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The Arberesh: the Christian Albanian emigration to Italy

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L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

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Part One

If we attempt to highlight the Albanian emigration taking place in the early 1990's due to the long politico-administrative crisis of the Enverist government, we can make a connection between the mid-XV century and 1774 which represents the consolidation of the Arberesh nucleus in Italy.

The first Albanian soldiers arrived in our country (Italy) under the orders of Dhimiter Reres, who was called upon by Alfonso I il magnonimo, King of two Sicilys, (1442-58, V di Aragona 1416-58), to intervene in Calabria against the adversary of the Iberian monarch. Alfonso II delegated to Reres political responsibilities in Ulterior Calabria (1448). Dhimiter's sons, Gjergj and Vasil, established themselves in Sicily thus giving life to Albanian communities in the provinces of Agrigento, Catania and Palermo. The intensification of the relationship between the kingdom of the two Sicilys and that of the Albania of Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbeg soon helped Ferdinando I il Bastardo (1458-94) in his fight against Angioni, obtaining lands in Puglia. Because of the acceleration of the Turkish offensive in Albania after the demise of Skenderbeg in 1468, numerous of his soldiers remained in Ivi to which others were added who took refuge in Italy with other Christians thereby giving life to Campomarino, Casalnuovo Monterotaro, Casavecchio of Puglia, Chieuti, Martino, San Marzano of San Giuseppe, San Paolo of Civitate, Santa Croce of Magliano, Sternatia, Ururi and Zollino. Skenderbeg (1405-68) until his death fought to ensure the freedom of his country in an epoch during which the Ottoman Turks threatened the entire West from the gates of Vienna (in a museum in that city to this day, Skenderbeg's helmet and his sword are still preserved). Skenderbeg was a highly educated man, (he knew five languages). He was a catholic, an extraordinary diplomat, and the originator of guerilla warfare. In 1461, Pius II (1405-64) had sought his help in the common fight against the Turkish enemy.

In 1470 after the marriage of Irena Kastrioti to the prince of Bisognano (a great feudal lord of Calabria), many of the Albanians of Puglia moved with the noble Irena to the land of her consort, thus populating Macchia Albanese, San Cosmo Albanese, San Demetrio Corone, San Giorgio Albanese, Spezzano Albanese and Vacarizzo Albanese. After the fall of Kruja (1478), the legendary capital of Scanderbeg's resistance against the Turks, new Albanian arrivals inhabited the towns of Acquafredda, Castrolibero, Cavallerizzo, Cervicati, Cerzeto, Civita, Falconara Albanese, Firmo, Frascineto, Lungro, Mongrassano, Plataci, Porcile, Rota Greca, San Basile, San Benedetto, Ullano, San Giacomo di Acri, San Lorenzo del Vallo, San Martino di Finita, Santa Caterina Albanese, Santa Sofia di Epiro, Serra d'Aiello, etc.

The great Albanian emigration of the half second millennium concluded in 1533-34 when Albanian families began settling in Naples, on the island of Lipari, with the majority settling in Melfi, Brindisi, Montagna, Farneta, Maschito, and San Constanto Albanese. Afterwards, other refugees arrived in 1467 (Barile), 1744 (Villa Badessa), and in 1774 (Brindisi Montagna). Other groups of arberesh settled in the territory of Parenzo and in the village of Peroi (Istria e Pola); the colony of Peroi rose after a concession from Venice which welcomed some families that were commercially connected with Serenissima. Albanians between the fourteenth and fifteenth hundreds settled in Bari, Bosco Tosca and Pievetta Dogana Po (Piacenza), Cardevole (Corsica) and Rimini.

Some Albanians preferred to enlist in the Spanish army to fight heroically in European wars. The most well-known was the Albanian cavalry of Venice, the so-called Stratiotes, and the Albanian infantry of Naples, the Real Macedone, created by King Carlos VII [1734-59, III of Spain: 1759-88]).

The Albanian refugees were considered Catholics by the local ecclesiastical authorities. Latinization, or the threat of such a measure, let alone the form

of a mixture of Latin and Byzantine liturgies, was imposed on many Albanian colonies. However, the reigning pontiff of Albanian origin Clemente XI (in-fra) under the initiative of the arberesh priest, Stefano Rodota, accepted a proposal to establish a college of the Byzantine rite in Calabria as well as the nomination of a bishop assigned to the clergy of this now firmly established rite. The opposition of the Latin bishops delayed to a great extent this activity but, in 1732, Clement XII (1730-40) granted to whoever would undertake the project the goods of the Abbey of San Benedetto Uiano along with a considerable donation of money. Through the disposition of the Holy Father, the Byzantine bishop was given complete authority at the college along with full rights to administer the clergy of the Byzantine churches. Yet, the clergy of the Byzantine rite remained under the supervision of the Latin hierarchy. This is the reason that for the Albanians of Sicily was established a college in Palermo by Carlo VII and Ferdinando IV (1759-1806, 1815-25) who assigned to that jurisdiction a bishop seated in the Sicilian capital (1784).

The activities of the Albanians to obtain official acceptance of their Byzantine rite were finally granted during the second half of the 1600s in an authoritative document by Pompilio Rodota titled "The origin, progress, and present status of the Greek rite in Italy." This arberesh identity was further recognized by Leone VIII (1878-1903), who eliminated all liturgical additions that were incompatible with the Byzantine rite. Afterwards in 1919 during the pontificate of Benedetto XV (1914-22) the (Byzantine) diocese of Lungro was founded in Calabria, and in 1937, under the leadership of Pius XI (1922-39), the diocese of Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily, and, at the same time, the diocese of the Abbey of Saint Mary of Grottaferrata (Rome).

Part Two

Pope Clement XI and the Albani Family

The ongoing objective of Clement XI (Gian Francesco Albani, b. 1649, 1700-21) to unify Christianity had significant results in Albania where the Catholic and Orthodox churches were united for a period of time. Clement XI, after becoming aware of his Albanian origins, became very interested in the political and religious rebirth of his fatherland. During this period the "First Albanian National Council" (1703) took place which decisively proclaimed clerical guidelines relative to dogmatic, moral, canon and pastoral questions. Meanwhile there was good news even for the orthodox church. After a first attempt to arrive at some sort of unification did not work, a second attempt was made to establish archbishoprics in Ocrida and Skopje. From 1628, a mission of Byzantine rite had already taken hold in Himara. In the 18th century in the northeastern and central areas of Albania appeared the phenomena of crypto-Christianity, which is present even in our time (in particular during the Enverist period). Among those who embraced Islam, many preferred the sect that was the most heterodox and closer to Christianity – the Bektashi.

The Albani family was founded by two Albanian brothers, George and Phillip of Michele de' Lazi, previously fighters under Skenderbeg. They found refuge in Urbino, where Federico and Guidobaldo from Montefeltro entrusted them with diplomatic matters during wartime. They took the last name "Albanesi" that Altobello (1445-1564) son of George, changed to "Albani." The Albani family, besides Clement XI, produced other illustrious personages — cardinals, diplomats, and important statesmen: Giovanni Girolamo, (1509-91), cardinal, vice commander of armed forces of the Serenissima Republic, in two conclaves candidate in Soglio di Pietro, stereograph and personal judicial consultant of Gregorio XIII (1572-85) and Sisto V (1585-90); Orazio (1576-1653): diplomat, appointed senator of Rome by Urbano VIII (1623-44); Anibale (1682-1751): canon of St. Peter, president of the Apostolic Council, secretary of Memoriali, cardinal (1711) and extraordinary diplomatic representative in Vienna, where he worked for the ratification of the election of Emperor Carlo VI (1711-40), representative of St. Romana church, arch-priest in Vatican Basilica, bishop of Sabina and then of Porto and Santa Rufina, vice doyen at the Sacred College; Alessandro (1692-1779); at the age of fifteen colonel of the armed pontificate who gave up a military career, secretary of Memoriali, correspondent in Vienna, cardinal (1721), librarian in St. Romana church, Austrian ambassador in Rome, protector of the Sardinian kingdom, protector and friend of Winckelmann, constructor of the Albani Villa, and an extraordinary patron; Gian Francesco (1720-1803) cardinal (1753), protector of Polish Affairs, participated in the negotiation with Caterina II (1762-93) to regulate the situation of Catholics in Russia, bishop of Sabina then of Porto and Santa Rufina until in 1775 when he became doyen of the Sacred College, bishop in Ostia and Vallettri, defender of the Pontific State against the French revolution and supporter of the election of Clement XIII (1758-1769) and Pius VII (1800-23); Giuseppe (1750-1834): representative of the counsel of Pius VI (1755-99), was sent to Vienna to get the blessed strip for the baptism of archbishop Ferdinando who afterwards became Emperor (1833-48), cardinal (1801), protector of the Austrian Empire, pre-secretary of Brevi and the League of Bologna, Secretary of State for Pius VIII (1829-30), librarian in Santa Romana church, bishop of Urbino and legate of Pesaro and Urbino. In 1852 the family tree was extended with Filippo. In the East, we find another great Albanian family of royal vizirs of the Ottoman Empire, contemporaries of the Albani in XVII-XVIII century: the Keprylu (Koprulu).

Even before Clement XI, we find there were three other pontiffs of Albanian origin: Saint Eleutherius, (175-189), Saint Caius, (283-296) and John IV (640-642).

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KOSOVA: THE KAÇAK MOVEMENT (1918)

In 1918, disaffected Kosova Albanians, who had rallied around Hasan Prishtina, formed a "Committee for the National Defence of Kosova" in Shkodra, their main demand being the reunification of Albanian lands. A general revolt started, known as the Kaçak (outlaw) movement, led by Azem Betja-Galica against the incorporation of Kosova into the newly proclaimed 'kingdom of Serbia, Croats, and Slovenes' otherwise known as the first Yugoslavia. The Committee issued strict guidelines to the Kaçak fighters, urging insurgents not to harm local Slavs, burn houses or churches, or mistreat victims — instructions which were in stark contrast to Serbian activities in Kosova. The movement enjoyed considerable support from Albania, especially after 1920 when three well-known Kosovar Albanians became senior officials in Albania's government — Hasan Prishtina, a member of parliament, Hoxhe Kadriu, Minister of Justice, and Bajram Curri, Minister of War. The key task for Belgrade, therefore, was to destabilize Albania, and an effort was made to this end, with the encouragement of the Catholic areas in Mirdita, north-east of Tirana, to proclaim an independent republic — something that the Montenegrins had several times attempted in the past, with some success. But the new interior minister, Ahmet Zogu, managed to route the Mirdita rebels, who returned with Yugoslav forces to take some territory in northern Albania.

The Kaçak movement began to suffer, mostly as a result of politics inside Albania. The Kosova leaders fell out with Zog, and Prishtina, who briefly became Albania's prime minister, tried to dismiss him, but this ended in street fighting between the rivals' supporters.

Zog became prime minister on 2 December 1922. His squabbles with the Kosova leaders had turned him into a fierce opponent of the Kaçak rebellion, and of Kosova in particular; hence the end of Albania's short-lived support of Kosova. Zog sentenced the Kaçak leader, Betja, and Prishtina to death in absentia and had Prishtina assassinated in 1933. Betja died after being wounded in 1924 and the Kaçak movement withered away afterwards.

Two years after coming to power, Zog experienced the first and only significant challenge to his authority when he was forced out of office by a more liberal coalition led by Bishop Fan Noli and supported by Bajram Curri. Zog retreated to Yugoslavia where he was supplied with money and men and returned to stage a coup six months later. From then onwards, he became a virtual vassal of the Serbs, and the question of Kosova was buried. However, his Serbian vassalage did not last long and Zog's government and chances of survival were to remain subject to the whims of Italy and Yugoslavia. When, in 1928, Zog proclaimed himself King Zog I, transforming the country into a monarchy, political pragmatism had led him to abandon the Serbs in favor of Italian promises of economic assistance. With Italian blessing, the Albanian leader proceeded to style himself 'King of the Albanians'. The title infuriated Belgrade as it openly signalled territorial claims to Kosova and other Albanian-inhabited lands in Yugoslavia although Zog displayed no intention of planning any such thing.

The plight of the Albanians annexed into the first Yugoslavia worsened when a Belgrade programme aimed at changing the ethnic composition of Kosova and Macedonia had begun after the Balkan wars, pursuant to the 'Decree on the Settlement of Newly Liberated and Annexed Regions of the Kingdom of Serbia' of 20 February 1914. However, its implementation had been interrupted by the start of hostilities. When the war ended, the agrarian reform began, culminating in decrees passed in 1931 aimed at forcing Albanians out of their lands, with, among other things, new regulations requiring all land to pass into state property unless the owner could produce Yugoslav title-deeds — something few Albanians had been issued with. A fuller platform for the colonization of Kosova was worked out by Vaso Cubrilovic in 1937 in the form of a memorandum called 'The Expulsion of Arnauts'.* Some of its draconian measures were implemented in the interwar period — which coincided with the signing in 1938 of an agreement between the Yugoslav and Turkish governments on the deportation to Turkey of huge numbers of Albanians. But the Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939 and the onset of World War II subjected the country and its people to a different kind of fate.

* 'Arnaut' – old Turkish for 'Albanian'

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The Four Albanian Popes

Pope Saint Eleutherius (175-189)

Pope Saint Caius (283-296)

Pope John IV (640-642)

Pope Clement XI (1700-1721)

In the official newspaper of the Vatican in Rome, L'Osservatore Romano*, Giovanni Armillotta published an article titled "Pope Clement XI and the Albani Family" in which he stated that the prominent Albani family in Italy was founded by two Albanian brothers, George and Filip of Michele dei Lazi, who fought the Turks alongside the 15th century Albanian folkhero, Gjergj Kastrioti, known in Europe as Scanderbeg (1405-1468). As a military leader of outstanding capabilities, Scanderbeg united hitherto warring Albanian clans into a common army to battle the invading Turks thus preventing the Ottoman Empire from extending into Europe.

The Albani brothers took the name "Albanesi" that George's son, Altobello (1454-1564) had changed to "Albani". In addition to Pope Clement XI (1700-1721), Armillotta states that the Albani family produced other illustrious personages who became cardinals, diplomats, and important statesmen including Giovanni Girolamo (1509-91) cardinal, Orazio (1576-1653) statesman, Anibale (1682-1751) cardinal, Alessandro (1692-1779) cardinal, and Guiseppe (1750-1834) cardinal.

Armillotta concludes his article in L'Osservatore Romano by stating that "even before Clement XI (1700-1721), we find there were three other Pontiffs of Albanian origin: Saint Eleutherius (175-189), Saint Caius (283-296), and Pope John IV (640-742)".

Pope Saint Eleutherius (175-189)**

Eleutherius spread the Bible to many countries of the Roman Empire. While the legend that an English king Lucius sought baptism from Eleutherius may be fiction, the pope sent a mission to the British which was then a Roman province. He is believed to be the first Albanian pope.

Pope Saint Caius (283-296)

Caius decreed that before a man would be bishop, he must first be porter, reader, exorcist, acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon, and priest. He divided the districts of Rome among the deacons. It was during the pontificate of Caius that Diocletian ascended the imperial throne.

Pope John IV (640-642)

John IV did not forget his native land which was being harried by Serbs. He sent funds to Dalmatia to help redeem the poor natives who had been carried off by barbarians. He also secured relics from the its troubled churches and built a church in Rome to house them.

Pope Clement XI (1700-1721)

Born in Urbano, Italy, of the Albani family whose forebears fought for the Turks for 25 years alongside the 15th century folkhero of the Albanians, Scanderbeg thus preventing the Ottoman Turks from overrunning Europe. Clement XI also fostered foreign missions but was unsuccessful in converting Czar Peter the Great.

* L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO Year CXL -N 139 (42.777), Vatican City, Wednesday, June 20, 2001

** See Frosina infobit: Saint Eleutherius: the First Albanian Pope.

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Scanderbeg on the English Stage

Author: Peter Rennie

In the 18th Century when the Ottomans were suffering reverses in Central Europe, there was a revival of interest in the earlier struggle of the 15th century Albanian national hero, Scanderbeg, against them in Albania. Not only did Scanderbeg serve as the subject for operas by Vivaldi and two French composers, Francouer and Lacedepe, but he was also the hero in three English plays dealing with his defence of the fortress in Kruje against the forces of Sultan Amurith in 1450.

The first to be written, but never performed, was Scanderbeg or Love and Liberty by Thomas Whincop who was rector of a London church. According to the preface to the play, which was printed in 1747, the reason for its non-performance was due to the difficulties encountered by his widow in getting a theatre to put on a performance, and to the "caprices" of theatre managers. An account of the life of Scanderbeg is given along with drawings of scenes from the play, one of which depicts Scanderbeg wearing a turban and mounted on a horse. Interestingly, the Albanian translator, Skender Lularasi, translated the text into Albanian in 1920, but it was not until 1967 on the eve of the 500th anniversary of Scanderbeg's death in January 1468 that it was published by the Naim Frasheri publishing house in Tirana.

In 1733 William Havard (1710-1778) an actor and dramatist, son of a Dublin vitner, published his play entitled Scanderbeg. It was performed twice at the Goodman's Fields Theatre in London, but with little success. He faced allegations that he had stolen the plot from Whincop whose play was in the hands of the manager of Goodman's Fields. Havard is buried in the courtyard of St. Paul's, adjacent to Covent Garden, where his gravestone bore an epitaph written by the well-known actor David Garrick.

The third and best of a rather poor trio of plays on Scanderbeg was The Christian Hero by George Lillo (1693-1739), son of a London jeweller, and better known in English literature for his domestic drama entitled George Barwell. Encouraged by the success of this latter work he ventured upon a more exotic theme in his play on Scanderbeg, but after four performances at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1753 it sank into obscurity, having met with a mixed reception. In the first night review of the play the theatre periodical The Prompter thought it was not to the taste of the English audience, but a later Account of the English Stage published in 1832 said it deserved a much better fate and was decidedly the best of the three tragedies written on Scanderbeg.

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Saint Eleutherius: The First Albanian Pope

Author: by Ismet Hajrullahu

Over the centuries Albanians have distinguished themselves by their bravery, generosity and wisdom; their contribution to the European civilization has unquestionably been remarkable. Knowing the history of the Albanians has made an immense impact on the strengthening of their national identity. Albanians, as one of the most ancient peoples in Europe, were the first on the European continent to embrace Christianity. Albanians produced such holy personages as Saint Eleutherius, Pope Clement XI, Saint Dardan, Saint Jeronim, Saint Ashtin, and others whom many other nations have attempted to claim as their own.

Yet, the Slavs maintain that Saint Jeronim was a Croat and have understandably been proud of him. But here is the issue: where was Saint Jeronim from? Were there any Croats living at that time in Dalmacia? Which peoples lived in Dalmatia? Illyrians were the ones living in Dalmatia back then, a historical fact that proves Saint Jeronim was Illyrian.

Among those saints, about whom little is mentioned, is Saint Eleutherius, one of the predecessors of other Albanian Popes, and one of those renowned personages who contributed to the spread of Christianity, not only among Albanians, but throughout the entire European continent.

Hundreds of bishops from Illyria participated in the first Synod of Rome established in 130 A.D. This fact provides evidence to the existence of a well-organized church administration in Illyria during the 2nd century. The first elements of the church that constitute the foundations of Christian doctrine, the first seven ecumenical codes, are from Illyrian territories (Illyria was once called "The Island of Saints"). This is the best evidence of the contributions that Albanians have made to European civilization.

Saint Eleutherius was born a hundred years after Christ in the town of Nikopol, a well-known town in Epirus. Some archeologists maintain that this is the present town of Preveza. He was educated in Rome under Pope Saint Aciteti (whose papacy lasted 11 years, from 157-168) where he received Holy

Orders. In 177 AD, Saint Eleutherius was appointed Pope and assumed the Holy Seat at Saint Peter's. During his papacy, Saint Eleutherius spread the Bible to many countries of the Roman Empire. Based on existing data, after the beseechment of Lucas who was the King of England, Saint Eleutherius sent missionaries to preach Christianity — the faith that civilized European nations and which remain predominant there to the present day.

In 192 AD, after 15 years of his papacy, Saint Eleutherius was martyred by idolaters of Rome. Attempts by others to claim Saint Elutherius and Saint Jeronim as their own are numerous. In reality, Saint Eleutherius is neither Greek nor Roman as some historians contend. He is clearly an Illyrian predecessor of Albanians, born and raised in Epirus, a territory that lies from the Vjosa River to the Ambraky Bay in the south, from the Pindus Mountains in the east up to the Ionian seacoast in the west, a territory ruled by King Pirros in 277 BC. In one of Skenderbeg's correspondences written in Kruja in 1460 to the prince of Taranto, he states, among other things, "We the Albanians are being called Epiriots."

The continuity of Arber (Albania) is very well preserved in the annals of the Catholic Church, but what has been written about it is something else. I have to admit that we, Albanians, unfortunately are much lacking in this respect as we have not given our saints their rightful places in history. We have left them in obscurity unlike the Western civilization which has faithfully and fanatically preserved them — Excerpted from URA, a bimonthly magazine for immigrants, No. 7, July 2001, Prishtina, Kosova.

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Albanians of Macedonia

Author: Janusz Bugajski

Approximately 20 percent of the population of Macedonia, numbering over 400,000 people, are ethnically Albanian. Some Albanian representatives have claimed that the true figure may be closer to 40 percent, and local Albanian leaders calculate that the actual population of that group may be nearer 800,000. They reside primarily in the western part of the republic, near the Albanian border. Albanian demographic growth has far exceeded that of the Macedonian Slavs, and in recent years increasing numbers of Albanians have been settling in other parts of the republic.

Albanian leaders have claimed that they have been denied the most fundamental civil, cultural, educational, and political rights in Macedonia, and have been subjected to incessant assimilationist pressures, particularly since the purge of Albanian officials in 1987. Macedonian nationalists, in turn, have charged that the Albanians have planned to numerically overrun the republic and declare its western areas as an autonomous region prior to annexation by an expansionist Albania. Demands for Albanian group rights have therefore been interpreted in Skopje as the first steps toward secession. The Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), which captured most of the Albanian vote in the republican elections in November 1990, has been accused by Macedonian nationalists of deliberately fanning ethnic conflicts, displaying separatist tendencies, and being an appendage of the Kosovo-based DLK (Democratic League of Kosovo).

PDP leaders have complained that the Albanians do not enjoy equal rights with the Slav Macedonians. They have asserted that Albanians should figure in the constitution not as a national minority but as a distinct nation with equal rights vis-a-vis other nations. PDP chairman Nevzat Halili planned to wait until after the new Macedonian constitution was adopted to introduce changes in the definition and rights of the Albanians. He warned that if constitutional stipulations proved unsatisfactory, then the Albanians would declare the Macedonian constitution non-binding and take steps toward "cultural and territorial independence." This could culminate in the proclamation of an Autonomous Region of Western Macedonia with the right to enter into alliances with other states.

Indeed, in early January 1992 a referendum was held among the Albanian minority despite strong governmental opposition. Over 90 percent of the ballots were cast in favor of political and cultural autonomy for Albanian areas in Macedonia and their eventual unification with Kosovo. After the voting, several predominantly Albanian municipalities in western Macedonia declared the region as the Republic of Illirida but this initiative was condemned by the PDP leadership. At its first congress in February 1992, the PDP passed a resolution asking the Macedonian authorities to recognize the independence of Kosovo and the autonomy of Albanian western Macedonia. However, the PDP has been racked by internal disputes and it split into radical and moderate factions at an emergency congress in February 1994; the radicals were more outspoken in demands for autonomy, sovereignty, and merger with Kosovo and Albania.

The leading Macedonian nationalist party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (IMRO-DPMNU), adopted a militant stance toward the Albanian minority and criticized Skopje's "indulgent policy" toward the Albanians. It opposed any extension of educational rights for Albanians, warned about any moves toward Albanian autonomy and decentralization, demanded new republican

elections, and proposed resolute moves against alleged Albanian agitation in western Macedonia. Some Macedonian nationalists have suggested solving the Albanian problem through mass deportation to Kosovo and by denying full citizenship rights to the Albanian minority. Indeed, conflicts over Skopje's foreign policy and the position of the Albanian minority have virtually paralyzed the Macedonian legislative process while sanctions on Yugoslavia have adversely affected Macedonia's economy, which had been dependent on Belgrade for over 60 percent of its trade.

PP141-143, "Nations in Turmoil" by Janusz Bugajski, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1995.

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More Little-Known Facts About The Albanians

Did you know that...

... Ismail Qemal Vlora, an Albanian who was a member of the Turkish Chamber of Deputies, was one of the first people to protest the inhumane treatment of the Armenians by the Turkish government?

... when the same Ismail Qemal Vlora, a Muslim, assumed the Presidency of the Albanian Provisional Government in 1912, he appointed as his Vice President, Monsignor Nicholas Kachou, the Catholic Prelate of Durres?

... the Institute of World Archaeology based in the UK stated that the world's oldest chess piece was recently uncovered in Butrint, Albania, suggesting that the game was played at least 500 years earlier than previously thought?

... in 1850, Clement C. Moore, who wrote the much-beloved Yuletide classic "Twas the Night Before Christmas..." also wrote a history about Albania's great, 15th century folkhero titled "George Castriot Surnamed Scanderbeg?"

... after the death of Scanderbeg, Albanian horsemanship became proverbial all over Europe. Leaders of Italy, France, and England came to recruit Albanian light cavalymen for their armies. In the 16th century, if the French wanted to praise a horseman, they'd say "Il chevauche comme un Albanais" (he rides like an Albanian)?

... although it is well-known that James Fenimore Cooper wrote "The Last of the Mohicans," his son Paul Fenimore Cooper wrote "Tricks of Women and other Albanian Tales" in 1928?

... in 1982 the Italians made a movie out of noted Albanian writer Ismail Kadare's novel "The General of the Dead `Army" starring Marcello Mastroianni as the General and Michel Piccoli as the Priest?

... the name of one of the Albanian leaders who fought so valiantly for Greek Independence against the Ottoman Turks in 1820 was Laskarina Bupalina, a female commander? And that other Albanian leaders in that same Greek war against the Turks were ,eo Picari, Foto Xhavella, Gjon Leka, Rrapo Hekali, Hodo Leka, Tafil Buzi, Shahin Qafezezi, and Marko Boari?

... the reigning Khedivial Dynasty of Egypt which began at the time of Napoleon and survived down to King Farouk in more recent times was founded by an Albanian, Mehmet Ali Pasha (1769-1849)?

... Rose Wilder Lane (1886-1968) who wrote "The Peaks of Shala" in 1923 after visiting northern Albania for the purpose of establishing schools , dedicated the book to her mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the "Little House on the Prarie" children's books that became a popular TV series in America?

... an Albanian, Alexander Albani, was once the curator of the Vatican Library?

... the 'Albanian Altar' of marble at the Cathedral of Milan was largely the work of the Arberesh (Albanian) refugee, Andrea Aleksi (1425-1505) of Durres ...the central figure being that of "Our Lady of the Illyrians"?

... the Italo-Albanian Jeronim De Rada (1814-1903) from Macchia of Cosenza (in southern Italy) is generally acknowledged to be the outstanding figure

in Albanian literature? He was a teacher, publicist, folklorist, and the Albanian poet laureate. His romantic and patriotic writings in Albanian beginning in 1836 remain unsurpassed!

... the Illyrians (from whom the Albanians are descendents) gave to the early Christian Church one of its most celebrated church fathers and theologians, St. Jerome, called Hieronymous (340-420). He is especially remembered for his bible translation known as the Latin Vulgate!

... the great Illyrian emperor, Decius (retired 305), made his native Salona, just above Shkodra in northern Albania the administrative seat of the province of Illyricum, and, there, erected his magnificent palace of Diocletian?

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Scanderbeg's Helmet and Sword in Austrian Museum

Author: Dr. Matthias Pfaffenbichler of the Kunthistorisches Museum

Gjergj Kastrioti surnamed Scanderbeg (1405-1468), the national hero of Albania who united hitherto warring Albanian feudal clans into an effective armed alliance against invading Ottoman Turks for some 25 years, was noted for his military genius. His repeated defeats of overwhelmingly larger Ottoman forces were attributed to his first-hand knowledge of Turkish military tactics and his brilliant leadership and battle strategies. Yet, all that remain of Scanderbeg's personal military armament are his helmet and sword which are now preserved in the Kunthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria.

How Scanderbeg's personal belongings turned up in Vienna so far away from his native land of Albania is attributed to the 16th Century Archduke Ferdinand II of Tirol and, especially, his secretary, Shrenke.

In 1567, Archduke Ferdinand went to Innsbruck, the capital of Tirol (which he had inherited from his father) to restore Ambras castle. The Archduke, with Shrenke's help, wrote letters to the outstanding personages of the period and to the heirs of those deceased requesting military arms, clothing, pictures, biographies, and other artifacts for exhibition in the armory of Ambras castle.

The first mention of Scanderbeg's sword and helmet was in a letter dated October 15, 1578, from the Duke of Urbino to Archduke Ferdinand stating that he would send the helmet and sword to Ambras.

In 1605, Ambras castle including the armory was sold to the Austrian Emperor where Scanderbeg's sword and helmet remained until 1806 when they were transferred with the rest of the military artifacts collection to Belvedere castle and finally, in 1888, to the Kunthistorisches Museum in Vienna where they have remained on display to the present day.

It is believed that Scanderbeg's helmet and sword were brought to Italy by his wife and son and other members of his family who had emigrated to Italy after Scanderbeg's death in 1468 where they were eventually acquired by the Duke of Urbino.

The museum where Scanderbeg's helmet and sword are currently on exhibit is:

**Kunthistorisches Museum 1010 Wien,
Neue Burg Vienna, Austria
Tel: 525 24 / 460 — Fax: 523 77 50**

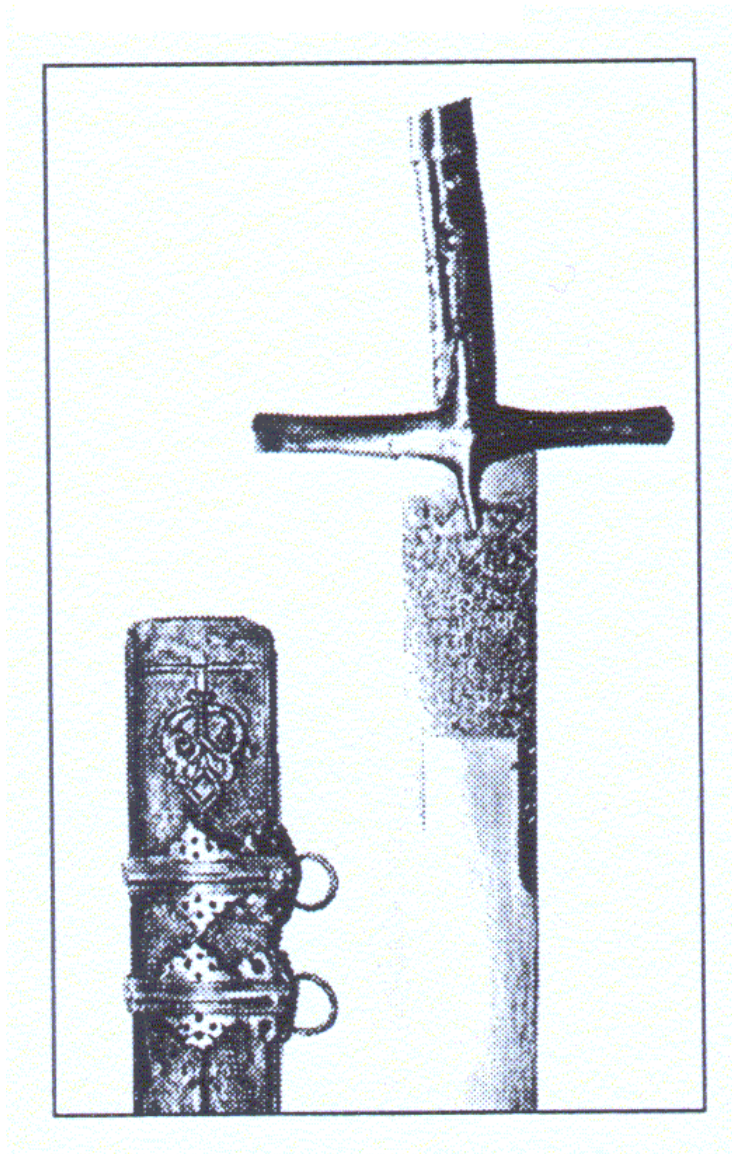
The above is rewritten from an English translation of the original Albanian on PP 76-77, "Shkenca dhe Jeta", Nr. 4, 1989. Frosina thanks Dr. Matthias Pfaffenbichler of the Kunthistorisches Museum for the photos and museum catalogue information, Connie Christo for providing Austrian-to-English translations, and Marjorie Senechal for the infobit idea.



Ceremonial Helet

Ceremonial Helmet

Italian, circa 1460 Bright steel, bells of Italian design. Lower border and neck protection removed where corrosion and cracks have appeared. These have been covered by a sown-in leather band under which the former coverlet of gold silk remains. Adjusted copper headstrap bound by gold ornamental borders decorated with six rosettes of which the copper gilt original is in the neck – the remaining five are restorations of the 16th century. Between the rosettes inscription: in/per/ra/to/re/bt. helmet ornament in the form of a goat's head of embossed, engraved gilt sheet copper with gilt ornamental border. A hole in the helmet originally served for fastening Scanderbeg's crest.



Oriental Sword

Oriental Sword

Near East, 15th century Wide, double-edged blade with rounded tip. At the head of the front side are gold inlaid leaf ornaments – a circular medallion and a band of indecipherable Arabic script. Later grip of Turkish style with blackened handle hood parrying rod with leather-covered handle. Even later sheath of black leather with pressed knotted pattern and simple ornamental iron carrying strap as well as positioning strap. On the reverse side, red oil-painted incscription of the Ambrasian armory: "Sk'anderwech."

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The League of Prizren (Kosova) Lidhja e Prizrenit

There is scarcely a book about Albania that does not contain some reference to the League of Prizren (Lidhja e Prizrenit) as occupying a very special place in Albanian history — not only because of its influence outside Albanian-speaking territories after it was formed but also because



of its effect on the international scene. In point of fact, it was thanks to the League of Prizren alone that the question of a separate Albanian nation was posed for the first time in worldwide diplomatic circles.

Why was the League of Prizren in Kosova formed, what were its aims, and what did it accomplish? Concisely stated, as a result of the Russian victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, the Porte (Turkish government) was forced to accept the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano the following year which, among other things, deprived Turkey of some important, integral parts of Albania which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. It should be noted that for purposes of administration and control, Turkey had divided Albania, after its subjugation, into the four vilayets of Shkodra, Kosova, Manastir*, and Janina. Great Britain, however, demanded that Russia submit the Treaty to a European convention of six Great Powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austro-Hungary, and Russia), and on June 14, 1878, the Congress of Berlin was convened to resolve the issue.



League Fighters / Luftëtarë të Lidhjes (Lithograph) B. Zajmi. 1978

Two prominent Albanians, Abdyl Frasheri and Mehmed Vrioni, were commissioned by the League to the Berlin Congress to ask for national recognition of Albania, but, there, Prince Bismark of Germany uttered his now-infamous statement that “there is no such thing as an Albanian nationality.” Bismark also urged the exclusion of the Albanian question from further deliberations. In due course, the Great Powers ordered that certain Albanian territories including Antivari, Plava, and Gusije be ceded to Montenegro. Yet, when Montenegrin armies attempted to occupy those Albanian territories, they were met with such fierce Albanian resistance that the Great Powers immediately changed their minds about ceding inland Albanian territory to Montenegro giving it, instead, the coastal town of Ulqin. But here, too, this territory was defended heroically by the Albanians who were forced to give it up only because of the threat of bombardment by the combined fleets of the Great Powers.

Eventually, the will of the Great Powers was to have its way, and what remained after they ceded major portions of the vilayets of Shkodra, Kosova, Manastir, and Janina to, respectively, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece, is, essentially, the nation of Albania as it is known to this day. The name of the city of Manastir (after which that vilayet was named) was changed to Bitola after WWII.

Reprinted from an article entitled “The League of Prizren” by Van Christo, LIRIA, November/1992

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The Massacre and Destruction of Borova, 1943

Author: Vladimir Misho

Borova in Albania was founded sometime between the 14th and 15th centuries by three brothers named Miho, Gjeke, and Pashka who were among the first to settle in the village where they created the three neighborhoods of Mihollare, Gjekkollare, and Pashkallare. It is believed that the name of “Borova” is the result of a massive Slavic movement into Albania at the end of the 5th century since “boro” means “pine” in the Slavic language. Because the people of Borova were so industrious, it was rare to find family members that were not craftsmen such as masons, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, etc. Many emigrated to other Balkan countries, America, and Argentina.

The Borovans’ love of knowledge and education was extraordinary. They opened an Albanian school as soon as Albania attained independence in 1912. By receiving a good education, many of the male population were employed by the state administration of Albania. One intellectual from the village even became a Minister in King Zog’s royal court. Since 1925, Borova had its own theatrical group which regularly produced Albanian theatrical pieces. Elderly people recall that the village organized in 1925-1926 a broad colloquium on Arthur Lewis’s “Science and Religion.”

Regrettably, the most indelible event that is forever imprinted in the memories of the people was the massacre of the unarmed and unprotected population of the village by the Nazi German army on July 6, 1943. At that time, Borova had about 450 inhabitants and 100 houses, stores, offices, churches, etc. All of the houses and buildings were completely burned or otherwise destroyed by the Germans. 107 inhabitants were massacred including 5 entire families. The youngest victim was an infant of only 4 months, the oldest – a woman of 73.

The reason for the massacre and destruction was Nazi German army retaliation against the people of Borova because they supported Albanian partisans who had attacked German replacements of Italian military occupation forces. In the darkness of the massacres, there were rare appearances of the light from the human spirit: a German soldier found a live infant thrown in with dead bodies. He took the infant and placed it in a safe place where it survived.

In 1945, Borova was honored for its resistance during the Albanian war of liberation. A monument was erected of a baby being saved. From 1996, improvements by the German Embassy in Tirana were made to Borova's schools, roads, and water pipes along with the construction of a wall around the cemetery where the massacred victims are buried. The events at Borova are commemorated in a symphony by Albanian composer Thoma Gaqi entitled "Poema Simfonike Borova."

The above data was supplied by Vladimir Misho of Tirana, Albania, and translated into English by his daughter, Silva Misho.

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