

Population of Kosovo during 16th – 17th Centuries

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Abstract: The research paper is focused on the population status during the first centuries of Ottoman ruling in Kosovo. Archaeological, historical, linguistic and folklore data scientifically argue on the lineage of the Illyrian-Albanian during ancient times, the early Middle Ages in the territory of Kosovo, on the presence and predominance of the Albanian population during the Ottoman occupation between 15th -17th centuries. Opinions of Albanian and foreign historiography objectively and scientifically confirm the life continuation of Kosovo people in the areas where they live today.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; Kosova; Population; Prizren, Prishtina; Trepça; Novoberda; Vuçiterna; Janjeva dhe Peja

Introduction

Plenty of historical sources such as Ottoman, Slavic and Latin that provide evidence about the lineage of Illyrian-Arberian-Albanian as of the ancient times, throughout the 16th-17th centuries, the early Middle Ages in the region of Kosovo were written by Albanian authors in the mid- seventeenth (17th) century. In this regard, sources of primary importance for the territory of Kosovo are the registers (defters) of cadastral registrations compiled by the ruling Ottoman administration in the mid-fifteenth(15th) and sixteenth (16th) centuries, such as the Registration of 1455 known as the Defteri (register)of Velk Vilayet; Defter of Shkodra (Scutari) Sanjak in 1485; Defter of Vuçitren Sanjak in 1462; Defter of Dukagjini Sanjak 1571-1591, as well as the Defter of Prizren Sanjak 1591.

After the conquest of a part of Kosovo by ottomans, immediately its registration was conducted and the administrative unit Vilayet of Velk was established in 1455, which was comprised of all the lands that were under the rule of Gjergj Brankovic. Dukagjin area, Istog, Peja and Prizren area were not included in this province

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(vilayat) since they had not been occupied yet by the ottomans, but Albanian Principality of Dukagjin had vassal relations with the Ottomans. Defter of Velk Vilayet was published in 1972 by a group of Ottoman paleographers: H. Begiq, Handžić Adem and E. Kovacević from Sarajevo. The significance of this defter is on the registation of population. In addition to the names of each head of the family, father' name was also recorded almost in all cases, while in special cases brother's name was written instead of father's name. In some households people were marked by settings like "poor, blind, newcomers", also by proffesion settings such as: rawhide dealer, cattle dealer, potter, etc. (Pulaha, 1990, p. 80). More than two thousand people names are in this defter. Therefore, this defter offers a valuable onomastic material for the territory of Kosovo (Vilayet Vellk) during the first half of the 15th century.

The first researcher of this defter Handžić Adem, in his analysis from antroponymic and onomastic point of view reaches at the following findings: "The mentioned data speaks clearly that Albanians at the time of serbian ruling during the Middle Ages lived not only in the border areas but also in Kosovo and Metohija, as a minority among serbs scattered into markets also in villages. With regard to the general population it is difficult to determine the percentage. It is not not possible to share from our sources all data related to Albanians, since the symbiosis process of one or another population was quite strong since the emergence of Albanians, at least in the light of the registered names. We were focused only in a considerable number of typical Albanian names and we have also recorded the Slavic names in those cases when was considered that the latter are cousins of the first ones (with Albanian names). It can be realized that Albanians simply adopted Slavic names in the second generation". (Handžić, 1969, p. 208). Finally, as far as the relationship between Slavic and Albanian anthroponomies concerns the researcher comes to a conclusion that "*Albanians in Kosovo were minorities among Serbs*". Albanian scholar Muhamet Tërnavë opposes this view claiming that it does not stand because the claim relies on a wrong methodology. Main slip (mistake) was made on the identification method of Albanian anthroponomy or at characteristics of Albanians, respectively with the alleged real number of Albanians and it was not foreseen the possibility to search for Albanian population behind Slavic anthroponomies, although he claims that Albanians adopted Slavic anthroponomy in the second generation. (Tërnavë, 1995, p. 45) Another remark made by M. Tërnavë is that Slavic anthroponomy belonged also to Albanians, mainly to those of Orthodox confession. Taking into account that Albanian population of this territory by the end of the 12th century, and some Albanians as of the beginning of 13th century were constantly

under the rule of the Serbian Nemanjid governing, they had no religious or state institutions of their own, part of the population had the same religious affiliation with the Orthodox rulers who were greatly influenced by the Serbian Orthodox Church. Therefore, it is obvious why it was consisted of mostly Slavic anthroponomy. Therefore, Slavic anthroponomy which was widespread in the area when the Brankovic family once ruled, does not prove that the population was mainly Slavic, but proves the opposite: that Albanian population was present in large numbers, but there are foreign Slavic anthroponomies. (Tërnavë, 1995, p. 45).

Researcher Handžić Adem, in his analysis conducted for anthroponymic evidences of this defter (1455) found that in that year Albanians lived in 5 villages of Dollc district, in 23 villages of Vuçitërna district, in 35 villages of Morava district, in 9 villages of the Prishtina vilayet and in 7 villages of the Llap district. Therefore, it was found by this author that Albanians lived in 79 settlements and villages of the Velk Vilayet. (Handžić, 1969, pp. 205-207).

Based on the detailed analysis conducted by M. Ternava, comes out that Albanian anthroponomy is in 155 villages of Velk Vilayat or of Kosovo, excluding Dukagjini Plain. Therefore, considering political and historical circumstances that were before 1455 during the occupation of Brankovic, Albanian population should be seen also at those people who had replaced arberian names with Slavic ones. That is quite possible taking into account one's nation situation during the occupation.

The researcher of medieval onomastics Iljaz Rexha concludes that in the Defter of the Vilayet of Vuk, many traditional Albanian anthroponomies and patronymics of the Albanian names have not been read accurately and precisely. By comparing the original of defter (register) and its transcription, I. Rexha came to a conclusion that drafters of this defter from Sarajevo, as mentioned above, had read and transcribed incorrectly many of anthroponomies and patronomies. Therefore, the author has presented some of incorrect orthography such as: Alex for Alexije, Andreja for Andrija, Bardo for Pardo, Berisha for Persiha, Bero for Pero, Bili for Billa, Boja for Bojo, Bojki for Bojko, Daba for Dabo, Dimitri for Dikitrije, Gjoni for Gjura, Gjurgj for Gjuragj, Jak for Jako, Luk for Lluka, Lazor for Lazar, Mati for Matije, Mili for Mile, etc., and some other anthroponomies and patronomies of this defter were given according to Albanian language traits, whereas are transcribed according to Slavic language traits, thus it was reduced the form of names of the householders. (Rexha, 2005, p. 286).

Initially, many settlements names were recorded according to the traits of Albanian language but then from Sarajevo paleographs were transcribed and adopted according to the traits of Slavic language, such as: Gjonofici, not Đunovci or Đinovce, Muzeçina, not Muzićane, Bujak, not Bojak, Busina, not Businje, Grykova, not Grkova, Busovata, not Busovato, Kçiçi, not Kćiče, Ropotova, not Ropotovo, Karaçeva, not Kraçevo, Gjinlan, not Gnjljan, Lablani, not Llabjane, Barileva, not Bariljevo, Podjeva, not Podujevo, etc. (Rexha, 2005, p. 286)

All names of these settlements, the ottoman administrators heard directly from the mouths of Albanian speakers and registered them in 1455 in the original defter (register) of Velk Vilayat. Whereas, during the translation and transcription of this defter drafted by the paleographs resulted in Slavic forms, which is incorrect and unacceptable. (Rexha, 2005, p. 286)

In order to recognize the ethnical demography in Dukagjin Plain during 15th – 16th centuries, there are two highly important and detailed defters of this sanjak: first one defter of 1571, whereas the second one defter of 1951. After a detailed survey, it was found that during 15th century most of the registered householders and unmarried people of Altunilia, Rudina, Domeshtiçi, Pashtriku, Opoja, Hoça and Prizren districts had Albanian (arberian) names and later by the second mid-16th century when some of them were forced to embrace islam and adopt muslim names. (Pulaha, 1972, p. 195) Completely arberian was also the population of Rudina, Domeshtiçi and Pashtriku districts that constituted the territory of today's Has during the second half of 16th century, a territory that lies on both sides of the state border of the Albanians – between Albania and Kosovo. This is evident from the fact that the householders of these areas, who are recorded on the mentioned two registers, had mainly arberian (arberor) names or characteristics typical for arbers (Albanians) such as: *Gjin, Gjon, Gac, Bac, Kol, Gjeç, Dodë, Prend, Gjik, Bibë, Likë, Nue, Lula, Shtepan, Jak, Petar, Dukë, Vata, Kolë* etc. (Pulaha, 1974, pp. 185-186)

These Ottoman registers, scientifically, provide fact that invalidate the Serbian theory of the alleged mass arrival of the Albanian population during 16th-17th centuries from the northern parts of Albania. Demographically this process is impossible. According to Ottoman cadastral registers of the 15th- 16th centuries, for instance, only Prizren and Dukagjini Sanjaks had several times more houses than the highlands of Northern Albania. The ratio of the number of houses ranged from about 20,000 in the single areas to about 2,000 houses in northern Albania. In order to get information about the ethnic structure of population of Prizren, Opoja and Hoça district refer Turkish registration of Prizren Sanjak of 1591. According to it, at that

particular time the vast majority of Opoja's population was arberians. District of Hoça was consisted of 96 villages. These villages were located in the southern part of Prizren and were mainly inhabited by arberians who belonged to three religions: Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox) and Islam. (Pulaha, 1984, p. 22). In that register are 409 heads of families (householders) and single (unmarried) people, as well as 104 land (bashtina) owners who had arberian (arberor) names, 248 muslim families and 172 muslim land owners, among them 81 householders had their names and surnames of their arberian parents. (Tërnavë, 1995, p. 109) According to this register comes up that Prizren in 1591 had 237 christian households and 320 muslim households. The names of householders 112 out of 237 christian households are arberian. (Tërnavë, 1995, p. 109)

Serbian historians while trying to explain the increase of Albanian population, came up with an alibi for allegedly physical immigration of Albanians in Kosovo during the early Ottoman period. Thus, opposing the original sources coming from Ottomans that highly validate the presence of Albanian population in Kosovo before the Ottoman period. They claim that Albanians from the Northern Highlands (Malesia e Veriut) which is located in Albania were incited by the Ottomans to relocate in Kosovo, and that many of them converted to Islam to take advantage of benefits offered by them and for better status, respectively by taking possession of some properties, such as 'timare' (lands), etc., whereas Serbs who became Muslims, not that only converted into Islam, but immediately or later they had been assimilated into Albanians.

These claims of Serbian historians are strongly refuted by the facts that originate from Ottoman sources. Ottoman officials, while drafting registration documents, all householders who were newcomers at their villages were registered (marked) as "newcomers". In the sanjak of Prizren in 1591, among the 41 Albanians born there, only 5 names of Albanian were registered as 'newcomers'. (Tërnavë, 1995, p. 116) This evidence opposes the claim that Albanians migrated from northern Albania to Kosovo. More generalized evidences against this idea relies on the population relative number and population growth rate. Kosovo population during this period was much larger than population of Northern and Central Albania. Therefore, the alleged claim is impossible. (Tërnavë, 1995, p. 116) Cadastral defters (registers) bring convincing evidence that Albanian population was steady and autochthonous while the Serb minorities were fluctuating, immigrants and mobile, the opposite of what is written and claimed by Serbian authors. Usually in the registers (defters), the heads of the families who have moved were marked as "prishlac, dashlac" for the

newcomers -or “haymanegan” –for the pilgrims. Another indicator is the number of householders with Slavic names who were considered to be ‘newcomers’ during the 15th-16th centuries in the territory of Kosovo and beyond. Therefore, it was obvious that Serbian minority both in previous centuries and in the 16th century remained unsteady and fluctuating. The reason for the movements of this small Slavic population was that they were not natives, but immigrants, and colonizers during the centuries of Serbian occupation of Kosovo. Ottoman cadastral facts prove that there was a huge presence of Albanians in Kosovo, while the Slavic element constituted an insignificant minority.

Ottoman sources of 15th -16th centuries prove that in the territories of Kosovo, majority of Albanian population was Catholic and Orthodox, while Serbian ethnic was minority and were feudal, administrators - church servants, merchants etc., who came and settled in Kosovo especially during the period of Stefan Dushan, the period when Slavic population was migrating from one to another place. According to Ottoman sources it is important that the majority of the inhabitants registered in the territories of Kosovo and especially Dukagjini Plain during 15th century had Albanian names, while from the second half of 16th century, a part of the Albanian population was forced to convert to Islam and took Islamic names too. The population of Kosovo, living under the constant political and religious pressure of the state and the Serbian church was forced to take Slavic names and after they got free from pressure, they returned to their Albanian names. (Pulaha, 1990, pp. 79-80) In the provinces of Kosovo, we encounter Orthodox clerics who argue that the Slavic names of local Albanians mainly came as a result of the conversion of Catholic Albanians to Orthodoxy, or by the pressure and influence of the Orthodox Church under the rule of the Serbian state. Rather than in domestic areas, the process of converting Catholic Albanians into Orthodox and the impact of Slavic anthroponomy was higher in Peja, Altun-ilia (Reka e Keqe) where the centre of Orthodox Church is and where important monasteries are located (Pulaha, 1974, p. 41).

The occupation of Albanian lands by the Ottoman Empire did not fundamentally change the ethno- cultural structure of the Albanian nation in Kosovo, but changes occurred in political, economic, social and ideological field. The establishment of a new Ottoman state administration in the 15th century finally ruined the apparatus of Byzantines in Kosovo.

Most of the cities in Kosovo in the second half of the 16th century began their consolidation, due to the severe consequences caused by the Ottoman invaders.

Based on data provided, the number of the houses was as it follows: Prizren had 557 houses, Prishtina 506 houses, Trepça 288 houses, Novobërda 366 houses, Vuçitërna 286 houses, Janjeva 288 houses, Peja 158 houses, while Gjakova as a village had 46 houses. Each city had its own neighborhoods that expressed the tradition of the civic life. In the mentioned cities, the islamization process of Albanians had started at a very fast pace. In Peja 90% of the population, in Vuçitër 80%, in Prishtina 60%, in Prizren 56%, in Novobërda 37%, in Trepça 21%, in Janjeva 14%. No doubt, it can be stated that the majority of the Islamized were Albanians.

This is evidenced in many other cases where Islamized residents preserved the Christian surnames and names of their descendants who were typical Albanian names such as Gjoci, Bardhi, Gjini, Deda, Raçi, Koka, etc. According to the evidence provided by the defter, the ethnic Turkish characteristics have been distinguished from the Albanian Muslim population, taking their ethnic names such as Turkish Bali, Turkish Ahmeti, etc (Pulaha, 1990, p. 87). Cadastral records provide important data for the development of handicrafts, the cities of Kosovo in the 16th century reached a satisfactory handicrafts and trade level. In the most important cities, about 55 craftsmen of different profiles exercised their function. The largest center in the territory of Kosovo was Prizren, their activity was exercised by 45 craftsmen, the largest number of craftsmen were tailors (27), feltmaker (23), tanners (19), shoemakers (17), wheelchair makers (17) farriers (12), butchers (14), silk makers (16), bakers (7), locksmiths (5), fur-makers (5), saddlers (3), cooks (3), etc. Compared to other Albanian cities in Prizren, silk production and processing had increased, as evidenced by the annual income of 150,000 akçes (silver ottoman coins) Prizren became one of the most important trade centers thanks to its geographical position, which connected the coastal countries of Albania with the interior part of the Balkan. In the city there were commercial squares such as the old bazaar, the grain market, the bazaar, the saddlers market, etc. After Prizren, Prishtina is ranked as a very important city in socio-economic terms. 28 craftsmen and 100 shops exercised their production activity in the city of Prishtina. Compared to Prizren and Prishtina, Peja and Vuçitrna were at a lower economic level. Their craft was exercised by about 22 craftsmen, the number of craftsmen in Peja was 68, while in Vucitërna 59. Cities such as Novoberda, Trepça and Janjeva were almost at the same level in terms of socio-economic development, which differed from other cities in Kosovo. They were very important mining centers as per the conditions and circumstances of the sixteenth (16th) century. (Duka, 1996, p. 88)The report of the Priest of Prizren, Gregor Mazrrek, about the parish conditions, gives information that there were Christian merchants of Prizren who exported fur to Germany. The

aforementioned cities, although under Ottoman occupation, reached satisfactory levels in terms of country's economic growth. The economic condition became an additional weapon for the population of Kosovo to fight against all the injustices done to them.

The Islamization of the majority of the population of Kosovo was followed by major changes on the aspect of urbanization of dwellings also on the cultural aspect throughout Kosovo region. Islamic culture was spread to Albanian areas and it was embraced as part of national culture. A number of Islamic cult objects such as mosques, madrasas, masjids (teqe), etc. were built in the cities of Kosovo, and a considerable number of waqfs were established. A well-known Turkish guide of the 17th century, E. Çelebi, while visiting the lands of Kosovo in 1660, gives information about the city of Vuçitrn: “ a bazaar (çarshi) that implies the market of Vuçiterna, there are waqfs of Hydavendigjar, a mosque called old mosque, madrasa, masjids (teqe) and elementary schools (mejtepe)”. (Duka, 1996, p. 88) Among the key factors that influenced the Islamization of Albanian population in Kosovo were political, economic, social and psychological factors. By the second half of the 16th century, half of the Albanian population of Kosovo was islamized, while in the 17th century the islamization of the population also prevailed in the villages. Albanians, although massively Islamized, fanatically preserved the language, customs and national feeling. Some of the Albanian population resisted any kind of pressure from Ottomans by not converting to Islam.

Cadastral registers (defters) testify that the vast majority of the population in the territories of Altun-ilia, Has, Hoça and Opoja, were Albanians belonging to three religions Catholic, Orthodox and from the end of the 16th century also Islam. (Pulaha, 1984, p. 93). Records provide information that by the end of the 16th century in the above-mentioned areas the process of islamization of population was significant. Based on anthroponymic data, a part of Hoxha population belonging to Catholic and Orthodox faiths converted to Islam. In 1591, 248 families and 172 land owners converted to Islam. The process of Islamization in the Opoja region had greatly progressed, in 1571 most of the population had converted to Islam, and as a result had Islamic anthroponomy. Even well-known scholars such as Shuflaj and Jereçeku argue that the lands that include the territory of Rudina, Pashtrik, Altu-ilia, Hoçë, Opoja and Prizren, etc., since the early Middle Ages were inhabited by the Albanian population (Pulaha, 1984, pp. 105-109).

Ottoman sources are so powerful in refuting the “Serbian myth on Kosovo” as well as the “taboos” of Serbian historiography allegation that Albanians had colonized

Kosovo after the Austro-Ottoman war. Ottoman defters strongly argue that Albanians were present in these areas even before the process of mass Islamization began, as evidenced by the Kosovo census register in 1455, where Albanians were massively present in the eastern territories of Fushë Kosovë (Drançolli, 1994, p. 70).

Except Ottoman sources that confirm the autochthony of Kosovo Albanians. Austrian documentation also proves that the lands of Kosovo and Dukagjin area were inhabited by Albanian populations and they were included in Albania concept. Source documents of the Austrian army command that entered Kosovo in 1689 on the occasion of the Austro-Ottoman War of 1683-1699 indicate that "Prizren is located in Albania and was the capital of Albania", "Peja city in Albania", because they considered Kosovo as a part of Albania. The Austrian army was welcomed in Kosovo by a large number of Albanian insurgents who could only come out of those areas that are locally populated, in Prishtina 5,000 insurgents had emerged, in Prizren 6,000 insurgents. The Austrian army supported the war of Albanians, especially the war of Kosovo population in fighting to get rid of the Ottoman Empire. These sources validate indisputably the autochthony and the predominance of the Albanian population in Kosovo (Zamputi & Pulaha, 1990, p. 10).

The autochthony of Albanians is also confirmed by the ecclesiastical (church) sources, evidence of the envoy of the papacy in the 17th century. In the report of the Archbishop of Bar, Marin Bici addressed to Pope Paul V, on the visits made through the dioceses of Albania and the city of Prizren in 1610. Gives important data on the population status of this area. The city of Prizren has 8,600 large houses and each of them has its own courtyards, which distinguishes Prizren's houses from the houses of other cities. Prizren has a good geographical position, with running waters, whirling rolls of mills that make the city even better, it has beautiful lands, vineyards and meadows (Zamputi, 1963, p. 169) that none of other places had it. The castle of Prizren is located on the hill of a high mountain, half a mile away from Varosh, only few people live in the Castle. The noblest city of this province seems to have been Prizren, as a beautiful place with the buildings of temples and churches built years ago. Prizren is said to be the homeland of the emperor Justinian I. (Zamputi, 1963, p. 431). The natural resources that city of Prizren gives, greatly enabled the well-being of the population. In the city of Prizren lived a considerable number of Catholics, because the city was very pleasant and offered good living conditions. That is why a part of the Turkish population lived in the city of Prizren with pleasure because they enjoyed the beauty of greenery and waterfalls in many places, also a very clear river flowing from mountains and passing by the city. There were lots of

beautiful churches built by Albanians. Two of the most beautiful churches Turkish turned them into mosques, just like in many other places. Prizren at the beginning of the 17th century had 12,000 thousand Turkish, almost all Albanians, skillful people and capable to undertake any assignment. About 200 people out of this population were Catholics, (Zamputi, 1963, p. 337) who lived in dire conditions due to breakdowns, they had only one church built by their ancestors which was equipped with rich attire, years earlier, after damages from the fire the church had lost its beauty, with great sacrifices of the Christian inhabitants managed to regain.

Reports compiled by Pjetër Mazrreku regarding his visits to Balkan countries in 1623/1614 provide important information on Prishtina, a place inhabited by many Turkish people, also by militant people, who were all land feudals (timar-spahi), it means they are very brave for their country. Prishtina is located below the black highlands, on the field of Kosovo, not far away from the place where Milos Kopili, a brave and valuable soldier killed Muratbeu, the emperor of the Turks, where he lost his life. Except Turkish in Prishtina also live some Serbs, as well there are 20 Christian houses with 100 people, a year earlier the city and the district had been destroyed. Residents of Novoberda, Janjeva, Prishtina and Trepça were in a very difficult condition, so they were unable to keep a parish priest, and there are many magnificent and costly churches built by Catholics in all the above-mentioned places. Thirty years ago, all of these places were rich in gold and silver mines as well as rich in other precious metals. At the peak of their development, churches were built and equipped with the necessary items for the divine cult. (Zamputi, 1963, p. 343). Except Pjetër Mazrreku who provided information on the city of Prishtina, during the 17th century was also a Turkish guide Evliya Çelebi, who during his travels between the years (1611-1684), give information that Prishtina city had 2060 houses with large courtyards, vineyards and gardens. There were a total of 11 pulpits, six of which were mosques for prayer. There were madrasas, hadith schools, primary schools and dervish masjids (tekkes). Also 11 dosshouses in the city of Prishtina. (Çelebiu, 2008, p. 18). Except Prishtina, Çelebi visited and indicates about the town of Vuçitërna, the inhabitants of this town did not speak Slavic but spoke Albanian, while Turkish language was used in administration. The cities of Kosovo became important trade centers not only for Balkan but beyond also. Owing to their economic prosperity, a better welfare was created for the population living in these areas.

Trepça, is 20 miles from Prishtina (Zamputi, 1963, p. 343). At the beginning of the 17th century the city of Trepça had 500 houses, out of which 40 houses were

Christian, more than 200 schismatic, who also had a bishop and their headquarter was outside the city. There was no church in the city, but outside two miles away, most of the time the learning took place on a bridge inside the house. (Zamputi, 1963, p. 177). The reports of Pjeter Mazrreku, Tivar Archbishop gave to the Holy Congregation of Propaganda de Fide over the inhabitants of the Dukagjini Highlands. He brought interesting facts about the province of Has, which was inhabited by a large number of Albanian citizens of the Ottoman Empire, the inhabitants of this province of Dukagjini did not want to call themselves vassals of the Ottoman Empire, although these people were forced to pay ransom. Some people became citizens of the Empire just by changing their names. The inhabitants of this area within their capabilities tried to resist any pressure exerted by the Ottoman Empire.

Review conducted by Gjergj Bardhi – the Archbishop of Tivar, regarding the number of Catholic inhabitants in Gjakova around 1637. According to the data provided by Gjergj Bardhi: Gjakova with its vicinity the population could be 550 people. The majority of this population are more women than men because their husbands had denied Catholic faith, whereas women remained Christians who seek the sacred sacraments. Since the sacraments were not allowed to them by the order of Holy Congregation, the wives of those men who have denied the Christian religion are greatly complaining and the desolate priests are being persecuted. In Gjakova the number of Christian houses was about 20, while the population was around 156 people. The villages in the area of Gjakova had 20 Christian houses.

The report of Gjergj Bardhi the Archbishop of Tivar, on his visits to Kosovo and Serbia, in October 10, 1641. During his travels he came across a village called Suho Reka (Suhareka), which in Italian means ‘the dry river’. The report of the priest of Prizren, Gregor Mazrrek, on the situation in his parish during the years 1650-1651. During the trip to the village of Suhoreka (Suhareka) Gregor Mazrreku shows that the entire Catholic population of this area became Turks because of tax evasion, women in these countries do not pay any taxes (Zamputi, 1963, p. 441). The Ottoman Empire had imposed very heavy taxation, so for the population were not affordable, this way most of the population was pushed to convert to Islam.

Except for Suhareka, Gregor Mazrreku provides information also about other villages of this area. In Studençan village you can find a Christian households with seven members, young and old (mixed aged) members. The village of Mamushja has two Christian women. The husband of one of them is Turkish, and she begs me to go secretly and enable her confession and sacrament. The village of Zacista

(Zeçishtë) had two large Christian families (houses), totally 13 members. I go to this village 5 or 6 times a year to offer the sacred mass and twice a year for sacrament. Three brothers live in one of the houses, one of them is a merchant, and other two are famous brigands, and they cause harm to both Turks and Christians. The village of Ostrosule (Ostrozub) had 200 Christian families (households), at the time being all have become Turkish. This village was under the church of Prizren for a long time, while currently for several years now, the Archbishop of Ohër D. Ndre Bogdani has placed it under the Shegjeq church. Landovica village has four (4) Christian families, who serve Turks. They plow and plant in the lands for Turks, since they have almost nothing of their own. These people came from mountainous villages populated by Albanians who do not subdue to Turks, so all of them are brigands very cold attitude towards religion. In Valesha (Velezha) village there are two households with Christian people. One of the houses has all Christians family members, while the other household the men have become Turks and the women have preserved the Catholic religion. (Zamputi, 1963, p. 441). Houses having all the Christian inhabitants are very good people and they sacrifice a lot for the religion of Christ. They have been persecuted by the Turks since they possess lands, and for the fact that they are Catholics and so on. Those Christians who converted to Turks could barely make their living even though they do not pay any taxes, those who keep the faith and pay are in a better position. In all the villages there are Christian populations, those who have denied the faith repent for their mistakes. Some of them say that by heart we are Christians, we have changed our names just because we cannot afford to pay taxes imposed by Turks.

According to some ecclesiastical sources provided by Gjergj Bardhi, Prizren with the province of Has, Jakova (Gjakova), the parish of St. Mary of Shegjeçi, the entire population of these areas speak the Epirotic language, respectively Albanian language. They also want to have a priest and parish priests, who speak Albanian language, and currently three of them speak the language, these priests are in service of souls. If any of these three priests were to be absent, it would be dangerous that all those souls could lose their language by not having a priest in their language, or could become Turkish or schismatic. Albanians, with their own language, have started to develop Christian doctrine, which will give its outcomes. It is necessary to organize seminars or open a Christian college, which would be of a great benefit for the fate of Catholics in the future, because foreign priests in Prizren are accustomed to staying for a short time. Almost all other places in Kosovo speak the Illyrian language and want their priests to know the same language.

In the 18th century, according to the Ottoman reports of 1738, some cities of Kosovo, such as Janjevo, Novobërda, Prishtina and Vuçitërna, were completely destroyed. Most likely the population had moved from one place to another, or a considerable number of people might have been killed, sources say. Ecclesiastics confirm that a large part of the population was killed and other part of the population was taken as slaves. At the end of the 17th century, a new wave of the Islamization process took place in the territory of Kosovo. The Ottoman Empire, thought that by its policy, by converting the population of Kosovo into Islam, hardship and peace could be established. But it is proven that it was wrong policy that could not happen as it was predicted by Ottomans.

According to francesian sources, for a particular case is stated that 1692 Mahmut Centro is trying to bring a large number of Catholics (both from the forest and from plains) to join his army. Mahmutbegolli was threatened with death by the vizier and made much efforts and used different methods to make Catholics, especially the Kelmendis embrace Islam, but most of them did not surrender to this pressure and maintained their religion. In 1695 Mahmut Mahmutbegolli died, and Hudaverdi Pasha (from the family of Mahmutbegolli) was appointed his successor in Peja who aggravated the situation of the population by applying new and non-affordable taxes for Christians. The Archbishop of Tivar, Vicko Znajevic, complained in 1700 that Christian population was requested to convert to Islam by Pasha. Znajevic, in his report that sent to Rome in 1702, with regard to the western region of Kosovo, (Malcolm, 1999, p. 170) wrote that new taxes have been applied in the sensitive border area between Albania's northern border and Montenegro, new taxes had been applied "to force Catholics to become Muslims, otherwise are asked to leave the country. They should rather accept to pay the ransom or they would be relocated to other parts of the Empire " Most of the population of the Kelmendi tribe who disregarded the orders, were forcibly relocated to the Peshter plateau (north of Peja, in the Sandzak of Novi Pazar).

The Ottoman administration allowed other nations (Serbs, Greeks, Vlachs, Jews, etc.) except Albanians to use their language in schools, churches, and other cultural and educational institutions. During the Ottoman rule, the aforementioned nations enjoyed privileges from a national point of view, they had their own church, the right to education in their national language. Albanians were almost the only ones denied the privileges of other nations under the administration of the Ottoman administration. Among other European nations, Albanians were the most engaged people by giving great contribution in opposing by arms the expansion and

strengthening of the Ottoman power. By Islamizing the Albanians and giving them good positions in the Ottoman administration, the Sultan aimed to use their authority to strengthen his power. Albanians, after being denied from their right of education in their national language, became more separable, and more irresistible.

The occupation of Kosovo by the Ottoman Empire changed the living conditions of the Albanian population in economic, political, cultural, social and religious terms.

Conclusion

The Albanian population constitutes the majority of the population of Kosovo, descendants of Dardanians. Ottoman cadastral registers confirm that during the 16th century the cities of Kosovo and Dukagjini were entirely inhabited by the Albanian population, respectively before the century of the so-called displacement of Serbs from Kosovo by the end of the 17th century, according to Serbian historiography allegations. Another evidence that proves the presence of Albanians in the territory of Kosovo during 16th and 17th centuries is that many assemblies were held by Albanians, intending to organize resistance for the liberation of Albanian territories. So it was the Assembly of Dukagjini held in Mat in 1601-1602, attended by the leaders, respectively the representatives of 14 Albanian provinces, among them leaders of Kosovo. Kosovo Albanian population was autochthonous, not immigrant as claimed by the Serbian historiography. Cadastral records for the 15th and 16th centuries prove that these areas were highly populated by Albanians, they lived in those areas even during the Serbian rule, and it is direct lineage of the Illyrian population.

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