

# ALBANIA IN MIDDLE AGES

## THE ALBANIAN PRINCIPALITIES

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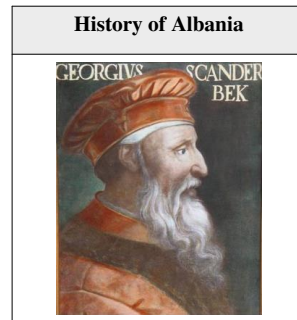
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# Albanian Principalities



The term **Albanian Principalities** refers to a number of principalities created in the Middle Ages in Albania and Epirus that were ruled by Albanian noblemen. The 12th century marked the first Albanian principality, the Principality of Arbër, however it is in the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century that these principalities became stronger, especially because of the fall of the Serbian Empire. Most of these principalities were united in 1444 under the Albanian state, called League of Lezha.

## List of Albanian Principalities

Nr	Principality	Flag	Years
1	Principality of Arbër		1190-1255
2	Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto		1358-1374
3	Principality of Valona and Kanina		1332-1417
4	Despotate of Arta		1358-1416
5	Principality of Gjirokaštër		1386-1434
6	League of Lezha		1444-1479
7	Muzakaj Principality of Berat		1335-1444
8	Principality of Kastrioti		1389-1444
9	Principality of Dukagjini		1387-1444
10	Princedom of Albania		1368-1444
11	State of Arianiti		1432-1444

## Principality of Arbër

The **Principality of Arbër** (1190–1255) was the first Albanian state during the Middle Ages. The proclamation of the feudal state of Arberia, in the north of Albania, with Kruja as the capital took place on 1190. As the founder of this state is known Progoni and later on Gjini and Dhimiter. Nderfandina is known as the most important center of this principality. For this was spoken clearly by the emblem of Arber found carved on a stone in the Catholic Church of Saint Maria. After the fall of Progon Dynasty the principality came under Grigor Kamona and Gulam of Albania. Finally the Principality was dissolved on 1255. The best period of the principality was under Dhimiter Progoni.

## Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto

**Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto** (1358 - 1374) was a Despotate, ruled by Albanian chieftains of Epirus. It was created after the defeat of Nikephoros II Orsini in 1358 and ceased to exist in 1374, when its despot, Gjin Bua Shpata, unified the territory with Despotate of Arta.<sup>[1] [2] [3]</sup>

## Principality of Valona

The **Principality of Valona** (1346–1417) was a medieval state roughly encompassing the territories of the modern Albanian counties of Vlorë (Valona) and Berat. Initially a vassal of the Serbian Empire, it became an independent lordship after 1355 until conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1417.

## Despotate of Arta

**Despotate of Arta** (1358 - 1416) was a Despotate, ruled by Albanian chieftains of Epirus. It was created after the defeat of Nikephoros II Orsini in 1358 and ceased to exist in 1416.<sup>[1] [2] [3]</sup> After the death of Peter Losha in 1374, the Albanian despotates of Arta and Angelokastron were united under the rule of Despot Gjin Bua Shpata. The territory of this despotate was from the Corinth Gulf to Acheron River in the North, neighboring with the Principality of Gjon Zenebishi, another state created in the area of the Despotate of Epirus. The Despotate of Epirus managed to control in this period only the eastern part of Epirus, with its capital in Ioannina. During this period the Despotate of Epirus was ruled by Thomas II Preljubović, who was in an open conflict with Gjin Bue Shpata. In 1375, Gjin Bue Shpata started an offensive in Ioannina, but he couldn't invade the city. Although Shpata married with the sister of Thomas II Preljubović, Helena their war did not stop. After the death of Gjin Bua Shpata in 1399, the Despotate of Arta weakened continuously. Among the animosities with the rulers of Janina Gjin's successor, Muriq Shpata, had to deal with the intentions of the Venetians and of Count Carlo I Tocco of Cefalonia. In 1416 he defeated Jakup Shpata and conquered Arta, ending the Shpata dynasty.

## Principality of Gjirokaštër

**Principality of Gjirokaštër** (1386 - 1434) was a principality created by Gjon Zenebishi in 1386 and abolished after the Ottoman invasion in 1434. In 1380, Gjon Zenebishi was appointed *sebastocrator* or prefect of Vagenetia near Delvina and in 1386 he became Prince. In 1399 Esau, supported by some Albanian clans, marched against his wife's brother-in-law John Zenevisi of Argyrokastron. Now Esau was routed and captured, and much of his land was occupied by Zenevisi. Esau returned to Ioannina in 1400, regaining the reign from Zenebishi. Zenebishi was defeated by the Turks, he fled to the Venetian island of Corfu, but was called back two years later (1416) by an uprising of the mountain tribes. With the support of Venice, he again set his sights on Gjirokastra, but was chased away once more by the Turks and died in Corfu in 1418. He was succeeded by his son Bua Thopia, who lost the principality to Turks in 1434.

## Muzaka Principality

**Principality of Berat** or **Muzakaj Principality** (1335 - 1444) was a principality created by despot Andrea II Muzaka in 1335, with its capital Berat. The principality was united with other Albanian Principalities in the League of Lezhë in 1444.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Kastrioti Principality

**Principality of Kastrioti** (1389 - 1444) was one of the most important principalities in Medieval Albania. It was created by Gjon Kastrioti and then ruled by the national hero of Albania, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg. Gjon Kastrioti had originally only two small villages, which probably emblem of the eagle family with a black two-headed, even if it can provide different interpretations. In short time John Kastrioti managed to expand its lands so as to become the undisputed lord of Central Albania. Gjon Kastrioti was among those who opposed<sup>[5]</sup> the early incursion of Ottoman Bayezid I, however his resistance was ineffectual. The Sultan, having accepted his submissions, obliged him to pay tribute and to ensure the fidelity of local rulers, George Kastrioti and his three brothers were taken by the Sultan to his court as hostages. Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg was distinguished as one of the best officers in several Ottoman campaigns both in Asia Minor and in Europe, and the Sultan appointed him General. On November 28, 1443, Skanderbeg saw his opportunity to rebel during a battle against the Hungarians led by John Hunyadi in Niš as part of the Crusade of Varna. He switched sides along with 300 other Albanians serving in the Ottoman army. After a long trek to Albania he eventually captured Krujë by forging a letter<sup>[5]</sup> from the Sultan to the Governor of Krujë, which granted him control of the territory. After capturing the castle, Skanderbeg<sup>[6]</sup> abjured Islam and proclaimed himself the avenger of his family and country. Following the capture of Krujë, Skanderbeg managed to bring together all the Albanian princes in the town of Lezhë<sup>[7]</sup> (see League of Lezhë, 1444). Gibbon<sup>[6]</sup> reports that the *"Albanians, a martial race, were unanimous to live and die with their hereditary prince"* and that *"in the assembly of the states of Epirus, Skanderbeg was elected general of the Turkish war and each of the allies engaged to furnish his respective proportion of men and money"*.

## Dukagjini Principality

**Principality of Dukagjini** (1387 - 1444) was one of the most important principalities in Medieval Albania. It was created by brothers Pal and Leka I Dukagjini and then ruled by Pal's descendants, Tanush Dukagjini, Pal II Dukagjini, who took part in the League of Lezha. Pal's son, Lekë III Dukagjini is one of the most prominent personalities in Albanian history.

## Princedom of Albania

**Princedom of Albania** (1368-1443) was an Albanian Principality formed after the disestablishment of Kingdom of Albania, by Karl Thopia. The principality changed hands between the Thopia dynasty and the Balsha dynasty, until 1392, when it was occupied by the ottoman Empire. When Skanderbeg liberated Kruja and reorganised the Principality of Kastrioti, the descendant of Gjergj Thopia, Andrea II Thopia, managed to regain control of the Princedom. Finally, it was united with other Albanian Principalities forming the League of Lezha in 1444.

## State of Arianiti

**State of Arianiti** (1432–1444) was a principality created by prince Gjergj Arianiti in 1432, with its capital Berat. The Principality was created, after the division of the Muzakaj Principality of Berat and was united with other Albanian Principalities in the League of Lezhë in 1444.<sup>[4]</sup>

## League of Lezha

The **League of Lezhë** (2 March 1444 - 25 April 1479) was a confederation of all Albanian Principalities, created in the Assembly of Lezha in 2 March 1444. The league was led by Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and after his death by Lekë Dukagjini. Skanderbeg organized a meeting of Albanian nobles, the Arianits, Dukagjin, Spani, Thopias, Muzakas, and the leaders of the free Albanian principalities from the high mountains, in the town of Lezhë, where the nobles agreed to fight together for mutual gain against the common Turkish enemy and they voted Skanderbeg as their suzerain chief. The League of Lezhë was a confederation and each principality kept its sovereignty.

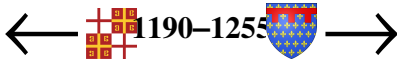

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- [2] John V.A. Fine Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans*, Ann Arbor, 1987.
- [3] *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford University Press, 1991.
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- [5] James Emerson Tennent, 1845, *The History of Modern Greece, from Its Conquest by the Romans B.C.146, to the Present Time*
- [6] Edward Gibbon, 1788, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume 6, Scanderbeg section (<http://books.google.com/books?id=b8ETAAAAYAAJ&printsec=titlepage#PPA462,M1Scanderbeg>)
- [7] Minna Skafte Jensen, 2006, *A Heroic Tale: Marin Barleti's Scanderbeg between orality and literacy* (<http://miqesia.dk/Barleti-Scanderbeg.htm>)

*"History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science. ISBN 99927-1-623-1*

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# Principality of Arbër

<b>Principata e Arbërit</b> <b>Principality of Arbër</b>	
Principality <sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[2]</sup>	
	
	
Flag of the Principality of Arber	
<b>Capital</b>	Kruja
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Catholic
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Prince</b>	
- 1190-1198	Progon
- 1253-1255	Gulam of Albania
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	1190 1190
- Disestablished	1255 1255

The **Principality of Arbër** or **Arbëria** (1190–1255) was the first Albanian state during the Middle Ages.<sup>[3]</sup> The proclamation of the feudal state of Arbëria, in the north of Albania, with Kruja as the capital took place on 1190.<sup>[4]</sup> As the founder of this state is known Progoni and later on Gjini and Dhimiter. Nderfandina is known as the most important center of this principality. For this was spoken clearly by the emblem of Arber found carved on a stone in the Catholic Church of Saint Maria. After the fall of Progon Dynasty the principality came under Grigor Kamona and Gulam of Albania. Finally the Principality was dissolved on 1255. The best period of the principality was under Dhimiter Progoni.



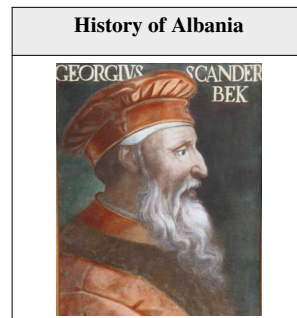
## Princes

### Progon Dynasty

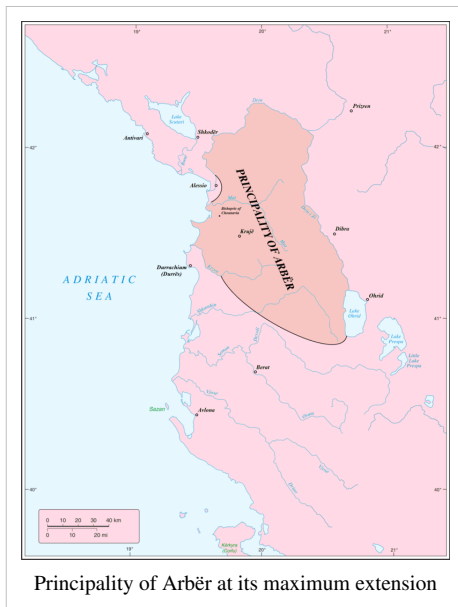
- Progon (1190–1198)
- Gjin Progoni (1198–1208)
- Dhimitër Progoni (1208–1216)

### Others

- Grigor Kamona (1216–1253?)
- Gulam (1253?–1255)



## Under Dhimitër



Dhimitër Progoni was the third and the last Prince of Albania from the Progon Dynasty, reigning between 1208 and 1216. He succeeded his brother Gjin and brought the principality to its climax.<sup>[5]</sup> Western sources of the time attribute him the titles *judex* ("judge") and *princeps Arbanorum* ("prince of the Albanians"),<sup>[6]</sup> while Byzantine records refer to him as *meas archon* ("grand archon").<sup>[7]</sup> Marrying Komnena, the daughter of the Serbian Prince Stefan Nemanjić and granddaughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios III Angelos, he also earned the exalted Byzantine title *panhypersebastos*.

Dhimitër's marriage with Nemanjić's daughter did not rule out the risk of a Serbian expansion toward the Albanian domains. However, in 1204, the most serious threat came from the Venetian Duchy of Durrës, a Latin entity formed after the Fourth Crusade in the former territories of the Byzantine Empire. In search for allies, Dhimitër signed in 1209 a treaty with the Republic of Ragusa and began negotiations with Pope Innocent III regarding his and his subjects' conversion to Catholicism.

## Succession

Dhimitër had no son to succeed him. His wife, Komnena, married an Albanian noble, Grigor Kamona, who became the ruler of principality.<sup>[8]</sup> Grigor Kamona saw a decadence of the principality and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Gulam. Under Gulam's rule, the principality ended.

## References

- [1] Clements' encyclopedia of world governments, Volume 10 Author John Clements Publisher Political Research, inc., 1992 p. 31 "By 1190, Byzantium's power had so receded that the archon Progon succeeded in establishing the first Albanian state of the Middle Ages, a principality"
- [2] The history of Albania: a brief survey Author Kristo Frashëri Publisher s.n., 1964 p.42"The territories of this principality extended over the present- day districts of central Albania. Its capital was at Kruja. The first ruler of the Principality of Arberia was Archon Progon (1190-1198) about whose life and doings we know.."
- [3] Clements' encyclopedia of world governments, Volume 10 Author John Clements Publisher Political Research, inc., 1992 p. 31 "*By 1190, Byzantium's power had so receded that the archon Progon succeeded in establishing the first Albanian state of the Middle Ages, a principality*"
- [4] The history of Albania: a brief survey Author Kristo Frashëri Publisher s.n., 1964 p.42"*The territories of this principality extended over the present- day districts of central Albania. Its capital was at Kruja. The first ruler of the Principality of Arberia was Archon Progon (1190-1198) about whose life and doings we know..*"
- [5] Anamali, Skënder and Prifti, Kristaq. Historia e popullit shqiptar në katër vëllime. Botimet Toena, 2002, ISBN 9992716223 p.198
- [6] Fontes Fontes, Catholic Church. Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici Orientalis Recognoscendo Author Catholic Church. Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici Orientalis Recognoscendo Publisher Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1943 p. 338
- [7] Zogo ve Atatürk Author Tayfun Atmaca Publisher Tayfun Atmaca, 2007 ISBN 975-94215-1-8, 9789759421519 p. 44
- [8] The history of Albania: a brief survey Author Kristo Frashëri Publisher s.n., 1964 p.43 *After the death of Dhimiter in 1216, a native noble by the name of Grigor Kamona was elected as ruler of Arberia.*

## Sources

- *History of Albanian People*. Albanian Academy of Science. ISBN 99927-1-623-1

# Progon of Kruja

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**Progon** was the Albanian ruler of the Principality of Arbër in the 12th century.<sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[2]</sup> He gained the possessions of Kruja fortress and the lands surrounding it between 1190 and 1198 and had the title of *archon* (mentioned in the Gëziq inscription).<sup>[3]</sup>

After the castle of Kruja became his possession, Progon proclaimed himself a Prince in 1190.<sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[4]</sup>

He was succeeded by his son Gjini who later was succeeded by Dhimitër Progoni. He founded the Progon Dynasty which would possess the lands until 1216 when Grigor Kamona took the throne.<sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[5]</sup>

## Family

- Gjini Progoni, ruled 1198-1208
- Dhimitër Progoni, ruled 1208–1216, married Komnena Nemanja, daughter of the Serbian Prince Stefan Nemanja in 1202.<sup>[1]</sup>

## References

- [1] Akademia Shqiptare e Shkencave - Historia E Popullit Shqiptar 2002 edition p.197 (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/23318421/Akademia-Shqiptare-e-Shkencave-Historia-E-Popullit-Shqiptar>)
- [2] The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century (<http://books.google.se/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC>)
- [3] Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250 (<http://books.google.se/books?id=YIAYMNOOe0YC&pg=PA340>)
- [4] The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century (<http://books.google.se/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC>)
- [5] The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century (<http://books.google.se/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC>)

# Gjini Progoni

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**Gjini Progoni** was a *archon* (lord) of Kruja, in present-day Albania ca 1200 until his death in 1208.<sup>[1]</sup> He succeeded his father, Progon, becoming the second ruler of the House of Progon. He was succeeded himself by his younger brother Dhimitër.

## References

- [1] The New Cambridge Medieval History: c. 1198-c. 1300 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=belfdU\\_2lesC&pg=PA786](http://books.google.com/books?id=belfdU_2lesC&pg=PA786))

# Dhimitër Progoni

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**Dhimitër Progoni** was the third and the last Prince of Arbër from the Progon Dynasty, reigning from 1208 to 1216. He succeeded his brother Gjin Progoni and brought the principality to its maximum. Western sources of the time attribute him with the titles *judex* (judge) and *princeps Arbanorum* (prince of the Albanians), while Byzantine records refer to him as *megas archon* (grand lord). In 1208 he married Komnena Nemanjić, daughter of the Serbian King Stefan Nemanjić, he secured a brief peace with Serbia<sup>[1]</sup>. Dhimitër also earned the exalted Byzantine title *panhypersebastos*.

Dhimitër's marriage with Nemanja's daughter did not rule out the risk of a Serbian expansion toward the Albanian domains. However, in 1204, the most serious threat came from the Venetian Duchy of Dyrhachium, a Latin entity formed after the Fourth Crusade in the former territories of the Byzantine Empire. In search for allies, Dhimitër signed a treaty with the Republic of Ragusa in 1209 and began negotiations with Pope Innocent III regarding his and his subjects' conversion to Catholicism. This is considered a tactful move, which Dhimitër undertook to establish ties with Western Europe against Venice.

Dhimitër had no son to succeed him. After his death, his wife, Komnena, married an Albanian noble, Grigor Kamona, who later became Prince of Albania. His closest ally was an archon named Dhimiter Gaba the 3rd.<sup>[2]</sup>

## References

- Jubani, Zef et al. *Historia e popullit shqiptar: për shkollat e mesme*. Libri Shkollor: Prishtinë, 2003. 48.

[1] [http://books.google.com/books?id=bclfdU\\_2lesC&pg=PA786](http://books.google.com/books?id=bclfdU_2lesC&pg=PA786)

[2] Zeqo, Moikom. *Kur lindi shteti tek shqiptarët?*. Albasoul.com (<http://www.albasoul.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=245>)

# Gregory Kamonas

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**Gregory Kamonas** (Albanian: *Grigor Kamona*, Greek: Γρηγόριος Καμωνάς, Serbian: Grgur Kamonas<sup>[1]</sup>) was a Greek<sup>[2]</sup> -Albanian<sup>[3]</sup> *archon* (lord, prince) of Kroja<sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[4]</sup> and Elbasan<sup>[1]</sup>, between 1216 and 1253. He married Serbian princess Komnena Nemanjić<sup>[3]</sup>, the daughter of King Stefan Nemanjić, and widow of the Prince of Arbër Dhimitër Progoni, thus inheriting the rule and securing it through an Orthodox alliance.<sup>[3]</sup> He allegedly had the title of *sebastos*.

He had a daughter together with Komnena, who married Golem of Kruja, his successor.<sup>[4]</sup>

## References

[1] Genealogy, The Nemanjiden (<http://genealogy.euweb.cz/balkan/balkan5.html>): Kominia; 1m: Dimitri Progonovic, Archon of Albania (+1215); 2m: 1215 Grgur Kamonas, Archon of Kroja and Elasan

[2] Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen (<http://books.google.com/books?id=Jr9DAAAAYAAJ&q=gregorios+kamonas>), page 239: "...*Griechen Gregorios Kamonas*..."

[3] The New Cambridge Medieval History: c. 1198-c. 1300 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=bclfdU\\_2lesC&pg=PA786](http://books.google.com/books?id=bclfdU_2lesC&pg=PA786)), page 786: "*the Greco-Albanian lord Gregorios Kamonas*... ..took *Komnena* as his second wife"

[4] The Genealogist (<http://books.google.com/books?id=J7pnAAAAMAAJ&q=gregorios+kamonas&dq=gregorios+kamonas>), page 40: "*Golem married the daughter of Gregorios Kamonas, Prince of Kroia c. 1215*"

# Golem of Kruja

**Golem** (Greek: **Goulamos**<sup>[1]</sup>, Albanian: *Gulam*) was an Albanian lord and vassal of Kruja and Elbasan in circa 1254.<sup>[2]</sup> He married the daughter of *sebastos* Gregorios Kamonas and Komnena Nemanjić and was thus entitled the rule of his father-in-law.<sup>[2]</sup>

During the conflicts between Michael II Komnenos Doukas of Epirus and Emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes, Golem and Theodore Petraliphas, who were initially Michael's allies, defected to John III in 1252.<sup>[3]</sup> [1]

## References

- [1] George Akropolites: the history ([http://books.google.com/books?id=v\\_0LdWboHXwC&pg=PA73](http://books.google.com/books?id=v_0LdWboHXwC&pg=PA73)), page 73: "*Goulamos defected to the Emperor*"
- [2] The Genealogist (<http://books.google.com/books?id=J7pnAAAAMAAJ&q=gregorios+kamonas&dq=gregorios+kamonas>), page 40: "*Golem... Lord of Kruja and Elbasan circa 1254... married the daughter of Gregorios Kamonas*"
- [3] <http://books.google.com/books?id=3zXFCs9EfEYC&pg=PA134>



# Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto

*Not to be confused with Despotate of Epirus, or with the Despotate of Arta, with which it was eventually unified.*

<b>Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto</b>	
Despotate	
<p>← 1358–1374  →</p>	
	
Flag of the Shpata Family and the Despotate of Arta	
	
Map of the Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto	
<b>Capital</b>	Angelokastron
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian, Greek
<b>Religion</b>	Eastern Orthodox Church
<b>Government</b>	Monarchy
<b>Despot</b>	
- 1358-1374	Gjin Bua Shpata <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	April 1358

- Unified with the Despotate of Arta	1374
<b>Warning:</b> <i>Value specified for "continent" does not comply</i>	

The **Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto** was a short-lived despotate ruled by the Albanian chieftain Gjin Bua Shpata, in the late medieval period including parts of Western Greece. It was created after the defeat of Nikephoros II Orsini, Despot of Epirus in the Battle of Achelous, in 1359 and ceased to exist in 1374, when its ruler, unified the territory with the Despotate of Arta.<sup>[2] [3]</sup>

## References

- [1] Initially as Despot of Angelokastron, then became despot of Arta and Angelokastron after the death of Peter Losha
- [2] "History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science.ISBN 99927-1-623-1
- [3] John V.A. Fine Jr., The Late Medieval Balkans (<http://books.google.com/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC&pg=PR3&dq=John+V.A.+Fine+The+Late+Medieval+Balkans,+Ann+Arbor&hl=el&cd=1#v=snippet&q=syata+noble&f=false>). Ann Arbor, 1987, 0. 350: "... these two Albanian chieftains"

# Gjin Bua Shpata

**Gjin Bua Shpata** (died 1399), also known as **John Bua Spata**, was an Albanian ruler of the Despotate of Arta.<sup>[1]</sup> He was part of the noble Shpata family.<sup>[2]</sup> He was also despot of Angelokastro and Acheloos (1358–1399), Lord of Arta 1375, Lord of Lepanto, Despot of Arta and Lepanto.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Ruler and Despot of Arta

In the summer of 1358, Nikephoros II Doukas, the last despot of Epirus that belonged to the Orsini dynasty, fought against the Albanian forces in the Battle of Achelous (1359) near the river Acheloos, Acarnania. The Albanians won the war and managed to create two new states in the Southern Despotate of Epirus.

After the fall of the Orsini dynasty of the Despotate of Epirus, the Serbian lords of Stefan Uroš IV Dušan, divided the territory between them and the Albanian rulers that supported the Serbian campaign.

The first of the two Albanian lead states had its capital in Arta and was under the Albanian nobleman Peter Losha. The second, centered in Angelokastron, was ruled by Gjin Bua Shpata. After the death of Peter Losha in 1374, the Albanian despotates of Arta and Angelocastron were united under the rule of Despot Gjin Bua Shpata. The territory of this Despotate was from the Corinth Gulf to Acheron River in the North. The Despotate of Epirus, just north of the Despotate of Arta, managed to control in this period only the eastern part of Epirus, together with Vagenetia (Thesprotia). Its capital was Ioannina.

North of the Despotate of Epirus was another Albanian state, the Principality of Gjon Zenebishti.

During this period the Despotate of Epirus was ruled by Thomas II Preljubović, who was in an open conflict with Gjin Bue Shpata. In 1375, Gjin Bue Shpata started an offensive in Ioannina, but he couldn't invade the city. Although Shpata married with the sister of Thomas II Preljubović (the Despot of Epirus), Helena, their war did not stop. In 1380 and 1382 Thomas II Preljubović allied with the Ottomans against Gjin Bua Shpata.<sup>[4]</sup>

In the same period Shpata started a war against Leonardo I Tocco, who was the ruler of Cefalonia and Leucada. Shpata died in 29 October of 1399, under the continuous pressure of Preljubović and Tocco, whose son would become the next despot of Epirus.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Shpata family

Gjin Bue Shpata was part of the noble Albanian Shpata and Boua families. His father Pietro Bua Shpata was lord of Gjirokastër and Delvina.<sup>[6]</sup> His genealogical family was as follows:

- A1. Nicolo, Protovestarios of Stefan Dushan King of Serbia (1345–49)
  - B1. Pietro, Lord of Angelokastron and Delvina 1354
    - C1. Gjin Bua Shpata
      - D1. Irene, fl 1403; m.1396 Esau de' Buondelmonti, Despot of Ioannina (+1403)
      - D2. a daughter, fl 1392; m.Gjon Zenebishti
      - D3. [illegitimate] Paolo Spata, Lord of Lepanto (1400–07), sold to Venetians, +after 1408
        - E1. a daughter, heiress of Dragomeste in 1402; m. N.H. Francesco Foscari, Patrizio Veneto (+before 1427)
        - E2. [parentage uncertain] Rosso Bua, "Baron of Morea" in 1423
          - F1. Gjin Bua, Baron of Morea in 1457
            - G1. Pietro Bua, Albanian master of clan in Morea (1453–89)
              - H1. Nicolo, "Stratioti" in 1500
                - I1. Mercurio/Maurizio, Count of Holy Empire 1510, +after 1527; m.1519 Caterina Bocalis
              - F2. Alessio Bua, Baron of Morea in 1457
- C2. Maurizio Bua Sgouros, Despot of Arta (1400) +killed by Carlo I Tocco Duke ofLeucada 1418
- C3. Comneno Spatas, fl 1392-1407
  - D1. a daughter; m.1392 Count Nicetas Thopia Lord of Kruja and Vlorë (+1415)
  - D2. Maurizio/Macer
    - E1. Comneno/Camusa Spata, Lord of Eximeno (1464–66), gave to Venetians 1466
    - E2. Count Giaras, lived in Agraphi by Lepanto in 1465
      - F1. Nicolo Sguros, Turkish vassal in 1518
      - F2. Giorgio Sguros, Turkish vassal in 1518
- B2. a daughter; m. Marco de Gozze, Noble of Ragusa (living 1349)
- A2. Michele, +1350
  - B1. Ripa, Lord of Meleda's island 1360<sup>[3]</sup>



Flag of the Family, and later of Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto and Despotate of Arta



## References

- [1] Encyclopedia Britannica "He (Stefan Dusan) was able to assert Serbian control over northern Epirus and fought with the Albanian lords of Arta (Ghin Bua Spata and Peter Ljoša) in the south, eventually defeating them with Ottoman help"
  - [2] The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present. Edwin E. Jacques. P. 166 ISBN 0899509320
  - [3] Marek, Miroslav. "Bua Spatas family" (<http://genealogy.euweb.cz/balkan/spatas.html>). . Retrieved 15 July 2010.
  - [4] Johnson, Raphael (2000). *TBR* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=HcnvAAAAMAAJ&q=Gjin+Bua+Shpata&dq=Gjin+Bua+Shpata&lr=&hl=en&cd=5>). TBR. **6**. TBR Co.. pp. 41. .
  - [5] "History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science. ISBN 9992716231
  - [6] Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Volumes 5-9 Author Università di Roma. Istituto di studi bizantini e neoellenici Publisher Istituto di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Università di Roma, 1968 Original from the University of Virginia
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# Principality of Valona

<b>Principality of Valona and Kanina</b>	
Principality	
<b>Capital</b>	Vlorë
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian, Greek, Serbian
<b>Religion</b>	Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Despot, later simply Lord</b>	
- 1346–1363	John Komnenos Asen
- 1414–1417	Ruđina Balšić
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Serbian conquest	1346
- <i>De facto</i> independence	1355
- Ottoman conquest	1417

The **Principality of Valona** (1346–1417) was a medieval principality in Albania, roughly encompassing the territories of the modern counties of Vlorë (Valona), Fier, and Berat. Initially a vassal of the Serbian Empire, it became an independent lordship after 1355 until conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1417.

## History

The strategically important city of Valona, on the coast of Albania, had been fought over repeatedly between the Byzantines and various Italian powers in the 13th century. Finally conquered by Byzantium in ca. 1290, it was one of the chief imperial holdings in the Balkans.<sup>[1]</sup> During the 1340s however, the Serbian ruler Stefan Dushan, taking advantage of a civil war, took Albania from the Byzantines. Valona fell in late 1345 or early 1346, and Dushan placed his brother-in-law, John Asen, brother of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander, in charge of Valona as his capital and Kanina and Berat as his main fortresses.<sup>[2] [3]</sup> The extent of John's authority over this territory is unclear; it is not known whether he was limited to the rule of these fortified cities, or whether the various local chieftains of central Albania reported to him as a representative of Dushan.<sup>[4] [5]</sup>

John was granted the rank of Despot by Dushan, and went on to solidify his control over his new territory by portraying himself as the heir to the Despots of Epirus. To that end, he married Anna Palaiologina, the widow of Despot John II Orsini, adopted the trappings of the Byzantine court, took on the surname "Komnenos" that was traditionally borne by the Epirote rulers, and signed his documents in Greek.<sup>[2] [6]</sup> After Dushan's death in 1355, the Despot John established himself as an independent lord. He maintained close relations with Venice (whose citizen he became) and with Simeon Uroš, ruler of Epirus in the south. Under his rule, Valona prospered through trade with Venice and the Republic of Ragusa (mod. Dubrovnik).<sup>[2] [7]</sup>

John died in 1363 from the plague, and was succeeded by Alexander, possibly his son, who ruled until ca. 1368. He continued his father's policies, maintaining close ties with Ragusa, whose citizenship he acquired.<sup>[7] [8] [9]</sup> In 1372, John's unnamed daughter was married to Balša II of the Serbo-Albanian House of Balšić, who received Valona,

Kanina, Berat and Himara as a dowry. Many of Valona's citizens fled to the island of Saseno and asked for Venetian protection.<sup>[10] [11] [12]</sup> Balša continued to expand his territory in the western Balkans, inheriting Zeta in 1378 and conquering Dyrrhachium from Karl Thopia soon after, whereupon he assumed the title "Duke of Albania", probably after the former Venetian province of the same name.<sup>[12]</sup> Thopia called on the Ottomans for help however, and Balša was killed in the Battle of Savra near Berat in 1385. His widow recovered control of her patrimonial territory, and ruled it thereafter jointly with her daughter Ruđina. Berat however had already fallen to the Musachi clan, and their lordship was now confined to the area around Valona, with Kanina, Himara and the fort of Pyrgos.<sup>[12] [13]</sup>

The principality was now faced with the ever-increasing Ottoman threat; in 1386, Balša's widow offered to cede Valona to Venice in exchange for aid, but the Republic refused, since Valona alone without her hinterland was indefensible. Following the decisive Ottoman victory at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the situation became yet more precarious. A similar offer in 1393 was also rejected by a Venice anxious not to antagonize the Ottomans, but another, more comprehensive proposal, followed two years later. Through the bishop of Albania, the widow offered to the handover of the entire principality in exchange for a life-long pension for her and her family of some 7,000 ducats drawn, from the principality's revenue (estimated at 9,000 ducats). Negotiations faltered after the widow's death in 1396.<sup>[14]</sup> She was succeeded by Ruđina, who in 1391 had married Mrkša Žarković. Threatened by Ottoman expansion, both Balša's widow and Mrkša repeatedly offered to surrender Valona and their principality to the Venetians, but they refused or procrastinated. After Mrkša's death in 1415, he was briefly succeeded by his widow Ruđina, until the Ottomans took the city in 1417.<sup>[15] [16] [17]</sup>

The Venetian bailo at Constantinople tried to obtain the return of the territory to Ruđina, who was a Venetian citizen, or alternatively purchase it for the Republic with up to 8,000 ducats, but nothing came of it.<sup>[18]</sup> With the exception of a brief Venetian occupation in 1690–91, the region remained under Ottoman rule until the First Balkan War and the establishment of an independent Albanian state.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Rulers

- John Komnenos Asen (1346–1363), Despot
- Alexander Komnenos Asen (1363–1368), Lord of Valona and Kanina<sup>[20]</sup>
- NN. Komnena Asanina (1368–1396), with
  - Balša II Balšić (1372–1385), Lord of Valona and Kanina, and eventually Duke of Albania<sup>[12]</sup>
- Ruđina Balšić (1396–1417), with
  - Mrkša Žarković (1396–1414), variously styled *dominus Avlonae* (Latin: "lord of Valona"), ἡγεμὼν Κανίνων (Greek: "lord of Kanina") or *Ré di Serbia* (Italian: "King of Serbia")<sup>[21]</sup>



Map of the Balkans ca. 1400

## References

- [1] Miller (1921), pp. 432–434
- [2] Miller (1921), p. 434
- [3] Fine (1994), p. 320
- [4] Fine (1994), pp. 320, 347, 357
- [5] Soulis (1984), p. 136
- [6] Fine (1994), pp. 320, 347
- [7] Fine (1994), p. 357
- [8] Soulis (1984), pp. 137–138
- [9] Miller (1921), pp. 434–435
- [10] Fine (1994), pp. 372, 383
- [11] Soulis (1984), p. 138
- [12] Miller (1921), p. 435
- [13] Fine (1994), pp. 390–391
- [14] Miller (1921), pp. 435–436
- [15] Fine (1994), p. 391
- [16] Soulis (1984), pp. 140–141
- [17] Miller (1921), pp. 436–437
- [18] Miller (1921), p. 437
- [19] Miller (1921), pp. 437–442
- [20] Soulis (1984), p. 137
- [21] Soulis (1984), p. 140

## Sources

- Fine, John Van Antwerp (1994), *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (<http://books.google.gr/books?id=Hh0Bu8C66TsC>), University of Michigan Press, ISBN 978-0472082605
  - Miller, William (1921), "Valona" (<http://books.google.com/books?id=Wcw7AAAAIAAJ>), *Essays on the Latin Orient*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 429–441
  - Soulis, George Christos (1984), *The Serbs and Byzantium during the reign of Tsar Stephen Dušan (1331–1355) and his successors*, Dumbarton Oaks, ISBN 0-88402-137-8
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## Balša II

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**Balša II** (died September 18, 1385) was the Ruler of Principality of Zeta and a member of the House of Balšić, which ruled Shkodra and Zeta from 1356 to 1435. Balsha II was the youngest of three sons of Balša I. On January 13, 1378, he came to power in Zeta after the death of his older brother, Đurađ I. His power was felt only in region around Shkodra and in the eastern part of Zeta's coast. The most prominent feudal lords who did not recognize Balsha's rule were the Đurašević-Crnojević family, encouraged by Venetians.

In 1372, Balša II married Komnina (Kanina), a daughter of John Komnenos Asen. As a dowry, Balsha gained the cities of Berat and Kanina.<sup>[1]</sup>

In 1382, Balša II started the war for the conquest of Durrës, taking it following four attempts. In 1385, defeated ruler Karl Topia appealed to Murat I for assistance and Ottoman Army led by Hajredin Pasha routed the Balšići the Battle of Savra near Berat. The Turks chopped Balša's head off and sent it as an exclusive gift to Hajredin Pasha. This ends the rule of his family over Durrës.



Balša's widow, Komnina, and their daughter Ruđina, later took control of Balša's territory in southern Albania to protect it from Turkish invaders. Komnina seemed to be the Duchy of Valona's main ruler, until her death in 1396. In the meantime, the Muzakaj family had gained control of Berat. In 1391, however, Ruđina married Mrkša Žarković. Žarković succeeded the duchy, calling himself *Lord of Valona*. He reigned over the city until his death in 1414. Ruđina took over her late husband's position and ruled Valona until 1417, when it, as well as its citadel in Kanina, was seized by the Turks.<sup>[2]</sup> Ruđina fled Albania and sought asylum in Zeta. Her nephew, Balša III, then-ruler of Zeta, granted her asylum and entrusted her with governorship of the coastal town of Budva.<sup>[3]</sup>

## References

- [1] The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest, page 372 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC&pg=PA533&lpg=PA533&dq=svetomiholjska+metohija&source=web&ots=8AnkP01Yen&sig=iXrTNSrJ-ZiCTf3aGwSrGlzGl2Q#PPA372,M1>)
- [2] The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest, page 391 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC&pg=PA533&lpg=PA533&dq=svetomiholjska+metohija&source=web&ots=8AnkP01Yen&sig=iXrTNSrJ-ZiCTf3aGwSrGlzGl2Q#PPA391,M1>)
- [3] The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest, page 514 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC&pg=PA511&lpg=PA511&dq=drivast&source=web&ots=8BgcJY8Vam&sig=h6vkryf786DiahzLA6wzyJDB1\\_M&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA514,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqIC&pg=PA511&lpg=PA511&dq=drivast&source=web&ots=8BgcJY8Vam&sig=h6vkryf786DiahzLA6wzyJDB1_M&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA514,M1))

# Despotate of Arta

*Not to be confused with the Despotate of Epirus.*

<b>Despotati i Artës</b> <b>Despotate of Arta</b>	
Despotate	
← 1358–1416 →	
	
Banner of Shpata Family and the Despotate of Arta	
	
Map of the Despotate of Arta	
<b>Capital</b>	Arta
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian, Greek, alongside other languages. <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Religion</b>	Eastern Orthodox Church
<b>Government</b>	Despotate
<b>Despot</b>	
- 1358-1374	Peter Losha
- 1374-1399	Gjin Bue Shpata <sup>[2]</sup>
- 1400-1401	Vango <sup>[3]</sup>
- 1401-1415	Muriq Shpata

- 1415-1416	Jakup Shpata
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	April 1358
- Unified with Angelokastron and Lepanto	1374
- Disestablished	4 October 1416
<b>Warning:</b> <i>Value specified for "continent" does not comply</i>	

The **Despotate of Arta** was a despotate established by Albanian rulers during the 14th century, when Albanian tribes moved into Epirus and founded two short-lived principalities there.<sup>[4]</sup> The Despotate of Arta was created after the defeat of the local Despot Nikephoros II Orsini by the Albania tribesmen in the Battle of Achelous in 1359 and ceased to exist in 1416, when it passed to Carlo I Tocco.<sup>[5] [6] [7]</sup>

## History

### Creation

In the late spring of 1359, Nikephoros II Orsini, the last despot of Epirus of the Orsini dynasty, fought against the Albanians near river Achelous, Aetolia. The Albanians won the battle and managed to create two new states in the southern territories of the Despotate of Epirus. Because a number of Albanian lords actively supported the successful Serbian campaign in Thessaly and Epirus, the Serbian Tsar granted them specific regions and offered them the Byzantine title of despotes in order to secure their loyalty.

The two Albanian lead states were: the first with its capital in Arta was under the Albanian nobleman Peter Losha, and the second, centered in Angelokastron, was ruled by Gjin Bua Shpata. After the death of Peter Losha in 1374, the Albanian despotates of Arta and Angelocastron were united under the rule of Despot Gjin Bua Shpata.

At April 1378 the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitaller, Juan Fernández de Heredia set about to take Arta but failed and was captured in battle by Gjin Bua Shpata. Herendia was sold by Spata to the Ottoman Turks for a huge prize. Thomas II Preljubović, the Despot of Epirus offered valuable help during the battle, however this alliance didn't last for long.<sup>[3]</sup>

The territory of this despotate at its greatest extend (1374–1403) was from the Corinth Gulf to Acheron River in the North, neighboring with the Principality of Gjirokastër of Gjon Zenebishti, another state created in the area of the Despotate of Epirus. The Despotate of Epirus managed to control in this period only the eastern part of Epirus, with its capital in Ioannina. During this period the Despot of Epirus Thomas II Preljubović was in an open conflict with Gjin Bue Shpata. In 1375, Gjin Bue Shpata started an offensive in Ioannina, but he could not invade the city. Although Shpata married with the sister of Thomas II Preljubović, Helena, their war did not stop.

### Fall of the Despotate

After the death of Gjin Bua Shpata in 1399, the Despotate of Arta weakened continuously, and Shpata Family was involved in civil war. Among the animosities with the rulers of Ioannina Gjin's successor, Muriq Shpata, had to deal with the intentions of the Venetians and of Count Carlo I Tocco of Cefalonia. Meanwhile Ottoman incursions were intensified as they were occasionally called by despot Esau de' Buondelmonti of the Despotate of Epirus. After the death of de' Buondelmonti in 1411, the throne was offered to his nephew, Carlo I Tocco. Even though his gain was accompanied by a great loss that the forces of Gjon Zenebishi's inflicted upon his army, he would later subject the leaders of southern Albania. In spite of Muriq Shpata`s victory over Carlo in 1412, the Albanians failed to take Ioannina. On the contrary, not long after killing Muriq Shpata in battle in 1415, Carlo advanced on Arta. In 1416, he defeated Jakup Shpata and conquered Arta thus annexing the Despotate.

## Local legacy

The city of Arta was relatively unknown during the period of the Albanian rule (1358–1416). The Albanian leaders, not used to live in cities, as mountaineers, acquired legally Byzantine titles and tried to adopt Byzantine state structure. Although no architectural activity had been reported on this period, little seem to had changed in Arta and Albanian and Greek population coexisted peacefully in the city.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Despots

### Losha Dynasty

- Peter Losha

### Shpata Dynasty

- Gjin Bua Shpata
- Muriq Shpata
- Jakup Shpata

## References

- [1] The ethnicity of other nobles is unknown. Greek was official in religion and probably used also in court of nobles, alongside other languages spoken in the despotate: Aromanian, Italian, etc. *frontiers, contesting identities* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=3zXFcs9EfEYC&hl=imaging>). Steven G. Ellis, Lud'a Klusáková. Edizioni Plus, 2007. ISBN 978-88-8492-466-7, p. 138-139. "We cannot identify the nationality of the archons or the population. Probably they were both ethnically mixed."
- [2] Served firstly as Despot of Angelokastron, became despot of Arta and Angelokastron after the death of Peter Losha.
- [3] *Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (<http://books.google.gr/books?id=QDFVUDmAIqICThe>). John Van Antwerp Fine. University of Michigan Press, 1994 ISBN 0-472-08260-4
- [4] *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 53
- [5] *History of Albanian People*. Albanian Academy of Science. ISBN 99927-1-623-1
- [6] Fine, John. *The Late Medieval Balkans*. Ann Arbor, 1987.
- [7] *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 191
- [8] *Imagining frontiers, contesting identities* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=3zXFcs9EfEYC&hl>). Steven G. Ellis, Lud'a Klusáková. Edizioni Plus, 2007. ISBN 978-88-8492-466-7, p. 138-139.



# Peter Losha

Peter Losha	
<b>Born</b>	Pjetër Losha
<b>Died</b>	1374
<b>Title</b>	<i>despotes</i>
<b>Religion</b>	Orthodox Christian
<b>Children</b>	Gjin Losha

**Peter Losha** (Albanian: *Pjetër Losha*, Serbian: Petar Ljoša, Greek: Petros Leōsas) was a 14th-century Albanian despot of Despotate of Arta from 1359 to his death in 1374 under Simeon Uroš.<sup>[1] [2]</sup>

In 1346-1348 Epirus became a part of the Serbian Empire and Albanian tribes were defeated by Stefan Dushan.

He led the Albanian force against Nikephoros II Orsini at the Battle of Achelous (1359) that won him the rule of Arta, he founded his domain around Arta with the help of the *Mazarakii* (Vlachs) and *Malakasei* (Albanian) tribes<sup>[3]</sup>. Nikephoros died during the battle, which made Simeon Uroš approach him.

He was given the title of *despotes* by Serbian ruler of Epirus and Thessaly Simeon Uroš in 1359. Simeon soon divided Aetolia (southern Epirus with Arta) between Peter and John Shpata, Peter received the region of Arta and John received Angelokastron.<sup>[4]</sup>

In 1366, Thomas II Preljubović succeeded Simeon as Ruler of Epirus and Peter remained the despot of Arta.

He died in 1374, because of a plague in Arta and his despotate was united with the Despotate of Angelokastron and Lepanto under the rule, of his relative Gjin Bua Shpata.<sup>[5]</sup>

He had a son, Gjin Losha (*Jovan Ljoša, Ioannēs I Leōsas*) who ruled briefly for a year (1374–1375) before being deposed.



## References

"History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science.ISBN 99927-1-623-1

[1] <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/mladjov/files/romanemperors2.pdf>

[2] Encyclopedia Britannica "He (Stefan Dusan)was able to assert Serbian control over northern Epirus and fought with the Albanian lords of Arta (Ghin Bua Spata and Peter Ljoša) in the south, eventually defeating them with Ottoman help"

[3] Epeirotica 2.220; cf. 222 f

[4] <http://books.google.se/books?id=LvVbRrH1QBgC&pg=PA350>

[5] "History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science.ISBN 99927-1-623-1

# Muriq Shpata

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**Muriq** (or **Maurice**) **Shpata** was the despot of Despotate of Arta after the death of his brother, Gjin Bue Shpata. He served until his death in 1415.<sup>[1]</sup> His brother Jakup Shpata succeeded him.

## References

[1] "History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science.ISBN 99927-1-623-1

# Jakup Shpata

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**Jakup Shpata** was the last despot of the Despotate of Arta. He served after the death of his brother Muriq Shpata, in 1415, until the loss of Arta in 4 October 1416 from Carlo I Tocco. He was the only Muslim ruler of the Despotate of Arta.<sup>[1]</sup>

## References

[1] "History of Albanian People" Albanian Academy of Science.ISBN 99927-1-623-1

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# Principality of Gjirokaštër

<b>Principata e Gjirokastrës</b> <b>Principality of Gjirokaštër</b>	
Principality	
← 1386–1418 →	
	
Principalties of Epirus 1370-1409	
<b>Capital</b>	Gjirokaštër
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian, Greek
<b>Religion</b>	Eastern Orthodox
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Sebastokrator</b>	
- 1386-1418	Gjon Zenebishi
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	1386 1386
- Disestablished	1418 1418

The **Principality of Gjirokaštër** (1386–1418) was an Albanian principality created by Gjon Zenebishi in 1386, encompassing the area around Gjirokaštër (modern southern Albania). It was conquered by the Ottomans in 1414, but Zenebishi was able to rally the local population and recover his realm before being finally defeated by the Ottomans in 1418.

## Creation

In 1380, Gjon Zenebishi was appointed *sebastocrator* and prefect of Vagenetia near Delvinë. He was also ruler of Pyrgo and Sayada. He submitted to the Turks after a first invasion and gave them his son as a hostage to be sent to Edirne to the court of the Sultan. This son converted to Islam and became known as Hamza Bey, a military leader. Shortly after his submission however, Gjon revolted and seized the fortress of Gjirokaštër, encouraged no doubt by the attack on Janina by the Albanians of Acarnania. In 1386 he officially assumed the title of Prince of Gjirokaštër, a post which he held until the abolition of his principality.

## Rivalry with the Despotate of Epirus

Gjon Zenebishi was married with Irene, the daughter of Gjin Bua Shpata, Despot of Arta. Thus he became the son-in-law of Shpata and the brother-in-law of the wife of Esau de' Buondelmonti, Despot of Epirus.

In April 1399 Esau, supported by some Albanian clans, marched against Gjon Zenebishi. Esau's army was routed and he himself captured, to be released in July 1400 after the Florentines, who benefited from his rule, paid a large ransom.<sup>[1]</sup>

In 1412, Zenebishi allied with the Despot of Arta, Maurice Shpata, and defeated the army of Carlo I Tocco, who had some months earlier taken possession of Janina, with the aid of its Greek inhabitants. Despite their victory, the allies failed to recover the city.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Turkish invasion and conquest

In 1414, Zenebishi was defeated by the Turks. He fled to the Venetian-held island of Corfu, but was called back two years later by an uprising of the mountain tribes. With the support of Venice, he recovered Gjirokaštër, but died in Corfu in 1418. In the same year the Turks, after a prolonged siege, took Gjirokaštër. Gjon's son, Depa Zenebishi, fled to Corfu. He landed again on the mainland and laid siege to Gjirokaštër in 1434, but was killed in battle with a reinforcing Ottoman army in 1435.

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# Gjon Zenebishi

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**Gjon Zenebishi** (see below about names) (died 1418) was an Albanian nobleman and Prince of Gjirokaštër.

## Rise in power

In 1380, Gjon Zenebishi was appointed Sebastocrator or prefect of Vagenetia near Delvinë. He was also ruler of Pyrgo and Sayada. He submitted to the Turks after the initial invasion and gave them his son as a hostage to be sent to Edirne to the court of the sultan. In Turkish historiography, this son became known as Hamza Bey, a military leader. Shortly after his submission, Gjon revolted and seized the fortress of Gjirokaštër, encouraged no doubt by the attack on Ioannina by the Albanians of Acarnania.

## Prince

In 1386 he became officially the Prince of Gjirokaštër, post which he held until the abolishment of his principality. Gjon Zenebishi was married with the daughter of Gjin Bua Shpata, Despot of Arta, Irene, and thus became the son-in-law of Shpata and the brother-in-law of the wife of Esau de' Buondelmonti Despot of Epiros. In 1399 Esau, supported by some Albanian clans, marched against his wife's brother-in-law John Zenevisi of Gjirokaštër. Now Esau was routed and captured, and much of his land was occupied by Zenevisi. The neighboring magnates determined to restore the captured despotes and secured Venetian intercession in his favor. Esau returned to Ioannina in 1400, regaining the reign from Zenebishi. During this time, Zenebishi was defeated by the Turks, he fled to the Venetian island of Corfu, but was called back two years later (1416) by an uprising of the mountain tribes. With the support of Venice, he again set his sights on Gjirokaštër, but was chased away once more by the Turks and died in Corfu in 1418.

## Descendants

Gjon Zenebishi's descendants continued to live undisturbed in the mountains of Zagoria and eventually faded into history. In 1455, a certain Simon Zenebishi, who was ruler of Kastrovillari (Castro i Vivarit near Butrint) was active at the court of the king of Naples and Aragon on behalf of Skanderbeg in order to gain back Neapolitan support for his land in Albania. In 1455, Venice, the only power to support his claim, reminded him of his pledge of allegiance to the Republic but was not able to change his political orientation, i.e. his ties with Naples. A son of this Zenebishi was also a hostage at the court of the sultan, this time of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, but fled to Naples where King Alphonso had him baptized and made him his vassal. The fate of this Alphonso Zenebishi was to be closely linked to that of Skanderbeg.

## Zenebishi Family

Gjon Zenebishi, Lord of Makasi 1382, Sebastocrator of Argyrokastron and Paracolo, Lord of Vagenetia and Strovilo (a castle) (1387–1418), Despot (=Prince) of Ioannina (1399–1400), +1418; m.N, a dau.of Gjin Bua Shpata, Lord of Arta

- A1. Anna "Kyrianna", Lady of Grabossa in 1419; m.1419 Andrea III Musachi
  - A2. Maria, +after 1419; m.Perotto d'Altavilla Baron of Corfu (+1445)
  - A3. Bua Thopia, Lord of Argyrokastron (1418–34), deposed by Turks, +1435
    - B1. Simone, Lord of the Strovilo's castel (1443–61), deposed by Turks
      - C1. Alfonso, fl 1456
      - C2. Alessandro/Lech, Lord of Strovilo's castle in 1473, sold to venetian in 1473 (destroyed 1479)
      - C3. Filippo, Lord of Strovilo's castle in 1473 with his brother
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- A4. Amassa/Hamsa, a Moslem, fl 1456-59

## Name

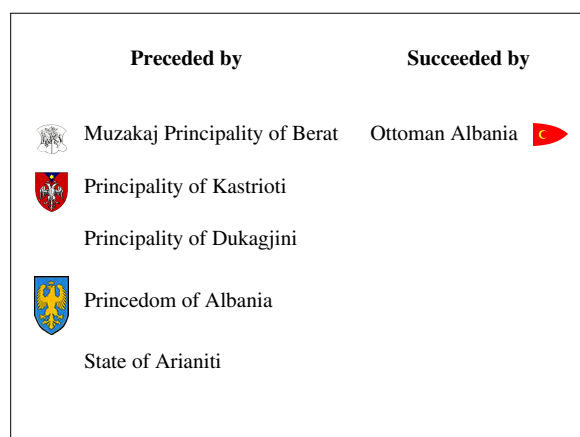
Gjon Zenebishi can be founded with different name in historical documents. His name was: Albanian: *Gjon Zenebishi*, or *Gjon Zenebishti* and English: *John Zenevisi*, *Ghin Zenebisi*.

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# League of Lezhë

<b>Lidhja Shqiptare e Lezhës</b> <b>League of Lezhë</b>	
Union of all Albanian Principalities	
Flag of Skanderbeg and League of Lezhë	
<b>Capital</b>	Lezhë
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Catholic and Orthodox
<b>Government</b>	Confederation
<b>Head of the State</b>	
- 1444-1468	Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg
- 1468-1479	Lekë Dukagjini
<b>Legislature</b>	Assembly of Noblemen
<b>Historical era</b>	
- Established	2 March 1444 1444
- Disestablished	25 April 1479 1479



The **League of Lezhë** (2 March 1444 – 25 April 1479) was a confederation of all Albanian Principalities,<sup>[1]</sup> created in the Assembly of Lezha in 2 March 1444.<sup>[2] [3]</sup> The league was led by Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and after his death by Lekë Dukagjini. Skanderbeg organized a meeting of Albanian nobles, the Arianiti, Dukagjini, Spani, Thopia, Muzaka, and the leaders of the free Albanian principalities from the high mountains, in the town of Lezhë, where the nobles agreed to fight together for mutual gain against the common Turkish enemy and they voted Skanderbeg as their suzerain chief. The League of Lezhë was a confederation and each principality kept its sovereignty.

## Background

After the collapse of Stefan Dushan empire of 1355 in Albania, different local Albanian noblemen created their own dominions. Just like in other parts of Europe when Ottoman forces entered in Albania they found only small principalities in vicious fight against each other. The first organised resistance against the Ottoman forces was that of Balsha II in the battle of Savra (18 September 1385) when Albanian forces were defeated and Balsha II himself was killed. Other Albanian nobles like Gjergj II Balsha, Theodor II Muzaka, Dhimiter Jonima, Zaharia Gropa and others with their forces participated in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

In the 15th century the Ottoman Empire began establishing its dominion in the Balkans. No major resistance was offered by local Christian nobles at that period. Many of them were still fighting each other and didn't see the advance of Ottoman forces as a threat to their power. The Ottoman Empire's advance was also facilitated by their policy. Usually when the Turkish forces conquered a territory they either eliminated or coopted the native nobility, thus depriving the population of its natural leaders. Although a civil war broke out between Bayezid I sons', during 1402-1413, none of the Christian forces of the Balkans in that time seized the opportunity to do so, in the contrary Serbs and Hungarians even helped the future sultan Mohammed I seize power, by participating as his allies in the final battle against his brother.<sup>[4]</sup> After the Ottoman civil war was over in favor of Mehmed I, his forces captured Kruja from Thopia family in 1415, Berat in 1417 from Muzaka, Vlora and Kanina in 1417 from the widow of Balsha and Gjirokastër in 1418 from Zenebishti family.

At the same time the Republic of Venice capture the coastal cities of Albania. Under the pressure from Ottoman Empire and Venetic Republic, the Albanian principalities began to vacillate.<sup>[5]</sup>

Together with occupation new rulers were appointed and the registration process of the population and properties was done from the Ottoman tax officers. Local population and old nobility was not happy with that and various local rebellions happened that period the most famous ones being those of Gjon Kastrioti in 1429-1430 and Gjergj Araniti in 1432-1435.

In November 1443, Skanderbeg captured Kruja, which was the capital of principality of the Kastrioti, with his troops and declared its independence from the Sultan. However a more organised resistance than that of a single principality was needed.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Formation

Skanderbeg's example gave impetus to the liberation movements in Central and Northern Albania. Nearly all princes rejected Ottoman rule, and the large Albanian clans reestablished their principalities. George Kastrioti made efforts to unite all moral and material resources of the individual families in a successful struggle against the Ottomans. To this effect, on 2 March 1444 he called in Lezhë an assembly of the Albanian princes, where almost all of them gathered: the Arianits, Dukagjin, Thopias, Muzakas, as well as the leaders of the free Albanian tribes from the high mountains. In spite of the discord among the princes, they founded a union, which went down in history by the name of the Albanian League of Lezhë. George Kastrioti - Skanderbeg was elected its leader, and commander in chief of its armed forces numbering 8,000 warriors.

In the light of modern geopolitical science, the League of Lezhë represented an attempt to form a state union. In fact, this was a federation of independent rulers who undertook the duty to follow a common foreign policy, jointly defend their independence, and contribute their armed forces to the alliance. Naturally, it all required a collective budget for covering the military expenditures, and each family contributed their mite to the common funds of the League.

At the same time, each clan kept its possessions, its autonomy in solving the internal problems of its own estate. The formation and functioning of the League, of which George Kastrioti was the supreme feudal lord or suzerain, was the most significant attempt to build up an all-Albanian resistance against the Ottoman occupation and, simultaneously, an effort to create, for the span of its short-lived functioning, some sort of a unified Albanian state. It is no accident at all that to this day Skanderbeg is a national hero of the Albanians, and the period of the Albanian League has been perceived by the Albanians as a peak in their history, especially if compared with the subsequent failed attempts, until the beginning of the 20th century, to constitute an independent statehood.

## Success

Under Skanderbeg's command the Albanian forces marched east capturing the cities of Dibra and Ohrid. For 25 years, from 1443–1468, Skanderbeg's 10,000 man army marched through Ottoman territory winning against the consistently larger and better supplied Ottoman forces. Threatened by Ottoman advances in their homeland, Hungary, and later Naples and Venice - their former enemies - provided the financial backbone and support for Skanderbeg's army. On May 14, 1450, an Ottoman army, larger than any previous force encountered by Skanderbeg or his men, stormed and overwhelmed the castle of the city of Kruja. This city was particularly symbolic to Skanderbeg because he had been appointed *suba* of Kruja in 1438 by the Ottomans. According to the Chronicles of Ragusa (also known as the Chronicles of Dubrovnik), the fighting lasted four months and thousands of Albanian soldiers lost their lives. Even so, the Ottoman forces were unable to capture the city and had no choice but to retreat before winter set in. In June 1466, Mehmed II, known as "the Conqueror", led an army of 150,000 soldiers back to Kruja but he still couldn't capture the city.



## Defeat

Skanderbeg's death in 1468 did not end the struggle for independence, and fighting continued until 1479 when the Albanian lands were forced to succumb to the superior Ottoman armies.

## Battles of the League of Lezha

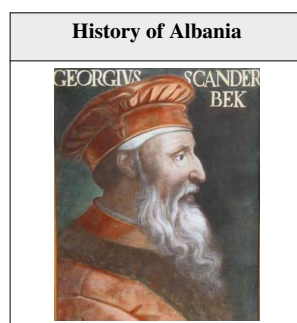
The League of Lezha fought the following 26 battles against the Ottoman Empire in 35 years (1443–1478):

1. Siege of Petrela (1443/1444)
2. Siege of Stelluzi (1443/1444)
3. First Siege of Sfetigrad (1443/1444)
4. Battle of Torvioll (1444)
5. Battle of Mokra (1445)
6. Battle of Otonetë (1446)
7. Albanian–Venetian War (1447–1448)
8. Battle of the Drin (1448)
9. Battle of Oranik (1448)
10. Second Siege of Sfetigrad (1449)
11. First Siege of Krujë (1450)
12. Siege of Modrica (1452)
13. Battle of Mokra (1453)
14. Siege of Berat (1455)
15. Battle of Oranik (1456)
16. Battle of Albulena (1457)
17. Skanderbeg's Italian expedition (1461–1462)
18. Macedonian campaign (1462)
19. Macedonian campaign (1463)
20. Battle of Ochrida (1464)
21. Battle of Vajkal (1464)
22. Battle of Vajkal (1465)
23. Battle of Kashari (1465)
24. Second Siege of Krujë (1466)
25. Third Siege of Krujë (1467)
26. Fourth Siege of Krujë (1478)
27. Siege of Shkodër (1478)

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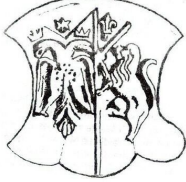

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## External links

- Map of the Albanian state under Skanderbeg (<http://home.online.no/~bmatos/artimages/800x600ACFHAAmZaqVB.bmp>)
  - Map of the Albanian state under Skanderbeg (<http://mek.oszk.hu/01900/01918/html/cd4m/kepek/c0105gf95171.jpg>)
  - Albanian Identities ([http://www.omda.bg/imir/studies/alban\\_id9.html](http://www.omda.bg/imir/studies/alban_id9.html))
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  - History of Albania (<http://web.archive.org/web/20090730200508/http://geocities.com/CapitolHill/Rotunda/2209/Albania.html>)
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# Lordship of Berat

<b>Principata e Muzakajve Lordship of Berat</b>	
← 1335–1444  →	
	
Arms of the Muzakaj family	
	
Muzakaj Principality of Berat in 15th century	
<b>Capital</b>	Berat
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Eastern Orthodox
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Despot and later Prince</b>	
- 1335-1372	Andrea II Muzaka
- 1417-1444	Teodor III Muzaka
<b>Historical era</b>	
- Established	1335 1335
- Disestablished	2 March 1444 1444
<b>Warning:</b> <i>Value not specified for "common_name"</i>	

The **Lordship of Berat** (1335–1444) was a county created by despot Andrea II Muzaka of the **Muzaka** noble family in 1335, with its capital at Berat. In 1432, Gjergj Arianiti formed a state in the Muzakaj possessions, dividing the principality and taking Berat. The principality was united with other Albanian Principalities in the League of Lezhë

in 1444.<sup>[1]</sup>

A chronicle by Gjon Muzaka (John Musachi), written in 1515 after he abandoned Albania and went to Italy, records many interesting facts about the Muzakaj family and the Principality of Berat, although at places unreliable.<sup>[2]</sup> The text is considered to be one of the oldest written by an Albanian.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Rulers


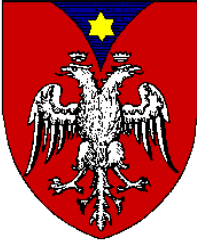

- Andrea II Muzaka (1335–1372)
- Teodor I Muzaka (1372–1389)
- Teodor II Muzaka (1389–1417)
- Teodor III Muzaka (1417–1444)

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# Principality of Kastrioti

<b>Principata e Kastriotit</b> <b>Principality of Kastrioti</b>	
Principality	
← 1389–1444  →	
	
Flag of Skanderbeg	
	
Principality of Kastrioti in 15th century	
<b>Capital</b>	Kruja
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Catholic
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Prince</b>	
- 1389-1417	Gjon Kastrioti
- 1443-1444	Gjergj Kastrioti
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	1389 1389
- Fall under Ottoman Empire	1417
- Regained control	1443
- Disestablished	2 March 1444 1444



**Principality of Kastrioti** (1389–1444) was one of the most important principalities in Medieval Albania. It was created by Gjon Kastrioti and then ruled by the national hero of Albania, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg.

## Formation

Gjon Kastrioti had originally only two small villages, which probably emblem of the eagle family with a black two-headed, even if it can provide different interpretations. In short time John Kastrioti managed to expand its lands so as to become the undisputed lord of Central Albania. He married Vojsava Kastrioti who bore five daughters - Mara, later wife of Stefan Crnojević of Montenegro; Jela, then wife of Gjin (Gino) Musacchio; Angjelina (Angelina), later wife of Vladan Arianit Comnenus Thopia; Vljaka, later wife of Stefan Maramonte Balšić; Mamica, later wife of Karol Musacchio Thopia - and four sons: Reposh, Stanisha (Stanislaus), Kostandin (Constantine) and Gjergj (our George Kastrioti). Gjon Kastrioti was among those who opposed<sup>[1]</sup> the early incursion of Ottoman Bayezid I, however his resistance was ineffectual. The Sultan, having accepted his submissions, obliged him to pay tribute and to ensure the fidelity of local rulers, George Kastrioti and his three brothers were taken by the Sultan to his court as hostages. After his conversion to Islam,<sup>[2]</sup> he attended military school in Edirne and led many battles for the Ottoman Empire to victory. For his military victories, he received the title *Arnavutlu İskender Bey*, (Albanian: *Skënderbe shqiptari*, English: *Lord Alexander, the Albanian*) comparing Kastrioti's military brilliance to that of Alexander the Great.

## Restoration of Gjergj Kastrioti

He was distinguished as one of the best officers in several Ottoman campaigns both in Asia Minor and in Europe, and the Sultan appointed him General. He even fought against Greeks, Serbs and Hungarians, and some sources say that he used to maintain secret links with Ragusa, Venice, Ladislaus V of Hungary, and Alfonso I of Naples.<sup>[3]</sup> Sultan Murat II gave him the title Vali which made him General Governor. On November 28, 1443, Skanderbeg saw his opportunity to rebel during a battle against the Hungarians led by John Hunyadi in Niš as part of the Crusade of Varna. He switched sides along with 300 other Albanians serving in the Ottoman army. After a long trek to Albania he eventually captured Krujë by forging a letter<sup>[1]</sup> from the Sultan to the Governor of Krujë, which granted him control of the territory. After capturing the castle, Skanderbeg<sup>[4]</sup> abjured Islam and proclaimed himself the avenger of his family and country. He raised a flag showing a double-headed eagle, an ancient symbol used by various cultures of Balkans (especially the Byzantine Empire), which later became the Albanian flag. The Governor was killed as he was returning to Edirne, unaware of Skanderbeg's intentions... Skanderbeg allied with George Arianite<sup>[5]</sup> (born Gjergj Arianit Komneni) and married his daughter Andronike (born Marina Donika Arianiti).<sup>[6]</sup>

## League of Lezha

Following the capture of Krujë, Skanderbeg managed to bring together all the Albanian princes in the town of Lezhë<sup>[7]</sup> (see League of Lezhë, 1444). Gibbon<sup>[4]</sup> reports that the "*Albanians, a martial race, were unanimous to live and die with their hereditary prince*" and that "*in the assembly of the states of Epirus, Skanderbeg was elected general of the Turkish war and each of the allies engaged to furnish his respective proportion of men and money*". With this support, Skanderbeg built fortresses and organized a mobile defense force that forced the Ottomans to disperse their troops, leaving them vulnerable to the hit-and-run tactics of the Albanians.<sup>[8]</sup> He managed to create the League of Lezha, a federation of all Albanian Principalities.

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## Gjon Kastrioti

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**Gjon Kastrioti** ( ? - 2 or 4 May 1437<sup>[1]</sup> ) was the father of Albanian national hero Skanderbeg. In the documentary acts of the time, Scanderbeg's father is variously called *Iohannes*, *Janus*, *Iouan*, *Ioannis*, *Yuan*, *Ivan*, *Yuvan*, etc.<sup>[2]</sup> Gjon Muzaka - or Giovanni Musachi, who by the way knew him and his family well - in his *Breve memoria de li discendenti de nostra casa Musachi*, written in Italian, calls him *Giovanni*. *Giovanni* is also used by Demetrio Franco. Barleti, who wrote in Latin, calls him Iohannes. In the few acts of his own chancellery, his name results *Ivan* or *Ivanъ*. It is possible that these acts were written by Ninac Vukosalić.<sup>[3]</sup> <sup>[4]</sup> Besides the acts in Slavonic, *Ivan* is used by some Byzantine chroniclers, like Laonicus Chalcocondyles.<sup>[5]</sup> Also, interesting is a testimony from Franciscus Blancus, who lived and wrote two centuries after Gjon Kastrioti's time: In his *Apology*, he writes about two "heroes" of his own time from the *Kastrati* family, one Muslim called Isuf bey, and the other Gjon "i.e. in Latin Iohannis *Kastrati*".<sup>[6]</sup> This same author, knowing the difference Gjon/Iohannis, specifically calls Skanderbeg's father by his Latin name. Kastrioti's family had its origin in Has region and ruled over Northern Albania from Kruja region up to Prizren, Tetova and Gostivar. Defeated by Murad II in 1421 he was forced to vassalage and from time to time one or more of his sons were sent as hostages to Ottoman court. This way Kastrioti, blackmailed through his sons would be faithful to the Empire.

In 1426 he donated to the Monastery of Hilandar two villages from his dominions in Gostivar, near the monastery where his son Reposh retired and died in 25 July 1431: the Saint George graveyard is today known as the Albanian graveyard (*Arbanaški pìrg*).<sup>[7]</sup>

In 1430, Gjon Kastrioti led an unsuccessful uprising against the Ottoman Empire in the city of Krujë in what is now Albania. He was defeated again by the Ottoman forces of Isac bey Evrenosi.

After his death in 1437<sup>[1]</sup> his son Gjergj was appointed as commander of Kruja in 1438.

He married Vojsava Tripalda<sup>[8]</sup> from Lower Polog (present day Tetovo, Macedonia) and had nine children with her: four sons and five daughters.

The sons' names were Stanisha, Reposh, Kostandin, and Gjergj (Skanderbeg).

The oldest daughter of Gjon Kastrioti, Maria Kastrioti, also called *Mamica*, married Muzakë Topia.

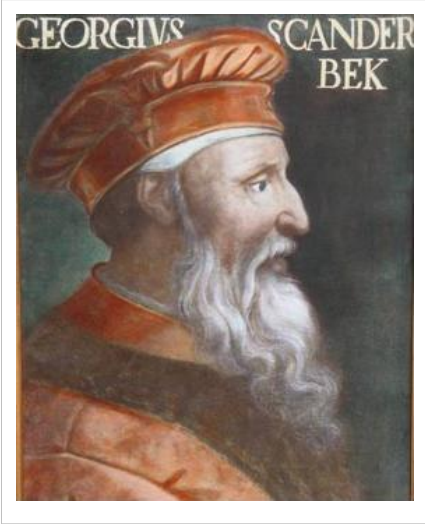
Gjon Kastrioti was also the name of the grandson through Gjergj Kastrioti.

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  - [6] Blancus, *Georgius Castriotus*, 73: "Gion (id est Iohannis Latine) Castrati nuncupatus
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  - [8] Jov. Radonić: or. cit., str. 1—2.
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# Skanderbeg

George Kastrioti Skanderbeg	
	
Portrait of Skanderbeg in the Uffizi, Florence	
<b>Reign</b>	1443–1468
<b>Born</b>	6 May 1405 <sup>[J]</sup>
<b>Birthplace</b>	Sinë, <sup>[A]</sup> Principality of Kastrioti, modern day Albania
<b>Died</b>	17 January 1468 (aged 62)
<b>Place of death</b>	Lezhë, League of Lezhë, modern day Albania
<b>Buried</b>	Saint Nicholas Church of Lezhë, Albania
<b>Predecessor</b>	Gjon Kastrioti
<b>Consort to</b>	Donika Kastrioti
<b>Royal House</b>	Kastrioti
<b>Father</b>	Gjon Kastrioti
<b>Mother</b>	Vojsava Tripalda
<b>Religious beliefs</b>	Roman Catholic

**George Kastrioti Skanderbeg** (6 May 1405 – 17 January 1468), widely known as **Skanderbeg** (Albanian: *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu*, Latin: *Georgius Castriotus Scanderbegh*, Turkish: *İskender Bey*, meaning "Lord Alexander", or "Leader Alexander") was a 15th-century Albanian lord<sup>[D]</sup>, who as leader of the federation of the League of Lezhë defended the region of Albania against the Ottoman Empire for more than two decades. Skanderbeg's military skills presented a major obstacle to Ottoman expansion, and he was considered by many in western Europe to be a model of Christian resistance against the Ottoman Muslims. Skanderbeg is Albania's most important national hero and a core figure of the Albanian National Awakening.

Skanderbeg was born in 1405<sup>[J]</sup> to the noble Kastrioti family in the Dibër region. Sultan Murad II took him hostage during his youth and he fought for the Ottoman Empire as a general. In 1443, he deserted the Ottomans during the Battle of Niš and became the ruler of Krujë. In 1444, he organized local leaders into the League of Lezhë, a federation aimed at uniting their forces for war against the Ottomans. Skanderbeg's first victory against the Ottomans, at the Battle of Torvioll in the same year marked the beginning of more than 20 years of war with the

Ottomans. Skanderbeg's forces achieved more than 20 victories in the field and withstood three sieges of his capital, Krujë.

In 1451 he recognized himself as a vassal of the Kingdom of Naples through the Treaty of Gaeta, to ensure a protective alliance. In 1460–1461, he participated in Italy's civil wars in support of Ferdinand I of Naples. In 1463, he became the chief commander of the crusading forces of Pope Pius II, but the Pope died while the armies were still gathering. Left alone to fight the Ottomans, Skanderbeg did so until his death in January 1468.

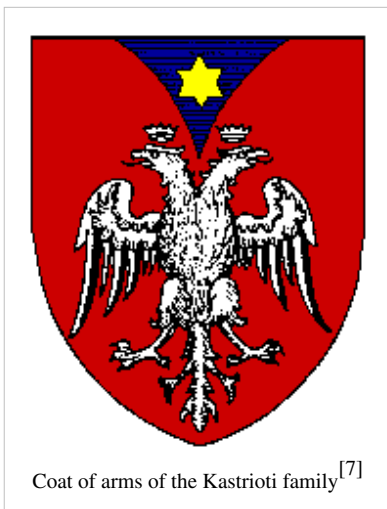
Marin Barleti's biography of Skanderbeg, written in Latin and in a Renaissance and panegyric style, was translated into all the major languages of Western Europe from the 16th through the 18th centuries. Such translations inspired an opera by Vivaldi, and literary creations by eminent writers such as playwrights William Havard and George Lillo, French poet Ronsard, English poet Byron, and American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

## Name

Skanderbeg's first name in Albanian is *Gjergj*, the equivalent of the English form *George*. The form of his last name was given variously as *Kastrioti*,<sup>[1]</sup> *Castriota*,<sup>[2]</sup> *Castriottis*,<sup>[3]</sup> or *Castriot*.<sup>[4]</sup> The last name *Kastrioti* refers both to the Kastrioti family and to a municipality in northeastern Albania called Kastriot, in the Dibër District.

The Ottoman Turks gave him the name *Skanderbeg*. *Skanderbeg* has also been rendered as *Scanderbeg* in English versions of his biography; *Skënderbeu* (or *Skënderbej*) is the Albanian version. *Skanderbeg* is derived from the combination of *Iskender* (a Turkish word derived from *Alexander*) and the Turkish appellation *Bey* (for Lord or Prince).<sup>[5]</sup> Latinized in Barleti's version as *Scanderbegi* and translated into English as *Skanderbeg*, the combined appellation is assumed to have been a comparison of Skanderbeg's military skill to that of Alexander the Great.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Early life



Skanderbeg is thought to have been born with the name *Gjergj Kastrioti* in 1405<sup>[J]</sup> in Sinë, one of the two villages owned by his grandfather.<sup>[A]</sup> Skanderbeg's father was Gjon Kastrioti, lord of Middle Albania, which included Mat, Mirditë, and Dibër.<sup>[8]</sup> His mother was Vojsava Tripalda, a princess from the Tripalda family,<sup>[9]</sup> originally from the Polog valley, north-western part of present-day Republic of Macedonia. Skanderbeg's parents had nine children, of whom he was the youngest son, his older brothers were Stanisha, Reposh, and Kostandin, and his sisters were Mara, Jelena, Angelina, Vlajka, and Mamica.<sup>[1]</sup>

Gjon Kastrioti had accepted his submission to be the Sultan's vassal in 1409 and was obliged to pay tribute and to send his eldest son, Stanisha, to be the Sultan's hostage.<sup>[C]</sup> Gjergj seems to have gone to Sultan Murad II's court in 1423, when he was 18.<sup>[10]</sup> It is assumed that Skanderbeg remained as Murad

II's hostage for a maximum of three years<sup>[10]</sup> because his name is mentioned in Albania for the first time in 1426, in the *First Act of Hilandar*.<sup>[L][11]</sup> Shortly afterwards, Gjon Kastrioti and his sons, with the exception of Stanisha (who had by then become a Muslim), purchased four adelphates (rights to reside on monastic territory and receive subsidies from monastic resources) to the Saint George tower and to some property within the monastery as stated in the *Second Act of Hilandar*.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

In 1430, Gjon Kastrioti was defeated in a battle by the Ottoman governor of Skopje, Isa bey Evrenos and as a result, his territorial possessions were extremely reduced.<sup>[13]</sup> Later that year, Skanderbeg started fighting for Murad II in his expeditions, and he gained the title of *sipahi*.<sup>[14]</sup> In 1437–1438,<sup>[15]</sup> he became *suba* of the Krujë zemet.<sup>[12]</sup> Up until 1432, the *suba* of the city had been Zaganos Bey. During the 1430s, Skanderbeg controlled a relatively large *timar* composed of nine villages, which historians believe may have been part of the vilayet of Dhimiter Jonima.<sup>[12]</sup>

It was because of Skanderbeg's display of military merit in several Ottoman campaigns, that Murad II (r. 1421–1451) had given him the title of *vali*. At that time, Skanderbeg was leading a cavalry unit of 5,000 men.<sup>[16]</sup> During his stay in Albania as Ottoman governor, he maintained close relations with the population in his father's former properties and also with other Albanian noble families.<sup>[12]</sup>

After his brother Reposh's death on 25 July 1431<sup>[17]</sup> and the later deaths of Kostandin and Skanderbeg's father (who died in 1437), Skanderbeg and his surviving brother Stanisha continued to govern the *zeamet* that had earlier been governed by their father.<sup>[15]</sup> Although Skanderbeg was summoned home by his relatives when George Arianiti and Andrew Thopia with other chiefs from region between Vlorë and Shkodër organized rebellion against Ottoman Empire in period 1432–1436, he did nothing, remaining loyal to the sultan.<sup>[18]</sup> During the 1438–1443 period, he is thought to have been fighting alongside the Ottomans in their European campaigns, mostly against the revolts led by Janos Hunyadi.<sup>[15]</sup>



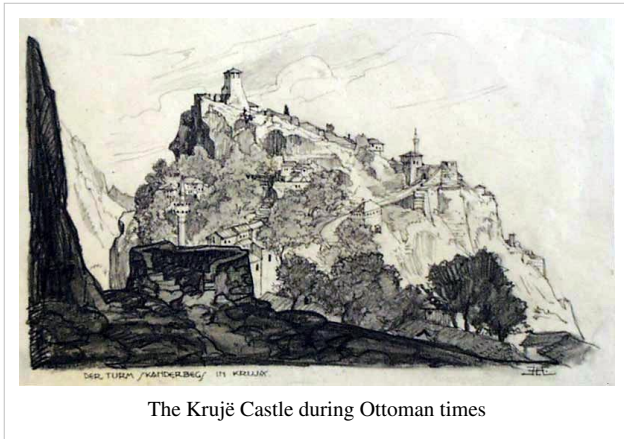
Skanderbeg dueling with a Tatar in the Ottoman court (1436)

## Albanian resistance

### Rise

In November 1443, Skanderbeg saw his opportunity to rebel against Sultan Murad II during the Battle of Niš, while fighting the Crusade of Varna against the Hungarians of John Hunyadi.<sup>[19]</sup> Skanderbeg quit the field along with 300 other Albanians serving in the Ottoman army.<sup>[19]</sup> He immediately went to Krujë on November 28, and by forging a letter from Murad II to the Governor of Krujë, he became lord of the city.<sup>[19]</sup> <sup>[20]</sup> To reinforce his intention of gaining control of the former domains of Zeta, Skanderbeg proclaimed himself the heir of the Balšići. After various attacks against Bar and Ulcinj along with Đurađ Branković, Stefan Crnojević<sup>[21]</sup> and Albanians of the area, the Venetians offered rewards for his assassination.<sup>[22]</sup> After capturing some other minor surrounding castles and eventually gaining control over more than his father Gjon Kastrioti's domains, Skanderbeg abjured Islam and proclaimed himself the avenger of his family and country.<sup>[23]</sup> He raised a red flag with the double-headed eagle silhouette on it: the same flag and symbol are still in use today by Albania (see Albanian flag).<sup>[24]</sup>

On March 2, 1444, Skanderbeg managed to bring together all the Albanian princes in the city of Lezhë and form the League of Lezhë.<sup>[25]</sup> Particularly strong was his alliance with Gjergj Arianiti, a member of the Arianiti family, whose daughter Donika he later married.<sup>[26]</sup> <sup>[27]</sup> <sup>[28]</sup> Gibbon reports that the "Albanians, a martial race, were unanimous to live and die with their hereditary prince", and that "in the assembly of the states of Epirus, Skanderbeg was elected general of the Turkish war and each of the allies engaged to furnish his respective proportion of men and money".<sup>[29]</sup> <sup>[29]</sup> With this support, Skanderbeg built fortresses and organized a mobile defense army that forced the Ottomans to disperse their troops, leaving them vulnerable to the hit-and-run tactics of the Albanians.<sup>[30]</sup> Skanderbeg fought a guerrilla war against the opposing armies by using the mountainous terrain to his advantage. During the first 8–10 years, Skanderbeg commanded an army of generally 10,000-15,000 soldiers,<sup>[31]</sup> but only had absolute control over the men from his own dominions, and had to convince the other princes to follow his policies and tactics.<sup>[26]</sup>



The Krujë Castle during Ottoman times

In the summer of 1444, in the Plain of Torvioll, the united Albanian armies under Skanderbeg faced the Ottomans who were under direct command of the Turkish general Ali Pasha, with an army of 25,000 men.<sup>[32]</sup> Skanderbeg had under his command 7,000 infantry and 8,000 cavalry. 3,000 cavalry were hidden behind enemy lines in a nearby forest under the command of Hamza Kastrioti. At a given signal they descended, encircled the Turks and gave Skanderbeg a much needed victory. About 8,000 Turks were killed and 2,000 were captured.<sup>[26]</sup> Skanderbeg's first victory echoed across Europe because this was one of the few

times that an Ottoman army was defeated in a pitched battle on European soil. In the following two years, Skanderbeg defeated the Turks two more times, on October 10, 1445, when Ottoman forces from Ochrid suffered severe losses,<sup>[33]</sup> and again in the Battle of Otonetë on September 27, 1446.<sup>[34] [35]</sup>

At the beginning of the Albanian insurrection, the Republic of Venice was supportive of Skanderbeg, considering his forces to be a buffer between them and the Ottoman Empire. Lezhë, where the eponymous league was established, was Venetian territory, and the assembly met with the approval of Venice. The later affirmation of Skanderbeg and his rise as a strong force on their borders, however, was seen as a menace to the interests of the Republic, leading to a worsening of relations and the dispute over the fortress of Dagnum which triggered the Albanian-Venetian War of 1447–1448. The Venetians sought by every means to overthrow Skanderbeg or bring about his death, even offering a life pension of 100 golden ducats annually for the person who would kill him.<sup>[35] [36]</sup> During the conflict, Venice invited the Ottomans to attack Skanderbeg simultaneously from the east, facing the Albanians with a two-front conflict.<sup>[37]</sup> Skanderbeg, who had besieged a few castles that were possessed by Venice in Albania, was forced to fight an Ottoman Army commanded by Mustafa Pasha. In 1448, he won a battle against Mustafa Pasha in Dibër. Some days later, on July 23, 1448, he also won another battle in Shkodër against a Venetian army led by Andrea Venier. At the same time, he besieged the towns of Durazzo (modern Durrës) and Lezhë which were then under Venetian rule.<sup>[38]</sup> This forced the Venetians to offer a peace treaty to Skanderbeg.

The peace treaty, signed between Skanderbeg and Venice on 4 October 1448, envisioned that Venice would keep Dagnum and its environs, but would cede to Skanderbeg the territory of Buzëgjarpri at the mouth of the river Drin, and also that Skanderbeg would enjoy the privilege of buying, tax-free, 200 horse-loads of salt annually from Durazzo. In addition Venice would pay Skanderbeg 1,400 ducats. Soon after the treaty Skanderbeg left to join John Hunyadi in Kosovo.<sup>[39]</sup> During the period of clashes with Venice, Skanderbeg intensified relationships with Alfonso V of Aragon (r. 1416–1458), who was the main rival of Venice in the Adriatic, where his dreams for an empire were always opposed by the Venetians.<sup>[40]</sup>

Skanderbeg did not participate in the Second Battle of Kosovo in 1448 because he was delayed by Đurađ Branković, who was then allied with Sultan Murad II.<sup>[41]</sup> He and his army were still *en route* to reinforce the mainly Hungarian army of John Hunyadi, when the Hungarian forces lost the battle.<sup>[42]</sup> Skanderbeg and his army ravaged Branković's land to punish Serbs for desertion of Christian cause.<sup>[43]</sup>

In 1448, Alfonso V suffered a rebellion caused by certain barons in the rural areas of his Kingdom of Naples. He needed reliable troops to deal with the uprising, so he called upon Skanderbeg for assistance. Skanderbeg responded to Alfonso's request for aid by sending to Italy a detachment of Albanian troops commanded by General Demetrios Reres. These Albanians were successful in quickly suppressing the rebellion. Many of these troops settled there.<sup>[44]</sup> King Alfonso rewarded Demetrios Reres for his service to Naples by appointing him governor of Calabria. One year later, in 1449, another detachment of Albanian troops was sent to garrison Sicily against a rebellion and invasion. This time the troops were led by Giorgio and Basilio Reres, the sons of Demetrios.<sup>[45]</sup>



Woodcut of a confrontation between Skanderbeg's forces and Ottoman forces

On May 14, 1448, an Ottoman army led by Sultan Murad II and his son Mehmed laid siege to the castle of Svetigrad. The Albanian garrison in the castle resisted the frontal assaults of the Ottoman army, while Skanderbeg harassed the besieging forces with the remaining Albanian army under his personal command. In late summer 1448, due to a lack of potable water,<sup>[B]</sup> the Albanian garrison eventually surrendered the castle with the condition of safe passage through the Ottoman besieging forces, a condition which was accepted and respected by Sultan Murad II.<sup>[46]</sup> Although his loss of men was minimal, Skanderbeg lost the castle of Svetigrad, which was an important stronghold that controlled the fields of Macedonia to the east.<sup>[46]</sup>

In June 1450, two years after the Ottomans had captured Svetigrad, they laid siege to Krujë with an army numbering approximately 100,000 men and led again by Sultan Murad II himself and his son, Mehmed.<sup>[47]</sup> Following a scorched earth strategy (thus denying the Ottomans the use of necessary local resources), Skanderbeg left a protective garrison of 1,500 men under one of his most trusted lieutenants, Vrana Konti, while, with the remainder of the army, he harassed the Ottoman camps around Krujë by continuously attacking Sultan Murad II's supply caravans. The garrison repelled three major direct assaults on the city walls by the Ottomans, causing great losses to the besieging forces. Ottoman attempts at finding and cutting the water sources failed, as did a sapped tunnel, which collapsed suddenly. An offer of 300,000 *aspra* (Turkish silver coins) and a promise of a high rank as an officer in the Ottoman army made to Vrana Konti, were both rejected by him.<sup>[48]</sup>

During the First Siege of Krujë, the Venetian merchants from Shkodër sold food to the Ottoman army and those of Durazzo supplied Skanderbeg's army.<sup>[49]</sup> An angry attack by Skanderbeg on the Venetian caravans raised tension between him and the Republic, but the case was resolved with the help of the *bailo* of Durazzo who stopped any Venetian merchants from furnishing any longer the Ottomans.<sup>[48]</sup> Venetians' help to the Ottomans notwithstanding, by September 1450, the Ottoman camp was in disarray, as the castle was still not taken, the morale had sunk, and disease was running rampant. Murad II acknowledged that he could not capture the castle of Krujë by force of arms, and in October 1450, he lifted the siege and made his way to Edirne, leaving behind several thousand dead soldiers.<sup>[48]</sup> A few months later, on February 5, 1451, Murad died in Edirne and was succeeded by his son Mehmed II (r. 1451–1481).<sup>[50]</sup>



## Consolidation

Although Skanderbeg had achieved success at resisting Murad II himself, harvests were unproductive and famine was widespread. Following Skanderbeg's requests, King Alfonso V helped him in this situation and the two parties signed the Treaty of Gaeta on March 26, 1451, according to which, Skanderbeg would be formally a vassal of Alfonso in exchange for military aid.<sup>[51]</sup> More explicitly, Skanderbeg recognized King Alfonso's sovereignty over his lands in exchange for the help that King Alfonso would give to him in the war against the Ottomans.<sup>[E]</sup> King Alfonso pledged to respect the old privileges of Krujë and Albanian territories and to pay Skanderbeg an annual 1,500 ducats, while Skanderbeg pledged to make his fealty to King Alfonso only after the full expulsion of the Ottomans from the country, a condition never reached in Skanderbeg's lifetime.<sup>[40]</sup>



Engraving of an Albanian assault on a Turkish camp

A month after the treaty, in April 1451, Skanderbeg married Donika Kastrioti, daughter of Gjergj Arianiti, one of the most influential Albanian noblemen, strengthening the ties between them.<sup>[27]</sup> Their children included Gjon Kastrioti II

Right after the Treaty of Gaeta, Alfonso V signed other treaties with the rest of the most important Albanian noblemen, including Golem Arianit Komneni,<sup>[52]</sup> and with the Despot of the Morea, Demetrios Palaiologos.<sup>[53]</sup> These movements of Alfonso show that he was thinking about a crusade starting from Albania and Morea, which actually never took place.<sup>[54]</sup> Following the Treaty of Gaeta, in the end of May 1451, a small detachment of 100 Catalan soldiers, headed by Bernard Vaquer, was established at the castle of Krujë. One year later, in May 1452, another Catalan nobleman, Ramon d'Ortafà, came to Krujë with the title of viceroy.<sup>[E]</sup> In 1453, Skanderbeg paid a secret visit to Naples and the Vatican, probably to discuss the new conditions after the fall of Constantinople and the planning of a new crusade which Alfonso would have presented to Pope Nicholas V in a meeting of 1453—1454.<sup>[55]</sup>

During the five years which followed the First Siege of Krujë, Albania was allowed some respite as the new sultan set out to conquer the last vestiges of the Byzantine Empire, but a battle did take place in 1452 when another Ottoman army sent to Albania was defeated again by Skanderbeg's forces. During this period, skirmishes between Skanderbeg and the Dukagjin family, which had been dragging on for years, were put to an end by a reconciliatory intervention of the Pope, and in 1454, a peace treaty between them was finally reached.<sup>[56]</sup>



Portrait of Alfonso V of Aragon, by Vicente Juan Masip

In November 1453, Skanderbeg informed King Alfonso that he had conquered some territories and a castle, and Alfonso replied some days later that soon Ramon d'Ortafà would return to continue the war against the Ottomans and promised more troops and supplies. In the beginning of 1454, Skanderbeg and the Venetians<sup>[57]</sup> informed King Alfonso and the Pope about a possible Ottoman invasion and asked for help. The Pope sent 3,000 ducats while Alfonso sent 500 infantry and a certain amount of money,<sup>[58]</sup> along with a message directed to Skanderbeg.<sup>[59]</sup> Meanwhile, the Venetian Senate was resenting Skanderbeg's alliance with the Kingdom of Naples, an old enemy of the Republic. Frequently they delayed their tributes to Skanderbeg and this was long a matter of dispute between the parties, with Skanderbeg threatening war on Venice at least three times during the 1448–1458 period, and Venice conceding in a conciliatory tone.<sup>[60]</sup>

In June 1454, Ramon d'Ortafà returned after a long absence to Krujë, this time with the title of viceroy of Albania, Greece, and Slavonia, with a personal letter to Skanderbeg as the Captain-General of the armed forces in Albania.<sup>[61]</sup> Along with Ramon d'Ortafà, King Alfonso V also sent the clerics Fra Lorenzo da Palerino and Fra Giovanni dell'Aquila to Albania with a tabby flag embroidered with a white cross as a symbol of the Crusade which was about to begin.<sup>[62]</sup><sup>[63]</sup> Even though this crusade never materialized, the Neapolitan troops were used in the Siege of Berat where they were almost entirely annihilated and were never replaced.

The Siege of Berat was the first real test between the armies of the new sultan and Skanderbeg. That siege would end up in a defeat for the League of Lezhë forces.<sup>[64]</sup> Skanderbeg besieged the town's castle for months, causing the demoralized Turkish officer in charge of the castle to promise his surrender.<sup>[64]</sup> At that point, Skanderbeg relaxed his grip, split his forces, and departed the siege, leaving behind one of his generals, Muzakë Topia, and half of his cavalry on the banks of the Osum River in order to finalize the surrender.<sup>[64]</sup> It was a costly error—the Ottomans saw this moment as an opportunity for attack and sent a large cavalry force from Anatolia, led by Isa bey Evrenos, to reinforce the garrison.<sup>[64]</sup> The Albanian forces had become overconfident and lulled into a false sense of security.<sup>[64]</sup> The Ottomans caught the Albanian cavalry by surprise while they were resting on the banks of the Osum River, and almost all the 5,000 Albanian cavalry laying siege to Berat were killed.<sup>[64]</sup> Most of the forces belonged to Gjergj Arianiti, whose role as the greatest supporter of Skanderbeg diminished after siege of Berat ended up in defeat.<sup>[64]</sup>

The defeat of Berat somewhat affected the attitude of other Albanian noblemen. One of them, Moisi Arianit Golemi, defected to the Turks and returned to Albania in 1456 as a commander of a Turkish army of 15,000 men, but he was defeated by Skanderbeg in a swift battle.<sup>[65]</sup> Later that year, he returned to Albania asking for Skanderbeg's pardon, and once pardoned, remained loyal until his death in 1464.<sup>[65]</sup>

In 1456, one of Skanderbeg's nephews (the son of his sister Elena), Gjergj Stress Balsha, sold the fortress of Modric to the Ottomans for 30,000 silver ducats. He tried to cover up the act; however, his treason was discovered and he was sent to prison in Naples.<sup>[66]</sup>

In the beginning of 1457, another nobleman, Hamza Kastrioti, Skanderbeg's own nephew and his closest collaborator, defected to the Turks when he lost his hope of succession after the birth of Skanderbeg's son Gjon Kastriot II. In the summer of 1457, an Ottoman army numbering approximately 70,000 men<sup>[67]</sup> invaded Albania with the hope of destroying Albanian resistance once and for all. This army was led by Isa bey Evrenos, the only commander to have ever defeated Skanderbeg's forces, and by Hamza Kastrioti, the commander who knew all about

Albanian tactics and strategy. After wreaking much damage to the countryside,<sup>[67]</sup> the Ottoman army set up camp at the Ujëbardha field (literally translated as "White Water"), halfway between Lezhë and Krujë. After having avoided the enemy for months, calmly giving to the Turks and his European neighbours the impression that he was defeated, on 2 September Skanderbeg attacked the Ottomans in their encampments and defeated them.<sup>[68]</sup> This was one of the most famous victories of Skanderbeg over the Ottomans, which led to a five-year peace treaty with Sultan Mehmed II. Hamza was captured<sup>[69]</sup> and sent to detention in Naples.<sup>[70]</sup>

After the victorious Battle of Ujëbardha, Skanderbeg's relations with the Papacy under Pope Calixtus III were intensified. The reason was that during this time, Skanderbeg's military undertakings involved considerable expense which the contribution of Alfonso V of Aragon was not sufficient to defray.<sup>[71]</sup> In 1457, Skanderbeg requested help from Calixtus III. Being himself in financial difficulties, the Pope could do no more than send Skanderbeg a single galley and a modest sum of money, promising more ships and larger amounts of money in the future.<sup>[71]</sup> On December 23, 1457, Calixtus III appointed Skanderbeg as Captain-General of the Curia in the war against the Turks and declared him Captain-General of the Holy See. The Pope also gave him the title *Athleta Christi*, or *Champion of Christ*.<sup>[71]</sup> Meanwhile, Ragusa bluntly refused to release the funds which had been collected in Dalmatia for the crusade and which, according to the Pope, were to have been distributed in equal parts to Hungary, Bosnia, and Albania. The Ragusans even entered into negotiations with Mehmed.<sup>[71]</sup> At the end of December 1457, Calixtus threatened Venice with an interdict and repeated the threat in February 1458. As the captain of the Curia, Skanderbeg appointed the duke of Leukas (Santa Maura), Leonardo III Tocco, formerly the prince of Arta and "despot of the Rhomaeans", a figure virtually unknown except in Southern Epirus, as a lieutenant in his native land.<sup>[71]</sup>

On June 27, 1458, King Alfonso V died at Naples and Skanderbeg sent emissaries to his son and successor, King Ferdinand.<sup>[72]</sup> According to the historian C. Marinisco, the death of King Alfonso marked the end of the Aragonese dream of a Mediterranean Empire and also the hope for a new crusade in which Skanderbeg was assigned a leading role.<sup>[73]</sup> The relationship of Skanderbeg with the Kingdom of Naples continued even after Alfonso V's death, but the situation had changed; Ferdinand I was not as able as his father and now it was Skanderbeg's turn to help King Ferdinand to regain and maintain his kingdom.



Portrait of Ferdinand I of Naples

In 1460, King Ferdinand had serious problems with another uprising of the Angevins and asked for help from Skanderbeg.

This invitation worried King Ferdinand's opponents, and Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta declared that if Ferdinand of Naples received Skanderbeg, Malatesta would go to the Turks.<sup>[74]</sup> In the month of September 1460, Skanderbeg dispatched a company of 500 cavalry under his nephew, Gjok Stres Balsha.<sup>[75]</sup> Ferdinand's main rival, Giovanni Antonio Orsini, Prince of Taranto, in correspondence with Skanderbeg tried to dissuade the Albanian from this enterprise and even offered him an alliance.<sup>[75]</sup> This did not affect Skanderbeg, who answered on October 31, 1460, that he owed fealty to the Aragon family, especially in times of hardship.<sup>[1]</sup> When the situation became critical, Skanderbeg made a three-year armistice with the Ottomans on April 17, 1461, and in late August 1461, landed in Puglia with an expeditionary force of 1,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry. At Barletta and Trani, he managed to defeat the Italian and Angevin forces of Giovanni Antonio Orsini, Prince of Taranto, secured King Ferdinand's throne, and returned back to Albania.<sup>[76]</sup> <sup>[77]</sup> King Ferdinand was grateful to Skanderbeg for this intervention for the rest of his life: at Skanderbeg's death, he rewarded his descendants with the castle of Trani, and the properties of Monte Sant'Angelo and San Giovanni Rotondo.<sup>[77]</sup>

## Last years

After securing the Neapolitan kingdom, a crucial ally in his struggle, Skanderbeg returned home after being informed of Ottoman movements within the borders of the League of Lezhë. There were three Ottoman armies approaching: the first, under the command of Sinan Pasha, was defeated at Mokra (near Dibër); the second, under the command of Hussain Bey, was defeated in the Battle of Ohër, where the Turkish commander was captured; and the third was defeated in the region of Skopje.<sup>[78]</sup> This forced Sultan Mehmed II to agree to a 10-year armistice which was signed in April 1463 in Skopje.<sup>[78]</sup> Skanderbeg did not want peace, but he was outvoted in the League of Lezhë, and Tanush Thopia's willingness for peace prevailed. Tanush himself went to Tivoli to explain to the Pope why the League had opted for peace with Mehmed II. He pointed out that Skanderbeg would be ready to go back to war should the Pope ask for it.<sup>[78]</sup>

In November 1463, Pope Pius II tried to organize a new crusade against the Ottoman Turks, similar to what Pope Nicholas V and Pope Calixtus III had tried to do before him. Pius II invited all the Christian nobility to join, and the Venetians immediately answered the appeal.<sup>[79]</sup> So did Skanderbeg, who on 27 November 1463, declared war on the Ottomans and attacked the Turkish forces near Ohrid. Pius II's planned crusade envisioned assembling 20,000 soldiers in Taranto, while another 20,000 would be gathered by Skanderbeg. They would have been summoned in Durazzo under Skanderbeg's leadership and would have formed the central front against the Ottomans. However, Pius II died in August 1464, at the crucial moment when the crusading armies were gathering and preparing to march in Ancona, and Skanderbeg was again left alone facing the Ottomans.<sup>[79]</sup>



Skanderbeg Museum in Krujë

Meanwhile, the position of Venice toward Skanderbeg had changed perceptibly because the Republic had entered in their first war with the Turks (1463–1479). During this period the Republic saw Skanderbeg as an invaluable ally, and on 20 August 1463, the peace treaty of 1448 was renewed and this time other conditions were added: the right of asylum in Venice, an article stipulating that any Venetian treaty with the Turks would include a guarantee of Albanian independence, and allowing the presence of several Venetian ships in the Adriatic waters around Lezhë.<sup>[80]</sup>

In April 1465, at the First Battle of Vajkal, Skanderbeg fought and defeated Ballaban Badera Pasha, an Albanian Ottoman general. However, during an ambush in the same battle, Ballaban managed to capture some important Albanian noblemen, including Moisi Arianit Golemi, a cavalry commander, Vladan Gjurica, the chief army quartermaster, Muzaka of Angelina, a nephew of Skanderbeg, and 18 other officers.<sup>[79]</sup> These men were sent immediately to Constantinople (Istanbul) where they were skinned alive for fifteen days and later cut to pieces and thrown to the dogs.<sup>[79]</sup> Skanderbeg's pleas to have these men back, by either ransom or prisoner exchange, failed.<sup>[79]</sup>

Later that same year, two other Ottoman armies appeared on the borders. The commander of one of the Ottoman armies was Ballaban Pasha, who, together with Jakup Bey, the commander of the second army, planned a double-flank envelopment. Skanderbeg, however, attacked Ballaban's forces at the Second Battle of Vajkal, where the Turks were defeated. This time, all the Turkish prisoners were slain in an act of revenge for the previous execution of Albanian captains.<sup>[81]</sup> The other Turkish army, under the command of Jakup Bey, was also defeated some days later in Kashari field near Tirana.<sup>[81]</sup>

In 1466, Sultan Mehmed II personally led an army of 30,000 into Albania and laid the Second Siege of Krujë, as his father had attempted 16 years earlier.<sup>[82]</sup> The town was defended by a garrison of 4,400 men, led by Prince Tanush Thopia.<sup>[82]</sup> After several months of siege, destruction and killings all over the country, Mehmed II, like his father, saw that seizing Krujë was impossible for him to accomplish by force of arms. Subsequently, he left the siege to return to Istanbul.<sup>[82]</sup> However, he left the force of 30,000 men under Ballaban Pasha to maintain the siege by building a castle in central Albania, which he named *Il-basan* (modern Elbasan), in order to support the siege. Durazzo would be the next target of the sultan in order to be used as a strong base opposite the Italian coast.<sup>[82]</sup>

Skanderbeg spent the following winter of 1466—1467 in Italy, of which several weeks were spent in Rome trying to persuade Pope Paul II to give him money. At one point, he was unable to pay for his hotel bill, and he commented bitterly that he should be fighting against the Church rather than the Turks.<sup>[83]</sup> Only when Skanderbeg left for Naples did Pope Paul II give him 2,300 ducats. The court of Naples, whose policy in the Balkans hinged on Skanderbeg's resistance, was more generous with money, armaments and supplies. However, it is probably better to say that Skanderbeg financed and equipped his troops largely from local resources, richly supplemented by Turkish booty.<sup>[84]</sup> It is safe to say that the papacy was generous with praise and encouragement, but its financial subsidies were limited. It is possible that the Curia only provided to Skanderbeg 20,000 ducats in all, which could have paid the wages of 20 men over the whole period of conflict.<sup>[84]</sup>

However, on his return he allied with Lekë Dukagjini, and together on April 19, 1467, they first attacked and defeated, in the Krrabë region, the Turkish reinforcements commanded by Yonuz, Ballaban's brother. Yonuz himself and his son, Haydar were taken prisoner.<sup>[81]</sup> Four days later, on April 23, 1467, they attacked the Ottoman forces laying siege to Krujë. The Second Siege of Krujë was eventually broken, resulting in the death of Ballaban Pasha by an Albanian arquebusier<sup>[26] [78]</sup> named Gjergj Aleksii.<sup>[85]</sup>

After these events, Skanderbeg's forces besieged Elbasan but lacked artillery and sufficient numbers to capture it by direct assault.<sup>[86]</sup> The destruction of Ballaban Pasha's army and the siege of Elbasan forced Mehmed II to march against Albania again in the summer of 1467. He energetically pursued the attacks against the Albanian strongholds while sending detachments to raid the Venetian possessions (especially Durazzo) and to keep them isolated. The Ottomans failed again, in their third Siege of Krujë, to take the city and subjugate the country, but the degree of destruction was immense.

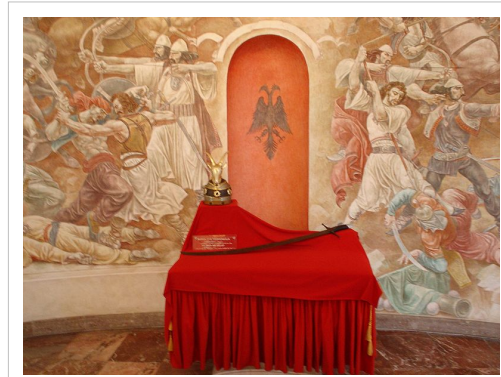
During the annual Ottoman incursions, the Albanians suffered a great number of casualties, especially to the civilian population, while the economy of the country was in ruins. The above problems, the loss of many Albanian noblemen, and the new alliance with Lekë Dukagjini, caused Skanderbeg to call together in January 1468 all the remaining Albanian noblemen to a conference in the Venetian stronghold of Lezhë to discuss the new war strategy and to restructure what remained from the League of Lezhë.<sup>[86]</sup> During that period, Skanderbeg fell ill with malaria and soon died on January 17, 1468.<sup>[86]</sup>



Skanderbeg's helmet preserved in the  
Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna

## Aftermath

After Skanderbeg's death, Venice asked and obtained from his widow the permission to defend Krujë and the other fortresses with Venetian garrisons.<sup>[86]</sup> Krujë held out during its fourth siege, started in 1477 by Gedik Ahmed Pasha, until 16 June 1478, when the city was starved to death and finally surrendered to Sultan Mehmed II himself.<sup>[86]</sup> Demoralized and severely weakened by hunger and lack of supplies from the year-long siege, the defenders surrendered to Mehmed, who had promised them to leave unharmed in exchange.<sup>[87]</sup> As the Albanians were walking away with their families however, the Ottomans reneged on this promise, killing the men and enslaving the women and children.<sup>[87]</sup> In 1479, an Ottoman army, headed again by Mehmed II, besieged and captured Shkodër,<sup>[86]</sup> reducing Venice's Albanian possessions only to Durazzo, Antivari, and Dulcigno.<sup>[86]</sup>



Mural commemorating a battle of Skanderbeg. The Arms of Skanderbeg visible in the forefront are copies of the originals held at the Art Museum of Vienna

Meanwhile, King Ferdinand of Naples' gratitude toward Skanderbeg for the help given during this Italian campaign continued even after Skanderbeg's death. In a letter dated to 24 February 1468, King Ferdinand expressively stated that "Skanderbeg was like a father to us" and "We regret this (Skanderbeg's) death not less than the death of King Alfonso", offering protection for Skanderbeg's widow and his son. It is relevant to the fact that the majority of Albanian leaders after the death of Skanderbeg found refuge in the Kingdom of Naples and this was also the case for the common people trying to escape from the Ottomans, who formed Arbëresh colonies in that area.

On April 25, 1479, the Ottoman forces captured the Venetian-controlled Shkodër, which had been besieged since May 14, 1478.<sup>[88]</sup> Shkodër was the last Albanian castle to fall to the Ottomans. The Albanian resistance to the Ottoman invasion continued after Skanderbeg's death by his son, Gjon Kastrioti II, who tried to liberate Albanian territories from Ottoman rule in 1481–1484.<sup>[89]</sup> In addition, a major revolt in 1492 occurred in southern Albania, mainly in the Labëria region, and Bayazid II was personally involved with crushing the resistance.<sup>[90]</sup> In 1501, Gjergj Kastrioti II, grandson of Skanderbeg and son of Gjon Kastrioti II, along with Progon Dukagjini and around 150–200 *stratioti*, went to Lezhë and organized a local uprising, but that too was unsuccessful.<sup>[91]</sup> The Venetians evacuated Durazzo in 1501.

## Descendants

Skanderbeg's family, the Kastrioti Scanderbeg, were invested with a Neapolitan dukedom after their flight from the Ottoman conquest of Albania.<sup>[92]</sup> They obtained a feudal domain, the Duchy of San Pietro in Galatina and the County of Soletto (Province of Lecce, Italy).<sup>[93]</sup> Gjon Kastrioti II, Scanderbeg's son, married Irene Palaiologina, one of the last descendents of the Byzantine imperial family, the Palaiologos.<sup>[93]</sup>

Two lines of the Castriota Scanderbeg family lived from that time onwards to the present day in southern Italy, one of which has descended from Pardo Castriota Scanderbeg and the other from Achille Castriota Scanderbeg, who were both biological sons of Duke Ferrante, son of Gjon, and Scanderbeg's nephew. They are part of the Italian nobility and members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta with the highest rank of nobility.<sup>[94]</sup>

The only legitimate daughter of Duke Ferrante, Irene Castriota Scanderbeg, born to Andreana Acquaviva d'Aragona from the Nardò dukes, inherited the paternal estate, bringing the Duchy of Galatina and County of Soletto into the Sanseverino family after her marriage with Prince Pietrantonio Sanseverino (1508–1559). They had a son, Nicolò Bernardino Sanseverino (1541–1606), but the direct male line of descendants was lost after Irenece Castriota. Prominent modern descendants include Filippo Castriota, collaborator of Ismail Qemali, founder of modern Albania and author Giorgio Maria Castriota.

## Legacy

The Ottoman Empire's expansion ground to a halt during the time that Skanderbeg's forces resisted. He has been credited with being the one of the main reasons for delaying Ottoman expansion into Western Europe, giving the Italian principalities more time to better prepare for the Ottoman arrival.<sup>[26]</sup> <sup>[95]</sup> While the Albanian resistance certainly played a vital role, it was one of numerous relevant events that played out in the mid-15th century. Much credit must also go to the successful resistance mounted by Vlad III Dracula in Wallachia and Stephen III the Great of Moldavia, who dealt the Ottomans their worst defeat at Vaslui, among many others, as well as the defeats inflicted upon the Ottomans by Hunyadi and his Hungarian forces.<sup>[96]</sup> Along with Skanderbeg, Stephen III the Great and Hunyadi achieved the title of *Athleta Christi* (Defenders of the Christian faith). The distinguishing characteristic of Skanderbeg was the maintenance of such an effective resistance for a long period of time (25 years) against one of the 15th century's strongest powers while possessing very limited economic and human resources. His political, diplomatic, and military abilities were the main factors enabling the small Albanian principalities to achieve such a success.



Skanderbeg's mausoleum in Lezhë

Skanderbeg is considered today a commanding figure not only in the national consciousness of Albanians but also of 15th-century European history.<sup>[97]</sup> According to archival documents, there is no doubt that Skanderbeg had already achieved a reputation as a hero in his own time.<sup>[98]</sup> The failure of most European nations, with the exception of Naples, to give him support, along with the failure of Pope Pius II's plans to organize a promised crusade against the Turks meant that none of Skanderbeg's victories permanently hindered the Ottomans from invading the Western Balkans.<sup>[98]</sup> When in 1481 Sultan Mehmet II captured Otranto, he massacred the male population, thus proving what Skanderbeg had been warning about.<sup>[98]</sup> Skanderbeg's main legacy was the inspiration he gave to all of those who saw in him a symbol of the struggle of Christendom against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>[99]</sup>

Skanderbeg's struggle against the Ottomans became highly significant to the Albanian people. It strengthened their solidarity, made them more conscious of their identity, and was a source of inspiration in their struggle for national unity, freedom, and independence.<sup>[100]</sup>

Probably one of the most important legacies of Skanderbeg lies with his military mastery. The trouble that he caused to the Ottoman Empire military forces was such that when the Ottomans found the grave of Skanderbeg in Saint Nicholas, a church in Lezhë, they opened it and made amulets of his bones, believing that these would confer bravery on the wearer.<sup>[101]</sup> Indeed the damage inflicted to the Ottoman Army was such that Skanderbeg is said to have slain three thousand Turks with his own hand during his campaigns. Among stories told about him was that he never slept more than five hours at night and could cut two men asunder with a single stroke of his scimitar, cut through iron helmets, kill a wild boar with a single stroke, and cleave the head off a buffalo with another.<sup>[102]</sup> James Wolfe, commander of the British forces at Quebec, spoke of Skanderbeg as a commander who "excels all the officers, ancient and modern, in the conduct of a small defensive army".<sup>[103]</sup> On October 27, 2005, the United States Congress issued a resolution "honoring the 600th anniversary of the birth of Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg), statesman, diplomat, and military genius, for his role in saving Western Europe from Ottoman occupation."<sup>[104]</sup> <sup>[105]</sup> Fully understanding the importance to the Albanians of the hero, Nazi Germany formed in February 1944, the 21st SS Division *Skanderbeg*, with 6,491 Kosovo Albanians.<sup>[106]</sup>

Skanderbeg is also remembered as a statesman. During his reign as part of his internal policy programs, Skanderbeg issued many edicts, such as those on carrying out a census of the population and on tax collection, based on Roman and Byzantine law.

## In literature and art

Skanderbeg gathered quite a posthumous reputation in Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. With much of the Balkans under Ottoman rule and with the Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1683, nothing could have captivated readers in the West more than an action-packed tale of heroic Christian resistance to the "Moslem hordes".<sup>[98]</sup>

Books on the Albanian prince began to appear in Western Europe in the early 16th century. One of the earliest was the *Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi, Epirotarum Principis* (Rome, 1508), published a mere four decades after Skanderbeg's death. This *History of the life and deeds of Scanderbeg, Prince of the Epirotes* was written by the Albanian historian Marinus Barletius Scodrensis, known in Albanian as Marin Barleti, who, after experiencing the Turkish occupation of his native Shkodër at firsthand, settled in Padua where he became rector of the parish church of St. Stephan. Barleti dedicated his work to Don Ferrante Kastrioti, Skanderbeg's grandchild, and to posterity. The book was first published in Latin.<sup>[107]</sup> Although Barleti gives a good history of Skanderbeg, he is sometimes inaccurate in favour of his hero, for example, according to Gibbon, Barleti claims that the Sultan was killed by disease under the walls of Krujë.<sup>[108]</sup> Barleti's inaccuracies had also been noticed prior to Gibbon by Laonikos Chalkokondyles.<sup>[109]</sup>



Frontispiece of *Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi, Epirotarum principis* by Marin Barleti

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Barleti's book was translated into a number of foreign language versions: in German by Johann Pincianus (1533), in Italian by Pietro Rocca (1554, 1560), in Portuguese by Francisco D'Andrade (1567), in Polish by Ciprian Bazylík (1569), in French by Jaques De Lavardin (French: *Histoire de Georges Castriot Surnomé Scanderbeg, Roy d'Albanie*, 1576), and in Spanish by Juan Ochoa de la Salde (1582). The English version was a translation made by Zachary Jones Gentleman from de Lavardin's French version, and was published at the end of the 16th century under the title, *Historie of George Castriot, surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albinie; containing his Famous Actes, his Noble Deedes of Armes and Memorable Victories against the Turkes for the Faith of Christ*. All these books, written in the panegyric style that would often characterize medieval historians who regarded history mostly as a branch of rhetoric, inspired a wide range of literary and art works.



Franciscus Blancus, a Catholic bishop born in Albania, also wrote Kastrioti's biography. His book "Georgius Castriotus, Epirorensis vulgo Scanderbegh, Epirotarum Princeps Fortissimus" was published in Latin in 1636.<sup>[110]</sup> French philosopher, Voltaire, in his works, held in very high consideration the Albanian hero.<sup>[G]</sup>

Skanderbeg is the protagonist of three 18th-century British tragedies: William Havard's *Scanderbeg, A Tragedy* (1733), George Lillo's *The Christian Hero* (1735), and Thomas Whincop's *Scanderbeg, Or, Love and Liberty* (1747).<sup>[111]</sup> A number of poets and composers have also drawn inspiration from his military career. The French 16th-century poet Ronsard wrote a poem about him, as did the 19th-century American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.<sup>[112]</sup> Gibbon, the 18th-century historian, holds Skanderbeg in high regard with panegyric expressions.<sup>[H]</sup>

In 1855, Camille Paganel wrote *Histoire de Scanderbeg*, inspired by the Crimean War,<sup>[113]</sup> whereas in the lengthy poetic tale Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812–1819), Byron wrote with admiration about Skanderbeg and his warrior nation.<sup>[F]</sup> Ludvig Holberg, a Danish writer and philosopher, claimed that Skanderbeg is one of the greatest generals in history.<sup>[114]</sup> Sir William Temple considered Skanderbeg to be one of the seven greatest chiefs without a crown, along with Belisarius, Flavius Aetius, John Hunyadi, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, Alexander Farnese, and William the Silent.<sup>[115]</sup> Skanderbeg is also mentioned by Prince of Montenegro, Petar II Petrović-Njegoš, one of the greatest poets of Serbian literature in his poem *The Mountain Wreath*,<sup>[116]</sup> and False Tsar Stephen the Little<sup>[117]</sup>

The Italian baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi composed an opera entitled *Scanderbeg* (first performed 1718). Another opera, entitled *Scanderbeg*, was composed by 18th century French composer François Francœur (first performed 1763).<sup>[118]</sup> In the 20th century, Albanian composer Prenkë Jakova composed a third opera, entitled *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu*, which premiered in 1968 for the 500th anniversary of the hero's death.<sup>[119]</sup>

*The Great Warrior Skanderbeg* (Albanian: *Skënderbeu*, Russian: *Velikiy voyn Albanii Skanderbeg*), a 1953 Albanian-Soviet biographical film, earned an International Prize at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival.<sup>[120]</sup>

Skanderbeg's memory has been engraved in many museums, such as the Skanderbeg Museum next to Krujë Castle. Many monuments are dedicated to his memory in the Albanian cities of Tirana (in the Skanderbeg Square by Odhise Paskali), Krujë, and Peshkopi. A palace in Rome in which Skanderbeg resided during his 1466–67 visits to the Vatican is still called Palazzo Skanderbeg and currently houses the Italian museum of pasta.<sup>[121]</sup> the palace is located between the Fontana di Trevi and the Quirinal Palace. Also in Rome, a statue is dedicated to the Albanian hero in Piazza Albania. Monuments or statues of Skanderbeg have also been erected in the cities of Skopje and Debar, in the Republic of Macedonia; Pristina, in Kosovo; Geneva, in Switzerland; Brussels, in Belgium; and other settlements in southern Italy where there is an Arbëreshë community. In 2006, a statue of Skanderbeg was unveiled on the grounds of St. Paul's Albanian Catholic Community in Rochester Hills, Michigan, the first Skanderbeg statue in the United States.<sup>[122]</sup>



Portrait of Scanderbeg, ca. 1648

## Notes

- A. ^ Although there have been many theories on the place where Skanderbeg was born,<sup>[123]</sup> the main biographers now tend to agree on the place of birth as the village of Sinë, in modern Albania. One of the main Skanderbeg biographers, Frashëri, has, among other, interpreted Gjon Muzaka's book of genealogies, sources of Raffaele Maffei, ("il Volterrano" (1451–1522)), and the Turkish *defter* (census) of 1467 and has placed the birth of Skanderbeg in the small village.<sup>[124]</sup>
- B. ^ On the reasons why the besieged had problems with the water in the castle primary sources disagree: While Barleti and Biemmi maintained that a dead dog was found in the castle well, and the garrison refused to drink the water since it might corrupt their soul, another primary source, an Ottoman chronicler, conjectured that the Ottoman forces found and cut the water sources of the castle. Recent historians mostly concur with the Ottoman chronicler's version.<sup>[125]</sup>
- C. ^ According to Barleti, a primary source, Skanderbeg and his three older brothers, Reposh, Kostandin, and Stanisha, were taken by the Sultan to his court as hostages. However, according to documents, besides Skanderbeg, only one of the brothers of Skanderbeg, probably Stanisha,<sup>[1]</sup> was taken hostage and had been conscripted into the *Devşirme* system, a military institute that would enroll Christian boys, convert them to Islam, and train them to become military officers.<sup>[126]</sup> Recent historians are of the opinion that while Stanisha might have been conscripted at a young age, and had to go through the *Devşirme* system, this was not the case with Skanderbeg, who is assumed to have been sent hostage to the Sultan by his father only at the age of 18.<sup>[10]</sup> It was in use at that time that in case of a military loss against the Sultan, a local chieftain would send one of his children at the Sultan's court, so that the child would be kept hostage for an unspecified time. The Sultan would this way exercise control in the area of the father by the hostage kept. The treatment of the hostage was not a bad one: Far from being a prison or anything similar, the sons taken hostage would be usually sent to the best military schools and trained to be future military leaders.<sup>[127]</sup>
- D. ^ Skanderbeg always signed himself as "Lord of Albania" (Latin: *Dominus Albaniae*), and claimed no other titles but that in official documents.<sup>[128]</sup>
- E. ^ Authors have disagreed on whether Krujë belonged to Skanderbeg or to Alfonso V. While scholar Marinesco claimed in 1923 that Krujë no longer belonged Skanderbeg, but to Alfonso, who exercised his power through his viceroy,<sup>[129]</sup> this thesis has been rejected by scholar Athanas Gegaj in 1937, who claimed that the disproportion in numbers between the Spanish forces (100) and Skanderbeg's (around 10–15 thousand) clearly showed that the city belonged to Skanderbeg. Now what is generally accepted is that Skanderbeg *de facto* had full sovereignty over his territories: while Naples' archives registered payments and supplies sent to Skanderbeg, they do not mention any kind of payment or tribute by Skanderbeg to Alfonso, except for various Turkish war prisoners and banners sent by him as a gift to the King.<sup>[130]</sup> Frashëri agrees with Gegaj in regards.<sup>[131]</sup>
- F. ^ In his lengthy poetic tale *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1819), Byron wrote about Skanderbeg and his warrior nation in the following terms:<sup>[132]</sup>

*Land of Albania! where Iskander rose,  
 Theme of the young, and beacon of the wise,  
 And he his namesake, whose oft-baffled foes,  
 Shrunk from his deeds of chivalrous emprise:  
 Land of Albania! let me bend mine eyes  
 On thee, thou rugged nurse of savage men!  
 The cross descends, thy minarets arise,  
 And the pale crescent sparkles in the glen,  
 Through many a cypress grove within each city's ken."*

- G. ^ Voltaire started his chapter "The Taking of Constantinople" with the following catchy phrase:<sup>[133]</sup>  
 Had the Greek Emperors acted like Scanderbeg, the empire of the East might still have been preserved.
- H. ^ Gibbon attributes to Hunyadi and Skanderbeg that they *are both entitled to our notice, since their occupation of the Ottoman arms delayed the ruin of the Greek empire.*<sup>[134]</sup>
- I. ^ In his response to Orsini, Skanderbeg mentioned that the Albanians never betray their friends, and that they are the descendants of Pyrrhus of Epirus. He also reminded Orsini of Pyrrhus' victories in southern Italy.<sup>[75]</sup>
- J. ^ Since there is no birth documents for any of the children of Gjon Kastrioti, there has been disagreement between historians in relation to the year of birth of Skanderbeg until 1947, when Fan Noli's study on Skanderbeg placed the year of birth in 1405, which is now agreed upon by the majority of scholars<sup>[135]</sup>
- K. ^ Several scholars have assumed that Skanderbeg was given a fiefdoms in Nikopol in modern Bulgaria, because that location is mentioned in a document that has a certain Iskander bey,<sup>[15]</sup> however other scholars have rejected that possibility, arguing that the document is unreliable, because there can be no certainty that the Iskander bey mentioned is the same as Skanderbeg, in addition, the document is undated.
- L. ^ The two villages are in the area of Gostivar

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- [5] Hodgkinson 2005, p. 1
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- [9] Noli 1947, p. 21
- [10] Frashëri 2002, p. 86
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- [12] Anamali 2002, p. 342
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- [16] Francione 2003, p. 15
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- [18] Fine, John Van Antwerp (1994), *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (<http://books.google.gr/books?id=Hh0Bu8C66TsC>), University of Michigan Press, p. 535, ISBN 978-0472082605, , "In 1432 Andrew Thopia revolted against his Ottoman overlords ... inspired other Albanian chiefs, in particular George Arianite (Araniti) ... The revolt spread ... from region of Valona up to Skadar... At this time, though summoned home by his relatives ... Skanderbeg did nothing, he remained ... loyal to sultan"
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- [29] Gibbon 1788, p. 143
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- [35] Myrdal 1976, p. 48
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# Principality of Dukagjini

<b>Principata e Dukagjinit</b> <b>Principality of Dukagjini</b>	
Principality	
←  1387–1444  →	
 <p>Dukagjini Principality in 15th century</p>	
<b>Capital</b>	Lezha
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Catholic
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Prince</b>	
- 1387-1393	Pal Dukagjini and Leka I Dukagjini
- 1393-1438	Tanush Dukagjini
- 1438-1444	Pal II Dukagjini
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	1387 1387
- Disestablished	2 March 1444 1444

**Principality of Dukagjini** (1387–1444) was a principality in Medieval Albania. It was created by brothers Pal and Leka I Dukagjini and then ruled by Pal's descendants, Tanush Dukagjini, Pal II Dukagjini, who took part in the League of Lezha. Pal's son, Lekë III Dukagjini is one of the most prominent personalities in Albanian history.

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# Lekë Dukagjini

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Lekë Dukagjini	
<i>Prince of Albania</i>	
<b>Born</b>	1410 1481 (aged 71)
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic

**Lekë Dukagjini** (1410–1481) was an Albanian prince who fought against the Ottoman Empire. A contemporary of Skanderbeg, Dukagjini is known for the *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*, a code of law instituted in northern Albania.

## Biography

Lekë Dukagjini is thought to have been born in Ulpiana - (an area south and close to present day village of Gračanica and Hajvalia suburbs of Prishtina City), in Kosovo, although documents from the Vatican archives suggest it may have been near Pukë.

By the time he took over the ruling of the county from his father Prince Pal Dukagjini in 1446, Dukagjini had gained knowledge, inspired by European Renaissance humanism, of towns such as Venice, Ragusa and Shkodër, and had studied in Prizren.

Dukagjini fought under the command of Skanderbeg against the Ottomans during the last two years of the legendary war of Skanderbeg. During times of peace they also fought against one another, as Albanian loyalties came and went during that period of their history. Lekë Dukagjini ambushed and killed Lekë Zaharia Altisferi, prince of Dagnum. The two princes had been in dispute over who should marry Irene Dushmani. Irene was the only child of Lekë Dushmani, prince of Zadrime. In 1445, the Albanian princes had been invited to the wedding of Skanderbeg's younger sister, Mamica, who was being married to Muzaka Thopia. Irene entered the wedding and hostilities began.<sup>[1]</sup> Dukagjini asked Irene to marry him but Zaharia, drunk, saw this and assaulted Dukagjini. Some princes attempted to stop the fight, but only more people became involved, resulting in several deaths until peace was established.<sup>[2] [3]</sup> Neither of the two antagonists had suffered any physical damage, but after the event Dukagjini was morally humiliated. Two years later, in 1447, in an act of revenge, Dukagjini ambushed and killed Zaharia.

The death of Zaharia left his principality with no successor, resulting in his mother handing the fortress over to Venetian Albania, a stretch of possessions of the Republic of Venice.<sup>[4] [5] [6]</sup> When Skanderbeg tried (unsuccessfully) to capture Dagnum in 1447 he caused Albanian–Venetian War (1447–1448) that resulted with loss of Svetigrad.

Dukagjini continued to fight with limited success against the Ottoman Empire, carrying on as the leader of the Albanian resistance after the death of Skanderbeg, until 1479. At times his forces united with the Venetians with the blessing of the Pope.

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## Legacy

Overshadowed by the legend of Skanderbeg, Dukagjini is most well-known for the set of laws ruling the highlands of northern Albania, known as the *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*. Whilst identifying Skanderbeg as the "dragon prince" who dared to fight against any foe, chronicles portray Dukagjini as the "angel prince" who, with dignity and wisdom, ensured the continuity of the Albanian identity.

The set of laws were active in practice for a long time, but it was not gathered and codified until the late 19th century by Shtjefën Gjeçovi.<sup>[7] [8]</sup> The most infamous laws of Kanuni are those regulating blood feuds. Blood feuds have started once again in northern Albania (and have since spread to other parts of Albania, and even to expatriates abroad) after the fall of communism in the early 1990s, having been outlawed for many years during the regime of Enver Hoxha, and contained by the relatively closed borders.

Dukagjini's military success against the Ottomans was never extremely successful; he also lacked the ability to unite the country and the Albanian people in the way that Skanderbeg had. Loyalties wavered, and splintered, betrayals were common, and Albania fell into complete submission to the Ottomans by the end of the 15th century.

## Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini

Overshadowed by the legend of Skanderbeg, Dukagjini is most well-known for the set of laws ruling the highlands of northern Albania, known as the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini.

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# Princedom of Albania

*Not to be confused with Principality of Albania, which existed in the modern Albanian state*

<b>Princedom of Albania</b>	
Principality	
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-right: 10px;">←</span> <span style="margin: 0 10px;">1368–1444</span> <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 10px;">→</span> </div>	
	
Flag of Princedom of Albania	
	
Princedom of Albania in 15th century	
<b>Capital</b>	Durrës
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Catholic
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Prince</b>	
- 1368–1382	Karl Thopia
- 1443-1444	Andrea II Thopia
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	1368 1368
- Disestablished	2 March 1444 1444

**Princedom of Albania** (1368-1443) was an Albanian principality formed after the disestablishment of Kingdom of Albania, by Karl Thopia. The principality changed hands between the Thopia dynasty and the Balsha dynasty, until 1392, when Durrës was occupied by the Republic of Venice and the Princedom managed to control only a portion of the surroundings of the city. When Skanderbeg liberated Kruja and reorganised the Principality of Kastrioti, the descendant of Gjergj Thopia, Andrea II Thopia, managed to regain control of the Durrës. Finally, it was united with

other Albanian Principalities forming the League of Lezha in 1444.

## Rulers

- Karl Thopia 1st reign 1368–1382
- Balša II 1382–1385 (Serbian rule)
- Karl Thopia 2nd reign 1385–1387
- Gjergj Thopia 1387–1392
- Andrea I Thopia 1392-1428
- Andrea II Thopia 1428-1444

## Creation

In 1358, Karlo rose against the rule of the Anjou and could drive them out up to Durrës from Epirus and Albania. It prevailed from 1358 to 1387 over far parts of central Albania and called themselves Princeps Albaniae.

Since 1362, Karlo sought himself to set Durrës, which was in the possession of the Duchess Johanna of Anjou, also into the possession of the city. The first, certainly still unsuccessful siege lasted from April 1362 until May 1363. Then, Thopia had to withdraw his troops, who were weakened by an epidemic disease. Only in 1367 could Karlo conquer Durrës, who had attained in the meantime the tacit agreement of the Venetians for his project and make important port his residence.

Karlo gained control of Durrës in 1368, which was where the Angevins held out due to their Kingdom becoming smaller in size. This event caused the Kingdom of Albania to end.

## Balša dynasty

Balša II made a fourth attempt to conquer Durrës, an important commercial and strategetic center, which was ruled by rival, Karl Thopia. In 1382, Balša II began a war and seized Durrës. In 1385, the defeated Karl Thopia, appealed to Murad I for support against his rivals, the House of Balšić of the Principality of Zeta. This was the equivalent of inviting the Ottoman Empire into Albania in order to help him defeat his rivals of the Balšić family.

This attempt caused an Ottoman force, led by Hayreddin Pasha, to quickly march into Albania along the Via Egnatia. The Ottoman force routed the Balšas by inflicting heavy defeats on Balša II's forces. Balša II himself was killed in a big battle on Saurian Field (Serbian: Saurijsko Polje) near Berat in 1385, ending the Balša family's rule over Durrës.

## Downfall

In 1392, the Princedom of Albania was territorially shrinking in the areas surroundings Durrës, which fell under the Republic of Venice. When Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg managed to regain control over Krujë, Andrea II Thopia, descendant of Karl Thopia, regained Durrës and united the princedom with the League of Lezha on March 2, 1444.

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# Karl Topia

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**Karl Topia** (died 1387) was an Albanian Prince from 1358 to 1387. He was the son of Andreas Topia and his mother was a daughter of Robert I of Naples. Karl was the independent Albanian ruler of Durazzo (modern-day Durrës). To the Roman Curia, Karl maintained usually good relations, therefore that could do. In 1376 a vacant place became an ore diocese in Durrës, again with a Latin Bishop to be occupied.

## Control of Durazzo

In 1358, Karl rose against the rule of the Anjou and managed to drive them out of Durrës from Epirus and Albania. He ruled most of modern central Albania from 1358 to 1387 and had the title of Princeps Albaniae.

Since 1362, Karl sought himself to set Durrës, which was in the possession of the Duchess Joanna of Anjou, also into the possession of the city. The first, certainly still unsuccessful siege lasted from April 1362 until May 1363. Then, Topia had to withdraw his troops, who were weakened by an epidemic disease. Only in 1367 could Karl conquer Durrës, who had attained in the meantime the tacit agreement of the Venetians for his project and make important port his residence.

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## Balša family rivalry

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An Ottoman force had been prepared in Macedonia to strike against Topia in 1384 before Balša had conquered Durrës. He did not invite the Ottoman forces into Albania as has been claimed by writers like Marin Barleti. Furthermore, Turkish sources never refer to Topia calling for Ottoman aid.<sup>[1]</sup>

An Ottoman force, led by Hayrudin Pasha, marched into Albania along the Via Egnatia and routed the Balšići, Hajrudin Pasha's forces inflicted heavy defeat on Balša II's forces and killed Balša II in a big battle on Saurian Field near Berat in 1385, ending the House of Balšić's rule over Durrës.

## Venetian Alliance

In the last decade of his rule Karl followed closely the Republic of Venice particularly with regard to foreign policy. On August 17, 1386, Karl Topia allied himself with Venice. Karl committed himself to participate in all wars of the Republic or pay auxiliary funds and supply grain. In addition, he promised the Venetian buyers protection in his country. Venice supplied, in response, a galeere to it with, permitted its mercenaries in their areas to recruit and instructed the captain of their Adriatic fleet to protect Karl's coasts from the Turks. These undertook several heavy attacks on Durrës, which also still persisted as Karl in January 1388 died. His son, Gjergj, became Karl's successor.



## Buildings from Topia

In 1381, Karl built the St. Jovan Vladimir's Church in the proximity of Elbasan, where Jovan Vladimir's remains were held until 1995.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Marriage and children

Karl married Serbian Voisava Balšić, ca 1370. The pair had four children:

- Gjergj Topia - The successor of Karl. Married Teodora Branković
- Elena Topia - Married Sergiant Marco Barbadigo (first marriage) and Serbian Konstantin Balšić (second marriage)
- Voislava Topia - Married N Cursachio (first marriage) and in 1394, Progon Ducaghin, Lord of Alessio (second marriage)

## Parentage uncertain

Karl had two more children but the parentage is unknown:

- Maria Topia Married Filippo di Maramonte
- Nicheta Topia Married a daughter a Cominum Shpata.
  - Mara Topia, Daughter of Nicheta Topia and a daughter of Cominum Shpata. Married Serbian Balša III.

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# Gjergj, Lord of Durrës

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**Gjergj Thopia** (died 1392) was the Lord of Dyrrhachium from 1387 to 1392. He was the son of Karlo Thopia and Vojsava Balšić. Gjergj married Teodora Branković of the Serbian Branković family.

Gjergj surrendered Dyrrhachium to the Republic of Venice in 1392. Later that year, he died without issue. His sister, Elena, gained the bulk of his holdings. A smaller portion was left for his younger sister, Vojsava.

# State of Arianiti

Shteti i Arianitit State of Arianiti	
Principality	
←  1432–1444  →	
 <p>State of Arianiti in 15th century</p>	
<b>Capital</b>	Berat
<b>Language(s)</b>	Albanian
<b>Religion</b>	Eastern Orthodox
<b>Government</b>	Principality
<b>Prince</b>	
- 1432-1444	Gjergj Arianiti
<b>Historical era</b>	Medieval
- Established	1432 1432
- Disestablished	2 March 1444 1444

**State of Arianiti** (1432–1444) was a principality created by prince Gjergj Arianiti in 1432, with its capital Berat. The Principality was created, after the division of the Muzakaj Principality of Berat and was united with other Albanian Principalities in the League of Lezhë in 1444.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Prince

- Gjergj Arianiti (1432–1444)

## References

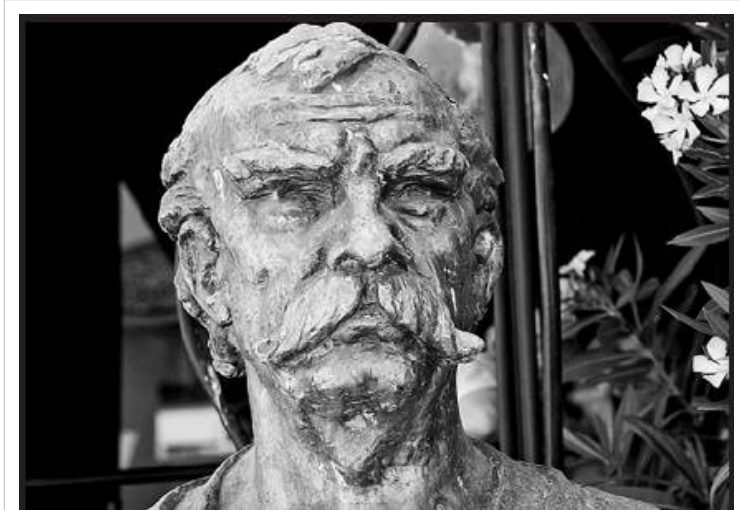
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# Gjergj Arianiti

**Gjergj Arianiti** was an important Albanian hero and the great uncle of Moisi Arianit Golemi. He was also the father of Gjergj Kastrioti's wife Marina Donika (Donika). He shared a distant relation from his great grandmother with the famous Byzantine Komnenos dynasty, originating in Paphlagonia, Asia Minor. He was thus often referred to as **Gjergj Arianit Komneni**.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Life

Gjergj Arianiti has many names. His full name was *Gjergj Arianit Komnen Golem Thopia*, however he was most commonly known as *Gjergj Arianiti*. Among folk legends and Albanian folklore, he is also known as *Gjorg Golemi*, and on his bust found in Librazhd is written *Gjorg Golem Arianiti*. He is also known as **Gjergj Golemi**.



Bust of Gjergj Arianit found in Librazhd.

Writings of his figure are not very common. He is more commonly referred to as the father of Donika Kastrioti, Skanderbeg's wife, rather than a leader of a rebellion that held back the Ottoman armies for years.

The family origin of Gjergj are debated, but it is known that his family eventually emigrated to Italy along with many other Albanians. In 1253, Byzantine chronicles mention a *Gulem* who ruled the lands of *Albanon*. Gulemi may be an ascendant of Gjergj Arianiti. Gulemi married a cousin of the Byzantine empress, Irene. From this marriage came the name *Komneni*.

Gjergj was the oldest of three sons. He married Maria Muzaka, and from this he acquired a territory from Mallakstra to Vlorë. His territories eventually reached northwards to Dibër. The center of his dominions were located between Librazhd and Elbasan.

With the death of his first wife, Gjergj married Pietrina Francone, an Italian aristocrat. His two wives bore him ten children, three of which were boys.<sup>[2]</sup>

The first was called Lady Andronica (also known as Donika), the second Lady Voisava, the third Lady Chiranna, the fourth Lady Helena, the fifth Lady Despina, the sixth Lady Angelina, the seventh Lady Comita and the eighth Lady Catherine.<sup>[2]</sup>

The first daughter, Lady Andronica, was married to Lord Scanderbeg Castriota, who was Lord of Dibra, Mat and Kruja down to the sea, and of Deberina, also called Randesio (Renc?), and of the province of Guonimi (Gjonëm).<sup>[2]</sup>

This Lady Andronica and Lord Scanderbeg gave birth to Lord John Castriot II who was Duke of Saint Pietro in Galatina. Lord John Castriot II was married to the lady Donna Irina Palaeologus, who was the daughter of Lord Lazar, Despot of Serbia. They had many children who died. Only two of them survived: a boy and a girl, Don Prince

Ferdinand Castriota who is Duke of Saint Peter, and a girl called Donna Maria Castriota.<sup>[2]</sup>

The second daughter called Donna Voisava was married to Lord John Cernovichi (Cernojevic), Lord of Montenegro and Zeta, and they had two sons. The first one was called Lord George and the second one was Lord Scanderbeg.<sup>[2]</sup>

Lord George married and had two sons. The first one was called Lord Solomon, the second Lord Constantine, as well as three daughters. Two of the latter married in Hungary and the third one in Venice. The said Solomon died and Constantine married in Venice.<sup>[2]</sup>

The second son, the said Lord Scanderbeg, turned Turk and now rules the land of his brother, which was given to him by the sultan for his having turned Turk.<sup>[2]</sup>

The third daughter, Lady Chiranna, was married to Lord Nicholas Dukagjini. She was the only daughter among brothers, and gave birth herself to two sons. One died and the other turned Turk and became a pasha and a great commander of the sultan.<sup>[2]</sup>

The fourth daughter, Lady Helena, was married to Lord George Dukagjini, to whom many children were born and all turned Turk. One called Scanderbeg is still alive and is a sanjak bey.<sup>[2]</sup>

The fifth daughter, Lady Despina, was married to Lord Tanush Dukagjini. They had two children: a boy and a girl. The boy died. The girl, Lady Theodora, was married to [...] and had two sons, Lord Blaise and Lord Jacob.<sup>[2]</sup>

The sixth daughter, Lady Angelina, was married to Lord Stephen, son of the Despot of Serbia called Lord George. The said Lady Angelina and Lord Stephen had two sons and one daughter. The sons died. The daughter was called Lady Maria and married the lord Marquis of Monferrato. They had two sons. The first one was called Lord William who married the sister of Monsignor d'Alençon, who is now the dauphin of France. This nobleman had two children: a boy and a girl. The boy is now the Marquis of Monferrato and the girl married Lord Frederick, Duke of Mantua. The other brother, Lord George, died without children.<sup>[2]</sup>

The seventh daughter, Lady Comita, married Lord Gojko Balsha who is Lord of Misia. They had two sons and one daughter. The sons died in Hungary. The daughter, Lady Maria, married the nobleman, Count of Muro, and had two daughters. The latter were called Donna Beatrice and Donna Isabel. The first lady, Donna Beatrice, married Prince Ferdinand Orsino, Duke of Gravina, and the other one, Princess Isabel, married Lord Louis of Gesualdo, Count of Conza.<sup>[2]</sup>

The eighth daughter was Lady Catherine who was married to Nicholas Boccali. They had two sons, Lord Manoli and Lord Constantine Boccali, and two daughters. Now let us turn to the five brothers who are as follows: Lord Andrew Musachi, Lord Materango, Lord Blaise, Lord Bogdan and Lord Laldi.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Campaigns against the Ottoman Empire

The eventual Ottoman rule over Albania caused much distress and negative reactions among the population. The Ottoman domination of Albania brought their legal, political, and economic systems into Albania, threatening to destroy the feudal system and autonomy of the Albanians. These reforms took away much of Gjergj's power, but still remained a vassal of the sultan. These drastic changes encouraged the rebellions of the Albanians against the Ottoman empire. Gjergj Arianiti was one of the main leaders of these rebellions.

In the spring of 1432, after the first phase of the reforms ended, an Albanian revolt erupted which spread to much of Albania. The first revolts began in central Albania. The Albanians called on Gjergj Arianit - who was thirty six years old- to lead the revolt.

Gjergj was at first apprehensive, but saw an opportunity to save the dominions left to him by his father. Upon hearing of the rebellions, many political enemies of Gjergj, who had become sipahis returned from Edirne to Albania. Upon reaching Albania, Gjergj immediately banished them. He was to lead the soldiers rebellion, which came from the peasant masses. Durrës, the area of Tirana controlled Andrea Topia, and Nikoll Dukagjin in the North joined the revolt.

Although Skanderbeg was summoned home by his relatives when Gjergj Arianiti with other chiefs from region between Vlorë and Shkodër organized rebellion, he did nothing remaining loyal to the sultan. <sup>[3]</sup> The Porte responded by sending an army of fresh troops in Albania under experienced commanders. Danja in northern Albania fell, while the Topias were returned to their former state. After a strong counterattack by Arianiti, the Ottomans were soon defeated.

This victory strengthened the revolt in southern Albania, especially in Kurvelesh. Murad II headed for Albania and chose to camp at Serez in Macedonia. From here, he sent out a force of ten thousand into Albania under Ali bey Evrenoz. The army of Ali bey, in the winter of 1432-1433, went through the tight valleys of the Shkumbin; near Buzurshekut (Bërzeshtës), the Albanians ambushed the Ottoman army. Arianiti observed and maneuvered against the Turks while also encouraging his men, eventually leading to an Ottoman rout. This victory further strengthened the Albanian cause and gave hope to the Europeans who feared a major Ottoman invasion.

The Byzantine chronicler, Chalcondyles, wrote: "*In this battle, Arianit Komneni won a glorious victory.*"

Arianiti used the classic tactic of "*Pulling the enemy in, preparing the trap and striking suddenly.*" Arianiti also destroyed a second army sent by Ali bey, leaving hundreds dead in the valleys of Kuç all the way to Borsh. The failure of the second Ottoman expedition became known throughout Europe, which was used to hearing about Christian defeats in the East. The joyful states of Europe - Pope Eugene IV, Alfonso V, Emperor Sigismund, Venice and Ragusa - promised aid. In his third battle (1434), in order to recapture Vlorë and Kanina, Arianiti used numbers, expediency and his tactics. Arianiti was known as the "protector of freedom" throughout the European kingdoms.

During the fall of 1443 and the winter of 1444 Arianiti led an army deep into Macedonia. During the same time, the Turks were routed at Nish and Skanderbeg deserted the Ottoman army and began another rebellion. Skanderbeg eventually allied with Gjergj Arianiti through the League of Lezhë.

When Krujë was besieged by the Turks, the sixty seven year old Gjergj Arianiti fought fiercely against the Turks. Arianiti, along with 3,000 warriors, joined the anti-Venetian force which eventually defeated the Venetian army at Drin. He was one of the main commanders during the short siege of Durrës and the siege of Dagno. Some of his troops went as far as the gates of Shkodër. Thus, his interests were not harmed by Venice, who wished to incorporate the bay of Vlorë into its dominions.

Arianiti supported the recapture of Sfetigrad with 4,000 men. During the two main engagements of the siege, Arianiti showed great bravery. During the siege, his brother was killed. The experience of Arianiti convinced Skanderbeg to marry Donica, Arianiti's daughter. The strong connections between the Kastrioti and Arianiti families were of great benefit to the Albanian cause.

Arianiti was the only Albanian leader to have two capitals; one near the coast in Kanina, and another near the eastern mountains in Sopot. His dominions acted as the first defense against many of the Ottoman expeditions and served as one of the main centers of the Albanian League. The union between the Kastrioti and Arianiti did not have much effect due to the exposed territories of Arianiti. Through many localities, he brought together his last resistance force (1460–1462). In an open front, Mehmet II ordered movements into Albania to engaged a group of Arianiti's warriors. He then surrounded Gjergj Arianiti by moving through the valley of Furka all the way through Shushicë. Fierce engagements began, but Sopot was not captured and the Ottoman encirclement failed. The people compared Gjergj Arianiti to Skanderbeg. To celebrate this victory, the army was taken to Galigat after the Ottomans had fully left Albania. However, when the Ottomans heard of this, they traveled back to Albania at night. The fortress of Sopot, left with a garrison chosen by Arianiti, still could not be taken. Only through bribery and treachery was it possible for the castle be taken. The Ottoman commander, took advantage of Arianiti's absence by launching a large attack with his main army. The Ottomans soon entered the castle, and in revenge for the defeats they had suffered, the entire population was massacred.

## Descendants

- Golemi, ruled *Albanon*, married Irene Komnenos
  - **Gjergj**, married Maria Muzaka
    - Donika Arianit, married Gjergj Kastrioti (Scanderbeg)<sup>[4]</sup>
    - Angelina of Serbia, Serbian Orthodox saint, married Stefan Branković<sup>[4]</sup>

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# Arianiti family

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The **Arianiti** were an Albanian noble family that ruled large areas in Albania and neighbouring areas from the 11th to the 16th century.<sup>[1]</sup> Their domain stretched across the Shkumbin valley and the old Via Egnatia road and reached to the east today's Bitola.<sup>[2]</sup>

## History of the family

The Arianiti family name has been linked with the noble Byzantine family of Arianites, which is mentioned for first time in the 11th century in the work of Byzantine historian, George Kedrenos. Kedrenos tells how during the 1001–1018 period the Byzantine Emperor Basil II, named David Arianites *strategos* of Thessaloniki, and later *strategos* of Skopje. David Arianites fought against the Bulgarians in Strumica and Skopje. David's son, Constantine, is also mentioned in the years 1049-1050 as being in the military service of the Byzantine Empire.

The name appears in modern Albania in the late 13th century: in 1274, in an agreement between Charles I of Naples and some Albanian noblemen the name of a *sebastokrator* Alexios Arianites is mentioned. The Arianites/Arianiti last name has also been mentioned in other 14th century documents: In 1304 two documents, one from Philip I, Prince of Taranto, and the other from Charles II of Naples between several names of Albanian noble families, to whom are recognized prior held privileges, include the name of the Arianiti family. In a 1319 letter, Pope John XXII sent to some Albanian nobles, the name of *protogator* Guljelm Arianiti is included. In the Epitaph of Gllavenica, embroidered in 1373, the name of George Arianiti, the embroiderer is documented.<sup>[2]</sup>

Not necessarily all the Arianiti people mentioned in various 11-14th century sources belong to the same family tree, however from them it is safe to assume that the Arianiti family was an important noble family of Medieval Central Albania. The importance of such family stemmed from the possession and control of important segments of the Royal Road (Via Egnatia) which served multiple convoys trading grain, salt and other products. The Arianiti family must have had the collaboration of the Pavle Kurtik, whose domain were in the provinces middle course of Shkumbin, and with Župan Andrea Gropa, ruler of the city of Ochrid. The dominant position of the fortress of Ochrid, on the whole area of a very rich lake with high quality fish, had made his possession was the focus of political and military actions of the gods of the areas nearby.<sup>[2]</sup>

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Arianiti's political activity is better reflected in 15th century documents, when following Ottoman conquests, they lost the rich eastern regions of their dominions and began to pursue more active and aggressive foreign policies, especially since 1430 when Gjergj Arianiti had a series of victories over the Ottoman armies.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Arianiti family members are several times mentioned by their last name along other last names, which include Komneni, Golemi, Topia, Shpata, and Çermenika, as well as nobility titles. The inherited titles and the other names testify that the Arianiti had established family ties with other noble families, including those of the Byzantine Empire, as indicated by the surname Komneni/Komnenos. The Arianiti family also had their coat of arms and other heraldry signs. The double headed eagle emblem was on their heraldic symbols. A document shows that Gjergj Arianiti had commissioned in Ragusa his flag to be designed.<sup>[2]</sup>

The genealogical tree Arianiti cannot be built exactly, since the earliest periods, when they are first mentioned. According to Marin Barleti and Gjon Muzaka Gjergj Arianiti's father was Komnen Arianiti. Komnen Arianiti had married the daughter of Nikolle Zaharia Sakati, ruler of Budva. Komnen Arianiti had three sons (Gjergj, Muzaka, and Vladan), and one daughter who married Pal Dukagjini.<sup>[2]</sup>

Muzaka Arianiti had one son, Moisi Arianiti, a warrior that fought the Ottoman Empire along Skanderbeg. Moisi Arianiti is primarily known as Moisi Golemi. Moisi Golemi had married Zanfina Muzaka, first wife of Muzaka Topia. Muzaka Topia, after his marriage with Zanfina Muzaka, married Skanderbeg's sister, and oldest daughter of Gjon Kastrioti, Maria Kastrioti, also called *Mamica*.<sup>[2]</sup>

The younger brother of Gjergj Arianiti, Vladan, married the daughter of Gjon Kastrioti, Angelina, long before that Skanderbeg appeared on the top of the Albanian war against the Ottoman Empire. Their son, Muzaka (described as *Muzaka of Angelina*, in order to distinguish him from his uncle) participated in the creation of the League of Lezhë in 1444.<sup>[2]</sup>

The political and military activities of the great son of Komnen Arianiti, Gjergj, gave the Albanian noble family name of Arianiti a particular weight in Albania's political life.<sup>[2]</sup>

Gjergj Arianiti married Maria Muzaka with whom he had eight daughters. Her death caused him to marry the Italian noblewoman Despina (or Petrina) Francone, daughter of the governor of Lecce in the Kingdom of Sicily. They had three sons (Thoma, Kostandin and Arianit) and a daughter.<sup>[2]</sup>

The possessions of the Arianiti family have changed over time with expansion and contractions, but in general, the Arianiti enjoyed a special position in the economic and political life of Albania and in the relationships with different regions of country and their political forces. Proof of this are the several marriages of the Arianiti's descendants to the Kastrioti and Muzaka families, as well as Dukagjini, and also to Serb despot Stefan Brankovic, who married Gjergj Arianiti's daughter, Angelina Arianit Komneni, later Saint Angelina of Serbia.<sup>[2]</sup>

The eastern extension of the state of Gjergj Arianiti included Manastir and Florina, and most of the areas around the Ohrid Lake from which a large income from fishing and fish exporting was obtained. The Arianiti also owned the Sopotnica castle (Svetigrad), later named by the Ottomans Demir Hisar.<sup>[2]</sup>

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