

FERIT DUKA

Coast and Hinterland in the Albanian Lands (16th–18th Centuries)

Since the last decade of the fourteenth century the Albanian territories began to be invaded by the Ottomans. The establishment of the Ottoman rule marks a turning point in the Albanian history creating a new political, social and economic reality in this important and interesting area of the western Balkans. All the Albanian lands became an integral part of the huge space governed by the Ottoman State being included into the administrative units created by the new governors (kazas, sandjaks, etc.). The economic life as well began to function based on the rules and the principles of the timar system. Fundamental changes also took place in the cultural and religious sphere of the Albanian society. As one of the most important features of this new reality, we should mention here the gradual penetration of Islam and the Islamization of the majority of the Albanians.

The Albanian coast as well became an important part of this new political, economic and social reality. To better understand this new situation of this area created by the coming of the Ottomans and the installation of their administration, it seems helpful to present here the main features which characterized the littoral cities under the new conditions of Ottoman rule. The main cities of the maritime façade of Ottoman Albania, Vlora (Valona, Avlonya) in the south, Durrës (Draç) and Kruja (Akçahisar) in the centre, Shkodra (Iskenderiye) and Lezha (Alessio, Lesh) in the north, after leaving the Venetian rule behind and entering the Ottoman one, began to be shaped in accordance with the new system and were transformed into important political and economic centres of the western part of the Ottoman space. Vlora and Shkodra became administrative centres of the homonymous sandjaks, while Durrës, Kruja and Lezha were centres of kazas or nahiyes. *Vlora* was one of the first Albanian cities that fell under Ottoman rule. In 1417, this city along with Kanina (another city close to Vlora) was surrendered to the Ottomans by the local ruler Rugina Balsha.¹ We have no evi-

¹ Historia e Shqipërisë. Vol. 1. Ed. A. BUDA et al. Tirana 1959, 248.

dence showing that the city acquired any importance in the following decades of the 15th century. It mostly remained a centre of a kaza. Yet in the years 1479–80, we see that the city of Vlora with its surrounding villages were mentioned in a defter of mukataa-s as “kaza of Avlonya” among the other kazas (Elbasan, Shpat, Berat, Gjirokastra and Delvina) of the *Albanian sandjak (Iiva-i Arnavud)*.² Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the creation of the sandjak of Vlora is chronologically related to the period between 1480 and 1490, a time when the Ottomans began to consolidate their rule in the Albanian lands.³ Hereafter the city of Vlora as a centre of the homonym sandjak was seen by the new rulers as an important strategic basis for the Ottoman invasion of the western shore of the Adriatic sea.⁴ Due to its strategic position and its favourite place in the framework of the political and military projects of the Ottoman state, during the first half of the 16th century, Vlora showed a rapid social and economic development. The high dynamics of such developments are illustrated especially by the impressive population growth of the city. According to the Ottoman records of this period, the population of Vlora in 1506 counted 762 households (hane)⁵ while in 1520 it rose to 1367 households. Divided into quarters (mahalle), the demographic situation of the city in the latter year appears as follows:

1. The quarter <i>Yorgi Venedik</i>	97 households (hane)
2. The quarter <i>Serenkovat (Sarankolet)</i>	139 households
3. The quarter <i>Kakuri</i>	104 households (in the defter are recorded 102 ones) ⁶
4. The quarter <i>Patropoulos</i>	113 households
5. The quarter <i>Apsiton (Apstion?)</i>	90 households
6. The quarter <i>Papa Mihal</i>	61 households
7. The quarter <i>Thomai</i>	89 households
8. The quarter consisting of emigrants from <i>Kanina</i>	21 households
9. The community of the <i>musellems</i> (individuals exempted from tax-paying due to certain services given to the Ottoman state)	132 households

² İstanbul Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (further: IBOA), MAD, Mukataat defteri, Nr.176, 314.

³ In relation to this fact we can acknowledge that the Albanian sandjak as well ceased to exist just after the creation of the sandjak of Vlora which would include a major part of the first one.

⁴ Historia e Shqipërisë, 305–306; K. GIAKOUMIS, The Ottoman Campaign to Otranto and Apulia (1480–1481), in: The Turks–Ottomans. Ed. H. C. GUZEL/Kemal ÇIÇEK/Salim KOCA. Vol. 3, 191.

⁵ IBOA, Tapu Tahrir Defterleri (further: TTD), Nr. 34, 3.

⁶ Ibid., 81.

10. The *Hebrews*, divided into the following quarters:

The <i>Old Quarter</i> with the <i>Quarter of the Spanish Community</i>	101 households
The quarter <i>Moisi Mezistrin</i> ⁷	28 households
The quarter <i>Joseph</i> , the son of Moisi, ⁸ the son of Selemo	12 households
The quarter <i>Matia</i> , the son of Moisi	45 households
The quarter <i>Angelo</i>	19 households
The quarter <i>The Catalans</i>	9 households
The quarter <i>Isak</i> , the son of Sinonia (Sinovina?)	13 households
The quarter <i>Yahoda Isak</i> , of the Sicilians (Çilçiljan)	17 households
The quarter <i>Nesim</i> , the son of Joseph, a physician	14 households
The quarter <i>The Portuguese community</i> of the Hebrews of Vlora	76 households
The quarter <i>Kalabrese (Kalavres)</i>	15 households
The quarter <i>Selemo Haron</i> , of the community of Otranto	54 households
The quarter <i>Iasha (?) Mechaleto (?)</i>	128 households

If we consider carefully the changes in the demographic panorama of Vlora in the course of the 16th century we may notice a constant decrease in the number of the urban population as a clear tendency for that time. Based on the evidence extracted from the detailed defter of the sandjak of Vlora in 1583, the city registered a total of 962 householders (including bachelors as well),⁹; thus, one may estimate the number of households without bachelors at 800.¹⁰ The following quarters were specified in the register:

1. The quarter (<i>unnamed – F. D.</i>)	243 individuals (neferen)
2. The quarter <i>Orta Mahalle (Middle Quarter)</i>	194 individuals
3. The quarter <i>Tuzla (Salt-works)</i>	184 individuals
4. <i>The community of the salt-cellars (tuzcuyan)</i> of Vlora:	
The quarter <i>Narta</i>	79 individuals
The quarter <i>Gorica</i>	10 individuals
	(2 of them from the village of Panaya)
5. <i>The community of the Hebrews of Vlora:</i>	
The quarter <i>Danial (Daniel, Dhaskal?)</i>	54 individuals
The quarter <i>Shelemo Ahron</i>	41 individuals
The quarter <i>Hatrosh (Katrosh?)</i>	37 individuals
The quarter <i>Museliç</i>	30 individuals
The quarter <i>Moisi Protokal</i> (it must be: <i>Portugal-Portugese</i>)	25 individuals
The quarter <i>Moisi Hekim (Physician)</i>	24 individuals

⁷ From Mezistra (Mistra) of Peloponnesus.

⁸ The Ottoman registrar has written it in the form “Musa”, a traditional manner of writing and pronouncing this name in Turkish.

⁹ In the defter it is incorrectly written 916 individuals.

¹⁰ Ankara Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi (further: ATKGMA), Defter-i mufasal-i liva-i Avlonya, Nr. 62, 9–13.

The decrease of the population of Vlora mostly during the second half of the 16th century may be explained by several reasons. We can mention here the effects of the epidemics (in 1557 Vlora had been touched by the pest),¹¹ the periodical emigration from the local Jews community, the negative impact caused by the occasional military conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and the western powers,¹² and the gradual loss of the importance of the city as an administrative centre of one of the main Albanian sandjaks. About the middle of the 16th century a considerable part of the southern lands of the sandjak had been separated to form the new sandjak of Delvina.¹³

Beside Vlora the city of *Durrës* (*Durazzo*, *Draç*) as well played an important role as one of the main doors of the communication between the eastern and the western side of the Adriatic Sea since Antiquity until Modern Times. The city still preserves many traces of its turbulent past. After it had been administrated by Venice since 1392, Durrës was taken in August 1501 by the Ottoman army under the command of the sandjakbey of Elbasan.¹⁴ The city became a centre of the homonymous kaza within the sandjak of Elbasan. It seems that the inhabitants left the city and fled either to Venice or other states of the Apennine peninsula; some found shelter in the surrounding villages. An Ottoman defter from the early 16th century illustrates the dramatic situation of Durrës immediately after it had fallen into the hands of the Ottomans. Aside from 118 defenders (*mustahfizân*) of the castle, nobody else had been registered in the above-mentioned defter as inhabitant of the city.¹⁵ This demographic collapse marked Durrës for almost the entire 16th century. That is the reason why more than eight decades later, the detailed defter of the above-mentioned sandjak compiled in 1583, shows that the city wasn't inhabited with the exception of *the community of the defenders of the castle (mustahfizân-i kila'-i Draç)*.¹⁶ This particular situation has been confirmed by different travellers as well. Passing through the Al-

¹¹ G. VEINSTEIN, Une communauté ottomane: les Juifs d'Avlonya (Valona) dans la deuxième moitié du XVI-e siècle, in: *Gli Ebrei à Venezia, secoli XIV–XVIII*. Ed. G. Cozzi. Milan 1987, 786.

¹² F. DUKA, Hebrenjtë në Shqipëri. Bashkësitë e Vlorës dhe të Beratit (shek. XVI–XVIII), *Studime Historike* 39 (2002) 3–4, 17.

¹³ To confirm this we can mention the Ottoman registration of the new sandjak of Delvina around the middle of the 16th century. The data provided by this registration is reflected in a new detailed defter. See IBOA, TTD, Defter-i mufassal-i livai-i Delvine, Nr. 273, year 958H/1551.

¹⁴ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*. Vol. 1. Ed. K. PRIFTI et al. Tirane 2002, 477.

¹⁵ IBOA, TTD, Nr. 367, year 905 Hicri.

¹⁶ Ankara Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi (further: ATKGMA), Defter Nr. 66, 87, 114.

banian lands, they inform us that Durrës had lost its importance more or less for a considerable part of the 16th century. Some of them described Durrës of this time as fallen into ruin.¹⁷ It seems that the city started to revive towards the end of the century, since according to some information given again by travelers, Durrës in this time was inhabited by Turks (Muslim Albanians – F. D.) and Catholic Albanians.¹⁸ While it seems that the situation of Durrës worsened during the first century of Ottoman rule, Bashtova, another coastal dwelling centre to the south of this city continued to serve as a wharf in the estuary of the Shkumbin (a river passing through Middle Albania). Bashtova is mentioned in an Ottoman defter of 1566 as “nefs-i Bashtova” (Bashtova itself, town of Bashtova).¹⁹ Although in the Ottoman defter Bashtova is presented as a town, from the demographic point of view it encompassed a very small amount of the population (58 individuals). The majority of them are registered as Muslims, except 7–8 individuals who had kept the Christian faith.²⁰ Another dwelling centre mentioned in the same defter as “Cavalia” (certainly a Latin name; today Kavaya) was situated between Durrës and Bashtova; in the second half of the 16th century, it appeared not as a town, but as a village (in Ottoman *kariye*).²¹

The city of *Shkodra* (*Scutari*, *Iskenderiye*) in the north of Albania may be considered as a typical case when one speaks of the new features and tendencies characterizing the development of the Albanian cities during the Ottoman era. Being for a long time (1396 – 1479) a stronghold in the chain of the Venetian possessions on the eastern shore of the Adriatic, Shkodra passed under the Ottoman domination after a fierce military confrontation between the Venetian and Albanian defenders and the Ottoman army, which ended in January 1479 with the surrender of the city to the Ottomans. The demographic situation of the newly invaded Shkodra presented in an Ottoman defter of 1485 clearly reflects the dramatic consequences of the above-mentioned battle. The population of the city didn't exceed 80 households (hanes). No quarter is mentioned.²² Fifteen years later, just at the beginning of the 16th century, although Shkodra had been registered as a “kasaba” (small town – F. D.), it showed a significant growth of population (from 80

¹⁷ S. YERASIMOS, *Les voyageurs dans l'Empire Ottoman*. Ankara 1991, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ ATKGMA, Defter Nr. 66, 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²² S. PULAHA, *Defteri i regjistrimit të sanxhakut të Shkodrës i vitit 1485*. Tirana 1974, 135–136.

to 146 households).²³ In this time the town had a community of Muslims divided into three mahalles (quarters): Mosque, Hasan and Hoshkadem, and also a community of Christians (Gebran) divided into two mahalles: Stamat and Berditsa.²⁴ From the demographic evolution of Shkodra in the course of 16th century, it results that though the urban population increased in the second half of the century, the town was still less populated than other urban centres of the Albanian region as Vlora, Berat or Elbasan. The detailed defter of the sandjak of Shkodra (1582) shows that the urban population rose to 282 households which were divided into eight quarters:

Cami-i Şerif (Sacred Mosque)	61 households
Velijan Bey	35 households
Tophane or Hasan Marshin	46 households
Suleyman Ahmed or Haji Resul	60 households
Ali Bey	62 households
Pukla (Pumlla?)	18 households
(I) Stamad	empty
Berditsa or Wlachs	empty ²⁵

After the 16th century, the urban population increased as a result of the economic development of Shkodra and the political role that the city obtained during the 17th and 18th centuries. While Vlora suffered a gradual decrease of its population, Shkodra became a major urban centre.

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CHANGES: THE ISLAMIZATION

As we had stressed above, the establishment of the Ottoman rule caused fundamental changes regarding the religious and cultural sphere of the cities of the Albanian coast as well. Not only individuals pertaining to the administrative and military bodies but also a considerable part of the mass of the urban population gradually converted to Islam. There is no doubt that the coastal cities manifested differences regarding the time and the rhythms of the process of Islamization. Although Vlora had been conquered by the Ottomans at a very early stage (1417), it succeeded at least until 1583 in preserving its overwhelmingly Christian character and presents thus a very specific case in the Albanian lands. In contrast, the mass-islamization of the

²³ IBOA, TTD, Nr. 367, 305.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ ATKGMA, Defter-i mufassal-i liva-i Iskenderiye, Nr. 59, 6–8; S. PULAHA, Qytetet shqiptare nën regjimin feudal-ushtarak osman gjatë shek. XV–XVI, *Monumentet* 1 (1980), 41.

population of Shkodra started immediately after its surrender (1479). Only 6–7 years later we see that more than 30% of the urban population had converted to Islam, while in the second half of the 16th century (1582) 100% of the Shkodran population had been islamized.²⁶

The Islamization of the majority of the population of the coastal cities marked the biggest loss for Albanian Christianity, especially for Catholicism. The massive penetration of Islam among the population of the coastal cities had been accompanied with deep changes in the social and cultural life of the population. The Muslim communities hereafter became an important component of the urban society. The number of mosques, tekes, medreses, imarets, etc. had increased quickly, while the urban space had been reshaped in accordance with a new model which was in some kind similar to the model of the Islamic (Ottoman) city. Elements of this model are mentioned in one of the Ottoman defters which described Shkodra (1500–1501) as: *Kasabadur, pazardur; bir hamamı ve iki camisi var (it is a small town, it is a bazaar; it has one bath and two mosques)*.²⁷ In the 17th century, the religious character of Shkodra, Vlora and Durrës underwent significant changes. The Turkish traveler Evliya Çelebi observed in Shkodra: “[...] the town outside the walls consists of 1800 one-and-two-story stonework houses with slate and tiled roofs and surrounded by vineyards and gardens. The inhabitants are all Muslim. There are 15 quarters, of which the best known are: Bayezid Khan quarter; Ali Beg quarter; Huseyn Beg quarter; Iskele-bashi (Docks) quarter; Mufti quarter; Kara Hasan quarter and the Courthouse quarter at the end of the bazaar. There are 11 prayer-niches (congregational mosques). First is the mosque of Sultan Bayezid II the Saint at the end of the bazaar. In front of it is a well with delicious water and an iron chain. It is definitely the finest of the mosques, an exquisite building with a tiled roof, and has a large congregation. Then comes the mosque of Huseyn Beg in the Ali Beg quarter; the Mufti mosque at the Docks and the mosque of Kara Hasan. These are all well-known and radiant mosques with tiled roofs. Aside from these, there are 70 other prayer-houses.”²⁸

During the same time, the city of Vlora as well manifested clear signs of an oriental city. Between the fortress and the open town, Çelebi wrote there was a broad meadow used for public worship which could encompass 2000 people. From the fortress to the open town, the meadow was more than 1000

²⁶ Historia e popullit shqiptar, 590.

²⁷ IBOA, TTD, Nr. 367, 365.

²⁸ Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid). Ed. R. DANKOFF/R. ELSIE. Leiden, Boston, Köln 2000, 34–35.

paces long. There were several quarters (Çelebi mentions no number – F. D.) as those of Hünkâr mosque, Mumci-zade, the Tanners, Huseyn Aga, the Courthouse and the Bazaar. They all had prayer-niches (Çelebi mentions no number – F. D.). Among them was the lovely Sultan Suleyman mosque with a chiseled stone dome covered in lead and with a fallen minaret.²⁹ Çelebi mentions as well the mosques of Mumci-zade, Huseyn Aga and that of the fortress.³⁰ From Çelebi's work we learn that Vlora had also three medreses and three dervish convents, including the Halveti tekke of Yakub Efendi with hundreds of devout dervishes, barefooted and bareheaded, with patched woolen cloaks.³¹

THE TIMAR SYSTEM

The coastal cities like the other cities of Albania had been included into the timar system. Vlora, Durrës and Shkodra, because of their big revenues, had been assigned as hases to sancakbeys (Shkodra) or the Sultan (Vlora and Durrës). The urban population was obliged to pay a range of taxes to the has owner. The inhabitants of Shkodra had been discharged (muaf) from the taxes of avariz-i divaniye and nüzul which were replaced by the obligation to defend and repair the bridge over the river of Buna (Boyana) built by Mehmet the Conqueror.³² Apart from the above-mentioned towns, the majority of the huge sources of revenues existing in or around them had been included into the fiscal units named “mukataa” which, as a rule, were a part of the hases of the Sultans. Important parts of the mukataas were the salt-works, the mines of bitumen (near Vlora), fishing etc. However we must point out that the customs remained the main source of revenue that the Ottoman treasury received from the Albanian coast. Vlora and Shkodra had their own Kanunnames, which regulated the economic activity in these cities and their surroundings.³³

THE ALBANIAN COAST BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE WEST

The essential changes that the establishment of the Ottoman rule brought to the Albanian society including the coastal area should not create the impres-

²⁹ Ibid., 139–141.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Defter-i mufassal-i liva-i Iskenderiye, Nr. 59, 5; PULAHA, Qytetet shqiptare, 41.

³³ Ibid.; Burime të zgjedhura për Historinë e Shqipërisë. Vol. 3. Ed. I. ZAMPUTI/S. N. NAÇI/Z. SHKODRA. Tirana 1962, 50–64.

sion that Ottoman Albania closed all the doors to the western world. It would be very important to understand that the Albanian territories and the Albanian coast in particular, being a considerable part of the western frontier line of the Ottoman Empire, had not only formed a contact area between the Albanians and the West, but at the same time an area of confrontation between the Ottomans and the West in a wider sense. Therefore we should see this area as a terrain of a continual interaction, rivalry, conflicts and communication as well. The historical sources show that the communication of the Albanians with the West during the Ottoman era as well were not interrupted. To be more persuasive let us shortly analyze two of the main factors which continued to link the Albanian coast and Albania in general with the western side of the Adriatic:

1. THE PERIODICAL MOVEMENT OF POPULATIONS:

The establishment of the Ottoman rule in the Albanian lands caused during the centuries a massive emigration of the Albanians toward the West. The main destination of the Albanian emigrants was the Apennine Peninsula from the north to the south. Particularly, we should mention the settlement of Albanians in such important cities as Ancona and Venice. In Venice since the 15th century the Albanian community gathered regularly in the church of San Severo under the protection of the Lady of Shkodra. In 1442, the “Scuola degli Albanesi” had been created in Venice.³⁴ The Albanian Diaspora in Italy played a very important role in the affirmation of the Albanian nation there. On the other hand, since the end of the 15th century a considerable Jewish population, displaced by violence from the different countries of Western Europe, settled in great number mainly in the city of Vlora. Within about three decades, Vlora became one of the main centres of Jewish life countries in the Balkans.³⁵ The Jewish community of Vlora had a leading role in the activation of the economic life of the city, and in the Adriatic trade as well, investing here their rich experience accumulated before in their countries of origin.³⁶

³⁴ P. CABANNES et al., *Historia e Adriatikut* [translated from French into Albanian by A. KLOSI & A. LESKAJ]. Tirana 2005, 242.

³⁵ S. J. SHAW, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*. New York 1991, 38.

³⁶ A Hebrew named Abraham Trinç represented in 1514 the merchants of Vlora who earned privileges from the Council of Ancona; see F. DUKA, *Fasada bregdetare e Shqipërisë osmane. Qyteti i Vlorës gjatë shek. XV–XVII*, *Studime Historike* 41 (2004) 3–4, 13.

2. THE TRADE

During the Ottoman rule the Albanians continued to be a very important factor in the Adriatic trade. Since the first half of 16th century, Vlora possessed a very powerful class of merchants. A significant indicator of the role that the merchants of Vlora played in the Adriatic trade is reflected in their mentioning in documents issued by the administrations of the well-known centres in the Adriatic trade as Ancona. In January 1514, the Council of this city made a decision which aimed at facilitating the trade activity of the merchants of Vlora. Four years later again, the Council of Ancona gave some privileges to the above-mentioned merchants regarding the costumes taxes.³⁷ During the 17th and 18th centuries, Durrës and Shkodra had been turned into important centres of trade. During the 18th century, the main destination of the activity of the merchants of Shkodra (about 40 people) was Venice.³⁸ They had their agents there, who arranged the trade operation. A considerable volume of the Albanian trade was realized in Durrës as well. The huge revenues coming from the customs of this city during the 18th century caused a permanent rivalry and conflicts between the Albanian pashas and beys who endeavoured to obtain the license from the Porte in order to manage the mukataa of the above-mentioned city.³⁹ In addition, the cultural exchanges between the Albanians and the western side of the Adriatic Sea that occurred in the course of the Ottoman centuries formed another basic component of the communication between the two sides of the sea. Important books written by Albanian intellectuals had been published in Venice and other cities of Apennine Peninsula. Albanian students of theology had been sent to Italian universities and seminaries.⁴⁰ We should also mention the presence of Albanians at the military service in the West (Venice). The Himariots from a region in the south of Vlora were well-known for such services.

I would like to end this study by pointing out that the complexity of these factors and tendencies counterbalancing each other would later constitute a very important part of the historical background of the Albanian movement for national emancipation and independence.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁸ For this topic see B. McGOWAN, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe*. London 1977, 20, 31, 40–41, 43.

³⁹ *Historia e Shqipërisë*, 420–424.

⁴⁰ CABANNES et al, 316–317.