

ITALIAN CULTURE THROUGH ARCHITECTURE, LANGUAGE, AND DIFFERENT AREAS IN ALBANIA IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Irena NDREU

University of Tirana, Albania

E-mail: alen_irena@yahoo.com

Karmen LAZRI

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania

E-mail: karmenlazri@yahoo.it

Abstract

Albania has had an important role in the history of Venice to the point of leaving cultural traces that reach to the present day. The most important cities such as Durres, Vlora, Shkodra, Lezha, Butrinti have been among the cities whose commercial exchanges were very important for both of these countries. Venice's need to control as many countries as possible, which possessed a diverse wealth of commercial exchanges, made it possible to conquer the most important places in Albania, where they also left different cultural traces, such as architectural and linguistic ones, which reach to the present day today.

During the Ottoman occupation, the Lordship could not rely on its defense either on the amount of troops or on technological superiority; so it was based on the system of fortified cities that had taken them around the year 1400. Some of these cities, which were restored from time to time, continue to be traces of Italian culture in our culture, in which there is very little left to visit since they did not have a constant care so that their architecture was easy to understand.

A qualitative step was taken in the Venetian era also in terms of legal relations. As long as Balsha and the Serbian despots, these powerful neighbors, used Slavic as the language of their documents, the Venetian authorities had no choice but to translate all the texts into Latin or Venetian.

Keywords: *Albanian, Venetian, culture, architecture, relations.*

Literature Review

In order to protect its strategic and economic interests, a "Western" state intervenes in a conflict in the Balkans. Firstly, it sends troops, then officials. It builds a protectorate and begins to organize the administration of the area in crisis. In the case of Arberia, it was the local rulers who called Venice to help them against the Ottomans. After many years of reluctance, Sinjoria intervened

almost at the last moment, thus securing a part of the eastern coast of the Adriatic from Ottoman occupation. It was a purely defensive undertaking: its aim was to secure the Adriatic Sea routes and make peace in the Arbanon coastal areas. With the establishment of a protectorate over the port of Durrës (1392), Venice laid a foundation stone for a new overseas province: the Venetian Arberia, which would soon include large regions of northern Arberia and today's Montenegro, with northern districts that would remain under Venetian administration until the fall of the Republic (1797). (Schmitt, 2007, pp. 19-20)

After Durrës, in later centuries, the Venetian presence extended to other important centers of the Albanian coast: in Shkodër, Lezhë, Vlorë, Spinaricë, Butrint, Bashtovë and Parga. With imperial permission, the Venetians celebrated their presence in these countries by starting to build *ecclesiam, curiam et fundicum*, necessary elements for a sustainable economic and cultural presence. (Xhufi, 2003)

In the daily relations between the authorities and the inhabitants of the province, the language problem hindered simple understanding. Usually, Venetian officials did not know the local language, nor did they learn it before or during their stay in Arbëri. Since after finishing their service, they could be assigned to Italy, Greece, Crimea or Egypt, they did not even have the opportunity to learn the respective languages. Only a few Venetian aristocrats mastered the languages of the Balkans so well that they could communicate without difficulty with the locals. In the cities they must have communicated without difficulty with the remnants of the Roman population. Otherwise, they had to rely on interpreters or low-ranking soldiers and officials who were bilingual. The Venetians also had big problems with the language of the Serbian chancelleries, which was used in all of Arberia. As long as Balsha and the Serbian despots, these powerful neighbors, used Slavic as the language of their documents, the Venetian authorities had no choice but to translate all the texts into Latin or Venetian. It is very likely that there was such a translation office in Shkodër. Gjin Juban appears in Shkodër in 1409. Gjin Jubani as translator; although he has a typical Arbnon name, it cannot be said without any doubt in which language he worked. The same uncertainty also exists in Dobrosan from Shkodra (1458), but not in Stefan Sabini, who as an "Arbanon translator" certainly used the Albanian language (1459). (Schmitt, 2007, p. 400-401)

During the Ottoman occupation, the Sinjoria could not rely on its defense either on the amount of troops or on technological superiority; it was therefore relied on the system of fortified cities that it had received around the year 1400. The fortifications of the Arbanon area in this period were in a miserable state. Therefore, their first task was to make these fortifications capable for defense again: in 1403 the walls and towers of Shkodra were renewed, the same year a tower in Durrës

was renovated. The way of thinking about the security of the Venetians also brought some interventions in the residential structure of the cities. Rather, Venice relied on two main castles, in Shkodër and Durrës, around which the other cities came and gathered. (Schmitt, 2007, pg. 528-529)

But what were the traces of Venice in the Albanian territories. Documents confirm that at one time there were no less than three hundred old buildings. Here is a ruin that has not been preserved and is quite significant. It is about the front of a church that was said to be dedicated to the *Our Lady of Shkodra* (Annex 1). The church had to be about 22 meters long and 7 meters wide. Nothing else remains except the Istrian stone facade, where the Romanesque style gate and above the Gothic style window can still be seen intact. In its simplicity, the ruin has nothing of the Byzantine style, but clearly affirms its Italic origin: such churches could be found around the year 1200 somewhere in Apulia and on the lower Adriatic coast. Post qwem statement about the foundation of the church of Shias is found on a stone placed on the left side of the gate which keeps the following inscription: HIC. REQUIESCIT. EP. MARCUS. BOAE. MEMORIES. A. MCCLXII. (Sergio, 1933) The era of the destruction of this church and others can be determined around the first half of 1500, when the country conquered by the Turks became Muslim.

Another medieval Italian architecture in the Albanian territory are the old ruins of the church dedicated to Saints *Sergio and Bako*, located where the Buna River makes wide branches, (pp. 2-3). Here too we are in front of a typical Italian Romanesque to Gothic architecture. The building, the one which has remained, is built with layers of bricks placed one on top of the other, which can be seen in the churches of Markejan, Pulje, and especially in today's Dalmatia. The church dedicated to Saints Sergio and Bako was built by Elena, daughter of Emperor Baldovino, ruler of Raša in 1227, when the children Stefano and Urosh were small. It is the time when the Serbian tsars crossed from Albania to conquer the Macedonian territory: and it is precisely the tsar Urosh, the son of Elena, who had built the church of Saint Serxho and Bako in Buna.

Other cities of Northern Albania that have the Italian architectural style are the village of Balldre, Kakarriq, but especially in Rubik. An Italian Romanesque-Gothic style can be found inside the church of *Our Lady of Danjo* (Vau i Dejes) (pg. 4,5) where unfortunately there is very little left to comment on. The style of architecture with blind arches, the small rose at the entrance, the apse decorated with Romanesque arches. Inside, there are paintings with two layers, one on top of the other, with a Byzantine-Cretan character. The castle, which forms the heart of the medieval city, is now in ruins. But before leaving the city of Shkodra, it is worth mentioning a well (pg. 6) hidden in the courtyard surrounded by high walls of the old aristocratic houses. His style looks very noble and meaningful, typical Venetian, Gothic but already taking the forms of the

Renaissance. Built by Bartolomeo Buon's workshop in the first half of the 15th century. Gothic leaves, inflated for reasons of space of the Renaissance style that closes the twisted corners in the dense moldings, characteristic of this time in Venetian sculpture. (Sergio, 1933)

In the use of the nobles of the time, thrones or armchairs sent from Venice are also mentioned. And so Noli, not by chance, says about Vojsava Kastrioti: "she sat by the fire on a Venetian armchair..." (in the short prose "The Return of Skenderbeu to Krujë"). Even the generous Gjon Muzaka, in his memoirs, mentions "a despotal armchair", decorated with an emblem of Andre Muzaka's with precious stones, around the year 1372. Other luxurious examples of these armchairs are the thrones of despots in some of the Orthodox churches of the country, in which many devices have been preserved with great conservatism.

Until the end of the century XV clothing of the nobles continued to develop not only under the influence of the Byzantine civilization, but also under the Western influence, which entered in our country mainly through relations with the most developed Italian cities of the time. Here it should not be forgotten that many of the generous families of the time, such as the Balshajs, Topiajs, Dukagjins, Gropajs, Muzaks, Zaharias, Arians, Kastriots, Jonimas, etc. were mixed among themselves with multiple ties of blood and marriage. Some of them even had such connections with the great dynasties of the time such as the Palaeologians, the Asiens, the Angevins, as well as with the Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian aristocracy, so they considered themselves equal to them, even to the nobles of Southern Italy.

These noble families each had their own court, where a lot of lords and nobles, chancellors, chieftains and voivodes of various ranks came around, as well as a multitude of knights, courtiers and servants, as well as many guests. This nobility from the contacts with the nobles of the West, aimed to live and have fun like them.

"For a very long time," says Shuflai, "the nobles and gentlemen of the hinterland used to go to Durrës frequently within a year, for their business and for entertainment («pro suis factis, vel pro placere)". In an agreement between the Angevins and the Albanian despot Andre Muzaka, in 1336, members of this family were given freedom to come to Durrës as often as they wanted and they remained, until their move to Italy in 1476, in friendly relations with the noble families of Durrës. These ties of friendship, which favored the extension of Venetian fashion into the whole way of life, seem to have continued even in the 19th century XVI. (ASHSH, 2002)

A qualitative step was taken in the Venetian era also in terms of legal relations. And in fact, it was precisely under the direct Venetian influence that the transition from the practice of consuetudo, which until then disciplined boni mores, to the written law: the statutes was realized.

"The Statute of Shkodra", - this is the title of the last book of the historian, prof. Lucia Nadin, who in 1995 published the book "Venice and Albania: traces of ancient connections".

In the 14th century, North Italy provides more spiritual food in the legal field. The documents of financial accounts for Drishti, Ulcinj, Danja, Shkodra and Durrës are a complementary element and an accurate indicator of the practical life of the statutes. This autonomy would also lead to the activity of minting the coins of these cities. Thus, the silver coin of Kotor had the image of Saint Tryphon, the coins of Shkodra had Saint Stephen of Shkodra, the coins of Ulcinj had the image of Saint Mary, the coins of Tivar had the image of Saint George. Autonomous coinages were often made after the image of the city seal. Thus, a coin of Drishti has the image of a fortress with walls of battlements with a large circular gate and a lily in it. The minting establishments of Shkodra and Ulcinj worked fruitfully under the rule of the Balshais. The Venetians in Shkodër minted a coin with the figure of Saint Mark. These monetary phenomena are related to the charters of the cities in question. After the XII century, the direct influence of the famous law schools of Bologna and Padua increases. In the 14th century, Venice has priority and its leveling influence is not only manifested in the fact that the statutes were confirmed there, but also that judicial appeals were determined by the governors in the last instance, such as that of Shkodra or Durrës were assigned by order and that the statutes of Venice themselves were the source of law in the statutes of Albanian cities.

At the time of the Roman Emperor, Augustus, many Venetian citizens, settlers and veterans had moved to Durrës. So, the connections of the Albanians with Venice have to do with a very early substratum.

However, the Queen of the Seas seriously tested her when the Turks, after conquering Macedonia, began to push towards the Adriatic coast. Now the control "from a distance" of the cities and the Albanian coast was not enough. The invasion of the Albanian coast by the Turks threatened to take away the breath of the Venetian traffic in the Adriatic, and this would be the end ("leviter esset destructio culphy nostri, navigiorum et mercationum nostrarum"). Therefore, the possibilities of going out to the sea had to be blocked ("pro oviando his que possent occurrere in colpho nostro in damnum nostrum"). And here is outlined the new Venetian policy in Albania, which was related to the occupation of the main coastal cities. Entrepreneurship was not that difficult. Terrified by the possibility of Ottoman conquest, many cities voluntarily placed themselves under Venetian rule. In Durrës, there were many who supported the transition under the Venetian symbols: the Venetian residents of the city, those from Durrës "who passed themselves off as Venetians" (renomandi Venetiani), the clergy and even the bishop of the city, Demetrio Nesha, who long ago later was especially appreciated by Venice for the role he had

played as "principalis causa solicitandi et instandi, ut dominatio nostra haberet dominium Durachii". But the representatives of the wealthy Albanian aristocracy were equally open to Venice. This is so true that it was precisely Inclechi Albanensis, a gentleman from the surroundings of Durres, who raised the flag of Saint Mark on the upper tower of Durres that September 1392. In addition to gentlemen who were friends and loyal to the Sinjorise, there were also those who fed completely different feelings. Among them, around 1420, was Gjergj Balsha of Shkodra, a sworn enemy of the Sinjorise, a troubled and vindictive soul. He punished with untold suffering one of his men who dared to pass under the Venetian faith, poor Pjeter Shestani, to whom "the amputee fecit unam manum et unum pedem, propter fidem suam in dominationem nostram". So being a friend of the Venetians had its own risks. Therefore, aware of these things, the Lord showed prudence and care in his relations with the faithful.

However, the Ottoman threat helped coordinate Venetian-Albanian relations towards an alliance that ensured the inviolability of the eastern part of the Adriatic for decades.

Albania's ties with Venice would become even closer when, for almost a century, XV-XVI, the inhabitants of Durrës, Shkodra, Ulcinj, Tivar, Lezha (the southern centers fell under Turkish rule at the beginning of the XV century) became Venetian citizens with all rights. Thanks to this prolonged Venetian presence, entire areas of Mediterranean Albania became part of a cultural koinè, with a clear Venetian character. The signs of this special historical period were seen everywhere: in the urban planning of the city, in the economic activity, in the institutional organization (universitas, comunitas), in the social structure, divided into the classes of boni homines and popolo minuto-s mujshar. mujshar. (Xhufi 2003)

In the era of the great Ottoman conquest, the Republic of Venice was a point of reference for many Albanian gentlemen, who wanted to preserve their properties by putting them under Venetian protection. But even the Republic had done its calculations, so it did not always respond to their offers. She preferred to become the master of some (not all) Albanian cities, offering in exchange shelter and safe retirement for them and their families in Venice, or in any of the Venetian lands. None of the Albanian gentlemen was denied this opportunity. And in fact the Venetian possessions turned into a safe haven for many of those Albanians, rich and poor, who fled in the face of the Turkish advance.

Undoubtedly, the fall of the Venetian castles in Albania, Shkodër (1479), Durrës (1501) and then Tivar, Ulqin, caused a real influx towards the city of lagoons.

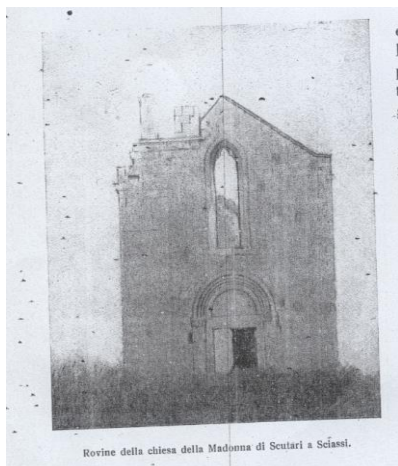
Until the battle of Lepanto (1571), Venice fought fiercely until the Turks, now masters of Albania, brought the Adriatic under their rule. Therefore, the Republic did what was possible to encourage the resistance of the Albanian population. A multitude of Venetian emissaries, spies and arms

traffickers still roamed the Albanian land. On the other hand, descendants of Albanian noble families who had emigrated abroad, returned to Albania with Venetian ships, weapons and Venetian money, in an attempt to recover the lands of the ancestors. But as soon as the naval power of the Ottomans was destroyed in Lepanto, Venice gave up interfering on the coast of Albania and was content to observe and carefully follow any movement that might interest them. (Xhufi 2003)

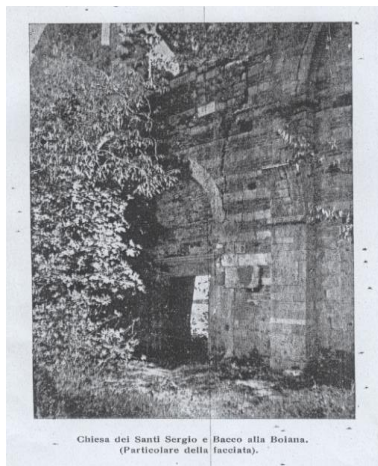
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Appendix



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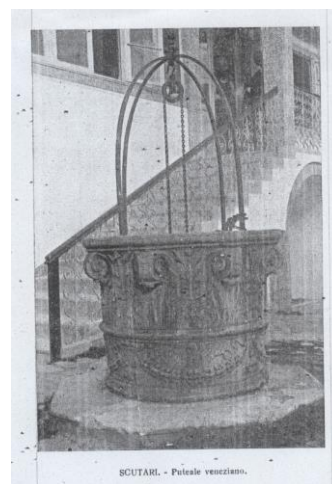
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