

Shkodra during the Turmoil of the Balkan War and Serbian-Montenegrin Invasion



History

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Bendis Kraja

University "Luigj Gurakuqi" State University of Shkodra, Albania.

Abstract

The study called "Shkodra's turmoil in the Balkan War and the Serbo-Montenegrin invasion", sheds light on a period that includes events and important listed facts, seen at national level as well as at local level. This was the reason Shkodra, the largest and the most populated city of Albania, from October 1912 to April 1913 spent the most difficult days in its history, also among the most heroic, especially for the extraordinary resistance in fight for protection from neighboring chauvinists of its territorial integrity. The purpose of the study is a historical overview on the political and social situation, but also wider. It is based mainly on documents from Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Shkodra of the years 1912-1914, as well as in relations from Jesuit priests, who day after day marked events and facts. This study supports the idea that Shkodra, as an integral part of the newly created Albanian state, is primarily a result of the titanic efforts of all Shkodrane without discrimination, which indicated that they were formed as a spiritual family. The world witnessed the common willingness for a civilian national dignity, and desire of living together for the future. On the other hand, it reveals the enormous importance and persistent strong support shown from Austria, in these moments of a severe national trauma.

The declaration of Albanian independence had found Shkodra under Turkish rules as well as part of the war that took place between Turkish garrisons and those of Balkan allies.

It is known that, from October 1912 to April 1913 the siege of Shkodra took place. This came as a result of arrangements taken during March and September 1912 between the Balcan powers, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro, for sharing Turkish territories in Europe in which Albania was included. The nomination of Shkodra as the primary target, was justified first by the fact that here the Turkish garrison was commanded by Hasan Riza Pasha and also with the idea that "Shkodra was a vital issue for Montenegro"¹, and that "the separation of this city from Montenegro-as King (Krajl) Nicholas writes- during centuries has hampered my land on the path of political and economic development"². That day, while celebrating the 71 anniversary of King Nikola I Njegosh in an ongoing delirium, he swore to his soldiers that Shkodra would be taken Within 10 days³. The start of the First Balkan War, marks the beginning of an unprecedented resistance seen in this last war, that Albanian and Turkish worked together in the defence of the city, not during 10 days but 183.

As events have shown, and as Father Justin Rrota has written in his journal kept during the siege: "Shkodra is a big mouthful in the throat of whom it is intended to be swallowed". That was a very clear findings not only for the fact that Shkodra was the largest and more populated city of Albania counting about 36 thousand inhabitants, a center of other reasons. Shkodra was the final point of all economic strands of northern Albania, including Kosovo. Shkodra served as an important hub for the transition from the Adriatic region to Balcan regions and enjoyed a distinct position of the other cities for years maintaining the first place in the internal and external commerce⁴. In 1863 was opened in Shkodra a branch of the Imperial Bank. The city had motorized mills, oil presses, a soap factory, pasta factory, cigarette factory, silk workshops, workshops for bands, bricks and tiles factories, tiles and roof tiles, printing houses. Shkodra had the most important Bazaar in the country⁵. Placed in a key location between East and West, the city showed consistently the openness, facing west, renewing ties with Austria, Italia, etc. Above all, as a city with rich traditions, the city had strong institutions in the educational and cultural fields, as well as Catholic and Muslim clerics. In this period it was consolidatet as an

¹ Rexhepi Përparim, "Mbrotjtja e Shkodrës", Tiranë, 2001, fq.21.

² Gurakuqi Romeo, "Çështja e Shkodrës në Konferencën e Ambasadorëve 1912-1913 deri në dorëzimin e Malit të Zi", Shkodër, 1998, fq.2.

³ Rexhepi Përparim, vepër e përmendur, fq.26.

⁴ Shkodra Zija, "Qyteti Shqiptar gjatë Rilindjes Kombëtare", Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1984, fq.24-25.

⁵ Duka Valentina, "Qytetet e Shqipërisë gjatë viteve 1912-1924", Tirana: Toena, 1997, fq.16.

important educational, cultural, religious center. Thanks to the contribution of the government of Austria-Hungary, Shkodra enjoyed for years a protectorate right of cult. Among schools and the institutions of the Catholic Clergy a very valuable work was done for educational establishment, elaboration of language, writing down of cultural tradition, supporting naturally the western side.

There was also a patriotic intellectual elite, educated in western schools, very active in the city's life, in every direction. They created and animated an active, literary, cultural, educational, publishing life. That policy made Shkodra the "moral capital" of Albania. From the years of the Prizreni League to the great insurrections, especially that of 1911, in Shkodra a high increase of the level of national consciousness was confirmed, and that turned the city into a very active heart for politics and patriotism.

All this development, which was envied, but also noted by foreign travelers, was questioned the 8 October 1912, when hostilities between Shkodra and Serbo-Montenegro began.

"Freedom took time to come. Shkodra, the city of national movements, suffered siege, hunger, violation, while in another corner of our dearest country, renaissance was acclaimed and welcomed."⁶

At this time, because of the specifics of the state of siege and war going on in the city, Shkodra did not indicate manifestly any signs of joy.

The resistance made against Serbo-Montenegrin forces, the faced suffering, the patience of selflessness, the heroism, all that remembered us of the way in which Shkodra once protected its castle against the hordes of Sultan Fatih.⁷

The commander of the Vilajet of Shkodra, Hasan Riza Pasha, fortified the city during 1911 and onwards, anticipating a possible siege. So, Buna Bridge was rebuilt with funds from the Ottoman government. For the eventuality of war, a strategic mechanized bridge was needed. As a result, this bridge was set on cement feet, attached with iron timber, paved in wood, and all mechanized ready to open for the steamboats. In time of war, Shkodra was protected by seven key areas: Taraboshi, Bërdica, Dervish Tepe, Shtoj Field, the area around Kiri and the Lake and the Bardhanjorët.

Protective power of Shkodra was formed of 15.000 soldiers (5.000 active and 10.000 reservists). Serbian-Montenegrin military offensive, according to Colonel Emmanuel (German war observer on the Montenegrins side) consisted of 25.000 troops from teenagers to the elderly, and with Serbs joint forces formed together 55.000 troops⁸. According to information from the book "Ishkodra Mudafaasi" the first bombardment against the fortress began in Tarabosh the 11 October 1912 and the fighting continued until 22 April 1913, so for 183 days⁹.

When Qazim Pasha came to Shkodra, with a message from Istanbul and asked Valiun that, if in case of war he could defend Shkodra, he responded positively to this question. Then Qazim Pasha commanded to protect at all costs, and if necessary, when the situation would become desperate, he commanded. "Bring cannons over the city and take all into ashes, so the troops from Montenegro have nothing to take"¹⁰.

⁶ "Hylli i Dritës", XII, Prill 1936, Nr.4, fq.157.

⁷ Bushati Hamdi, "Shkodra dhe motet", vëll I, Shkodër: Idromeno, 1998, fq.446.

⁸ Po aty, fq.447.

⁹ Po aty, fq.447.

¹⁰ Kamsi Ndoc, "Rrethimi i Shkodrës", Almanaku "Shkodra", 1961, Nr.1, fq.260. Botim i Shtëpisë së Kulturës dhe krijimtarisë popullore, see also: At Justin Rrota: "Ditët e mramë të Turqisë në Shkodër gjatë 1912-1913", Botime Françeskane, Shkodër, 2010, fq.9.

For the sake of truth should be noted that bravery of selflessness of Shkodra which was ready to sacrifice everything, was strongly liked to the great military strategic art of Hasan Riza. This realistic soldier gave the best possible protection of the city during the time of a troubled Balkan policy. His strategy was appreciated by the military at this time and today. He could link the honor of the Ottoman army with the fate of Shkodra, with its salvation. Hasan Riza Pasha, to whom “the logic of the reality of things, the logic of the war, was more important than the policy dictated by secret agreements dictated from different groups”¹¹, decided to protect the Albanian city of Shkodra. He said. “I want to defend and save the city from Montenegro and put up on top of the castle the Albanian flag”¹². Many efforts were done to connect with the Catholic clergy of the Catholic nobles of Shkodra, mainly with Kryepeshvin Serreqi, a patriotic figure¹³. Serreqi clearly said, that “people of Shkodra will strongly reject replacing the Turkish Occupation by the Montenegrin occupation and Shkodrans want autonomy”¹⁴. The conditions that the Archbishop presented through his representative father Gjergj Fishta during the talks, were to fight “that we see Shkodra the capital of an independent Albania”¹⁵. Louis Gurakuqi writes in a letter from the 13 October 1912: “you must try together with Dom Nokole Kaçorri and the others to show that the Albanians in the war, as well as in their demands, they want to be and remain Albanians”¹⁶. The need for national unity was felt in Shkodër perhaps more than anywhere else. The raising of the Albanian flag in Shkodras castle depended on the orders of the clergy to mountaineers to turn weapons against the Montenegrins. “The mountaineers with good will or not, have guided the troops from Montenegro because they were misled by them. The Montenegrins pretended, that they want Albanian Independence”¹⁷. For this purpose, with help from Father Gjergj Fishta and archbishop of Shkodra James Serreqi, efforts began. The Archbishop requested personal insurance from Hasan Riza Pasha before he started officially the work.

“A certifying sign that Ottoman commands work on behalf of Albania, would be the establishment of the Albanian flag in the castle of Shkodra under the Turkish flag”¹⁸. To support this idea, there exists two facts mentioned from different sources. The first one is the proposal that the Valiu of Shkodra made to his friend Gjergj Fishta to write a march in Albanian and to teach it to the soldiers, so they can sing it when they exercise or in the war. The second is the preparation of a national flag to be raised on top of the declared independence, were presented also in Shkodra. The Valiu in Shkodër who once addressed to Istanbul the words: “it is needed to put on track and not to smash Albanian nationalism”¹⁹, now was working to keep alive and to promote this nationalism.

Father Fishta prepared the mentioned march which is since then traditionally known as the anthem of the flag. “He was rewarded by Pasha hundred times. The Pasha paid the verses of the anthem with Turkish gold”²⁰. One of his verses is this: “Over that flag, God himself has written/That Albania will be for Albanians / Whoever touches them, will be cursed”.

Concerning the flag, information from contemporaries and protagonists about this story says that it was prepared by Bernardina Marubi (Harapi), daughter of the patriot Kel Marubi. She writes in her memories that: “Towards November 1912, my dad had given to me and my cousin the task to embroider an Albanian flag”²¹. Kel Marubi himself found the red silk fabric and drew the two headed black eagle. “It took us about 10 days,

¹¹ Zambauer Hortense, “Rrethimi i Shkodrës”, Shkodër 2006, fq.146.

¹² “Hylli i Dritës” vjeta X, kallnuer 1934, Nr.1. “Kontributi i elementit katolik në lëmë të atdhetaris”, fq.38.

¹³ At Justin Rrota, “Ditët e mrame...”, vep. e përmend. fq.9.

¹⁴ Gurakuqi Romeo, “Shkodra në shekuj”, Shkodër, 2000, fq.153-164.

¹⁵ At Justin Rrota, “Ditët e mrame...”, vep. e përmend, fq.9.

¹⁶ Nika Nevila, “Përmbledhje dokumentash mbi kryengritjet shqiptare 1910-1912”, Tiranë, fq.333.

¹⁷ “Dituria”, e përkohshme, cituar sipas Hamdi Bushati, “Shkodra dhe Motet”, vëll. I, Shkodër, 1998, fq.453.

¹⁸ Bushati Hamdi, vep. e përmend, fq.455.

¹⁹ Po aty, fq.451.

²⁰ Gjergj Fishta, Commemorative edition, Shkodër, 1941, fq.144; K.Taipi, “Zana Popullore”-Shkodër, 1933, fq. 203-206.

²¹ “Kujtime të grave veterane nga lëvizja për çlirim kombëtar”, Tiranë, 1962, fq.160-161.

than we delivered to my father ... Later on, my father told me that this flag was raised on top of the fortress of Shkodra". Hamdi Bushati described this event in "Shkodra and times": "Shkodra had no luck, because Hazan Riza Pasha was killed fraudulently what caused the failure of that fortunate plan"²².

As a keen observer of the political situation, a far-sighted diplomat, brilliant administrator and a rare military strategist, Hasan Riza found the key to a successful, invincible defense. He bound the honor of his arms with the selflessness and courage shown by the people of Shkoder in defense of their national dignity."Being aware of the right position that he had chosen, he never went backwards"²³. In the detailed correspondence kept from the Jesuit fathers²⁴ and sent to their superiors is indicated that there were fighting which resulted in many dead and injured people. That caused the influx in the city from the residents of "Side of Mountain"(Ana e Malit) and "Coast of Buna" (Bregu i Bunes). They left behind burned homes and brought with them their livestock. That was associated with worsening of the economic situation, the confusion and the uncertainty about the awaited fate. "Shkodra feeling unsecure, gathered all wounds of her body at her breast"²⁵. Shkodra experienced days of furious bombing, suffering, hunger and death. The government gave three days time for everybody who wanted to leave the city. In fact, Shkodran were not allowed to flee, but this step was taken to put slight pressure on foreigners and their counsels, because they were unwanted witnesses of what was going on, but also because they wanted to take their houses and assets needed by the army²⁶.

All foreign consuls decided to stay. This had its positive side because they were witnessing the tragic events that passed Shkodra, they witnessed the bombing without any logical criteria (even their own buildings were bombarded). The reason why the consuls raised their voices and had an effect, was first their respective political interests but perhaps also the fact that they were witness in a selfless struggle, they were present during the cruelties and hardships inflicted to the people of Shkodra who did not surrender. The protests organized from the consulates against the bombing of their buildings, the religious and charitable institutions, received the following response from Montenegro's king: according to him he was sorry for the suffering of the peaceful population "but military needs in this cases exceed human feelings. The buildings with a raised flag did not get bombarded by purpose, but sometimes the missiles turned wrongly and fell on those buildings".

Today, after more than hundred years, we are still impressed by the reading of the chronicle compiled by the journalist of "Corriere della Sera" of Milan, Gino Barry, in his book "The Siege of Shkodra": "Six months inside the besieged city (diary of a war correspondent)", published by Treves, in Milan, in June 1913. We would call it today, an "instant book" which the publishers proudly introduced as "...a voice of truth in the great unknown fate of Shkodra during almost a year when this city had to deal with anxieties, dangers, and different interests from Europe"²⁷.

Despite the siege, initially the authorities tried to maintain some normality: "Today the 21st November is the only day of Eid. They should have been four, but it was reduced because of the circumstances. The Valiu ordered to close all stores, even those of the Christians. The canon shot five times twenty-one shots."

²² Bushati Hamdi, "Shkodra dhe Motet", vëll. I, fq.559.

²³ Hortense von Zambaur, "Rrethimi i Shkodrës", Camaj-Pipa, Shkodër, 2006, fq.146.

²⁴ "Sette mesi di terrore", Lettere edificanti dei padri della Compagnia di Gesù, Padova, Editr. Antoniana

²⁵ Kamsi Ndoc, "Rrethimi i Shkodrës", art. i përmend, fq.261.

²⁶ Arkivi i Muzeut Historik Shkodër (AMH), Fondi: Dokumente të Konsullatës Austro-Hungareze në Shkodër (DKAHSH) në vitet 1912-1913, vj.22.12-1273; fq.227.

²⁷ Muner Paolo, "Rrethimi i fundit i Shkodrës", revista "Klan", Tiranë 2014, nr.840.

The economic condition since November aggravated to misery. For war purposes it was ordered to take from the residents: flour, wheat, barley, corn, rice, beans, sugar and food for animals. To close the wounds of 5.000 wounded soldiers admitted to hospitals, the Valiu ordered to look tirelessly for fabrics²⁸.

The army needed wood, which was the reason why olive, fig and other trees in the Bardhaj vineyards and in the city were cut. The detailed correspondence between the Jesuits and their superiors shows us that the value made only from foodstuffs taken from the population was one million two hundred thousand francs. But the worse was the lack of bread. The Veliut of Shkodra gave order to the bakeries that it was allowed to bake bread only for the military only (there was no flour or even time for the population to bake the bread). The population which had food reserves when the war started (according to their social rang) now after nearly two months of siege were living in poverty. "It was painful to see the people starving, and to see how they were standing next to the bakery to get a bread from the flour that was taken from them... and even so they did not get it they came back to the bakery the next day"²⁹.

Most of the time the families did not eat bread every day, or they took "an alternation day" that allowed to eat bread for half of the family only and for the other half of the family the next day the remaining half... That was the case also in wealthy families, the ones that normally would eat bread every day. The meat, which until this point was not missing (because people from the surrounding villages had brought their livestock during their influx into the city of Shkodra), now, rarely could be found in the market. Its price rose to 11 penny per kg or 2 francs per kg. For most of the people with empty pockets it was impossible to afford it³⁰.

It was common to see people going the slaughterhouse at the Buna area, to see if they could get some blood to use it as food. Teofik Gjyli remembers: "People would fight for a bone or some blood... Only there I saw and tasted blood boiled in a pot... it had become black from boiling"³¹.

The heavy taxes to be paid to the Ottoman government made the situation worse. Christians had to pay thousands of Turkish Lira for "nizamijte" (tax for exemption from military service) and Muslims were "charged" with a "death toll" through the general mobilization of all Muslim men from 15 to 70 years. All men, having received a short instruction and equipped with the most necessary things, were directed to the front.

In those difficult days, when 28 bakers left work, the Jesuit priests helped by feeding with bread daily during half of November and throughout December of 400 poor people. Even some families, like the Rrepishti family, were distinguished for their great heart. They were in better economic condition than the big majority of population and kept alive by feeding with bread the members of a family living in a tent in the neighborhood Dudas. For helping the poor people is well known also the "Gjuhadoli" Assembly that had charity organisations such as "Bread of St. Anthony" and "The daughters of Mary" at the Stigmatine Sisters.

War and hunger were accompanied by violent rains that made the waters of Drini river break out all over. Since half of the XIXth century Shkodra began to suffer from the effects of flooding, because the river Drin began to form new ramifications into the Buna river flow path. The rising river water reached the market area and often arrived nearly the city.

²⁸ AMH, Shkodër, Fondi: DKAHS, në vitet 1912-1913. vj.22.12-1273, fq.228.

²⁹ AMH, Shkodër, Fondi: *Relacioni i priftërinjve të Shkodrës*, v.1912-1913, fq.229.

³⁰ However, we read another opinion in a report from Father Domenico Facin (from Breno in Torino, who had Italian nationality but Austro-Hungarian citizenship. He was the general commissioner of the catholic minor brotherhood) sent to his general superior. This document mentioned that "young monks and "Stigmatine nuns" during the siege of Shkodra in 1912-1913," demonstrated a clear evidence of a tremendous organization. This report dated, as was announced, of the 8th June 1913, consisted of 100 pages, 34 photographs attached, and was published in Quaracchi, in Florence, by the printing House of the College of San Bonaventuras, in the same year, with imprimatur (permission for publication by the ecclesiastical censorship) the 11th July, only six months later. Another "instant book".

³¹ Almanaku "Shkodra", 1962, Kujtime, Nr.1, fq.30.

Economic condition deteriorated day by day. "In early December there was not any fuel kerosene or coal, so the majority of the families had light only during daytime"³². Flour mills were not working any more. Nobody was using the public mill anymore, because at least one tenth of the amount of the flour was used by the Turkish administration.

By the end of January 1913, 360 cannonballs had fallen over the city. A tragedy shock for the whole city was the night of 30th January, when the Valiu of Shkodra was killed. His name was Hasan Riza Pasha, he was the commander of the Turkish army, a big lover of Albanians. The public opinion in Shkodra was that this was the work of Essad Pasha Toptani. The population in Shkodra had understood since a long time that there was an incompatibility of character, goals and ambitions between the two pashas. Everyone believed that Esat Pasha had secretly agreed with the Montenegrins for giving them Shkodra, in exchange of support for becoming himself the ruler of middle part of Albania "³³.

The taking of command from Essad Pasha was followed by an increasing frequency of arrival of negotiators from Montenegro. Conversations took hours, but apparently "the right language" was not found.

Meanwhile, the city's appearance was miserable. The ongoing bombing, the hunger and cold associated with snow, gave the following picture: "a lot of people were walking in the streets with difficulty leaning on walls, as if they came out of a long illness, occasionally you could see some people are falling unconscious..., everywhere destroyed walls, stones distributed across the streets, uncovered roofs, ruined houses"³⁴.

After an epidemic of cholera among the worst (1911), already sanitation conditions in the city was far from being normal (until May many dead people were left unburied). The biggest hospital (its building was the old prefecture), which was taking care of 800 injured with only four surgeons available, appear to be overcrowded. Now the school buildings were functioning as hospital and as were some of the houses. The number of casualties was so high that the local authorities had to seek the help from Franciscan and Jesuit priests and nuns³⁵. The images were dreadful. The wounded were lying on the ground on mats or sacks, they were wearing only their coats as cover, they were hungry and trembling in temperatures that were four degrees below zero..." It was also snowing in these days. It is not hard to imagine the situation of the population considering the misery and the hunger and the cold "³⁶.

Looking for a safer place, thousands of Christians had taken refuge inside the cathedral. But the cathedral was also bombarded "without end". The answer that gave Esat Toptani (Montenegrin foreign minister) to Plamenaci is known when the last one was trying to justify that the Cathedral was wrongly bombarded instead of Tepja: "I would have shot the artillerymen that often missed their target for 3000 meters".

A large part of population was now fed on grass, snails and seeds. Soldiers left without bread began to slaughter the horses of the artillery. Prices became unbearable. The streets were filled with dead and wounded.

Esat Toptani thought that this was the best moment to initiate a meeting of chiefs of Shkodra at the customs office, the 23rd April 1913, to announce that the city should surrender because there was no more food and no resistance in vain. But Esat Pashas hoped that the population would surrender "by their own will",

³² "Sette mesi di terrore in Scutari"- Relazione dell' assedio di Scutari in Albania dall'Ottobre 1912 al 14 Maggio 1913 mandata dai P.P della Compagnia di Gesu dimoranti in Scutari, ai loro Superiori, Benefattori e Amici, Padova 1913, fq. 32-33.

³³ Zavalani Tajar, "Histori e Shqipnis", Tiranë: Phonix, 1998, fq.232.

³⁴ "Sette mesi di terror in Scutari", material i përmend. fq. 50-51, fq. 54-55.

³⁵ Nuns who worked in the hospital, not wanting to leave for a moment their patients alone, had requested to the Archbishop to be allowed to put out during the night the sacrament. This was granted with pleasure.

³⁶ AMH, Shkodër, Fondi: DKAHSH, në vitet. 1912-1913, vj.22.12-1273, fq.243, 245.

fainted. Most of the council members were ready for further sacrifices to avoid the surrender. Over 300 cannonballs and shrapnel were thrown that night on the town of Shkodra³⁷.

The surrender of the city was already a done deal. Essad Pasha submitted Shkodra after he signed with Prince Danilo, the 15 points of “conditions for delivery”. The 24th April Prince Danilo entered Shkodra leading the Montenegrin army, and the 25th April, the surrender was fully realized. This date coincided with the surrender of the city to the Ottoman armies of Mehmet Fatih the 25th April 1479. After 434 years the Turks handed Scutari to Montenegro, leaving the city forever. Montenegrins shot 21 cannon shootings from the castle. Essad Pasha also was sent off with an additional shooting and accompanied by a battalion of honor. Shkodra felt not defeated, but only betrayed. Fortunately, the “fait accompli” of the invasion did not help Kralj Nicholas.

Diplomatic treaties were held for making possible the release of Shkodra. The Austrian government, convinced to act vigorously, was making demarches with the capitals of Europe, for a collective intervention, in order to force immediately the Serbian and Montenegrin armies to withdraw from the territories that the Conference of Ambassadors in London had known as Albania. The perseverance of Kralj Nikolla to keep Scutari was absurd, when even the Tsar of Russia was not supporting him anymore.

An official communiqué from the Foreign Ministry announced the public: "Russia recognizes that Shkodra is part of Albania because it is simply and purely an Albanian town and the seat of a Roman Catholic archdiocese."

This withdrawal of Russia from protecting the interests of its satellite Balkan saddened King Nikolla immensely, who sent a personal message to the Russian Tsar: "The big slavic heart of the Majesty would be proud of the triumph of my soldiers, but it seems that your Majesty should take decisions which are against the interests of my country".

The 4th May 1913 the diplomatic representatives of Russia, France and Britain took a step towards Kralj Nikolla, to push him to release Shkodra as soon as possible. This was the only way to avoid military aggression which was threatened by Austria in case of non release of Shkodra.

Austria remained steadfast in its decision and this time the “great powers” insisted to implement their decision without being “impressed by the triumph of Montenegrin weapons”.

Having no other chance in front of the humility towards the unanimous will of the European powers, Kralj Nikolla confirmed the decision to release Shkodra. For the sake of truth it must be said that the bad luck for Shkodra would have continued without this strong intervention of Austria, in this case giving “prestige” to itself. With this solution, the European powers avoided a European conflict that would have been caused by Montenegro.

On the night of 7th May, when it was thought that suffering had come to an end, the Montenegrins plundered the city and then set fire to the Bazaar of Shkodra. The damage was very great. Hundreds of stores, especially the richest ones filled with food and fabrics, were burned. As consequences of political-military events of 1911-1913 the city market suffered more than any other market in Albania. For seven months Shkodra was cut off by any communication from the outside world and the trade was suspended totally. All requisition made, first by the Ottomans and later by the Montenegrins, damaged many small merchants. Many of them lost a good part of their assets³⁸.

³⁷ Berri Gino, *L'assedio di Scutari*, Tiranë: Toena, 1997, fq.247.

³⁸ Duka Valentina, “Qytetet Shqiptare në vitet 1912-1924”, Tiranë: Toena 1997, fq.23.

The former splendor, which had made known the Bazaar worldwide, faded (at the beginning of the 19th century the most important bazaar in the country was the one in Shkodra, with more than 2,500 stores³⁹). Nearly 400 stores suffered fire damage, 200 of which were demolished completely closing the activity of many small and big traders. Since a long time in the Rozafa castle were kept many different antiquities as old cannons (Baba Hajdar, Ball-Jemes), flags from Venetian time, hooks and swords, tools used for the execution of prisoners. All these historical materials were stolen.

The well known journalist and ethnologist Edith Durham wrote also about the damages and the causes of robbery and fire raising: "The Bazaar always was locked at night, after all, merchants and craftsmen returned as usual to the city. One night in May the Montenegrin soldiers set fire to the richest part of the Bazaar. It was impossible to extinguish the flame before half of the bazaar was ruined. Montenegrin crowds, officers and soldiers laughed when the shopkeepers were trying to save their goods, most of which were stolen from Montenegrins". Later, Edith Durham had seen herself that stolen clothes from shops in Shkodra were sold in Montenegro⁴⁰.

At the end of the siege, which cost misery, grief and destruction, if there were losers (the Turks), there were no winners, because the Montenegrins had held the city for several weeks but later they were forced by the Great Powers to leave. The Albanians, paying a very high price, were liberated the same day from two conquerors, the Turks who stayed there for centuries and from that very short but not less frightening and hated Montenegrins. Now they started on the difficult and slow journey towards real independence.

The decision of the Great Powers that Shkodra remains Albanian is influenced by several factors. That came as a result of the following:

- titanic efforts from all people of Shkodra indiscriminately, to protect the civilian national dignity of their city;
- persistence and strong efforts from Austria and a realistic tendency of this process from the United Kingdom;
- unfortunately, as a result of a satisfactory balance offered to Russia, ethnic Albanian lands of the northwest and northeast of the country were given to Serbia and Montenegro.

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