ABSTRACT

Purpose: The paper provides historical context on the Topias family's role in Naples' political and religious landscape, detailing their break from Byzantium, alliances with Anjouans, and power dynamics.

Methods: The paper discusses the Topias family's historical context, indicating that historical scholars used a combination of archival research, primary source analysis, comparative analysis, contextualization, and narrative storytelling to understand their interactions, relationships, and historical context. These methods were likely used to gather and analyze information about the family's history.

Results and Conclusion: The paper provides a narrative account of the Topias family's historical significance, their break from Byzantium, and their role as vassals to the king of Naples. It highlights their resilience and adaptability in medieval European politics, highlighting the complex dynamics of political and religious spheres.

Research implications: The paper provides a rich historical account of the Topias family, highlighting their political strategies, interfaith relations, vassalage, Anjouan influence in the Balkans, and the influence of clergy in politics. It also highlights the importance of examining the historical narrative and its potential to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions on medieval European history, politics, and culture.

Originality/value: The paper provides valuable insights into medieval Balkan politics, interfaith relations, and vassalage dynamics in medieval Europe. It focuses on lesser-known actors like the Topias family, their religious conversion, Angevin influence in the Balkans, and the complexities of feudal relationships. The narrative also highlights the intersection of clerical and political power, enhancing our understanding of medieval governance and interfaith relations.

Keywords: Topiaj, Byzantine Empire, Durrës, Arbri, Naples.

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O ESTADO DO TOPIAJ DURANTE O SÉCULO XIV

RESUMO

Propósito: O artigo fornece um contexto histórico sobre o papel da família Topias na paisagem política e religiosa de Nápoles, detalhando sua ruptura com Bizâncio, alianças com Anjouans e dinâmicas de poder.

Métodos: O artigo discute o contexto histórico da família Topias, indicando que os estudiosos históricos usaram uma combinação de pesquisa arquivística, análise de fontes primárias, análise comparativa, contextualização e narrativa narrativa para entender suas interações, relacionamentos e contexto histórico. Estes métodos foram provavelmente usados para coletar e analisar informações sobre a história da família.

Resultados e Conclusão: O artigo fornece um relato narrativo do significado histórico da família Topias, sua ruptura com Bizâncio e seu papel como vassalos do rei de Nápoles. Destaca a sua resiliência e adaptabilidade na política medieval europeia, destacando a complexa dinâmica das esferas políticas e religiosas.
Implicações da pesquisa: O artigo fornece um rico relato histórico da família Topias, destacando suas estratégias políticas, relações inter-religiosas, vassalagem, influência de Anjouan nos Balcãs, e a influência do clero na política. Ele também destaca a importância de examinar a narrativa histórica e seu potencial de contribuir para discussões acadêmicas em curso sobre a história, política e cultura medieval europeia.

Originalidade/valor: O artigo fornece informações valiosas sobre a política medieval dos Balcãs, as relações inter-religiosas e a dinâmica de vassalagem na Europa medieval. Ele se concentra em atores menos conhecidos como a família Topias, sua conversão religiosa, a influência angevina nos Balcãs e as complexidades das relações feudais. A narrativa também destaca a interseção do poder clerical e político, aumentando nossa compreensão da governança medieval e das relações inter-religiosas.

Palavras-chave: Topiaj, Império Bizantino, Durrës, Arbri, Nápoles.

EL ESTADO DEL TOPIAJ DURANTE EL SIGLO XIV

RESUMEN

Propósito: El artículo proporciona contexto histórico sobre el papel de la familia Topias en el paisaje político y religioso de Nápoles, detallando su ruptura con Bizancio, alianzas con Anjouan y dinámica de poder.

Métodos: El artículo discute el contexto histórico de la familia Topias, indicando que los académicos históricos utilizaron una combinación de investigación de archivo, análisis de fuentes primarias, análisis comparativo, contextualización y narración narrativa para comprender sus interacciones, relaciones y contexto histórico. Es probable que estos métodos se utilizaran para recopilar y analizar información sobre la historia de la familia.

Resultados y conclusión: El artículo ofrece un relato narrativo de la importancia histórica de la familia Topias, su ruptura con Bizancio y su papel como vasallos del rey de Nápoles. Destaca su resiliencia y adaptabilidad en la política europea medieval, destacando la compleja dinámica de las esferas políticas y religiosas.

Implicaciones de la investigación: El artículo proporciona un rico relato histórico de la familia Topias, destacando sus estrategias políticas, relaciones interreligiosas, vasallaje, influencia de Anjouan en los Balcanes y la influencia del clero en la política. También destaca la importancia de examinar la narrativa histórica y su potencial para contribuir a los debates académicos en curso sobre la historia, la política y la cultura medievales europeas.

Originalidad/valor: El artículo proporciona información valiosa sobre la política medieval balcánica, las relaciones interreligiosas y la dinámica vasallaje en la Europa medieval. Se centra en actores menos conocidos como la familia Topias, su conversión religiosa, la influencia angevina en los Balcanes y las complejidades de las relaciones feudales. La narrativa también destaca la intersección del poder clerical y político, mejorando nuestra comprensión de la gobernanza medieval y las relaciones interreligiosas.

Palabras clave: Topia, Imperio Bizantino, Durrës, Arbri, Nápoles.

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1 INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 14th century, Albanian lands were characterized by a boost in economic development which was expressed in the wide extension of feudal property and the creation of the dominant economy within it, in the increase of feudal production that improved the structure of goods going to the civil market, in the addition of cities-markets mainly in
estuaries. Their totality led to the expansion and strengthening of economic ties within the Arber. An emerging economic community was being set up represented by the majority of inter-provincial markets with city-market centers (Akhyadov: 2022).

The initiative to transform the economic community into a political community was taken by the most prominent representatives of the prominent feudal lord in economic life and authority in the political field (Francisco Villereal et.al: 2023). Documents from 13-14th centuries often mention the generosity of the feudal lords of the country (Pepo 2002: 1355). They also took advantage of the political circumstances that were created in the first half of the 14th century. In this period the Arber lands were generally found free from foreign rulers. In 1347 the Byzantine feudal lords were expelled, and in 1355 Stefan Dusan's Serbian Empire collapsed and the Anjou feudal lords left. There were certain historical conditions that led to the formation of some independent Albanian principalities (state formations) "with which are related the efforts for the political unification of the Albanian territories" (Bogdani 2009: 2090). The process was accelerated by the death of Stefan Dusan in 1355 (Jircek 1976: 29). His successor, Stefan Uros V (who did not have Dusan's ruling authority) could not withstand feudal anarchy. In the Arberian territories from Genta and Kosovo in the northern part to Epirus in the southern part, favorable conditions were created for the further and independent development of political emancipation. These circumstances were followed by the process of economic integration with the political one of Arberian generosity. With the political intuition that characterized it, it managed to understand the complexity of the favorable economic and political circumstances, Arberian and non-Arberian, secular and religious, direct and indirect.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper aims to study for several political formations (states or principalities), which were born or revived under the rule of local princes. This state-building process of large families (Anamali 2002: 279) such as Topiaj, Balshaj, Shpataj, Muzakaj, Matrënga, Gropaj, Zenebisht, Loshaj, Dukagjini, Spani, Ionimi, Arianiti, Kastrioti etc. which included all the Arberian territories could not be unified and create a stable Arberian state. They were small states with limited territorial extent. The map of possessions had no consistency. Occasionally parts of their territories passed from one possessor to another. In the course of time, some of them became part of the other owners, a process that favored the Arberian political community. It took place in the circumstances: when foreign rulers were withdrawn and as such was an internal process; when the social strata with low socio-economic level (in the conditions after the departure of
the invaders), felt in more suitable conditions, as they did not suffer the obligations imposed by the foreigners; when the departure of the invaders and the creation of feudal possessions created an embryo for more unified developments. During this process, it was gradually passed from the possessions of many feudal lords to the creation of some large feudal principalities (states), the possessors of which exercised more economic and political power.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 TOPIAS AND STATE-BUILDING IN 14TH CENTURY

What characterizes the political developments of the second half of the 14th century in the Arberian territories was the struggle or rivalry for economic and political rule within the great feudal generosity. In this rival process, there are several tendencies such as: expansion of the possessions of each at the expense of small and medium feudal lords; the inclusion within their possessions of urban centers; further demolition of various strata of the peasantry. These tendencies produced several contradictions, the development of which was increasingly reflected in the political field. Among them, in terms of influencing the disruption of existing balances and the creation of different situations were those: among the great feudal lords themselves; between them and the middle and small feudal lords; between feudal lords and civic centers; between feudal lords and peasantry etc. The presence of these conflicts shows that, in the second half of the 14th century feudal anarchy reigned in the Arber lands. Within it, revolts, conflicts and other forms of war often dominated. They were companions of the process, which was followed by great destruction and losses in human and economic aspects. Regardless of the rivalry between the Arber political formations, it was a progressive process (Thëngjilli 2002: 101), which in certain situations inside and outside Arber tended to become more and more comprehensive unification. Among the large Arber families that could form more stable state formations were: the Balshaj dynasty in Northern Arberia, the Topiaj dynasty in Central Arberia and the Shpataj dynasty in Southern Arberia (Pepo 2003: 3). They gained the status of genuine states extending to large parts of the Arber region, including most of Kosovo. The first two (Balshaj and Topiaj) aimed to own the city of Durres, as the most important economic and strategic center. Therefore, a different period begins for Durrës. From a coastal civic center sought and ruled by the Byzantines, Anjouans, Serbs, etc., it became the most sought after city for local political formations, to have this city not only in possession but also as an administrative and political center.
Among these two dynasties was that of the Topias who dominated the control or rule of Durres and its environs. According to historical sources, the first traces of Topiaj dynasty belong to the 70s of the 13th century. It emerges as a continuation of the Skurraj dynasty. After the fall of the latter, the war between the local leaders brought out the victorious feudal family of Topiaj. The first heir of this family, who is proven as a well-known owner in the province of Kruja (Pepo 2003: 11), was representative of the military aristocracy and held the title miles (Anamali 2002: 279). The state-building initiative is taken by the Topiaj family in areas with a rich state tradition. As a result, he had gained enough experience to play in the political field, using Arberian and extra-Arberian factors. In the rivalry of the time between the Orthodox Byzantines on the one hand and the Catholic Anjouans of the Papacy on the other, it was oriented towards the latter, an investment that would serve the political goal in the near future. In exchange for mutual cooperation, the Topiaj accepted the conversion to the Catholic rite, while the Catholic wing (Anjouans and Papacy) recognized to the Topiaj the possession of Arberian lands between Mat and Shkumbin (1338), once territories of the Arberian Principality. Legally, the Topiaj possessions were a state formation within the Anjouan kingdom, which was the lord of Durres and Arbri. It was a vassal relationship proclaimed by Charles I of Anjou (1272). The western orientation of the Topiaj continued on an ascending road even in the first half of the 14th century. This orientation is mainly dedicated to the bishop of Kruja, Andrea (1318-1354) (Pepo 2003: 11), who mediated at the Holy See. The latter was interested in increasing the influence on the Arber lands. The name and the fame of the Topiaj dynasty was cultivated under Anjouan rule. Although the Topiaj family was a vassal of the Anjouan kings, relations with them remained formal. The Anjouan kings (Charles I, Charles II, Robert I) were constantly confronted with the "disobedience" and "rebellion" of the Topiaj and other Arberian princes. A rich historical information proves that the Topiaj family in relation to the Anjouans acted as if they were an independent political formation. The culmination of the aggravation of the Topiaj-Anjouan relations belongs to the time of the rule of Andrea Topiaj (son of Tanush Topia). Although he was married to the illegitimate daughter of Robert I of Anjou, he was disobedient and showed strong dissociative tendencies, so the Anjouans organized his assassination. But despite these clashes, the Topiaj were for the Anjouans one of the most cooperative Arberian families, firmly oriented towards the Catholic wing. It was for this reason that they did not react forcefully against the Arberian rebellions, but by applying the institution of forgiveness or by offering them privileges of various natures at the right time and direction, managed to maintain a stability in these relations.
The principality of Topiaj (state of Durrës) was preceded by rapid developments, which in terms of time belong to the period 1338-1358. At this time, the primary task was to take over the territories that were under Serbian rule, including the capital, Kruja (Anamali 2002: 279), to which, Stefan Dushan, in 1334 (Jirçek 1976: 29) and in 1343 (Suflay 2006: 144) granted the privileges of Byzantine and Anjouan times. After the Serbian penetration until 1350, the territories controlled by Tanush Topia in Central Arberia were limited. From 1350 the process of forming the independent state of Durres began. It was conditioned, in addition to the state-building tradition of this family and other factors treated above, by other favorable circumstances. The possession of the Topiaj had a suitable position that promised development (Pepo 2003: 11). This area was dominated by large feudal property, had better terrestrial and climatic conditions for further development, had extensive contact with the sea (where the country's largest port was installed), elements with priority values for economic development and politics. An important factor was the presence of the city of Durres, which was the largest and most developed urban center in all Arber lands, the most important point connecting bridge between the outside world and Arber, giving the Topiaj principality the opportunity to play a key role in the political life of the country. Under the action and influence of this complexity of factors, the Topiaj family, in the most favorable circumstances, projected the formation of an Arberian state formation detached from the Anjouans and with Durrës as its capital. It was conceived as a vast and concentrated feudal state that would be implemented through the expansion of territories at the expense of other feudal lords. Tanush Topia stepped up efforts to first create a nucleus (1350) of an independent political formation (although still without Kruja) (Thëngjilli 2002: 101). The political goal of this ruler consisted not only in the realization of the claims to return to all the possessions before the Serbian occupation but also to expand them, with the basic goal of creating an independent state with a wide access to the Adriatic Sea. In view of this goal, Tanush Topia and especially his successor Karl Topia applied a very active domestic and foreign policy, not sparing dangerous alliances, such as the one with the Ottoman Turks (Peqo 2003: 14).

3.2 STATE OF TOPIAJ IN TIME OF KARL I

According to the evidence of the time, Karl Topia in 1358 (a year before coming to the helm of the state of Durrës), is mentioned as a participant in the battle of Anchialo (Koçollari 2007: 19), who strikes with his forces the castle of Angelokastro. Karl Topia was in this battle on the side of the Arberian princes of the southern wing Pjetër Losha and Gjin Bua Shpata,
during their clash with the last representative of the old Byzantine dynasty of Epirus, Nicephorus II the Angel. The latter had Serbs (retreating from these territories) and numerous Turkish troops to occupy the Arberian territories in the south. In the fierce battle fought outside the city walls, the Arbers under the command of Karl Topia achieve a brilliant and surprising victory, completely destroying the forces of Nicephorus and his allies, where the Byzantine despot himself lost his life. Participation in this distant battle on the southern flank, in addition to being an indicator of the military power of the state of Durrës, is also a significant indicator in terms of respecting the Arber ethnic community. The primary role played by Karl Topia in the victory of this battle served as a moment for the final realization of the projected state. After being crowned at the head of the principality (1359) (Anamali 2002: 288), undertook a series of successive raids aimed both at taking possession that was still under Serbian rule and at expanding the territories at the expense of the territories owned by Arberian rivals. First the focus was on the departure of the Serbian occupier. Therefore, upon returning to Arbëri (after Angelokastro), Karl Topia, with a well-organized force, strikes and takes the city of Berat and in continuation of the attack to the north, he turned to Kruja (Koçollari 2007: 20), which quickly fell under the rule of Topias. After these successes, Karl Topia with his Arberian army hit the Serbian forces everywhere and after some bloody battles forced them to leave the territories of Arberia forever (Koçollari 2007: 21). Following the realization of the project, Karl Topia faced many Arberian rivals. On all sides, the princely family of the Topiaj competed with other princely families, which aimed to have the city of Durres as the most important point why not and the capital of their emerging principalities (states). The earliest rival appears to be on the southern flank of the Topiaj possessions. According to the Ragusa evidence of 1360, the powerful feudal lord of Myzeqe, Vlash Matrënga, made attempts to conquer Durres. This move also disturbed the Italian states, whose intentions for the Arber coast (in particular Durres) were linked to the Topiaj family.

According to the evidence, the Anjouans accepted a request from the municipality of Durres to the Grand Council of Ragusa (Consilium maius) with the object of intervening to avoid the occupation of Durres by the Topiaj rivals. This council, to mend the relations between the Arber families in the conflict, on April 23, elected an ambassador. It is also proven that Ragusa and Venice, for their interests (especially trade) had ambassadors to Matrënga family, Topiaj and other areas of Arberia (Koçollari 2007: 21). Despite Ragusan mediation, the rivalry between the two large families for the takeover of Durres continued. Historical sources speak of the withdrawal of Vlash Matranga, which is attributed to Karl Topia who was considered one of the most energetic feudal lords of the time. The civic community of Durres was also at
a disadvantage. It was against the inclusion of the city and its environs within the Topiaj possessions. They aimed to be a separate administrative and political unit, a status present in earlier periods. Karl Topia, expanded and consolidated his power in the Arber lands in record time. The departure of the Serbian ruler, the expansion of territories through a series of clashes with other Arberian princes, as well as the use of early political ties but also blood ties with the Anjouans (Karl Topia's mother was the daughter of Robert I Anjou) were developments and at the same time factors that were leading to the final realization of the project - the independent state. The state was conceived as a continuation of the "Kingdom of Arberia" of the time of Charles I of Anjou but completely detached. This was the reason that in the coat of arms of the Topiaj family, in addition to the symbol of the lion, the Anjou symbol of the lily was added. By this stage, Karl Topia had achieved the goal. A vast and concentrated feudal state was formed, thanks to his rare qualities as a military strategist, with special organizational skills and the necessary intuition for the political assessment of the totality of situations, which resulted in a perfect state organization (Koçollari 2007: 21). The state formation of the Topiaj had already secured a wide and stable possession of the central Arber trunk between the rivers Mat and Shkumbin, with a wide hinterland on the eastern side and centered on the city of Kruja, which had long gained the status of the Arber capital. The erection of the castle in this city "as a suitable place for war" occurred at this time (Faverial 2004: 267) with origins in the period of Skurraj dynasty but completed, in the contours that more or less still exist today, in the time of the Topiaj dynasty.

But the final realization of the project still required energy. According to the project, a part of the territories in the north, east and south, including Durres and its surroundings, continued to be out of jurisdiction. It was the hardest part because the Topiaj clashed with the most powerful Arber rival, the Balshaj. The Topiaj-Balshaj rivalry first focused on the hottest point, the issue of ownership of the city of Durres, as the most important commercial and economic center (Koçollari 2007: 21) but also with rich experience in the political field. To obtain it, Karl initially set in motion the alliance with the Ottoman Turks. It was a problematic and damaging alliance for the Arber issue. Karl Topia who excelled in political assessments came to realize that the Turks were seriously endangering his possessions and that the political perspective of the Topia dynasty was doomed to fail. So he made the necessary corrections in the field of alliances, focusing on other alliances, whereby we should mention that with Venice. The ability to assess and re-evaluate situations politically identified Karl Topia as one of the most powerful leaders in the Arberian feudal world. The sovereigns of Europe regard him as the true ruler of the Arberian lands. The Venetians called it *catolicus princeps Albanis*, the
Serbs knew him as Zhupan Velij (Great Zhupan), the pope of Rome as a magaus coms, while in the sources of the 14th century he is mentioned with the general title as princeps Albanise (1363-1388) (Koçollari 2007: 21). It is therefore no coincidence that the European sovereigns of the 14th century invited Karl Topia to participate in the signing of alliances and agreements, seeking to establish economic-trade relations with him. Karl's relations with Hungary, Ragusa, Venice, the papal state, etc. should be mentioned. The issue of the possession of Durres became the "apple of discord" even between Karl Topia and the Anjouans, who owned the city and its surroundings. The first blow for the capture of Durres was given in 1362, when the forces of Karl Topia surrounded the city by land and sea (Malltezi 2007: 46). Although the city was able to avoid invasion, the consequences were not lacking. The city of Durres from this moment was obliged to pay Karl Topia an annual significant sum from the tax increase for foreign traders who were present in Durres. It was a step towards the inclusion of Durres as part of the Topiaj state. Apparently, the dependence on the Anjouans was so formal that for the Albanian historical thought Durres in 1364 was under the domination of the Topiaj (Anamali 2002: 301).

The scales tilted to the side of the Topiaj and it alarmed the traditional western ally, the Anjouans. The latter set out to find new ways to keep Durres under his control. The strongest conflict within the Arber was used as the most appropriate moment between the Topiaj in Central Arber and the Balshaj in Northern Arber. The political-military rivalry between the two most powerful Arber principalities became inevitable because the policy of the Topiaj aimed to control the entirety of the centers that had traditionally been part of the administrative and military system of Durres, in particular Lezha. The conflict escalated step by step. The first major confrontation between them was that of September 1364, the issue of Ulqin (Malltezi 2007: 46) or for the case of Lezha. Despite these attitudes in Albanian historical thought, the city of Ulqin or Lezha fell under the rule of Karl Topia. Gjergji I Balsha was taken prisoner in this battle. The Anjouans, who were not interested in the conflict between the Arberian princes because its political and economic status was damaged, took the initiative to mediate the Topiaj-Balshaj conflict. The Grand Council of Ragusa authorized its ambassador to Durres, who on 20 October 1364, began talks with Karl Topia, for the release of Gjergji I Balsha (Gelcich 2009: 50). Anjouan mediation, although it did not bring the intended expectations, created premises for the softening of relations between the Topiaj and the Balshaj. Karl Topia, meanwhile, was forced to face another rival in the west, the Republic of Venice. Strengthening Karl Topia's fleet (ASV, Sent. Misti, R. 32 / 116v.) raised its concern that it recognized its right to rule in the Adriatic (ASV, Sent. Misti, R. 32/116v). The possessions around Durres and especially of the important naval points on the north and south side of the city by Karl Topia were an expression
of the efforts for the creation and strengthening of a military fleet. The Venetians closely followed the strengthening of Karl Topia's power. The victory over the Balshaj showed that Karl Topia was not an ordinary ruler, but "princeps Albënie", a dangerous rival that was imposed by its own authority. Karl Topia's fleet anchored at Cape Rodon and Cape Melit, north and south of Durres respectively, could control and damage Venetian ships moving across the Adriatic. Therefore, the Senate of Venice, in 14 May 1364 ordered the captain of the Adriatic fleet to take measures to neutralize the expected blows from Karl Topia's fleet, to the point of destroying the fleet and destroying their main base at Cape Melit (Anamali 2002: 289). In the instructions that the senate sent to the captain of the Gulf, Mr. Andre, it was suggested that he warn the Arberians to give up carrying armed ships, but if they do not do so, then the captain is ordered to take action. appropriate or as stated in the document to treat them "just as if they were robbers with your reputation and your enemies" (Acta Albaniae veneta-tomus primus, Sen.delib. miscr 31). But Venice, while on the one hand intended to neutralize the naval power of Karl Topia, on the other hand was interested in having good relations with the most powerful Arberian prince, so

The rivalry and understanding color climate between the Republic of Venice and Karl Topia was a somewhat favorable factor before managing the danger that the Topia Principality had with the Balshaj on the north side. The Balshaj were a strong rival. As such, not only would they act for the recapture of Ulqin as a strategic coastal point, but they could also risk penetrating the Topiaj’s possessions. It was a reality that was bothering Karl Topia. He also saw the continuation of the conflict to his disadvantage. Therefore, in 1366 he sought Ragusa mediation to influence Balsha II, with the aim of ending the war between them. Ragusa, on 25 July 1366 charged its citizen Matheo de Bolcen to carry out this service (Acta Albaniae veneta-tomus primus, Sen.delib. miscr 31). Mediation led to a conclusion with peace between the Topiaj and the Balshaj. In August 1366 Gjergji I Balsha was proved free (Acta Albaniae veneta-tomus primus, Sen.delib. miscr 31). But the signing of the peace did not last long. In January 1368 the conflict reappeared (Gelcich 1899: 50). It was closed only after the marriage bond that Karl Topia made with the Balsha family. For this connection, according to the evidence or historical opinion, two versions are given: Karl Topia married Balsha's daughter, Vojsava (Hopf 1873: 298); Karl Topia married the Balshaj sister, Katerina (Anamali 2002: 302). It was a temporary solution as long as both sides felt ready for a new match. Karl Topia used this time to fully extend his rule in the area of Middle Arberia (between Mat and Shkumbin), especially the possession of Durres. The circumstances were more favorable than ever. Karl, who had already built up a strong fleet, disturbing to the Westerners, intensified the attacks for the
The capture of Durres (it was under Anjouan rule). In March of 1368 (Suflay 2004: 144) the city fell into the hands of Topia and from this moment he, in addition to the title he held "prince of Arber", added the title "god of Durres" (Mihalčič 1989: 150). From this moment, the possession of Durres and the markets of the estuaries in the south of Durres (Bozhic 2002: 47) (finally defeating old rival Vlash Matrënga) finalized the strategic goal. At this time the Principality of Topiaj reaches its greatest extent. He ruled over the territories of Durres, Kruja, Peqin, Elbasan, Mokra, Gora and up to Lake Ohrid on the eastern side. So the placement was on both sides of the Royal Road. Apparently in administrative terms it consisted of two units: the eastern part called the "mountain" and the part of the coastal lowland (Jacques 1995: 191).

The capture of Durres was a sought-after point of great economic and strategic value. But at the same time, a period of contradictions and rivalry would begin, with military and diplomatic pressures, internal and external, against the state of Durres. In the internal sphere were the military pressures coming from the neighboring principalities in the south and north (Muzakaj and Balshaj) (Pepo 2002: 32) as well as the efforts of the civic community of Durres to break away from the rule of the Topiaj feudal lord. Externally the pressures came from Venice and other powerful coastal centers of the Western Adriatic. Extremely strained relations with the kingdom of Naples, Venice and the Pope continued. The conflict with the Anjouans of Naples was over the issue of Durres. They can not forgive this to their "vassal", Karl Topia. Obstacles to the movement of Venetian trade across the Adriatic Sea kept the conflict with Venice open, while the accusation addressed to Karl Topia as a supporter of the patriarchal antipapal movement for the manifestation of heretical tendencies strained relations with the Papacy. Although Karl Topia maintained friendship with Ragusa and Hungary, they had no factorial advantages in political plans. Ragusa as a trading power had no weight in political and military events, while Hungary was considered for indirect or conjunctive effects, as an opponent of Venice. While the Topiaj had weakened relations with the Catholic states and the Papacy, the Balshaj began to develop communication with this factor. In 1369 the Balshaj proclaimed the conversion to the Catholic rite which was at the same time an orientation towards ties with the Catholic states. A year later, Pope Urban V received the Balsha brothers in the Catholic Church, introducing the bishops appointed in Arberi, among them the one of Vlora, a proof that speaks of the domination of Vlora by the Balshaj.

The circumstances of how the Balshaj took possession of Vlora remain obscure. On the southern side were the powerful Muzakaj, who after annexing the wealthy possessions of Vlash Matrënga (1370) between the rivers Seman and Shkumbin formed a political formation, generally called the Principality of Muzakaj. It is possible that the despot Andrea II Muzaka
owned or at least controlled the city of Vlora together with the castle of Kanina. At the same time, an alliance between the Principality of Muazkaj and the Principality of Balshaj (Anamali 2020: 290). This alliance posed a serious threat to the Topiaj. In the course of time it was the Balshaj who dominated politics in the Arberian lands. In the 70's the dilapidated state of Durrës entered into intensive relations with well-known western states. In 1379, Karl Topia became part of a large association "Liga domini nostri regis Hungarices" which was initiated by the state of Hungary. The latter considered Karl Topia as his most loyal ally (Koçollari: 19). In the field of trade relations, those with Ragusa come to the fore. Its merchant ships periodically penetrated the Arber coast. Karl, as a Catholic, maintained good relations with the Holy See. Pope Gregory XI addressed him repeated praises. But in the course of time the ratio of favorable and unfavorable factors rolled rapidly. In addition to clashes with other Arberian rulers and fluctuations in relations with Western countries, Turkish attacks coming from the east were becoming present and very disturbing, which were sporadic and occasionally called by Balkan feudal lords (including Arberian ones) were becoming more intense and with intent to establish their rule throughout the Balkan Peninsula. In these situations of war, internal and external, Karl Topia also focused on fortifications. He erected new castles and repaired existing ones. Primary attention was focused on the castle of Durrës, Petrela's horse (Pepo 2004: 17) etc. The mentioned situations could not but be accompanied with consequences for the Topiaj Principality.

Turkish military incursions were used as a very favorable circumstance for the Anjouans to retake the city of Durrës and its environs. Karl Topia, who was caught in the middle of many fires, could not defend Durrës. This city reverted to Anjouan rule. Its recapture, was considered by the Anjouans as a suitable moment to extend rule throughout the territory of Arberia. But, this remained just a project. Karl Topia, not only succeeded in defending his rule in the Arberia region, but also managed to expand his possessions at the expense of the Muzakaj principality, annexing from it the space between the Shkumbin and Seman rivers. After these developments, the state of Durrës exercised its sovereignty in the area between Drini and Seman. The city of Durrës, on the other hand, was almost formally under Anjouan rule. The influence of the Topiaj power was clearly felt in it. In these situations, Karl Topia, took the necessary care to maintain more than ever the balances within the Arberian Catholic and Orthodox ethnicity. Although a Catholic himself, he never underestimated the Arberians of Orthodox religion. Significant evidence in this regard is the rise to the city of Elbasan (on the bank of the river Shkumbin), in the years 1381-1383, of the Orthodox monastery of St. John of Elbasan (Popa 1957: 186), whose religious authority quickly grew to become among the best known in Central Arberia.
Karl Topia, at the height of his political, military and economic power, appreciating the importance of the city for the principality, made its purchase from the Anjouans in 1383 for a large sum. But meanwhile the main Arberian rival, the Principality of Balshaj, with the ruler Balsha II (1379-1385) was at the peak of its prosperity. Balsha II included within the principality also areas of Southern Arberia which included important civic centers such as Berat, Vlora, Kanina as well as the coastal markets south of Seman, which he took as a dowry from the marriage of Balsha II with Komnena Muzaka (daughter of the despot Andre), the only heiress of the god of Vlora (Rizaj 1982: 22), at the expense of the territories of the state of Durres. The only obstacle that the Balshaj had for the unification of possessions was the central part of the Topiaj Principality, Durres and its surroundings. But the situation for Balsha II was not developing properly. On the southern wing of the rule, he was confronted with an environment of resistance mainly of the craft and trade strata, whose economic and political interests were linked to Venice. The vast majority of them left Vlora and other markets of this area and settled in other possessions of Venice, mainly in Saza. Despite this situation, Balsha II regained the issue of the city of Durres. He also had the support of Venice and the Pope. Pope Bonifaci IX insisted that Durres pass under Balshaj rule (Pepo 2004: 72). According to researchers S. Rizaj, Balsha II, instigated by them undertook the military campaign of 1382 against Karl Topia. Although not proven, war between them was inevitable. In 1384, Durres was conquered by the Balshaj. A year later (April 1385), Balsha II is proved as duke of Durres: "I am Balsha for the sake of god the Duke of Durres" (Jircek: 43) (dei gratis Dyrrachii dux) (Maltezi: 226). But Durres under Balshaj did not even pass the time frame of one year. Karl Topia in collaboration with the Ottoman forces defeated the forces of Balsha II on 18 September 1385 in Savër of Myzeqe (Rizaj 1976: 22). Durres returns under the ownership of the state of Durres.

But then the events rolled step by step to the disadvantage of Balshaj and Topiaj. The issue of Durres also remained a rival issue in the Arberian and non-Arberian rhetoric.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Meanwhile, Turkish attacks had become dominant in the Balkans. They created internal distortions and cracks. The divisive actions of the Arber feudal lords were increased. This process was accompanied by the weakening or dissolution of many Balkan political formations, including the Arberian ones. The final stage of the existence of the Topiaj Principality belongs to this time. Regardless of this, the period of rule of this state under Karl Topia occupies a
special place in the medieval history of the Albanian people. This prince managed to gather within a state a good part of the Arberian lands, extending to the rich areas of Middle Arberia, on which important roads such as the Egnatia Line (Royal Road) passed. The borders of this state have been variable. According to the historiographical opinion, the maximum borders stretched on the northern side up to the Drin river, in the south to the Vjosa river, in the west the Adriatic Sea, while in the east it extended to the highlands of Dibra and Ohrid (Pepo: 18).

The population was dominated by indigenous Arbers, whose name in the 14th century experienced a fairly wide extension. These were the relations of the Topia Principality with its internal rivals and with Western allies or rivals when Karl Topia died in 1388 (Pepo: 19) the only heir Gjergj Topia comes to power who did not have the energy and intelligence of his father. He ruled in the years 1388-1392. In this short period he faced destabilizing factors, existing or new. The Balshaj on the Arberian plane and Venice and the Turkish attacks on the extra-Arberian plane were the main factors that led to the final fall of the state of Durres. In the end, the rule for Durres and the coastal markets in its south created a situation of conflicts and penetrations.

Venice is appearing active like never before. Over the course of several years there is a new escalation of Venetian penetration in the city of Durres and other coastal points to its south. This penetration was preceded through a policy of approximation, first with Gjergj Topia but also with other Arber families such as Muzakaj, Skurraj, Neshaj, etc. with the aim not only to create a pro-Venetian environment within the Arberians and to use it in due course in favor of his policy of owning the Arberian coast but also to use it against the Balshaj Principality as contenders and rivals. So, the most important Arberian factor, Balshaj, Venice aimed to neutralize by relying on another Arberian factor (in decline) Topiaj. Meanwhile the population of this city was divided into two parts. One was in favor of Gjergj Topia, while the other (largest part) was in favor of Gjergj Strazimir (Balsha). Based on this policy, Venice, taking advantage of the stagnation period, hastened to take possession of the Arber coastal cities. To achieve the goal, he set in motion the weapon of diplomacy, starting with their "submissive" Gjergj Topia, who was ill. A series of talks and signatures between him and Venice that began on 21 August 1389 (Acta et Diplomata II), when Gjergj Topia was awarded the title "Princeps catholicus" and at the same time is provided with a large pension. Two years later, on 2 May 1391, Venice, through an agreement with Gjergj Topia, appointed the chief castle keeper in Durres, (Act and Diploma II) gaining at the same time the possession of the port tower of the city. Then the question of the passage of Durres under Venetian rule proceeded rapidly. On 18 April 1392 Gjergj Topia handed over the defense of the city to the Venetians and, in August of this year,
through a final agreement signed between the Republic of Venice and Gjergj Topia, the latter agreed that after his death, the entire city would pass even de jure under the rule of Venice. In the period 1393-1396, Lezha, Shkodra and Drishti also passed under the rule of Venice. Durres remained under Venetian rule until 1501, when the city fell to the Ottomans (Pepo; 18).

5 CONCLUSIONS

This was an abbreviated synthesis for the state of Durres seeing it in the focus of Arberian, Byzantine, Balkan and European factors. Through this complex view we think that we have come as close as possible to the real values of this state, for which we are drawing the following conclusions:

First, in the history of the relations of Byzantine and Arberian factors, there is a line that has to do with privileges, concessions, etc., which in favorable circumstances advanced to the creation of the Arberian political bed. It served as an accumulated factor under Byzantine rule. It was represented by economically strong Arberian generous people but also with the ruling authorities, who inspired and fought for the formation of Albanian state formations. Among them stands out the Topiaj Principality / State of Durres.

Second, the activity coincides in time with the period when the western influence prevailed in the embryonic territory of Arber: Anjou, Papal, Hungarian, Venetian, with dominance that Anjou. This was a clear indication that Byzantine influence in the territories of Middle Arberia was being minimized. The times of Byzantine rule were almost over. Durres, based on the interpretation of all available documentation and the generalization of historical thought so far, we assess with the status of a state formation. We support this conclusion in these main theses:

First, the territory in which this principality was located constituted for the Byzantine period the epicenter of the formation of the Arberian population, as an autochthonous substratum for political developments.

The second, the Arberian population of the region in question was the first to make efforts and accomplish significant achievements in the political field. Here the political factor, compared to other Arberian territories, appeared more clearly, which was made concrete with the establishment and activity of the Principality of Durres.

The third, the feudal lords of this area managed to exploit, even effectively, the clashes and contradictions between the powers that had interests in the territories of Middle Arberia. They had constantly been and continued to be the arena of external invasions and penetrations.
Fourth, the passage of the territories of Middle Arberia from one ruler to another was a factor that left its mark on the Arberian population. In its most advanced districts the idea of creating an Arberian political formation began to find more and more support.

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