

WAR OF SHKODRA 1912-1913 ANNONYMOS DIARY

The war of Shkodra against the Serbo-Montenegrin aggression in the years 1912-1913 is a major event in our national history, although it has not been given the importance and attention it deserves. Another issue with the historiographical representation of this event is the lack of local resources, which include memorials and diaries of famous personalities who were part of this war.

The Academy of Albanological Studies, Institute of History in Tirana, recently published the 'anonymous diary' of the Shkodra War, prepared by the historian and scholar Hasan Bello. The diary was originally published in three issues of the Kumtari magazine. A copy of the diary can be found in the Central State Archive, while the original version is stored in the Archive of the Historical Museum of Shkodra. This book sheds light on one of the greatest wars that Albanians have waged in order to defend their homeland in the 20th century.

The diary covers a period of time starting from October 10, 1912 to April 27, 1913, when the war ends and the city is placed under the control of the Montenegrin forces. It is considered to be anonymous because the author's name is unknown. The data show that he belongs to the Catholic faith. This is noticed throughout the whole diary, on the notes that he makes regarding various events. The data in this diary match the documentation of the time, as well as studies and memorial books that other local and foreign authors have written on the War of Shkodra.

The book presents us with several entries of different dates. For example, on the entry dated 12 October 1912, which coincides with the beginning of the war, the author describes the attacks and then the entry of the Montenegrin forces, with the help of Albanian highlanders, in Koplik. The latter were convinced by Nicholas, the King of Montenegro, to fight together with his forces against the Ottoman army and the Albanian reservists, who fought for the defense of Shkodra. He objectively narrates that in the first few days, reservists from Durrës, Kavaja, Elbasan, Tirana,

etc. flooded towards this city. The latter were called by Esat Pasha Toptani, who was their commander, and they were considered to be his supporters. This shows that the War of Shkodra had become a national issue and a life-or-death matter for many Albanians. The mobilization geography of these forces is an issue which hasn't been properly addressed in historiography.

On the entry dated October 20, 1912, the author writes about a letter that Hasan Riza Pasha, in his capacity as commander and vali, had sent to the Archbishop of Shkodra, Jak Serreqi, in which he asks for support. He writes that the letter did not say whether the vali was seeking material or human aid. Frightened, the Catholics of Shkodra had collected a sum of 700 liras. The truth is that Hasan Riza Pasha wanted political support from the Archbishop. That is because the Catholic highlanders had been involved in Montenegrin politics ever since the uprising in year 1911. Thus, one of the tactics used by Hasan Riza Pasha, and later Esat Pasha Toptani as well, is cooperating with the leaders of the Catholic clergy in order to influence the leaders of the highlanders to secede from the Serbo-Montenegrin forces.

On another entry, the author emphasizes the fact that the leaders of the clergy had previously attempted to make the highlanders comply with the Ottoman administration, but these attempts had no result. In time, the tribal chiefs realized that they were being used by King Nicholas. Therefore, as it is written in this diary, disappointed, the highlanders asked Nicholas to make written commitments this time.

On the entry dated November 14, 1912, the author writes that "the church and school of shkjeve¹" in Shkodra had hoisted the French flag to protect themselves from the bombardment of the Montenegrin artillery. This action was repeated after a few days, but this time by hoisting the Russian flag. A police officer from the defense forces mistook it for the Montenegrin flag and removed it by force. This caused the Russian consul to protest to the vali, saying "They don't recognize my flag...".

In the diary the author talks about the pressure of the Montenegrin propaganda, exerted directly or indirectly through infiltrated individuals who would spread ideas of defeatism among the population. For this reason, the Montenegrin propaganda exploited the peace signing between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan allies, as well as the surrender of Edirne and Thessaloniki, before these agreements were even signed.

1 Shkije or Shkje, is a pejorative term used in the Gheg dialect of Albanian to refer to non-Albanians such as Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Greeks, Italians, and to a lesser extent Croats and Bosniaks.

From the entry of December 18, 1912 which talks about Albania's autonomy under the auspices of Austria-Hungary and Italy, we conclude that the author was well informed about the Conference of Ambassadors in London (December 17, 1912) and the decisions that it would make regarding the future status of the Albanian state. This information could only be obtained by a person who had confidential relations with either the Austro-Hungarian or the Italian consulate.

All records show that the bombing of the city was done mainly at night, in order to arouse panic among the population and to force the defense command to surrender the city as soon as possible.

One of the most interesting entries of this diary is the one dated January 26, 1913, where the author writes "They will also say that Hasan Rizaja, the commander of Shkodra, called the Muslim leaders and told them: "What do you want to do, because I am going to withdraw from Shkodra". They told him that "when the time comes, we want to join Austria". The vali apparently swore at them and told them that "the leaders of Shkodra are saying that they want to be separate, and you go on saying that you want to join Austria". This confirms the fact that Hasan Riza Pasha had decided to withdraw from Shkodra together with the Ottoman army, and that he had made this clear to the Muslim nobles, who thought salvation would come from the continuation of the resistance and the Austro-Hungarian support. Esat Pashë Toptani and the Albanian officers thought the same. According to them, the withdrawal of the Ottoman forces from Shkodra would be accompanied by the massacre of the population.

The fiercest battles for the defense of Shkodra from the Serbian-Montenegrin aggression would take place in the period when Esat Pasha was in command. This is confirmed by documentation and eyewitnesses. Such a fact is acknowledged in a book by two Turkish officers, Lieutenant General Abdurrahman Nafiz and Brigade General Kiramettin, partners of Hasan Riza Pasha and Esat Pasha Toptan, and members of the leadership headquarters.

This book was first published in 1933 and then republished in 2007. Therefore, any accusations of "bribery", "surrender", etc., in order to denigrate Esat Pasha, have no factual basis. According to the defenders of Shkodra, one of the reasons behind the superiority of the Montenegrin forces was the military support they received from Serbia, and why not, the support of the Albanian highlanders as well.

The book "The War of Shkodra 1912-1913" written by a Catholic Albanian remains one of the most authentic and objective sources on the

Shkodra War. Because of its importance, it is ranked with the diary of the Italian journalist Gino Berri, and that of the Austro-Hungarian consul's wife, Hortense von Zambaur.

