

The City of Drisht in the Middle Ages**History**

Keywords: Drishti, Albania, the Republic of Venice, George II Strazimir, Balsha III, Stefan Lazarevic, George Brankoviq.

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Abstract

The topic "Drishti in the Middle Ages", includes a period characterized by significant development in the social, economic, cultural and political sphere, not only in the city, but also in Albania in general during the Middle Ages. Drishti as many cities of Albania was founded during the Middle Ages, reaching a high development state which placed the city among the ranks of other medieval cities not only in Albania, but even further in the region. As evidence of these developments are the achievements in the field of legislation, the developments in the economic, social, religious and cultural life.

During the Middle Ages, the city of Drisht had reached a significant development in terms of economic, strategic, political, cultural aspect and in many other aspects, playing an important role in the development of important events and processes that characterized medieval Albanian history. In the late XIV century and early XV century, Albania and in this case the city of Drisht, entered a new phase due to political changes and developments taking place all over the region. In this period the city was confronted with the efforts of the Republic of Venice to put it under its rule, while facing successive attacks of the Ottoman army.

The medieval city of Drisht had reached a high municipal organization alongside the other cities of the time. Evidence of this development are the city statutes that are of high value and importance. From the content of Drishti's statutes, it can be noted that they were more oriented in regulating religious affairs. Specifically, regulating and organizing of internal ecclesiastical order starting from the church hierarchy, namely the order of titles and ranks within the church, to continue with the rules for the masses and prayers, then the penalties for those who established reputations as thieves in relation to canonical writings and other issues (Ahmeti & Lala, 2009, 151, 155). So, Drishti's Statutes, unlike other medieval city statutes, were not secular, but were more religious and clerical statutes. The statutes of Drisht are evidence that confirms and argues convincingly the development of this city alongside other European cities of the time, being equipped with written laws or to put it better, written statutes. During the middle ages, Drishti reached a momentous economic bloom that contributed to the export and import of high importance items for the time.

Besides the geographical position's and natural conditions' role in the economic development, specifically trade, a factor that played an important role was the route from Shkodra to Plava which passed exactly through the city of Drisht (Pulaha, 1974, 383). In the economic sphere, Drishti because it was rich with olives, had become known for producing olive oil products (Schmitt, 2007, 159). Drishti also stood out in the cultivation of grain, and together with Shkodra they were listed as one of the most developed agriculture regions in medieval Albania, being identified with suitable conditions for growing crops. The most common crops in the family of grains were: wheat, millet, (Иван, 1983, 99) etc. On the vegetable family broad beans, onions, spinach and some others stood up; whilst among fruits, plums, figs and chestnuts were more famous (Huta, 1990, 63). Among other agricultural products Drishti was also distinguished for the cultivation of grapes. This agricultural product besides being served as fresh fruit was also consumed in its refined forms such as cider and wine (Huta, 1990, 63). An important factor that contributed to the development of the economy, and trade specifically, were the tariffs and the lending system.

During the medieval times, northern Albania, and in our case the city of Drisht, were distinguished with a relatively active religious life. The city of Drisht comprising within its territory numerous religious buildings was notable for its highly organized churchly system. The political changes that took place in the Albanian territories during the Middle Ages were also reflected in the ecclesiastical organization of Drishti. As a consequence of the political changes, Drishti's churches were at times under the directives of the Eastern Church and at times under the directives of the Western Church, according to the circumstances that the time imposed. For the city of Drisht and the rural areas that were under its jurisdiction, resources that refer to this medieval period show that during this time there were a significant number of church buildings (like cathedrals, churches, monasteries etc). The mentioned cathedral churches in Drisht were the cathedral church of St. Mary's (Tholloczy, Jiriček, & Sufflay, 1918, n° 99, n° 252, n° 333, n° 427, n° 615, n° 656, n° 745), St. George's (Tholloczy, Jiriček, & Sufflay, 1918, n° 745), St. Francis' (Tholloczy, Jiriček, & Sufflay, 1918, n° 47), Shelbuemit (Šufflay, 1916, 262), St. Prendes' (Ahmeti & Lala, 2009, 54), and the monastery of St. Benedict (Tholloczy, Jiriček, & Sufflay, 1918, n° 119). Therefore, during the Middle Ages with reason, the city of Drishti was considered to be the most Catholic city of Albania (Schmitt, 2007, 579). Within the theme "Drishti in the Middle Ages", referring to published sources, as well other relevant literature, in terms of political developments that occurred in the city we have come to these conclusions which we categorized into the following periodical phases:

-The first phase: covers the period 1392-1396, and is marked by numerous changes and transformations that had occurred in Albania. This period is characterized by the ceaseless acts of the Republic of Venice to put under its rule the Albanian coast, which thanks to its promises and pressing politics in 1396 achieved to take possession of cities such as Durres, Shkodra Lezha (Tholloczy, Jiriček, & Sufflay, 1918, n° 555) and Drisht (Millutinoviq, 1985, 43).

-The second phase: spans from 1396 to 1404. This phase begins with the Venetian measures in taking over the coast of Albania, to proceed with an outbreak of a series of uprisings such as that of the year 1399, which erupted in Durres and then spread out in Shkodra and up to Drisht (Millutinoviq, 1985, 45). Besides the austerity measures taken by the Venetians, the city was also confronted with the Turkish attacks, which in June 1400 demolished Drishti's grain fields and vineyards. In the Albanian political sphere of the time, George II Strazimir was a figure that stood out, a person that was distinguished in particular in his fight to liberate the city of Drisht and other cities like Shkodra, Lezha etc. from the oppressing rule of the Venetians. Clashes between George II Strazimir and the Venetian authorities continued until 1402, which is depicted as a period of relative stability between Venice and the Balshaj (Dokumente për historinë, 1987, n° 199). This calmed period continues up until 1403, when George II Strazimir dies. After his death, his son Balsha III comes to power.

-The third phase: takes place between the years 1404-1421, a period that encompasses complex events and processes and at the same time important ones for the cities of Albania and especially that of Drisht. The period 1404-1421, in terms of political developments is characterized by the battles of Balsha III and specifically his struggle for the liberation of Drisht and other cities, which were constantly threatened by the Venetian attacks. Referring to resources and literature that have been available for the fights of Balsha III during 1404-1421, we noted that the city of Drisht had a special significance for Balsha III, and taking over this city was really important for Balsha. This is confirmed not only by the attempts of Balsha III to liberate it, but also by his constant insistence to keep Drisht under his dominion. Requirements to keep Drisht under his dominion can be observed during the armistice of Balsha III with Venice (Arkivi i Institutit, A. III/563, n° 49). If we take a brief look at Balsha's War for the liberation of his possessions which were under the rule of the Venetian Republic during the years 1404-1421, it is enough to understand that in this war whose goal was the liberation of the Albanian territories, in the case of holdings Balsha III, the city of Drisht was not overlooked.

-The Fourth phase: (1421-1448), covers the period after the death of Balsha III, which is characterized by claims of some who considered themselves as heir to Balshaj and their possessions. On the other side, the Venetian Republic by taking advantage of Balsha III's death, managed to takeover some of his possessions such as: Drishti, Tivat and Ulcinj and attach these regions to some of its other holdings in Albania. However, the Republic of Venice did not have an easy time in managing these territories. Moreover, after the death of Balsha III, over these cities did not fail to raise his claims the Serbian ruler Stefan Lazarevic, who considered himself the heir to Balshaj. Besides the Serbian despot as contender to inherit the possessions of Balsha III's, on the scene comes the duke of Bosnia, Sandali Hraniq (Иван, 1983, 67), the stepfather of Balsha III and a third person by the name of Stefan Maramonte (Fine 1994, 528). From the year 1421 until the year 1442, Drishti was under the rule of Venice and under the constant efforts of the despot Stefan Lazarevic (Ljubić, 1890, 112) and his successor George Brankoviq to take over the city, or was under the Serbian rule and facing efforts from Venice to take possession of it under itself.

-The fifth phase: covering the period 1448-1478, is a period that encompasses the most fragile in the history of Drishti. It includes events and processes that gradually bring changes in the political arena as well as in the wider economic arena, marking the end of Venetian rule, and the beginning of the Ottoman rule. The city after falling under the Ottoman rule, gradually began to lose the role it once had (Millutinoviq, 1985, 62), where from an important center slowly ceased to exist as a city.

Conclusion

During the Middle Ages, the city of Drishti had reached a significant development in terms of economic, strategic, political, cultural aspect and in many other aspects, playing an important role in the development of important events and processes that characterized medieval Albanian history. During the middle ages, Drishti reached a momentous economic bloom that contributed to the export and import of high importance items for the time.

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