

The first significant Slavic attack was noted by chronographers in 548. Then the Slavs reached the Adriatic city of Epidamnus (Bulgarian: Drach, modern: Durrës), in whose vicinity they captured many fortresses, killing or capturing all those able to fight(2).

In the late 70s and 80s of the 6th century, the Slavs conquered all of Old Epirus (present-day Epirus region in Greece and southern parts of Albania), expelling and killing the local population(3).

The invasion of the Slavs in the early 680s is described more generally by the contemporary John of Ephesus, who concludes that the Slavs settled in the land they had ravaged without fear, as masters.(4) There is also evidence from the same period of the flight of bishops from Illyricum and Epirus, which confirms the data on the destructive invasion and the flight of the autochthonous inhabitants.(5)

For example, in an abridgement of Strabo's Geography, made by an unknown author in the 10th century, it is added that " *Scythian Slavs inhabit the whole of Epirus* " (6).

In one of the supplements to the Middle Bulgarian translation of Manasseh's The chronicle says that the Bulgarians (i.e. the Slavs) filled the land of Durrës and beyond(7).

Historical monuments confirm the settlement of the Slavs around Lake Skadar, in the vicinity of Durrës and in southern Albania. Today it is accepted that the Slavization of these lands as well as Macedonia, Thessaly, Epirus and mainland Greece began in 578 and lasted until the 9th century. In the 9th century, the Byzantines managed to subjugate some of the Slavs, creating the themes of Thessaloniki, Cephalonia, Peloponnese and Strymon, as well as Dyrrhachium and Nicopolis on the coast of present-day Albania(8).

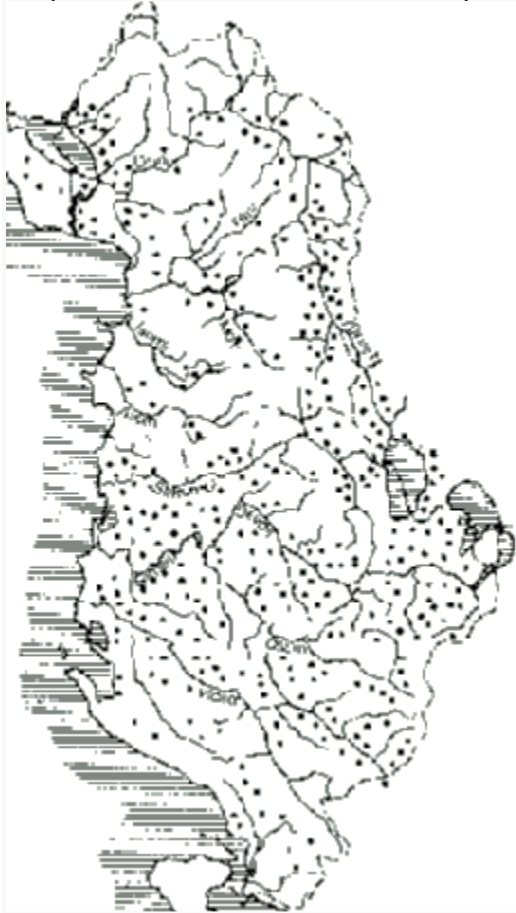
How Af. Selishchev described the route of Slavic migration "*The movement [of the Slavs] in the areas of Bistritsa (Aliakmon River, Greece),*

The Vojusa, Semeni, Shkumbi took place mainly from the southeast, from the regions of Kostur and Ohrid-Resen. (11) In their movement westward, the Slavs occupied Semeni-Devol, settled in Muzakia, and settled along the upper reaches of the Shkumbi... The limit of their further movement in this region was the mountain range called Chermenika by the Slavs...." (12).

The largest concentration of Slavs is along Black Drin river and Shkoder Lake to the north and To the south between The rivers of Viosa and Devol-Semen. It shows that the names from antiquity have been forgotten and later have been Used by the Albanians.

Slavic Toponymy has been more numerous through the middle ages. За това various Byzantine and Western documents testify, but the most complete picture is given by the first Ottoman tax census for Central and Southern Albania (Arvanid sanjak) from 1431–1432. This census is the focus of Yordan Zaimov, who, based on the numerous Bulgarian settlement and personal names in the register, concludes that in the 15th century the Bulgarian population in Central and Southern Albania was still numerous, and in the early Middle Ages it was in the majority. According to Zaimov, Bulgarian toponymy in Albania is not as archaic as, for example, that in Greece, especially in its southern parts. This shows that the Bulgarian population in Albania was assimilated or pushed out later than in Greece, and Slavic names in Albania continued to develop in parallel with the Bulgarian language itself in that country(16).

Greece in this example I think is referred to Attika. Because there are numerous documents showing Slavic presence in Epirus, Thessaly and Peloponnese
Map of Selichev about Slavic Toponymy.



the Danish linguist Gunnar Svane. He makes a critical review of previous studies and comes to the conclusion that standard for the entire linguistic territory of Albanians have over 500 Slavic loanwords, with many more present in individual dialects.

However, studying them in individual dialects is difficult due to the lack of an Albanian language atlas.

Slavic words have entered most strongly into certain semantic fields, such as:

- *agriculture and the names of agricultural products;*
- *household and yard supplies; tools, household utensils and equipment;*
- *food and clothing;*
- *plants and animals.*

from a story by Skylitsa we understand that in 1078 the usurper Nikephoros Vasilaki, as came from Italy to Durrës, gathered an army from all the places there. " *He gathered a strong army of Franks (it is explained that they came from Italy, b.a.), Bulgarians, Romans and Arvanites* "(47).

Also " *by governing the region [Durrës] poorly and without experience , he ruined everything* " .

His soldiers revolted and elected one of their former strategists, Tihomir, as king of Bulgaria(45). " *And so two rebel camps of Bulgarians were formed* ", continues Skylitsa. Ataliat claims the same, adding that the army was recruited according to a military list from all the places around Durrës. " *He had many soldiers - Romans, Bulgarians and Albanians* ", says Ataliat(48). Durrës was of particular importance in the history of the Albanian lands during the Middle Ages. Here, as in the surrounding area, Byzantine power was restored at the beginning of the 9th century with the establishment of the theme of Dyrachion. The city became an important Byzantine base in the western part of the Balkans for

control and intervention in neighboring lands. This is the second such base after Thessaloniki. For the Bulgarians, Durrës is a port of particular importance and a rich trading center. This city and other settlements in the region enjoy a certain autonomy within Byzantium and Bulgaria (49).

In all likelihood, Slavs settled in the city from the nearby surroundings even before it became Byzantine again in the 9th century. During its brief Bulgarian rule under Tsar Samuil, a Bulgarian aristocracy also settled here. Its presence is attested until the 13th century. However, the presence of Bulgarians in the city and the region probably persisted until the arrival of the Ottoman Turks, because they adopted the name of the city precisely from its Bulgarian form – Durrës (tur.

Even in the 17th century, in the Diocese of Drachta, there was a village of Bulgari with a church "St.

"(50) It is also interesting to note that when the Crusaders passed through Durrës at the end of the 11th and in the 12th centuries, they noted it as a Bulgarian city, although from 1040 it was finally under Bulgarian rule.

Byzantine rule. In 1096, Fulcher of Chartres wrote that Bulgaria began from Durrës. Norwegian

A participant in the Crusades, returning from Constantinople to Italy in 1154, says that Durrës lies in Bulgaria (50a).

Also the Chryselios family is from Durres

Even in the middle of the 13th century, names of merchants from Durrës, whose origin is Slavic. The preponderance of the indigenous population, and especially of

The Greeks broke down after 1269, when, after a destructive earthquake, a process of emigration. But Durrës retained its cosmopolitan character in the 14th century.

According to a report from 1322

The inhabitants of the city were ethnically Latin, Greek, Jewish and " *barbarian Albanians* ". The reports of

The presence of Albanians in the city, some of whom were merchants, increased in the first quarter of the 14th century (53) Probably with the wave of emigrants from the second half of the 13th century, John Kukuzel also left Durres,

later became one of the greatest hymn writers in the history of the Orthodox Church.

Then he talks about the Arban Oblast and where it is.

The southernmost point of Arban was probably the mountain ridge Baba Gora, first mentioned in

beginning of the 11th century. The location of Baba Gora is important in terms of determining the southern borders of the Arban region. This ridge (mountain) had

strategic importance on the Via Egnatia road in the transition from Durres to Ohrid. In a letter from the beginning of the 11th century, the Ohrid Archbishop Theophylact wrote that " *Bagora is a very large mountain, located between the Durres and the Bulgarian mountains* " (62). This description comes to show that somewhere there was also the border between his dioceses and the Durres Metropolis, covering the theme of the same name.

The name of the mountain has been preserved to this day in the village of Babje/Babja. This village is located on the border of the Mokra region with the Shkumbin River and is the first in the mountain range itself. The mountain elevation starting here bears the same name, and the village is also known as Babe Mokra(65). In 1537, the army of Sultan Suleiman I the Lawgiver passed through here in the campaign against the island of Corfu. Even then, the village was a road station located before Elbasan(66). The Ottoman travel writer Evliya Çelebi passed through the same village in the middle of the 17th century. He notes that Babja is located 4 hours east of Elbasan. According to his account, the village was inhabited by Albanians, Bulgarians and Greeks, who were probably forcibly settled here to repair the road and guard it as dervendjii. The residents had a sultan's firman for this. However, the passage continued after Babia, and the next village, Jura, another 4 hours away on the road to Ohrid, was also inhabited by Christians.

woodcutters(67).

Babilani (Babije) is recorded in the first Ottoman register for this part of Albania, compiled around 1467. At that time, it had 30 households. It is not mentioned in the register as having been

dervendzhiysko, unlike the neighboring Jurani, which already had this status (68). Both villages belonged to the Chermenika vilayet, most of which is located north of the Shkumbin River. The village had its largest population in the 16th century. In a registration from 1583, 130 households were recorded here. In 1642–1643, it decreased to 57 households (69).

From all this it follows that Theophylact of Ohrid defines the region southeast of present-day Elbasan as bordering Bulgaria (its diocesan districts of Mokra and Chernik) and the mountains separating it from the theme of Dyrachion.

Then he talks about the norman conquest on page 20-21

The demographic collapse in this region of the Balkans, however, began even before the arrival of the Normans in 1081 due to the tax harassment of the Byzantine authorities. The tax system established by Basil II in the conquered Bulgarian lands was changed after 1040. This change affected the agricultural population to the greatest extent. This led to rebellions and uprisings(72). The information about the extent of the damage left us in his letters by the contemporary of these events – the Archbishop of Ohrid, Theophylact, is interesting, because many of the affected areas belonged to his dioceses. In a letter addressed to John Comnenus, when the latter was governor of Durrës (1092–1106), Theophylact describes the depopulation of the Devol region. Since the Devol bishopric was on the road (i.e. the Via Egnatia), it was left without a bishop, who fled. The people living there left their homeland and " *entrusted themselves to the dense forest, nesting there* ". Therefore, neither a priest nor a deacon remained.

According to Theophylact, the reason for the population to flee was the extraordinary taxes, the so-called "epiria" (73).

Fulcher of Chartres notes the following about the area from Durrës to Ohrid: " *And so we continued through the Bulgarian regions, through mountain slopes and deserted places... on all sides around us rose huge mountains, in which no inhabitant appeared* " (74).

The warriors of the 1st crusade call the lands still lands of Bulgaria which shows a Bulgarian presence there.

Gilbert of Tournai is more specific about the latter, writing that the Epirotes are called Bulgarians ("atque Epirotas, quos dicunt Bulgaros") (7

Another Western chronicler, William of Tyre, explains the lack of population in these parts by the Byzantine policy of not allowing

In a letter from 1107 to the master

Archbishop John Pantekhni writes the following: " *And the things in Ohrid are very terrible: the region*

of Mokra – Mokra is part of Ohrid – was plundered by the slave and the apostate [Bohemond] , and Bagora -

This is a very large mountain, located between the Bulgarian and Dirachian mountains – it is guarded by the rebel. In a word, misfortune after misfortune " (77).

Thus, after in 1018 the lands of Southern Albania (around Devol, Berat and the Tomor mountain) were the last points of Bulgarian resistance and suffered the blow of the Byzantine army, after 1040 they were subjected to unprecedented tax oppression, and in the period 1081–1085 they were plundered and devastated again, this time by the Normans. The strongest impact of this war was on the settlements along the Durrës–Ohrid–Devol–Kostur road (Via Egnatia). The valley of the Arzen and Shkumbin rivers seemed completely depopulated in the eyes of the Crusaders in 1096–1097. In 1107–1108 the Normans again devastated the region from Durrës to Lake Ohrid, this time ravaging the Mokra region. The consequences for the region of Glavinica, Belgrade and Devol were severe. The period from 1081 to 1108 was also critical for the Orthodox Church in the region. As is understood from the letter of Theophylact, the bishop of Devol fled. The damage to the population and church activity in the region was probably too severe, since from then on Slavic enlightenment in Southern Albania began to fade. It was probably in the 12th century that the Slavic liturgy in Southern Albania was replaced by the Greek one.

The majority of medieval Albanians were engaged in cattle breeding, which distinguished them from their Bulgarian and Serbian neighbors. Nomadic cattle breeding is one of the important elements of the medieval and later economic history of the Balkans. In the Balkans, it was particularly widespread in the mountains of present-day Albania and Northwestern Greece. Interestingly, the medieval Balkan nomads turned out to be the descendants of the autochthonous Balkan population, pressed by the invading Slavs to the mountains. As we have already mentioned above, the Romanized inhabitants of the Danube coast are the most likely ancestors of the Vlachs (Romanians) and the Short-haired people pushed far south into the Pindus and Olympus mountains. The descendants of the Illyrian population found refuge from the attacks of the Slavs in the mountainous region of Arban, located north of the Shkumbin River, and were forced to also take up cattle breeding.

In the 15th century, the Vlach katuns in southern Albania were still quite numerous, as is evident from the Ottoman register of the Arvanid sanjak of 1431–1432. In the 17th

century, the Kutsovlas in southern Albania were already divided into two communities - one of those who continued their semi-nomadic lifestyle and another of settled residents of the cities and several large villages, living from handicraft production and trade. The Kutsovlas exclusively inhabited the town of Moschopolis and constituted a large part of the Christian population of Elbasan, Korça and other cities. There is no specific data on the Albanians of this early period, but it can be assumed that they, like the Vlachs, led a semi-sedentary life for several centuries, only to switch later to nomadic seasonal movements associated with longer migrations (78).

Testimonies about the Vlach nomads from this period give a similar picture of their actions. They were first described in the 1170s by the Byzantine writer Kekaumen, who said that the Vlachs were loyal to no one and did not adhere to any oaths. According to him, their migration had already reached considerable proportions. They were found in Epirus and Macedonia, but especially in Hellas (today's Thessaly, also called Great Wallachia in the 11th–14th centuries)(82). A century later, the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela wrote about the Vlachs as coming down from the mountains to the fields of Greece, committing robberies. No one dared to oppose them, let alone subdue them(83)

Then he talks how the nomads (Albanian and Vlachs) due to population increase settle in areas with sparse population to search for fields where to watch their livestock.

The question of the presence of Albanians in present-day Southern Albania between the 11th and 13th centuries cannot be answered. During this period, news about them comes exclusively from the area north of the Shkumbin River. Some authors believe that the existence of the administrative units Glavinica and Vagenetsia in Southern Albania in the 13th century with the name "hartulat" suggests that a Slavic population still lived here (84).

According to the sources known so far, the mass migrations of Albanians began sometime in the second half of the 13th century.(85)

A signal of the unrest that had occurred among the Albanian tribes was the announcement of

the Byzantine writer Pachymerus, that in 1280 the Albanians became independent and settled

destruction earlier than the Durrës earthquake (86). Even after the earthquake itself, which is not dated with precision,

the Albanians and the "surrounding people" plundered the city and then left it(87). In the same historical period it is

There is evidence of Albanian settlement in the Dalmatian port city of Kotor and its surroundings (88). They came here from the area of Lake Skadar. In the 13th century, there already seemed to be a certain number of Albanians who made a living from agriculture. The coexistence of Albanians with Bulgarians and Serbs influenced not only the language but also the livelihood of this population. On the other hand, the increase in contacts led to the development of assimilation processes, in which the constantly increasing Albanian element gained the upper hand (89).

The first large-scale migrations of Albanians to the south probably occurred in the first half of the 13th century. The treaty signed in 1268 between Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos and the Epirus despot Michael II Angelos mentions the forced migration of Albanians to southern Thessaly, in order to defend it from the attacks of the Latins from

Athens(90). It is not clear from this message whether these migrants came from Northern or Southern Albania. In fact, the use of Albanian migrants as a population with military functions became one of the main reasons for their movement south.

The process of population migration from the mountains to the plains reached its peak in the 1320s and 1330s. This was first noted in the writings of the Venetian Marino Sanudo in 1325. According to him, the Albanians descended on Thessaly in large numbers, capturing and plundering everything except the fortresses(91). A very important source is the information provided by the Byzantine emperor and writer John Kantakouzenos for the 1330s. Speaking of the Albanians, he characterizes them as autonomous and independent nomads. From his account it is clear that the Albanians already inhabited the vicinity of the cities of Belgrade (modern Berat) and Kanina, as well as the region of Colonia in southern Albania and even the vicinity of Ohrid in Macedonia(92). In the 1330s, the Albanians attacked and devastated the areas around the important cities of Valagrita and Kanina in modern southern Albania. In 1338 they broke the treaty with the Byzantine emperor and captured the fortresses of Skreparion, Klisura and Timorion in the same region. Unable to cope with the Albanians, Andronikos III Palaiologos was forced to hire 2000 Turkish infantry from the Seljuk emir of Smyrna, with whom he managed to defeat them at Belgrade. Kantakouzenos also informs us that the resettlement of the Albanians included entire tribes. For example, in the mountainous parts of Thessaly they had settled malachite, buite and mesarite.

Kantakouzenos' valuable information about the Albanians shows that they were mainly pastoralists and

soldiers and were very hostile to the population inhabiting the valleys and cities.

According to Kantakouzenos, after the Albanians were defeated by the Turks, many of their women and children were captured, as well as 300,000 oxen, 5,000 horses and 1,200,000 sheep(93). These figures are undoubtedly inflated, but they show one thing with certainty – that the Albanians were moving south with their families, all their livestock and household goods. That is, it is not just about raids or seasonal migrations, but about a large migration in search of new pastures and places of residence. The migrations of the Albanians in the first decades of the 14th century in a southerly direction are distinguished by great intensity and mass.

The testimonies of Kantakouzenos and of later authors such as George Scholarius and Laonikus Chalcocondylus (15th century) show that the Albanians invading the lands of southern Albania, Epirus and Thessaly were

They were completely nomadic, with no permanent settlements. In the summer they roamed the high mountains and in the winter they descended to the plains (94).

Around the same time, Albanians began to move north and west. Throughout the 14th century, they moved to Macedonia, Kosovo, the area around Lake Skadar, and even along the Dalmatian coast.

In a charter of the Serbian king Stefan Dušan from the mid-14th century, given to the monastery of St. Archangels near Prizren, in the western part of Kosovo, 9 katuns (nomadic settlements) of Albanians are mentioned among various settlements(95).

There is also other evidence of settlement of Albanian herders in Kosovo(96).

Migrations to the cities of Dalmatia also continued(97). Migrations from the mountainous

parts of Albania were not uniform in all directions. Probably the least intensive migration was to the east – to Macedonia.

According to Vikentij Makušev, during the Angevin period of Albanian history (1250–1350), the Slavic population remained concentrated only in the towns and villages along the sea, the Drin River, and the vicinity of Lake Ohrid. The Albanians lived in the mountains, led by tribal chieftains. Little by little, they subjugated the Slavic population. Then, in their language, Slavjanin became synonymous with "slave", and according to their unwritten laws, only a Serb or a Slav could be a slave (98).

As we have already mentioned, the Serbs and Bulgarians were called by the Albanians by the general name "shkia". The simplification of the ethnic name of the southern Slavs is a consequence of the Albanians' attitude towards them not only as a foreign-speaking people, but also as a population with another main occupation - agriculture. This is also felt in the "Anonymous Description of Eastern Europe" compiled in 1308. The characteristics of the Albanian people given in it are unique in character. According to its unknown compiler, the Albanians "*do not have cities, castles, fortresses, fortifications and villages, but live in huts and constantly move from place to place through their bands and clans*". The inhabitants of the provinces of Cumania, Stefanat, Pilot and Debar paid tribute to the Albanians and, since they were engaged in agriculture, worked their vineyards as slaves (99). This is probably about Slavs - Serbs and Bulgarians, who were conquered by the Albanian cattle breeders.

Some other sources also point to this conclusion. For example, in 1332, the Archbishop of Bar Guillaume Adam (100) wrote about strong anti-Slavic attitudes among the Albanians.

Venetian documents from 1381–1383, relating to the sale of slaves on the island of Crete, show that many of those who lost their freedom came from villages in what is now southern Albania. Most of them are explicitly mentioned as Bulgarians (*de genere Bulgarorum*)(101). These slaves were probably sold to the Venetians by the Albanians, the then masters of these lands. The first serious penetration of the Ottoman Turks here was only in 1385. Here are the names of some of the sold slaves, whose origins coincide with the names of villages and regions in southern Albania:

George, Bulgarian from the Danube (1381)

Maria, Bulgarian of the Danube (1381)

Maria, Bulgarian from Koluni (1381)

Kali, Bulgarian from Devol (1382)

Kali, a Bulgarian from Rudine (1382)

Maria, Bulgarian of Prespa (1383)

The Bulgarian population in Southern Albania, Epirus and Thessaly, whose presence was recorded until the 12th century, began to decline due to constant raids by the nomadic Vlachs and Albanians. However, Bulgarians are mentioned among the inhabitants of Southern Albania and Epirus in the 13th–14th centuries. Such are, for example, Rado and Stana from the Devol theme and Valko and Stanyo from the Vagenetsia theme(102).

The so-called Ioannina Chronicle from the 14th century attests to a Bulgarian presence in Epirus. In 1379, the Ioannina despot Toma Preljubovich fought with the Albanian tribes neighboring Ioannina,

led by John Spata. Preljubovich ordered some of the captured Albanians to be sold into slavery, others to be distributed among the inhabitants of the city, and a third part he handed over *"to the Bulgarians and Vlachs, ordering their noses to be cut off"*. These Bulgarians were probably his subjects in Epirus or even his soldiers. According to the same chronicle, in 1379 there were riots among the citizens of Ioannina against Despot Preljubovich, who undertook cruel persecutions against the instigators. One of them, Ivan the Bulgarian, was thrown from the fortress wall. Bulgarians in neighboring Thessaly are mentioned in the so-called Morean Chronicle also from the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th centuries. Bulgarians are mentioned along with Albanians and Vlachs in the region of the Western Thessaly bishopric of Stagi in a charter of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus III from 1336 (103).

In addition to physical extermination, enslavement and forced expulsion from their homelands, we must also add assimilation processes to the reasons for the decline of the Slavic element in the lands of present-day Albania during the Middle Ages. The complex and prolonged stage of gradual settlement of the semi-nomadic Albanians and Kutsovlas in the 14th century finds echoes in some Byzantine sources from that era. They include names such as Bulgaro-Albanovlah or Serbo-Albanovlah(104). Some of the Vlachs living in southern Albania were also pushed south. Others managed to hold on to the area south of Lake Ohrid(105).

It was mentioned above that the migration of Albanians to the east was less intense. In addition to Kantakouzenos' report on the presence of Albanian nomads near Ohrid, there is evidence of their presence in other areas of Macedonia. As early as 1306, in a charter of the Serbian ruler

Stefan Uros II, given to the monastery of St. George near Skopje, mentions Albanians among

visitors to the local fair(107). In another charter from 1334–35 north of the town of Prilep it is

noted name of the settlement of Arbanas, which is an almost certain indication of the ethnic origin

belonging of the inhabitants or at least the presence of Albanians in it(108). In the same period

also mentions a certain Gino Arbanas in the town of Štip(109). In a charter of the Serbian king Stefan Dušan from around 1343, Albanians and Vlachs are forbidden to use the pastures of the mountain (ridge) Nanov dol in the Polog region - northwestern Macedonia(110). In another charter of Stefan Dušan from the middle of

In the 14th century, the donation of 9 villages and 9 settlements (abandoned villages) to the church of "St.

"Virgin Mary" in the village of Archilevitsa. Among the mentioned villages located in the Kumanovo-Preshevska Black Forest, there is one with the name Arbanassi (later known as Arbanashko)(111).

From Ottoman registers from the 15th–16th centuries it can be seen that a number of settlements in the region of southwestern Bulgaria bear the name Arbanas. Such are Arbanas in the Sofia district, Arbanas in the Radomir district, Arbanas in the Kyustendil district, the Arbanas neighborhoods in Slavishte and Sirishtnik (today Kovachevtsi). This name can be associated with resettlements or seasonal movements of Albanians that occurred before the conquest of these Bulgarian lands by the Ottoman Turks at the end

of the 14th century. Evidence of the settlement of Albanians in Macedonia is also confirmed by early Ottoman tax censuses from the 15th century. The first Ottoman tax registers (tahrir defterleri) are a valuable source for the ethnic and demographic changes that occurred in the regions of present-day Albania. The oldest preserved copy of such an Ottoman register is precisely from the territory of Albania. It dates from 1431–1432 and refers to the Ottoman Arvanid sanjak, encompassing the lands of Central and Southern Albania conquered by the Ottoman Turks(112).

The first peculiarity that stands out is that the registered settlements are very small in terms of their population. They have an average of 20–25 families. On the other hand, it can be noted with some reservations that the geographical area enclosed between the Vjosa and Devol-Semeni rivers was quite sparsely populated. As already mentioned, the census did not cover all the settlements, but even those that did have a very small number of inhabitants. For example, in the Belgrade vilayet, located around the present-day city of Berat between the Osumi and Vjosa rivers, the calculations show the presence of 2,932 households (of which 115 were widowed) and 51 single men. This corresponds to about 15,000 people. The city of Belgrade (present-day Berat) itself had a small population – 208 households, of which 33 were widowed, and 20 were single men. The neighboring vilayet of Tomorince, located along the Tomorica River, had a population of 789 households, of which 27 were widowed(113).

Also in 1432, the census of taxpayers in the mountainous vilayet of Kolonja (today's southeastern Albania) (114) dates back to this time. Since the preserved copy is from a detailed census (defter-i mufassal), some comparisons and conclusions can be made. First of all, it is striking that the inhabitants of Kolonja, noted by Kantakouzenos a century earlier as "nomadic Albanians" (115), were already producing a significant amount of agricultural produce (wheat, rye, barley, oats, lentils, etc.). **On the other hand, it is evident that a large part of the inhabitants of the vilayet still bore Slavic names. Slavic names of settlements also prevail. All this suggests that the Ottoman conquest accelerated the process of assimilation of the Bulgarians in southern Albania. One of the main reasons for this could be the restriction of the seasonal movement of Albanians by the Ottoman authorities and their gradual integration into the new socio-economic system.**

Of interest are the tax register data for the areas north of the Shkumbin River. More important for the present study is the first Ottoman census carried out in the ethnically mixed vilayets.

Upper and Lower Debar, Dalgobardo, Chermenika and Reka(116). Above all, this registration shows the significant population losses in the lands of Central Albania and Western Macedonia as a result of the long-standing wars of the Turks with the Albanian ruler George Kastriot-Skenderbeg(117). If they are

However, comparing the figures from 1467 with those from the preserved census of 1519, it can be seen that the smaller population was also due to omissions in the tax registration carried out immediately after the conquest of the country. This can also be partly attributed to the hiding of the population in the mountains. For example, the Debar region shows an increase in population of almost five times (118)! Administratively, Debar was divided into two parts – Upper and Lower Debar. According to Skanderbeg's biographer, Barleti, in the 15th century the first part was inhabited by Bulgarians and the second by Albanians (119). However, as is evident from the census of 1467, a

considerable part of the population of Lower Debar (today in Albania) was also of Bulgarian origin. This is also evidenced by the fact that many of the inhabitants, in addition to Slavic personal names, also carry the suffix "-ik" to their surnames. In the same

administrative unit there was also a settlement called Slavyani(120). The settlement of Albanians in Dolni Debar allowed their further movement in an eastern direction. In the neighboring region of Gorna Reka, lying around the banks of the Radika River, Albanians probably settled permanently as early as the 14th century. It can be assumed that Gorna Reka and Polog were the first Western Macedonian regions in which there were mass settlements of Albanians as early as the 14th century. The first evidence of the presence of Albanians in Gorna Reka is the aforementioned Ottoman tax register from 1467. Here Albanian personal names predominate in villages with Slavic names such as Valkovija, Tarnica, Krakornica, Strezimir, Ribnicica(121). The mixed ethnic character of the Reka vilayet did not escape the attention of the Ottoman tax registrar. For example, Dimitri Arbanas and Petar Arbanas were recorded in the village of Prisojnitsa; Petko Arbanas and Pavle Arbanas in the village of Bitushe. Most likely these Albanians lived in a Bulgarian environment. The opposite is true for Nikola Sklav (a Slav) in the village of Bogdevo(122).

With the exception of a few villages (Leka, Gradec, Kosharitsa and Liboražde), Albanian names and surnames are borne by the inhabitants of the Chermenika vilayet, located northwest of Lake Ohrid(123). They also predominate in the aforementioned village of Babjani (present-day Babja), about which the Turkish traveler Evliya Çelebi wrote two centuries later that it was inhabited by Albanians, Greeks and Bulgarians(124). It is obvious that in the 14th century, there were three routes for the resettlement of Albanian nomads in a westerly direction. The first one passed through the regions of Gorna Reka and Polog in Western Macedonia and reached Skopje and Kumanovo. The end points of this movement were the Kyustendil, Radomir and Sofia regions, where they probably reached separate katuns in their nomadic movement. The second stream passed through the Ohrid region towards Kichevo, Bitola, Prilep and Shtip. The third passed along the Prespa Lakes in the Lerin region, with individual Albanian settlers even reaching the Drama and Ser regions. These Albanian settlements were few in number and, with the exception of the Gorna Reka and Polog regions, left no lasting traces. Despite its incompleteness, the Ottoman tax census of 1467 provides an idea of the ethnic changes that occurred north of Lake Ohrid in the 14th and first quarter of the 15th centuries. On the other hand, Skanderbeg's struggles with the Turks forced some of those who had already temporarily moved back to the higher mountainous areas. However, in the 15th century, Albanians were already permanently settled in areas such as Chermenik, Dolen Debar and Gorna Reka. They permanently penetrated the Mokra region, and south of Lake Ohrid they settled the Kolonja region. The Bulgarian population remained in the Opar region, as the Albanian Giovanni Muzaki (16th century) attests (125). The Bulgarian presence in the Gora region, which included many villages between Lake Ohrid and the Devol River to the south, was also longer. By 1670 The already mentioned Evliya Çelebi wrote that the entire population of this region, with the administrative center being the town of Pogradec, was Bulgarian (126).

Year of registration/ Administrative area	Heads of households	Number villages
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1452-1453		
Vilayet Kalkandelen (Tetovo)	31	22
Vilayet Yuskub (Skopje)	1	1
1467-1468		
Kalkandelen Province	20	17
Vilayet Yuskub	2	2
Vilayet Pirlepe (Prilep)	10	10
Vilayet Köprülü (Veles)	3	2
Nahiya Karchova (Kicevo)	7	7
Mariovo District	1	1
Nahiya Manastir (Bitola)	41	25
1481		
Nahia Filorina (Lerin)	30	24

The data presented so far show that the most intensive migrations of Albanians in the 14th and early 15th centuries were to northwestern Macedonia (mostly in Reka and Polog) and in the southwestern – to the Bitola, Prilep and Lerin regions. It can be assumed that the migrations of Albanians in the eastern direction were severely limited after the conquest of Macedonia by the Ottoman Turks in the last decades of the 14th century. As is known, during the Ottoman conquest, Albanians migrated south – to Central Greece, the Peloponnese, the island of Euboea and elsewhere in mainland and island Greece(129). During the final conquest of Albania, which lasted throughout the 15th century, between ten and twenty thousand Albanians crossed the Adriatic and Ionian Seas to find salvation in southern Italy. The Albanian colony in Venice, which was composed mainly of mercenaries, was also significant in number(130). All these migrations originated from present-day Southern Albania. The migrations of Albanians to the north and northeast were much weaker (131). In the last decades of the 14th century, the mass migrations of Bulgarians from eastern Albania were also interrupted. They were renewed towards the end of the 15th century. For example, according to local tradition, at that time the ancestors of the current inhabitants of the villages of Tresonche and Rosoki settled in the vicinity of Elbasan in Dolna Reka, Western Macedonia (132). Both villages remained Bulgarian in a later period, with their inhabitants' main occupation being cattle breeding. It is likely that in the same period, families of Slavs with the Catholic religion migrated from Northern Albania and to Skopje Montenegro (133). The migrations of Albanians in the 14th–15th centuries have no analogues on the Balkan Peninsula. Unlike the earlier migration of the Aromanians (Aromanians), the Albanians maintained the compactness of their ethnic territory and significantly expanded its borders during their movements. Their raids were aggressive and militarily powerful. In addition to migrations, the assimilation processes that began in the 13th century also contributed to the change in the ethnic appearance of some parts of present-day Albania. They were caused by the gradual settling and transition to agriculture of some of the previously nomadic Albanians. This phenomenon was stronger in southern Albania, where the Bulgarian population was also more numerous. The process of assimilation of the Slavic-speaking population south of the Shkumbin River continued for several centuries. It had a significant impact on the economic development of this part of Albania. First, here the transition to agriculture was faster

and covered a larger number of Albanians. Second, the role of the clan organization that accompanied the northern Albanians (Gegs) throughout the Ottoman rule weakened. One fundamental fact of Albanian history that contributed to the survival and growth of the Albanian nation during the Ottoman rule of the Balkans should not be overlooked. Of all the Balkan peoples, the Albanians showed the greatest degree of integration into the Ottoman feudal and religious system. The Ottoman register of the Arvanid sanjak from 1431 shows that even at the time of the conquest of Albania, only 30% of the timariots were Turks. The remaining 54% were newly converted Albanians, and 16% were local Christians, including even bishops and metropolitans (134). The penetration of the Albanians into the Ottoman military-feudal system was so successful that they provided over 30 grand viziers to the Sublime Porte. Entire families of the Ottoman army and auxiliary units were composed almost exclusively of Albanians. In Albania, Ottoman colonization occurred only in a few strongholds, such as Elbasan, Shkodra, Argirokastro, etc. Later, the Turks almost disappeared as a feudal stratum in Albania, and their place was taken by local feudal lords who had converted to Islam. That is, not the Ottoman Turks, but the Albanians themselves became the masters of this land. Therefore, there was no Turkish colonization on the territory of present-day Albania, and the colonizers of Albania and the nearby lands were the Albanians, who converted to Islam, who also settled a number of neighboring territories in Macedonia and Serbia. For two centuries, the ethnic name of the Albanians was associated only with those who moved from here to present-day Southern Albania. As early as the 15th century, the Byzantine historian Laonik Halkokondyl expressed the opinion that the Albanians moved south, coming from the region of Durrës (135). The resettlement of large masses of Albanians only from the purely Albanian region of Arban is possible, but it hardly explains the large flows of population that flooded not only some southern Albanian regions, but also Epirus and Thessaly, and later Central and Southern Greece. It is possible that Slavic colonization broke a common proto-Albanian ethnos into two parts for centuries. The differences in the dialects of the southern (Tosk) and northern (Gheg) Albanians are one of the proofs of this (136). The migration of large masses of Albanians only from the purely Albanian region of Arban is possible, but it is difficult to explain the large population flows that flooded not only some southern Albanian regions, but also Epirus and Thessaly, and later Central and Southern Greece. It is possible that Slavic colonization broke a common proto-Albanian ethnic group into two parts for centuries. The differences in the dialects of the southern (Tosk) and northern (Gheg) Albanians are one of the proofs of this (136). The migration of large masses of Albanians only from the purely Albanian region of Arban is possible, but it is difficult to explain the large population flows that flooded not only some southern Albanian regions, but also Epirus and Thessaly, and later Central and Southern Greece. It is possible that Slavic colonization broke a common proto-Albanian ethnic group into two parts for centuries. The differences in the dialects of the southern (Tosk) and northern (Gheg) Albanians are one of the proofs of this (136).

Fragmentary information about the presence of Bulgarians in present-day Albania in the 15th–17th centuries shows that the Bulgarian national presence was preserved the longest in the areas south of Lake Ohrid. This, as we mentioned, is evidenced by Giovanni Muzaki in the early 16th century and Evliya Çelebi in the second half of the 17th century. In this region, the Albanians gained the upper hand only in the 19th

century, after the destruction and devastation of Christian settlements by the Albanian independent feudal lord Ali Pasha Janinski. According to a local legend, printed in 1898 in the Brussels-published magazine "Albania", in the 1870s the inhabitants of the Devol region were still bilingual - they spoke both Albanian and a " *mixed Bulgarian*". However, the leaders of 50 villages swore not to speak Bulgarian anymore, not to pass this language on to their children and to become Albanians. Since then, Bulgarian has been in serious decline (153). Thus, towards the end of the 19th century, in the former Bulgarian region of Gora, the great expert on ethnic relations in the western Ottoman provinces, Vasil Kančov, discovered a single Bulgarian village – Ljubanishca. It is characteristic, however, that the newly settled Albanians adopted the old regional name of the Bulgarians – Gorani (154). The case is similar with the mountainous region of Mokra, where the Albanians were called Mokrani – a name of the local Slavic population, registered as early as the 11th century in a letter by Theophylact of Ohrid. The Bulgarian language eventually retreated in the city of Korça (its name derives from the Bulgarian medieval name Gorica) and in the surrounding villages. It is here that one of the few Bulgarian enclaves in present-day Albania, consisting of two villages – Boboshtitsa and Drenovo(155). The village of Boboshtitsa is located 8 km southeast of Korça and is located at the foot of the Morava mountain. It has four churches and two monasteries in its vicinity. According to documents kept today in Tirana, towards the end of the 15th century, the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II granted his mirahor, the local Turkified Albanian Ilyas Bey, a number of villages, including Boboshtitsa. These fermanas are probably copies of the same ones preserved in Turkey and published by Gökbilgin. However, when reading them, he noted the name of the village as Botoshindzhe. This village actually became the mulk of Ilyas Bey with a fermana of Bayezid II from January 1486. It was endowed by the same sultan together with three other villages from the Korçanska kaza in 1505.(156) Boboshtitsa is one of the Bulgarian villages with longest history. The church "St. Ivan" was built most likely in the 13th century, restored and expanded in the 15th and 17th centuries. In 1503, a second church was built at the local monastery "St. Nikola" - "St. Dimitar". The main occupations of the village were sheep breeding, agriculture and logging. In 1709, the local monastery "St. Nikola" became stauropegial of the Ohrid Archbishopric(157). Therefore, it seems that the village was the summer residence of the Ohrid Archbishop Joasaph, who was a native of Korça. A rare fact is recorded in the great condica of the Korça Metropolis. In April 1728, 58 delegates from the vakf settlements of Boboštitza, Vitkuki, Korça and others, elders, merchants and clergymen, gathered in Boboštitza for a council. They decided to expel from the vakf anyone who turned to the Ottoman court and reported to the authorities, and did not go to be tried by the local chieftains(158). This is a typical example not only of the internal organization of Christian communities, but also demonstrates a limited autonomy of a group of villages with a special status. Boboštitza, as well as other surrounding villages inhabited by Albanians or Kutsovlas, was exposed to Greek influence for a long time. In 1724 In 1911, a Greek school was established in Korça, supported financially by the people of Boboš. The village began to decline after 1814, when the Albanian independent feudal lord Ali Pasha Tepedelenli included Boboshtitsa and Drenovo among his 900 farms. After the pasha's death in 1822, Sultan Mahmud II retained the villages as his estate. In 1873, the villagers wrote to the Bulgarian exarch Antim that they had become impoverished and half had fled. In

1880, the village had 1,004 inhabitants (159). Memories of an old Bulgarian population have been preserved in the nearby villages of Dvoryane, Darda (Bulgarian: Krusha), Mborya, and Polyana. In Drenovo, one of the neighborhoods bears the name Gabrovo, probably after Bulgarians who moved here from a neighboring village (160). The dialect of the Bulgarians from Boboshtitsa and Drenovo is archaic, with preserved Old Slavonic verb forms and pronouns, and the dative case is used. Phonetics also speak of the preservation of speech over the centuries (161). Today, only the oldest inhabitants still know Bulgarian. The ethnic border between Bulgarians and Albanians left the two Bulgarian villages as islands among the Albanian population as early as the beginning of the 19th century. At that time, this border ran to the east, somewhere in the area of the town of Biglishta. In 1805–1807, the Englishman William Leake passed through Albania. According to him, the border of the country was the village of Biglishta, since its inhabitants spoke Albanian. In the middle of the 17th century, however, the Turkish geographer Hadji Kalfa, in his description of European Turkey, noted that the inhabitants of the Biglishta nahiya were Bulgarians and Albanians (162). The Christian population of this area decreased mainly due to emigration to other regions and the adoption of Islam. An example of this is an Ottoman document from July 1658. According to the ilam of the qadi of Biglishte, the population of the district was taxed with 416 khanets, but the inhabitants could only take up 120 khanets. The remaining khanets fell to rai, recorded in previous registers, but went to Constantinople for profit. They refused to pay taxes on the pretext that they had become janissaries, jebedjis, gunners, ajemi oglani, or, more generally speaking, soldiers (163). The figures from this document show a population decline of more than three times. It is unlikely that all these professions related to the army and the janissary corps are true, but the fact is that people were already far from their native lands. In a description of Albania and Epirus by the Greek monk Cosmas Thesprotos from 1833, it is written that Korça had 50 villages, the inhabitants of which were mainly Albanians. Old Slavonic verb forms and pronouns are preserved, and the dative case is used. Phonetics also speak of the preservation of speech over the centuries (161). Today, only the oldest inhabitants still know Bulgarian. The ethnic border between Bulgarians and Albanians left the two Bulgarian villages as an island among the Albanian population as early as the beginning of the 19th century. At that time, this border ran to the east, somewhere in the area of the town of Biglishta. In 1805–1807, the Englishman William Leake passed through Albania. According to him, the border of the country was the village of Biglishta, since its inhabitants spoke Albanian. In the middle of the 17th century, however, the Turkish geographer Hadji Kalfa, in his description of European Turkey, noted that the inhabitants of the Biglishta nahiya were Bulgarians and Albanians (162). The Christian population of this area decreased mainly due to emigration to other regions and the adoption of Islam. An example of this is an Ottoman document from July 1658. According to the ilam of the qadi of Biglishte, the population of the district was taxed with 416 khanets, but the inhabitants could only take up 120 khanets. The remaining khanets fell to rai, recorded in previous registers, but went to Constantinople for profit. They refused to pay taxes on the pretext that they had become janissaries, jebedjis, gunners, ajemi oglani, or, more generally, soldiers (163). The figures from this document show a population decline of more than three times. It is unlikely that all these professions related to the army and the janissary corps are true, but the fact is that

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identity for at least two centuries. Evliya Çelebi wrote about the presence of Bulgarians in Elbasan in 1670–1671. The resettlement of the Bulgarians to Elbasan most likely took place in the winter of 1466–1467. The fortress itself was built in the summer of 1466 and was subjected to an unsuccessful siege by Skanderbeg the following year (1467). In an Ottoman register from 1528 the forcibly settled Christians appear as "*the community of the resettled Christians of the city of Elbasan*". At that time they numbered 73 households and were officially exempted from paying avariz. Another 97 Christian households had come and settled in the city of their own free will. In the 16th century Elbasan developed rapidly. In 1570, the Ottoman tax register counted 177 Christian households that were exempted from paying extraordinary taxes and fees, for which they were obliged to maintain the fortress and the bridge over the Shkumbin River. It is noteworthy that those who came voluntarily had already received the same rights as those who were forcibly resettled. This can be considered a prerequisite for the beginning of assimilation processes within the Christian community. Elbasan quickly became an important craft and trade center of Central Albania. An Italian description from the same year 1570 states that Elbasan was a trading settlement. In another description with an unknown date, but from the 16th century, it is known that half of the inhabitants were Greeks (1573). Pietro Mazarechi in 1623–1624 also wrote that "*in this city all are Turks and Greek schismatics*" (1624). An interesting fact proving the Bulgarian origin of some of the Elbasan Christians are the notes in the codices of some of the Macedonian monasteries. In the codice of the Slepce monastery near Bitola in the 16th–17th centuries, there are names of Christian visitors who are stated to be from Konyuh or Elbasan. According to one of the notes in the Slepce Memorial, dated to the middle of the 16th century, "*Mr. Bozhidar from Konyuh came to the holy monastery "Prodrom" and spoke together with the abbot and the priests and the monastery elders. And he made a promise to the holy monastery to bring a load of oil every year*" (1577). It is evident that despite the location of Elbasan in the heart of Albania, its inhabitants of Bulgarian origin continued to maintain ties with the Bulgarian lands. There are names of visitors from the Christian villages surrounding Elbasan and others in today's Central Albania. The majority of the personal names of the visitors are also Slavic, although Albanian ones are also found. In the codice of the Treskavec monastery near Prilep, it was recorded once in the 17th century. A visitor from Elbasan. Very often, visitors to the monasteries were merchants from South Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus. There were also visitors from the villages of Srštan and Shalasi in Elbasan, Rabi in Malokastrinski (1578). Apart from Elbasan, there were separate Bulgarian settlements in other parts of Albania. According to family tradition, one of the leading fis (clan) of the Albanian tribe Mirditi originated from an Orthodox Bulgarian who moved to Northern Albania and converted to Catholicism there (1579). In this part of Albania, the villages of Bulgari and Bulgeri were mentioned as early as the 16th–17th centuries (1580).