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**ARBANENSE BISHOPRIC, GJON KASTRIOTI AND THE
QUARREL ABOUT THE BORDERS OF THE BISHOPRIC
LEZHA'S***

The present paper devotes some space to the period forerunning Gjergj Kastrioti's war and the following centuries, a very much discussed event among the local and foreign scholars. The quarrel between the Arbanense bishopric and the bishopric of Lezha (*Alexiense-Lexiensi*) about the appurtenance of a series of churches pretended or contested from both sides and for the history of this bishopric itself is here reported.

Up to now, the letter of Gjon Kastrioti, father of our Hero, sent to Serenissima is the oldest testimony of this quarrel. It is proved in the Acts of April 3, 1407, and from what Gjon writes, we understand that these 12 churches are in his territories and belong to the Arbanense bishopric for 800 years now. He asked for intervention to avoid the quarrels and turmoil among the people of those territories caused by this injustice. In the Acts, after a short explanation, it is given the text of the letter addressed to the Holy Father, the Pope Gregory XII, where it is asked to intervene in favor of the Arbanense bishopric, to force the Bishop of Lezha-*Alexiense* to not keep occupied those 12 churches of Arbanense, in letter *episcopatum Albanie*, 800 years old now. This is a very well-known letter by the scholars, and it is published by Jireček¹,

* This presentation is part of the discourse segments.

¹ K. Jireček, Zëei Urkunden aus Nordalbanien, *Monumenta spectantia Historiam Slavorum meridionalium*. v. Quintum, Zagabriae 1875, 86-899.

Ljubić², father G. Valentini in A.A.V³, and then is treated by Šufflay and the subsequent scholars.⁴

These aspects, the dating of *Arbanense* bishopric in its lands and the mentioning of the 12 churches, have been widely discussed, but Prof. Kristo Frashëri says: "... *the location of these 12 churches and what lied behind the interests of Gjon Kastrioti have never been investigated.*"⁵

This is the starting point of my presentation in parallel with the implication and the clarifications given in the history of that time on the bishopric and the region where this bishopric is positioned, until the end of this quarrel.

I had the transcript *Letter* of the Pope Gregory VIII sent to the Archbishop of Antivari - *Archiepiscopo Antibarensi* dating May 23, 1407⁶ by chance. At that time, in the see of Tivar, Martin from Ulqin (Martinus de Dulcinio 1395-1420) was the office-holder, while Andrea Summa (1405-1426) was the office-holder in Lezha. The Holy Father, encouraged by the *Petition* sent by *episcopo Arbanensi Georgij* demands the freeing of the taken churches from the Lezha's bishopric, which, *de jure*, belong to the bishop Georgij and his predecessors: *nevertheless, our honorable brother Andrea, Bishop of Lezha (Lexiensi) still unjustly continues to hold them causing a damage....* The Holy Father demands *that the bishop of Lezha and others to withdraw otherwise... could not wait for forgiveness from the Apostolic See for their suspension from duty or excommunication.*

The first study on this document, which we consider important, is reported in a paper titled "The bishopric of Arbër" in the conference "*Albanians and Hungarians: historical similarities and differences in centuries the contribution of their diasporas on their mutual*

² *Listine o odnosajih izmedju juznog slavenstva i mletacke Republike*, skupio S. Ljubic, knjiga V od godine 1401 do 1409, Zagreb 1875, 94-95.

³ G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, v.5,

⁴ M. von Šufflay, *Situata të kishës në Shqipërinë paraturke, Zona e depërtimit ortodoks në "digën" katolike*, Shkodër 2013, 98..O.J.Schmitt, *Arbëria Venedike 1392-1479*, Tiranë 2007, 569, K. Biçoku, *Toponimet mesjetare për studimin e historisë së Skënderbeut*, Tiranë 2016, 35-36.

⁵ K. Frashëri, *Skënderbeu*, Tiranë 2002, 69.

⁶ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Registro Laterano, v. 128, 159^v-160. I thank for this Dr.Musa Ahmeti.

recognition,” run in Budapest on 26-27 May 2014, under publication process.

The facsimile of the letter sent to us from the Vatican's Secret Archive⁷ allows us to be as accurate as possible about the churches' saints and their location. The most important distinction from what is known to day is that from Lezha's Bishop were occupied 17 churches in 16 villages, at detriment of *Arbanensis diocesis*. The location of those churches and villages could be clearly understood. So, there are real and reliable data that clarify the quarrels and debates about this.

First, the bishop Georgij, the office-holder of the *Arbanensis* bishopric in the letter sent to the Holy Father his complain (*petitio*), as far as it could be understood in details (that date is unknown to us). From the letter results that the complain has been investigated according to the rules. The investigation was subsequently followed by the order or request of Vatican.

Second, in the letter we have the complete and precise list of the churches into question and their location:

Sancte Venere in *Baldreni*, Sancti Nicolai in *Blenisti*, Sancti Salvatori in *Malemalit*, Sanctu Johanis in *Merchina*, Sancte Eufemia in *Calameto*, Sancte Venere in *Vello*, Sancti Salvatoris in *Vello*, Sancti Georgij in *Fico*, Sancti Blasij in *Solomundo*, Sancti Demetrij in *Span*, Sancti Alexandri in *Bochiano*, Sancti Nicolai in *Soyme*, Sancte Barbare in *Pedana*, Sancte Venere in *Re*, Sancta Maria in *Soesa*, Sancti Michaelie in *Castineto*, Sancti Helie in *Guimala*

Let's examine the location of those 17 churches of 16 villages, about which have had only presumptions needed for aprioristic conclusions. The majority of these churches are found today in the villages with the same name that we find in the list.

- The church of Shna Prenda is situated in *Balldre(n)*.⁸
- The church of Shën Koll is not located in *Blinisht*, but in Kakarriq, nearby. However, in the Venetian Cadaster of 1416-17 we find both *the*

⁷ *Ibid*, I thank for this Dom David Xhuxha.

⁸ A.Meksi, *Arkitektura e kishave të Shqipërisë (shek.VII-XV)*, Tiranë 2004, 195-197, fig.150-152, G. Hoxha, L. Përzhita, F. Cavalini, *Monumente Historike të Kultit të Krishterë në Dioqezën e Lezhës*, Lezhë 2007, 60-63, fig. 30-33, B. Bregu, *Entre Orientet Ocident, l'architecture religieuse medievale du nord de l'Albanie. Etudes architecturales comparatives à travers les méthodes de l'archéologie du bati: les églises Sainte Parascève de Balldren et Saint Nicolas de Lezha, Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyene Âge* (en ligne), 2016.

Village of Kakarriq and the Village called *Shën Koll of Kakarriq or Blinisht*.⁹

- The third in the list should be the Kisha e të Shelbuemit (Church of the Redeemer) in *Akrolis*, the mountain east of Lezha from which is preserved more the name rather than the ruin traces.¹⁰

- The church of Shën Gjini is located in *Mërqinë*.¹¹

- The church of Shën Eufemia (Mia) could be found even today in *Kallmet*.¹²

- The Shna Prenda and the Kisha e të Shelbuemit are situated in *Velë*.¹³

- The church of Shën Gjergj is situated in *Rasfik*.¹⁴

- In *Grykë Manati* is preserved the church of Shna Vlash and the name Solomund.¹⁵

- We couldn't find the location of the village of *Span*. In those areas, at Lezha's back, we have one church with the saint Shën Dhimiter in the village *Tresh-Dardhë*.¹⁶

- The church of Shën Llezhdri of Bokian is located in the *Spiten*.¹⁷

- The church of Shën Koll is located in *Zejmen*.¹⁸

- The Church of Shën Barbullë is located in *Pllana* (Pëdhanë).¹⁹

⁹ *Regjistri i Kadastrës dhe i Koncesioneve për Rrethin e Shkodrës 1416-1417*, Tiranë 1977, 93/a, 92/b; A. Meksi, *Arkitektura...*, 173, fig.113, G. Hoxha and others, *Monumente...*, 57-58, fig. 58.

¹⁰ On it K. Biçoku, *Toponimet...*, 35, note 93, thinks that this is about Saint Salvator of Rubik. G. Hoxha etc., *Monumente...*, 53, fig. 24.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 104, fig. 86.

¹² *Ibid*, 64-67, fig. 34-37, Copy of sandjak of Dibra register, *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke në Shekullin XV, Burime osmane*, Prepared for publishing by Selami Pulaha, Tiranë 1968, 364 (Kallmeti).

¹³ *Ibid*, 108, fig. 93-94 (Shna Prenda) and 106-107, fig.90-92 (Kisha e Shën Salvatorit).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 123, *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke...*, 336 (Fiku).

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 73-75, fig. 43-49. *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke...*, 336 (Solomoni).

¹⁶ *Relacione mbi gjendjen e Shqipërisë Veriore e të Mesme në shekullin XVII, vol. I (1610-1634)*, the original text translated by I. Zamputi, Tiranë 1963, dok 31,401. K. Biçoku, *Toponimet...*, 36 note 93. reveals that near the village of Dardhë is preserved the toponym Shtëpan.

¹⁷ A. Meksi, *Arkitektura...*, 173-174, fig. 114-115, G. Hoxha and others, *Monumente...*, 60-63, fig. 53-57. *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke...*, 336 (Kapruli-Bokoiani).

¹⁸ A. Meksi, *Arkitektura...*, 169-170, fig.105-107, G. Hoxha and others, *Monumente...*, 84-85, fig. 58-63. *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke...*, 364 (Zejmeni).

¹⁹ A. Meksi, *Arkitektura...*, 174-175, fig. 116-118, G. Hoxha and others., *Monumente...*, 88-90, fig. 64-70 (architecture) and 127-138, fig. 111-117 (painting), *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke...*, 364 (Pëdhanë).

- The Church of Shna Prenda is located in *Rej*.²⁰
- The Church of Shën Mëri is unknown in *Zeze* (Reja e Zezë).²¹
- The Church of Shën Mëhill is situated in *Kashnjet*.²²
- We haven't found the church with the patron saint Shën Ilia in *Gjunal*, but in Jezull (Gazull) a nearby village.²³

Thus, all these 17 churches in 16 villages, are all East of Lezha city and north of Mati River.

Meanwhile; this list of churches and villages, has recently been published by Prof. Kasem Biçoku²⁴, but without focusing on the related problems.

Third, we should investigate the reasons behind the intervention of Gjon Kastrioti in this quarrel and the support for the *Arbanense* Bishopric. Thus, we think that these villages were in the possessions of Gjon Kastrioti, or because he was asked to help as he was a powerful lord of the territories near and with interest in the ways, harbors and the necessity for good relations with the Church and the local lords, by protecting their interests and rights. Apparently, once part of the Princedom of *Arbër*, these territories were now ruled by many small feudal lords. We think that, it should have been the chiefs of *episcopatus Arbanensis* those who asked Gjon Kastrioti for support. They were apparently not very much convinced that could solve this problem in their favor themselves, hoping in the good relations on reciprocal bases, between Kastrioti and the Republic. The latter had possessed Lezha²⁵ since 1393. So, the intervention and the support of Gjon might have been useful to them.

There is another explanation, as Gjon Kastrioti stated: "*they are in our possessions and belong to the Arbanense bishopric for 800 years now*," that they are in the lands of the Kastrioti family. I think that this statement is just an excuse for intervention, to be affirmed in a region near Gjon Kastrioti's territories and in old relations with them. It could help us on this a note at the end of the Ottoman Register of 1431-2,

²⁰ *Relacione*..... , dok. 31, 167 (401).

²¹ The village of Reja e Zezë is situated near the above mentioned village, but we can't find traces of this church.

²² G. Hoxha and others, *Monumente*., 118-120, fig. 105-107.

²³ *Relacione*..... , dok. 31,167 (401).

²⁴ K. Biçoku, *Toponimet*.....,35-36.

²⁵ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, I, 2002, 323.

where in the Timar of Andre Karlo it is said: *Even nine pieces of villages, according tahvili of Scanderbeg's, son of Gjon, were taken from the Vilayet of Dhimitër Jonima and the Timar was registered in Gjon's land cadastre. In case of necessity to be seen [in] that register.*²⁶ This note dates in 1441 and it explains that these lands did not belong to Gjon Kastrioti previously, but to the Jonima family. Later, in the Register of Dibra's Sanjak dated in 1467, six of these villages were still under the Jonima family possession.²⁷

Now let's see what the Arbanense bishopric is, its history and location. The bishopric of *Arbëria* and the region's political organization of the region where it was located has been widely discussed. I was also interested in about this issue. In the Symposium of 1990 (December 4), I held a presentation entitled "*Episcopatum Arbanense*," which has not been sent for publishing at that time. However, it was sent for publishing without change or improvement in "*Hylli i Dritës*", in 1995,²⁸ along with a very interesting paper about the inscriptions of the churches of Gëziq and that of Brrar,²⁹ authored by Injac Zamputi. Surprisingly, some of the scholars involved in the area have not read it.

The bishopric of *Arbër* was first mentioned in the act of the Shën Trifon church dedication, in 1166, where the *episcopis Lazaro Albanensi* or *Lazarus episcopus Arbanensis*, its titular participates.³⁰ *Andreas prior Arbanensis* participated in the ceremony, in addition to the bishop Lazar, who dedicates the altar on the left of the principal one. Confusion has been created about *Andreas prior Arbanensis* in the Albanian historiography has been made a confusion, calling him as the principal of the region, but in fact *prior* refers to the head of the religious community in a diocese and classified after the bishop and we have to admit it.³¹

²⁶ *Regjistri i Sanxhakut të Arvanidit i vitit 1431*, Tiranë 2017, 234.

²⁷ *Lufta Shqiptaro Turke...*, see above the note 12 (Kallmeti), 14 (Fiku), 15 (Solomundi), 17 (Kapulli-Bokiani), 18 (Zejmeni), 19 (Pëdhana)

²⁸ A. Meksi, Peshkopata e Arbërit (Episcopatus Arbanensis), *Hylli Dritës* 5-6, 1995, 30-43.

²⁹ I. Zamputi, Two inscriptions at the beginning of the XIII century and their connections with the Principality of Albania, *Hylli Dritës* 5-6, 1995, 16-29, fig. 1-4.

³⁰ L. de Thalloczy - C. Jiricek - E. de Sufflay, *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae mediae aetatis illustrantia*, I. Vindobonae 1913, dok 93 13 iunii 1166 (hereinafter A.Alb.).

³¹ Giacomo Baroffio, *Dizionario Liturgico* (on line), 71, DIZIONARIO DEI TERMINI RELIGIOSI, AA.VV., Invictus Editori.

Researches have been made about the bishopric of *Arbër* and principality connected to it to enlighten their aspects and history, often with different outcomes. To give an accurate opinion and be as closer to the truth as possible, we have to follow its development process, define its geographic location and clarify some events related to it.

Regarding the ecclesiastic aspect, the territories inhabited by Albanians are found in the middle of the XII century under the jurisdiction of some church centers. The bishoprics of Tivar (Auarorum), Ulqin (Liciniatensem), Shas (Suacinensem), Shkodra (Scodrinensem), Drisht (Driustinensem) and Pult (Polatensem) located in the north Albania depended hierarchically from the archbishopric of Ragusa-Epidauri.³² In the Central Albania we have the Metropolis of Durrës (Dyrrachium). The bishoprics of Lezha (Elison), Stefaniaka (Stefaniakon), Kruja (Kroon), and Kunavise (Hunavian) depend hierarchically on it.³³ In the eastern and southern Albania we have the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The bishoprics of Gllavnica, Deaboli, Kanina and Dibra depend hierarchically on it.³⁴ In the southern Albania we have the bishoprics of Himara, Butrint (Buthrot) and Drinopoja (Drinopoleos) hierarchically dependent upon Naupakt Metropolis.³⁵ The Catholics of Dyrrachium or the Latin people chaired by the archdeacon were closely related to the bishoprics in northern Albania which belong to the Catholic church. The latter was under the Vatican rule.³⁶

There are few records on the orthodox bishoprics in the Central and Southern Albania connected to Ohrid and Constantinople, but we have sufficient information about the structures of the Catholic church connected with Rome through the archbishoprics of Tivar and Durrës because the investitures of the Catholic bishops were done by the Roman Curia. The Catholic church replaced starting from the XII century the archbishopric of Ragusa with the archbishopric of Tivar

³² *Ibid*, dok 91;93; M. Sufflay, Die kirdrienzustande im vorturkischen Albanien. Die orthodoxe durchbruchszonein katholischen Damme, *Illyrische-Albanische Forschungen*, vol. I. Munchen und Leipzig 1916, 188-281.

³³ J. Darrouzes, *Notitiae Episcopatum ecclesiae Constantinopolitana*, Paris 1981, 154-158 and 372-377, that is the report of Nil Doksopatri date on 1142-3.

³⁴ H. Gelzer, *Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistumverzeichnisse der orientalischen kirche*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* I, 1892, 257.

³⁵ J. Darrouzes, *op. cit.*, 154-158 and 372-377.

³⁶ The first report on this archdeacon we have it on 1200, *A.Alb.* I, dok 126.

(Antivari) which was located in the northern Albania, up to Prizren. It is an Albanian church and located in the territories ruled by local feudal lords. During the Anjou rule, the Catholic church expanded its territory up to Vlora (Avellonense), Cernika (Cernicense), which appears in 1507 with the old name Scampense, and Vrego (Vregensis), having in these cases Durrës (Duracensis) as archbishopric center, with Kruja (Croense), Lezha (Alexiense), Stefaniaka (Stephanense et Bendense even Bendense et Priscense) and Kunavia (Canoviense) hierarchically dependent upon. There are many data up to the XV century about them.

In the beginning of the XV century, under the subordination of the Archbishopric of Tivar, are evidenced these bishoprics: Ulqin (Dulcinense), Shas (Suacinense), Shkodra (Scodrinensis), Balleci (Balleacenses), Drisht (Drivastense), Danja (Danense), Shurdhahu (Sardenensis), Pult (Polatensis). The latter, since the middle of the century is divided into the Polatensis Maior (Sarda) and Polatensis Minor (in Shën Pal of Pult), Shat (Sappatensis), Prizren (Prisrenensis), Arbëria (Arbanensis).³⁷

Now let's focus on the bishopric of *Arbër* and its territories basing on the historic data.

A year later from the Shën Trifon altar's dedication mentioning in Kotor (1167), the Pope Alexander III addresses to the bishop "*Lazarum episcopum de Albania*" praising him for refusing to follow the Greek rite and *having the will to avoid in many cases when is presented the possibility of the Greek rite*³⁸. On the same day, the Pope in another letter of great importance, confirmed the archbishopric of Ragusa its subordinates, but the bishopric of *Arbër* was not among,³⁹ which is not recognized as such even in previous papal bulls that confirm Ragusa's subordinates.⁴⁰ Thus, one of the bishoprics of *Arbër* is not among the subordinates of the metropolis of Dyrrachium or archbishopric of Ohrid.

Under these circumstances, we can think that this is a newly established bishopric and it is located in the territory of Durrës metropolis. This means that it was under the Byzantine rule whose

³⁷ A. Meksi, *Arkitektura*...., 70-71.

³⁸ A.Alb. I, dok.97, *Burime të zgjedhura për Historinë e Shqipërisë*, Vol. II, Tiranë 1963, 111.

³⁹ A.Alb.I, dok.94.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, dok. 84 (1142), dok.87 (1153), dok.91 (1158); M.Sufflay, *op. cit.* 202-205.

rulers were connected with the archbishopric of Antivari to affirm the existence or the religious convictions. If the bishopric was created long time ago, it would have been included in the subordinates lists, especially if detached from the Catholic bishopric. The latter was under the Tivari rule. The Bishopric of *Arbër* was found in the territories of Dyrrachium and this is stated in the above-mentioned letter of the Pope Alexander III, in which very clearly is noticed her affiliation in the orthodox rite (in the letter it written the *Greek*) and the dependence upon the metropolis (implying the metropolis of Durrës), *to which I should pay the respect he deserves*, what is explained by the good relations between the Pope and Manuel Komnenos, the emperor of the time.⁴¹

The establishment of a new bishopric in the medieval situations, detaching from the previous church structures with a long tradition, couldn't be understood without the support of a powerful state or a powerful feudal. The sources and the historic records do not prove the invasion of these territories by the rulers of Zeta or Rasha. Also, we do not think that Byzantine, with its center in Durrës, is behind this act, regardless the ceremony held in Kotorr, the Dalmatian shore which was also under the Byzantine rule as this act implies.⁴² We have to think that this bishopric could have been connected with a local feudal who under specific circumstances succeeded in setting his rule in that territory. This *appropriation* act was accompanied by the establishment of the bishopric administering the church in his lands.

In absence of other data, it is difficult to define the impact of the church administrative structures, the political forces and the religious ones in this new establishment process.⁴³ Here, we refer to the will of the scholars and the prelates of *Arbër* to be mainly bound with the Latin Church, the archbishopric of Ragusa and later with the archbishopric of Tivar. Probably, the abbey of Shën Aleksandër in Mali i Shenjt might have played a role. This abbey was connected with the Benedictines

⁴¹ F.Chalandon, *Les Comnenes*, II, Paris 1932, 555, 565-6.

⁴² In it, A.Alb. I, dok.73, is said: *kur ishte në fuqi perandori Emanuel (when was on power the emperor Emanuel)*.

⁴³ The fact that on a later letter, A.Alb.I, dok.133. year 1208, comes out that, the then ruler of Dhimitër principality, asked for help to the Pope *to exercise the purity of the cult* clearly speaks that beyond the desire for a special archbishopric has more political rather than religious reasons.

and other Catholic, e.g., the abbey of Rubik, whose church clearly proves through its architectural construction the connections with the Catholic world.

The other question that we have to define accurately relates to the time when this bishopric was established. Consequently, the Byzantine power weakened and possible alliances to make this act of *rebellion* be concluded from the side of local feudal, archon or a region's lord.

Historic data show that period from the victorious campaigns of 1149 of the emperor Manuel Komnenos in Corfu from where he entered Albania and passed to the north,⁴⁴ to the '70es, is the period of the confirmation of the Byzantine power among the southern Slavs and their rebellions acts, especially after the appointment of Stefan Nemanja as the great Župan of the state of Rasha. Once subdued in 1173, Stefan Nemanja was captured by the emperor and kept in Constantinople.⁴⁵ Under such circumstances the goals of the lords of this region and the bishopric founded by them couldn't have much affirmation possibilities.⁴⁶ Once the emperor died in 1180, efforts were made to become independent from Stefan Nemanja and other rulers north of Arbanon. Consequently, new possibilities were unfolded for the lords of the region the Arbanense bishopric belonged to.

Exactly in this time of decline for the empire, we have data about the involvement of the bishopric of *Arbër* in the lists of the subordinates of the archbishopric of Ragusa.⁴⁷ Based on a notice from the Roman Curia dated in 1188, Pëllumb Xhufi says that bishopric of *Arbër*⁴⁸ is directly dependent upon the Holy See.⁴⁹ This shows that after a period of existence instability or nonrecognition, the bishopric succeeds in being to be fully affirmed, proving at the same time a stronger position of the lords of this region and the clergy connected to Rome.

The same it is also proved by the participation of the archbishop of *Arbër* in a council kept in Tivar in 1199⁵⁰. The hierarchical dependence

⁴⁴ G. Ostrogorski, *Storia del Impero bizantino*, Torino 1966, 350 ; F.Chalandon, *op. cit.* 384.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 397-8.

⁴⁶ See note 41.

⁴⁷ A.Alb. I, dok. 104, (year 1188).

⁴⁸ A.Alb. I, dok. 116.

⁴⁹ A.Alb. I dok. 200, P. Xhufi, *Dilemat e Arbërit*, Tiranë 2006,400, Gj. Berisha, *Arbërorët ndërmjet kishës perëndimore dhe asaj lindore gjatë shekujve XI-XV*, Prishtinë 2015,141.

⁵⁰ A.Alb. dok. 120, September 1199, *Burime...*, 59-62.

of the bishopric of *Arbër* or the bishops of dioceses of Arbanon upon the archbishopric of Tivar has been mentioned since then.

The Princedom of *Arbër* or the state of Arbanon is inseparably connected with the Arbanense bishopric. The Albanian historiography has devoted an important space to this princedom by considering the first Albanian state to emerge in recorded history. The idea that the *arbërs* have had their own archonate for a long time, and the *Arbër State* was established under new circumstances, from 1190-1191 to 1215⁵¹ prevails.

Since the beginning we have stated that a powerful feudal structure with a proper territory might lie in the establishment of the bishopric Arbanense. The archons' presence in the hinterland of the Theme of Durrës is proved since the Taktikon of Uspensky, in 842.⁵² In the Preseancës (Presence?) lists, as we have said in a paper published in the "*Illiria*" of the Academy of Sciences in 1989, to Dyrrachium strategists were also recognized the archons of Durrës (in plural), persons and rulers in the hinterland regions of that important center of the Byzantine power, honorable people, known to the local and central administration until when, together with the strategists, could participate in the ceremonies held in the Imperial Palace at his presence. In that paper, we have widely treated the archons and the archonate and their being in time, even before Themas establishments, according to historic sources, scholars' opinion and on our stand for this problem in the case of medieval Albania⁵³.

We have tried to prove that they the lords of the regions hierarchically depending from Durrës, as autonomous structures. The presence of the bishoprics of *Elison*, *Hunavia*, *Stefaniakas* and *Kruja* in the List of the metropolis of Dyrrachium indirectly proves this. Those archonates were located in the hinterland of Durrës, and their population were in relation with and hierarchically dependent on it within the framework of the Byzantine Empire. The Alps in the North, the territories around Shkumbin in the South, the river Drin in the East and the Adriatic in the West were part of their territory. This is the

⁵¹ K. Frashëri, *Principata e Arbërisë 1190-1215*, 63,125, N. Loka, *Principata e Arbërit shteti i parë i shqiptarëve*, Tiranë 2015, 148, 163.

⁵² N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles*, Paris 1972, 56.

⁵³ A. Meksi, *Të dhëna për historinë e hershme mesjetare të Shqipërisë (fundi i shek.VI - fillimi i shek. XI), Iliria*, 1 1989.122-123.

Theme of Durrës that in time was extended to the Acrokerauns in the South and Tivar in the North, as comes out from the later lists of the bishoprics depending on Durrës.

Certainly, the first archonates might have had sub-divisions under the rule of the powerful lords. Apparently, here we can mention the division amidst the XII century from where the Arbanense Bishopric emerged for a spiritual rule on his people. About this branch or family, we know only what is recorded in the official papers of the time, but the data about their predecessors remain unknown.

Historians say that this was called the Principedom of *Arbër*, because of the title *princeps* granted to them by the Pope in his Letter, along with the titles *panhypersevast* and *great archon*. The history of the direct descendants of this family is well-known around the 1200 until the extinction of its rule under other historic circumstances, also because of the increased number of other ruling feudal families.⁵⁴ Probably, Gëziq might have been the see of the rulers this region, as proved by a famous inscription and their emblem found at the Church St. Mary of Trafandina.

We have stated that the word *Arbanense* of the bishopric (given also to the ruler of that region) refers to the ethnic relevance of the population of that territory and should be distinguished from the description that the historians and the historic sources give to Durrës' hinterland: *Arbanon*, while to the local population *arbër*,⁵⁵ descriptions that are extended when the foreign rulers include in their lands other regions inhabited by Albanians, as in the case of Anjou, whose kingdom Regnum Albaniae was extended down to the South.

The two other problems connected to each other that are to be discussed are:

1. Which was the territory and the see of this bishopric?
2. Is the bishopric of Kruja and the Arbanense bishopric the same?

⁵⁴ A.Alb. I, dok. 133, (year 1208), *Historia e...*, I, 228, K. Frashëri, *Principata...*, 71, N. Loka, *Principata e...* 152.

⁵⁵ P. Xhufi, *Dilemat e...*, 3-23, K. Biçoku, *Kastriotët në Dardani*, Prishtinë-Tiranë 2009 147-170.

M. S. Drinov (year 1894-5) stated for the first time that the bishopric of Kruja and the bishopric of *Arbër* are the same. In his study on the three letters of the archbishop of Ohrid about the marriage of Gregor Kamona, the ruler of Kruja with Komnina, the widow of the Dhimitër of *Arbër* and the daughter of Stefan Nemanja, Drinov says that Gjini, an Arbër's tribe was living in Kruja or nearby.⁵⁶ Also, he supposed that in the Latin documentation the bishopric of Kruja refers to the bishopric of *Arbër* —both of them are named after the region of location and the see, respectively as Dhimitër Komatianoï calls it (*episkopon Kroon*) in his third letter sent to the bishop of Kruja's.⁵⁷ Here are the publishers of *Acta Albaniae* and Šufflay a little bit later⁵⁸ based when affirming this standardization. The latter says that the double name of this bishopric caused confusion, and the Anjous intervened for the establishment of a special bishopric for Kruja and the Catholic bishop to *Arbër* was transferred elsewhere.⁵⁹

Also, Salaville emphasized it in his study on the epitaph of Konstantin Meles, archdeacon of Arbanon, which is dated around the end of XIII century.⁶⁰ Allain Ducellier⁶¹ has also this opinion, while K. Frashëri says that Kruja was the center of Arbanon Dioceses, and when the bishoprics of Lis and Stefaniaka came under the rule of Rome, those merged in one, *Arbër*.⁶² In contradiction with them, Dh. Shuteriqi in his first paper considers these bishoprics as separate entities until the end of the XIV century.⁶³

In absence of reports from the patriarchate of Constantinople about the end of the XII century and the first half of the XIII century, such a thesis is easily presented but, the presence of an Orthodox bishopric in Kruja after the inclusion of these territories under the rule of Epirus is

⁵⁶ M. S. Drinov, *Trudove po Bullgarska i Sllavianska istorija*, Sofija 1909, v. I, 587.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 599.

⁵⁸ *A.Alb.* I, dok.48.

⁵⁹ M.Sufflay, *op. cit.* 213.

⁶⁰ S. Salaville, *Epitaphe metrique de Constandin Meles, Archidiaque d'Arbanon, Echos d'Orient*, t. XXVII, 410-413.

⁶¹ A. Ducellier, *La façade maritime d'Albanie au moyene age*, Thessaloniki, 1981, 108.

⁶² K. Frashëri, *Trojet e shqiptareve në shekullin e XV, Shqipëtarët dhe trojet e tyre*, Tiranë 1982, 201-202.

⁶³ Dh. S. Shuteriqi, *Mbi disa çështje të Arbërit dhe mbi emrin Shqipëri, Buletin për shkencat shoqërore* 3, 1956, 199-201.

precisely proved in 1216.⁶⁴ Kamona turned to Ohrid and not to Durrës because of the authority of Komation and the delicacy of the problem, the solution on which couldn't be accepted if the answer came from the contested metropolitan of Durrës, Dokeianos, which appointment for the Nikea patriarchane was not canonical.⁶⁵

In the episcopal lists of the Catholic church, we see that from 1279 with Roman Crohensi⁶⁶ to the XV century we have always two parallel lines of Catholic bishops in *Arbëria* and Kruja.⁶⁷ However, the first hierarchically depended on the archbishopric of Tivari and the Catholic bishopric of Kruja hierarchically depended on the archbishopric of Durrës. Shuteriqi says that the letters of the Pope John XXII sent to Mihal, bishop of *Arbëria* and to Andrea, bishop of Kruja on June 6, 1318,⁶⁸ and the letter of the Pope Calixtus III in 1457, where it is said that the church of Church St. Mary of Trafandina is in the dioceses of *Arbëria*, while the church of Shën Veneranda of Kurbin is in the dioceses of Kruja⁶⁹ incontestably prove that the bishopric of Kruja and the bishopric of Arbanon are two different ekklesiastical entities. Here, we note that we have the conversion of the bishoprics of Central Albania (four) to Catholic which previously belonged to the orthodox bishopric of Durrësi. This means that Kruja was never replaced by the bishoprics of *Arbëria*.

As we define the bishopric of *Arbëria* as a different ekklesiastical entity from the bishoprics of Kruja, we define their territories. The location of churches in the jurisdiction of this bishopric helped to define the territory of the bishopric of *Arbëria*. In the investiture act of Shën Trifon in Kotorr of 1166, it is mentioned the abbot of the

⁶⁴ A.Alb. dok.150.

⁶⁵ D. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros*, Oxford, 1957, 41; A. Ducellier, *La façade...*, 150 Dokeianos was situated in this see on 1213 and his appointment is approved only on 1222.

⁶⁶ A.Alb. I, 400 (2.12.1279) mentions for the first time this Catholic bishopric of Kruja, whose archbishop left, as his colleague of Vlora, by the coming again of the Byzantines to live as retired some times in Rome and some time in Anjani (M.Sufflay, *op. cit.* 212).

⁶⁷ Respectively; A.Alb. I, dok. 502, (20.05.1266), dok. 505 (31.05.1287), dok. 552 (5.06.1294) dok. 525 (8.09.1295), dok. 636 (6.06.1318), dok. 663 (18.06.1320), dok. 664 (10.03.1320), dok. 665 (16.07.1320); A.Alb. II, Appendix 9 (25.06.1352), dok. 215 (8.06.1366), Appendix 34 (5.06.1372), 48 (19.01.1391), 76 (20.02.1400), 94 (13.04.1305), M.Sufflay, *op. cit.* 218 note 1 (year 1425). See also the respective appendix of this research.

⁶⁸ Dh. Shuteriqi, Mbi disa çështje.... 199, A.Alb., I, dok. 636 (6 iunii 1318).

⁶⁹ J. Radoniq, *Gjuragj Kastriot Skanderbeg i Arbanija u XV vek*, Beograd 1942, dok. 146 (18.08.1457).

Shelbuemit (Redeemer) church in Rubik (*Sancti Salvatori Arbanensis*), which is named so to be distinguished from the abbot of Tivar, also present in this celebration. The second monastery is the monastery of Shën Llezhdri in Orosh or in the Holy Mountain (and from *Agjios Oros* derives the toponym Orosh in parallel of the Mountain of the Saint). This abbey it is known in the records with the names *San Alexandri Maior de Albania*⁷⁰ and *Sancti Alexandri dioecesis Albanensis*,⁷¹ and should be distinguished from the monastery of Shën Llezhdër of Bokian which is found in the records with the name *San Alexandri di Collematia*.⁷² The latter was hierarchically dependent on the bishopric of Lezha.⁷³ The third church is the church of Gëziq that has been correctly unified with *Sancta Maria di Trafandina in diocesis de Albania*.⁷⁴

In his manuscript about the Gëziq's inscription Zamputi devotes some space to the questions related to it, in addition to his transcription. But we disagree with him when he says that during the Turkish occupation the church changed the name of the saint protector by being called now Shën Veneranda to become the cathedral of *Arbëria*, because the cathedral of Kruja in Kurbin was under this saint.⁷⁵ Also, the above-mentioned letter of the Pope Calixtus III (year 1457) leaves no room for such a hypothesis.

⁷⁰ A.Alb. I, dok. 93.

⁷¹ A.Alb. I, dok. 553, n.1.

⁷² M. Sufflay, *op. cit.* 273, on which Shuteriqi, Një mbishkrim..., 137) thinks that is "*Shën Lleshi i Oroshit të Mirditës në mos ai i Dukagjinit të Matit*". By the latter we think that he is mistaken. Also we think that the Assembly of 1602 that is held in Orosh that according to us comes out very clearly when is said that it's in Dukagjin region and after Serbia and Dibra that follow is mentoned the region of Mat. I. M. Ugolini, *Pagini di storia Veneta ai tempi di Skenderbeg e dei suoi successori con due documenti inediti, Studi Albanesi*, III-IV 1933-34, 23-25.

⁷³ M. Sufflay, *op. cit.* 273, note 3 (year 1435). There is mentioned that the monastery was the same with that of Orosh and the latter depended from Lezha. The ruins of this monastery are on the hills of the village of Spiten. See above the note 17.

⁷⁴ J. Radoniq, *Gjuragj Kastriot...*, dok. 146 (year 1457). For the stones with inscriptions on them see on Th. Ippen, *Stare crkvene rusevine u Albani*, *GZMB i H.* Sarajevo 1901, 585-586. Dh. S. Shuteriqi, *An inscription of Arbër (1190-1216) and other founded inscriptions in Mirdita. Studime historike* 3, 1967, 131-156, I. Zamputi, *Rindërtimi i mbishkrimit të Arbërit dhe mundësitë e reja për leximin e tij, Iliria* 2, 1984, 207-217.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 214-215.

All the three constructions, as Shutereqi shows about Gëziqi,⁷⁶ clearly define the extension of Catholic bishopric of *Arbëria* in the today region of Mirdita, bordering the bishopric of Lezha in the west, the region of Pult and the homonymous bishopric in the north, and the territories of the bishopric of Stefaniaka and bishopric of Kruja in the south and east.

Albanian scholars expressed different opinions about the manuscript published in 1995. So, Kristo Frashëri says that Kruja is the see, as he thinks that the 12 churches are in found the region of Misje, the bishopric is extended also to the south of the river Mat.⁷⁷ But the data reported so far prove that K. Frashëri is wrong.

Kasem Biçoku, in his study about this bishopric, supports our studies about the extension of this bishopric in the territory of Mirdita. Also, the reports of the XVII century extend it even in the territories of Kruja and Durrës.⁷⁸ These reports also inform about the organization of the church after more than a century of Ottoman rule. Marin Bici says in 1610 “*three bishoprics: Sapa, Lezha and Shtjefni have remained in Arbëria.*”⁷⁹ Latter on, Pjetër Budi, bishop of Sapa, in a Report of 1624 adds the bishopric Albanense as well. The latter replaces the archbishopric of Durrës and it is extended in the lands that traditionally were called *Arbëria*, but it's not the bishopric that has given it its name to the territory.⁸⁰

As to the Episcopal see, based on the importance of Orosh abbey in this territory and the fact that some centuries later it is called the Episcopal Abbey, we think that the see should precisely be searched in Shën Aleksandër of the Holy Mountain.

Our opinion on the cases that we have presented in the beginning can be briefly summarized:

1. The Arbanense bishopric was established under specific historic circumstances in the mids of the XII century by the powerful lords of the region, first being relating to and later included as subordinate of the archbishopric of Tivar. It was established along with the territories and churches of the Bishopric of Lezha, and probably of Stefaniaka. In

⁷⁶ Dh. S. Shutereqi, *Një mbishkrim...*, 149.

⁷⁷ K. Frashëri, *Skënderbeu*, 69.

⁷⁸ K. Biçoku, *Kastriotët në...*83.

⁷⁹ *Relacione...*, I, dok. 2,101.

⁸⁰ K. Biçoku, *Kastriotët në...*, 88.

this fact it should be searched the roots of the quarrel between the bishopric of *Arbëria* and the bishopric of Lezha.⁸¹

2. This bishopric is different from the Orthodox bishopric of Kruja (or Catholic when belonged to that religion), hierarchically depending on the metropolis or the archbishopric of Durrësi.

3. The territory of the bishopric of *Arbëria*, and of the principality forming it, was situated between the valley of Drin and the valley of Mati, between the Lezha and Lura's highlands. Its neighboring bishoprics were the bishoprics of Lezha, Pult, Stefaniaka and Kruja. The data about its principal extension, the enlargements and territory reduction in time, i.e, the annexing of its territories and their ceding to the bishopric as based on the letters of the Pope, and the administrative changes under the long Ottoman rule are meanwhile missing.

Also, we notice that the *Arbanense bishopric* does not cover the whole territory known from the medieval records under the name *Arbanon*, which church administration was the responsibility of the metropolis of Dyrrachium mainly.

Indirectly, the present manuscript defines the location where the Assembly of Mat was called up in 1462, by Pal Engjëll, the archbishop of Durrës, which Constitutions are presented in the manuscript *Ashburnham nr. 1167* (pages 1-37).⁸² Here we learn that Pal Engjëlli called up a special synod of the clergy of bishopric of Lis (*Lisigen*), subordinate of Durrës,⁸³ to examine and improve the defects that he himself noticed during the visits in the region, according to him a consequence "of the previous tyranny of the Turks or other disasters, which have affected the region for a very long time." He paid his visit at a time when he thought that the clergy was enjoying an extraordinary protection under the honorable signor Scanderbeg, lord of *Arbëria*.⁸⁴ In the constitutions there are some cases that in a way or another show the consequences of war against the Turks in the region and later during the occupation period. His statement explains the way the

⁸¹ *Acta Albania Juridica*, 1-2. Also Drinov *op. cit.*, had noticed that the archbishopric of Arbër should have been in neighborhood with Tivars' subordinates.

⁸² A. Meksi, The position of Monasteri Sancti Trinitati de Emathia, Qendra dhe shtrirja e Peshkopatës së Lisit në kohë dhe gjendja kishtare në krahinën e Matit dhe ato pranë gjatë shekujve XIV-XVII, *Hylli i Dritës*, 2011,2, 33-57.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

church's wealth and properties at clergy level are considered and the deviations from church rules, but also the need for changes.

From the text of the Constitutions, we also learn that Mat, from the church organization point of view belonged to the Archbishopric of Durrës and also to the Province of the Franciscans Order (maybe is about their monasteries). The monastery of Shën Trini (*Monasterium Sancte Trinitatis de Emathia*) where the above-mentioned synod was assembled, "a very worthy place," as Pal Engjëlli says, "to celebrate such an endeavor"⁸⁵ is situated in Mat. He says that the bishop of Lis, Andrea and the abbots, the rectors, the officials and all the priests were invited to participate in this synod. He also adds that these orders should be fulfilled even by other bishoprics in Mat and its region, a clear indication that the bishopric of Lis did not extend across the Mati region.⁸⁶

This encourages us to look for new evidences about it, ruins or only traces in toponymy. We have to emphasize that all the scholars that have been interested in the linguistics and historic aspects of this document, have posed questions, but not about the location of the monastery in the region of Mat, because the evidence in the text of the Constitutions casts away all the doubts. However, Kasem Biçoku, who explains in details his thesis about the territory in the north of Mati River and east of Lezha where the churches are situated being called Mati, objects our thesis.⁸⁷

The location of the Monastery of Shën Trini near the village Lis of Mat, was first determined by Dilaver Kurti in 1966. He found near the village of Shëlli in Mat the ruins of an old church called *Shnritat* "between the village of Shëlli and the neighborhood Dazaj of Macukull, on the hill of Balla in Dharbël." Shën Mëria (Saint Mary) is the patron of Lisi, that according to Mark Skura it is situated in the land of Lis (*Terra di Lisia*).⁸⁸ Again, Dilaver Kurti shows that in the toponym of Lis and Shlli, we also have the toponym *Mali i Shën Mërisë* that might be connected with the monastery into question.⁸⁹ Dilaver Kurti, also

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ K. Biçoku, *Toponimet mesjetare*..., 183-241.

⁸⁸ Dilaver Kurti, *Dokumenti ma i vjetër i gjuhës shqipe dhe Trinia e Matit*, 1972, *Trashëgime Iliro-Arbërore*, Tiranë 1999, 303.

⁸⁹ D. Kurti, *Shënime etnografike nëpër Mat*, 2004, 22.

thinks that the village of Lis might have been the center of Lisinense bishopric.⁹⁰ The village is situated near the medieval fortress of Stellush, famous for the wars at the time of Gjergj Kastrioti.⁹¹ Also, the village of Shqefën borders Stellushi. The scholars rightly unify Shqefen with the old bishopric of Stefaniaka, first mentioned in the IX century (Stefaniakon),⁹² even with the fortress Stefaniaka as the Procopius of Caesarea⁹³ says.

Kurti says that the the records of the XVII century do not report other churches dedicated to Shën Trinia in the Mati region and in the territory where the bishopric of Lis was situated.⁹⁴ Another case is in the region of Martanesh where such a toponym could be found.⁹⁵ In the center of the village of Peshk is preserved the toponym Kisha e Shëmtrinës. However, according to Mark Skura, the region is situated under the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Benda.⁹⁶ We share the same opinion with Dilaver Kurti about the location of this monastery in Lisi and not in Martaneshi, a remote area. Archeologic researches in the ruins of Shën Trini and in the cathedral of St. Mary in Lisi would be useful to the Albanian culture and history.

Another aspect of the Constitutions relates to the archbishopric of Lis itself, the head of this archbishopric and the place in the church organization by the time and the data about the heads of this archbishopric throughout its existence period. Regarding it and the bishopric of Lis itself, we share the same opinion with the authors of the manuscript, who say that it is about Lisi in Mat and not in Lezha as many others scholars of the church history stated.

The study of the known authors about the publication of the history of the church and its hierarchy, even of those who studied about it later

⁹⁰ D. Kurti, Dokumenti..., 303.

⁹¹ S. Anamali, Stelushi, qyteti i Skënderbeut në Mat, *Studime Historike*, 1967, 4, 105-120. D. Kurti, Një qytet i lashtë ilir në rrethin e Matit, *Studime historike*, 1967, 1, 185, quoted after Trashëgime..., 25.

⁹² S. Anamali, *op. cit.*, 107. D. Kurti, Diskutim mbi kumtesën e Skënder Anamalit "Kalaja e Varoshit në Mat – Stelushi - Nji hallkë e sistemit mbrojtës të Skënderbeut", *Trashëgime...*, 171.

⁹³ Procopii Caesariensis, *De Aedificis, Ilirët dhe Iliria tek Autorët Antikë*, Tiranë 2002, 439.

⁹⁴ D. Kurti, Dokumenti..., 304.

⁹⁵ D. Kurti, Shënime..., 295, A.Cuka, *E folmja dhe toponimia e Martaneshit*, Tiranë 2014, 120,123, (disertacion on line, www.doktoratura.unutir.edu.al).

⁹⁶ *Relacione për gjendjen Shqipërisë së Mesme e të Veriut në shekullin e XVII, përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi*, Tiranë 1965, v. II, (1634-1650), 337.

on, show that their mistake derives from the unification of the bishopric of Lezha (*Alexiense*) with the bishopric of Lisi (*Lisienense*, *Lixiense*). This mistake was first made Daniele Farlati,⁹⁷ but Eubel did not.⁹⁸ Farlati is followed by the publishers of *Acta e Diplomata...*⁹⁹ and lately by Fedalto.¹⁰⁰ We have studied this document, and based on his study and other sources, we are convinced that the list with the names of the bishops of Lisi that Eubel and Tacchella give¹⁰¹ is the most complete list. Giovanni Nigris, Michael de Natera and Nicolò Mondulo are the three names added to this list by us. But Burchardus and Johanis are two names listed in 1358 and around 1370, respectively. The list continues with a range of bishops of this diocese, established in the region of Mat in the mids of the XIV century.

This mistake is noted less among the Albanian scholars, because they know well and in details the place and the local history. Thus, Kristo Frashëri¹⁰² says that foreign scholars including Šufflay, are mistaken when considering it the bishopric of Lezha. Injac Zamputi makes the same remarks.¹⁰³ He says that many scholars are wrong when thinking that the church where the synod was assembled belonged to diocese of Lezha, unifying *Lisiense* with *Alexiense*. Here we can mention Farlati when saying the "*Lisienses seu Alexienses*."¹⁰⁴ However, if we attentively see the list of with the names of bishops Lezha of Farlati presents, it comes out that some of them are mentioned as *Alexiense* and some others as *Lissiense*. After the beginning of the XVI century when the bishopric of Lis had extinguished, only

⁹⁷ Daniele Farlato, *Illyrici Sacri tomus septimus, Ecclesia Diocletana, Antibarensis. Dyrrachensis, et Sirmiensis cum earum suffraganeis*, Venetis, MDCCCXVII. 384-394.

⁹⁸ *Hierarchia Catholica Medii Aevi sive Summorum Pontificum, S.R.E. Cardinalium Ecclesiarum Antistitum Series, ab anno 1198 usque ad annum 1431 perducta e documentis tabularii praesertim- Vaticani collecta, digesta, edita per Conradum Eubel –editio altera*, Monasterii vëll. I, MDCCCCXIII, 83-84; vol. II 85, vol. III 84-85.

⁹⁹ A.Alb, I-II.

¹⁰⁰ G. Fedalto, *La Chiesa Latina in Oriente. Hierachia Latina Orientes*. Verona, 1976, vol. II.35.

¹⁰¹ Lorenzo Tacchella, *Le Antiche sedi episcopali Latine, Greche e Bulgare dell'Albania etnica e della Macedonia*. Milano 1990, 37-39 (Alessio), 85-88 (Lisia).

¹⁰² Kristo Frashëri, *Pesëqind vjetori i dokumentit më të hershëm shqip* (8 Nëntor 1462), *Formula e Pagëzimit*, Tiranë 2009 125.

¹⁰³ Injac Zamputi, *500-vjetori i Dokumentit ma të hershëm të shkrimt shqip. Formula...*, 129.

¹⁰⁴ D. Farlati, *Illyrici Sacri...*, 384.

Alexiense was used. Of the same opinion is also Kolë Ashta who says that Lis, as center of the dioceses of Mat and hierarchically depending on the archbishopric of Durrësi, and Lezha are two different things. Also, finally Peter Bartl, a god expert of our church history, has reservations and inaccurate data about the bishopric of Lisi.¹⁰⁵

Differently from them and us thinks Kasem Biçoku who says that the bishopric of Lezha has been closely connected with Scanderbeg, therefore Andrea, its bishop, was at the side of Pal Engjëlli,¹⁰⁶ and that the bishopric of Lisies *is an invention*, a mistake that occurred due to the mentioning from Mark Skura two centuries later. Except this, he says that Shën Trini is in Breg të Matës, because for him the hinterland of Lezha is part of Mat.

Biçoku has accurately studied about our paper on this topic, but he considers it wrong because *we have not restrained ourselves*, because in our lists of bishops some names are in different languages or are in two places (Lezha and Lis). We have to explain that; I haven't drafted a definitive list of mine because more detailed research is needed, but I have put all the bishops mentioned by publishers of the historic documents and other sources, and the scholars that I have known as well, referring that somebody might be in two places. Nevertheless, the appendix of this manuscript lists the lists with the names of the bishoprics of Lezha, Lisi, Kruja and Arbanense prepared based on additional data and a better interpretation these lists,¹⁰⁷ avoiding the unnecessary mistakes and repetitions. Now it is the turn of the future scholars to complete this list by studying the documentation preserved in the Archives, first of all in the archives of the Holy See, to find out the names of the bishops; their nomination, the see, etc., because the data about the period running from the first Ottoman invasions to the mids of the XVII century are missing.

About the bishop Andrea, the starting of the debate, who in the Constitutions it is considered the bishop of Lis (*Lisignen*) as reported by Gams¹⁰⁸ who apparently might have been based on the letter of the

¹⁰⁵ P. Bartl, Arqipeshkvia e Durrësit gjatë periudhës turke sipas relacioneve të vizitave baritore, *Hylli Dritës*, 2 -2011, 8-11.

¹⁰⁶ K. Biçoku, Mjedisi kishtar dhe politik i kuvendit të Arbërit, *Formula...*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁷ In these appendixes we have tried to make the respective corrections in accordance with this paper.

¹⁰⁸ K. Biçoku, *Toponimet mesjetare...*, 195.

Pope Nicholas V in 1454 where explicitly is described *episcopo Lixiensis*, also as Biçoku reports¹⁰⁹, we are convinced that it is Lis. This is because Eubel presents Lezha with *Alexien – Lexien- Less(i)en*, while Lis with *Lixien- Lissanen*, and not of Lezha. This name is not given by Farlati, in the Lists of whom there are other bishops covering those years, and the nomination depended on the case: Alexiense or Lisien, and after the extinguishing of Lisi, we find the term Alexiense only.

A key role on the thesis of K. Biçoku about Lisi *being an invention*, which has also been admitted by us (viz we framed), is the appointment of Andrea bishop of Lis-Lixense in 1441, after the death of Georgius who was appointed bishop of Lezha - Alexiense - Lexiense in 1440. Andrea was succeeded after the death by Blasius de Bramay on 1.6.1467.

However, if attentively look at the Lists of K. Eubel (v. II, p. 85), it results that after the death of the bishop Lezha, Petrus (Sarda) de Pirano who was appointed by the Pope Martin V (1411-1431) in 1426, Petrus Domgjon, the rector of the church of Shën Koll in Lezha (Alexien) was appointed bishop by the Pope Pius II (1458-1464) in 1459. Vitus Jonima, a noble from Shkodra,¹¹⁰ who was appointed bishop succeeded him after his death in 1474. These names are not listed in the list of Farlati, but their names could be found in the lists of Eubel and Bartl.¹¹¹ As we could notice, Petrus Domgjon was appointed by the Pope— a definitive data proving that Andrea couldn't be the bishop of Lezha. The bishopric of Lis has existed, therefore. The names of the officials of this bishopric are here listed as well. However, further investigation in the archives is needed.

The other aspect of K. Biçoku remarks, is that he finds our mistake when: *we have unified prejudicially the geographical extension of the toponym Emathia (of 1462) with the today extension of Mat's region*. This is incorrect, because in the present paper we have mentioned some contemporary reports about the location of Mati in the Middle Age, that

¹⁰⁹ K. Biçoku, *Toponimet mesjetare*..., 191. The letter has no indication on the position of this bishopric.

¹¹⁰ *Hierarchia Catholica*..., II, 85, *Albania Sacra, Gestliche Visitationsberichte aus Albanien I: Diözese Alessio* Herausgegeben und bearbeitet von Peter Bartl, Wiesbaden 2007, 14.

¹¹¹ *Hierarchia Catholica*..., II, 85, *Albania Sacra*..., I, 14.

with some unessential distinction has remained the same. Also, we remain of the same opinion that the toponym Bregu i Matit (situated north of the river Mat) does not have any connection with the region, but with the river of Mat flowing near by.¹¹²

From the documentation that is preserved we learn that during the middle of the XIV century all the existing bishoprics in the Durrësi hinterland which up to that moment were Orthodox bishoprics were established or converted to Catholic, changing their officials at the same time. With the Anjou occupation (at the end of the XIII century) and the introduction of the Franciscan and Dominican orders, we have frequent actions of the Catholic church from the Albanian bishoprics in Tivar and Durrës concerning the conversion of the Orthodox bishoprics to Catholicism.¹¹³

This activity gives stable outcomes especially after the extinguishing or the exclusion of the Orthodox prelates from the see of the metropolis of Durrës, which apparently is replaced by the Catholic archbishopric. As we have mentioned elsewhere, the latest mentioning of the Orthodox metropolis of Durrës dates in 1343 in the synod act, but whether it resided in its own see remains unknown.¹¹⁴

The establishment of the Catholic church structures under these new circumstances by replacing the Orthodox bishoprics, was characterized during the rule of the Byzantines or the Slavs by fluctuations, depending on the fluctuations of the church and Albanian aristocracy. The same thing happened during the first Turkish occupation around 1415, when the bishopric of Kruja converted to Orthodox, hierarchically depending on the Archbishopric of Ohrid. These events are accurately studied by Gj. Berisha.¹¹⁵

Interestingly, the Catholic bishopric of *Stefaniense et Bendense* with the bishop Demetrius serving as the head of the Catholic bishopric was called in 1363 *Stefaniense*. The bishop Demetrius was later transferred

¹¹² P. B.Gams, *Series episcoporum ecclesiae catholicae, quotquot innotuerunt a Beato Petro Apostolo*. Ratisbonae, 1873, 392. We need to mark that Gams as Farlati unifies the Bishoprics of Lezha and Lissus.

¹¹³ A. Meksi, *Arkitektura e...*, 68-70, R. Elsie, Two Irish travellers in Albania, *Albanien in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Internationales Symposium der SudosteuropA-Gesellschaft*, Munchen, 1991, 24-27; O. J. Schmitt, *Arbëria Venedike...*, 1392-1479, *Tiranë 2007*, 373, 453.

¹¹⁴ A. Ducellier, *La facade maritime ...*, 428-9. P.Xhufi....

¹¹⁵ Gj. Berisha, *Arbërorët ndërmjet kishës perëndimore dhe asaj lindore gjatë shekujve XI-XV*, Prishtinë 2015, 185-224.

to Durrës and succeeded by Julian in 1365— synchronously with Petrus, serving as the head of the unified sees of Stefaniaka and Benda,¹¹⁶ who continues to have this position years later. The inclusion of Benda makes us think that the see might have been there as well, i.e., little retention, but change of the see, and eventually the territory under its jurisdiction was placed in Benda and often in Priska as in some documents it is mentioned as “*Bendense et Priscense*”.¹¹⁷ In these documents it is reported that the Cathedral named after Shën Gjon Pagëzori (Saint John the Baptist), is situated in Moisiti (*terra di Moisiti*), which is today a small village between Shëngjini i Vogël and Qafëmolla. As in some documents dating years earlier (1358), the bishopric of Lis it was mentioned (hierarchically depending on Tivar) in the area nearby the old see in Stefaniaka (Shtjefën), we could explain that the conversion of the local clergy to Catholicism occurred later, under the influence of the Arbanense bishopric situated in east of Stefaniaka. During the rule of Gjergj Kastrioti Kruja became an important political center. So, this bishopric hierarchically depended on the bishopric of Durrës, and remained under this dependence from then. Mark Skura, in a document dating in the middle of the XVII century, emphasizes this dependance including in many territories which once belonged to Stefaniaka, but now the see is in Benda. Their extension could be understood by the villages and the churches mentioned by Mark Skura who says that these bishoprics haven’t had their officials for a long time.¹¹⁸ Also, this document shows that Lisia is situated in the centre of Mat, expanding its territory in the east, in the Dibra region to the shores of the Drini i Zi River— a natural border, and in the north, Mirdita. So, the western and southern parts of the region and the highland of Tirana remained to Stefaniaka and Benda.

From the XV- XVII century, the country and the church faced difficulties because of the wars with the Ottoman Empire and the difficult relations with the Holy See. The Ottoman occupation lasted for almost five years and it was accompanied by the conversion to Islam of the majority of the Christian population and the abandonment and the ruin of the religious buildings, which made the continuity and extension

¹¹⁶ A.Alb. II, Appendix 21, 20 Decembris 1363.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, dok. 747 (12 maii 1404).

¹¹⁸ *Relacione....*, II, dok. 63, 10^v (after 1644).

of the bishoprics and of any other church structure difficult. There are many the cases of the bishops not being able to exercise their duty during the first centuries of occupation, and with the conversion to Islam of the majority of the inhabitants, they were not mentioned anymore. However, the bishops' Lists proves their existence during the XVI-XVII century, and the time when each of them ceases to exists.

So, this was situation into which the church and the administration of the Catholic dioceses was found. They were left without spiritual leader. The churches were ruined and abandoned even by the believers, while the archbishopric of Durrës was displaced in Kurbin, in a safe highland area. We have a slightly different picture of the religion situation in the Central and Southern Albania practicing the Orthodox religion. By establishing the Timar system (possibly since during the rule of the sultan Mehmet I, in the respective registers are described the properties of the churches, bishoprics and the metropolis (the metropolis of Berat).¹¹⁹ This means that it was applied the policy declared by Mehmet II after the conquer of Constantinople in 1453. The properties and other rights were left by decree to the Patriarchane and subordinate churches. These measures were applied up to a certain point during the XV century.

Regarding the church administration, comparing this situation with the situation of the second half of the XIV century, when these territories converted from Orthodox to Catholic with the XV century about which there are more accurate data, regardless the difficult situation for the nation and church, helps us to know the church organization during the Gjergj Kastrioti – Scanderbeg rule.

There is no clear situation of the church even in the territories of Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg. Therefore, studies based on the Archives records and in the historic evidences of the time must further. The Albanian-Turkish war effected the church organization and the real functioning of bishoprics. Based on a document of 1453 shows that in the bishopric of Kruja *there is no Catholic priest and deacon to assist during the mass* the chaplain Don Elia, who has come together with the soldiers of Alfonso V, Gjon Berisha thinks that the castle inhabitants practiced the oriental rite and the Orthodox bishops at this time in

¹¹⁹ *Regjistri i...*, Timaret 148, 200.

Kruja, have played a role of the ambassadors of Scanderbeg. Here we can mention Stefan bishop who was sent to Gaeta in 1451.¹²⁰

The presence of Nifon, an Arvanite from Morea who became at the end of the century Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, in Kruja helps us understand the stand of Scanderbeg's stand towards the presence of both churches, especially after the Council of Florence (1439).¹²¹ Nifon and Zacharia undertook a missionary voyage and visited Kruja at the beginning of the '60es of that century. They were welcomed by Scanderbeg enthusiastically. They exercised their ministry throughout their stay in Kruja, until the city was threatened by the Turks and left to Ohrid.

Further researches are needed, because the Kruja case shows that the territories under the church jurisdiction of Durrës, alternated between the two religions due to the confusion created in the first years of the Ottoman rule and continued even after the death of the Hero and the fall of Kruja at the hands of the Turks and the fall of Durrësi in 1501. Kristo Frashëri says that the Albanians were not fanatic as Šufflay previously emphasizes,¹²² and the Albanian Middle Age was not a clash between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.¹²³

It is clear that during the XV century, when specific regions were occupied, the data on the church organization and its hierarchy incomplete. Under these circumstances, the church documentation has also created many confusions among the scholars. Even in our case, the events occurring in a century of wars and Ottoman occupation, are characterized by ambiguity. There are missing data about the continuity of the Arbanense bishopric, and whether it is related to the establishment of the bishopric of Lis, which in the XVII century administers a part of the territories. The rest of the territories were administered by Lezha. In the first case K. Biçoku¹²⁴ thinks that the extinguishing of the local aristocracy after the Turkish occupation is the

¹²⁰ K. Frashëri, *Skënderbeu*, 187. K. Biçoku, *Kastriotët në...*, 72, Gj. Berisha, *Arbëroret...*, 160-161. During that period are mentioned in the Castle of Kruja, the churches of Shën Gjergj, Shën Mërisë and Shën Ndreu, K. Frashëri, *Skënderbeu*, 244, K. Giakoumis, *Kisha e Shën Gjergjit në kështjellën e Krujës dhe tradita bizantine, Skënderbeu dhe Evropa*, Tiranë 2006, 218.

¹²¹ *Ibid...*, 186.

¹²² *Ibid...*, 188

¹²³ M. von Sufflay, *Serbët dhe shqiptarët*, Tiranë 2004, 122.

¹²⁴ K. Biçoku, *Kastriotët në...*, 73.

source of lack of political support for the Arbanense bishopric, and parts of its territory were included in other bishoprics, and here we would add that the highland territories were included in that of Lis.¹²⁵

The Arbanense bishopric was established around 1166, and it should not be unified with the bishopric of Kruja (Croïense), because it has different territorial area and different leadership. This bishopric was called in 1506 *Albanense* bishopric and Giovanni Corona was appointed bishop by the Pope Julius II (previously are also known Angelo da Macerata and a certain Paolo).¹²⁶ In 1513, Corona retires at favor of Martin Lelesa (Lalëzi),¹²⁷ who appoints Antonio Mida¹²⁸ vicar in the area of Rodon, and from the denomination Mysia, Musia of that area as reported in the documents of the time, derives the today toponym of Muzhli. Meanwhile, the bishopric extended up to Rodon, because, the bishopric of Durrës (and the archbishopric) had apparently disappeared. The bishopric of Durrësi was recreated in 1635 with Mark Skura as the bishop of Albania, whose see was displaced in Kurbin, in the monastery of Shën Veneranda. We think that the term *Albanense* does not refer to *Arbanense*, but Albania -Arbëria. This title is granted to Giovanni Corona to reorganize the church of the Central Albania that had dispersed and no leadership. It was impossible for him to move from Xara where he was placed under the protection of Venice until his death in 1515.¹²⁹

During his stay in Xara, Giovanni Corona appoints Giorgio de Nigris, the bishop of Lisie, as the general subordinate (*suffraganeo generale*). This proves that Corona was the leader of the church in the Central Albania and not of *Arbanense*. On this occasion, also Praga admits that Lisia is not Lezha, and the bishopric of Stefaniaka is a different bishopric.¹³⁰ There are appropriate data (XVII century) and some reports from Mark Skura about the extension of the dioceses of Lisie. In the report dating in the end of 1641, he shows that Lisia was situated between the Kruja mountain and Dukagjin Mountain

¹²⁵ *Relacione....*, II, dok. 63

¹²⁶ G. Praga, Il vescovado Albanense al principio di secolo XVI, *Rivista d'Albania*, II, luglio 1940, 143.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 144

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 150.

¹³⁰ G. Praga, *Ibid*, 144-145.

(Mirdita). In addition, Mati region is a big valley, more than 30 miles long and more than 17 miles wide.¹³¹ Moreover, the *Albanense* bishopric, its subordinate, it is situated in the region of Elbasani which is called by him *città di Albano*¹³². This is another data that proves our theses, and at the same time it clearly shows that the old nominations and dependencies were extinguished from the memory of the local clergy and believers.

Another question to be addressed is the location meeting of the Assembly of Dukagjini in 1462. Generally, many authors say that this meeting was held in the Mati region, in a village with the same name and where the abbey of Shën Aleksandër (Saint Alexander) was situated.¹³³ Injac Zamputi emphasizes the same in his study about the country's situation in the XVII century.¹³⁴ Here it is hypthetised the transference of the official of abbey of Oroshi in Dukagjini in Mat due to the country's occupation. Later on, in his manuscript about the efforts of the Albanian leaders to liberate the country from the Turks, he remphasizes that "...we have the conviction that the Assembly was held in the village of Mat's Dukagjin...."¹³⁵ We think that this statement was based on *...insieme nel paese di Ducagini a Santo Alessandro....* Also, before the signatures it is written... *Data di Sant' Alessandro della provintia di Ducagini...*

In our paper about the bishopric of *Arbëria*, based on the documentary data, we think that the Assembly of Dukagjin was held in the famous abbey of Shën Aleksandër (Shën Llezhdri) in the Mali i Shenjt in Orosh of Mirdita in 1602.¹³⁶ This is further studied it in details.¹³⁷

2565 delegates from many parts of Albania were gathered in this Assembly aiming to organize a general rebellion. It was decided to address a special letter to the Republic of Venice, because it was hoped

¹³¹ *Relacione.....*, II, 245.

¹³² *Relacione.....*, II, dok.63. 11 (after 1644).

¹³³ *Historia e Shqipërisë*, v. II, Tiranë 2002, 568.

¹³⁴ I. Zamputi, Të dhëna të reja mbi gjendjen ekonomike shoqërore e politike të vendit tonë në shekullin e XVII-të, *Buletin për shkencat shoqërore* 2, 1956, 161.

¹³⁵ I. Zamputi, Projektet shqiptare për çlirimin e vendit drejtue Evropës në vjetet 1577-1621, *Buletin për shkencat shoqërore*, 4, 1956, 122 note 1.

¹³⁶ A. Meksi, Peshkopata e..., note 79.

¹³⁷ A. Meksi, Ku u mbajt Kuvendi i Dukagjinit i vitit 1601-2, *Hylli i Dritës* 4, 2007, 103-106.

that it would be in its own interest to support them in the war against the Turks.¹³⁸ The Assembly demanded of Seignory to help them to gain the freedom, ...*wich they had in the time of Gjergj Scanderbeg*..., and also to welcome the Albanian Ambassador Pal Dukagjini, the bishop of Sapa and Sarda (*Sapatense et Sardinense*) whose task was the negotiation with the Republic of Venice involving the stronghold of Kruja. Also, they were committed to putting at her disposal forty thousand warriors, the bravest ones, to whom could join the Orthodox Albanians, and even the Slavs, and together would make up a hundred thousand men in arms to fight the barbarians.

The requests were written in the letter, and it was hoped that the Republic of Venice would consider them their real and faithful vassals by supporting them and they were ready to live and die in the name San Marco. In the end, they ask to the Republic of Venice to protect them from any enemy and consider them her citizens. The letter dates February 15, 1602 and signatures after the regions: *oDukagjin, Serbia, Dibra, Shkodra, Sapa* (Zadrima with Lezha), *Mat, Kurbin, Kruja, Petrela, Elbasan, Durrës, Myzeqe, Padenia-Spaderica(?)* could be found in it.¹³⁹

The signatories, that prove with their seal the above-mentioned content, are the bishop of Stefaniaka and the Apostolic visitor for the entire *Arbëria Nikollë Mekajshi* (Nicolo Mecansci) and *Nikollë Bardhi* (Nicolo Bianchi), the bishop of Sapa and Sarda. The letter ends with the signature of the abbot of Shën Aleksandër's, fra Bernard Laçi, who wrote the letter "*with the command and the consensus of the above-mentioned chieftains and leaders of all Albania*".¹⁴⁰

The ranking of signatories according to region shows that it is about Shën Aleksandër in the Dukagjini region. Among the signatures there are some chieftains who are mentioned by name and others are described as "*other chieftains*". The chieftains of Serbia (meaning Kosova) Dibra, Shkodra and Lezha with Sapa, the Mati region are listed after Dukagjini. Therefore, Mati is not part of Dukagjini and has never been part of it. This can be understood even from the reports that

¹³⁸ L. Ugolini, *Pagine di Storia Veneta ai tempi di Scanderbeg e dei suoi successori* (con due documenti inediti), *Studi Albanesi*, vol III-IV, 1933-1934, 21-25 (dok.1).

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 22-24.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 22-24. On N. Mekanshi, his life and efforts for the liberation of Albania see: R. Hoxha, *Peshkopi i Arbërisë*, Kavajë 1998.

the envoys in *Arbëria* and the local prelates such as Marin Bici, Mark Skura, Pjetër Budi, Pjetër Mazreku sent to Rome.¹⁴¹ These reports clarify the differences between the Dukagjini region and Mati region, and the Assembly of Dukagjin was gathered in the the Abbey of Shën Aleksandër in Malin e Shenjti and not in the village of Dukagjini in Mat, where there is an abbey with the same patron saint.

The old quarrel between the bishopric of Lezha and the Arbanense bishopric comes out again in the beginning of the XVII century when the envoys of the Congregation Propaganda Fide and the missionaries established in the missions, began to reestablish the church structures in the Central Albania. This is could be noted the letter of Marin Bici, the archbishop of Tivari, in 1610,¹⁴² where he says that except the bishopric of Stefania, the bishoprics of Sapa and Lezha have remained, meaning that the bishop of Stefania is the bishop of Albanense, once the Archbishopric of Durrësi. The first evidence about the quarrel dates in 1625,¹⁴³ when Benedict Orsini, the bishop of Lezha, complains about the behavior of Gjon Kolesi, because when he turned from Rome, brought the indulgence of the Holy Year only for his dioceses. This is because according to him it was not granted to the other dioceses. According to Orsini, the title *Albanense* for the dioceses of Kolesi is fake, because such a diocese does not exist. He doesn't want to understand that the Vatican has made a reorganization, according to which this bishopric includes all the territory that once belonged to Durrës. This bishopric was called the Archbishopric of Durrës and its see was in Shën Veneranda of Kurbin, as Durrësi was occupied by the time. These are the beginnings of the renewal of the old quarrel Lezha-Arbëria about the churches in the Mirdita, Mat and Kruja regions, which lasted repetitively for 30 years. Kolesi was appointed bishop by the time and was succeeded by the bishop Mark Skura.¹⁴⁴

This quarrel is described in many reports sent to Rome to ask for support, from each part. The cause is clearer, because the absence of the *Arbanense* bishopric and of the heads of this bishopric for nearly 150 years due to the Ottoman occupation, their reestablishment process

¹⁴¹ *Relacione...*, dok. 36, 44, 44^v, dok. 3, 185, dok. 5, 83, dok 37, 271.

¹⁴² *Relacione...*, I, dok. 2, 101.

¹⁴³ *Relacione...*, I, dok.22, 88^v.

¹⁴⁴ *Relacione...*, I, dok. 31,167, dok. 32.

faced difficulties with regard to the borders of Lezha first, and of the territory that was once of the bishopric of Durrës.

In the reports sent to Rome about his visit in 1629, B. Orsini mentions the villages at the back of Lezha, which he considers his villages, and also the villages in the highland (Ndërfanda, Fani i Vogël, Mirëdita, Bulgëri, Kthella, Selita etc. that he did not know), with more than 3000 houses that were not subdued to the Turks. According to him they belonged to the *Albanese* diocese.¹⁴⁵ The same year, after monsignor Gjon Kolesi bishop of Lezha dies, Orsini goes to the Mountains in Mirdita and makes the inhabitants swear under oath for him, and in the Abbey of Orosh, once Episcopal abbey, is appointed a new abbot.¹⁴⁶ Once bishop Mark Skura is appointed bishop in 1636, complains about the churches of Shpërdhasa, Velje, Gjunalit e Fandit të Madh, in which the bishop of Lezha presents himself while not belonging to Archbishopric of Durrës.¹⁴⁷

This quarrel required evidences from a group of clergymen and seculars, and a little bit later from some vicars who in 1636¹⁴⁴ show that the villages of Kthella, Mirëdita, Fand, Selita and Dibri, have been part of the Albanese bishopric for 60 years now. And when Mark Skura takes the same year from Rome the bull and the decrees for the Albanese church to administer *the peoples of Durrës metropolis: Bendense, Lisiense, Crojense, Canouiense*; he again complains about the bishop of Lezha for usurping the name *Lisiense* with *Alessiense* and taking some villages.¹⁴⁸

For this purpose, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide envoys Gjergj Usković as commissar for the borders between Lezha and Albanese in 1637.¹⁴⁹ Based on his reports, Gjergj Usković did not have right stand. Mark Skura in the letter says that B. Orsini would like to make the name of the Lis diocese disappear, and detaches Blinisht, Mirdita and other villages from this diocese.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ *Relacione...*, II, dok. 2, 215.

¹⁴⁶ *Relacione...*, II, dok. 6, 117.

¹⁴⁷ *Dokumente për Historinë e Shqipërisë (1623-1653)*, Transcribed and translated by I. Zamputi, St. Gallen-Prishtinë 2015, dok. 28, 125-125^v, (11 February 1636) dok. 29, 127-127^v, (24 March 1636).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* dok. 33, 119-119^v, (12 June 1636).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* dok. 43, 150-157^v, (28 May 1637).

¹⁵⁰ *Relacione...*, II, dok. 23, 217-218^v, (29 May 1637).

We have detailed reports on the church situation of the Catholic bishoprics from bishops and visitors since then and throughout the second half of the XVII century. These reports are partly published in Albanian. Here we can mention the reports made by Mark Skura (in the half of the '40s), Shtjefën Gaspari¹⁵¹ (in the end of the '60) and of Vincens Zmajević in 1701.¹⁵²

This quarrel had definitively ended in 1703, when the Council of Arbër defined the borders among the bishopric of Lezha, Sapa and Albani and the borders of the bishopric of Pulti.¹⁵³ However, there is space for further discussions and studies as well as about the history of the church organization for the XV-XVII centuries in the Central and Northern Albania. The studies by professor Zamputi, Peter Bartl and other Albanian and foreign scholars remain of great importance. Exhaustive research in the Archives of Vatican etc. are however needed.

The present paper provides information about the *Arbanense* bishopric; its establishment, extension, the quarrel with the bishopric of Lezha (Alexiense-Lexiense) and some current data about it. The abbey of Shën Aleksandër in Orosh (*Sancti Alexandri supra Montem Meriditarum*) played a great role.

We aim to inform about some of the many historic events of the Medieval Age as it is a period that requires further accurate researches in the Archives. The new generation of historians is needed to be trained about systematic research on data that should be published based on scientific criteria. So, the existing deficiencies have caused confusion in knowing this period of our history.

¹⁵¹ *Albania Sacra*....., I,108-122, (1671/72), *Albania Sacra, Gestliche Visitationsberichte aus Albanien 2: Erzdiözese Durazzo*. Herausgegeben und bearbeitet von Peter Bartl, 196-214 (1672), Wiesbaden 2011.

¹⁵² *Quellen und Materialien zur Albanischen Geschichte im 17. Und 18. Jahrhundert*, Herausgegeben und bearbeitet von Peter Bartl, München 1979.

¹⁵³ V. Malaj, *Kuvendi i Arbënit* 1703, Prishtinë 1998, 122, *Kuvendi i Arbënit*, Prishtinë 2003, 445-447, *Concili Provinciaali o Cuvendi JArbenit 1706*, prepared for publishing by Bardhyl Demiraj, Shkodër 2012, 201-205. In the decisions of the council is said that should stick on the conversations made in Mërqi on 1638. Thus: Shën Gjergji of Kukul, Shën Mëria of Lasingagji, Shën Marku and Shna Prenda of Kthellës, Shën Vlasi and Shën Lleshi of Selita are of Albani; While Shën Mëria of Fand and Shën Lleshi on the mountains of Mirdita, Shën Mëria and Shën Marku of Fand i Vogël, Shën Mitri in Fand i Madh, Shën Pali and Shën Shtjefni of Blinisht are of Lezha.

Only the multiplied efforts we can shed light on the Albanians' Middle Age, exceeding the frontiers of the first decades of the past century.

Appendix 1

The bishopric of Lezha (*Alexiense, Lexiense*)

1357	Jacobus	E ,I,83; ADA ,II, A.12; T 37;
1365	Dionisio	E ,I, 83; ADA ,II, A.28; T 39;
???	intruso Giovanni Lursi (Nigro)	E ,I, 83; T 39;
1369-72	Domenico Progoni di Camona	E ,I, 83; ADA , II,296,A.38 ; T 39;
???	Petrus	E I, 83;
1394	Francesco Petri	E ,I, 83; ADA ,II, A.59,65; T 39;
1397	Andrea Regino	E ,I, 83; G 392; T 39;
1405	Bartholomeo	R. L. 125, 208^r-209^r
1405	Andrea Sumae	F 388; E ,I, 84; R. L. 122A , 295 ^v -296 ^v ;
		LeQ III, 955- 956;; Fed II, 35-36
1426	Pietro Sarda da Pirano	F 388; E ,I, 84; G 392; Fed II, f.36; LeQ III, 955-956 R. L. 267, 234^v-235^r ; ; T 39;
1459	Pietro Domgion	E II, 85; T 39;
1474	Vito Jonima	E ,II, 85; T 39;
1478	Petrus Malonsis	F 389; E ,II, 85;
1485	Petrus	E II, 85;
1489	Petrus II. Malonsius	G 392;
1489	Blasius II	G 392;
1509	Petrus	G 392;
1513	Nicolo Dabri	E III, 103; T 39;
1518	Petrus Gil	E III, 103;
1518	Giovanni Gionema	F 386, 390; E III, 103; G 393; T 39;
1519	Ferdinando de Rosas	F 386, 390; T 39; G 393; E III, 103;
1525	Nicolaus Naule	F 390; E III, 103; G 393;
1525	Joannes III. de Stymai Albanensis	F 390; E III, 103; G 393;
1529	Antonius Nigris	E III, 103;
1535	Guglielmus de Furrbitius	F 390; E III, 103; G 393;
1558	Nicolaus III. Guernus	F 391; G 393; E III, 103;
1559	Antonius de Nigris	E III, 104;
1560-75	Johannes IV. Crassinga	F 391; E III, 104; G 393;
1575	Theodorus Calumpsi	F 391; E III, 104; G 393;
1578	Marinus Brajano Ragusinus	F 391; G 393; E III, 104;

1596-1601	Innocentius Stoicini	F 391; E III, 104; E IV, 77; G 393;
1621	Benedictus Orsini	F 392; G 393; E IV, 77;
1656	Georgius Vladagni	F 393; G 393; E IV, 77;

The bishopric of Lis (*Liciense, Lisiense, Lixiense*)

1358-69	Burchardus	E ,I,83; ADA ,II, dok.270, A. 12;
Para 1370	Johanis	E ,I,83; ADA ,II,A.32,dok.270 n.4;
1370	Giovanni Hueti de Codomo	F 387; E I,309; T 85;
1373-85	Gregorio Laurenti da Venezia	F 387; E I,309; T 85;
1392	Martinus	E ,I,309; ADA ,I,256; Fed ,II,36; T 68;
?	Nicolo "Oculi Grandi"	E II,179; T 88;
1436	Giorgio	E ,II,179; Fed ,II,36; T 88;
1441	Andrea	E ,II,179; Fed ,II, 36; T 88;
1467	Biagio Bramay	F 389; LeQ ,II,96; E ,II,179; Fed ,II, 36; T 88;
1498	Francesco de Comitibus	F 389,A .60; E ,II,179; Fed ,II,36; T 88;
1510	Giorgio Nigris	LeQ ,II 956; P dok.9;
1513	Michael de Natera	F 389; LeQ ,II,956; T
88;		
1517	Nicolo Madulos	F 390;

The bishopric of Arbëria (*Arbanense, Albanensis, Albaniensis*)

1166	Lazaro	F 194, G 392; ADA ,I,dok.93; T 36
1199	N.N.	F 194; G 392;
1250(2)	N.N. (Petrus?)	F 194; M 29; G 392;
1292	Michael	E ,I,100; F 195;G, 392; T 36;
1306	Martino	F 196; G 392; T 36;
1316	Michael	F 196;
1317	Michael II	G 392;
1317	Martinus	E I, 100; R. V. 70, epis. 477; Mo. nr. 10362;
1350	Laurus	E ,I,100; F 196; G 392; ADA ,II,dok.78;
1354	Nicolaus	E ,I,100; F 196; G 392; ADA ,II,dok.104;
???	Andreas	E I, 100;
1364	N.N.	F 197; G 392;
1367	N.N. /Dominicus, 1372, G 392/	F 197; G 392;
1370-91	Giovanni Lourlis	F 197; E I, 100; G 392; T 36;
1391-97	Giovanni da Trieste	E ,I,100; G 392; ADA ,II,dok.459; T 36;
1398-402	Thomas	E I, 100; ADA ,II, A.82;

1402	Giorgio	E ,I,100; ADA ,II,A.82; R. L. 102, 147r-148 ^r ; T 36;
1411	Andreas	E ,I, 100; F 197; G 392; R. L. 189, 104 ^r ;
1412	Vulcanos Sinuti	E , I, 100; R. L. 135, 4 ^r -5 ^r ; T 36;
1426	Andreas Summa	E I,100; E II,104; F VII, 197-198; G 392; R. L. 337, 50 ^v ;
1441	Andrea Svinci	E ,II, 92; F VII, 197; G 392; R. L. 386, 13 ^v -14 ^r ; T 36;
1463	Nicolaus	E II, 92;
1471	Nicolo	E ,II, 92; T 37;
?	N.N. (Paolo ?)	F 198; P 143;
1494	Angelo da Macerata	E ,II, 92; F 198; G 392;
1506 (albanense)	Giovanni Corona	F 198; E ,III, G 392;114; P 143; T 37;
1518	Johannes (Jacobus) de Montalbo	E ,III,114; F 200; G 392;
1519	Ludovicus de Vivaldis	E ,III,114; F 200; G 392;
1540	Petrus de Torres	E ,III,114;
1554	Dominicus Bigorrei	F 202; E ,III,114; G 392;
1578	N.N.	F 202;
1598	N. N.	G 392;
1608	N.N.	F 202; G 392;
1615	Ioannes Collesius	F 202; E ,IV.74; G 392; T 37;
1635	Marcus Scurra	F 203; E IV, 74; G 392; T 37; 6;

The bishopric of Kruja (*Croensis, Croiense, Crojenses, Crojacenses, Croiae*)

1286-98	Romano	F 413-4; E , I, 216; Fed , II, 109; G 404; T 59;
1318-20-27	Andrea	F 413; E , I, 216; G 404; Fed , I, 109; T 59;
1352	Gregorius	F 413-4; E , I, 216; LeQ , II, 956; G 404; T 59; Fed , II, 109;
1366	Andrea	F 413-4; E , I, 216; LeQ , II, 956; G 404; T 59; Fed , II,109;
1400	†Iohannes	E , I, 216;
1400	Gualtieri	E ,I, 216; R. L. 255, 94 ^v -95 ^{r-v} ; Fed ,II, 109;
1407	Johannes Petri de Arbania de Volpevisto	R. L. 132, 117 ^r ;
1409	Francesco	T 59;
1409	Nicola	T 59;
1415-25	Antonio Ventura de Urbe	F 415; E I, 216; G 404; LeQ ,II,956; R. L. 255, 94 ^v -95 ^{r-v} ; H I, 344 (nr. 724); T 61;
1457†	Silvester	Fed , II, 119;
1457	Paolo	E ,II, 140;); G 404; Fed , II, 110;

		R. L. 349, 254 ^{F-V} ;
		H I , 344 (nr. 724; T 61;
1468	Pietro de Varnis (de Brutis)	F 430; E ,II,140; G 404; T 61;
1471	Elia Sguri	E ,II,140; T 61; Fed ,II,110;
1475	N. N.	G 404;
1476 †	Iohannes	T 61;
1476	Nicolo	T 61;
1478	Pietro	T 61;
1480	N.N.	F 430-1; Fed ,II,110;
1498	Iohannes Didacus	F 413,431; G 404;
1498	Martinus de Portu	E ,II,140;
1517	Ferdinandus	F 431; G 404;
1525†	Paulus	F 431; E , III, 182; G 404;
1524(5)	Francesco de Chios	F 431; E , III, 182; G 404; T 61;
1542	Bonaventura Dalmata	T 61;
1632	N.N.	F 432; G 404;
1649	N.N.	LeQ ,II,956;
?	Iohannes	F 432; G 404;
1694	Isidorus	F 432; G 404;

Abbreviations:

ADA – *Acta et Diplomata Res Albaniae Mediae Aetatis Ilustrantia. Collegerunt et Digesserunt Dr. Ludovicus de Thallóczy, Dr. Constantinus Jireček et Dr. Emilianus de Sufflay. Volumen I, (annos 344-1343 tabulamque Geographicam continens); volumen II, (anos 1344-1406, continens).* Vindobonae: Typis Adolphi Holzhausen, 1913-1918.

E – Conradum Eubel, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii Aevi sive Summorum Pontificum, S. R. E. Cardinalium Ecclesiarum Antistitum. Series ab anno 1198 usque ad annum 1431 perducta e documentis tabularii praesertim Vaticani collecta, digesta, edita per Conradum Eubel. Editio altera. Monasterii, 1913, vol. I, ab anno 1198 usque ad annum 1431; 1914, vëll. II. ab anno 1431 usque ad annum 1503. [Sumptibus et typis, Librariae Regensbergianae. /Re-Impressio immutata Patavi 1960. Typis et sumptibus domus editorialis "Il Messaggero di S. Antonio" Provinciae Patavinae S. Antoni ordinis fratrum Minorum Conventualium apud Basilicam S. Antonii – Patavii, Italia].*

F – Daniele Farlato, *Illyrici Sacri. Tomus septimus. Ecclesia Diocletiana, Antibarenis, Dyrrhachiensis, et Sirmiensis, cum earum sufraganeis. Auctore, Daniele Farlato, presbytero Societatis Jesu, et Jakobo Coleti olim ejusdem Societatis alumno. Venetiis: Apud Sebastianum Coleti. Superiorum permissu, ac privilegio, 1817, vol. VII.*

Fed _____, *La Chiesa Latina in Oriente. Hierachia Latina Orientes. /Studi relegiosi /2/ una collana che presenta con rigoroso metodo scientifico momenti, istanze, problemi religiosi della nostra epoca. Verona: Casa Editrice Mazziana, 1976, vol. II.*

G – Pius Bonifacius Gams, *Series episcoporum ecclesiae catholicae, quotquot innotuerunt a Beato Petro Apostolo. A multis adjutus edidit P. Pius Bonifacius Gams, O.S.B. Ratisbonae: Typis et Sumtibus Georgii Josephi Manz, 1873.*

H – Ulricus Hüntemann. *Bullarium Franciscanum continens constitutiones epistolas diplomata Romanorum Pontificum Eugeni IV et Nicolai V, ad tres ordines S. P. N. Francisci spectantia collegit et eddidit fr. Ulricus Hüntemann O.F.M. lector iubilatus. Nova Series, tomus I, (1431-1455). Florentiam: Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi). Ex Typographia Collegi S. Bonaventurae, 1939, vol. I.*

LeQ – Michaelis le Quien, *Oriens Christianus, inquitur patriarchatus digestus; quod exhibentur Ecclesiae, Patriarchae, caeterique praesules totius orientis. Studio et opera R. P. F. Michaelis le Quien, Morino-Boloniensis, Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum. Opus Posthumum. Tres magnas complectens Diaeceses Ponti, Asiae, et Thraciae, Patriarchatui Constantinopolitano subjectas. Caeterique praesules totius orientis, tomus secundus. Pariis: Ex Typographia Regia, 1740, vol. II.*

M – *Monumenta Montenegrina, knjiga V, tom I, Crkve podloznice Barske Arhiepiskopije. Podgorica, 2001.*

Mo – Guillaume Mollat, and Guillaume de Lesquen, *Lettres Communes des papes d'Avignon. Paris: Libraire des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1905.*

_____, *Lettres Communes de Jean XXII (1316-1334). Introduction la collation des bénéfices ecclésiastiques a l'époque des papes d'Avignon (1305-1378). Paris: E. de Boccard, 1921.*

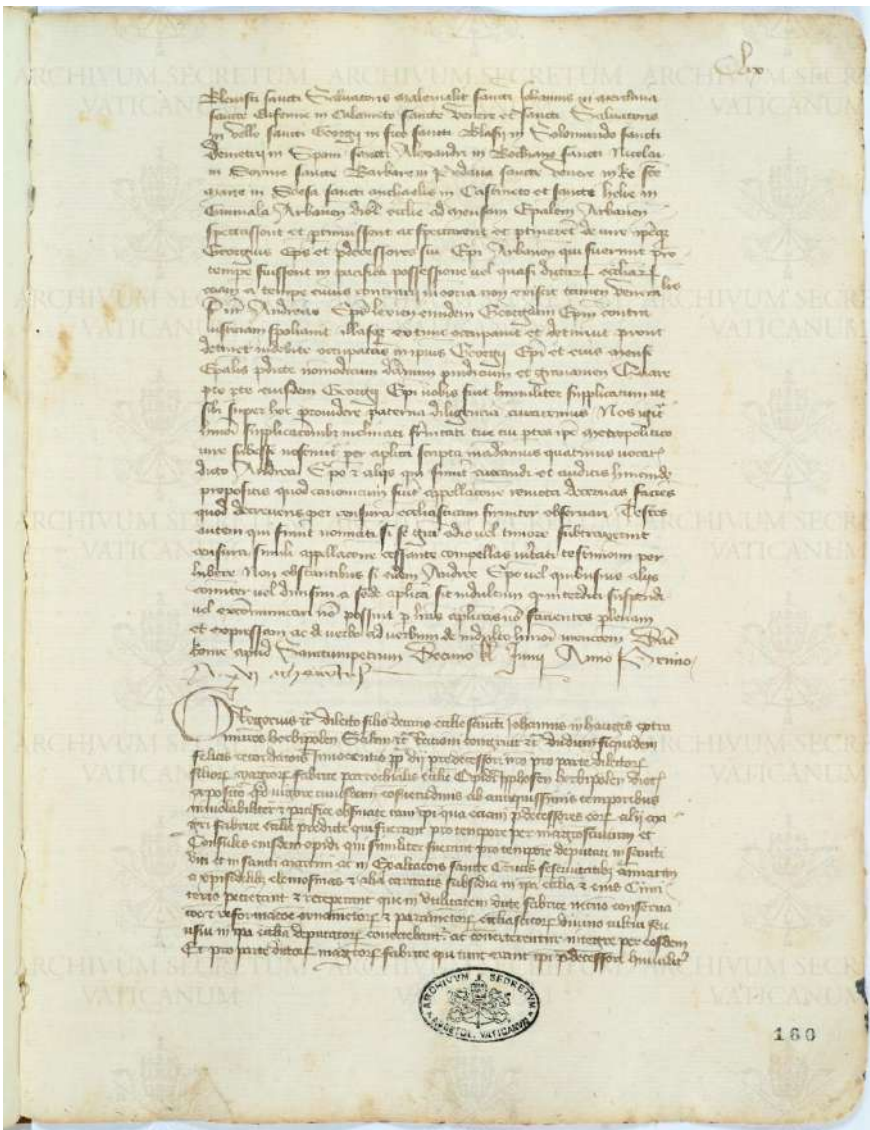
_____, *Lettres Communes Jean XXII (1316-1334). Analysées d'après les registres dits d'Avignon et du Vatican. Paris: Albert Fontemoing, 1904.*

_____, *Les Papes d'Avignon (1305-1378). Dixième édition revue, remaniée et augmentée. Paris, 1965.*

P – Giuseppe Praga, *Il vescovado Albanense al principio di secolo XVI. In: "Rivista d'Albania." Milano II, luglio 1940.*

R L – *Registri Lateranesi, (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Vatikan. Fond: Registri Lateranensi) vol. 102, 109, 112, 122A, 132, 133, 135, 162, 189, 204, 255, 267, 289, 320, 337, 349, 386, for the years 1401-1454.*

T – Lorenzo Tacchella, *Le Antiche sedi episcopali Latine, Greche e Bulgare dell'Albania etnica e della Macedonia. Milano: Biblioteca dell' Accademia Olubrense, 1990.*



fratris nostrl Georgij episcopi Arbanensis .petitio continebat quod licet Sancte Venere in Baldreni, Sancti Nicolai [f. 160^r.(o1. 159r)] in Blenisti, Sancti Salvatoris Malemalit, Sancti Johannis in Merchina, Sancte Eufemie in Calameto, Sancte Venere et. Sancti Salvatoris in Vello, Sancti Georgij in Fico, Sancti Blasij in Solomundo, Sancti Demetrij in Spani Sancti Alexandri in Bochiano, Sancti Nicolai in; 'Soyme, Sancte Barbare in Pedana, Sancte Venere in Re, Sancte Marie in Soesa, Sancti Michaelis in Castineto et Sancti Helie in Guimala Arbanensis diocesis ecclesie ad mensam Episcopalem Arbanensisspectassent et pertinuisent ac spectarent et pertinerent de iure ipseque Georgius episcopus et predecessores sui episcopi Arbanensis qui fuerunt pro tempore fuissent in pacifica possessione vel quasi dictarum ecclesiarum etiam a tempore cuius contrarij memoria non existit tamen venerabilis frater noster Andreas episcopus Lexiensiseundem Georgium episcopum contra iustitiam spoliavit illasque extunc occupavit et detinunt prout detinet indebite occupatas in ipsius Georgij episcopi et eius mense episcopalis prediacte nonmodicum damnum preiudicium et gravamen quare pro parte eiusdem Georgij episcopi nobis fuit humiliter supplicatum ut sibi super hoc providere paterna diligentia curaremus. Nos igitur huiusmodi supplicationibus inclinati fraternitati tue cui partes ipse metropolitico iure subesse noscuntur per apostolica scripta mandamus quatenus vocatis dicto Andrea episcopo et aliis qui fuerinevocandi et auditus hincinde propositus quod canonicum fuerit appellatione remota decernas faciens quod decreveris per censuram ecclesiasticam firmiter observari. Testes autem qui fuerint nominati, si se gratia, odio vel timore subtraxerint, censura simili appellatione cessante, compellatis veritati testimonium perhibere, non obstantibus sed eidem Andre episcopo vel quibusvis alijs communiter vel divisim a sede apostolica sic indultum quod interdicti suspendi vel excommunicari non possint per litteras apostolicas non facientes plenam et expressam ac de verbo ad verbum de indulto huiusmodi mentionem.

Datum Rome apud Sanctum Petrum. Decimo Kalendas Junii Anno Primo.
N. XII. *Achevontius*.

(ASV. Reg. Lat. vol. 128,j.159^v-160^r.) transcribed by M. Ahmeti

Grigori etc.