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**THE SOCIAL STATUS OF ALBANIAN WOMEN
IN THE XIV - XV CENTURY¹**

It is of great interest to report a synthesized profile of the social status of Albanian women in the XIV – XV century, in the main civilization centers, such as Shkodra, Durrës, Ulqin, Tivar etc. In distinction from the data of the customary law, typical of the rural and mountainous areas of the Albanian local government, the documentary sources of the time give a significant information about the role and importance the woman living in the autonomous cities had, and also clarifies the judicial and penal protection of her personality, dignity and honor. The killing, the beating, the insults, the violations and raping of the women didn't spare nobody, whether be secular or religious men. The abuse or the misappropriation of the woman's dowry, her freedom to bequeath, or to represent the husband in a legal process, if the latter was not present, and also other situations and combination similar to these, prove that the respect and the protection of women's dignity in the Late Middle Ages was real and seriously taken. The general panorama of the social position of female citizen of the XIV – XV century in Albania was similar with the medieval municipal organization and practices of the Italian-Dalmatian cities and with those of the Western Adriatic of the Mediterranean realm. Also, the present paper informs about the political organization of the noble women in Albania during the end of the XIV century and the first half of the XV century and their privileges during this period, and their right to emigrate, mainly in the Queen of Adriatic (the Republic of Venice) and Southern Italy after the Ottoman occupation of the Albanian territories.

The present paper also informs about the social status, the rights and the privileges that woman in the Albanian civilization centers such as

¹ This presentation is part of the lectures segment run from 1-2 November 2018.

Shkodra, Drishti, Durrësi, Ulqini, Tivari etc. of the XIV – XV century enjoyed. Neither the Albanian historiography, nor the foreign one has generally ever been involved in this single study subject.

The situation of the Albanian woman and their position has been of great interest for the foreign Albanologists and researchers, from the XIX century and onwards. Here we can mention François Charles Hugues Laurent Pouqueville,² Johannes George Von Hahn,³ Edith Durham⁴, Roberto Morocco della Rocca⁵ and Bernd Jürgen Fischer⁶. However, this issue has not been directly addressed to by them (with exception of Pierre Cabanes⁷).

Regarding the Albanian historiography, this aspect has been reported in many papers and scientific studies, (monographs) authored by historians,⁸ ethnologists,⁹ anthropologists, jurists and scholars of

² François Charles Hugues Laurent Pouqueville, *Voyage dans la Grèce* (Paris, 1820 – 1821).

³ Johannes George Von Hahn, *Reise durch die Gebite des Drin und Wardar* (Wien, 1867).

⁴ Edith Durham, *Brenga e Ballkanit dhe Vepra të tjera për Shqipërinë dhe Shqiptarët*, reedition, (Tiranë: Naum Veqilharxhi, 1998).

⁵ Roberto Moroco dela Roka, *Kombi dhe feja në Shqipëri 1920 – 1924* (Tiranë: Elena Gjika, 1994)

⁶ Bernd J. Fischer, *Mbreti Zog dhe përpjekja për stabilitet në Shqipëri* (Tiranë: Çabej, 1997).

⁷ Pierre Cabanes, "Vendi i gruas në Epirin antik", *Iliria* 2 (1983): 193 – 209. Neritan Ceka, *Ilirët deri te Shqiptarët* (Tiranë: Migjeni, 2015), 387 – 388.

⁸ Injaz Zamputi, "Pozita shoqërore e gruas malësore shqiptare sipas Kanunit", në *Buletin i Universitetit Shtetëror të Tiranës*, seria: shkencat shoqërore, 2, (Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës 1961), 101 – 123. Beqir Sinani, "Lëvizja për emancipimin e femrës në vitet 1920 – 1924", *Studime Historike* 1 (1986). Pal Doçi, *Vetëqeverisja e Mirditës: vështrim etnologjik e historik* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese Enciklopedike, 1996). Fatmira Musaj, *Gruaja në Shqipëri në vitet 1912 – 1939* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë – Instituti i Historisë, 2002). Eduart Caka, "Disa të dhëna mbi rolin dhe të drejtat e gruas në Shqipëri gjatë shekujve XVII – XVIII", *Studime Historike* 1-2 (2015): 69 – 87. Gentiana Kera, Enriketa Papa, "Karakteristikat e familjes shqiptare sipas regjistrimit të popullsisë në vitin 1918", *Politika & Shoqëria* (Revistë shkencore e Institutit të Studimeve Politike e Sociale), vol. 5, nr. 1 (10) (2002): 83 – 96.

⁹ Abaz Dojaka, "Karakteret e lidhjeve martesore para çlirimit", *Etnografia shqiptare* 11 (1981). Kahreman Ulqini, "E drejta zakonore përballë së drejtës kanonike dhe sheriatit", *Etnografia shqiptare* 16 (1989).

customary law,¹⁰ sociologists¹¹ etc., — all focused mainly in the women of the Ottoman period during the XX century.

The information here reported has been collected from the Byzantine documents about the history Albania (VII – XV century),¹² The Statutes of Shkodra,¹³ Documents about the history of Albania during the XV century (years 1400 – 1405; 1406 - 1410) and (1479 – 1506)¹⁴, and also the Cadaster and Concessions Register for the district of Shkodra 1416 – 1417.¹⁵ The chronicle by Gjon Muzaka,¹⁶ the Canon of Lekë Dukagjini¹⁷ and the Canon of Scanderbeg¹⁸ were used for complementary comparative purposes.

¹⁰Ismet Elezi, *E drejta zakonore e Labërisë në planin krahasues* (Tiranë: SHBLU, 1994). Aleks Luarasi, *Marrëdhëniet Familjare* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "Luarasi", 2001).

¹¹Zyhdi Dervishi, *Gratë në syrin e ciklonit të sfidave dhe perspektiva:trajtesë sociologjike e problematikës sociokulturore të grave shqiptare në vitet '90 të shekullit XX*, (Tiranë: Dora D' Istria, 2000).

¹²*Dokumente të periudhës bizantine për historinë e Shqipërisë* (shek. VII – XV), prepared for publishing by Koço Bozhori (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1978).

¹³*Statuti di Scutari della prima metà del secolo XIV con le addizione fino al 1469*, (a cura di Lucia Nadin, traduzione in albanese a cura di Pëllumb Xhufi, con saggi introduttivi di Giovan Batista Pellegrini, Oliver Jens Schmitt e Gherardo Ortalli), (Roma: Viella, 2002). (Hereinafter: *Statuti di Scutari*).

¹⁴*Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 1405), prepared by Injaz Zamputi and Luan Malltezi (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1987). *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë*, 2(1406 – 1410), prepared by Injaz Zamputi and Pranvera Bogdani, manuscript in Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë, file nr. A – III – 563, (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë – Instituti i Historisë, 1984). *Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, vol. IV (1479 – 1506), Part I (1479 – 1499), prepared by Injac Zamputi (Tiranë: Universiteti shtetëror i Tiranës – Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë, 1967). *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Part II (1499 – 1506), prepared by Injaz Zamputi (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1979).

¹⁵*Regjistri i kadastrës dhe i koncesioneve për rrethin e Shkodrës 1416 – 1417*, prepared for publishing by Injac Zamputi (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1977).

¹⁶Karl Hopf, *Chroniques gréco – romanes inédites ou peu connues* (Berlin: Librairie de Weidmann, 1873). Used for publication after the translation of Dhori Qiriazi: Gjon Muzaka, *Memorje* (Tiranë: Toena, 1996) and after the translation of Pëllumb Xhufit from the Italian language at his monograph: *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt: Berati dhe Vlora në shekujt XII – XV* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "55", 2009), 380 – 456: Historia dhe genealogjia e shtëpisë Muzaka, written by Don Gjon Muzaka, Despot i Epirit.

¹⁷Shtjefën Gjeçovi, *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* (Tiranë: Kuvendi, 2001).

¹⁸Frano Ilia, *Kanuni i Skanderbegut* (Milot: Rosa, 1993).

In distinction from the customary law data, typical of the local government of rural and highland areas in Albania, the documentary sources give a quite significant information about the role and importance of woman in the Medieval autonomous cities, and also sheds light on the legal and penal protection of her personality, dignity and honor.

Earlier historic data about some important rights of the women in Albania are found in the Byzantine documents of the first decades of the XIII century and in the beginning of the second half of the same century. They inform about the women's right to ask for divorce,¹⁹ to be custodian of the wealth, to bequeath,²⁰ and also other notary acts.²¹ In a letter from the archbishop of Ohrid Dhimitër Homatjanoj²² of May 1223, it is said "*...the so-called Kabasilina who was in the castle of Durrës, bequeathing without the presence of her sons and not mentioning them (her sons – E. B.) in the testament.*"²³

In addition to the Byzantine sources, the Statutes of Shkodra²⁴ give a significant information about the western archetype of the role and

¹⁹*Dokumente të periudhës bizantine për historinë e Shqipërisë* (shek. VII – XV), dokument nr. XXVI, 55.

²⁰*Ibid.*, dokument nr. XXVIII, 60 – 62: "The testament is legal, when includes all those who enjoy the heritage right. A land owner in Dibra becomes peer".

²¹*Ibid.*, dokument nr. XLV, 82 – 84: "February 1258 – The sale of vineyard near the city of Durrës".

²²Dhimitër Homatjanoj concluded the studies for jurisprudence in Constantinople and around 1200 was envoy in Ohrid as chartophylax (*one of the most important aids of the patriarch*) of the bishopric, where he carried out this duty until 1216, year in which he became archbishop and continues this duty until 1234. Quoted from: *Dokumente të periudhës bizantine* (shek. VII – XV), 58.

²³*Ibid.*, dokument nr. XXVIII, 61.

²⁴The Statutes of Shkodra are also re-published on 2010 under the care of Albania's Ministry of Tourism, Culture Youth and Sports and "Wisdom" University, Tirana, and on 2017 with an anastatic edition of theirs (Tiranë: Instituti i Komunikimit dhe Dialogut). The Statutes of Shkodra were discovered on 1997 in the fund of the library of Correr Town Museum of Venice, from the Italian linguist Lucia Nadin and the Swiss Albanologist Oliver Jens Schmitt. On 2002, under the care of L. Nadin, accompanied in her studies, by the historians O. J. Schmitt and Gherardo Ortalli, the linguist Giovan Battista Pellegrini and with the translation in Albanian by the prominent medievalist Pëllumb Xhufi, were published for the first time in Rome, the Statutes of Shkodra. The Statutes of Shkodra contain 279 chapters, written in the Venetian language of the XV century, and as date of their drafting "*as terminus ante quem will be the year 1346*", according the opinion of O. J. Schmitt. The first 268 chapters belong to the first decades of the XIV century, 6 appendixes on 1391 – 1393 and also 5 provisions from the Venetian period 1457 – 1469.

importance of women in society. In a series of dispositions, a special place also occupied the penal action against the morality, which shows the legal and penal protection of the personality, dignity and honor of women. The law was very sensitive towards the denunciation of women for insults,²⁵ exercise of physical and sexual violence²⁶ against them. There were severe punitive measures equal to anyone, regardless his social position or status, religious affiliation or his secularity.

The fact that in the legal framework on this aspect there were included a variety of situations and a combination of such situations, prove that the respect of the women rights and dignity in that period was real and seriously taken. If a married woman complained about being raped, beaten or robbed by a cleric, she had to be trusted even without witnesses.²⁷ The cleric was immediately fined with fifty hyperpers, which half passed to the bishop, one fourth to the count (representative of the Serbian royal power in the city of Shkodra),²⁸ and one fourth was granted to the claimant woman.²⁹

(Indeed, only the 278 chapters are with complete texts, because the chapter 66 entirely lacks the content. Note by E. Baze).

The Statutes of Shkodra contain a strong European spirit, where since their first chapter you can find incarnated the medieval Western European known principle: "*the city's air makes you free*", proclaimed for the first time in the city of Goslar (south of Northern Germany) on 13 July 1219 from the Roman Holy Emperor of the German nation, Frederick II Hohenstaufen. (*Krestomacia e Historisë së Mesjetës*, translated by Sami Leka and edited by Zenel Minarolli, Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, Fakulteti Histori – Filologji: 1965, 175). Indeed, the first chapter sanctions the right of granting protection asylum to every person, who entered in the commune of Shkodra to escape the persecutions of the feudal power. However, it's not the only chapter, that reminds the modern documents on human's freedom and rights. These freedoms and rights are sanctioned in a series of legal provisions of the statutes, where is treated the right of life, the right of property, the right of heritage, the right to defend oneself, the right to be elected and to elect, and the right of *privacy*. The Statutes dedicate a special protection of the most fragile strata of the society: children, women and elderly people.

²⁵ *Statuti di Scutari*, chapter 255.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 256: "*If it's proven that a secular person touches or beats a woman, or violates her home, this is condemned with a fine of eight hyperpers. If violates another woman in the same way, he had to pay eight hyperpers, half to the count and the other half to the claimant*".

²⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 200.

²⁸ *Acta et Diplomata Res Albaniae Mediae Aetatis Illustrantia*, (collegerunt et digesserunt Dr. Ludovicus de Thalloczy, Dr. Constantinus Jireček et Dr. Emilianus de Sufflay), volumen I, (Annos 344 – 1343 Tabulamque geographician continens),

Also, the statutory norms also previewed the case of honest and unmarried women raped by a man. If the man was also unmarried, he was forced to legally marry her.³⁰ If both of them were married, the man was punished with a fine of fifty hyperpers, equally divided between the count and the woman.³¹ In distinction from the first case, when the woman was believed even without witnesses, in this situation she had to give convincing evidences.³²

However, in the coastal Albanian cities (Durrës, Lezha, Shkodra, Drisht, Ulqin, Tivar) at the time when these were administered by the Republic of San Marco (1392 – 1479), the question of respecting the statutes, rules and old customs from the part of the Venetian authorities started to cause dissatisfactions among the local population.³³ In the municipalities of Durrësi and Drishti, there are documented cases of abuse and trampling on the most elementary norms of morality towards the local women by the Venetian local governors: "*The governor of Durrës Pietro Arimondo, as its seen from the process against him on 29 October 1409, had made the inhabitant of Durrës, Kirana arrested to force her to perjure herself that the testament bequeathed by the chancellor of Durrës, Nicola Parma (with whom the Venetian governor had to settle old scores), was allegedly a fake testament. The governor exercised his menaces to force her to act as he wished, otherwise he would have tortured her with the most barbarian tools. And he hanged the chancellor of Durrës, after forcing Kirana to perjury... .*" "*Heustak Grioni, one of the unpleasant figures that the citizens of Drisht knew in 1401 – 1402, in the most banditry way that could ever be imagined, entered the house of the citizen Gjergj Varshi, when the latter was not there, to rape his wife. In front of the powerful anger that erupted in Drishti, the Seignory was forced to move away her citizen, before his*

Vindobonae MCMXIII, reedition, Tiranë, Prishtinë: "Dukagjini" – Pejë, 2002, dokument nr. 527.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 201.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Luan Malltezi, *Qytetet e bregdetit shqiptar gjatë sundimit venedikas* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë – Instituti i Historisë, 1988), 217.

time of service being concluded to preserve somehow the discredited prestige of the state stained by its governor."³⁴

The Statutes of Shkodra previewed severe punishment measures for the vicious women. They were neither allowed to wear hats, nor to live or share company with the noble ladies of the city. The women of no-good morality who were involved in forbidden activities were beaten with sticks and banished from the city within three days. *"If a woman is proved vicious by the testimony of two or three men, she is not to be allowed to wear a hat he, as our custom is, or share company at her will. She is not allowed to stay or dwell close to the noble ladies. If she infringes these orders, she will be punished with eight hyperpers that will be divided between the count and the claimant. If it's proven that a vicious woman makes dirty works or seeks to ruin the others, she has to leave our city within three days, and if this deadline is not respected, she will be punished with a fine of eight hyperpers, fustigated in the roads of the city and at the end to be evicted and never return to our land.*"³⁵ Also, the vicious women and the prostitutes were excluded from the right to inherit the wealth of their family. *"...when the daughter ends up being a prostitute, and both parents have died, the brothers have the power to exclude their prostitute sister from the heritage; if this sister has not living father, mother or brothers, but only a sister that is a fair woman, then to the latter should pass the part of the above defamatory sister.*"³⁶ These severe sanctions were certainly taken to stop promoting and developing the whoredom, as it was spread in the coastal cities of the Eastern Adriatic. *"In all the coastal cities,"* says Milan Šufflay, *"certainly existed brothels, as it could be proved by 'whores' mentioned in the Statutes of Budva (1350), and in 'battessa di bordello', which is mentioned in Ragusa (1400).*"³⁷

The husband in general had to show respect towards the wife and should not abandon her because of dowry lack or her little wealth.³⁸

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 220 – 222.

³⁵ *Statuti di Scutari*, chapter 87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 171.

³⁷ Milan v. Šufflay, *Städte und Burgen Albaniens* (Wien und Leipzig, 1924). Used after the edition in Albanian prepared by Luan Mallezi, *Qytetet dhe kështjellat e Shqipërisë, kryesisht në mesjetë* (Tiranë: Onufri, 2009), 96.

³⁸ *Statuti di Scutari*, kreu 265: *"The man who enters his home a woman as a wife, cannot discard her out because she has not kept dowry in the house. The dowry must be by*

Her dowry should not be alienated or wasted by the husband,³⁹ because protecting wife's wealth was a right. Also, to him was not allowed to use his wife's dowry to liquidate the blood tax or the *urazba*. "*To no man was allowed to take something from the wife's dowry to pay a blood feud or urazba. The commune should protect the woman, while the husband who commits such a foolish action had to pay it himself.*"⁴⁰

According to the statutes, the consorts should have mutual reciprocity towards one another, which was also reflected in the bequeathing process when one of them passes away.⁴¹ Not only the husband, but also the wife had the right to draft a testament.⁴² The wife has the right to keep her share from the father-in law and mother-in law, and also the right to bequeath. "*The daughter and the woman in general have the right to issue a testament, starting from the age of twelve years old and on*".⁴³

Also, the woman's right to file a lawsuit,⁴⁴ draft a testament,⁴⁵ inherit a testament and to benefit therefrom,⁴⁶ warrant,⁴⁷ have legal representatives on different issues of their wealth,⁴⁸ and to be church warden (*epitrope*) for the application of the dispositions of the testament⁴⁹ are all described in the archival documents of Shkodra and Durrësi and Dubrovnik (*Državni u Dubrovniku*), at the beginning of the XV century, and in the other Albanian coastal cities such as Ulqini and Tivari as well. The Dubrovnik and Venetian documentary report that

reason sought. He that banishes the wife is fined with eight hyperpers, half for the count and half for the claimant".

³⁹ *Ibid.*, chapter 165.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 266.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 168.

⁴² *Ibid.*, chapter 196.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, chapter 186.

⁴⁴ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë*, 2(1406 – 1410), dokument nr. 374.

⁴⁵ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 1405), dokument nr. 24, 65, 121, 132, 160, 161.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, dokument nr. 295, 374, 403. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë*, 2(1406 – 1410), dokument nr. 214.

⁴⁷ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 1405), dokument nr. 274, 285, 377, 408, 428.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, dokument nr. 228: :27 June 1402 – The legal representative of a woman from Tivar withdraws in Dubrovnik what the daughter has left to her after death".

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, dokument nr. 410: "1 January 1404 – Vlash's daughter from Ulqin, epithrope in a testament".

there were women who possessed properties and assets⁵⁰ and had the right to administer,⁵¹ donate⁵² and sell⁵³ them for different economic purposes.⁵⁴

In "the Cadastre of Shkodra and the Register of Concessions of 1416 –1417" drafted by the Venetian administration on the properties which possessed "the Queen of Adriatic" in the Albanian territories and on the fiscal system on the inhabitants living under her authority, it is often mentioned the term 'woman's right', when considering land possessions in the city of Shkodra and the surroundings that different woman inhabitant of Shkodra, including here even the widows⁵⁵ had in possession.⁵⁶

In general terms, the woman inhabitant of Shkodra of the XIV – XV century had a status that even the successors in the later centuries would envy. The statutes show that the family's wealth is an equal property. *"Everything that husband and wife gain together is considered equal, viz half belongs to the husband and half to the wife."*⁵⁷ We hastily recall for comparison one article of the "Canon of Lekë Dukagjini": *"The woman is a bellows to carry as much as she can in her husband's home."*⁵⁸ *If the husband beats the wife, the canon does not blame him, and neither the parents can redeem the beating"*⁵⁹ or

⁵⁰ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 1405), dokument nr. 39, 84, 158, 173, 228. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë*, 2(1406 – 1410), dokument nr. 129, 366.

⁵¹ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 1405), dokument nr. 428: "20 April 1404 – A woman from Tivar presents a general power of attorney to extract and administer the properties and the assets that has inherited in Tivar and surroundings".

⁵² *Ibid.*, dokument nr. 63: "6 September 1400 – The widow of a shoemaker from Durrës donates a house in Durrës". Dokument nr. 239: "4 August 1402 – The wife of Nikollë Spani from Drisht distributes the assets of the husband in Albania".

⁵³ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 1405), dokument nr. 339. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë*, 2(1406 – 1410), dokument nr. 364.

⁵⁴ *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1 (1400 – 14005), dokument nr. 210: "28 April 1402 – The daughter of a man from Tivar in Dubrovnik has economic interests in the city of Tivar".

⁵⁵ *Regjistri i kadastrës dhe i koncesioneve për rrethin e Shkodrës 1416 – 1417*, fl. 2/a, 3/a, 20/a, 30/a.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9/a, 9/b, 10/b, 11/a, 19/b, 21/a, 25/b, 30/b, 35/a.

⁵⁷ *Statuti di Scutari*, chapter 166.

⁵⁸ *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*, node 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, node 28.

"the woman that leaves her husband home, has no right to take anything with her, but the only the coated clothes."⁶⁰ In this direction, in the family law there were some improvements and novelties brought by Scanderbeg, who changed the old customary law that allowed the husband in any case to divorce the wife without reason and without granting her any asset.⁶¹ "The Canon of Scanderbeg" – ascertains Aleks Luarasi – *previewed only two legal causes to divorce the wife: stealing and the conjugal unfaithfulness (dishonest affairs).*⁶² According to "The Canon of Scanderbeg" the wife could be divorced also for no reason, but the husband was obliged to give the wife her part in the conjugal wealth recognizing her contribution in the common wealth (home's wealth).⁶³ Also, in Scanderbeg's Canon it was previewed to divorce without reason the wife, but in this case she would get half of the land to secure her life.⁶⁴ However, the changes that Scanderbeg made to the customary law were partial and temporary.⁶⁵ After his death and Albania's occupation by the Ottomans, most of these rules were abolished.

In relation with the above-mentioned rules of the customary law, in the positive law,⁶⁶ that in this case is represented by the Statutes of Shkodra, the protection of the moral integrity of woman and right wealth's, prove somehow the respect towards her personality, as one of the principal indexes of the development and emancipation of the citizens of Shkodra and other coastal communes in the Albania of the Late Middle Age (XIV – XV centuries).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, node 31.

⁶¹ Aleks Luarasi, "E drejta në shtetin e Skënderbeut", in *Studime për Epokën e Skënderbeut*, 3 (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1989), 51.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶³ *Historia e shtetit dhe e së drejtës në Shqipëri*, fourth edition, (Tiranë: Luarasi University Press, 2007), 189.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁵ Petrika Thëngjilli, *Historia e popullit shqiptar 395 – 1875*, (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese e Librit Universitar, 1999), 169.

⁶⁶ Pëllumb Xhufi, "Statutet e Shkodrës mes së drejtës pozitive dhe së drejtës zakonore", in *Statutet e Shkodrës nga gjysma e parë e shek. XIV, me shtesa deri më 1469*, anastatic edition, (Tiranë: IDK, 2017), 27: In the case of Albania, and not only, the positive and the customary law have coexisted until the moment of the modern state establishment, each has had the proper action zone. The first mainly acted in the prosperous agricultural areas and cities, while the second was overwhelming in the hinterland mountainous areas.

The sources and the chronicles inform us about an important part of the noble Albanian women of the XIV – XV centuries. The dynasty marriages and marriage alliances in the Medieval Europe and further, were first a political act, through which were strengthened the political alliances with the neighbors, and also these led to the expansion of the territory of the principalities and different political formations in the Middle Ages and the spread of their influence. Such family alliances were established during the XIV – XV century and almost in all the noble families of the time e.g., Arianiti, Muzaka, Topia, Dukagjini, Zaharia, Kastrioti, Balshaj, Zenebishi, Gropaj from Ohrid and Dibra, the lords of the Prespa families etc.⁶⁷ There were cases of dynasty marriages and family alliances of political character between the Albanian nobility and the foreign nobility, mainly in the region and in the other side of the Adriatic coasts.⁶⁸

⁶⁷For more see: *Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, written by Don Gjon Muzaka, Despot i Epirit. Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 293.

⁶⁸Among the first Albanian nobility marriages with foreigners is mentioned in the Byzantine sources that of Dhimitër, ruler of Albania's principality (on 1208 – 1216) with Komnena on 1208, the daughter of Serbia's great župan, Stefan Nemanja (1196 – 1227). As well, approximately at the same time is the marriage of the pansevast sevast Grigor Kamona, governor of Epirus Despotate with the daughter of Gjin Progoni, second ruler of the Albania's principality on 1198 – 1208. *Dokumente të periudhës bizantine* (shek. VII – XV), dokument nr. XXVI and XXVII, 54 – 60. The aunt of the chronicler Gjon Muzaka, Helena, was married with the Venetian noble Filippo Barelli, Ragusa citizen, former administrator of the Balsha family. Gjon Zenebishi, the ruler of Gjirokastra and of Vagenetia until 1418, gave in marriage his sister to the Italian Petrotto d'Altavilla, heir of the earlier Norman dynasty, who ruled Southern Italy during XI – XII centuries.

According to Gjon Muzaka, Komnen Arianiti was married with the daughter of a certain Nicolò Sacati, former baron of two cities in Sendia (according to Dh. Shuteriqi should be Serbia). Despina, the daughter of Ajdin Klope (ruler of Vrezda and of Helena Muzaka (sister of Andrea Muzaka, grandfather of the chronicler Gjon Muzaka) married with the sanjak bey of Ciorne, Ali Bey. In the beginning of the second half of the XIV century, Gjergj Balsha married the daughter of Vukašin Mrnjavčević (kral – ruler of the Western Macedonia and co-ruler with the king of Serbia Stefan Uroš V from 1365 - 1371), Olivera Mrnjavčević. Gjergj Arianiti in parallel of the first marriage with Maria Muzaka (sister of Gjin II and aunt of the chronicler Gjon Muzaka) nearly the end of the '40 of the XV century, married the Italian Pietrina Francone from the city of Lecce (in Southern Italy), the daughter of one of the vassals of Naples' Alfonso V, Oliverio Francone, "barone di Taurisano", governor of the city of Lecce. Around 1461 Angjelina Arianiti (1440 – 1520) (daughter of Gjergj Arianiti from the first marriage according the chronicle of Gjon Muzaka, while according the scholar and German Orientalist Franz Babinger, is the daughter of Gjergj Arianiti from the second marriage) married the despot of Serbia, Stefan

It should be emphasized the fact that the outcome of these alliances was not always successful. There were reported cases of dissatisfaction and political and military disunion between the Albanian noble families in the beginning of the second half of the XV century. The chronicler Gjon Muzaka says that one of his sisters named Zanfina or Suina was married to Muzak Topia⁶⁹ around 1460, at the time when these two families didn't have the glory they once had.⁷⁰ But, even these relations didn't endure, because Muzak Topia and his wife divorced shortly after their marriage to marry Mamica Kastrioti, Scanderbeg's sister. "*Lord Scanderbeg ruined the marriage of the above-mentioned lord Muzakë Topia with the Lady Zanfinë Muzaka, without taking into consideration God and nothing else, even the children they had, and married him with his own sister, Lady Mamica.*"⁷¹

This event, that the chronicler Gjon Muzaka attributes to Scanderbeg's intervention and influence, exacerbated the relations among the Muzakas, Topias and Kastriotis. This is one of the reasons that little bit later Scanderbeg "grabbed from the Muzaka family after the death of Gjini II Muzaka (father of the chronicler Gjon Muzaka – E. Baze), *Tomonishta, viz. the small Myzeqe...*".⁷² In the same line with the Muzaka family which was part of the group of people that was dissatisfied with Scanderbeg was also Moisi Golemi, an important character of the time, to whom the ruler of the Kastrioti family ceased

Branković (1458 – 1459), known as the "Blind Stefan" (son of Đurađ Branković, despot of Serbia from 1427 - 1456). The son of Scanderbeg, Gjon Kastrioti (1456 – 1502) married the third daughter of the despot Lazar Branković of Serbia (1456 – 1458) and Helena Paleologue (1431 – 1437), Jerina Branković. (Note E. Baze: There are plenty of other examples, which we are not mentioning here). *Historia dhe gjenealogjia e shtëpisë Muzaka*, 432, 433, 435, 436, 448. Milan Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, translated by Zef Fekeçi, Kal Gurakuqi and Zekeria Cana (Tiranë: Bargjini, 2001), 132. Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi, "Aranitët, emri dhe gjenealogjia", in *Studime për Epokën e Skënderbeut*, 2 (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1989), 64, 68, 75. Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 292.

⁶⁹*Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, 450.

⁷⁰Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 304: Researcher Pëllumb Xhufi.

The marriage of Zanfina or Suina Muzaka with Muzak Topia he stipulates around 1460, while the scholar Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi on the page 65 of his paper entitled, "Aranitët, emri dhe gjenealogjia", in *Studime për Epokën e Skënderbeut* 2, stipulates this marriage on 1445.

⁷¹*Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, 451.

⁷²Ibid., 453.

his possessions in Dibra.⁷³ Also, the marriage of Moisi Golemi with Zanfina or Suina Muzaka,⁷⁴ the divorced wife of Muzak Topia, exactly stated one of the causes that influenced the rebellion of the Albanian big feudal lords against Scanderbeg.⁷⁵

The noble women of local or foreign origin whose social – political profile in the region and both sides of the Adriatic area played a significant role in the dynasty and family marriage alliances were characteristic of the European Middle Ages in general (also including here the Balkan realm).

It is very interesting to mention the relation of Nemanjas, a Serbian family with the Angevins. Uroš I (1243 – 1276) married around 1250 the French princess Helene, who *"was praised for her sharp way of speech, kindness, generosity and spirituality."*⁷⁶ This is why the administration of the Catholic enclaves of the Serbian Kingdom, first Dioklea (Žeta, Monte Negro) was set under her auspices.⁷⁷ *"The devout Helena had founded the Franciscan monasteries in front of the gates of Tivar and Kotorr."*⁷⁸ It is proved that she was the ruler in these territories until 1314, the year when she died. Her sister Maria de Chauris has been the ruler of Ulqin since 1283, the year she appears with the title *"domina Ulcinii"*. *"Maria, the sister of queen Helena, was married to Anselm de Chauris, who in 1273 is mentioned as the general captain of Charles I in Albania. Maria lived as widow (from 1281) in the country of her sister, where she was given a residence in Ulqin."*⁷⁹

Under the disguise of protecting Catholicism by the French queen of the medieval Serbia, it is explicitly explained the reason why a considerable part of the coastal Albanian communes of East Adriatic such as Tivar, Ulqin and Shkodra, with an overwhelming population of

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴Shuteriqi, "Aranitët, emri dhe gjenealogjia", 65.

⁷⁵Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 304.

⁷⁶ Konstanti Jireček, *Historia e Serbëve*, Part I (until 1371), translated from the German language by Elda Gjajana – Boriçi (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "55", 2010), 356: *"His wife, we don't know, if the first one. the second or the third was the French Helene, approximately on 1250"*.

⁷⁷*Acta Albaniae*, I, nr. 509. Pëllumb Xhufi, *Dilemat e Arbërit* (Tiranë: Pegi, 2006), 283.

⁷⁸Konstanti Jireček, *Historia e Serbëve*, second part (1371 – 1537), translated from the German language by Elda Gjajana – Boriçi (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "55", 2010), 41.

⁷⁹*Acta Albaniae*, I, dokument nr. 470. Jireček, *Historia e Serbëve*, first part, 357.

Catholic religion, enjoyed the status of the autonomy, viz., of communal self-governing and self-organization, but at the same time respecting the sovereign right of the Serbian crown.⁸⁰

In the Albanian history of the second half of the XIV century, it is enthralling the political and diplomatic implication of Komnena Balsha, ruler of Kanina and Vlora and all the surroundings, (Komnita the elder daughter of the despot Andrea II Muzaka was married in 1372 with Balsha II who was the third son of the founder of this dynasty, Balsha I, who died in 1367. Thanks to this marriage, Balsha II took the possessions of Vlora and Kanina)⁸¹ and the widow of the Balsha II (died in the battle of Savër on September 18, 1385 against the troops of Karl Topia in alliance with the Ottomans)⁸² with Venice before the May of 1386, while expecting an Ottoman expedition of the Sultan Murat I himself against Vlora.⁸³ Referring to the monograph "*Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*" of the medievalist P. Xhufi, on May 1386, the Republic of Venice made its proposals to the lady of Vlora: "*in the first proposal, Venice sought Kanina and Vlora with surroundings to be given unconditionally to the Seignory and with all the rights and jurisdictions that Komnena herself had. If Komnena did not accept this solution, Venice was ready to make a second proposal, after which Komnena Balsha, as long as she lived, she would get all the revenues extracted from her possessions; but at the same time, she would face all the necessary expenses for their defense. Meanwhile, a unit of Venetian bowmen (ballistarii) had to be established immediately in the tower of Kanina and act under Seignory orders. That was the maximum of the*

⁸⁰Ermal Baze, *Një qytet me statute: Shkodra në gjysmën e parë të shekullit XIV* (Tiranë: Muzgu, 2013), 37 – 38.

⁸¹*Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, 429 – 430. Peter Bartl, *Shqiptarët: nga Mesjeta deri në ditët tona*, translated from the German language by Afrim Koçi (Tiranë: IDK, 2017), 38 – 40.

⁸²For more on the battle of Savër see: Marinus Barletius, *De obsidione Scodrensi* (Venetiae, 1504). Used after the translation in Albanian from the Latin by Henrik Lacaj: Marin Barleti, *Rrethimi i Shkodrës*, second edition, (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë, 1967), 36. Selami Pulaha, *Lufta shqiptaro – turke në shek. XV: Burime Osmane* (Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, 1968), 12 – 13. Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, (Tiranë: Toena, 2002), 304. Bartl, *Shqiptarët*, 40.

⁸³Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 304.

engagement that the Republic of San Marco promised for the defense of Vlora."⁸⁴

Also, the Senate of the Republic of Venice warned the Venetian citizens that whoever marries lady Komnena Balsha of Vlora or her daughter will be punished by imprisonment.⁸⁵ This decision explicitly proved that the Seignory wanted for itself Vlora and Kanina when refusing a common Albanian-Venetian governance in the above-mentioned territory, as "the Queen of the Adriatic" might get involved in the problematic relations of the ruler of Vlora with other Albanian nobles and the Ottomans. With both parts, Venice wanted to build relations based on its own interests, and not based on others stories and grievances.⁸⁶

Komnena Balsha would raise the curtain of a series of treaties with Venice about the question of her possessions, in February⁸⁷ and June 1389, when the ruler of Vlora took an extreme stance, by expressing her readiness to give Vlora and the castle of Kanina to the Venetian Seignory, but on some conditions.⁸⁸ But, even this time the Venetian authorities declined the her proposal, because in reality Corfu,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 318 – 319: "Komnena Balsha demanded to the Senate of Venice to be issued at her favor a statement, where was to be proven that she and her subordinates to be placed under the protection of the Venetian authority, in a way that nobody could bother them. It was a pure act of vassalage, that would be also consecrated with the symbolic gesture of sending three nationals of Komnena Balsha, to fulfill the military service in the Venetian fleet of the Adriatic. At this time also erupted an internal conflict between Komnena and Nikolla Muzaka (relative of Komnena) on Dieval's tower, in the outlet of the Seman river. Dieval's tower together with the merchant emporin before August 1390, belonged to Nikolla Muzaka, who has fallen prisoner to the men of Komnena Balsha. The defenders of Dieval's tower wouldn't give it up without being released their ruler, Nikolla Muzaka. To extinguish the conflict intervened the Venetian bajlos of Corfu, Luigi de Priolis, who decided that after the liberation of Nikolla Muzaka, Dieval's tower to be given the Venetian authorities of Corfu. The Venetians granted the mentioned tower to Komnena Balsha, but from now on the ruler of Vlora would keep this tower only as Seignory vassal. As symbolic gesture of this vassalage, Komnena Balsha had to eternally offer three people of her own who would serve in the Venice's military ships".

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 322.

Butrinti⁸⁹ and later Durrësi (1392) would be enough for Seignory to secure her possessions in the lower Adriatic and Northern Ionian sea. The last negotiation of Komnena Balsha with the Venetians dates in the autumn of 1395 (year, when she is mentioned for the last time as the ruler), when a delegation of her went to Venice to present the proposals of the ruler Vlora. Under the pressure of the Ottomans and the precarious health situation, Komnena Balsha accepted to surrender Vlora, Kanina and Pirc, from which were profited 9 thousand golden ducats per year, towards an annual provision of 7 thousand ducats, as long as Komnena and her daughter⁹⁰ lived.⁹¹ Even this proposal was not at all taken into consideration from the Republic of Venice.

In September 1396, the ruler of Vlora and Kanina was mentioned Mrkša Žarković (1396 – 1414),⁹² the son of the ruler Žeta and Rugina Balsha, daughter of Balsha II and Komnena (Muzaka – Balsha), who would rule these territories until 1417 (even after the death of her husband in 1414).⁹³ The marriage of Mrkša with Rugina⁹⁴ celebrated in 1391 reconsolidated the relations between the rulers of Vlora and Žeta, which were interrupted after the murder of Balsha II in the battle of Savër.⁹⁵ Also, the marriage between these two families in 1394 was

⁸⁹ Roberto Cessi, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, volume primo, (Milano: Casa Editrice Giuseppe Principato), 350: Corfu and Butrint, the Republic of Venice succeeded to detach from the Angevins on 1386.

⁹⁰ Giuseppe Gelcich, *Zeta dhe Dinastia e Balshajve*, translated by Laura Leka (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "55", 2009), 95: Balsha II, from Komnena Muzaka had no other children but one daughter, Rugina, which after his death, would rule together with her mother Vlora and Kanina, inherited from her ancestors.

⁹¹Constantinus Jireček, "Valona in Mittelalter", in *Illyrisch – Albanische Forschungen*, Zusammengestellt von Dr. Ludwig von Thallóczy. (München und Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1916). Used after the translation in Albanian by Mustafa Merlika – Kruja: Constantinus Jireček, "Vlora në Mesjetë", in *Vëzhgime iliro-shqiptare*, drafted by Dr. Ludwig Von Thallóczy. (Shkodër: Camaj-Pipa, 2004), 136. Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 323.

⁹²Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 25.

⁹³*Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, 441.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 324: Even after the murder of Balsha II in Savër, the Balsha family continued aftermath to be called rulers of Vlora. According to the Venetian chronicler and historian, Marin Sanudo Junior" (1466 – 1536), Gjergj II Strazimir Balsha pretended to rule the territories that belonged to his ancestors, nonetheless the Balshaj family possessions in his time were considerably corrugated.

interpreted and justified even by the Holy Synod of Constantinople, because of the kinship that the couple had: Mrkša's mother, Teodora (a Serb noble from Dejanović family) after 1371 had her second marriage with Gjergj I Balsha (1362 – 1378), who was the uncle of Rugina.⁹⁶

Rugina Balsha, the only ruler of Vlora after Mrkša's death in 1414, under the pressure of a serious Ottoman threat, continued the series of negotiations and proposals for help and the protection of her possessions from Venice with a worthy humbleness of a woman ruler, as her mother Komnena Balsha has previously done. The Republic of San Marco would turn a deaf ear to the demands of her delegation at the beginning of February 1415 and end of January 1416⁹⁷ facing an indifferent and uninterested stance of the governing Venetian authorities. When the Ottoman commander Hamza bey Evrenoz conquered Berat, Kanina and Vlora in June 1417, Rugina Balsha along with her family and court, moved in the beginning to Corfu, while in 1421 to Ragusa, where her treasure was deposited.⁹⁸ After 1421, Rugina Balsha was not mentioned anymore in the historic sources.⁹⁹

Another noble woman with political ambitions, progeny of the above-mentioned families was Evdokia Balsha, daughter of Gjergj I Balsha and Teodora, who was at the same time the cousin of the first grade (their fathers were brothers) of Rugina Balsha and sister of Mrkša by another father.¹⁰⁰ Around 1402, Evdokia married in the city of Vlora (in the territory where her brother ruled) the Italian despot of Ioannina Ezau Buondelmonte Acciaiuoli (1385 – 1411), after his divorce to the second wife, Irena Shpata, the sister of Gjini Bua Shpata, the ruler of

Thus, even after the tragedy in Savër, Gjergj Strazimir Balsha considered himself "suzerain of the territories from Vlora to Berat".

⁹⁶ Jireček, "Vlora në Mesjetë", 135. Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 324: The Ottoman danger tolerated this marriage, which from the canonical view was illegal.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 332 – 333.

⁹⁸ Jireček, "Vlora në Mesjetë", 136.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Cronaca dei Tocco di Cefalonia di Anonimo*, Prolegomeni – Testo Critico traduzione di Giuseppe Schirò (Junior) (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1975), 277. *Burime tregimtare bizantine për historinë e Shqipërisë shek. X – XV*, prepared for publishing by Koço Bozhori and Filip Liço (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1975), 277: Kronika e Tokove.

Arta and the surroundings (1359 – 1399).¹⁰¹ The marriage of Evdokia Balsha it is mentioned in a document from Ragusa dating in 11 and 14 July 1402, according to which Council of Ragusa decided to send a gift of 100 hyperpers to Mrkša's sister, and also offer the latter an armed Ragusan ship, to escort his sister to her husband.¹⁰²

After the death of the consort despot Ezau in 1411, Evdokia Balsha tried to govern alone Ioannina. She opposed the efforts of a good part of the city peers that wanted to surrender the city of Ioannina to Karl Toko, the nephew of the despot Ezau and count of Kefalonia.¹⁰³ Mainly supported by the lower and middle strata of the city, "Albania's Despina" entered negotiations with Gjon Zenebishi, something that put in action the supporters of Karl Toko.¹⁰⁴ After a complot organized by them, despina Evdokia together with her sons was forced to abandon the city and temporarily take shelter at Gjon Zenebishi in Gjirokastra.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Constantinus Jireček, "Witwe und die Söhne des Despoten Esau von *Epirus*", in *Byzantisch – neugriechische Jahrbücher* 1 (1920): 5. For more see: Giuseppe Schirò (Junior), "Evdokia Balšič di *Gianina*", in *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 8 (1964): 383 – 391. Koço Bozhori, "Kronika e Tokove as source on the history of the national formation of Southern Albanians at the end of the XIV century and in the first quarter of the XV century", *Studime Historike* 3 (1976): 183, 187: With Irena Shpata, mother of Muriq Shpata ruler of Arta principality, the Italian despot of Ioannina, Ezau Buondelmonte Acciaiuoli, was married on 1396, but divorced on 1402 to marry with Evdoki Balsha. According the *Kronikës së Tokove*, after the death of Gjin Bua Shpata on 29 October 1399 at the head of the principality was established Muriq Shpata, who, as can be ascertained, has been nephew from the part of Gjin's sisters, consequently of Sguro Bua Shpata (Gjin's brother), from his sister, who was married with a French count, Mirsi Makazanin. After the battle of Ankara of 1402, Muriq Shpata improved the relations not only with the Ottomans, but also relaxed them with the despot Ezau of Ioannina, who was Muriq's stepfather. Moreover, Ioannina's Ezau asked the hand of Muriq's daughter for his son born from his marriage with the Albanian Evdokia Balsha, daughter of Gjergj I Balsha. A part of this note is taken from: *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 283.

¹⁰² *Acta et Diplomata Res Albaniae Mediae Aetatis Illustrantia*, (collegerunt et digesserunt Dr. Ludovicus de Thalloczy, Dr. Constantinus Jireček et Dr. Emilianus de Sufflay), volumen II, (Annos 1344 – 1406 Tabulamque geographician continens), Vindobonae MCMXIII, ribotim, Tiranë, Prishtinë: "Dukagjini" – Pejë, 2002, dokument nr. 699. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1(1400 – 1405), dokument nr. 231, 234.

¹⁰³ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 286.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

"On 142," as P. Xhufi says, "Evdokia and her two sons are ascertained in Ragusa. 'Albania's Despina' was now nearly 60 years old and her presence in Ragusa seems that caused inconveniences to the authorities of the city: Evdokia coveted the properties from the possessions of the Balsha family, on which existed a strong clash between Venice and Serbia with which Ragusa had problematic relations."¹⁰⁶ For this reason, the Ragusan government wanted Evdokia Balsha and her sons to move away from Ragusa and be carefully watched and protected.¹⁰⁷ A year later, in 1428, the Great Council of Ragusa approved to grant Evdokia the permission to settle towards the city of Modon¹⁰⁸ (Methoni – in Southwest of Peloponnese region).

Helena Topia (1388 – 1402/1403), daughter of Karl Topia (1359 – 1388),¹⁰⁹ heir of a part of the Topia principality after her father's death, became ruler of Kruja and the regions around together with her husband, the Venetian noble Mark Barbadico.¹¹⁰ Through the agreement of 28 August 1393, Venice succeeded to convince Helena Topia and Mark Barbadico, to continue ruling Kruja on behalf of Seignory and as its vassals.¹¹¹ A year later (1394), the consorts Topia – Barbadico pledge alliance with the Ottomans and became vassals of the sultan Bayezid I (1389 – 1402), what caused the Venetians' dissatisfaction.¹¹² The husband of Helena Topia by the Ottomans approval tried to occupy all the territories to the outskirts of Durrës, and also to encourage the local population in rebellion against the Venetian

¹⁰⁶Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 326.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸Jireček, "Witwe und die Söhne des Despoten Esau von Epirus", 16.

¹⁰⁹The other daughter of Karl Topia was also Vojsava or Vojsllava dead on 1394, which was married with Progon Dukagjini (son of Lekë I Dukagjini) and after with a Venetian noble "Kyr Izakun, Kursaka, as is said, with the head of the patrician Venetian families, Engjëll". Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 134. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 311.

¹¹⁰Ludwig von Thallóczy, Constantinus Jireček, "Zewi Urkunden aus Nordalbanien", in *Illyrisch – Albanische Forschungen*, Zusammengestellt von Dr. Ludwig von Thallóczy. (München und Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1916). Used after the translation in Albanian by Mustafa Merlika – Kruja: Ludwig von Thallóczy, Constantinus Jireček, "Kruja e qarku i saj bërthamë e Shqipnis Mesjetore", in *Vëzhgime iliro-shqiptare*, drafted by Dr. Ludwig Von Thallóczy. (Shkodër: Camaj-Pipa, 2004), 72. Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 134. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 291.

¹¹¹Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, 316.

¹¹²Thallóczy, Jireček, "Kruja e qarku i saj bërthamë e Shqipnis Mesjetore" 72.

authorities.¹¹³ In these conditions, on 6 September 1394, the Republic of San Marco decided to organize the occupation of Kruja and to arrest the rebel Barbadico and his wife Helena Topia, who according to the Venetians, inspired her husband in his political stances.¹¹⁴

Referring to Milan Šufflay, on 14 February 1395, Konstandin Balsha (the son of Gjergj I Balsha and Teodora Dejanović), the second husband of Helena Topia, "*had taken over Kruja as a Turk vassal. Konstandin Balsha who married Helena Topia had Kruja in possession. He became ruler of the entire region of Skuria near Durrës, and on 1401 became honorary citizen of Venice together with her wife and his children.*"¹¹⁵ But, he didn't give up his old plans to conquer Durrës even with the help of the Turks. A little bit later, he ended up tragically: prior 22 October 1402 was also sentenced in Durrës his mother Teodora, and together with his wife were sent in Venice."¹¹⁶ On 22 October 1402, the Venetian authorities proclaimed Helena Topia innocent, and also decided to give her the previously confiscated properties back.¹¹⁷ The year 1403 would mark the end of the political activity of the noble Topia family, when the count Niketë Topia took the castle of Kruja from the hands of his cousin, Helena.¹¹⁸

Boksa Dukagjini (daughter of Lekë I Dukagjini), the wife of Kojë Zaharia, ruler of the castle of Shas, and then of Deja and of the straits of the road along Drin, played a significant role in the political activity of Zaharia family. The Dukagjini and the Zaharia family, which territorially bordered each-other, and not casually had marriage alliances between them, in general have had close cooperation relations.¹¹⁹ After the death of Lekë Zaharia (son of Kojë Zaharia and Boksa Dukagjini) on 1444, because his son Koja II, was infant, his grandmother Boksa Dukagjini, became head of the family: she sought

¹¹³*Acta Albaniae*, II, dokument nr. 518, 522. Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 134.

¹¹⁴*Acta Albaniae*, II, dokument nr. 524, 525. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1, dokument nr. 168, 169. Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 134.

¹¹⁵About this issue also speak: *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1, dokument nr. 125.

¹¹⁶Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 135. For more see: Thallóczy, Jireček, "Kruja e qarku i saj bërthamë e Shqipnis Mesjetore", 73.

¹¹⁷*Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë të shek XV*, 1, dokument nr. 267. Šufflay, *Serbët e Shqiptarët*, 134.

¹¹⁸*Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 291.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 312.

the Venetian support, by giving up to the Republic of San Marco, Deja and Shas, while the other territories of the Zaharia family were handed over to the Dukagjini family.¹²⁰

A leading figure in the political life has also been the most important woman of the medieval Albania, Andronika Komnena (the elder daughter of Arianit Komneni or Gjergj Arianiti and Marie Muzaka), as it is mentioned in the Gjon Muzaka's *Memorandum*,¹²¹ or as its widely known with the name Donika Kastrioti, wife of Gjergj Kastrioti – Scanderbeg (married him on April 1451).¹²² In the majestic work of the prominent Albanian historian and humanist of international dimensions, Marin Barleti, "*Historia e jetës dhe e bëmave të Skënderbeut*", published in Rome in 1508 – 1510, it is mentioned the primal role and importance of Donika Kastrioti in ruling Scanderbeg's state, while leading nearly 3 thousand warriors who landed in August 1461 in Southern Italy, in the city of Barletta, to aid the king Ferrante I of Naples (27 June 1458 – 25 January 1494), who was encircled with a part of his army.¹²³ "*With an army composed by the prime of youth and powerful, he quickly arrived in Dauni; but, before leaving his kingdom, he carefully and wisely agreed with Mehmet II, the ruler of the Turks and signed an armistice with him for a year. There is no doubt that he (Scanderbeg – E. Baze) fixed the agreement as he wanted to, and all the other questions of his power the lead and the defense left at the hands of his wife and to some friends peer to him.*"¹²⁴

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹*Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, 418 – 419, 432.

¹²²Marinus Barletius, *Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi Epirotarvm principis* (Roma: Bernardinus Venetus de Vitalibus, 1508 – 1510). Used after the translation from the original by Stefan J. Prifti: Marin Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut* (Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës – Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë, 1964), 291. Kristo Frashëri, *Skënderbeu: jeta dhe vepra* (Tiranë: Toena, 2002), 181. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 416. Kasëm Biçoku, *Skënderbeu* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë – Instituti i Historisë, 2005), 127, 149 – 150.

¹²³Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, Ninth book: 353 – 417. Frashëri, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, 379 – 380. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 442 – 443. Biçoku, *Skënderbeu*, 179 – 180: As a sign of gratitude for this help, the king of Naples donated to Scanderbeg the feuds of Monte Sant' Angelo and of San Giovanni Rotondo, and also an annual pension of 1200 ducats.

¹²⁴Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, 392 – 393.

Political privileges and rights, Donika enjoyed even after Scanderbeg's death on 17 January 1468. Referring to one of most interesting Italian scholars on the medieval Albania of the last decades of the XX century, Paolo Petta (1942 – 1999), "*Donika hasten to write on 24 February 1468 to king of Naples, Ferrante I, to inform him on her husband's death: and in that occasion the king immediately replied to her that Scanderbeg was to him like a second father and his death was not less hard than that of my honorable father, king Alfonso*".¹²⁵ Also, at the same day, – writes P. Petta – king Ferrante I wrote to the faithful noble, Jeronimo Caravigno, by ordering him to meet Donika and her son and to ascertain in case that they would be placed in his kingdom, "*they would have my attention and honors that every son is obliged to do to his mother and every father is obliged to his son*", and they would enjoy their feuds and also other benefits if necessary.¹²⁶

Because king Ferrante I immediately offered them his protection, and also the possibility to enjoy the revenues from their possession in Monte Sant' Angelo and San Giovanni Rotondo (where Donika has previously stayed), she and her son decided to be settled in Naples, and not in the Republic of San Marco.¹²⁷ In these disadvantaged historic conditions, of serious political shocks of the Albanian territories, which majority of them were occupied by the Ottomans, Donika together with Gjon, her 13 years old son, escorted by a retinue, which after the narrations of the chronicler Gjon Muzaka, was generally made of women, widows and daughters of the Albanian noble families (among them also the two sisters of the chronicler), that had lost their fathers in the war, were included in the big Albanian exodus towards Southern Italy.¹²⁸ Donika Kastrioti passed the major part of her life in the Aragon

¹²⁵ Paolo Petta, *Despotë të Epirit e princër të Maqedonisë: mërgata shqiptare në Italinë e periudhës së Rilindjes*, translated from the original by Pëllumb Xhufi (Tiranë: Botimet IDK, 2001), 32.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* Biçoku, *Skënderbeu*, 202: The Senate of Venice decided to send in Albania Pal Engjëlli, who since many years stayed there as Scanderbeg's representative. Just arriving to Albania, Pal Engjëlli talked with Scanderbeg's wife and son, and with relatives of Kastrioti family and asked them to give Kruja to Venice along the other possessions. When Scanderbeg's wife and son left Albania, Kruja passed at the hands of Venetians.

¹²⁸ *Historia dhe gjenealogjia shtëpisë Muzaka*, 419 – 420: His wife, lady Scanderbeg, after her husband death went in the Kingdom of Naples together with her son, lord Gjon, and together with the mentioned lady also travelled my two sisters, who have lost their

court of Naples, where enjoyed the growing authority and privileges,¹²⁹ and also the support and friendship of the queen Juana (Giovanna) of Aragon (1476 – 1494), the second wife of Ferrante I.¹³⁰ Also, the fate of other Albanian noble woman emigrated in the Kingdom of Naples was not that bitter; thanks to the above mentioned queen, who would had contributed in their dowry, they were accepted in the bosom of the royal aristocracy, shining in the mundane Neapolitan society.¹³¹

Albania's women during the second half of the XV century, carried not a small weight and played an important role in the protection of their cities from the Ottoman attacks and encirclements, especially when they intensified and accomplished. Barleti, in his first work entitled, "*Rrethimi i Shkodrës*" (De obsidione Scodrensi), published in Latin in Venice on 10 January 1504, described the courage, heroism and contribution of the Shkodra city women in the protection of their city, during the second encirclement (second half of the 1478 – beginning of 1479). "*The flags of the enemy a thousand times were raised on the top of the moats; there were held body to body fighting even at the heart of the city; no citizen of every age-group didn't escape without being wounded. Even the girls and the women were not second to the men for courage; watching the son dying at the mother's presence, the husband at the wife's presence dying, the brother laid close to the sister and again their eyes were not there, but always preparing to the strongest warriors the weapons against the enemy, carried every work that were told to do, replaced in many works the*

husbands in war; one was lady Maria, wife of the lord Muzak Komneni, that the people called Danxhelin; the other was lady Helena, who was married with lord Gjergj Karles; lady Maria took with her a girl called lady Porfida the big one, while lady Helena took with her another girl called Vojsava. However, also arrived other ladies, which were welcomed well by the above-mentioned king.

¹²⁹*Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, vol. IV (1479 – 1506), Part I (1479 – 1499), prepared by Injac Zamputi (Tiranë: Universiteti shtetëror i Tiranës – Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë, 1967), dokument nr. 147: 18 August 1489 – The King of Sicily decides that to Donika Kastrioti to be sent an Albanian boy called Kolë.

¹³⁰*Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Second part (1499 – 1506), prepared for publishing by Injac Zamputi (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPSSH – Instituti i Historisë, 1979), dokument nr. 180: 18 January 1501 – From the diaries of the Venetian Marino Sanudo (1466 – 1536). Scanderbeg's widow, Donika, is the companion of Naple's queen.

¹³¹ Petta, *Despotë të Epirit e princër të Maqedonisë*, 137.

warriors, that were resting a little bit or tied their wounds. Nor the cannon, or the weapon or the death frightened them; all were committed to one purpose: to saving the city by even shedding the last drop of blood".¹³²

After the fall of Drishti (1 September 1478)¹³³ and Shkodra and the surroundings at the hands of the Ottomans (25 April 1479),¹³⁴ there were pensions,¹³⁵ provisions,¹³⁶ privileges,¹³⁷ and the right of asylum¹³⁸ in Venice and Friuli¹³⁹ granted by the Venetian authorities to the widows and girls of Drisht and Shkodra, whose husbands and family members lost their lives in these wars.¹⁴⁰ Help and support the Venetian Seignory didn't give only to the widows of the commanders and other high military leaders of the army,¹⁴¹ and the representatives of the local

¹³²Marinius Barletius, *De obsidione Scodrensi* (Venetiis: Bernardinus Venetus de Vitalibus, 1504 – 1505). Used after the translation from the original by Henrik Lacaj: Marin Barleti, *Rrethimi i Shkodrës*, third edition, (Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1982), 154. Marin Barleti, *Rrethimi i Shkodrës*, translated by Henrik Lacaj and prepared for publishing by David Hosaflook (Tiranë: Onufri, 2012), 206 – 207.

¹³³Lucia Nadin, *Shqiptarët në Venedik: mërgim e integrim (1479 – 1552)*, translated by Pëllumb Xhufi (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "55", 2008), 162.

¹³⁴*Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. I, 471.

¹³⁵*Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, vol. IV (1479 – 1506), Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 24, 25, 60, 62, 146, 188.

¹³⁶*Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Part II (1499 – 1506), Appendix of the Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 43, 46.

¹³⁷*Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 57. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Second part (1499 – 1506), Appendix of Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 33.

¹³⁸*Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 11, 12, 35. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Part II (1499 – 1506), Appendix of Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 26.

¹³⁹*Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, Pjesa I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 30, 31. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Part II (1499 – 1506), Appendix of Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 24, 25.

¹⁴⁰For more see: Lucia Nadin Bassani, *Migrazione e integrazione: il caso degli Albanesi a Venezia (1479 – 1552)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2008). Nadin, *Shqiptarët në Venedik: mërgim e integrim (1479 – 1552)*. Edmond Malaj, *Historia dhe fizionomia e një qyteti mesjetar shqiptar: Drishti* (Tiranë: Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike – Instituti i Historisë, 2015), 278 – 280.

¹⁴¹*Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 35, 57, 62. *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479 – 1506*, Part II (1499 – 1506), Appendix of Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 26, 33.

nobility, but also to the 80 families from Shkodra belonging to the middle and lower social class.¹⁴²

The presentation, analyzing and description of the above-mentioned facts, explicitly prove that the general panorama of the status of the noble citizen woman in the XIV – XV century in Albania, regarding the rights, privileges, social-political attributions etc., is similar with the original medieval models and practices of the Italian-Dalmatian region and that of the Western Adriatic Mediterranean realm as a whole.

¹⁴² *Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë*, Part I (1479 – 1499), dokument nr. 29.

