

Gjergj Kastrioti-Skanderbeg in the Activities of Kostandin Jirecek

Prof. Ass. Dr. TEUTA SHALA-PELI

Assistant Professor

Institute of History "Ali Hadri", Prishtina

Kosovo

Abstract:

There are many foreign scholars who with their writings have contributed to the brightening of the life and work of Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg. Interesting information backed by facts and scientific arguments, is also brought to us by the researcher Kostandin Jirecek. Although his works are not devoted directly to Skanderbeg, however Jericheck in his writings, by treating the history of the Albanian people, has shown an interest in the figure of Gjergj Kastriot-Skënderbeu, providing us with important notions about the life and work of our hero, information which are built on the basis of archival resources.

Since we are at the 100th anniversary of the death of Constantin Jirecek and the 550th anniversary of the death of Skanderbeg, we found it reasonable to point out the scientific contribution of this scholar given to the treatment of the figure of our hero. To understand the scientific contribution of Kostandin Jirecek, to illuminate the image of Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg and his age, we will undertake a scientific analysis of the notices that the scholar in question offers to the Kastrioti family in general starting with his grandfather Pal Kastrioti to continue with the information on Gjon Kastriot, Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg's activity before 1443, for his wars against the Ottoman attacks, relations with neighboring countries such as Venice, Naples, Ragusa, then with local feudals, and issues which are related to the life and work of Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg, and ultimately trying to draw a conclusion on the value and significance of the works of the scholar in question about Skanderbeg and his age.

Key words: George Kastrioti Skanderbeg, *Kostandin Jirecek*, Gjon Kastriot, Albania, Ragusa, Venice, Ottoman Empire.

The information we have encountered about Skanderbeg in Jirecek works are starting with those referring to his family, starting with his grandfather, Pal Kastrioti, for whom he says he owned two villages in the Mat Valley.¹ While for Skanderbeg's father Gjon Kastriot, Jireček referring to the time period 1407-1437, he states: "He was a very powerful ruler in the province of Albania (*"dominus satis potens in partibus Albanie"*), honorary citizen of Venice and Ragusa, but vassal of Turkey."² His properties stretched from the Rodon coast to the north of Durrës to the province of Dibra. From the ecclesiastical point of view, a part of John's place went with the Catholic bishop of Arbanum and another part with the Serbian church.³ Interesting facts about Gjon Kastrioti he also offers us in the paper "Two Documents from Northern Albania", published in the Illyrian-Albanian Survey summary, co-authored by Thallókz. In this paper, scholar Jirecek states that since March 21, 1413 the decision of *Consilium Rogatorum*, John was a citizen of Ragusa, with all the privileges and immunities given to the honorable citizens,⁴ and the particularity of this work is that he informs us with two documents issued by Gjon Kastrioti: The word is for the issued passage on February 25, 1420, by Gjon Kastrioti and his sons, for the merchants of Ragusa who were allowed to go through his possessions from

¹ Konstantin Jireček, "Albanien in der Vergangeheit", *Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen*. Bd. 1, Wien 1916, 81.(më tej: Jireček, "Albanien"); Constantin Jireček, *Die Handelstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien. Während des Mittlalters*, Prag 1878,12 (më tej: Jireček, *Die Handelstrassen*).

² Jireček, "Albanien"..., 81; Thallóczy, Ludwig; Jireček, Konstantin, - "Zwei Urkunden aus Nordalbanien", *Illyrisch- albanische Forschungen*. Bd. 1, Wien 1916, 138.(më tej: Thallóczy-Jireček, "Zweit Urkunden").

³ Jireček, "Albanien"..., 81.

⁴ Thallóczy-Jireček, "Zweit Urkunden"..., 138: " *de acceptando dominum Iuanum Castriot in ciuem et vicinum nostrum, cum omnibus priuilegiis et immnitatibus cum quibus accipiuntur alii ciues facti per gratiam*".

Shufadaja to Prizren with the assignment of customs duties⁵ as well as the other document also written in Slavic where Gjon Kastrioti together with his sons *Stanishin*, *Reposhin*, *Konstantin* and *Gjergjin* forgive [donate] to the Hilandri monastery the Redostus and *Trebishte* villages.⁶ There is also interested in these documents as well as the description that is made not only of their content, but also the material they are writing and the style of writing. For the document of 1420, Jireček does not fail to mention that the stamp sealed on it is covered with a quadrilateral letter, according to him. Within a circle is seen a head turned to the left. On the back of the document continues it is a note: "*leter (a) de d. no Juan chastroi sauo chonduto ali merch (adanti)*".⁷ While for the second document it says it was written in italics and sealed with wax seal.⁸

In addition to this information, Kostandin Jirecek in his studies has paid special attention to Skanderbeg's figure, bringing us informations and facts of interest not only for his life and activity, but also for the time in which Skanderbeg lived and acted in general. For the activity of Skanderbeg before 1443, in the studies of Jirecek we have encountered the following information: Skanderbeg which was mentioning in the act of donating the property to the Hilandrian monastery, mentioned above, which belongs to 1426, Jirecek also states that Gjon Kastriot had four boys named Stanish, Reposh, Kostandin and Gjergj. Gjergji, who after 1426 lived with his father as a Christian, later became hostage to the Turks, returned to Mohammedan and named Scanderbeg, according to

⁵ Thalloczy-Jireček, "Zweit Urkunden", 125-151; Konstantin Jireček, "Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter", *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, Band I, München und Leipzig, 1916, 107 (më tej: Jireček, "Skutari").

⁶ Thalloczy-Jireček, "Zweit Urkunden", 144.

⁷ Ibid, 146.

⁸ Ibid, 144.

Iskander, Alexander the Great.⁹ Jirecek though does not give any information or year when Skanderbeg was taken hostage to the Sultan, however in this case he in one case claims that during the Thessaloniki War, John Kastrioti was asked in Venice that they should not hold him accountable if his son, who had already become Turkish, would attack the Sultan's order in the Venetian area,¹⁰ which was in the year 1428, which makes it clear that according to the reports that Jirecek had offer us. Skenderbeu may have been sent hostage between the years 1426 and 1428.

In his studies Jirecek offers us other reports of interesting informations about Skanderbeg. He further informs us that in 1438 the Venetians gave Stanishe and Gjergj the same rights as their father enjoyed,¹¹ Jirecek also speaks of the citizenship rights that the senate of Ragusa had given to Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg and his brother in July 1439.¹² He further adds that in both of these documents Skanderbeg emerges again with the names of Christians.¹³ Regarding the activity of Skanderbeg after 1443, besides the wars against the Ottoman Empire, Jirecek also pays attention to the reports of Skanderbeg with Venice, Naples, Ragusa and the local feudal lords. Regarding relations with the Republic of Venice, Jirecek also informs us about the tense relations that at certain moments Skanderbeg had with the Republic of Venice. He is particularly concerned with the conflict with Danjë that Skanderbeg met in Venice in 1447. Speaking of the tense relations between Skanderbeg and the Republic of Venice, he notes that in May 1448 the Venetians declared an price a

⁹ Konstantin Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben*, Bd.2, Bis 1371-1537(Allgemeine Staatengeschichte. 1. abt.:Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten), Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1918, 183. (më tej: Jireček, *Geschichte II*);Constantin Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese “ 55”, 2010, 216. (më tej: Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*).

¹⁰ Jireček, *Geschichte II*..., 183-184; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*..., 216.

¹¹ Jireček, *Geschichte II*..., 184; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*..., 216.

¹² Thalloczy-Jireček, “Zweit Urkunden”..., 142; *Historia e Serbëve*, 216.

¹³ Jireček, *Geschichte II*..., 184; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 216.

eternal payment of 100 ducats for the murder of Skanderbeg.¹⁴ Jirecek further states that this conflict ended with an agreement in October 1448, according to which Skanderbeg renounced his claims and received an annual payment of 1,400 ducats.¹⁵ In addition, Jirecek provides us with other information about Scanderbeg's relations with Venice, pointing out that one year after this agreement, in 1449, Skanderbeg asked and received from Medjugorje and Velipoja (Medjugorje) localities from Venice to feed their herds his sheep.¹⁶

In addition to reports with the Republic of Venice, interesting is also the announcements that scholar Jericek offers us for the reports or informations of Skanderbeg with the king of Naples Alfonsin and his son Ferdinand. Jericek announcements for these reports show that Skanderbeg's encounter with King Alfons continued with his good relationship with his son Ferdinand, focusing on the military aid Skanderbeg offered to King Ferdinand in 1461, Jirecek points out: "When his son King Ferdinand was at war Skanderbeg benefited from a ceasefire he had with the Turks and personally assisted with 3000 Albanians (1461), claiming that for this assistance Skanderbeg was awarded with property and a pension".¹⁷ As for Scanderbeg's reports with the local feudalists Jirecek points out that Skanderbeg could still be held, although some rivals in Albania, such as the Dukagjin and Muzakaj, opened up many difficulties. Then Jirecek writes that: "His mastery at Mat and Debar was small, his army had no more than 12,000 men. The big neighboring cities, like Berat and Ohrid, he could never get; his strength was largely on

¹⁴ Jireček, "Albanien"..., 82.

¹⁵ Jireček, *Geschichte* II; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 222. Константин Јиречек, *Историја Срба*, Прва књига до 1537. Године Културна историја "Научна књига" Космајска 28 Београд 1952, 390.

¹⁶ Jireček, "Skutari", 106.

¹⁷ Jireček, "Albanien"..., 82.

defense in the harsh mountainous place".¹⁸ It is known that after returning to Albania in 1443, Skanderbeg developed a series of wars against the Ottoman Empire, researcher Jericek mentioned especially the first and second siege of Kruja, among other writes: "In the summer of 1450 Murati (the second) II with his son Mehmeti, surrounded Kruja, but the bombing and the main attack failed and the Sultan had to retreat again. From this Skanderbeg became one of the most famous men of the time".¹⁹ Also a second Kruja siege by Mehmet II, failed like the first one 16 years ago (1466). Even the following year (1467), the Sultan had to retreat immediately after the start of the third siege of Kruja, due to the plague that was spreading.²⁰

About the Skanderbeg's death Jirecek offers us the following information: "Skanderbeg died in January 1468 in Lezha at the age of 63. His country was conquered and devastated by the Turks, only Kruja was held by the Venetians until 1478. Many Albanians fled to Italy, directed by their nobility"²¹, he emphasizes. Also related to the death of Skanderbeg Jirecek, he can not but mention the fact that after the Turks occupied Lezha in 1478, they opened the Skanderbeg tomb and leaved the bones of the famous prince to use as talisman among them.²² He speaks of the extremely difficult situation that was created in Albania after the death of Skanderbeg, where as a result of wars with the Ottomans, many cities were destroyed. Reflecting the state of Albania at that time as a result of the attacks of the Ottoman army, he notes that only between Gallipoli and Edrenes was found so many deserted cities in the Middle Ages as in the province of Shkodra. He also mentions the destruction of the bishopric of

¹⁸ Jireček, "Albanien"..., 82; Jireček, *Geschichte II...*, 193; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 227.

¹⁹ Jireček, *Geschichte II...*, 193; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 227; Jireček, "Albanien"..., 82.

²⁰ Jireček, *Geschichte II...*, 233; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 270.

²¹ Jireček, *Geschichte II...*, 233; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 270; Jireček, "Albanien"..., 83.

²² Jireček, "Skutari", 108; Jireček, "Albanien"..., 83.

Sardës, Drishti, Baleci, Svaçit, etc., while for Kruja he says that it was forced to surrender in 1478 and from that time was called Akhissar, the "White City".²³ According to Jirecek, the death of Skanderbeg was the beginning of a great exile of Albanians in Italy. Among them was the son of Skanderbeg.²⁴ In his studies Jirecek also speaks to Scanderbeg's descendants John and Gjergj, he points out that the generation of the descendants of Skanderbeg Stanishes's brother has extended more, where I learned from them as Castriota-Scanderbech [Kastriot-Skanderbeg].²⁵

Given the fact that marriages during the Middle Ages were an important element affecting the relationships or relationships between known families of both time and again in both Albania and abroad, Jirecek also stops at the marriages of some of Skanderbeg's relatives, singling out some cases. In his studies, we found informations on the marriage of Skanderbeg's sister Marës to Stefan Cernojevic,²⁶ as well as for his son Gjonin, who was married to Irene, Lazar Branković's daughter.²⁷ And finally, from the analysis of Jirecek works made in this paper we can conclude that during his 40 years of scientific activity, thanks to his work and passion for science, we now have a literature and some documentary volumes provide us with great help in studying and addressing many problems from the Middle Ages by offering us a good opportunity to think way more deeper in dealing with specific problems from the Albanian Middle Ages as we have the case with the topic that we discussed before in this paper, for one of the most emblematic figures of the Albanian medieval period, Gjergj Kastriotin-Scanderbeg.

²³ Jireček, "Albanien"..., 83.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 83-84.

²⁶ Jireček, *Geschichte II*..., 233; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 270.

²⁷ Jireček, *Geschichte II*..., 222; Jireček, *Historia e serbëve II*, 258; Константин Жиречек, *Историја Срба*, Прва књига..., 394.

Jirecek studies offered us opportunities to perceive general information for the Kastrioti family. Not only that, Jirecek studies moreover provided us with information about his relations with the Albanian feudalists as well as with the neighboring countries especially with the Republic of Venice and with Naples, pointing out the sincerity of Skanderbeg and the politics that were not good at some of the countries in question to Skanderbeg, the wars against the Ottoman Empire, and many other important information related to Skanderbeg's life and work that were dealt with above. As a result of all this, it is clear that the works of the scholar Kostandin Jirecek make a special contribution to the recognition, research and study the life and work of Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg, because they are based on the archival sources of archives such as: Dubrovnik, Naples , Rome, Vienna etc., in which the researcher in question had researched.