

THE VILAYET OF SHKODRA IN THE FIRST BALKAN WAR (1912-1913)

(From the perspective of Ottoman historians and archives)

Shkodra, in northwest of Albania, is one of the main strategic points in the Balkans. During the XI-XIII centuries, Shkodra (know also as Scutari) was a dominated area between Byzantium and the Serbian principality of Zeta. From 1360 till 1393 it became the center of the Balshaj Principality.

In 1396, Gjergj Strazimir Balsha handed over the city to the Venetians who fortified the city and kept it under control until 1479.

Due to its geographical location, Shkodra was difficult to rule and the Ottomans were able to establish full control of the region only a century after their first passage to Rumeli. Fatih Sultan Mehmet after taking Shkodra in 1479, practically achieved the establishment of Ottoman rule throughout Albania and beyond.

The Ottomans took Shkodra only through an agreement made with the Venetians. Under the terms of the treaty, part of the inhabitants had evacuated the city and immigrated to the Venetian territories.

The vilayet of Shkodra, after entering under the Ottoman rule, became an important administrative and cultural center. According to the Tahrir register of 1485, there were several hundred soldiers in the fortress and also civilian population of 97 houses (about 450-500 people), twenty-seven of them Muslims.

Shkodra until 1912 although it was under Ottoman rule, was allowed by the High Gate to have different characteristics and privileges both in administrative and legal terms. Thanks to this, despite the local differences, the loyalty of the Albanians of this vilayet to the High Gate (with a few small exceptions) has been preserved to the end.

Ottoman rule in Shkodra ended dramatically in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). The siege of Shkodra and the massacres committed by the Serbian-Montenegrin allied armies in the First Balkan War, still live in the memory of Albanians.

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