of the 17th-century French geographer Abbe Baudrand explicitly notes "Epirus or Lower Albania" (Vasilis Sphyroeras, Anna Avramea, Spyros Asdrahas, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Aegean*, Athens, 1985, p.179; Giacomo Gantelli da Vignola's map of 1689 notes "Epiro o Bassa Albania", and "Albania propria overo superiore detto anche Macedonia occidentale" (H.H. Buschhansen, *Die Marienkirch von Apollonia in Albanien*, Wien, 1976 (book cover).

10. As shown by "Kronika e Janinës", (*Burime tregimtare bizantine për Historinë e Shqipërisë shek.X-XV*, Tiranë, 1975, përgatitur nga Koço Bozhori e Filip Liço, pp.240- 250); "Aktet e sundimtarëve të Despotit të Epirit të shek. XIII" (*Dokumente të periudhës bizantine për Historinë e Shqipërisë*, Tiranë, 1979, përgatitur nga Koço Bozhori, Tirana, 1979, dok.XXXVII, XXXVIII, XL, etc.); E.Dulaj, *Koncept "Epir" dhe "Epirot" në shekujt XIII-XVI*, in: "Konferenca Kombëtare për formimin e popullit shqiptar, të gjuhës dhe të kulturës së tij", Tiranë, 1988, p.141.

11. B.Krekic, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) et le Levant au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1961, p.401.

12. Roderich Barron, the publisher of Friar Mauro's map of 1459 in: "*Antiche Carte Geografiche*", (No.11), notes that the Mediterranean lands of Europe are described with great accuracy, and the data for the extent of Arberia therefore possess special value. The name "Albania" is noted three times on the map. The name "Albania" is first situated in very large letters (like "Italia", "Bulgaria", etc.) in the central areas, implying that this name also covers all the southern areas down to the Gulf of Corinth, because no other name such as Epirus is used. For the northern areas above Shkoder and the eastern regions in the center of today's Macedonia. Mauro has written the name "Albania" twice, in smaller letters. The very large extent of the territory covered in the Middle Ages by the names of Arberia and Albania emerges much more clearly from this map.

13. R.Stoikov - Th.Kacorri, *Një regjistër osman turk i shek.XV për shqiptarët e Peloponezit*, in: "Studime historike", Tiranë, 1966, No.3, f.149-163.

14. P.Lemerle, *L'Emirat d'Aydın, Byzance et Occident, Recherches sur "La geste d'Umur Pasha"*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1957, p.125-126. P.Lemerle refers to the Ottoman chronicler Enver. Describing the landing of the Turkish emir Omar on the coast of Thessaly in 1339, Enveri wrote in 1464 that he set out to plunder the lands of the Slavs and the Albanians. P.Lemerle writes that Thessaly deserves this description because of the "density of the Serbian and Albanian settlements". The Ottoman chronicler's failure to mention Greeks on the coasts of Thessaly shows that Greek settlements were minor compared with those of the Serbs and Albanians.

15. K.Bozhori - F.Liço, *Burime tregimtare bizantine*, p.33,34,35.

16. *Ibidem*, p.142.

17. *ADA*, I, No.113.

18. *Ibidem*, No.1140.

19. Illyrian names that have come down to the present day includes place names and personal names with the root *arb*, sometimes in variant forms. They are found not only in the writings of Ptolemy, but other classical authors both before and after. These authors themselves, including Appianus and Stefan Bizantinus, point out that there are spelling variations between Greek and Roman renderings of Illyrian names, and between the renderings of the Greeks and Romans and those of the Illyrians themselves. These data are taken from *Ilirët dhe Iliria te autorët antikë* (Tirana, 1965). The relevant page number is placed in brackets after the name of the author and the relevant Illyrian name: Polybius (2nd century B.C.) mentions the city of *Arbon* (48) and the area of *Labeaton* (67); Pliny (1st century A.D.), the city of *Arba* (93); Pausanias (2nd century), the area of *Abanti* with its inhabitants the *abantii* (246); Ptolemy (2nd century), the city of *Albanopolis* and its inhabitants the *albani* (268); Stefan Bizantinus (6th century), the abroi population (416), the city of *Arbon* and its inhabitants the *arbianos and arbonites* (417); an anonymous author of Ravenna (7th-8th century), mentions the road station of *Arberie* (488). The name *Barbane*, found only in Livy (1st century, p.130) possibly stems from *arb*. Early names with the root *arb* (*alb*) have also been researched by P.Xhufi (*Arbërit dhe Arbëria në burimet historike të shekujve V-XI*, in: "Shkenca dhe Jeta", Tiranë, 1988, No.2, pp.54-55); Arbenius in a grave inscription from Padova (Th.Mommsen, *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum*, v.2898; Pauly-Wissowa, *Real Encyklopediae* v.IX, p.1303); Arbaïos in an inscription of the 3rd century B.C. found in Foinike (Finic) (P.Cabanes, *L'Empire de la mort du Pyrrhos à la conquête romane*, Paris, 1976, f.572).

20. K.Bozhori-F.Liço, *Burime tregimtare bizantine*, pp.46-47,106.

21. *ADA*, I, No.113, 140.

22. K.Luka, *Emri Albeinje-Albani dhe shtrirja e Arbërit në shek. XI - në fillim të shek.XII*, in: "Konferenca e Dytë e Studimeve Albanologjike...", II, Tirana, 1969, p.155.

23. R.Ushaku, *Roman i shekullit XII me syzhe shqiptar-balkanik*, in: "Rilindja", Prishtina, November 3, 1984, p.12.

24. P.Xhufi, *Arbërit dhe Arbëria në burimet historike të shekujve V-XI*, in: "Shkenca dhe Jeta", Tiranë, 1988, No.2, pp.54-55.

25. K.Biçoku, *Vështrim mbi ekonominë dhe demografinë e fshatit shqiptar të shek.XV*, in: "Studime historike", Tiranë, 1976, No.4, pp.163-185.

26. *Ibidem*, pp.179-180.

27. *Ibidem*, p.170.

28. On grain exports from mediaeval Albania, see: B.Hrabak, *Eksportimi i drithit në Shqipëri në shek.XIV-XV*, in: "Konferenca e Dytë e Studimeve Albanologjike", Tiranë, 1969, I, p.157.

29. Mediaeval documents show many salt pans on the Albanian coast from Tivar to Arta: *ADA*, II, 179, 320, 487, 745, 749, 789, etc.; Jorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, II, Paris, 1899, p.156, note 6; G.Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Iuridica*, Tomus I, München, 1968, No.167; G.Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, München, 1968, No.1058, etc.

30. On the road network in the Albanian lands during the Middle Ages, see:

J. Adami, *Historia e rrugëve të Shqipërisë*, in: "Buletin për Shkenca Shqërore", Tiranë, 1953, No.3, p.23- 26; K. Biçoku, *Rrugët nëpër vilajetin e Krujës të shek.XV dhe lokalizimi i Shufadasë*, in: "Monumentet", Tiranë, 1982, No.1, pp.41-62; A. Baci, *Rrugët shqiptare në mesjetë (shek. VII-XV)*, in: "Monumentet", Tiranë, 1984, No.11, pp.58-68; V. Shtylla - L. Papajani, *Të dhëna teknike mbi rrugët eluginës së Shkumbinit në antikitet e mesjetë*, "Monumentet", Tiranë, 1991, No.1, pp.57-73, etc.

