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FROM SERENISSIMA'S CENTRALIZATION TO THE SELF-  
REGULATING KANUN: THE STRENGTHENING OF BLOOD TIES  
AND THE RISE OF GREAT TRIBES IN NORTHERN ALBANIA  
FROM 15<sup>TH</sup> TO 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*Azeta KOLA*

Northwestern University, 1881 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Illinois 60208, USA

e-mail: ak3279@nyu.edu

**ABSTRACT**

*The article offers a short overview of the fifteenth century conditions that favored the strengthening of blood ties in the villages of the Scutari region in northern Albania during the Venetian and Ottoman reigns. The author argues that by favoring and preserving the special status of brotherhood clans that operated on strong blood ties, the subsequent Venetian and Ottoman administrations contributed to the rise of great tribes in northern Albania during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The conclusions are based on a comparative analysis of examples from the Catasto Veneto di Scutari, 1416–1417 and The Ottoman Defter of Scutari 1485.*

*Keywords: Venetian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Venetian Albania, Northern Albania, Kanun*

DALLA CENTRALIZZAZIONE DELLA SERENISSIMA ALLA  
AUTODISCIPLINA DEL KANUN: IL RAFFORZAMENTO DEI LEGAMI  
DI SANGUE E L'EMERGENZA DELLE TRIBÙ NELL'ALBANIA  
SETTENTRIONALE DAL XV AL XVII SECOLO

**SINTESI**

*L'articolo offre una breve rassegna riguardo le condizioni che nel Quattrocento avevano favorito il rafforzamento dei legami di sangue nei villaggi della regione di Scutari nell'Albania settentrionale durante il Regno veneziano e quello ottomano. L'autrice sostiene che favorendo e preservando lo status particolare dei clan del nord, i quali gestivano le questioni con alla base forti legami di fratellanza, le successive amministrazioni veneziane e ottomane contribuirono alla nascita delle grandi tribù nell'Albania settentrionale durante i secoli XVI e XVII. Il lavoro si basa sull'analisi comparativa degli esempi del Catasto Veneto di Scutari, 1416–1417 e del Defter Ottomano di Scutari 1485.*

*Parole chiave: Impero Veneziano, Impero Ottomano, Albania Veneta, Albania settentrionale, canone*

During the fifteenth century, the Venetian administration in Venetian Albania was faced with local habits, customs, and laws in the cities and inland territories that had existed for centuries. The Albanian littoral cities, part of the unified Adriatic world, operated on their city statutes and had unique bodies of communal representation. Dulcigno, for instance had a council of all the city (*consillium totius nostre*), Antivari had a great general council (*maiori et generali consilio*), while Durazzo had a captain and council of the communal city (*capitano, consilio et comuni civitatis*) (Malltëzi, 1988, 28–29).<sup>1</sup> The Venetian administration initially recognized these governing bodies, but eventually gave priority to the authority of the Venetian rector, as the examples presented later in this paper illustrate (ASV–COM, 10, 7v–8rv). Albania's Kanun, the country's old customary law that regulated the lives of the northern Catholic communities existed alongside city statutes, because it operated mostly inland, but was, nevertheless, present even in the territories under Venetian rule. The Kanun did not invent blood feuding, which occupies a very small percentage of its content, and, in fact, it provides for the forgiveness of blood (Gjeçovi, 1933; 1989).<sup>2</sup> The Kanun, however, preserved blood feuding by allowing its practice for centuries. In the harsh conditions of their existence and facing relentless conquests that disregarded their unique existence left the Albanian highlanders with the choice of holding on to the laws of the Kanun as a form of self-rule. In this paper, I shortly analyze the fifteenth century social, political, and economic conditions under Venetian and Ottoman rule that favored the strengthening of blood ties and the formation of the great northern Albanian tribes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To do this, I compare examples from the *Catasto Veneto di Scutari 1416–1417*, and the *1485 Ottoman Defier (Account Register) of the Sanjak of Scutari*.

The case of Albania debunks the myth of Venice as the just and benevolent Republic, which acquired these territories *da Mar* with the honorable intentions of protecting them from the Ottomans (Schmitt, 2007, 19–20, 431–443).<sup>3</sup> Venice's economic interests in Al-

1 Malltëzi quotes from ASV, Comm, Reg. 5, c. 94 for Dulcigno; *Acta et Diplomata res Albaniae Aetatis Illustrantia*, vol. II, 1918, doc. Nr. 260 for Antivari; Historijski Archiv u Dubrovniku, Reformationes, Nr. I, 64 for Durazzo.

2 Only Book 10 of the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, Kanun Against Perversity has provisions regarding blood feuding (consult, 822–842, 843–850, 851–853, 854–873, 866–897, 898–900, 901–908, 909–915, 916–919, 920–931, 933–938, 939–940, 941–957, 958–964, 965–968, 969–972, 973–976, 977–981, 982, 983–987, 988–990). Blood feuding (alb. *gjakmarrja*) is the deprivation of life of the executioner of a murder, or of a relative person, or of some persons, who are the co-members of the tribe of the executioner of the previous assassination (Pupovci, 1972, XC).

3 In the fifteenth century, from Kotor to the Bay of Patras, the Albanian space was an open patchwork of quarrelling local principalities, further divided between the possessions of the Republic of Venice and of the Ottoman Empire. Between 1392 and 1406, the Serenissima acquired the Albanian cities of Durazzo, Scutari, Alessio, Drivasto, Antivari, Dulcigno and Dagno through voluntary submission. These cities, cast on the unified Adriatic shores as pearls on a string, retained their Roman character until late and were inhabited by Latinized populations who spoke Latin and Neolatin languages, which carried a particular rite of Christianity unique to the Balkans. These combined elements gave this frontier zone, as Fernand Braudel coined it, its originality (see Braudel, 1995, 133; Durham, 1909, 2–5; Ducellier, 2005, 105–106, 112). Ducellier has argued that homogeneity between shores and the inland was characteristic of the Western Adriatic shore, while in the east, apart from homogeneity there existed heterogeneity, a characteristic that became important later on.

bania were similar to those in other parts of the Stato da Mar. Venetian Albania provided considerable amounts of grain, salt, timber, and silk and the Venetian state moved quickly to monopolize the production, trade, and transportation of these commodities (Schmitt, 2007, 327–335, 365–378; Malltëzi, 1988, 53–58, 202–211; Chambers, 1970, 44, 52–53). The state also fought against the greed of its own citizen traders operating in Albania as well as against the illegal activities of Venetian administrators who while shortly serving overseas mingled state duties with private business.<sup>4</sup> The sharp conflicts that arose between these groups show that the overlapping interests of all sides were quick profit at the expense of the other Venetian party as well as at the expense of the Albanian elite and population. The powerless Venetian state was unable to control the rampant corruption of its officials and traders, turning into an extension of private interests in service of profit (Kola, 2016, 54–81).

#### VENETIAN CENTRALIZING POLICIES IN THE CITIES AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

The policy of controlling everything from the center, which aimed at ultimately creating mini-Venices in the far away territories proved problematic in Venetian Albania where local traditions and customs were quite unique.<sup>5</sup> In administering justice, for instance, the administration used Venetian law in criminal cases and the local law in civil ones, giving jurisdiction to local judges in minor cases, but ultimately allowing the Venetian rector to decide alone, as the case of Antivari and Dulcigno show:

[Antivari] *Item chel rector che sera mandado p(er) la dogal Signoria di Venexia debia [...] c(o)governar secondo lor statuti, [...] I diti zudexi debia sentar cum el retor, e dir le suo opinion, ma pur Romagna in libertade de lo retor d(i) zudegar secondo la soa c(o)sientia. [...] [Dulcigno] Et che tre cudixi stia a banca cu(m) el retor digando le loro opinion che suo uxava, romagnando pero in libertadi de lo retor d(i) t(er)minar questo che I parera p(er) la sua gstia/* (ASV-COM, 10, 7v-8rv).<sup>6</sup>

- 4 Donald Queller has deconstructed the fifteenth century myth of the Venetian patriciate's selfless devotion to the republic. He shows how the patricians fought for offices and benefits, but did away with responsibilities. Despite the rhetoric of duty, honor, and pride in the common good, these patricians were prone to various forms of corruption, thus violating the same laws that they spent so much time drawing and passing in the Senate. The behavior of the Venetian administrators assigned to the Albanian territories offers yet another example of these widespread forms of corruption (Queller, 1986, 29–59, 113–151, 172–211, 247–259). On this, also consult, Muir (1988, 288–289). Luan Malltëzi has exposed the abuses of Venetian state apparatus in Venetian Albania (Malltëzi, 1988, 173–201).
- 5 The Albanian territories were acquired on promises of preserving pre-Venetian customs and traditions, but according to Cozzi-Knapton, the prevailing characteristic of the Venetian rule over the territories of the Stato da Mar was the desire to control all the strings of its governing system, “*tener la fila di tutto il sistema.*” Venice aimed at “Venezianizzare” and “centralizzare” all the territories it acquired. Whether in the Levant, Romania, Albania, Dalmatia, Istria or the Terraferma, the Venetian administration continuously fought to put all subjects and territorial resources under its direct control (Cozzi and Knapton, 1986, 191–192, 195–196; Viggiano, 1998, 67–111, 113–195).
- 6 These documents were signed by the Venetian and Albanian representatives on June 24, 1405 (“[...] *data Dulcigni anni dni milloquadringentesimo quinto die xxiiij ms Junij*”), and June 14, 1406 (“*data in nro ducali palatio, die ms J... xiiij Milloquadringentesimo sexto*”).

The Venetian interference in handling judicial cases went hand in hand with the centralizing efforts in the countryside where the Venetian administrators implemented the decima as a method of rent payment by peasants and citizens who owned land. The previous rent payment methods had been the Byzantine *soch* (sok) that consisted of one ducat and one mod wheat (approximately 250 kg per house annually), and the *obroch* (obrok) of four silver grossi per year, paid two on Easter and two on Christmas for the upkeep of the army and the government officials traveling on government duties (Zamputi, 1977, 9; Anamali et al., 2002a, 256–257). The implementation of the decima system interfered with local privileges and traditional rent payment methods, causing proniar uprisings and population flights from Scutari and Drivasto immediately after the 1396 Venetian acquisition (Malltëzi, 1988, 88–89).<sup>7</sup>

In August 1416, the Senate ordered the compilation of *The Catasto Veneto di Scutari 1416–1417*, a registry of lands and vineyards (with accurate borders) that belonged to Venice, complete with a list of annual dues from each head of family (or widow) who recognized Venice as the legitimate lord of the land. According to the Venetian *Catasto*, there are one hundred and thirteen registered villages. They are grouped into Upper Scutari (thirty-nine villages) and Lower Scutari (seventy-four villages, see table below) (Zamputi, 1977, 21–125; Mënga, 1989, 162).<sup>8</sup> After much consideration, the administration reverted to the old methods of payment with one ducat and one mod of wheat per family every year, and it assigned land to special people (proniar or big land owners). Those who were given land in concession were required to sow and harvest the land and take their annual payments to the castle of Scutari. Bad annual harvest was not taken into consideration for lowering the annual payment. Only in times of war, intending with war when the territory was under siege, the population was not forced to meet the annual requirements to be transported to the castle of Scutari:

*non expecto sel fosse guerra/che In tempo de guerra i non die pagar/Intendendo guerra quando per assedio che fosse intorno la terra/non se possesse semenar nire-coiere/in questo caso i non die pagar durando quella cossi facta Guerra/E altramente non se intenda Guerra/ (Cordignano, 1940, 17/b, 49).*

The population of Scutari complained about this practice, but the Venetian administration continued to assign land as it pleased. On April 6, 1421, Scutarine ambassadors reported that the Venetian administrator, Donato da Porto took away their land and property that belonged to the citizens, up to a territory known as Frasene and Busegiarpene and gave them as property to special people (ASV–SM, 54, 22rv).<sup>9</sup> In addition to special individuals, the Signoria rewarded foreign mercenary troops with land concessions on the Albanian territories. On January 30, 1416, the count and captain of Scutari rewarded a

7 For the institution of Pronia on the Albanian territories and the role of the proniar as the owner of land sanctioned by the Byzantine Emperor in exchange for military service, consult Anamali et al, 2002a, 252–256.

8 Oliver Jens Schmitt argues that there were one hundred and four villages in the upper and lower Scutari, although he does not list their names (Schmitt, 2007, 165–166).

9 The document is recorded on April 6, 1421.

virtuous and wise man from Hungary named Saginj for his loyal service to Venice. Saginj was allotted a piece of land or meadow located under the mountain of Scutari, bordering, on the one side, the land of Marin Bonzi, on another side the land of Sr. Matheus de Cataro, on a third side the old city of Scutari, and on the final side the Bojana River. The said Saginj could plant and saw this land and was asked to pay the chamber of Scutari ten soldi annually (“*Pro cuius [...] recognicione [...] solvere tenentur camere nostrj comunis seldos decem paruorum*” (Cordignano, 1942, 130/a, 32–33)).<sup>10</sup>

The abrupt Venetian interference in the traditional rent payment methods, land property and land use, the inability to implement all of its policies evenly, especially in the more rural areas of Scutari, as well as the lack of a consolidated budget for this part of the empire created a mixed system of obligations and payments where different villages had different privileges and they paid according to their specialization (Schmitt, 2007, 163–184, 424–427; Biçoku, 1989, 181–192). The overburdened peasants paid the decima on their millet, in addition to the old payment of one ducat and one mod wheat, and the *obroch* of four grossi, two on Easter and two on Christmas. Free labor during planting and harvest seasons was also required as well as a fixed tax on the vineyards that was expressed in loads (Malltëzi, 1988, 78–93). The *Catasto Veneto di Scutari* 1416–1417 exposes the abuses of the Venetian system. The peasants of the village of Caldiron (alb. Kalldrun) were required to pay the *obroch* of four grossi per household (*grossi quarto per casa*), which was collected in two payments of two grossi on Easter and two grossi on Christmas annually (*do ala pasqua e do al nadal*). In addition to the *obroch*, the peasants paid the ducat and mod, the tenth on their millet as well as engaged in free labor (*angaria*) by cutting wood, doing tolls, working in the castle and fishing in the lake as per the Venetian Signoria’s orders (Cordignano, 1940, 39/ab, 70–71).

In the wine producing village of Copenico (alb. Koplík), the peasants were required to pay four hundred loads of pure wine and transport it to the castle of Scutari:

*Nota che quilli de copenico si se e convegnudj cum i nobellj homenj miser Alban contarinj hon conte e capitaneo de Scutarj miser Andrea foscolo hon Ambasiador e provededor Jn leparte de Albania/ e miser Nicolo zanthannj hon camerlengo de Scutarj de pagar ogni anno Salme quatrocento de vin puro e neto/ e quello condure a suo spexe Jn lo castiello de Scutarj* (Cordignano, 1940, fl. 45/a, 45/b., 77–78).

In addition, the Venetian administration was requesting that peasants pay the *soch* and the *obroch* and do all kinds of *angaria* in the castle of Scutari. Finally, the men of arms of the village, both infantry and cavalymen were required to join the Venetian army at any time they were needed (Cordignano, 1940, fl. 45/a, 45/b., 77–78).

These examples show the ways in which the centralizing policies of the Venetian administration aimed at securing the highest earnings from its properties in Venetian Albania, taking double the usual rent in proportion to the obligations each family owed annually. They expose the administration’s greed and its lack of respect for local traditions.

10 One lira was equal to twenty soldi in Renaissance Venice (Lane and Mueller, 1985, vol. 1).

## THE ALBANIAN KATUN, THE KANUN AND THE STRENGTHENING OF BLOOD TIES IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

By the fourteenth century, the Albanian population was divided into Gheg and Tosk or northern and southern Albanians who spoke the Gheg and Tosk dialects, respectively (Elsie, 2015, 2). In the inland territories, especially, they lived in stockbreeding katuns or tribes with strong blood ties, which are mentioned as early as 1308 (Buda et al, 1962, 110). By 1330, Tzar Stephan Dušan donated with a special decree an entire Albanian Katun (Katuni Arbanas) to the monastery of Deçan (Malcolm, 1998, 54). The katuns or villages were old forms of social organization inherited from the past where communities related through strong blood ties/kinships practiced a closed farming economy based on stockbreeding (animal husbandry), and they moved constantly to find pasture (Pulaha, 1975b, 75–110). The Albanian population followed the laws of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, Albania's customary law as “the One-that-must-be-obeyed” (Gjeçovi, 1933, 1989; Durham, 1909, 166).<sup>11</sup> Particular historical conditions favored special economic and social changes in the territories ruled by customary law, which, in return, secured the survival and preservation of old forms of political and social organization in these territories. Albania's customary right evolved in conflict with and despite of foreign intrusion. The areas of foreign penetration in the Albanian territories were at times deep and at times less so, and this phenomenon influenced the strengthening or weakening of the customary law at different historical periods (Buda et al, 1989, 6–7, 15). Living according to their customary law and protecting their way of life allowed the population of these territories to live autonomously for centuries (Pupovci, 1972, XXVI; Thallóczy, 2004, 195).

The Kanun<sup>12</sup> is the most comprehensive summary of long-existing Albanian law (both civil and criminal) written in Albanian, which contains universal rules for every aspect

11 Lekë Dukagjini (1410–1481) was an Albanian noble and comrade-in-arms of Gjergj Kastrioti, Scanderbeg (1405–1468). The original name for the code was the Kanun of Dukagjin, the name for the mountainous region east of Shkodra where Lekë Dukagjini was lord and lawgiver to the local population who followed the Kanun named after their lord. The Kanun was also known as The Kanun of Leka (alb. Kanuni i Lekës) (Elsie, 2012, 1; Durham, 1909, 25–27; Pupovci, 1972, XXXIX). The Franciscan Father, Shtjefën Gjeçovi carefully recorded Albania's oral tradition of customary and canon law as well as the rules of morality in condensed phrases and proverbs that preserved in the most original form the centuries old wisdom of the highlanders regarding the essence of their affairs. He collected these rules in the northern Albanian territories where Islam had not penetrated or had spread minimally and where these territories had preserved their centuries old autonomy. Gjeçovi wrote them down during the early twentieth century before being shot by Serbian Secret Police in October 1929. The collection appeared for the first time in 1913 and afterwards in 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1930 in *The Morning Star*, Scutari's local magazine. It was published in its entirety posthumously in 1933. Gjeçovi's *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* is a constituent part of Albanian customary law in general (Pupovci, 1972, X, XIII, XXXI, XXVII–CX).

12 The Kanun suited well into the patriarchal society of northern Albania and Kosova where it enjoyed priority over other legal systems (national law and Church legislation). Harsh conditions dictated a unique existence and a defiance to any central government that tried to reach and conquer these territories (Tmavci, 1998, 3, 7, 9; Pupovci, 1972, XXVII; Durham, 1909, 166). The term Kanun penetrated from Greek to Arabic to early Turkish, where kanun was a law or legal disposition of the Ottoman state given by the Sultan, and finally into Albanian, where it is also known as Doke (Todorova, 2004, 111; Çabej, 1961, Nr. 2, 66; Šufflay, 1925, 132; Pupovci, 1972, XL). A short breakdown of each book's content can be found in Gëllçi, 2014,

of life from economics to ethics (Kadare, 1990, 74). The mobile katuns that descended from the mountains for winter pasture transported into the plains (where settled agricultural villages with developed feudal relations existed), not only their unique social organization, but the mentality of self-rule through the honor code of blood feuding (alb. *gjakmarrja*) as prescribed in the Kanun (Pulaha, 1975b, 75–110). As a result, during the Venetian and Ottoman periods, tribal elements gained new features that clothed the feudal institutions of the Albanian countryside and towns with a tribal outwear consistent with each Albanian territory.

According to the Kanun, the basic unit of the Albanian society was the family – a strong, distinctive, cultural and social unit with clear obligations and goals dictated by the community's necessity for survival in the difficult physical environment where the highlanders lived almost isolated by high mountains and harsh winters. The family is defined as “*the sum of its members, who live under a common roof and whose goal is the perpetuation of people through marriage, their physical upbringing and the development of their minds and senses*” (Gjeçovi, 1933, 18). In addition, “*the family is comprised of the house folk; when these expand, they are divided into brotherhoods, brotherhoods into kinships, the kinships into tribes, the tribes into flags and all together into a larger family, which is called a nation with a common home, blood, language, and customs*” (Gjeçovi, 1933, 19). A big family, which was a juridical person, could have from five to eighty members and it functioned based on social and gender inequality and the exploitation of the majority of its family members, especially women. The forms of collective property were the *kujria* of the tribe (see the term explanation below) and of the brotherhood. The objects of collective property were in service of the private property over livestock. Only male members of the blood tribe, clan or brotherhood could inherit property, which was divided “per brother,” but they had to obey and submit all their earnings to the father of the house who considered the sons as his servants (Gjeçovi, 1933, 18, 19, 20; Bartl, 2007, 64–65; Pupovci, 1972, XCV–XCVIII, C–CV; Gëllçi, 2014, 16–19).

The father of the family had the absolute authority over all the children from his bloodline as well as over all the family property. He represented the family outside the house, decided on property and land distribution, and could physically punish and even take his wife's and children's life without being punished. In addition to rights, the father also had the duty to provide for every member of his household and also buy guns for each of his sons when they reached maturity. The father consulted his sons in taking important decisions, however, and the family members had the right to elect a new head of the house

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82–83). The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini was followed in the territories of Scutari, Alessio, Dukagjin, Mirdita, Gjakova, and Kosova, while the Kanun of Scanderbeg was followed in Krupë, Dibër, and Mat. The Kanun of the Great Highlands (alb. *Kanuni i Malsisë së Madhe*) was followed in Kelmend, Gruda, Hot, Kastrat, and Shkrel. Central and southern Albania had their respective legal codes referred to by the name of the reputed lawgiver and sometimes unnamed. The Kanun of Labëria (alb. *Kanuni i Labërisë*) was followed in Valona, Kurvelesh, Himara, and Tepelena (Gjeçovi, 1989, xvi–xix; Resta, 2002, 39–69). Of all these, the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* has been more updated over the centuries as a consequence of historical changes, but scholars agree that these Kanuns are variants of the same customary law (Zojzi, 1956, 144–148; Zojzi, 1967, 173–182; Ulqini, 1961, 175–186; Pupovci, 1972, XXXII).

if the father did not fulfill his duties (Gjeçovi, 1933, 24/1, 59, 60, 62; Pupovci, 1972, CV; Durham, 1909, 22, 34). Each family protected its kinship relations with other families that derived, according to tradition, from one common blood relative.<sup>13</sup> These families formed a “certain tribe,” which solved all common concerns in the “assembly of the tribe,” in which all male heads of all the households of the tribe participated and were led by the head of the tribe – the firstborn son of the founder of that particular tribe (Anamali et al., 2002b, 530–531; Gjeçovi, 1933, 59; Hasluck, 1954, 148–163; Bartl, 2007, 66). The origins of many later Albanian tribes can be traced in the fifteenth century and sometimes earlier (Šufflay, 1925, 60, 63–65). By the second half of the fifteenth century, the Albanian villages were made of different tribes who solved their economic and social problems in the village assembly, in which all male heads of households participated, and which was led by the elder (or the elders) elected from the assembly (Gjeçovi, 1933, 992–998, 1146–1150, 1161–1162).

The peasant household was self-sufficient as its members lived in a mostly pastoral environment, in which they raised livestock, but also cultivated corn, and where the men worked outside the home, while women were occupied within. Its private property consisted of the house, arable land, vineyards, the right to irrigate (the stream), the mill, and the livestock. Forests, meadows, and pastures, which made up the territory known as *kujrija* were considered common property and were used commonly by the *katun* or *bajrak* (alb. flag) for pasture, grazing, lumber, or for hunting and other needs (Gjeçovi, 1933, 64–68, 73–75, 232; Gëllçi, 2014, 19).<sup>14</sup> There was little economic and social differentiation between the two social groups consisting of the wealthier owners of the means of production and the simple highlander peasants. The village assembly relied on the norms of customary law provided in the *Kanun* to solve various problems, modifying and updating the provisions according to changes of time, place, and socio-economic relations (Anamali et al., 2002b, 530–531; Pupovci, 1972, XCI).

Personal matters derived from the rules and expectations of the tribal society were regulated through the rigid code of honor based on blood feuding (alb. *gjakmarrja*) and the institution of *besa* (the given word) (Hasluck, 1954, 219–227, 228–234, 235–255, 256–260). Blood feuding was the harshest form of vengeance, where vengeance was thought of as causing a bad for the suffered harm, in proportion to it or even to a greater extent (Jelić, 1926, 8). As historical institutions, blood feuding and vengeance<sup>15</sup> had deep

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- 13 The tribe (alb. *fis*) was a patrilineal group tracing its origin to one specific male ancestor who lived centuries earlier. The tribe members were exogamous and did not marry within the tribe. The *bajrak* (turk. bayrak) was also a tribe, but it was thought of as a political entity, usually entailing a specific territory and was led by the *bajraktar* (standart bearer). While a *fis* implies kinship, a *bajrak* implies territory (Elsie, 2015, 4). Pupovci argues that in Gjeçovi's collection of the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, there is no clear definition between tribe and *bajrak* (Pupovci, 1972, XXX).
- 14 According to Pupovci, Gjeçovi did not provide enough details regarding the institution of *kujrija* of the tribe, the brotherhood, and the village as well as the common ways of its usage (Pupovci, 1972, XXIX).
- 15 In a long-standing Italian historiographical debate, Trevor Dean argues that vendetta indicates “a vengeance of limited extent for specific injury, whereas ‘feud’ was a state of continuous animosity” (Dean, 2007). For Edward Muir, vendetta and feud are synonyms that represent not only the act of violent reprisal but also a prolonged system of conflict. Netterström notes that the concept of feud has been applied more widely, while

roots in the particular economic conditions of the tribal society, where there was a need for protection and security (Pupovci, 1972, XC). According to the Kanun, if a man was dishonored, for example, by being called a liar in front of all the men gathered in an assembly or by being disrespectful to the guests at his house (Gjeçovi, 1933, 691), that man had reason to take revenge by killing the offender (Gjeçovi, 1933, 898, 899, 952–956),<sup>16</sup> because “*What profit is life to a man if his honor be not clean?*” (Durham, 1909, 32). According to the Kanun, “*the taken honor is not rewarded in kind, but with blood flowing, or with noble forgiveness (through the mediation of good people)*” (Gjeçovi, 1933, 598).<sup>17</sup>

Although the Kanun states that blood is never lost and cannot become a fine (Gjeçovi, 1933, 916–917), it provides two ways for the reconciliation of blood. The first is achieved through the mediation of good friends of the house and the village priest, while the second through the conciliatory efforts of the heads of the house of Gjonmarku, (the great leading tribe of Orosh in the region of Mirdita) together with the intervention of the sons of the *bajrak*.<sup>18</sup> In this case, for every blood killing, the house of Orosh collected a blood fine of five hundred grosh (grossi) (Gjeçovi, 1933, 917, 969).<sup>19</sup> The blood money was only

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vendetta seems to apply more specifically to Mediterranean, Southeastern European, and Middle Eastern contexts, where the two are often synonymous (Netterstrøm, 2007, 30, 40; Povolov, 2015, 202).

- 16 If the kin of the victim wanted revenge, he would have to keep in mind that “*blood goes per finger,*” meaning only *dorasi* or the shooter should get punished). The Kanun also maintains that, “*anyone who shoots in an ambush on women, children, homes or livestock works against the Kanun,*” and should be punished (Gjeçovi, 1933, 836). Also, “*the house of the victim has nothing to do with the women of the shooter,*” because “*woman and the Priest do not fall in blood*” (Gjeçovi, 1933, 897). However, there exist cases where members of the clergy, including bishops and archbishops were authors or victims of crimes and offense in honor cases (Anamali et al., 2002e, 332).
- 17 The time for revenge was divided into optional – when the revenge could be taken depending on the willingness of the injured, but it was not mandatory, and into mandatory – when the revenge was required to be taken. Although a superstition, it was customary to collect the blood of the victim in a container for preservation, opening it time after time to see whether it was “cold and calm.” This physical state of blood corresponded with the optional period. If the blood was found in a state of “boiling in the container,” that was telling that the time for revenge had come. A member of the Gjonmarkaj family from Orosh of Mirdita reported a case of “boiling blood” that he had witnessed himself in 1922. It was also customary to preserve the soiled shirt of the victim (*krvavu košulju*) until the revenge was taken. Gjorg, the twenty-two year old character in *Broken April* sees the shirt of his brother daily, because it hangs in a visible spot, serving as a reminder of the burden of revenge that falls on him, and of the passing of time to revenge (Jelić, 1926, 30–31; Pupovci, 1972, XCIII; Kadare, 1990, 22).
- 18 The house of Gjonmarkaj enjoyed great authority in the region of Mirdita, but the reach of it cannot be estimated. Its members were asked for advice, to examine claims and appeals, and to give money with interest (Pupovci, 1972, XXX).
- 19 The “*delegitimization of the practice of vendetta and the political weakening of the contexts that considered it a determining and essential instrument for maintaining social equilibrium and control,*” (Povolov, 2015, 234–235) has been making slow strides in the western Balkan countries of Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo in the twentieth century. Using traditional provisions to redeem old blood vengeance cases, the Albanian intellectual and folklorist, Anton Çetta successfully pacified nine hundred vendetta cases in Kosovo involving four thousand families. He was the founder of the Reconciliation Committee for Erasing Blood Feuds in the 1990s (Elsie, 2004, 38–39). Since the fall of the Communist dictatorship in 1991, daily murders that are reported by the media as blood vengeance cases have reappeared in northern Albania. We have to remember, however, that *gjakmarja* as a social obligation existed based on the very particular social and cultural environment of traditional Albanian life, the structure of which is no more, because Albanians now

accepted in Mirditë (five hundred grossi, i. e. piasters one purse), in addition to the fine of one hundred rams and one ox, but it was different in other parts of Albania and at different historical times (Pupovci, 1972, XXX). In accidental murders, the shooter could not count on paying blood money, but had to protect himself from the avenger. For wounds below the waist seven hundred and fifty grossi were offered as blood payment (Gjeçovi, 1933, 908, 932, 934, 938; Hasluck, 1954, 239–240, 241).

The institution of *besa* or sacred oath with its celebrated values of sacredness of promise and respect for guests and friends is one of the most observed provisions of social honor in the Kanun.<sup>20</sup> *Besa* is a promise of freedom and security, that the house of the victim gives to the shooter (alb. dorasi) and the members of his household that they will not follow them for blood temporarily, but at a certain time (Gjeçovi, 1933, 843, 854, 855; Kadare, 1990; 13). The giving of *besa* by the family of the victim to the shooter (and his family members) who commits the blood killing is regarded as a highly honorable act, because it creates inviolable trust during a short period of time, in which the shooter can walk freely. According to the Kanun, the promise is protected with one's honor. If a disloyal person betrays someone in *besa*, he is uprooted by the village and his blood is lost forever (Gjeçovi, 1933, 648; Hasluck, 1954, 244–247). This strong and inviolable sense of honor obligates the Albanians to welcome, honor, and protect anyone who enters their house (Durham, 1909, 171). The Kanun clearly states that, the house of the Albanian belongs to God and the guest, and that whoever entered his house as a guest, even if he owed the housemaster blood, he is obliged to welcome the guest in (Gjeçovi, 1933, 602, 620).

If a blood feud or murder happened during the “*besa* of livestock and the shepherd,” the consequences for the break were harsh on the shooter. This oath of *besa* that bound together two or more *bajraks* or tribes was necessary because it secured the free use of collective property facilities, such as roads as well as the free movement of the shepherd with the herd, the traveler, and the messenger. The guarantor of this *besa* – the head of a *bajrak* (*bajraktar*) or the lord of the boyhood of the *bajrak* – punished the shooter who

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have a new lifestyle, smaller households with a drastically reduced number of family members even in the northern territories. Albania is a modern constitutional democracy with a functioning rule of law. Its duty and exclusive right is to punish the executors of such criminal offenses, because killings from blood feuds are considered a crime in various legislations and are punished promptly (imprisonment is a normal mode of punishment in these cases) (Pupovci, 1972, XC; Hudson, 2003, 153–154; Black, 1983, 34; Povolov, 2015, 234–235; Djilas, 1958, 107; Gëllçi, 2014, 65–67; Tarifa, 2008, 47–49; Spiegel Online, June 6, 2014, 1). In present day Albania, “*there is no renaissance, but reminiscence of the gjakmarrja. Being very long part of the Albanian life, the gjakmarrja was culturally designed. There are still people that [who] believe to [in] gjakmarrja even though [they] do not understand it. There are other people who with or without knowledge confuse the sentiment for vendetta with vendetta as social obligation. This became truer in the case of gjakmarrja: It is obvious that crime is [has] appeared wearing the archaic gjakmarrja clothes hoping to survive in its cultural roots. However, regardless media speculations, [...] Albanian juridical system plays no longer the precedent of the gjakmarrja*” (Gëllçi, 2014, 67).

20 In the Albanian customary law, *besa* was also transformed into a juridical institution because it was not only a criminal law institution and criminal procedure, but also a civil law institution. In everyday life, in addition to formal contracts, people carried out actions that were backed up by the given word, the *besa*. These spoken contracts had a moral character and were in time transformed into legal obligations (Pupovci, 1972, XCVIII; Tarifa, 2008, 36–40).

was charged with breaking the besa by making him pay twenty-two pouches per blood to the house of the victim, and if the killing was not done for *gjakmarrja*, the shooter now was involved in a blood feud with the house of the victim. In addition, the tribe of the shooter (*dorasi*) burned three of his *kulla* (tower houses) (Kadare, 1990, 11). If the shooter did not own three *kulla*, then the guarantors burned one of his *kulla* and two more of the shooter's relatives going back one hundred generations if it were necessary. The tribe of the shooter made sure that he lost everything (Gjeçovi, 1933, 874–876, 878, 880, 881–882, 885; Pupovci, 1972, XCII–XCIII).

This self-regulating mentality reflected in the Kanun existed even in the territories under Venetian rule,<sup>21</sup> and the Venetians were aware of the customary way of life, including vendetta, in the Stato da Mar and the Terraferma. Edward Muir has shown that Friulans in the Patria of Friuli, which was acquired by Venice in 1420, had a long experience with war and conflict and they distrusted foreigners. Friulans clung to their customs and traditions and the Venetian rule did not change their way of life (Muir, 1993, 13–14). In the territories of Venetian Albania, villages with strong tribal relations lived alongside agricultural villages and this suggests that the rules of the Kanun had to permeate in the plains. In 1445, supporters of Venice in Paštrovići killed a cousin in a blood feud. An oath of *besa* was taken, but it was soon broken and two people from the murderer's family were killed. The Venetian administrators provided for the families of the victims, but did not interfere directly, allowing the Paštrovići population to regulate their personal matters according to the Kanun, in accordance with the legal privileges granted by Venice – they were permitted to use the local judicial assembly for resolving and settling any disagreements (Mijušković, 1959, 474–475, 482–483, 507).<sup>22</sup> Venice's intervention in vendetta cases was never to stop and uproot the phenomenon, but only mediatory, as it aimed to appease the quarrelling sides by favoring peace (Valentini, 1956; Valentini, 1967–1975; Schmitt, 2007, 561). Therefore, the Venetian administration left the laws of the Kanun untouched, allowing all sides involved to solve their own disagreements internally, while treating them with tolerance (Schmitt, 2007, 560–562). From communities with strong blood ties where the laws of the Kanun applied, the Venetian Signoria benefited by enlisting soldiers for its army, both footmen and cavalrymen, as the example of the village of Tuzi (mentioned below) suggests (Cordignano, 1940, fl. 42/b, 43/a, 75).

According to the *Catasto Veneto di Scutari 1416–1417*, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, agricultural villages with territorial relations prevailed in the plains of Scutari. That meant that most of the residents of each village taken separately bore different surnames, as they did not descend from a common male line. The village called Somesi,

21 In 1416, Lord Balshaj had entered a blood feud with members of the Hoti tribe after killing their family member (Anamali et al., 2002e, 332).

22 In 1423, the Venetian state signed a treaty with the leaders of the Paštrovići clan, in which it recognized their customs in exchange for protection of the territory by clan members in the name of Venice (O'Connell, 2009, 31). Viggiano also quotes from Paolo Boldù who recognized that the Venetian "*Principe aveva lasciato [alle popolazioni delle Bocche di Cataro] libero l'esercizio delle proprie Leggi, Religioni e Costumi*" (Viggiano, 1988, 93). For Kotor and Paštrovići during Venetian rule, also see Ergaver (2017, 179–206, especially 182–183).

for instance, which was lead by chief Vuucho Gubicich lists eighteen men (nineteen if we add the chief) who bear different last names, except for Bencho and Palj Docles(s)i and Simeon Gubechich who had the same last name as the chief of the village (note that the spelling is inconsistent). The peasants owned land and they were assigned tax payments by the Venetian administrators. All the men were to pay one ducat, while only ten of them were also required to pay one mod per household, with the exception of the head of the village who paid none. In addition, all of them were required to pay the *obroch* of four grossi, as it was customary, two on Easter and two on Christmas as well as the tenth on their millet. If houses were added, each were required to pay the ducat, mod and *obroch* as well as the tenth on their millet. Similar payments were required in the village of Rapisti, where there were six households with the exception of Pal Capiti who paid none (Cordignano, 1940, fl. 87/a, 56/a, 119, 91; Pulaha, 1975a, 122).

Blood relations, however, were not fully replaced by territorial relations, and a degree of internal self-governing still existed, as the examples from the villages of Oseti, Itusi, Grouemira Grandj, Maiora, Egresi, Vaiussi, Bodisa (rastenj), Schirellj, Castrati, Marsenj, Cruetio, Bardj, Messi, Cusmaci, Lubani, Cazapur, Spatarj, Gunësi, Prekal, Leporonsi, Mandrossi, Sigeci, and Preka (I have used the original Italian of the *Catasto*). In the village of Vaiussi, the three household heads were required to pay the ducat, mod, and the *obroch* of four grossi, two on Easter and two on Christmas as well as the tenth on their millet each. If houses were added and according to custom, each were required to pay the ducat, mod, *obroch*, and the tenth on their millet. In the village of Cruetio, where all members had one last name, and where George Cruetio was head of the village, the nine household heads were required to pay the ducat and mod each, except for George Cruetio, who paid none. Maria Cruetio, the widow of Uka Cruetio, who is listed as a household head, and Andrea Cruetio were required to pay the ducat, but not the mod. In addition, each were required to pay the *obroch* of four grossi, two on Easter and two on Christmas as well as the tenth on their millet. Most importantly, all the men of the village were required to take arms on any orders from the Venetian Signoria. Finally, if houses were added, they were each required to pay the ducat, mod, *obroch*, and the tenth on their millet (Cordignano, 1940, fl. 50/b, 75/a, 85, 102; Pulaha, 1975a, 122; Pulaha, 1974, 21).

In these villages, all or the majority of the inhabitants were from one tribe and held the last name of the head of the village (ven. *cavo*; ital. *capo*), which was also the name of the village. The head of the village was exempt from any payments, but he was responsible for overseeing the payment of other peasants, as well as guaranteeing their military service. The Venetian administration rewarded villages where blood ties were strong, because their inhabitants served as soldiers at the command of the Signoria and its rectors. In one such village, Itusi (alb. Tuzi) with head Jurco Tusi, there were one hundred and fifty houses, which provided five hundred men of arms, both infantry and cavalry. The Venetian Signoria ordered that the peasants of Itusi pay instead of *soch* and *obroch* and all other *angaria*, one hundred and twenty *iperperi* annually, sixty at Christmas, and sixty at Easter, which was considered a privilege when compared with the requirements of other villages. In addition, all the men of the village, infantry or cavalry were required to take arms on the orders of the Venetian Signoria and of its rectors. For their military service,

Mr. Alban Contarini, Mr. Andrea Foscolo, and Mr. Nicolo Zanthan, count captain, proveditor and chamberlain of Scutari ordered that a territory of forty or so fields belonging to another village called Caldiron (alb. Kalldrun) be given to the Itusi inhabitants for their use, while the peasants agreed to annually pay four mod wheat and transport it to the castle of Scutari with their own expenses. In addition, the peasants of Lugi, which was under Itusi were required to pay a ducat per house as well as the *obroch* of four grossi per house, two on Easter and two on Christmas (Cordignano, 1940, fl. 42/b, 43/a, 75).

Under Ottoman rule, certain northern villages, such as Hoti enjoyed a privileged position, that of Floriçi. They paid a minimum in taxes, only fifty Ottoman akçe, which was equal to one ducat (known in Ottoman documents as one Flori), and which the peasants had paid before the Ottoman rule (Pulaha, 1974, 24). By the end of the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Timar system was unevenly implemented in northern Albania. In the region of central and western Scutari, for instance, the Timar was poorly in place, while only in a narrow strip of the plain it was properly functioning with villages in the nahije (Ottoman administrative division) of Drivasto, Zhabjak, Krajna, and Merkod fully included in it and paying according to its requirements. Each hearth (household with a head of family) paid to the Ottoman Spahi (cavalry member) the *ispenxhe* in the amount of twenty-five akçe. Single adult men (*mücerred*) and widowed women (*bive*) also paid the *ispenxhe* – the first in the amount of twenty-five akçe, while the second only six. In addition, the spahi also collected the tenth (*ösür*) of the agricultural products (wheat, barley, oat, rye, cider, lentils, flax, bees, vegetables, olives, figs, fish) as well as the tenth on pasture, wood, and pigs. In the village of Mes, for instance, the inhabitants paid according to these requirements (Pulaha, 1974, 14–15).

A large number of a second group of villages situated south of the city of Scutari and in the Zhabjak region, who were given to the Ottoman Spahis as state land (*miri*)<sup>23</sup> continued to pay according to the old methods with ducat, mod, and *obrok*, as when the right of disposition of the land belonged to Lord Balsha and later to the Venetian state, while the right to possess the land belonged to the local proniari. With this move, the Ottoman administration simply changed the feudal lord in charge from the local proniari to the Ottoman Spahi. According to the *Ottoman Defter of Scutari, 1485*, the villages of this group (the village of Kryethi is an example) paid their feudal rent globally, in a cut and previously set form. *Hënta*, which was locally known as *moz* or *mod* was a load of grain that was valued at eighty akçe. *Hinne* consisted in a payment of fifty-two akçe, which included the “value of horseshoes.” This form of payment was a continuation of the old system of ducat and mod, which was in place before the Ottoman takeover, and was afterward presented by using Ottoman terminology (Pulaha, 1974, 15–18).

A third group of villages in the great Albanian highlands were never included in the Timar system, and they paid their dues with one ducat per household – the Ottoman Flori. The villages with the status of Floriçi, such as the villages of Shestan, for instance, paid

23 For the concept of *fay' al-muslimin*, in the sense of making the conquered lands the inalienable common property of the Muslim community (Umma) or the Islamic State and known as *Miri* or state owned lands, see Inalçik (1994, 103).

fifty akçe per household – the equivalent of one ducat, which was known as Ottoman Flori. The Flori substituted all other taxes and obligations going to the Ottoman state and the Sanjakbey of Scutari. The Flori was less in value in comparison to the value of all the obligations that it substituted and the peasants were not required to pay the haraç (land tax paid by non-Muslims) per head to the Sultan or the tenth of the agricultural products to the landowners or the ispenxhe (ispençe) and other obligations paid by the peasants (raja) (Inalçik, 1954, 33; Inalçik, 1994, 103). Although we have no direct information on what exactly the fifty akçe payment consisted of, we can draw some conclusions from the payments of Montenegrin villages under the same status. Of the fifty-five akçe they paid, thirty-three went toward xhizje (çizye) per head – a payment benefiting state cofers. The tenth and the ispenxhe was valued at twenty akçe and it was paid to the sanxhakbey, while two akçe covered the expenses of the Ottoman clerks who collected the taxes.<sup>24</sup>

The Ottoman administration, which slowly, but steadily settled in the Albanian territories from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries was merciless and abusive to the locals in countless ways and for a long time, but it allowed northern territories, such as the Kelmendi region self-governing rights. The Kelmendi tribes were of pure Albanian blood and of Catholic faith and were divided into three *bajraks* – Selca, Vukl, and Nikši. They proved difficult to subdue (“*I Clementi sono Albanesi di puro sangue [...] si dividono in tre “bajrak” di Selca, Vukli, Nikši [...] per religione sono tutti cattolici [...] Sono oltremodo bellicosi e nei secoli passati ebbero lunghe e sanguinose lotte coi Turchi*”) (Erber, 1883, 17), and in later decades, the Ottomans gave up all efforts to subdue them with violence allowing the Kelmendi self-governing rights (“*s’accontentò che ne riconoscessero soltanto di nome la supremazia*”) (Erber, 1883, 17–18; Thallóczy, 2004, 196–197).<sup>25</sup>

This was made possible when the Ottoman administration – aiming to raise taxes and possibly implement the Timar system – changed the highlander’s status from Floriçi to Derbendçi, which meant that they were in charge of protecting and maintaining roads and bridges that connected cities with the hinterland. The inhabitants of all northern territories of the Sanjak of Scutari, for instance, from Hoti and Kelmendi in the west to Tropojë and Pejë in the east needed to ensure free passage on all the roads that connected Scutari with Podgorica and Pejë with all of Kosova. In exchange, the highlanders were excluded from paying the extraordinary taxes, although they still paid the tenth, the ispenxhe, and the xhizje – the land and the per capita annual tax paid by non-Muslim subjects living in Ottoman territories known as Dhimmis. The territories of Kelmendi were allowed to pay only one thousand akçe for the xhizje and another one thousand for the ispenxhe as a favor. Despite these efforts, however, in the northern and northeastern highlands of Albania, the official registration of the obligations under the Timar system failed.

24 Pulaha gives a detailed account of rent payment methods for each of the three groups of villages, which were unevenly included in the Timar system as well as a list of their names (Pulaha, 1974, 14–27). For forms of payment in the Montenegrin villages, see the account in Djurdjev (1968, 30, 60).

25 For more detailed information on the origin of the northern Albanian tribes, including a list of their names (Elsie, 2015, 6, 32). Erber and Elsie argue that some of the Kelmendi converted to Islam (see also Durham, 1909, 31, 39–79, 80–108, 109–133, 134–222). Durham notes that the laws of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini were also followed in all of the great Muslim tribes of Albania in the early twentieth century.

The common property rights of the rural communities and brotherhood tribes over the pastures and arable lands, as prescribed in the Kanun, remained unaffected, while their method of tax payment retained the global form for each region separately. Most of the time these tax payments never materialized and remained only in paper. Similarly, in the region of Himara and Suli in southern Albania, the Timar system failed and was not implemented. Whole villages, such as Himara, Palasa, Qeparo, Vuno, Dhërmi, and Sopot were not registered in the Ottoman Defter in a gesture of resistance against the Ottoman rule (Duka, 2009, 143–148; Anamali et al., 2002b, 532–533).

During this time, as the *Ottoman Defter* of Scutari, 1485 shows, the villages of Kryethi, Kusmaç, Mes, Marshejn, Mosili, Mglush, Prela (Selita), Mazarak, David, Reç (by the Bojana riverbank), Reç, Prekal (in the mountain), Lepurosh, Gradasaliq, Grila, Dragovol were inhabited by one or more brotherhood because the heads of villages (*cavi*), in some all (Kryethi, Prela, Mazarak), in some the majority, (Kusmaç, Mglush, David, Reç, Lepurosh), and in others less than half (Mes, Marsenj, Mosil, Reç (by the Bojana riverbank), Prekal (in the mountain), Gradisaliq, Grila, (Dragovol) had the same last name, which was the name of that village. Although the names of heads of villages in 1485 are not the same when compared to those used in 1416, except for a small number, we can conclude that at the end of the fifteenth century, blood relations had become stronger or remained as strong as they were at the beginning of the fifteenth century, in some villages, while in other villages agricultural and territorial relations prevailed (Pulaha, 1975a, 123–126). When comparing the names of villages included in the *Venetian Catasto* with those of the *Ottoman Defter*, as in the table below, the names and numbers differ greatly.<sup>26</sup>

Table 1: The Names of the Villages of Scutari that appear in the Venetian Catasto of Scutari, 1416–1417 and the Ottoman Defter of Scutari, 1485

| Villages of Upper and Lower Scutari that are included in the Catasto Veneto of Scutari, 1416–1417 | Villages from the Catasto that are not included in the Ottoman Defter of Scutari, 1485 | Villages that are not mentioned in the Catasto Veneto of Scutari, but appear in the Ottoman Defter of Scutari | Villages that were not inhabited in 1485 (abandoned) |
|---|--|---|--|
| (Upper Scutari)<br>1. Bishtrrjoll   | Kadikam  | (Nahije of Scutari)<br>Kalza  | Bolca (Bulkja)                                       |
| 2. Dobra  | Rapisht  | Rash  | Shtira   |
| 3. Auraç  | Bulsar   | Bërdica   | Domëni (Dom)   |
| 4. Kaldiron (Kalldrun)  | Luban  | Buvarëza  | Somesi (Sumiza)                                      |
| 5. Tuz  | Vulkatan   | Mushani   | Prekal under stairway                                |

26 I have used the spelling in Albanian, and I have counted one hundred and thirteen villages in the *Catasto Veneto di Scutari, 1416–1417*. Thirty-nine villages from the *Catasto* are not mentioned in the *Ottoman Defter of Scutari, 1485*. Eight villages are uninhabited, while twenty-nine villages in the Nahije of Scutari and six in the Nahije of Drivasto, (thirty-five in all) are new (Pulaha, 1975a, 125–126).

|                       |                                |                               |               |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 6. Oset               | Spatar                         | Shënd Bfishi                  | Gunësi        |
| 7. Kopenic (Koplik)   | Gleros                         | Romeshtina                    | Mandrosi      |
| 8. Great Gruemira     | Turki                          | Marin                         | Braza (Braça) |
| 9. Podgora            | Laurel Mountain                | Maliç                         |               |
| 10. Majora            | Zamoran                        | Kurta                         |               |
| 11. Egresh            | Enkjekjan                      | Mosili                        |               |
| 12. Vajush            | Teklan                         | Xhovan                        |               |
| 13. Karokjeta         | Baladrin                       | Gril                          |               |
| 14. Sordan            | Renës                          | Oblik                         |               |
| 15. Ljushta           | Saraçinopol                    | Nikshiq (Psoglav)             |               |
| 16. Zanjeva           | Zupan                          | Gorna Voronica                |               |
| 17. Pesiugla          | Gazol                          | Mglush                        |               |
| 18. Bodisha           | Bardh (in Velipojë)            | Dobranica                     |               |
| 19. Lahol             | Serelj (in Velipojë)           | Bratoran                      |               |
| 20. Shkirela (Shkrel) | Baks                           | Poshtërkuza                   |               |
| 21. Kastrat           | Gaduç                          | Stres                         |               |
| 22. Polica & Shkurt   | Progjen & Stikjan              | Gjondra                       |               |
| 23. Marsen (Marshei)  | Small Tushan under<br>stairway | Prela (Selita)                |               |
| 24. Logoa             | Black Stone<br>of Rajko Prekal | Karpent                       |               |
| 25. The White One     | Oset                           | Mazarak                       |               |
| 26. Bolca             | Majora                         | Gramshi                       |               |
| 27. Rapisht           | Karogjet (Feralin)             | Dragovol                      |               |
| 28. Keqol             | Vajush                         | Ivrashtraketa                 |               |
| 29. Kuç               | Sordan                         | Shkripol                      |               |
| 30. Balec             | Renës                          | (Nahije of Drivasto)<br>Rosek |               |
| 31. Zakol             | Varës                          | Bleshja                       |               |
| 32. Braza             | Dardha                         | Shëngjin (Rasha)              |               |
| 33. Dar               | Dar                            | Vilza                         |               |
| 34. Leporosh          | Zamarak                        | Rasha                         |               |
| 35. Zamarak           | Sigjeç                         | Gradisaliq                    |               |
| 36. Grizhe            | Ibardh                         |                               |               |
| 37. Kereç             | Kryetin (Frankes)              |                               |               |
| 38. Bulsar            | Bodish (Rastenj)               |                               |               |
| 39. Little Gruemir    | Keqol                          |                               |               |
| (Lower Scutari)       |                                |                               |               |
| 40. Renes             |                                |                               |               |
| 41. Black Stone       |                                |                               |               |

|                                     |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 42. Vladami                         |  |  |  |
| 43. Black Stone of Rajko Prekali    |  |  |  |
| 44. Kruet                           |  |  |  |
| 45. Martan                          |  |  |  |
| 46. Bardh                           |  |  |  |
| 47. Mes                             |  |  |  |
| 48. Luba (Juban)                    |  |  |  |
| 49. Kacapur                         |  |  |  |
| 50. Vulkatan                        |  |  |  |
| 51. Spatar                          |  |  |  |
| 52. Turki of Marin Bonçi            |  |  |  |
| 53. Laurel Mauntain                 |  |  |  |
| 54. Dardha                          |  |  |  |
| 55. Gleros                          |  |  |  |
| 56. Great Bulkja                    |  |  |  |
| 57. Gostol & Misgoj                 |  |  |  |
| 58. Zamoran                         |  |  |  |
| 59. Enkjekjan                       |  |  |  |
| 60. Sakol                           |  |  |  |
| 61. Ndreshkijé of Andrea Skjavi     |  |  |  |
| 62. Somes                           |  |  |  |
| 63. Kimeqeq (Qimeqeq)               |  |  |  |
| 64. Sigjeç                          |  |  |  |
| 65. Dozan                           |  |  |  |
| 66. Trompis/Vuku                    |  |  |  |
| 67. Luors                           |  |  |  |
| 68. Barbarosh (Barbulush)           |  |  |  |
| 69. Pastropat                       |  |  |  |
| 70. Kukol (Kukl)                    |  |  |  |
| 71. Vlasan & Kruet                  |  |  |  |
| 72. Teklan                          |  |  |  |
| 73. Mensabardh                      |  |  |  |
| 74. Shenkoll of Kakarriq (Blinisht) |  |  |  |
| 75. Kakarriq                        |  |  |  |
| 76. Baladrin (Balldren)             |  |  |  |
| 77. Renise (Rens)                   |  |  |  |

|                                     |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 78. Saraçinopol                     |  |  |  |
| 79. Valm                            |  |  |  |
| 80. Dobraç                          |  |  |  |
| 81. Gunes (Gunëz)                   |  |  |  |
| 82. Brom                            |  |  |  |
| 83. Reglat                          |  |  |  |
| 84. Shirq                           |  |  |  |
| 85. Musanthi (Muzhan)               |  |  |  |
| 86. Dajç                            |  |  |  |
| 87. Samarish (Samrish)              |  |  |  |
| 88. Ruscol (Rrushkull)              |  |  |  |
| 89. Belan                           |  |  |  |
| 90. Stira                           |  |  |  |
| 91. Penatar (Pentar)                |  |  |  |
| 92. Prekal under<br>stairway        |  |  |  |
| 93. Karoq (Krraq)                   |  |  |  |
| 94. Buzëzesh (Buzëzez)              |  |  |  |
| 95. Luariz (Luarëz)                 |  |  |  |
| 96. Reç                             |  |  |  |
| 97. Vedolisht (uninha-<br>bited)    |  |  |  |
| 98. Zupan                           |  |  |  |
| 99. Gazol                           |  |  |  |
| 100. Pulaj                          |  |  |  |
| 101. Bardh                          |  |  |  |
| 102. Serelj                         |  |  |  |
| 103. Baks                           |  |  |  |
| 104. Gaduç                          |  |  |  |
| 105. Prekal                         |  |  |  |
| 106. Domin                          |  |  |  |
| 107. Stikjan                        |  |  |  |
| 108. Small Tushan under<br>stairway |  |  |  |
| 109. Kruetin (Frankes)              |  |  |  |
| 110. Mandrosh                       |  |  |  |
| 111. Tromps (Great<br>Trush)        |  |  |  |
| 112. Old Trompis                    |  |  |  |
| 113. Vars                           |  |  |  |

The phenomenon of instability and abandonment of the villages, their repopulation at a later time through the replacement of old brotherhoods with new ones, which occurred between 1416 and 1485 are telling of a massive population movement in this region that occurred not as a result of the expansion of brotherhood families, but due to the descent of highlander brotherhoods into the emptied plains after the fall of Scutari in 1479. The great exodus of the population from Scutari and Drivasto and their surrounding territories is easily observed in Venetian documents of the period. On May 9, 1479, the Venetian Signoria accommodated one hundred and ten loyal Albanian soldiers and survivors of the war of Scutari in Venetian territories in one of the Citadelle called Lixondo.

*Essendo adunq(u)e i (pre)dicti fidelissimi qui reduti ala speranza de la b(e)nigna gratia, dela nra Signor [Signoria], che i(n) renumeration de tanta fede, fatiche dani e proprio sangue sparso, li habi a proveder del viver, oltra la gran nota che saria a questo nro stado abandonarli, no(n) saria anche p(er) alcunmodo p(er) la nra Signor(ia) perder simel homeni probatissimi I qual i(n) ogni caso ne potranno esser utilissimi et comodissimi p(er) esser tuti valenti noi et soprattutto fidelissimi Ipo le da proveder de conbuarli et mantegnirli soto lombra nostra (ASV-SM, 11, 22rv, May 9, 1479).*

The Signoria provided for their upkeep, according to their merit, with the money paid by the chamber of Padua.<sup>27</sup> The provision was continuous (ASV–SM, 11, 22rv, May 9, 1479).

Throughout the fifteenth century, these immigration waves favored the downward movement of Albanian katuns and the formation of new villages on the plains where kinship relations were stronger in 1485 in comparison to the old villages. The example of the village of Reç, for instance, mentioned in the *Ottoman Defter of Scutari, 1485*, is telling of this phenomenon, as Reç has two locations – in the mountain and near the Bojana Riverbank (Pulaha, 1975a, 123–126).<sup>28</sup> In addition, the highlander influx into the plains strengthened the existing kinship relations still existing within the old agricultural villages on the plains. In 1485, in the villages created from the brotherhood of Itusi (alb. Tuzi), for instance, the patronymic name of the head of the family, Itusi was also used as the name of the village (Pulaha, 1975a, 124–125, 126–127). The movement of whole villages from mountains to plains continued throughout the sixteenth century as the nahija of Kelmend and Mirdita lost sixty-four point three percent and three point five percent of their population, respectively. The stockbreeding katuns of Kelmend, for instance moved to Piper, Kuç, and the plain of Scutari. There must have been some movement to the Dukagjin Plateau and the Kosova Plain from the mountainous parts of Altunili (Gjakova in modern day Kosova) because the population of this territory diminished during this period (Pulaha, 1988, 32; Pulaha, 1984, 647; Pulaha, 1974, 417–434).

27 On the immigration and integration of the Albanian population in Venice and Padua, also see Nadin (2008, 13–81).

28 Elsie identifies another Reçi Tribe in the northernmost part of the District of Dibra in northeastern Albania (Elsie, 2015, 316, 344).

During these massive population flights, the highlanders occupied the free land made available in the mountainous regions as well. This particular process of the establishment of katuns of stockbreeders led to the formation of the great tribes of northern Albania, which shared a common territory that stood out from other tribes (Pulaha, 1975a, 137). The lower rate of social differentiation in the mountains due to underdeveloped feudal relations and the persistence of a closed natural economy of stockbreeders as well as the population's refusal to pay taxes according to the Timar system forced the Ottoman administration to recognize regional unities, such as those in the Polat and Dukagjin regions, which formed single feuds without ever being divided into timars. Unlike any other part of the Balkans under Ottoman occupation, where the inhabitants of one particular village enjoyed the special status of *Derbendçi*, all northern Albania from Hot and Kelmend in the west to Tropojë and Pejë in the east were assigned the *Derbendçi* status in exchange for tax exemptions (Pulaha, 1974, 28).

The punitive military expeditions of the Ottoman army against the free and self-ruling highlanders failed to establish the Timar system, because the population of these northern territories of Albania resisted.<sup>29</sup> Organized in tribes of brotherhoods with strong blood ties and living according to the laws of the *Kanun*, thus lacking any divisive factors of importance among one another, these great Albanian tribes became a compact force with which the Ottoman administration had to wrestle continuously.<sup>30</sup> During the second half of the sixteenth century when the Ottoman Empire's power was still at its height, especially during the decade between 1560–1571, armed uprisings spread in the northern Albanian territories of Mirdita, Scutari, Kelmend, Kuç, and Pipri. As the Ottoman Empire faced the Catholic Coalition of European forces of Spain, the Papal States, and Venice at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the Albanian uprisings intensified, especially in the territories of the Sanjak of Scutari and Dukagjin. By 1574, however, the armed Albanian troops had to surrender the island of Alessio, which they had taken from the Ottomans in 1571. The Ottoman *Spahis* were able to penetrate into the highlands during this time, but their stay was temporary (Anamali et al., 2002b, 533; Anamali et al., 2002c, 563–564).

In the following century, the self-ruled northern Albanian tribes fiercely resisted the Ottoman administration's attempt to collect heavier taxes and spread the authority of the *spahis* in the highlands. This was achieved through a new political means – the organization of interregional Albanian assemblies. These assemblies were based on an existing tradition of provincial gatherings – a larger version of the *katun* assemblies where all the heads of households participated led by the elected elder (or elders) in order to solve any grievances. Now the leaders of the self-governed regions were joined by those of other Albanian territories as well as by Catholic and Orthodox members of the clergy, all interested in getting rid of the Ottoman rule. During the first decade of the seventeenth

29 On the uprisings against Ottoman rule, see Anamali et al. (2002c/d, 560–586), Thallóczy (2004, 195–196), Erber (1883, 16–21) and Durham (1909, 22).

30 By the nineteenth century, the Ottoman administration had put in place a project to oversee the relationship among the northern Albanian tribes. It was known as The Turkish Law on the Codification of the Albanian Customary Law (Pupovci, 1972, XXVII).

century, the uprisings of the northern highlanders forced all the Ottoman spahis in the Sanjak of Scutari and Dukagjin to abandon their posts and never return (Anamali et al., 2002c, 566–570).

As the Dukagjin region was severely punished during the Ottoman expedition of 1610, the center of the uprisings moved to the highlands of the Sanjak of Scutari – Kastrat, Kelmend, Shkrel, Hot, Kuç, Pipri, Vasojevic, and Palabardh – known as the Northern Highlands or the Highlands of Upper Scutari. These tribes formed a political and military union known as “The Albanian Mountains” or “The Union of the Mountains.” In their shared assemblies, the leaders swore an oath of *besa* to resist with all their might to any upcoming Ottoman expeditions, to fight against enemy armies in the neighboring regions, to protect their self-government, and to not allow the establishment of the authority of the Ottoman Spahis in the northern highlands ever again. Their resistance had a liberating character, which aimed at getting rid of the Ottomans from the Albanian territories (Anamali et al., 2002c, 570–571, 586; Pupovci, 1972, LIX–LXI).

In conclusion, both the Venetian and Ottoman administrations contributed to the deepening regionalism, preservation of blood ties and the rise of the northern Albanian tribes. The centralization efforts in every aspect of life, the differences between Venetian and Albanian judicial systems, which required the granting of legal privileges for resolving and settling disagreements in the local judicial courts, and the corrupt Venetian administrators disinterested in the application of the just rule of law left the Albanian population with the choice of solving its own problems internally through the application of the centuries-old Kanun to regulate everyday life. The Venetian administration rewarded villages where blood ties were strong and where the peasants lived according to the laws of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini with land grants, while taxing village heads less or not at all, because their inhabitants served as soldiers at the command of the Signoria and its rectors.

The massive exodus after the surrender of Scutari in 1479 and the abandonment of plains, the decline of production and the establishment of the Ottoman Timar system with a natural economy and rent payment in nature favored the descent of whole stockbreeding katuns into the plains and the occupation of free land in the mountains by the autonomous highlander communities. As the Ottoman administration was unable to permanently establish the Timar system in northern Albania, it awarded the highlanders the status of *Floriçi* and later *Derbendçi*. With this move, the Ottoman administration intensified their exploitation, on the one hand, while it allowed them self-governing rights. These chain events were conducive to the rise of new tribal communities with separate and clear territories, as in the Dukagjin region. These northern Albanian tribes continued to live according to the Kanun, openly refused the Timar system, preserved their internal self-administration and autonomy and used their privileged status to challenge the Ottoman rule for centuries to come.

OD CENTRALIZACIJE SERENISSIME DO SAMOREGULACIJE KANUNA:  
KREPITEV KRVNIH VEZI IN VZPON VELIKIH PLEMEN V SEVERNI  
ALBANIJ OD 15. DO 17. STOLETJA*Azeta KOLA*

Univerza Northwestern, 1881 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Illinois 60208, ZDA

e-mail: ak3279@nyu.edu

## POVZETEK

*V prispevku so analizirane družbene, politične in ekonomske razmere, ki so v 15. stoletju na območju Albanije privedle do okrepitve krvnih vezi v času beneške in osmanske vladavine. To je vodilo k oblikovanju velikih severno-albanskih plemen, ki so se še naprej ravnala po zakonih kanuna Lekë Dukagjini, običajnem pravu Albanije v 16. in 17. stoletju. Kombinacija različnih dejavnikov, kot npr. beneška bežna vladavina, centralizacija življenja v beneški Albaniji in korupcija beneških administratorjev, ki se niso strinjali z lokalno tradicijo, so prisilili albansko prebivalstvo, da se pri reševanju zasebnih sporov ravna po kanunu. Verižna reakcija, ki je sledila, kot npr. osmanska invazija in predaja mesta Skadar leta 1479, središča beneške Albanije, kot tudi masovni eksodus prebivalstva in zapustitev ravninskih predelov, padec v produkciji in vzpostavitev osmanskega sistema Timar z blagovnim gospodarstvom in plačevanjem davkov v naravi, je povzročila spust celotnih živinorejskih skupnosti na ravnine. Na novo ustanovljene plemenske vasi so ščitile svojo samoupravo, avtonomijo in izolirani življenjski slog, ter s tem kljubovale osmanski oblasti v naslednjih stoletjih.*

*Ključne besede: Beneški imperij, Osmanska država, beneška Albanija, Severna Albanija, kanun*

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