

Fourteenth-century Albanian migration and the ‘relative autochthony’ of the Albanians in Epeiros. The case of Gjirokastër

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to put together recent linguistic and historical studies, in order to challenge the views of ‘older’ Greek and Albanian scholarship with respect to the presence of a solely Greek or Albanian population in the regions of Epeiros, with specific reference to the district of Dropull in the light of primary sources dealing with the Albanian immigrations of the fourteenth century. It will show that Greek and Albanian-speaking populations had all along been living together in Epeiros, while in the fourteenth century immigrant Albanians migrated into the regions of Gjirokastër. The reactions of local milieux against the new settlers shall be attributed to the disintegration of the previous local elites.

The issue of the Albanian presence in the lands of Epeiros¹ has long been a point of contention between Greek and Albanian scholarship. On the one hand it is claimed that only in the thirteenth and especially the fourteenth century Albanians originating from the Elbasan region migrated to Epeiros, Macedonia and Thessaly and from there to more distant districts, including Roumeli (central Greece) and the Peloponnese, regions inhabited by Greek populations, and on the other hand that the Albanians have been the indigenous population

1. The term ‘Epeiros’ is used for historic reasons and in strictly geographic and cultural contexts (the northernmost limit being the River Vjosë). As will be shown, Epeiros was inhabited both by Greeks and Albanians (Illyrians); hence, there is no relation here with the political implications given to this term from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Nowadays parts of Epeiros belong both to Greece and Albania.

in Epeiros. It is needless to analyse how this scheme served the idea of national purity in zones claimed by both Greece and Albania in the beginning of the 20th century.

The first viewpoint was upheld chiefly by 'older' Greek scholarship, which either disregarded much of the evidence presented in support of the second viewpoint or even manipulated it to fit into its ideological position. P. Karolidis, at the beginning of 20th century, wrote: 'If Mr. Bauer,² as many other Europeans, call Epeiros Low Albania, this must be understood from an ethnological point of view only in the sense that in Epeiros there are Greeks who speak Albanian and that the word Albanian in Epeiros must mean Greek-Epeirote'.³ The existence of an Albanian-speaking population in Epeiros was attributed by Apostolos Vakalopoulos to a process of 'Albanization of the Greek population'.⁴ Such views were mechanically maintained in more recent popular books on Greek-Albanian relations.⁵ However, it is a well-documented fact that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was an Albanian infiltration into Epeiros,⁶ which was part of a wider immigration movement of Balkan people at the end of the Middle Ages and has been attributed to disintegration of the target territories.

2. Otto Bauer, Austrian politician (Wien, 1881-Paris, 1938), one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party and author of, among many others, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, 1907.

3. P. Karolidis, 'Αλβανία και Αλβανοί', *Ελληνισμός* 5 (1902) 636.

4. A. Vakalopoulos (1961), v. 1, 33-34.

5. For examples, see S. Stoupis, *Ηπειρώτες και Αλβανοί: Η Προσφορά της Ηπείρου προ το Έθνος* (Ioannina 1976) 84-99; A. Papadopoulos, *Ο Αλβανικός Εθνικισμός και ο Οικουμενικός Ελληνισμός. «Απειρος» χώρα* (Athens 1992) 28, 88-94, 110; T. Margaritis, *Αλβανία: Ελληνική Πανάρχαια Γη (και ο Τεχνητός Αφελληνισμός της)* (Athens 1994).

6. On the subject of the Albanian immigration of the 14th and 15th centuries, see A. Ducellier (1981), 366, 415-416, 551-552; A. Ducellier, 'Δημογραφία, μεταναστεύσεις και πολιτισμικά σύννορα από τα τέλη του Μεσαίωνα στη νεώτερη εποχή', *Τα Ιστορικά* 3/5 (1986) 31; I. Poulos, 'Η επιόκησις των Αλβανών εις Κορινθίαν', *Επετηρίς του Μεσαιωνικού Αρχείου* 3 (1950) 43-45; R. Stojkov - T. Kacori (1966); T. Jochalas, 'Über die Einwanderung der Albaner in Griechenland (Eine zusammenfassende Betrachtung)', *Dissertationes Albanicae, In Honorem Josephi Valentini et Ernesti Koliqi Septuagenariorum* (Munich 1971) 105; V. Panagiotopoulos (1985), 68-85; A. Puto - S. Pollo (1979), 63; D. Zakythinos, 'La population de la Morée byzantine', *L' Hellenisme Contemporain* 3 (1949) 117-119; M. Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou (1991), 332-333; P. Aravantinos (1984), v. 2, 104-126 and v. 3, 247-272

The second viewpoint was mostly supported by Albanian historiography which, in contrast, alleged that Epeiros was solely inhabited by Albanians.⁷ For example, according to the Albanian historian Pëllumb Xhufi, who misinterpreted Ottoman registers and a Greek chronicle, Dropull was colonized by Greeks not earlier than the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁸ However, some scholars have indicated that there is sufficient evidence, based on toponymy, to argue that Albanians were already in Epeiros by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹ Among them, the work of the leading Albanian linguist of the twentieth century, the late Ekrem Çacej who, taking into consideration toponymic data, concluded that the Albanians were descendants of the ancient Illyrians and should, therefore, be considered among the autochthonous inhabitants of Epeiros. His study stands out as one of the most serious works, quite distant from nationalistic

and 347-350; P. Oikonomou, 'Μεσαιωνική Ήπειρος (395 μ.Χ.-1430 μ.Χ.). (Σύντομος ιστορική επισκόπησις)', *Ηπειρωτικό Ημερολόγιο* 6 (1980), 328; P. Rontogiannis, *Ιστορία της νήσου Λευκάδος*, v. 1 (Athens 1980) 320-328; D. Vagiakakos, 'Η τοπωνυμική θεώρησις του θεσσαλικού χώρου', *Αθηνά* 79 (1984) 304; M. Kordosis, *Συμβολή στην ιστορία και τοπογραφία της περιοχής Κορίνθου στους μέσους χρόνους* (Athens 1981) 137; M.G. Lambrinidis, *Οι Αλβανοί κατά την κυρίως Ελλάδα και την Πελοπόννησον: Ύδρα-Σπέτσαι* (Athens 1907) 5-11; P. Xhufi (1991), pp. 14-17; K. Biris, *Αρβανίτες: Οι Δωριείς του Νέου Ελληνισμού* (Athens³ 1997) 41-72; M. Michael-Dede, *Οι Έλληνες Αρβανίτες* (Athens 1997) 99-137; S. Kargakos, *Αλβανοί, Αρβανίτες Έλληνες* (Athens 2001) 114-159 (even though on p. 153 he mentions that co-existence of Greeks and Albanians in Epeiros was for centuries a daily practice).

7. In an Albanian proclamation dated 1888, it is mentioned that «*The Albanians are descendants of the Pelasgians; Homer, the biggest poet ever, was a Pelasgian himself or, more correctly, Albanian. All heroes of Greece in Troia were Albanians, as well as Alexander the Great, Aristotle and many other glorious men of antiquity are erroneously characterised as Greeks...*», mentioned in K. Nikolaidis, *Ιστορία του Ελληνισμού με βάση την Μακεδονία δια μέσου των αιώνων Athens 1923*, cited in Stourpis, *Ηπειρώτες και Αλβανοί: Η Προσφορά της Ηπείρου προ το Έθνος* (Ioannina 1976) 17.

8. P. Xhufi (1991) 5-7, note 23 and P. Xhufi (1994) 54.

9. A. Ducellier, 'Les Albans du XIe au XIIIe siècle: Nomades ou sédentaires?', in A. Ducellier, *L' Albanie entre Byzance et Venise* (London 1987) 34-35; A. Ducellier, *Οι Αλβανοί στην Ελλάδα (13^{ος}-15^{ος} αιώνας). Η μετανάστευση μιας κοινότητας* (Athens 1994) 14-15, 19; K. Biris, *Αρβανίτες. Οι Δωριείς του νεώτερου Ελληνισμού*, v. 1 (Athens 1996) 53; A. Vakalopoulos (1961), v. 1, 25-26; N. Ziangos (1974), pp. 217-218; J. Drançolli (1987); V. Psimouli (1998), 27-57, 63-71 and K. Komis (1999), 18-21, where the case of Preveza is dealt with.

enthusiasm; it was this particular scholar who coined the term ‘relative autochthony’ referring to the Albanians in Epeiros.¹⁰

This question has only recently been the subject of both historical and linguistic studies. The purpose of this article is to put together all of these recent studies, in order to challenge the views of ‘older’ Greek and Albanian scholarship with respect to the presence of solely Greek or Albanian populations in the regions of Epeiros, with specific reference to the district of Dropull in the light of primary sources dealing with the Albanian immigrations of the fourteenth century.

Dropull [map 1], a fertile region in the Drino Valley of Northern Epeiros (Southern Albania), possesses a large number of villages. Its area does not exceed 50 km in length and 6-10 km in width and it lies on a SE. NW. axis. Its central city is Gjirokastër (Gk. Ἀργυρόκαστρον). Dropull shares borders with Lunxhëri (Gk. Λιούντζη) to the NE, Delvinë (Gk. Δέλβινο) to the West, Pogon (Gk. Πογόνοι) to the East and Ioannina to the South. Today, the major part of Dropull is included in Albania, while a smaller part is in Greece.

In dealing with our subject from a historical point of view, the recent work of Alain Ducellier stands out. At a recent congress held in the Centre of Byzantine Studies, The National Foundation for Research, Athens, the eminent French scholar dealing with sources referring either to Illyrians or Albanians demonstrated that there are reliable historical data that the latter were descendants of the former and therefore should be considered as indigenous inhabitants of Epeiros. The recent publication of the acts of the congress makes this important contribution accessible to the scientific community; consequently, there is no need further to elaborate on the author’s views.¹¹

10. Çabej E., ‘Problemi i autoktonisë së shqiptarëve në dritën e emrave të vendeve’, *Buletin i Universitetit Shtetëror të Tiranës*, 1 (1959) 54; for the English version of this important article see Çabej E., ‘The Problem of the Autochthony of the Albanians in the Light of Place-names’, in *The Albanians and their Territories* (Tirana 1985) 34. The relative autochthony of the Albanian populations in Epeiros was naturally accepted with great enthusiasm by Albanian scholarship (P. Xhufi [1991], 5-7; P. Xhufi [1994], 41-58 and K. Frashëri [1998]).

11. A. Ducellier (1998), where most of the relevant literature is listed.

From a linguistic point of view, toponymy, as well as other acknowledged linguistic features, such as the archaic elements in the Greek and Albanian idioms of Epeiros, reveal not only the 'relative autochthony' of the Albanians, but also of the Greeks themselves in the same lands. In connection with Albanological studies on linguistics, it is important to mention a recent and impressive doctoral thesis by the Albanologist Aristotelis Spyrou on the Greek linguistic idiom of the regions of Delvinë and Sarandë.¹² Since this doctoral thesis is still unpublished, it is worth mentioning his basic conclusions so far as they relate to the present article. The author confirms that the idiom in question, together with those of Dropull, Pogon and Thesprotia, constitute a clear continuum between the idiomatic conventions of Ioannina on the one hand, and those of Himarrë, Corfu and the other Ionian islands on the other.¹³ Spyrou has also discovered certain genitive singular nouns which are very close to ancient Greek forms.¹⁴ Additionally, he not only traced the influences of the Albanian language in this idiom,¹⁵ but also influences of Greek in Albanian idioms of the same region¹⁶ which he attributed to the perennial co-existence of Greek-speaking and Albanian-speaking populations in the same region.¹⁷ Furthermore, he has located certain ancient Greek words in the Delvinë-Sarandë Greek idiomatic vocabulary,¹⁸ which had not been preserved in any other Greek dialect or idiom, apart from occasional appearances in the neighbouring idioms of Dropull and Pogon.¹⁹ Important work of this kind, undertaken by serious scholars who distance themselves from the old stereotypes of the nationalistic ideologies constitute the most stable foundation not only

12. A. Spyrou (2000), with extensive references to the older literature in relevant linguistic research.

13. *op. cit.*, 207-208.

14. *op. cit.*, 95-96.

15. *op. cit.*, 185-188, 104, note 222 and pp. 116, 156, 161, 177.

16. *op. cit.*, 185, note 305, pp. 188-189 and note 310, p. 190.

17. *op. cit.*, 185.

18. *op. cit.*, 181.

19. For these words, see *op. cit.*, 181-182; for views on the close proximity of the Greek idioms of Dropull and Pogon to that of Delvinë – Sarandë, see *op. cit.*, 182-183, 207-208.

for the promotion of related studies, but also for the peaceful co-existence of both nations in regions of Epeiros and Albania where they have lived for centuries.

The presence of Albanians in the Epeirote lands from the beginning of the thirteenth century is also attested by two documentary sources: the first is a Venetian document of 1210, which states that the continent facing the island of Corfu is inhabited by Albanians;²⁰ and the second is letters of the Metropolitan of Naupaktos John Apokaukos to a certain George Dysipati, who was considered to be an ancestor of the famous Shpata family.²¹ Furthermore, I suggest that names that appear in two acts of the Angevins of Naples dated 1304²² using the forms, Albos, Spatos, Catarucos, Bischesini, Aranitos, Lecenis, Turbaceos, Marchaseos, Scuras, Zeneuias, Bucceseos, Logoresc and Mateseos are either well-known, less-known or totally unknown names of Albanian clan leaders at that time. Are we obliged to see in this a possible earlier Albanian immigration in the Epeirote lands, as Kostas Komis did in the case of the etymology of the toponym 'Preveza'?²³ I believe that the use of hypothetical immigrations as a basis to interpret sources that indicate the presence of Albanians in the Epeirote lands prior to the thirteenth-fourteenth century is somewhat arbitrary. For it serves the concept of national purity in zones with clear lines of communication, mutual relations (as linguistic research has proved²⁴) and common traditions, religion as well as principal language of communication. It is evident that this was the case in a period when co-existence and understanding among people of different

20. G. Tafel – G. Tomas (1856), 122.

21. N. Bees – E. Seferli, 'Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos', *BNJ* 21 (1974), doc. 62. For views on this name as being ancestral to the name 'Shpata', see P. Xhufi (1994), 47 and note 132.

22. L. Thalloczy – K. Jirecek – M. Sufflay (1913), 166a, doc. 563 and 167-168, doc. 569.

23. K. Komis (1999), 18-21.

24. See notes 10-16 (on Spyrou and his work).

nations (in the modern sense of the term) were far better than they are today.²⁵ Nevertheless, the immigration movements of the fourteenth century are documented facts, as I shall point out below.

Testimonies from the fourteenth century narrative sources not only confirm the population movements, but also describe the nature and character of the Albanian social immigrant groups. Byzantine sources present the Albanians as nomads, poor and autonomous, who attempted predatory raids against fortified cities.²⁶ The first appearance of the Albanians 'en masse' is recorded in a letter of Marino Sanudo Torsello who mentions the presence of large Albanian crowds in Thessaly, who, moving from place to place, had destroyed the lands outside the castles.²⁷ This kind of Albanian presence within the territories of the Despotate is not recorded before 1337, when the Albanians around Berat and Kanina revolted and carried out raids and plunderings against cities and castles. After the death of Andronikos III in 1341, the Albanians around Pogoniani and Livisda staged revolts at the same time as those in Thessaly attacking and pillaging Berat and other cities of the despotate.²⁸

It is known that the Albanians, continuously on the lookout for new pastureland, moved out of Arbanon (the region of Elbasan) and of the triangle Ohrid-Durrës-Kruië. They descended in two major immigrant-groups to the South following the axis of the valleys and the rivers. The first group, with a great number of interim stops of unequal duration, reached Thessaly via the regions around Kastoria. The second, again with many incremental stops of diverse length, arrived in Northern Epeiros.²⁹ The chief preoccupations of the immigrant clans were cattle-

25. On the presence of Albanians in Epeiros prior to the 13th century, see N.G. Ziangos, *Φεουδαρχική Ήπειρος και Δεσποτάτο της Ελλάδας: Συμβολή στο Νέο Ελληνισμό* (Athens 1974) 205-231 and especially the late A. Kollias, *Αρβανίτες και η καταγωγή των Ελλήνων: Ιστορική-Λαογραφική-Πολιτιστική-Γλωσσολογική Επισκόπηση* (Athens' 1992) 117-135, who believes that from antiquity Albanians and Greeks, both sharing the same civilization and culture, were living together not only in Epeiros, but also in other districts in Greece.

26. V. Panagiotopoulos (1985), 68-73.

27. G. Tafel – G. Tomas (1856), 500. See also V. Psimouli (1998), 30 and note 16.

28. For the history of the Despotate of Epeiros, see D. Nicol (1957); N.G. Ziangos, *Φεουδαρχική Ήπειρος και Δεσποτάτο της Ελλάδας: Συμβολή στο Νέο Ελληνισμό* (Athens 1974), where most of the related literature is given.

29. For a definition of this particular, see note 1.

breeding, robbery and war-making. The chronicle of the Tocco characterised them as ‘swineherds’,³⁰ implying heavy stock-breeding.³¹ Lacking even essential provisions, they exploited the lands and moved on. Apart from the clan-leaders, who held the castles together with a number of soldiers, the rest of the population lived in scattered, temporary, small settlements (‘katund’);³² when the security of the castle was threatened, the Albanian shepherds ran to its defence.³³ The different clans acted independently of each other.

After the death of Stefan Dŭsan and the battle of Achelouos, the Albanian clans established themselves in Epeiros. The indigenous population, decimated by the demographic crisis of the 14th century and especially by the Black Death,³⁴ probably did not react negatively to the newcomers, from whom it was neither linguistically nor culturally alienated. Thus, at the beginning of the 15th century the Albanians were consolidated in Epeiros. Apart from the clan of Shpata, who took control of Arta, the Chronicles also mention the clans of the Malakash, Mazaraq, Zenebis and Zulan.

Laonikos Chalkokondyles is explicit when it comes to questions concerning Albanian immigration to the province of Gjirokaštër and the character of the Albanian immigrants themselves:³⁵ ‘Ἀλβανοὶ δὲ ὠρμημένοι ἀπὸ Ἐπιδάμνου καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἔω βαδίζοντες Θετταλίαν τε ὑπήγοντο σφίσι καὶ τῆς μεσογαίου Μακεδονίας τὰ πλέω, Ἀργυροπολίχνην τε καὶ Καστορίαν. Ἀφικόμενοι δὲ ἐπὶ Θετταλίαν τήν τε χώραν σφίσιν ὑποχείριον ποιησάμενοι καὶ τὰς πόλεις ἐπιδιελόμενοι, κατὰ σφᾶς ἐνέμοντο τὴν χώραν, νομάδες τε ὄντες καὶ οὐδαμῇ ἔτι βέβαιον σφῶν αὐτῶν τὴν

30. G. Schirò (1975), verse 1426.

31. By heavy stock-breeding I mean the breeding of heavy animals, such as swine, cows, calves, oxen, etc. in contrast to light stock-breeding, meaning the breeding of light animals, such as sheep and goats.

32. G. Schirò (1975), verses 171, 2075, 2225.

33. *op. cit.*, verses 909 and ff.

34. K. Giakoumis, *The monasteries of Jorgucat and Vanishtë in Dropull and of Spelaio in Lunxhëri as Monuments and Institutions during the Ottoman Period in Albania (16th-19th Centuries)*, Ph.D. thesis submitted in the CBOMGS, University of Birmingham (Birmingham 2002) (hereafter cited as Giakoumis K. [2002], 50-53).

35. L. Chalkokondyles (1922), v. 1, chapter 4, p. 196, verses 15-22.

οἴκησιν ποιούμενοι' (The Albanians, originating in Durrës and marching towards the south, subdued Thessaly, most parts of central Macedonia, Gjirokastër and Kastoria for themselves. After arriving at Thessaly, they set their hands on the land and ravaged the cities; they exploited the land for their own purposes, for they were nomads and did not yet settle permanently in any place). As noted earlier, the Albanians left the regions of the triangle Ohrid-Durrës-Kruië and moved southwards. According to the sources, there were two migrant groups, the one which travelled via Ohrid and ended in Thessaly while the other, moving through Këlcyrë, reached Gjirokastër and the despotate. The purpose of their occupation was to search for new pasture lands. The combination of fertile plains and mountains rich in grasslands in the region of Gjirokastër was ideal for the poor nomadic Albanians who did not hesitate to ravage cities when they lacked provisions. Upon arrival, these nomads did not normally settle permanently in one place, but rather lived in temporary, impromptu settlements, the 'katunds', perhaps following the example of the rival nomadic Vlachs, who must have had already consolidated themselves in the region as did the Vlachs of Thessaly.³⁶

It is known that the clan of Zenebis arrived and settled in the province of Gjirokastër. As noted above, the Zenebis family is first mentioned in two Angevin documents of 1304,³⁷ where they are mentioned as land holders in regions controlled by the Angevins, a territory which extended, according to Xhufi, along the coastal zone among Himarrë, Gjirokastër and Preveza.³⁸ The Zenebis clan was possibly included among the 'Albanians around Pogoniani and

36. There is evidence of the presence of Vlachs at least from 1361, when the Vlachs of the village Suhë are mentioned in a chrysobull of the Despot Symeon Palaeologos P. Aravantinos (1856), v. 2, 311-314; cf. K. Stergiopoulos, *Παρατηρήσεις εις την Νεωτέραν Γεωγραφίαν της Ηπείρου* (Athens 1937) 37; N. Papadopoulos (1976), 21-22, 26-27. In the *mufassal defter* of 1520 an entire *nahiye* of Vlachs was registered (F. Duka [1991]). Vlachs were also mentioned in the villages of Vodhino and Luvinë [P. Xhufi (1994), p. 54]. On the Vlachs of Thessaly, see A. Rizos, 'The Vlachs of Larissa in the 10th century', *BS* 51 (1990) fasc. 2, 202-207.

37. L. Thalloczy – K. Jirecek – M. Sufflay (1913) 166a, doc. 563 and 167-168, doc. 569.

38. P. Xhufi (1994) 47-48 and note 133.

Livisda', who, according to John Kantakouzenos, having penetrated as far as Këlcyrë in 1337, sacked Berat and other cities of Epeiros, after the death of Andronikos III Palaiologos (15 June 1341).³⁹ The first mention in the Chronicle of Ioannina concerning the Zenebis as rulers of the provinces of Gjirokaštër and Dropull is in the last quarter of the 14th century.⁴⁰ In 1380 they are mentioned together with the Mazaraq as participants in the battle of Politzes against the allied forces of the despot Thomas and Isayim, the head of the Ottoman frontier forces (üç bey), in which the Albanians were defeated. In 1382 Thomas Preljubos with the help of the Ottoman forces subordinated the Albanian clans of Zulan and Zenebis in the north of Ioannina and recaptured the provinces of Vella, Dropull and Vagenitia.⁴¹ Two years later, Isayim (later called Shahin Pasha) occupied Dropull (1384).⁴² Shortly thereafter, the Zenebis regained control, probably contingent upon a small tribute due to the Ottomans as a token of vassalage. It seems, however, that a gradual slackening in performing the obligations of vassalage provided incentive for a new Ottoman attack under Evrenoz bey against Gjin Zenebis at the end of 1395-beginning of 1396.⁴³ In 1399 the despot of Ioannina, Isaù Buontelmonti, whilst at peace with Shpata, moved against Gjin Zenebis. His army consisted of men from the Malakash and Mazara clans, as well as from Zagor-Dropull and great Zagori. At the battle of Mesopotamon in the region of Vagenitia (today the Delvinë region) Isaù was defeated outright and held in captivity.⁴⁴ As a consequence of the victory, Gjin Zenebis extended his territory to the entire northern part of Vagenitia. In accordance with negotiations for the release of the captive despot Isaù, the Venetians addressed Gjin Zenebis as

39. Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris, *Historiarum Libri IV* 2 (Bonn 1930) 81. John Cantacuzenus located the sacks in the cities of Acarnania; for a survey of the use of the term in John Kantakouzenos see: V. Psimouli (1998) 35; for the penetration of the Albanians in Këlcyrë see V. Psimouli (1998) 34.

40. V. Psimouli (1998) 51-52.

41. For these events see L. Vranousis (1965) 90-92; P. Aravantinos (1856), v. 1, 146; V. Psimouli (1998) 51, 460.

42. L. Vranousis (1965) 92-93; D. Nicol (1957) 150-151; V. Psimouli (1998) 461.

43. L. Vranousis (1965) 98-99; V. Psimouli (1998) 462.

44. P. Aravantinos (1856), v. 2, 44, 105; V. Psimouli (1998) 51.

‘albanensem Jahannem sevastokratora’, while in 1400 they pleaded for peace to ‘Geomi Zenebissi qui tenet terram de la Sayata’.⁴⁵ Thus, the turn of the century found the Zenebis well established in the provinces of Gjirokaštër.

The Zenebis dominated these lands until 1418, when the Ottomans began the second stage of conquest and occupied the castle of Gjirokaštër, expelling the clan.⁴⁶ The consequences of the resistance of Zenebis against the transformation of vassal tributes into complete annexation were overwhelming: the Chronicle of Tocco describes them as causing the complete extermination and displacement of the Albanians from the regions of Gjirokaštër.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is my opinion that the chronicle’s description is exaggerated, since, according to Psimouli, the poor branches of the Zenebis family must have responded positively to the invitation of the Ottomans to re-settle these regions.⁴⁸ My opinion is supported by a passage in Laonikos Chalkokondyles who, in describing the attitude of the Albanians who had remained in the rebellion of Depa Zenebis (1432),⁴⁹ referred to them as ‘οἱ μέντοι τῶν πρὸς τὴν Ἀργυροπολίχνην οἰκούντων Ἀλβανῶν οἱ λοιποί’ (the rest of the Albanians living around Gjirokaštër).⁵⁰ The more powerful branches of the Zenebis clan, after wandering through the Epeirote provinces, in which they were not allowed to settle by the despot Charles Tocco, finally passed to the Peloponnese.⁵¹ The Zenebis branch of the family, being citizens of Venice, found refuge in Corfu.⁵²

45. L. Vranousis (1965) 100; D. Nicol (1957) 164, note 21; V. Psimouli (1998) 52, 460.

46. For the Ottoman advance and consolidation in Epeiros during the 15th century, see K. Giakoumis, ‘The Ottoman Advance and Consolidation in Epeiros during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century’, forthcoming.

47. G. Schirò (1975) 79-82 and verses 3174-3223, 3274-3303.

48. V. Psimouli (1998) 56-57.

49. On this rebellion, as well as other rebellions around that year, see K. Giakoumis (2002) 13-15.

50. L. Chalkokondyles (1922), v. 2, chapter 4, p. 29: 1-3.

51. Schirò G. (1975) 79-82 and verses 3174-3223, 3274-3303; V. Psimouli (1998) 51-52 and 56-57; J. Drançolli (1987) 155-156; P. Xhufi (1991) 16-17 and note 81 on p. 16.

52. G. Schirò (1975) 79-82 and verses 3174-3223, 3274-3303; V. Psimouli (1998) 57.

There is insufficient evidence for reliable conclusions about the sort of reception that the Albanian immigrants received. Scanty and highly limited evidence, such as the presence of Albanian-speaking populations in the regions in question prior to the immigrations of the thirteenth-fourteenth century, cannot, as I have shown above, offer secure conclusions. It is possible that some of the Vlachs, who had previously settled in the region, the local intelligentsia and, certainly, the old, ruling class, all of whom were affected by the presence of immigrants and their powerful rulers, must have resisted in some way the ambitions of the newcomers to rule these lands. These are the same circles who in 1399 allied themselves to the despot Isaù in the latter's campaign against Gjin Zenebis. The narrative sources, though, do not describe the social influence of this class.

In the present study I attempted to challenge the opinions of 'older' Greek and Albanian historiography that the regions of Gjirokaštër were inhabited solely either by Greek or Albanian populations by piecing together historical and linguistic evidence. I maintained that Greek-speaking and Albanian-speaking populations had all along been living together in Epeiros in the period in question. Furthermore, I presented evidence that in the fourteenth century immigrant Albanians taking advantage of the decimation of the local Epeirote population by the Black Death also migrated into the regions of Gjirokaštër. Moreover, I suggested that the reactions of local milieux against the new settlers, as expressed by their participation in the campaign of Isaù against Gjin Zenebis (1399), should be attributed to the disintegration of the previous local elites rather than to resistance against a 'foreign' invasion. Further linguistic research of the thoroughness of A. Spyrou's work is a *desideratum* for the advance of our knowledge on the subject dealt with in this article.

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