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**ALBANIAN NOBILITY IN THE BEGINNINGS OF THE  
OTTOMAN ERA: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A SOCIAL  
STRATUM\***

This year in Albania and abroad marks the celebration of the 600-birth anniversary of Gjergj Kastrioti-Scanderbeg. His place and role in the Albanian and European history are of an extraordinary importance. He organized and led for circa a quarter a century the Albanian people war against the Ottoman rule, a war full of sacrifices against the greatest military power of the time, becoming the brightest example of the centennial Albanians resistance to preserve the freedom and their national identity. Being an unequal war, but full of successes and victories, the Albanians resistance headed by Scanderbeg, turned their country into a powerful bulk walk for the defense of Western Europe by the Ottoman invasion. In this war, the Albanian people with his victorious sacrifices and wars, not only gave a priceless help for the protection of the western civilization values, but also became an inspiration source of hope for the entire Europe's peoples in their efforts for freedom and social progress.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>About Scanderbeg and his time, among others, see: Athanas Gegaj, *L'Albanie et l'invasion turc au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Louvain: 1937); Fan S. Noli, *Gjergj Kastrioti-Skënderbeu, 1405-1468*, (Tiranë: 1967); Selami Pulaha, *Prep. Lufta shqiptaro-turke në shek. XV-burime osmane*, (Tiranë: 1968); Aleks Buda, *Shkrime historike*, 1 (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1986); Halil Inalcık, *Hicri 835 Tarihli Sâret-i Defter-i Sancak-i Arvanid* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1987); Stavro Skendi, "Mjedisi kompleks i veprimtarisë së Skënderbeut", in: Stavro Skendi, *Studime kulturore ballkanike*. Translated by Artan Puto (Tiranë: IDK, 2013); Kristaq Prifti, ed. *Historia e popullit shqiptar*, Vol. I (Tiranë: Toena, 2002); Kristo Frashëri, *Skënderbeu, jeta dhe vepra*, (Tiranë: Toena, 2002); Kasem Biçoku, *Skënderbeu* (Tiranë: Botim impex, 2005); Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*. Translated by Ardian Klosi (Tiranë: K&B, 2008); Ferit Duka, *Shekujt osmanë në hapësirën shqiptare* (Tiranë: UET Press, 2009); Aurel Plasari, *Skënderbeu* (Tiranë: Instituti Shqiptar i Studimeve "Gjergj Fishta", 2010).

It's clear that to be better understood Scanderbeg's epopee, his personality and work, it is required to be scientifically analyzed the constituent elements of the social and political background on which were developed the impressive events of the XV century. Of course, in these frames, an essential question that deserves to be examined with special seriousness, is the position of the *Albanian nobility* in front of the dramatic turn that was marked in the Balkans and Albania with the establishment of the Ottoman rule in these spaces.

There is no doubt that the Albanian feudal nobility was formed and developed in a very complex environment related to the political and social circumstances of a country, whose medieval history was indissolubly connected with the foreign rulers of the eastern countries (Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serb) or western (Norman, Anjou and Venetian).<sup>2</sup> Consequently, in the profile of this social class and of Albanian society as a whole, all influences -whether from the East or from the West - had left deep impressions. In other words, this was a product of prolonged interactions, sometimes laden with great tension, between eastern (state) and western (seigniorial) feudalism, between the Eastern (Orthodox) and the Western (Catholic) Churches, between eastern and western cultures.<sup>3</sup>

Cultivated in this problematic environment, full of contradictions and clashes, where the historical process was developed in the form of strong deflections and zigzags, the Albanian nobility appeared at the eve of the Ottoman rule unstructured and mostly dominated from the division culture rather than that of unification.<sup>4</sup> In these conditions, nevertheless who has the greatest merit that preserved the Albanian ethnicity, culture and identity from the annihilation danger, it has

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<sup>2</sup>On this issue see further: Athanas Gegaj, *L'Albanie*; Aleks Buda, *Shkrime*, 1; Kristaq Prifti, ed. *Historia*, 1; Pierre Cabanes, drejt., *Historia e Adriatikut*, Translated by Arben Leskaj (Tiranë: Shtëpia e Librit & Komunikimit, 2005); Giuseppe Gelcich, *Zeta dhe dinastia e Balshajve*. Translated by Laura Leka (Tiranë: 55, 2009); Stavro Skendi, *Mjedisi*; Oliver J. Schmitt, Oliver J. Schmitt, *Arbëria venedike, 1392-1479*. Translated by Ardian Klosi (Tiranë: K&B, 2007); Pëllumb Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët te Muzakajt*, (Tiranë: Shtëpia botuese 55, 2009); Aurel Plasari, *Skënderbeu*.

<sup>3</sup> See: Aleks Buda, *Shkrime*, 1, 68-69; Stavro Skendi, *Mjedisi*, 188-189.

<sup>4</sup>Interesting sociological and anthropological analyzes about the position and role of the Albanian nobility in the Middle Ages and in the Ottoman period could be found in "Breviar i një kaste sunduese atipike: rendi i aristokracisë shqiptare në kohën e Perandorisë Osmane" by Thomas Frashëri. I thank the author for his readiness by putting at my disposal the above-mentioned study.

shown itself incapable to fulfill an essential objective of the medieval history: **the establishment of a unitary state and the unification of Albanians under the roof of this state**. Religiously and politically divided and as consequence, not having their own unified state, this was in a few words the overwhelming situation of the Albanians in the moments of the clash with the Ottoman state.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the Medieval Albanians established their tradition of the statehood, who found concrete expression with the foundation and the function of different state formations as meaningful evidence of the economic power manifestation and political emancipation of the local feudal nobility. Here is about the principality of Albania (Arbëria) that existed nearly two decades in the hurdle of XII-XIII centuries and also the Albanian principalities established in the second half of the XIV century. The first was established by a local prince named Progon and after him it was consecutively and successfully governed by his two sons Gjin and Dhimitër. Even though it was the first and powerful spark in the process of political and national developments of the Albanians in the Middle Ages, the principality of Albania was quickly vanished because of the conflicts and wars that included Byzantium and the Balkans during the first half of the XIII century.<sup>6</sup>

After the dissolution of Stefan Dušan's Serb empire in 1355, in the Albanian territories was marked a state revival proving through this establishment and the functioning of the new Albanian principalities governed by local big families from north to the south of the country.<sup>7</sup> Together with these new state formations, it was reborn the hope for a unique Albanian state. However, it was late now. These hope giving creations didn't evolve towards unification, not only because of quarrels and inner rivalries, but above all, of the appearance of the Ottoman danger on the horizon in more and more threatening manner.

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<sup>5</sup>Accordingly, Aleks Buda has put in evidence that our country both in antiquity and the Middle Ages, was found in the area of interference of the invading policies of "universal empires", of the Balkan medieval countries, and of the pressure of "universal cultures" represented by them, that hardened the consolidation process of a stable, unifying and independent political power. (Aleks Buda, *Ibid*).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*; Kristaq Prifti, ed. *Historia e popullit shqiptar*, Vol. I (Tiranë: Toena, 2002), 228-230.

<sup>7</sup>About the political emancipation of the local nobility and Albanian principalities of the XIV-XV centuries, see also: Athanas Gegaj, *L'Albanie*, Kristaq Prifti, ed. *Historia*, II; Pëllumb Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët*.

The main problem now for the Albanian nobility more than the country's unification, became the redefinition of orientation in the new dramatic situation that was created to the country and the protection of its political and economic interests in front of the Ottoman invasions.<sup>8</sup>

In these circumstances, at the eve of the Ottoman period, Albania instead of a unifying country, it was manifesting a political mosaic composed by feudal principalities and possessions. The first direct contacts of Albanian feudal lords with the Ottomans date early, perhaps since the rule of Durrësi by Karl Topia in 1385, when he called them to come at his help against Balsha, his rival. Four years after this first "visit" of the Ottomans in Albania, who secured the triumph of the head of Topia family over his opponent, there occurred a decisive battle in Fushë-Kosovë/Kosovo Polje among the member countries of the Balkan coalition. Albanians and the Ottoman army were active part of this coalition. The latter, nonetheless saw falling in the battlefield the sultan Murat I, won a meaningful victory of determinative importance for the further destinies of the peninsula's peoples.<sup>9</sup>

These shocking events marked the starting of a new process related with the gradual loss of sovereignty of the Albanian nobility in the proper possessions and their fall in the position of *vassalage* towards the Ottoman sultans. The vassalage meant the payment of a regular tribute or sending more boys as hostages to the sultan's court, or participation with military forces at the side of the Ottoman army. The documentary sources inform us that the vassalage regime towards the Ottoman state was accepted many times by certain elements of the local nobility. Lekë Dukagjin had accepted the vassalage since December 1387. In a letter he wrote to Ragusa together with his brother Pal, he called on the nobles of this Dalmatian republic that they may come undisturbed in his lands, because he has made peace with the

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<sup>8</sup>In parallel of the growing Ottoman pressure towards the Albanian princes, Venice attempted to exploit this conjuncture at the benefit of its annexation interests. Moreover see: Aleks Buda, *Shkrime*, 71. About the Venetian policy at this time see: Oliver J. Schmitt, *Arbëria*, 223-231.

<sup>9</sup>About the battle of Kosova on 1389, among others, see: Selami Pulaha, red. *Lufta shqiptaro-turke në shek. XV-Burime osmane* (Tiranë: 1968), 77-90; Noel Malcolm, *Kosova-një histori e shkurtër*. Translated by Abdullah Karjagdiu (Prishtinë-Tiranë: Koha & Shtëpia e Librit, 2001) (second edition), 62-67.

Ottomans.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the XIV century and the first years of the XV century, a good part of the nobility peers that has been forced to accept this new status, and also some of them, such as Kojë Zaharia, Dhimitër Gjonima, George Dukagjini and Dushmani, participated with their military contingents in the battle of Ankara on 1402 between the Ottoman army led by the sultan Bayazid II (The Thunderbolt) and the Mongolian army led by Tamerlane.<sup>11</sup>

In 1410 the vassalage status was also imposed to Gjon Kastrioti, Scanderbeg's father. The Ottoman commander of Skopje, Yigit pasha forced John to recognize the suzerainty of the sultan. On January of this year, Gjon Kastrioti informed Venice that was forced to send as hostage to the sultan's court one of his sons and was under pressure to allow their armies to freely pass through his territory to attack the Venetian possessions.<sup>12</sup>

The Ottoman invasion heavily shocked the Albanian society of the time. There is no doubt that the most sensitive and more endangered was the nobility. Nevertheless, the experience, the reactions, the political orientations that were seen among this social class, were different in dependence of the specific views that these individuals or particular groups had regarding the defense of their country and interests towards the new established situation. Therefore, from the bosom of this class were distinguished not only the protagonists, the leaders of the Albanian resistance against the Ottoman rule, among which the principal was George Kastrioti-Scanderbeg, but also the collaborators, the employees and the dignitaries of the different positions of the Ottoman administration in Albania and abroad.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kristo Frashëri, ed. in chief, *Burime të zgjedhura për historinë e Shqipërisë*, Vol. II (Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, 1962), 190-191.

<sup>11</sup> Stavro Skendi, *Mjedisi*, 190.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 190-191.

<sup>13</sup> Many documentary evidences of the XV century, especially those of Ottoman origin, prove the incorporation of that time Albanian nobility in the Ottoman system of timar receiving different positions in the Ottoman administration. An important source on this issue is the Albanian Sandjak (Sancak-i Arvanid) register, whose detailed data would be further examined. The register of 1431-1432 it's not the first one compiled in Albania. The first registration is thought to have taken place at the time of sultan Mehmet I. During this time, the district of Gjirokastra was definitively placed under the Ottoman rule and was directly included in the timar system. Many notes in the register of 1431 have clear references by a previous register which should have been compiled after 1415. As its seen, even in the register of Përmet and Korça of the same year, the timar system in the southern Albania was established since the time

Scanderbeg himself, was the personality who marked the Albanian history of the XV century, is also one of the most interesting examples of the fluctuations that are seen in the political and social position of the upper stratum elements of the Albanian population in the beginnings of the Ottoman period. He was sent as *iç oğlan* to the sultan's court (until now unclear when and in what circumstances) and there he was converted to Islam, receiving at the same time the high Ottoman title "*bey*". Basing on the Ottoman chroniclers Neshri and Hodja Sadeddin, the sultan had granted to Scanderbeg a timar in the paternal territories and has appointed him as the head of that Vilayet (the Vilayet of John Kastrioti-F.D.)<sup>14</sup>

From the notes written in the Ottoman register of 1431-1432, we learn that Scanderbeg on 1438 was carrying the post of subash of the vilayet of Kruja and as such, he had delivered authorizations to certain people appointed for timar possession.<sup>15</sup>The Vilayet of Kruja was bordering another administrative entity called "Jovan's land"(Jovan

of Bayazid I (Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-defter*, XV). On the bases conceived from the above-mentioned registers, are made interesting analyzes and assessments in important studies dedicated to the history of the Ottoman Albania. Among them can be mentioned: Selami Pulaha, *Pronësia feudale osmane në tokat shqiptare shek. XV-XVI* (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë: 1988); Halil Inalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu-Toplum ve Ekonomi* (Istanbul: Eren, 1993).

<sup>14</sup>The Ottoman chronicler Neshri, among others writes: "*Isa bey* (Isa bey Evrenoz-F.D.) *went, entered the unpenetrated Albanian territories, and from there attacked and fought. The infidels* (like this were called the Christians by the Ottomans-F.D.) *have been prepared and blocked the ways. The son of the ruler of Albanians, called Iskender, who in deed has been iç oğlan of the padishah* (sultan-F.D.) *and to whom the padishah has granted that vilayet as timar, rebelled against the sultan, escaped and went there. He settled in that country, which in fact was his timar. But he blocked the paths to akuncis which have arrived there with Isa bey.* "While the other chronicler, Hodja Sadeddin, describes this moment of Scanderbeg's history as following: "*He* (Gjon-F.D.) *sent Iskender in the capital to confirm his subjugation. And the powerful padishah like Alexander the Great introduced Iskender in the lines of the high court servants, which have the honor to do selected services. He was well treated by the sultan. When his father died, the sultan made him governor of that vilayet and granted him his father's throne.*"See: Selami Pulaha, *Lufta*, 91, 257-258; Ferit Duka, *Shekujt*, 16.

<sup>15</sup>In the above-mentioned register, it is stated that with Scanderbeg's authorization, to Jovan's son (in this form has been written the name of Gjon, Scanderbeg's father-F.D.), a part of the village of Mamurras was given as a timar to Uran (it can be also read "*Vrane*" or "*Vrana*") and as was mentioned above, he should be Count Uran or the Count Vrana). In the same register, according to another note, again Scanderbeg, this time together with the judge of Kruja, issued an authorization (mektup) to Uran (Vrana) for the other part of the above-mentioned village with 17 houses.

ili).<sup>16</sup> The territories of Jovan (this was the original name of Gjon Kastrioti, because it's known that the Ottomans registered the names as they were spelled by the locals -F.D.) included the western part of the former possessions of Kastrioti family, mainly the settlements of Ishëm and Rodon areas, which formed the region known as Mysie. After Gjon's death, it seems that the Ottomans had left these lands as a zeamet to his son, Scanderbeg. Despite that, the latter on May of 1438, had been deprived from getting the timar with nine villages in the vilayet of Dhimitër Gjonima.<sup>17</sup> Even though he enjoyed these attributions in the Ottoman hierarchy, his territorial possessions were seriously narrowed compared with what his father once possessed.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, for the distinguished progeny of the big Kastrioti family, a position nevertheless important within the frames of the local Ottoman administration, was too little comparing with the position of an independent ruler of a new principality, but powerful, as has been in its near past John Kastrioti's principality. In a time when the traditional principalities of the second half of the XIV century were one after another destroyed, the above-mentioned principality in the beginnings of the XV century, became the main bearer of the political responsibility in the new relations that the medieval Albanians had to build with the Ottomans. These circumstances were enough to keep alive in Scanderbeg's person the idea of restoring the Principality and the return to the glory of his ancestors. The past was much clearer in his mind rather than of other Albanian nobles and therefore his inspiration and determination to liberate his possessions and after that all of Albania, would turn into a project for which he would fight until the end of his life.<sup>19</sup>

The project in word was too ambitious. Two were its main objectives: to free the country from the Ottomans, and to establish a unique Albanian state. Both these objectives were synchronized and conditioned to one another. This meant that the victories in the liberation war would increase the chances to build the new state.

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<sup>16</sup>Mistakenly, the scholars have presented in the form "Juvan". See e.g.: Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i Defter*, 113, 120.

<sup>17</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i defter*, 120; Selami Pulaha, *Pronësia*, 60; Ferit Duka, *Shekujt*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Selami Pulaha, *Pronësia*, 60;

<sup>19</sup>On Scanderbeg's capability and charisma see further: Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*, 111-124.

However, the impressive achievements in fulfilling these historic duties, Scanderbeg's death on January 1468, paved the way to the reestablishment of the Ottoman rule in the liberated territories and the inclusion within a short time of all Albanian lands within the Ottoman orbit.<sup>20</sup>

In these conditions for the wife of Scanderbeg, Donika and her only son, Gjon, began a new period of challenges and vicissitudes in the new conditions of exile in the Apennine peninsula. The members of the Kastrioti family were settled in the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>21</sup> Like Gjon, also one of his sons, Gjergj (Young Scanderbeg) made attempts to organize freedom rebellions in Albania, but these attempts failed because of the weak support of the Western countries, and because of the powerful Ottoman counteraction.<sup>22</sup>

The initiative of February 1501 undertaken by Gjergj Kastrioti was more serious. The latter landed in the vicinities of Lezha to organize a general Albanian rebellion, and gain the previous possessions of his family. As support from the Venetians was not the one promised by them, this project failed regardless of some victories in the territory Lezha-Durrës. So, on 1503, the Young Gjergj, passed in the Ottoman camp embracing Islam and starting a new way, differently from that of his ancestors.<sup>23</sup> The other son of Gjon, Ferdinand, who inherited the feud granted to the Kastrioti family by the monarch of Naples, it is mentioned on 1506 as the Duke of San Pietro.<sup>24</sup>

Also, the renowned Arianiti family<sup>25</sup> was in front of strong dilemmas in the new reality established by the Ottoman rule in the Albanian territories. The head of the family, Gjergj Arianiti, known otherwise as Arianit Komneni, was the man who suffered the most from the drama of this great political turn. According to the Byzantine chronicler Chalcocondyles, Arianiti remained poor because his

<sup>20</sup> Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, I, 402-403, 425-435; 472-473; Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*, 139, 252-278.

<sup>21</sup> Paolo Petta, *Despotë të Epirit, princër të Maqedonisë*. Translated by Pëllumb Xhufi (Tiranë: Shtëpia e Librit dhe Komunikimit, 2001), 30-33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35, 41.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*; Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, 472-478.

<sup>24</sup> Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 42-44.

<sup>25</sup> Also is written and pronounced in the version "Araniti". We apologize to the reader that for specific reasons we couldn't take into possession the study of Prof. Dhimitër Shuteriqi on the Arianiti family.



possession in both sides of the Shkumbin valley to Elbasan, after the military expedition chaired by Isa bey Evrenoz, fell into the Ottoman rule, by leaving the Albanian prince expropriated. In these conditions, he went to the sultan's court in Edirne to demand the granting him of a timar, that would ease in a certain way his situation.<sup>26</sup> However, apparently, he didn't get a positive response, therefore just he came back from there, together with other Albanian chieftains, organized an anti-Ottoman rebellion which started with the killing of some timar holders. The dissatisfaction of the Albanian noble achieved its peak apparently after the Ottoman registration of 1431-1432 (Albanian Sandjak register), a document in which Arianiti does not figure as a timar holder. Therefore, the mentioned rebellion, should had started immediately after the end of the above-mentioned registration.<sup>27</sup> According the information of B. de la Broquière who traveled to Albania two years later (1434), and the notes of the Ottoman chronicler Oruj, in the winter of 1432-1433, sultan Murat II was settled in Serez to follow the Ottoman military expedition against the Albanian rebels. However, in that winter, the rebels headed by Arianiti, badly smashed the Ottoman army commanded by Ali bey.<sup>28</sup> As has written Prof. Inalcık, "in this time stands the origin of the Albanian resistance, which emboldened many of the western crusaders and the Ottoman state had to deal for a half a century with it."<sup>29</sup>

The chief of Arianiti family continued to remain a vivid member of the anti-Ottoman front in Albania and ally of Scanderbeg in this war until he died nearly 1461.<sup>30</sup> Groom of the Muzaka family and father-in-law of Scanderbeg, Gjergj Arianiti enjoyed special authority in the Albanian political space. As friend and ally to Scanderbeg, he also remained firm to preserve untouched his political independence and power. This is also reflected in his relations with the European

<sup>26</sup> Koço Bozhori, ed. in chief, *Burime tregimtare bizantine për historinë e Shqipërisë, shek. X-XV* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPSH-Instituti i Historisë, 1975), 325-326.

<sup>27</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i defter*, XIV; Koço Bozhori, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* About the Arianiti family and especially on Gjergj Arianiti, among others, see also: Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i defter*, XIV; Franc Babinger, *Fundi i Arianitëve*. Translated by Nestor Nepravishta. (Tiranë: Plejad, 2004); Selami Pulaha, *Lufta*, 44; *Ibid.*, *Pronësia*, 61; Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 143-148; Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, 296-299; Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*, 150, 195-199.

<sup>29</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i defter*, XIV.

<sup>30</sup> The year of death on: Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 145.

countries that had direct interests in that time Albania as were the Kingdom of Naples and the Republic of San Marco. With the first on 1451, separately by Scanderbeg he signed a vassalage agreement, but his vassalage relations with Alfonso, practically ended after the Albanian-Ottoman battle for Berat on 1455. After this event which turned useless the continuation of relation with the sovereign of Naples, Arianiti passed in pro Venetian positions by taking special titles and privileges from the Republic. On 1456, he was named from the Venice's doge "*Captain in the Albanian territories*", thus becoming representative of the Venetian interests in a space extending from Durrës to Shkodra.<sup>31</sup>

After Scanderbeg, Gjergj Arianiti is the most important personality of the Albanian history of the XV century. The distinguished scholar of the Ottoman history and especially of the Arianiti family, Franz Babinger, has put in evidence that the contribution of this personality in the liberation war of Albanians has been darkened by the fame of his groom and in true the Albanian noble has become popular for his deeds within and abroad the country. A number of personalities of the West including here the Pope, the king of Naples or the leaders of the Republic of Venice, didn't spare the praises on Arianiti.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the predecessors of Gjergj Kastrioti-Scanderbeg, the predecessors of Gjergj Arianiti also exiled abroad. This occurred at the moment when the fall of the Albanian fighters' resistance in front of the devastating offensive of Mehmet II which started in the spring of 1466 and continued in 1467 became clear. The possessions of the Arianiti family around Shkumbin were totally placed under the Ottoman rule, and in Elbasan, their epicenter,<sup>33</sup> it was built the powerful castle symbolizing the new reality.<sup>34</sup> The main branch of this great family represented by the second wife Despina and three sons were settled first in the Seignory's possessions in Albania, and then moved to Venice.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*, 196-197.

<sup>32</sup> Franc Babinger, *Fundi i Arianitëve*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> The Ottomans called the city "**Ilbasan**" (something that violates, rules the country, by not taking into consideration by this the functions and the symbol of the new castle).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>35</sup> Paolo Petta excludes the possibility that the Arianiti family may have lived in Puglia as Babinger thought (Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 145)

If we follow the progress of Gjergj Arianiti's family male line, we could notice that two of his sons, Arianiti (in all probability, named Gjon Arianiti) and Kostandin, definitively connected their destiny with the Apennine peninsula. Gjon Arianiti is mentioned as one of the men who served with dedication in Rome's Holy See, and a regular pension was paid to him.<sup>36</sup> The other son, Kostandin, in fact the most important from the Arianiti family in Europe, had a quickly successful career in Italy. He became a smart and agile player in the European scene by masterly placing himself between the great powers of the time as the Holy Roman Empire, France, Papacy and Venice.<sup>37</sup> He kept this position to his death (1531), by making known everywhere the name of his family and that of Albania.<sup>38</sup>

Also, the Arianiti family after a certain time, it was affected by the process of converting to Islam. At least, one of the sons of Gjergj, Thoma, abandoned the Albanian cause in 1466 to join the Ottoman army. He converted to Islam with the new name "Mahmud" accompanied by the title "bey" and was integrated among the lines of the military class starting thus a new life at the service of crescent moon state.<sup>39</sup> The data we have at our disposal until now from the earlier Ottoman sources and also the information of the known scholars on this question, encourage us to affirm that differently from the other great families of the Middle Ages, the process of converting to Islam and the Ottomanization lightly affected the Arianiti family. Only one of the progenies of the mentioned family has been identified as an individual who embraced Islam.<sup>40</sup>

It should be also emphasized that even the presented narration in specific studies for the moment of conversion and career of Mahmud bey in the Ottoman state, is a version not without flaws. The scholar Franz Babinger says among the other things that the son of Arianiti

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<sup>36</sup> Petta thinks that for this person the word was about when on 1471 was mentioned as "the great lord" Arianiti from Albania (Petta, 152).

<sup>37</sup> About the political life and activity of Kostandin Arianiti see further: Petta, 155, 157-188.

<sup>38</sup> On the inscription in his grave by his son is read: "*After was banished by the Turks from the paternal possessions, with courage contradistinguished his wicked destiny*" (Petta, 188).

<sup>39</sup> We think that was Thoma who converted to Islam and not Arianiti, as Babinger affirms (Babinger, 21). Petta even why does not mentions the name of the converted person, insinuates that it's about Thoma (Petta, 155).

<sup>40</sup> Such a thing is made also clear by Babinger (Babinger, 21).

converted to Islam passed on the Ottoman side, became Moslem and until the moment of the violent death, he had secured the post of sandjak bey of Himara region.<sup>41</sup> Otherwise, Himara would have been a nahie and not a sandjak! According to the version presented by Petta, the passing of the Arianiti's son at the side of the Ottomans might have occurred in the '70s of the XV century,<sup>42</sup> that is in contradiction with the assertion (right, to my opinion) of Prof. Schmitt that Thoma Arianiti joined the Ottomans in 1466.<sup>43</sup>

Currently, it is difficult to follow the progress of the Arianiti family Moslem line in the Ottoman sources from the XVI century onwards. However, for the two first decades of the XVI century we have some interesting data on this issue. The nephew of Gjergj Arianiti, Ali bey, son of Mahmud bey (Ali bey bin Mahmud bey bin Aranid) it is mentioned in a note made in the summary register of Vlora's sandjak of 1506 as possessor of a zeamet in the village Dhivër (district of Saranda) of this sandjak.<sup>44</sup> He was also in 1526-1527 sandjak bey of Prizren and possessed a cambric of 263000 akçe of revenue.<sup>45</sup>

These are important data, they because show that the successors of the Moslem branch of the Arianiti family not only converted to Islam and entered at service of the Ottoman state, but had an impressive career in the army and administration. This fact allows us to affirm that the Christian successors of the Arianiti family who were settled in the West, and also those who remained in the East, were in complete harmony according to the success and career manifested by each part at their position.<sup>46</sup> Another interesting element that should be put in evidence is that, nonetheless positioned in two hostile camps to each other, the conscience of belonging to the same family triumphed over

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<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*; Indeed, Mahmud bey was Vlora's sandjak bey and as such, remained killed on 1486 in an attempt to crush the rebellion that has erupted in Himara (Selami Pulaha, *Pronësia*, 61).

<sup>42</sup> Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 155.

<sup>43</sup> Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*, 199.

<sup>44</sup>T. C. *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Osmanlı Arşivi* (herein further: DAOA), *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*, No. 34, H 912/1506, f. 13; Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Toplum ve Ekonomi* (İstanbul: Eren, 1993), 88; Selami Pulaha, *Pronësia*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>46</sup>We remember here the important duties of Kostandin Arianiti in the European courts and from the other side, the high positions of Mahmud bey and Ali bey in the Ottoman state (to the position of sandjak bey).

the first making them to established a communication line to each other.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, the conversion to Islam and the Ottomanization phenomenon didn't affect only the Kastrioti and Arianiti families, but almost all the big Albanian families of the Middle Ages. The Zenebishi, Dukagjini, Topia families, etc., experienced the division of the traditional Christian line and the new Ottoman-Islamic line. In the Zenebishi family, the above-mentioned phenomenon was present since the first generation of Gjin's successors. One of his sons was sent as *içoğlan* to the sultan's palace in Istanbul, where he was converted to Islam and was educated with the Turkish-Islamic life norms and rules taking the new name *Hamza*. Hamza had important posts in the Ottoman administrative-military hierarchy, achieving the high post of sandjakbey. We think that for this person it's about the talking when a certain *Hamza bey* is mentioned in the register of 1431-2 as a sandjak bey of Albania.<sup>48</sup> Hamza bey Zenebishi has also been in the post of

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<sup>47</sup>On this issue Paolo Petta writes: *"In the first months of 1486, one of the frequent rebellions of the Christian Albanians took the life of the young sandjak bey (it's about the brother of Kostandin Arianiti converted to Islam, Mahmud bey-F.D.). Years later, Kostandin, that meantime had become a close collaborator of the Pope, succeeded to find his sons' traces (Mahmud bey-F.D.) that were grown as Moslems and served the sultan, establishing with them cordial relations. They sent to him in Rome letters and precious gifts"*. (Petta, 156).

<sup>48</sup>In the pages of the Albanian Register, Hamza bey is densely met as *"Arnavud-ili sancakbeği"*, *"sancakbeği-i vilayet-i Arvanid"*, etc. We are mentioning here some of the notes that are connected with the name of Hamza bey as the head of the Albanian Sandjak:

-the village Hundëkuq in the vilayet of Gjirokastrais given to Ballaban by the head of Arnavud-ili Sandjak (the sandjak of the country of Albanians, Albania-F.D.), Hamza bey (circa 1452).

-Hamza beygrants a part of the timar to a person from the place called "Vreshta e Zenebishit/The Vineyard of Zenebishi", in the vicinity of Gjirokastra (year H 845/January 1442).

-Hamza bey issues to the secretary Dhimo a possession document as timar of the Ardenica village in the region of Myzeqe.

-In the beginning of September 1453/beginning of the Ramadan 857, Hamza bey grants as timar of the village Floq in the district of Vlora to a person called Hasan.

-With the approval of the sandjak bey Hamza bey, nephew of Pavlo Kurtik, to Aliwere granted as timar on H 854/1450 the village of Shpolat in Myzeqe, and also the villages Vodica and Karkanjoz in the district of Berat.

-Hamza bey granted to Mustafa a timar that previously has been in the possession of Berat metropolis (January 1442).

-In the register are mentioned one by one as timar holders the brothers of Hamza bey: Iljas who possessed as timar the village Sopik of Saranda and Kasem, who cherished as timar

Mistra (Mezistra) sandjak bey in Peloponnesus.<sup>49</sup> Another progeny converted to Islam from the Zenebishi family, Hasan bey, on 1468 carried the post of Fanar's subash in the sandjak of Trikala.<sup>50</sup>

The other part of the Zenebishi family successors, differently from the above mentioned, kept the ancestors' religion and tradition by standing in opposition with the Ottoman power. The most prominent of them was Depa (Topia) Zenebishi, who became one of the chieftains of the Albanian resistance in 1433-1436, trying to liberate Gjirokastra and other paternal possessions. Although in synchrony with the liberation war of Gjergj Arianiti, Depa's rebellion and its protagonists had a tragic end.<sup>51</sup> However, the progenies of the Zenebishi family didn't pull back from their idea of liberating Gjirokastra. It's about Gjin Zenebishi (the Young) who in coordination with Scanderbeg's war, made two serious attempts (1444 and 1454) to regain Gjirokastra and other territories of Zenebishi principality. As these actions had unsuccessful outcome, the protagonism of the Zenebishi family in the Albanian scene of the XV century ended.<sup>52</sup>

The Topia family faced complicated, challenging, difficult and strong political shocks that accompanied the passing of Albania from pre-Ottoman to the Ottoman time. After the death of Karl Topia in 1388 and the giving up of Durrës to the Venetians in 1392, the principality entered the XV century weakened and divided, leaving behind the political prestige that once enjoyed in the '70-'80 of the past century.<sup>53</sup> A part of Karl Topia successors preserved the Christian religion and as such were incorporated in the Ottoman system of timar

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the village Malind of Skrapar (April 1452). See: Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i defter*, 5, 18, 25, 26, 37, 59, 73, 82, 96.

<sup>49</sup> Athanas Gegaj, *L'Albanie*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Osmanlı*, 77.

<sup>51</sup> Ferit Duka, *Shekujt*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Paolo Petta, Despotë, 211; Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, 287-290.

as Christian timariots (timar holders).<sup>54</sup> Generally, this category later joined Scanderbeg's war.<sup>55</sup>

On the Moslem line of Topia family the historic information is more limited, therefore our knowledge is restrained. In any case, according to the notes made in the Albanian Sandjak register of 1431-1432, a successor of the Topia family converted to Islam with the name Ali and possessed a timar with many villages in the vilayets of Pavlo Kurtik and of Kruja.<sup>56</sup> The mentioned person should have been the son of Karl Topia, and nephew of the famous Karl Topia, head of the Middle Albania principality in 1358-1388. It's not without interest to put in evidence that the above mentioned timar was previously possessed by his father Karl.<sup>57</sup>

Differently from the other medieval Albanian families, the big family of Dukagjini<sup>58</sup> north of Albania recognized a lighter stagnation from the pre-Ottoman to the Ottoman period. This was mainly related with the geographic position of its possessions. The latter, until the end of the '70s of the XV century, remained out of range of the Albanian-Turkish war. Therefore, their principality survived for a long time compared to others. However, the Dukagjini family has been actively involved in the Albanian politics scene — from the League of Lezha to the most important events related to the liberation war led by Scanderbeg. After Scanderbeg's death, many representatives of this family resolutely fought at the side of Venetians to defend the Albanian territories from the Ottomans. After the break of this resistance, those

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<sup>54</sup>According to the notes in the register of the Albanian Sandjak, Muzak (in original: Muzhaq) Topia possessed as timar the villages Korrë and Cërujë (the area of Funar between Elbasan and Tirana) with revenues 6156 akçe, while to Andrea Topia (in the register is marked Andre Karlo) were given three villages in the vilayet of Kruja. The same (in this case is mentioned as: Andre, son of Karl) together with a certain Andre Beksi (Halil Inalcık, *Suret-i defter*, 89, 105, 107, 120).

<sup>55</sup>Andrea Topia together with his two sons, Komnin and Muzakë Topia, and also his nephew, Tanush Topia, were participants in the League of Lezha called by Scanderbeg on 2 March 1444. Muzakë Topia remained killed on 1455, during the battle for the liberation of Berat from the Ottoman forces, while Tanush Topia was one of the most prominent commanders of Scanderbeg's army (Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, 402, 406, 419, 429, 451, 455).

<sup>56</sup>Halil Inalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Toplum ve ekonomi*, İstanbul, 1993, p.87.

<sup>57</sup>Halil Inalcık, *Suret-i defter*, 92.

<sup>58</sup>More widely on Dukagjini family see: Athanas Gegaj, *L'Albanie*; Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, 307-312; Oliver J. Schmitt, *Skënderbeu*, 201-212.

who remained alive, exiled by finding shelter in the Apennine peninsula, mainly in the region of Marche.<sup>59</sup>

The others chose to be at the service of the Ottoman state by converting to Islam and integrating in the new system. Here we can mention the grand viziers (the prime ministers) of the empire such as Daud Pasha and Mehmed Pasha, the famous poets Dukaginziade Yahya bey and Dukaginziade Ahmet bey, etc.<sup>60</sup>

The Muzaka family, another family of princes of the Middle Ages, offer a better understanding of the Albanian nobility metamorphoses in the political and social realms under the new circumstances created by the Ottoman rule. Thanks to the high political and social position they enjoyed in the Albanian environment of the time, the Muzaka family had a dense net of marriage and kinship alliances with the country's aristocratic elite. Here we can mention the Balsha, the Arianiti, the Kastrioti, the Gropa, the Dukagjini, the Zenebishi families etc.<sup>61</sup>

A part of the family represented by Gjin II Muzaka and his successors, decided to preserve untouched the political integrity and the religious identity, aligning in the anti-Ottoman war under the leadership of Scanderbeg. To this line belonged the narrator of the family history, Gjon (Giovanni) Muzaka. By aligning at the side of Scanderbeg together with his father, Gjin II, he became one of the main actors of the Albanian-Ottoman war in the XV century. The efforts of sultan Mehmet II (Fatih) to win over him, and distract him from the way of resistance by offering different posts failed.<sup>62</sup>

Only when the hopes on Albania's freedom were annihilated and the final establishment of the Ottoman rule was beyond any doubt (it's about 1479 when even the city of Shkodra fell at the hands of the

<sup>59</sup> Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 213.

<sup>60</sup> Zyber Bakiu, *Shqipëria dhe shqiptarët: hulumtime historike në enciklopedinë "Kamus'ul Alam" të Sami Frashërit*, (Tiranë: West Print, 2015), 319, 344, 346. At all odds, Daud Pasha could be the converted son to Islam of Nikollë Dukagjini and Kirana Arianiti, the daughter of Gjergj Arianiti. This information is received by the chronicler Giovanni Muzaka when writes: "The third daughter (of Gjergj Arianiti-F.D.), lady Kirana, was married with the lord Nikollë Dukagjini, as also were married to the Dukagjini family her sisters. From this lady were born two sons: one died, while **the other converted to Islam and became Pasha and Great Captain of the Sultan** (See on: Pëllumb Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët*, 433).

<sup>61</sup>On this issue see further: Giovanni Musacchi, "Historia e genealogia della casa Musacchia" in: Charles Hopf, *Chroniques Greco-Romanes inédites ou peux connues* (Berlin: Librairie de Weidmann, 1873), 282-288. See also: Pëllumb Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët*, 430-436.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid*, 421.



Ottomans), Gjon Muzaka, alike his sisters Scanderbeg's family and many others fellow countrymen, escaped by seeking asylum in the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>63</sup> The forced escape also had dangers and surprises. Gjon Muzaka, his wife and children were first sheltered in the city of Durrës (still under the Venetian rule). Miraculously escaping from falling at the hands of the Ottomans that were chasing them, his wife Maria (member of the Dukagjini family), together with the daughter and two sons (one of them newborn), passed the Adriatic and joined Gjon, who had previously arrived in the Apennine peninsula.<sup>64</sup>

Gjon Muzaka was welcomed by Naples' authorities, which appointed the noble from Albania in important positions of Puglia. Among others, he also served as commander of the Brindisi harbor.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, a nephew of John Muzaka, son of his brother Gjin, served as castellan in Mezzana (Puglia's region), a service that was inherited by his son, Andrea.<sup>66</sup> Probably, also Teodor, one of John's sons, accomplished different administrative duties in Mezzana and in Castellaneta. While the other two sons of Gjon, Adrian and Kostandin, achieved to have a good military career inside and outside the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>67</sup> Adrian, a thin boy, but very vivid and joyful, was appointed commander of a military troop of 200 stratiots to fight against the French. Vexed by the quarrels of the Neapolitan army, he suddenly abandoned the camp and passed on the side of the French. Hereinafter he served as captain of the light French cavalry. During all this time he was individualized for courage and boldness, especially in the front of the war with the British in northern France and died poisoned in dubious circumstances (1526).<sup>68</sup>

The same thing did Gjon's younger son, Kostandin, who together with his brother passed at the side of the French. He achieved to save him from the annihilation of his platoon during the fighting and return him safe and sound to France. After that, with the help of an influenced family he could return again in the Kingdom of Naples, which he has

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<sup>63</sup>*Ibid*, 422.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid*; Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 130.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid*, 131.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid*, 132.

betrayed years ago. In 1532, the king Charles V allocated to him a pension of 200 ducats.<sup>69</sup>

The other branch of the Muzaka family, represented by the successors of Teodor III Muzaka, found the compromise with the new ruler as a solution. They embraced the Islam and were included in the Ottoman military-administrative hierarchy, demonstrating one of the most typical cases of the Albanian aristocracy metamorphoses after the establishment of the Ottoman rule. The most remarkable representatives of the second orientation were Jakub Bey and Kasem Pasha, who were successful in their careers by quickly achieving the position of the head of Albanian Sandjak.<sup>70</sup>

The cases of Jakub Bey and Kasem Pasha surprisingly were not reported by Gjon Muzaka in his chronicles.<sup>71</sup> We cannot guess the reasons behind, but we want to put in evidence that this absence has been compensated by the status of these two progenies converted to Islam of the Muzaka family reported in the Ottoman register of the Albanian Sandjak during 1431-1432. This document has many notes on timar granting to different officials of the new Ottoman administration with special authorizations issued by Jakub Bey and Kasem Pasha in the respective periods that they governed the Albanian Sandjak.<sup>72</sup>

These two personalities and their brother Mehmed, also converted to Islam, were the sons of Teodor Muzaka. Jakub Bey represents one of the most interesting figures of the Albanian and Ottoman history of the first half of the XV century. However, his life and career were short. In 1441, he is presented in the historic sources of the time as Albania's Sandjak bey, and a year later he was killed in the battle between the

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid*, 133.

<sup>70</sup> Ferit Duka, *Shekujt*, 36.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid*. Otherwise, the chronicler of the house of Muzaka, didn't lacked to present a considerable number of other persons converted to Islam from this family during the XV century (see: Pëllumb Xhufi, *Nga Paleologët*, 435-436).

<sup>72</sup>In the summary register of the Albanian Sandjak (years 1431-1432) are found such notes as e.g.: With a letter of **Jakub Bey** 5 homes of the village Hotisht(?) of Vlora are joined to the timar of Sandal, son of Umur; with motion of **Jakub Bey** the village Cerkovinë of Vlora is given to the judge of Kanina; by order of **Jakub Bey**, a part of the revenues of the village Karavasta-Skelë with 21 homes, is given to Mustafa Bey, son of Pavllo Kurtiqi; **Jakub Bey**, sandjak bey of Albania gives Këlcyra to Aman Bey; in the presence of **Kasem Pasha**, the village Kuçovais given to Ali, son of Hamza etc. (see: Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i Defter*, 5, 30, 42, 47, 61).

Ottoman and Hungarian armies. He was considered one of the most distinguished military commanders of the sultan Murat II.<sup>73</sup>

The documentary data conceived from to date research, do not provide sufficient information about the successors of Jakub Bey. Nevertheless, from one note made in an Ottoman register on 1455, we learn that he had a son named Jusuf Chelebi, who possessed a timar in the vilayet of Tetovo (Kalkandelen), what meant that he also was included in the Ottoman state administrative-military hierarchy.<sup>74</sup>

The framing of the Muzaka family in the Ottoman system of timar was fulfilled through granting possession not only to the converted in Islam, but in the beginning to the Christian progenies of this family. Other notes from the Albanian Sandjak provide interesting information about the other members of the Muzaka family, who differently from the case of Jakub Bey were involved in the timar system by preserving the Christian religion, viz, being part of that transitional social category in the first centuries of the Ottoman rule known as "Christian timar holders". To this category belongs Andrea III Muzaka, the father of Gjin Muzaka, fellow warrior of Scanderbeg and grandfather of Gjon Muzaka, and also the brother of Andrea of the above mentioned, Vlash Muzaka. Both brothers possessed in this framework as timar the village Hekal of Mallakastro (after a note made in the mentioned register), granted to them on 1453 which was removed on 1450.<sup>75</sup>

Although the chronicle of Gjon Muzaka does not report about the typical cases of this phenomenon, it provides sufficient information to conclude that except the line of Gjin Muzaka, who ended up in political exile abroad after Scanderbeg's death, alike many others, all the successors of this family "melted" in the Islamic part of the Albanian population.<sup>76</sup>

However, here we have to note that the members of Muzaka family who converted to Islam, as as based on up to now research in the Ottoman documentation of the XVII-XVIII centuries, have not left a distinguishing trace that makes their identification possible. Apparently, they have erased every outer sign that could relate them

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<sup>73</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i Defter*, XVIII; Paolo Petta, *Despotë*, 129.

<sup>74</sup> Kasem Biçoku, "Dibra dhe Koxhaxhiku në kohën e Skënderbeut", *Studime historike*, nr.1-2 (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë, 2003), 21-22.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

<sup>76</sup> Ferit Duka, *Shekujt*, 39.

with their pre-Ottoman past, being satisfied by carrying their new titles of the Ottoman time, as "agha", "bey" or "pasha".<sup>77</sup>

The data conceived from the Ottoman sources of the '30s, XV century, help us to have a clearer view on Albania's political and social environment of the first decades of the XV century. The gap that the decline of the power of the once traditional principalities created was now filled with nobles of a second level who grew under the shadow of "the traditional" princes and empowered thanks to the fast involvement within the new Ottoman ruler by converting to Islam and maximizing their profits from the support of this new power.<sup>78</sup>

A typical example of the integration within the new above-mentioned system was the Kurtiqi (Kurtik) family, a big family of the Middle Albania. The most prominent individual of this family, Pavllo (it also written Pavli) Kurtik, who had in his possession a wide area within the line Tirana-Elbasan-Berat-Lushnja-Kavaja, and on its bases the Ottomans established an independent administrative unit in the framework of the Albanian Sandjak, called "Pavllo Kurtik's vilayet", which included a number of regions in the above-mentioned area.<sup>79</sup>

His sons were converted to Islam and were rewarded with timars from the Ottoman state not only in the territories of his father's vilayet, but also in other regions of the country. One of the sons, Mustafa, had long time granted with timars that included the specific villages of Mallakastra (among them also the villages Struman and Belishovë),<sup>80</sup> Përmet (among them also the village Odriçan)<sup>81</sup>. Also, by a note of the sandjak head, Jakub bey, the son of Teodor Muzaka, on H 841/1437, to Mustafa were granted as timar the villages of Bishqem, Mamël, Kozan (today: Kozaj), Krrabani (today: Kërrabë), Manës and Gjodelesh (today: Godolesh).<sup>82</sup> Part of Mustafa's timar also became some powerful economic sources as Karavasta harbor with revenues 220 golden coins and the village with the same name of revenues 9531 akçe.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40.

<sup>78</sup> Selami Pulaha, *Pronësia*, 62-63.

<sup>79</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Suret-i defter*, 85-97.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

Apparently, the most important was the other son of Pavllo Kurtik converted to Islam, Isa bey, who possessed as timar a big space with 113 villages included in. The revenues that Isa bey secured from the taxes and obligations receiving from the cadre of this timar were:

Ispenja - 30793 akçe; wheat - 2000 kilos x 10 = 20000 (akçes-F.D); barley and rye - 1000 kilos x 6 = 6000; vineyards' tithe - 1600 medres x 5 = 8000; olive oil's tithe - 3000; Shën Jorgji's harbor - 150 golden coins x 33 = 4950 (akçes-F.D.); Shën Mari(Saint Mary) fair - 150; pigs' taxes - 1000; niyabet tax (revenues from the fines) - 3000; niyabet of Krraba - 8000 (?); ispenja - 3413. The amount of all the revenues together in the region of Krraba achieved the sum of 81306 (akçes). By sultan's decree, on August 1437, to Isa bey were granted as timar bonus also the villages Gracen, Bizhutë, Bradashesh, Petresh, Shën Gjergj and Jatesh.<sup>84</sup>

The Moslem heirs of Pavllo Kurtik had a distinguished career and wealth even outside Albanian territories. On 1460-1463, one of the sons of Isa bey, Ibrahim, is seen in Morea (Peloponnese) as holder of a zeamet with revenues 22.952 akçes. The mentioned zeamet included the city of Sandamir together with its surroundings. Except Ibrahim, Isa bey Kurtik has another son named Yusuf. On 1454-1455, both brothers, Ibrahim and Yusuf, possessed an even bigger zeamet with revenues of 42 399 akçes. The zeamet was in Thessaly, area of Trikala.<sup>85</sup>

As its seen by the above-mentioned data, Pavllo Kurtik was one of the most powerful man of Albania at that time. He belonged to that part of the Albanian nobility which since the beginning chose the way of obedience and compromise with the new Ottoman power, therefore not only preserved its privileges, but its successors converted to Islam and made career in the Ottoman administrative-military unit.

The possession of the timars in the XV century in Albania was conditioned by the regular participation in the Ottoman campaigns against Scanderbeg, or the so- called by the Ottoman authorities of the time "**Albania's war**", underling this way the true dimensions of the event. This means that in the Ottoman register we have a clear evidence

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

<sup>85</sup> Inalcık, *Osmanlı*, 87; Levent Kayapınar, "Osmanlı arşiv kaynaklarına göre Dimitsana'nın demografik yapısı". Taken from: conference.arcadians.gr. In the document is said: "Zeamet-i Sandamiri, zaimmiş, İbrahim veled-i İsa Bey bin Pavllo Kurtik" (zeamet of Sandamir; was zaim, Ibrahim, the son of Pavllo Kurtik).

that the anti-Ottoman war under the leadership of Scanderbeg was not just a local rebellion within the territories of a specific principality, but a nationwide liberation war. Such a thing has found expression in some notes made in the register of Përmet and Korça.<sup>86</sup>

When it comes to the relations of the Albanian nobility of the Middle Ages with the Ottoman period, a special interest presents the other big family from Berat, the Zguro, whose members were converted to Islam, but differently from the Muzaka family, preserved their previous identity (family's name). The beginnings of the Moslem line of the Zguro family, can be identified since the first decades of the XV century. While in a note made in the Albanian Sandjak of 1431-1432, it is mentioned a Christian timar holder named Uzgur, groom of the known Albanian noble of the XV century, Dhimitër Prespa, to whom was granted as timar the village Divjaka and some other villages in the area of Berat and Myzeqe.<sup>87</sup> In another note of the same register, we learn that the village Babunë of Myzeqe, together with another village, was given to the son of Zguro, the Moslem Ahmet, showing that the successor of Zguro was converted to Islam.<sup>88</sup> This is one of the first cases that is mentioned the name Zguro and his progeny converted to Islam, perhaps the name that would belong later to the big Moslem Zguro family.<sup>89</sup>

The Moslem branch of the Zguro family was quickly empowered. Skillful and loyal to the Ottoman state, the progenies of this family newly converted to Islam, soon are reported in the Ottoman sources as

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<sup>86</sup> Thus e.g., about the village Verloçishtë is said that this village at the last year of shaban 858/July-August 1454, was seized as timar from Atmaxha and Avgjeden because the latter have stayed in their towers and have not fulfilled the military service. In another place of the same document is said that the village Biranji was previously removed to Isa, but was given again to him as timar with a part of the village Vashtëmi, at the end year of shevval 855 (November 1451), because the person in word have attested the participation in the war *against Albania* under the Pasha's command.

Also, about the village Poçestë of Korça is said that at the end of shaban year 859 (August 1455), the village in word was given as timar for common exploitation to Jakup and Sulejman with the condition that these must present themselves every year in **the near future military expeditions as those against Albania**, and also to participate alternately in distant expeditions (*DAOA, MAD*, No. 231, 75, 88).

<sup>87</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i Defter*, 95. Ferit Duka, *Berati në kohën osmane* (Tiranë: Toena, 2001), 47.

<sup>88</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i Defter*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Halil Inalcık, *Sûret-i Defter*, 5.

high national officials. According to the Ottoman chronicler, Oruc, Isa bey, the son of Zguro, was Anatolia's beylerbey in 1451-1454. Later, Mehmet II grants to Isa bey the high grade of Vizier and the title "Pasha".<sup>90</sup> It's necessary to mention in this case another note made in the Ottoman register of Përmet and Korça, in 1431-1432. It is said that the village Fratan in the district of Përmet in December 1451 was given as timar to the nephew of Isa bey Zguro, Ahmet, with the condition that the latter had to subdue and assemble the escaped population from this settlement and to take from them the tribute.<sup>91</sup>

In the first years of the XVI century, Murat Bey, a progeny of the Zguro family, was considered a holder of a big timar with revenues up to 64729 akçes.<sup>92</sup> Also, the son named Ali who was converted to Islam in the same year, possessed as timar the villages Vokopolë e Poshtme and Lurë in the kaza of Berat.<sup>93</sup> Two other progenies of the same family, Isa and Mustafa, sons of Mehmed Zguro who were converted to Islam, eminent personalities with a career in the Ottoman administration, possessed as timar the village Goriçan in the above mentioned kaza.<sup>94</sup> Even during the XVII-XVIII centuries, the Zguro family continued to be one of the most powerful Albanian families because also two neighborhoods of the city of Berat respectively carry the names "Mehmed bey Zguro" and "Ahmet bey Zguro".<sup>95</sup>

As aforementioned said, the Zguro family is the most meaningful case of the continuity and sustainability of the medieval Albanian noble families in the Ottoman period. Based on this finding, we conclude that the progenies of the Albanian nobility in the Middle Ages who the converted to Islam became one of the most main sources of the Albanian high-class formation at the Ottoman time. This means that a part of pashas and beys of the Ottoman Albania, have their distant origin from the medieval noble families. For sure, the latter were neither the only source, nor the main one. Other important sources was the obligation of devshirme (periodical sending of Christian boys to the

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<sup>90</sup> Ferit Duka, *Berati*, 47-48.

<sup>91</sup> *DAOA, MAD*, No.231, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Ferit Duka, *Shekujt*, 38.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Ferit Duka, *Berati*, 49.

Ottoman court),<sup>96</sup> and a a range of mechanisms through which the Ottoman political and economic system generated endless possibilities for many distinguished Albanians renowned for their courage and ability, to have a career and wealth during the Ottoman period and to turn into important actors of the Ottoman Albania political scene. This is how the great Albanian families of this period were created and functioned. They were extremely empowered in the XVIII century centering the new political developments which caused the establishment of the Albanian pachaliks.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 9. cilt (İstanbul: TDV, 1994),254-257.

<sup>97</sup> On this issue see further: Kristaq Prifti, ed., *Historia*, kreu IV; Thomas Frashëri, *Breviar*, 10-25.