



Xhufi, Pëllumb. *Árbërit e Jonit. Vlora, Delvina e Janina në shekujt XV-XVII. Botim i dytë, i plotësuar. Tiranë: Onufri, 2017.*

There can be no doubt that, throughout history, the developments in Epirus heavily influenced those in western Macedonia. That is exactly why I could not resist not only this, but also the previous exceptional books of the brilliant medievalist Pëllumb Xhufi. The second edition of this monumental study, which I luckily have in my hands, begins with the preface of the first edition (2016), which is supplemented by a very short preface of the second (2017). Being the most neuralgic point on the border between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, the so-called “Ionian” or “Lower” Albania functioned as a single historical

variable with the opposite, Italian coast. A compact Albanian population was spread over that area, with which Albanian historiography has dealt before, but this work is precisely the culmination of that interest, though not devoid of subtle nationalism. In addition to all those who made the publishing of this book possible, special gratitude is addressed to the recently deceased doyen of Albanian historiography, Kristo Frashëri. The second edition benefited from the recommendations of colleagues, as well as from the author’s archival research conducted in Venice in the meantime. The first part of Xhufi’s *opus magnum*

is entitled “Lower Albania in the Late Middle Ages” and comprises two chapters. The land and the inhabitants are the subject of the first one, which begins with perhaps too broad a scope, all the way to the Peloponnese, in an attempt to justify viewing the whole of Epirus as “Lower Albania”. Indeed, the unity of this Albanian habitat is confirmed by the existence of the theme of Nikopolis and of the Despotate of Arta already in the Byzantine period, and it was preserved in the later vibrant *sancak* of Valona. Venice claimed control of these shores of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas even before the arrival of the Turks, with whom it subsequently established relatively friendly relations. Occasional limited conflicts did not interfere with trade, recruiting soldiers and spying via Corfu. Prof. Xhufi convincingly shows that in ancient times, Roman and Ottoman, the toponym “Epirus” was not used, but even when it became more common later, it was everywhere dissociated from the Greeks and connected, earlier even identified, with Albania and the Albanians. However, the term “Lower Albania” is most appropriate for the territories between Vlorë and the Gulf of Arta, which are treated in this book. The real cradle of the Albanians in this region was the area of Vagenetia (formerly Thesprotia, later Chameria), the land opposite Corfu (sterea, terra ferma). The subchapter on Albanians in Epirus consists largely of a passionate reaction to Greek nationalistic historiography. It would have been better if the author had tried to explain the ideological differences in the approach, which irresistibly lead some Greek scientists to the Byzantine paradigm of understanding the population of Epirus (politocentric), while Xhufi and some of his compatriots search in the deep past for the ethnological basis of the contemporary Albanian national reality. Of course, Albanians have changed through time, and so has Hellenism. The tribes of Malakasa, Bua and Mazreka are indeed characterized by John Kantakouzenos with the same word (ἀβασίλευτοι) with which Thucydides defined the Chaonians and Thesprotians in antiquity, but this in no way entails ethnic continuity in those areas. The Albanian population, dominant according to the sources, was in any case large enough to be able to migrate *en masse* towards Greece and Southern Italy before the Ottoman conquest. It remains unclear how many of them could move towards Epirus, but “de-albanization” and “rehellenization” certainly did not ensue then. The many examples of villages not only in the wider region of Epirus, but also in Macedonia and Thessaly, can lead to a wrong conclusion about the Albanian presence there. The author nevertheless admits that Hellenization was a constant phenomenon, completed after the formation of the modern Greek state, in the absence of other cultural centres that would draw the Albanian population of Epirus

towards them. Cultural and educational independence were simply impossible at the time. At the end of this subchapter, Xhufi unfortunately again engages in a completely irrelevant consideration of the ethnological conditions in ancient Aetolo-Acarmania. From the other ethnic groups, he first deals with the Greeks (not only by religion!), whose presence is scarcely attested. Then he tries to trace the Vlach tribes in Epirus, but without much success, just like his predecessors. He does so in a slightly disorganized manner, first presenting the continuity of the Albanian-Vlach unity, then transhumance as a way of life and the appearance of Hellenism among these populations, and finally returning to the written sources of the Byzantine era and to the similarities between the Vlachs and the Albanians. The essay on the Vlachs ends with the typically Slavic anthroponymy of some “Vlach” villages in Epirus, which creates great confusion for the reader, especially when faced with the explanation that this is a consequence of “Western Macedonian” origin. Jews lived and traded on the shores of the Adriatic (Vlorë, Durrës) and were largely Islamized in the age of Sabbatai Zevi, while the Romani people are barely attested. Whatever the real situation was on the ground, it seems that the available sources reflect the dominance of the Albanians. An entire subchapter is devoted to the problem of terminology, where numerous examples show the primacy of religious identity in theocentric civilizations (Greek for every Orthodox Christian, not only for Albanians; Turkish for Muslims; Latin for Catholics). However, when it is necessary or desirable to specify the ethnicity, it is done freely and can lead to some comically complex identities (Greek Albanian, Turkish Albanian, Arnavud Albanian, Greek Latin Albanian), but that’s not all. In the Ottoman era, all the inhabitants of that empire were often called “Turks” in the political sense.

The second chapter provides data on many central settlements in Lower Albania, which the author extracted from the literature and especially from the archives. The ancient Apollonia was transformed into the medieval Polina, modern Pojan. It seems that the Ottoman river port of Polina was known as “Spinarica” in the earlier Byzantine era, of course, always on the river Vjosë. Vlorë has always been a large military base, as well as a trade and travel centre. With its *alter ego* Berat and other places in that area, it early attracted the attention of the Turks, then regained its freedom, and finally fell to Murad II. The impressive fortress of Vlorë was built during the time of Suleiman the Magnificent, as a protection against Venetian attacks, but later it served Venice for its defence from the mainland, and suffered from an earthquake in meantime. The nearby Kaninë fortress also had an extremely good position. Only Evliya Celebi writes

about Muslim quarters and religious buildings in Vlorë. A new wave of Jews came at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. Due to its location, the town suffered, but also enjoyed some benefits. Even before the Ottoman conquest, it played a significant role in the spice trade with Tunisia. But Prof. Xhufi seems to be dealing with the Jews excessively. It is also not clear why he pays so much attention to the insignificant place of Ducati in the always rebellious and unruly area of Himarë/Labëria. Perhaps that chapter should have been integrated into the next larger and incomparably more important one about Albania-Labëria, which should certainly be distinguished from the eponymous hinterland of Durrës and piedmont of Albania. Himarë was called “capo dell’ Arbano”, meaning the head of Labëria, but was also a synonym for the whole area. Xhufi also provides data on other settlements in this mountainous and almost impregnable region, with a certain economic and greater military potential. Himarë itself is explored after Kurvelesi, a village and also a synonym for the whole area in Ottoman times. The episcopal church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was located in its fortress, belonging first to the Archbishopric of Ohrid, then to Naupactus and finally to Ioannina. Of course, the inhabitants supplied Venetian Corfu with food and soldiers, and they also served for communication and espionage. However, they were not always on good terms with the “Serenissima”, and they even quarrelled among themselves, thus facilitating the Ottoman control of their homeland. The Albanian character of the population is evidenced more by contemporary correspondence than by typical anthroponymy. It is very interesting that in their letters addressed to European dignitaries, people referred to George Kastriot Skanderbeg as “noster Rex”. The Greek element in this area, differing linguistically from the rest of north-western Greece, may have come precisely from Mani in the Peloponnese, where some Himariotes served as Venetian troops and then returned home (bilingual, some with Italian trilingual). Next are “Porto Palermo”, established only in the age of Ali Pasha Tepedelenli by French military engineers, and the Sopot-Borsh binomial, a place of great importance both in the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman eras. The author could not neglect the binomial of Nivica-Bubar, Saranda (Ὀρχησιμός > Santi Quaranta) and Delvinë (an important centre for the Ottomans). With its exceptional position, the eternally fortified Butrint was the diamond of the Venetian thalassocratic “crown”, but they did not always hold it. It didn’t have a real port, but fishermen were always there and Corfu was eternally dependent on it. Perhaps it wasn’t necessary to repeat what had already been said about Vagenetia in the first chapter. Briefly under the control of the Neapolitans and Venetians

after the rule of the Zenebishi family, the fortress of Strobil was taken over and destroyed by Ahmed Gedik Pasha in 1479. Bastia-Sayada was certainly a key port and centre of salt production, but pp. 178-9 unfortunately haven’t been printed. There is not much information about Igoumenica, but there is also no doubt that it was a “Turkish country”. Ioannina often changed masters before it fell to the Ottomans, when it became a major trading centre with a Muslim community already in the 16th century. Margëlliç was the Ottoman antithesis of the Venetian Parga but there were also peaceful days. After some small piers between Igoumenitsa and Parga, comes the inhabited island of Paxos, opposite Parga, of great importance for warning of attacks. Unfortunately, footnote 521 and part of 520 haven’t been printed. Paramythia (Ajdonat, Euroia) was a large region loyal to the Turks, whose grain was regularly exported to Corfu, and a considerable number of regional Turkish dignitaries came from here. Many pages are dedicated to Parga, one of the most important and neuralgic settlements on the Ionian coast. The famous region of Suli was inhabited by Albanians, and thus in complex relations with an environment of the same nation, but of a different faith. This chapter ends with the town of Vilici and the inevitable Preveza.

The Classical education and sensibility of Prof. Xhufi can be recognized in the Latin title of the second part of this book, namely “Turcus ante portas”, the first chapter of which is entitled “From the Despotate of Vlorë to the Sancak of Vlorë”. After the reign of Ivan Komnen Asen, this despotate belonged to the Albanian noble family Muzaki and was later inherited by the Balshas of Vlorë. The capture of Vukashin by Andrew Muzaki in the battle at the fountain of “Dobrida” (Dobra Voda?) on the “Peristeri Mountain” cannot be verified from other sources. The Turks, as mercenaries of Christian masters, came to the region of Vlorë even earlier, but the Ottoman conquest began in 1383. The combined forces of the Sultan and Carlo Topia defeated Balsha’s army in the famous battle on the Saurian field in 1385. The opportunistic negotiations of Komnena Balsha and some communities such as Himarë with Venice and its representatives for patronage against the Turkish invasions filled the period until the legendary Battle of Kosovo, in which Albanian nobles also participated and died. However, Venice was satisfied with Durrës, Corfu and Butrint, and in 1396 Vlorë became the property of Merksha Zharkovich, husband of Rugina Balsha (no matter the canonical obstacles for their union!), which did not prevent the pretensions of some others. Merksha also tried to ingratiate himself with Venice, but equally unsuccessfully. The Battle of Ankara brought a sigh of relief to the Balkan princes, and the Republic of St. Marc used the

opportunity to secure its possessions on the coast, as well as trade in Ottoman territories, through a peace treaty. The last attempts were those of Rugina, before the news arrived in 1417 of the conquest of Vlorë and Kaninë by Hamza-bey Evrenos. Naturally, Rugina fled to Corfu, where Gjon Zenebishi also came, deprived of his possessions in Vagenetia. Venice failed to force the Sultan to return those territories to Rugina, so she had to consolidate hers and then send intelligence missions and create local friendships, without jeopardizing the signed peace. The caravans normally going to Durrës were redirected by the Turks to Vlorë, and the salt merchants there also competed with those of Durrës, while the Ragusans asked the Hungarian king to pledge that, in the case of a withdrawal of the Turks from the Balkans, the fertile region of Vlorë and Kaninë would be handed over to them. Venice's interest in those lands was renewed with the Christian-Ottoman war of 1443/4 on the Danube, but eventually they left Himarë too to Alfonso's Catalans, before conquering it together with some neighbouring fortresses in 1463. The interest persisted, but after the incursion of Ahmed Gedik Pasha in 1479, Venice respected the *status quo* for almost a century. After Krujë and Shkodër, Ahmed Gedik Pasha conquered parts of the coast together with Cephalonia, which triggered the alarm in Southern Italy. In the absence of an agreement between the European states and while not expecting help from independent Venice, Gedik Pasha led 70 Ottoman ships to Otranto in 1480, while 60 Venetian ships only observed them from the sea and then from Corfu. He showed brutality towards the population of Otranto when he took it over, but after the arrival of more Neapolitan troops, he had to retreat to Vlorë, in order to organize an even greater expedition. The author perhaps indulges too much in presenting an account of diplomatic efforts in the meantime. Nothing came of the great invasion, and the death of Mehmed II and the civil war between Bayezid and Cem facilitated the Neapolitan Reconquista (1481). A joint Albanian-Neapolitan action followed on the opposite coast, under the leadership of fugitive Albanian feudal lords such as Gjon, son of George Kastriot, and his first cousin Constantine Muzaki Karli, with the participation of famous commanders such as Krokodil Klada from Corona. Bayezid longed for peace with Europe and therefore reformed and consolidated the army and fleet, getting rid of warlike commanders like Gedik Pasha. Military actions were limited to the Albanian mainland, where there were always provocations, while rumours of large expeditions proved false right until the Ottoman-Venetian war (1499-1503). After the initial successes of the Ottoman fleet (Lepanto, Modoni, Corona, Xonkio) and the later Venetian-Neapolitan ones (Cephalonia, Xonkio), due

to the new front with Hungary, a peace was signed by which Venice lost Durrës. Charles VIII, King of France, occupied Southern Italy with hereditary pretensions, but soon had to retreat before the alliance of his European opponents, including Venice, without getting a chance for an invasion on the opposite shore of the Adriatic. Venice activated the Neapolitan subject George Kastriot the grandson without results, and experienced a debacle at the blockade of the Turkish fleet on the river Vjosë, but after an agreement was reached, trade with Italian countries continued.

The second chapter examines the pretensions and actions of Byzantium, the Despotate of Arta, the Serbian Empire, the Neapolitan Kingdom, Venice and the Albanian feudal lords on the territory of Epirus, with the whole complex of alliances, conflicts, dynastic marriages etc. The claims were also reflected in the official names of the Neapolitan rulers, who competed with other Italian states. In 1386 the Neapolitan king returned Corfu to Venice. The Byzantine civil war enabled the Serbian penetration, but it did not last long, for which the Albanians played a major role, as well as vis-a-vis the last Byzantine administration of Nicephore II Dukas. The title of this chapter refers precisely to the rule of the Albanian feudal lords Bua, Shpata, Zenebishi and Ljoshi in these regions. Albanians, Vlachs and Slavs from the wider area around Ioannina wanted to get rid of the unnatural rule of Thomas Preljubovich, but after his victory in 1379, the situation deteriorated, and after some fresh battles, the tyrant from Ioannina was called "Albanoktonos". Gjin Bua Shpata nevertheless managed to defeat and capture the Grand Master of the Hospitallers from Rhodes, who had intervened in Epirus on Neapolitan orders. The involvement of Turkish troops in inter-Christian conflicts and the submission to the Turks in the form of vassalage were options not only for Preljubovich, but also for his successor Esau Buondelmonte Acciaiuoli, and Shpata died. It is not clear how Gjon Zenebishi received the fourth-ranking Byzantine title of "sevastokrator", but it is obvious that he too had complex relations with his neighbours and the great powers of the era. The conflict over the Sayada saltworks, opposite Corfu, was particularly sharp. He captured Esau in 1399, then released him for a great ransom. The rise of the Neapolitan vassal and lord of some Ionian islands, Carlo Tocco, passed through complex relations and often open conflicts with the Albanian feudal lords, and even with Venice, until finally, after his death (1429), almost everything was taken over by the Turks. Even before the revolt of George Kastriot Skanderbeg, the Zenebishis tried to recover their feudal possessions and especially Strobil, first with the support of the Neapolitans and the resistance of the Venetians. In the end, Simon signed a contract

for joint administration with the second and had to surrender it completely soon, so that they would destroy it because of their distrust towards Albanians and Neapolitans, who cooperated there before the Ottoman invasion of Otranto. However, it is not possible to claim that some Albanians as a collective were “kurban” and dissatisfied with the Ottoman-Venetian peace.

The third chapter is devoted to the island of Corfu and begins with the phenomenon of the Albanian “stratiotes” there. This mercenary system originated in the Venetian lands of the eastern Mediterranean and spread throughout Europe. Maybe some Albanian nobles were also part of it, but in general this military caste was considered wild and dangerous, so their needs and those of their families had to be addressed intelligently. The contemporary phenomenon of Albanian Macedonism is connected with these exceptional Albanian warriors, but this fact hasn’t attracted the attention of Prof. Xhufi. Not only soldiers, but also nobles and ordinary farmers, for religious, economic, criminal and other reasons, left the opposite mainland and moved to Corfu. This frequently caused major problems in Venice’s relations with the affected Ottoman nobles, as well as challenges in regulating the status of the refugees and their relations with the native population.

“Pax Ottomanica”, i. e. the period of Ottoman stability in the studied area, is explored in the third part. After the not quite orderly transition into the new era, the *sancaks* formed by the Ottomans in Lower Albania (Vlorë, Delvinë and Ajdonat, Ioannina, Arvanid-Gjirokastër, Angelokastro and Santa Maura) are presented. Many members of Albanian feudal families were educated and Islamized at the Sultan’s court, and then returned to govern those territories, but there were others as well. Naturally, the Ottoman *timar* succeeded the Byzantine *pronoia*, and more and more Albanians occupied high positions in the Ottoman society and in the army, but the most spoken language in the Sultan’s court, besides Turkish, was Slavic. Some personnel decisions were made by the Porte, which occasionally sent special envoys to resolve certain issues. The second chapter is dedicated to the complex relations of the Ottoman state with Venice in this period, on the macro- and micro-level, which were the natural continuation of those of the previous period. Gifts, of course, were a constant. The last and large subchapter has a really misleading title, since it does not discuss simply peaceful coexistence, but many aspects of Ottoman-Venetian relations, about which the reader thought that enough had already been said. The third chapter examines Lower Albania as a granary for Venetian Corfu. A strategic resource for the nourishment of the population and for the production of biscuits for the Venetian fleet,

grain (not only wheat!) caused various situations in this area during the early New Age, and in the text some difficulties in the organization, which Xhufi could not overcome even after thousands of hours of work. That was not enough, so the author considered the status of Vlorë as the main grain market in a separate unit, after which comes the one dedicated to the Ragusan trade interest and competition with Venice. Even more inappropriate is the following title (“Export of grain from the *sancaks* of Delvinë and Ioannina”), the focus being on blockades, plagues, monopolies and direct contracts in general. An entire subchapter is devoted to the price of grain, including its manipulation, as well as sequestration. While the saltworks of Corfu and the opposite Sayada competed with each other and with Vlorë, Butrint clearly dominated in fishing. Acorns from Himarë, bitumen from Vlorë, lumber, soap, silk and sugar cane are paraded. The fair held closest to this region was that of Moskuluri (Thessaly), with the sale of various livestock, even slaves. Of course, the danger of plague and robberies was always present. The challenges of the arms trade deserved a separate subchapter, as did the counterfeiting of coins. The fourth chapter deals with resistance to the ruling regime. While not fully reiterating what he had already said about the general Albanian revolutionary mood and Venetian pragmatism, Prof. Xhufi not only repeated, but also seriously expanded the story of Spanish-Neapolitan interventionism, especially in the Himarë region, mostly based on the published research of Prof. Floristan. A large subchapter is dedicated to the exceptional figure of the “red patriarch” of Ohrid, Athanasios of Himarë, of Uniate disposition, whose revolutionary activity in the area of Lower Albania and beyond, as well as his diplomatic activity throughout Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Europe, did not achieve any significant successes, but in any case, it was more effective than that of the regional Catholic prelates at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. A broad activity at about the same age and in the same area was developed by Jeronimo Combi, “cappo delle spie del signor Vice Ré di Napoli”, but the last few paragraphs of this subchapter do not belong here, not even as a transition to the next, devoted to the return of Venetian interest in the region. Venetia’s opportunistic interactions were not limited to Orthodox Albanians, since many Islamized ones (called Turks) also resisted the Ottomans for some reason. The last subchapter deals with rebellious Ottoman governors, who appeared even earlier, but especially from the beginning of the 17th century. The fifth chapter begins with an introduction about the insurrectionary projects of Albanians and Spaniards in Epirus at the beginning of the 17th century, in which, of course, Jeronim Kombi was the main character.

It continues with the account of the uprising of Dionysios the Philosopher (or “Skylosophos”), with a detailed survey of the sources, including previously unused Venetian ones. The consequences for the population of Paramythia, Ioannina and the entire region were serious, including violent Islamization, but the odious Osman Pasha soon fell out of favour with the Sultan and was executed. Indeed, the conflict was between Albanians, but calling them “Shqiptarët” at that early age creates confusion. The character of the controversial Metropolitan Dionysios is discussed in the penultimate subchapter. The last subchapter’s title hints at more information about the adventures of this prelate from the region of Lower Albania, such as there really were, but gives only a recapitulation of the chapter, perhaps unnecessary.

The concept of the fourth part is as vague as the very sense of its existence. “Time of war” begins with a small transition subchapter, to continue with a large one about military events on both sides of the Channel of Corfu, from which I would single out a detailed account of Manolo Marmori’s activities during the Venetian-Turkish war of 1570/1. Another large subchapter is devoted to the diversionary actions of the Venetians and the Turks on the Adriatic and Ionian coasts during the War of Candia, in which the ambitious Beyko Pasha from Paramythia rose and fell. The next is a continuation of the previous one, with a strange digression about the Saxon Field Marshal von Schulemburg, in Venetian service, who in 1716 defended Corfu from Turkish attacks, and then liberated Butrint (why not in a footnote?). After the Ottoman victory in the War of Candia, the Venetians were more interested in restoring their Western Balkan possessions. In 1684, at the beginning of the Austrian-Turkish war, they signed an appropriate treaty with the Habsburg Monarchy. Vlorë and Kaninë were occupied during the military operations of 1690/1, but the Ottoman reconquest in the Balkans caused a controversy as to whether they should be kept, with all the costs and problems this would cause, or abandoned, with or without demolition. In 1691, during the Turkish attack, they finally decided to abandon their positions, and after everybody retreated to the ships, they blew up the fortress of Vlorë. Of course, the participation of Himariotes and other Albanians from the region was inevitable in this period as well, as was their abandonment by the Venetians and turning to the Neapolitans. The second chapter is dedicated to minor religious incidents and conflicts in the same area. The first subchapter brings reports on many events. At its very end, there is an extensive one about the counterfeit money of a trader from Berat, because of which interstate relations were damaged. The second explores the complex relations between Parga and the neighbouring

village of Agia, whose population entered and left the town according to circumstances. The next subchapter should perhaps have come earlier, and it refers to the tense relations between the Venetian Parga and the Ottoman Margëlliç, sometimes good, but more often bad. The second chapter closes with a brief review of similar situations around Butrint, rich in fish and forest. The third chapter is completely devoted to piracy and banditry, which were sometimes state-sponsored, politicized, and even suppressed by alliances. After the “Christian” piracy comes the fourth chapter, which discusses the phenomenon of reconnaissance in that area. Corfu was the centre where various encrypted information, collected from a branched and diverse intelligence network, came not only from the Balkans, but also from the Neapolitan mainland. Not everything was true and not everything worked, and the Neapolitan competition sometimes seemed intimidating, though it was not as widespread as the Venetian one. Intelligence activity, of course, carried its own risks, but that did not prevent generation after generation from accomplishing such missions for various masters (e. g. the Bixhili family of Himarë). Prof. Xhufi rightly singles out Peter Lanza, an Albanian from a famous family, as a “pluriagent”, for whom there is evidence that he adventurously served not only the Venetians, but also the Turks and the Neapolitans. In fact, he was much more than an intelligence officer, at one point even the governor of Parga. Yet the model of the perfect informant was probably the cleric.

The fifth part is dedicated to society and culture as factors of national unity and disunity. First of all, data from Ottoman censuses and other archival materials are analysed, which show that the process of Islamization was slow in the studied area. At the beginning of Ottoman rule, there were still many Christian feudal lords there, and the population was almost entirely Christian, with destabilization tendencies precisely because of the rebellious mood. However, blood did not lose its importance and conflicts between non-Islamized and Islamized Albanians were avoided. The disposition of the population of Himarë for union with the Pope did not spring from dogmatic convictions, but from a general libertarian and revolutionary spirit. The third subchapter presents all the complexity of the Albanian confessional climate, where it was often impossible to distinguish Orthodox from Catholics, or Christians from Muslims, since in the population of Epirus religion was regularly intertwined with pagan elements, and the situation was further complicated by the Bektashis (why not the other *tariqas*?) with cults of holy warriors, similar to the generally renowned and among the soldiers especially popular Christian saints. People converted to Islam because of conviction, economic reasons, sta-

tus, and even because of the pressure applied by the Ottoman state, which, of course, wanted to turn this rebellious region into its bastion for defence against Christian Europe. Coexistence based on conformity and opportunism was necessary, but state ideologies could sometimes inflame tensions and conflicts. In the second chapter, Prof. Xhufi considers very successfully the phenomenon of emigration from the studied areas. As for the aristocracy, even in Byzantine times, resettlement was linked to the service of imperial interests, which shows the secondary importance of ethnic identity in this era. Under the Ottomans, many representatives of these noble families embraced Islam and were integrated into the Ottoman administration. As for the lower layers of society, political and military conditions caused economic and social difficulties and forced them to flee to Italian soil, where they were not well received, but on the contrary, exposed to persecution and discrimination due to prejudices formed against them, namely that they were the source of all evil. Of course, some were respected for their outstanding qualifications, including some soldiers, and some were exclusively educated. Even the aristocracy was not spared from the psychosis of fleeing the Turks, but the people suffered and the country remained desolate. The redistribution of the Albanian population, often in the form of military colonization, took place on the Greek mainland and islands at the beginning of Ottoman rule. By the end of this chapter, Prof. Xhufi presents various and very interesting cases of emigration of individuals and entire populations, ending with the Stephanopouloi, Napoleon's friends in Corsica, originating from the Peloponnese (Mani). The third chapter, perhaps too extensive, deals with all aspects of the appearance of plague. The fourth explores society and culture in Lower Albania. The population of this area held the primordial institution of the council of elders. They did not tolerate one of them standing out above the rest. Clergy was respected without dogmatic sensibility, but there were also conflicts between the Greek clergy and Catholic missionaries. National character, often exaggerated in the sources, and clothing are also discussed. Almost all were illiterate and respected the given word (*besa*), while in some centres written contracts were already functioning. When written contracts and correspondence were necessary, they were usually written by clerics in Greek. Of course, the graduates of the College of St. Athanasios in Rome were taught both Latin and Italian, and the *stratiotes*

also mastered the languages of the countries where they served, so they were useful to their compatriots as well. Prof. Xhufi correctly points out that the Greek language spread to this area through Hellenization in the late Ottoman era, but it was present as the language of administration and culture since Byzantine times, hence used by the Ottoman central administration and regional magnates like Ali Pasha. Understandably, some Albanians knew Turkish well and worked with it. Blood feud was also characteristic of these populations and necessary to maintain order without written laws. Another interesting custom was the mourning of the deceased in their house and by their relatives on the first night after the burial. Since the land did not meet the existential needs of the Himariotes, they were engaged in mercenarism, as well as banditry and especially piracy. After a German drama on the coast of Himarë comes a large subchapter with a quite inappropriate title ("Soldiers for Venice"), which is actually an exhaustive study of the *stratiotes*. That title might have been more appropriate for the next, but the focus is on one unfortunate company. Recruitment for the benefit of Naples and Spain is the subject of the penultimate subchapter, and the Royal Macedonian Regiment of the last. This exceptional infantry formation was created by the decree of Charles of Bourbon in 1737, while recruitment was still underway on the Adriatic-Ionian coast. Under the generic name "Macedonian" is meant exclusively "Albanian", since candidates from other Balkan areas, and not only from the interior, were rejected. It was disbanded in 1812, after retreating before the French in Sicily, and despite the initiative of 1821, it was never reassembled. The last chapter is unfortunately burdened with modern Albanian nationalism, just like the first, from which it does not differ enough to be appreciated as an original conclusion. The only original part in it is the first subchapter, about the activities of Cosmas of Aitolia, but at the same time it represents the most brazen intrusion in the 18th century, only to shed profane light on a religious phenomenon. At the very end, there is a list of archival sources, a bibliography not too large for this kind of monograph, and an index of names, places and people. More illustrations would have been much appreciated, but such were probably not found. Only time will tell if this is the *opus magnum* of Pëllumb Xhufi, but for science it certainly is and will remain a monumental publication.

Jovica Grozdanovski

