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SHOQATA E INTELKTUALËVE
ASSOCIATION OF INTELLECTUALS

"JAKOVA"

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ÇARSHIA E MADHE E GJAKOVËS
GRAND BAZAAR OF GJAKOVA



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Let it be mentioned that the Gjakovar silversmiths were distinguished also for their fine mastery in guns decoration. It is known that the guns did not represent only a means of defence of freedom, of personal integrity and dignity, but they also were part of decoration of their costumes (wear). Hekard used to write in 1857: “The luxury of Mohammedan Albanians consists in the richness of their guns. Often what among us back in France is of wood in pistole, among them it is of gold and silver carved in a rich manner, or it is covered by filigree. The same is the case with the yataghans sheath (scabbard, case).” [The yatagan or yataghan, from Turkish yatağan, is a type of Ottoman knife or short sabre used from the mid-16th to late 19th centuries.]

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In addition to the division, grouping of the local craftsmen, in Bazaar, same as in other places of the Empire, there was also the ethnic and religious orientation against some kinds of crafts. Thus, the Muslim Albanians, who constituted the largest ethnic and religious group practices the craft of quilt-makers, butchers, bakers, tanners, tailors, traders etc. The Catholic Albanians, who constituted a minority, conducted mainly the crafts of goldsmiths, silversmiths, bakers etc. The Orthodox Serbs, who where in a very small number, were tinsmiths, coppersmiths, saloon-keepers, saddlers, moccasin-makers, tinkers etc. Roma, without religious distinction, Muslims or Orthodox, were blacksmiths, woollen rug-makers etc.

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Jastrebov, among other things, wrote: “... There is plenty of water in Gjakovë. In addition to streams flowing through the town, there are 25 fountains. In addition to this, almost every household has a well. There is plenty of water not only in town, but also the whole Region of Reka is irrigated from the streams of source water. That is why they never know here about drought. In the streams of Gjakova, there are 17 watermills. If we compare Gjakova with Prizren and Peja, then we cannot help admitting its advantages, it can be seen that its inhabitants express a big progress in all directions. The capitalists are there, neither here (in Prizren) nor in Peja are there such ones. In your Gjakovë there are 150 shops where it is produced the silk ... It is regretful, that there is no peace, without which the development of trade is impossible – there is no security in the streets; there could be excellent factories for the production Gjakovë etc” (I. J. Jastrebov, Stara Srbija. 179.)

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In the absence of the mass media, Bazaar was the centre where, through a herald, the news on all different orders, agreements and legal rules (suls) of the leadership of the town and the surroundings, of tailors and tanners guilds would be distributed, which in addition to their primary economic activity, dealt or had a crucial influence on all other activities of educational, religious, political, administrative and, even military life. In case of war the guilds were obliged to gather soldiers to participate in the defence of the Empire. Thus, on the occasion of the war against Russia (1806–1812), The Sublime Porte sent to Rexhep Pasha Tetova the firman by which it was ordered “... to gather the people and guilds of Gjakova Kaza...” and to arrive at a specific place.

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Gjakova belonged to the towns, which during the XVIII and XIX centuries, took advantage of weakness and anarchy, which had pervaded the Ottoman Empire and its administrative system, strengthening the power of its guilds in the Bazaar to the extent that it did not observe either the local governmental authorities or the influence of beys. The joining of craftsmen into guilds and the rigorous observation of their rules kept the craftsmanship and the trade in the Bazaar also in the early XX century, when, in the absence of the state power, the guilds maintained peace and order with the force of guns... The best, most honest, most polite, most authoritative, in one word, the most “decent (“esnafli”) masters were elected at the head of guilds.

Therefore, the power of guild president, who was called in Gjakova warden, was very big. In Gjakovë, the guild president held a special rod, which was a sign of the authority he held. He used this rod as a signal for closing a certain shop of a craftsman, who had violated the guild rules. There were cases when he ordered the closing of a shop for a certain time, for three, six months or for one year. But there were cases when the guild president would close for good someone's shop and send away for good its owner from the guild.

... When a Turkish general, and Anadolli pasha would take the courage to make any request which was in contradiction with their traditional local management rights, immediately the heads of the town, of the neighbourhood and of Highlands would be invited to a general meeting, "in gathering", which was usually held in the Taphane Meadow or in the offices of guilds in order to protect their rights. The first sign of revolt was the closing of Bazaar, which was usually followed by a traditional ultimatum: "for 24 hours to put your heels where you have put your toes", because otherwise, the town and the highland would turn their guns against him.

Page 62: There are plenty of such examples, when the closing of the Bazaar augured ill to Ottoman pashas.

In the Bazaar, as a more neutral place, the blood reconciliations between different families were done. Let us mention, on this occasion, that the town of Gjakovë was declared "a forbidden area", through "sule" (agreements) for blood revenge for a very long time. This was ensured by the "bachelors" of guilds, who served also as night security-guards ("hasasë") for guarding the shops during the night from eventual robberies of different thief gangs. They watched carefully the suspicious movements of the "foreigners" who came to buy or sell in town.

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On the shop shutters, in good weather, the "domenothings", who lived of the income of their estates, would spend their time, worrying about beys and pashas, even the sultan in Istanbul and the Moscow' tsar in Russia, or playing jig-saw or playing cards. Such ones distributed news that all Gjakovars loved. Thus, for example, Jup Domi, as often as he went out from beys house out to Bazaar, gathered round himself in those difficult days of Serb king's rule, that "decent men" ("esnafs") of Bazaar, to which he conveyed the bey's words that when the Saint George's day would come Ahmet Zogu would raise the Albanian flag in the field of Bajram Pasha. After this good news the coffees would be ordered.