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THE ALBANIAN POPULATION OF KOSOVA AND OTHER AREAS OF EX YUGOSLAVIA DURING THE XV-XVII CENTURY

Already scholars of the past times, like M.Sufflay, K.Jirecek, M.Kostic, H.Gerba, C.Contarini¹, and today's scholars like S.Pulaha, M.Ternova, S.Rizaj, I.Zamputi, A.Ducellier, A.Handić², have drawn a series of scientific conclusions concerning the problem of the ethnic character of Kosovo, Monte Negro and West Macedonia in ancient times.

These conclusions are in complete opposition with that part of nationalist politicized Serbian historiography which tries even today to present the areas mentioned "as a cradle of the" Serbian nation. In fact everything proves that the Albanian population was present during the whole medieval times in Kosova, west Macedonia, and Monte Negro, but it always consisted of the overwhelming majority of the population in those regions. Let's refer to Montenegro. Different authors, including the writers of the Royal Serbian court like G.Çamblaku and K.Filozofi, considered Zeta as an Albanian region³. Even tzar Dushani himself in a paper in the year 1349, considered Zeta as a part of

Albania⁴.

Relating to a Ragusean document which came out in 1443, Podgorica is included in the framework of the concept of Albania⁵. The chief owners and foreign rulers who had close contacts with those regions considered the entire Monte Negro seacoast as a part of Albania⁶. The Venetians themselves, who owned some seacoastal cities in the south Adriatic, considered Zeta as a part of Albania. So, from the Venetian offices, some data declared that Budua and Zeta and other regions were part of Albania⁷.

During the first centuries of developed feudalism, the Albanians have been present in the regions of today's Macedonia in Presheve-Kumanova, Skopje, Tetova, even in Shtip and Kostur⁸. In the year 1295 in these regions, ruled the Albanian nobleman Progon Sguero, who at that time built in Ohri "the church of "Zonja e Bekuar"⁹. The Albanian presence in the mentioned territories is proved by the chronicles of the writers of the Byzantine court e.g. J.Kantakuzeni¹⁰. So, L.Kalkondili of the 15th century underlines that the Albanians of his time had changed a lot from the Serbians and Bosnians, and he showed that there is no other people who resemble the old Macedonians more than the Albanians¹¹.

According to the cadastral documents of the time, it is obvious that some parts of Macedonia, especially west Macedonia, during the 15th-17th centuries are considered as a part "of the country of Albanians". So, we can see the presence of the Albanians in the areas of Skopje, Tetova, Gostivari, Dibra, Kërçova, Struga, Ohri, Manastir, Prilep and Veles.

We can find their traces in the northeast, south and southeast of these regions up to Kratova, Zletova and Shtipi¹². In these regions the Albanian population, because of social, political, and religious influences had borrowed Slav-Byzantine anthroponymy, as well as in some other ethnic areas, which were for a long time under the Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian rule. This feature is well observed in a paper (document) which belonged to the time of Bajaziti II where Kërçova Vilajet is registered. Among others, one of the two districts is called the quarter of Albanians. If you can have a look at all the names of this quarter, which is considered as a quarter inhabited entirely by the Albanian Christians, it is obvious that the greatest part of these names is not Albanian but Sllavian ones¹³. The same thing can be observed in Manastir, Kostur and Lerin, but they are of a Greek influence.

The thing which most attracts the attention has to do with the fact that side by side the names Macedonia and Epirus, these regions inhabited by the Albanians, were included in the concept of Albania. Hence, according to a Ragusean document of the year 1390, Kosturi was included in Albania¹⁴. According to the Austrian and Vatican documents, Skopje was included in the same background¹⁵. The well-known Scholar, L.Marsigli, in the 18th century, included Skopje and a part of the high mountains which lead to Durrës, in the areas of Free Albania¹⁶. Alongside the concept of Albania, part of today's Macedonia were also included in the framework of the concept Epirus, Skopje, Peja and Ohrid in Epir¹⁷.

During the second half of the 15th century, side by side with Epir and Epirotes, circulated the appellations Macedonia and Macedonian with the meaning of Arberia and Arberesh¹⁸. But high personalities of the time called Skanderbeg "Prince of Machedonia"¹⁹. Meanwhile, the humanists starting from the data of the ancient authors write: "That what is called Albania, once was a part of Macedonia, "the country of Albania is that one which was called by our ancestors, Macedonia"²⁰, etc.

As far as the ethnic situation of today's territory of Kosova is considered, neither the Slav invasion of the 6th-7th centuries nor its occupation by the Serbian state of Rasha (12th-14th century) changes its ethnic character, although the forced immigration of the Albanian areas took part under the policy of a Serbian king, especially that of tzar Stefan Dushani (1331-1355)²¹.

With the disintegration of the Serbian empire after the battle of Marica (1371), the ex-parts (areas) of the Dushan empire became a free area for the domestic rulers. Among them were the chief leaders Balshaj, Kastrioti and Dukagjine. For a time they dominated "the Rrafsh of Dukagjine"²². There exist a lot of documents and Osman witnesses, as well as writers of the time, besides the Ragusean ones, which tell about the rule of these Albanian chief leaders²³. When considering the question of the importance of the Ragusean documents, we should mention first of all the copy book of debtors of a merchant of Albanian origine, M.Luchari²⁴. This merchant who made business in the years 1432-1438 in Novoberde, registered in his copy book nearly 1 200 debtors. Among them there were 89 debtors of typical Albanian anthroponymy. But, to this number should be added some others who had a mixed anthroponymy and calendaric names, which proves the existence of a great number of Albanians in Novoberde before the Ottoman occupation. This document throws light on the existence of the Albanians in Gollap, Morave and South Serbia. The Ottoman documentation, especially the cadastral copy books, reaffirm the observations of many objective

Albanian scholars that the Albanians were present in those areas even at the time when the massive process of Islamization had not yet started, a thing which is better illustrated by the copybook of registration of Kosovo in 1455²⁵, where the Albanians were present in a massive way in the eastern areas of Fushe-Kosova. The Ottoman copy-books prove that in 1485 in the Peja region, the whole population was already Albanian. The same identical ethnic situation could be found in the regions of Altun-Ilise. We come across with a total Albanian population, according to the registrations of the year 1571 and 1591 in the regions of Sanxhak and Dukagjin²⁶.

The Ottoman registers confirm the small number of inhabitants of the mountainous regions (3 201 houses in 156 villages at the end of the 16th century) of Northern Albania, where it is pretended that the Albanians came from, in comparison to the population of Rrafshi i Dukagjinit and of Kosova. Thus, there existed no practical possibility of that area to populate all of Kosova. The existence of a great number of houses in the Rrafsh of Dukagjin and in Kosova (during the second half of the 15th cent, there were 1 202 living centres with 28 141 houses) and their increase in the 16th century (1 758 living centres with 35 844 houses) shows that there was no evacuation of the population and in these regions have always been an Albanian population²⁷.

Both in the Macedonian regions and Kosova areas is inquired the massive Slavization of Albanian anthroponymy. Concrete data for these areas is brought in by the Sanxhaku copybook of Vuçiterni from the years of 1566-1574. So, for example nearly half of the inhabitants of the Albanian quarter in Yajoneve had no Albanian anthroponymy, even though they were called Albanians (Arbanas), but they kept Slav Orthodox names or mixed Albanian-Slav names. The same phenomenon is observed in some Albanian villages of Kosova, such as the districts of Kurshumlis of Nishi, which has as toponyms the surnames Arbanas, Arbansko etc. Hence, the Turkish well-known describer of travellings in the 60 years

of the 17th century, mentioned that the Vuçiterna people did not know how to speak the Bosnian language. They spoke Albanian and Turkish²⁸.

Patric Arseni III Cernojeviq, in a letter addressed to the royal court of Vienna dated 27.06.1968, announced that Kosova and its suburbs were populated by the Albanians and *Rasbiani... albanesi et resciano populo*". Nearly an identical content is seen in the correspondence of the Austrian emperor Leopold I with Patric Arsen III Cernojevic²⁹.

The presence of a great number of Albanians is also proved by the witnesses of the envoys of the papacy in the 18th century. So, from another report of Pjetër Mazreku, bishop of Prizreni, in the years 1623-1624, we learn that at that time there lived in Prizren 12 000 Muslims, mainly Albanians, 600 Serbians and 200 Albanian Catholics. The same situation was also found in other cities of Kosova, as well as in the other regions³⁰. When it is a question of the Catholic belief for the Albanians, it is of great importance to mention that they made up the greatest majority of believers not only in the areas of Kosova, but also in the other regions of southern Serbia. The documents of the Vatican prove the presence of Catholic Albanians in Prokuplje, Kurshumli, Nish etc³¹.

Likewise, the areas of today's Macedonia and Montenegro, as well as suburban regions of Kosova, were included in the concept of Albania. Such announcements

date from the early medieval times, like that of Father of Dukla in the second half of XIIth century. It says that Rasha or Serbia is extended up to Arbi (meaning the area of today's Llapi in Kosova)³².

As a part of Albania, we come across Kosova in the writings of the French chronicler of the 14th century, F. de Mezier, who proves that the Kosova battle was waged in the Albanian regions. The same identical thoughts can be found in the volumes of "Forli Annales" from the 15th century³³. According to the French describer of the 15th century, B. de la Broquere, the overwhelming majority of Kosova is included in the framework of the Albanian concept³⁴. We also find such notices in Austrian, Ottoman, and Italian documentation of the 17th century, such as the notices, "Prishtina is situated in Albania" and "Peja city in Albania"³⁵. The documentation of the time witnesses for Kosova as being part of the framework of the concept Epirus, in an equivalent way. Such notices are: "Hasi, which is not far from Prizereni, a province in Epir". "Piccolomini came to Prishtina" and "Peja in Epir"³⁶.

In the end I find it reasonable to underline that all the archival documentation and the relevant information discovered by most scientists, prove in an incontestable way the prevailing Albanian population in Kosova and in some areas of today's Macedonia and Montenegro not only during the 15th-17th centuries but also during all medieval ages. This disapproves directly the opinions of many Slav scholars, that allegedly, after the great immigration of the Serbians from Kosova at the end of the 17th century, the Albanian highlanders ran over and de-serbianized this area. They announce that during the centuries of the Medieval Ages from the contraction of the Albanian ethnic areas as a result of the continuous occupation of the country, the oppression and poverty there caused a part of the population to emigrate to Italy, Dalmatia, Greece, Austria, etc. Hence, we can say with no hesitation that the geographical area that was occupied by the Albanians during the Medieval Ages, is not a result of demographic explosions but of territorial contractions.

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