

2.12.HERALDRY

By Jaho Brahaj

The discipline of heraldry has its roots in the 11th century in Europe, the same time the regulations emerged on the display of military guns, seals, feudal flags, countries and military coalitions.

This discipline was named “Heraldry” after the name of the person, whose job was to inform the neighbors, their authorities and the feudal to whom it served, to his provinces and to the king or the emperor from whom he depended. The herald’s job was to manage the ceremonies of the royals, to keep and collect the drawings of the emblems, the seals and flags to the person he served.

Researchers agree that in the Balkans, heraldry was practiced by the Arbër since its beginnings as a result of their contacts with the European pilgrim armies that landed along the Albanian coast in the 11th century. This is accepted by heraldry researchers as a fact, and is also supported by monumental heraldry testimonies.

The well known Croatian researcher Milan Shufli, who specialized in Albanian studies, writes: “*In the Albanian lands, heraldry was used early in ceremonies and chancellors...since their contact with the Anjou and the French knights...*”

The heraldic emblem of the *Arbër State* was discovered in Gëziq (Mirditë) and dates from the 12th century. From the same period is the old emblem of Muzakajve that displays a water stream and two torches.

During these centuries, heraldry was supported in Albania, also from wealthy individuals and princes as well as by Arber State institutions, cities, social, religious and artisan societies. Albania had a development of heraldry in all those forms. From medieval Albania, there are different samples and the continuous changes of the emblems based on the new coalitions and marriages. When Andrea Topia got married, the emblem of his seal changed by including the symbols of the French Kingdom, to which he became the Groom. Acknowledging the despot title, the door of the Muzakajve, made use of the Byzantine Empire symbols, the two-headed eagle to which it was added the 6 pointed star of the Balshaj family, to which it was dependent. In this line, the grandson of Skanderbeg, who joined the church hierarchy, added a triangle, to the inherited symbols of the Kastriot emblem, which stands for the holy trinity, and also made some changes in colors.



Emblem of the Arbër State





Topia's emblem

Heraldry also developed from the influence of rich inheritance of the Albanian folk symbols, and is found in many materials and cultural objects together with the myths, cults and ritual explanations.

The emblem of the Arbër State, 12th century, was set on an architectural ensemble of artistic values and written in Latin, considered the language of the nobles families of the time. The emblem per se is considered an art work.

The 14th century heraldic seal of the Topiajve was preserved at the monastery of Saint John Vladimir in Elbasan (collection of the National History Museum, Tirana) and it is produced according to all Heraldry regulations of the time. It is carved from the local master Dhimitër Spada and it is accompanied by a writing in 3 languages: Latin, Greek and Slav, showing that the herald (kasneci) of this noble Albanian family was a very well known artist.

The **SEAL** is the highest level of the artistic development of heraldry because new elements were introduced according to a defined regulation. The unity of these decorative- artistic elements was the seal.

In the Medieval times, the noble families also had their flags similar to the heraldry emblems. On the founding of the Albanian State in Lezha on March 2, 1444 the nation was unified and recognized the flag of Kastrioti as the Albanian flag.

In the centuries of occupation by the Ottoman Empire, the national culture suffered a shock, including heraldry which was one of the factors and the indicators of the cultural and social development of Albania parallel to the European countries.

The heraldry monuments that are preserved in the Albanian autochthonous lands are rare because the conquerors systematically worked to destroy these monuments.

During the Serbian occupation in 1912, in the castle of Lezha, three emblems disappeared. During the first half of the 20th century, the emblem with the two-headed eagle in Jabllanicë (Pejë, Kosovë), and in 1912 several emblem carved stones of monumental graves in north of Tetova were stolen by the Serb armies. In the 20th century, some family emblems of the nobility on the water wells of the Shkodra gardens, dating from the 12th-15th centuries went missing or were destroyed. There are many other common reports regarding looting of emblem patrimony.



Skanderbeg's seal with the six pointed star

Fortunately there are still preserved in Albania the emblems of the nobles Balsha, Muzaka, Topia, Skuraj, Bue, Shpata, Engjëllorët, Bukja, Araniti, Buzezi, Dukagjini, Dushmani, Gropa, Himara, Kopili, Matranga, Tribaldi, Zakarija, Spani, Gjura, Dreni and Jungu are documented. From the Arbëror dynasties, we have the emblems of Kastriotëve, Arbër Sate of the 12th century and the emblem of the "Albanian Kingdom" under the sovereignty of the Anjous at the end of the 14th century.



Emblem of Kastrioti-Tribaldi door, 16th century, Italy

The second stage of Albanian heraldry is of the 16th century, when the Arbërs were involved in important historical events, working for Western Countries and in various fields of culture, science and religion of the European Renaissance. They preserved and achieved noble titles. Some of these Albanian noble families inherited noble titles from their country, such as De Rada, Kladha, Maruli, Rralli, Vlora, Plezha, but we do not know how their emblems were centuries before. In these centuries, the affirmed and well known Albanian noble families in the West were Peta, Marmora, Makri, Karuzo, the descendants of the Aranitëve and Muzakajve, Bokali and Basta, etc, which were known in the military and administrative fields. Some Albanian noble families were recognized in the church hierarchy and their emblems have many elements of the symbols inherited from the emblems of the predecessors in the 13th- 15th centuries, like Kostandin Kastrioti, Pjetër Bogdani, Nikoll Mekajshi, and some other that received the titles later, such as the Vulgari, Lapacaja, Parrino, etc.

In culture, science and arts, Albanians were recognized abroad and inherited or achieved noble titles, from whom we have the emblems Gjon Gazulli, Karajani, Maruli and others.

The economic and cultural development and the judicial tradition of Arbëria in the centuries before the Ottoman occupation crystallized the strength and the autonomous development in many Albanian cities, some of which were a continuation of the ancient times, such as Shkodra, Lezha, Durres, Prizren, Janina, Ulqin, Berat, Janjeva and Vlora, but also new cities similar to European ones at the time were born and developed, like Danja, Shasi, Drishti, Shurrdhahu. Due to the city developments, they achieved to have their statutes of the



Emblem of the Gropa nobles, stone carving, Peshkopi Museum

cities and also and their emblems to “stamp” these statutes. As such we know of the emblems of Statutes of Shkodra, Ulqin, Lezha, Arta, Svaq (today is Shasi), Drisht and so on.



De Rada's home



gate and emblem.
SM, Calabria, Italy



Balsha and Muzaka
emblem. The water
stream of the Kruja
castle

Regarding **Seal**, there is graphic testimony for the seal of Gjon Kastrioti, seal of Gjergj Strazimir Balshes and we have knowledge but do not know the graphic presentation of seals from cities like Durres, Himara, Ulqin, Tivar and Lezha. Also, during the Turkish occupation, the seals of the bishop like Bardhi and Mekajshi were preserved, and they had in their emblems the noble symbols that they belonged. Most important, we know the seal of the leader of the Albanian Country in the 15th century, that of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg (see chapter I History), from which are inherited also the symbols of the Albanian national flag.

In 1601-1602 at the Convention of Dukagjin, 13 representatives were gathered from the regions of Kosovo, Dukagjin, Shpat and Myzeqeja with target to liberate Albania, sealed their act with the seal whose graphic presentation is preserved. There it is written: “*Sigillum Regni Macedonia et Albaniae*” (The Seal of the Macedonian and Albanian Kingdom), and has in the center the double-headed eagle as in the Albanian national flag.

In war times, all Albanian nobles had their flags at their properties, but at the top of all events, ceremonies and in the front line (battlefield) the national flag was waving. According to the reports in Albanian and international archives, the Albanian national flag, even though was not permitted by the occupiers, was still preserved and used in historic events in the country's regions continuously and again re-declared the official Albanian flag on the Independence Day in November 28, 1912. Same is happening with Kosova Independence on 2008, where although the UN assigned a “Kosova” flag, the Albanian redfield with two headed eagle flag remains at the top of all events.

The emblems of the Albanian medieval artisans is mentioned in documents and travel notes, and various unities of the cities had special flags. We know the emblems of the blacksmiths in Peja, the leather workers of Elbasan, and the emblem of the gun masters in Hajmel (Shkodra).

We have photos and publications of the emblems of the cultural club, national and publishing societies of the Renaissance period, in Albania and abroad. Greatly, the embroiled emblem of Kel Marubi “Albanian Language Club” from 1909 is still preserved.

Regarding Heraldic terminology in Albanian we have some data from the spoken language and the period when the Albanian writings were documented.. In the remote areas, where the occupiers had limited authority, there are found the words mister, misters (literally God, Gods, i.e. The Misters of Iballa), that the Albanian language uses to evaluate the noble families. At the traditional vest of Mirdita and Mati it is preserved in an



Emblem of the
"Albanian Language"
Club, Shkoder, 1909

Emblem of the
Buzezezi's door,
Renesi- Calabria, Italy

embroidered manner the Kastriot emblem, so called "*maroja*", that is preserved together with the name of the shield form where it was placed. The members of the noble houses, as documented by the historian and ethnologist Frang Bardhi (17th century), but also in the Albanian language, are called "*fisnik*" (noble) and "*bujar*" (generous). The term generous is preserved at the present from the Arbëresh in Italy as "buljar". The term "kasnec" in the Albanian language corresponds to the European term for "herald". This term is more important and shows that in the beginning phase of heraldry practice in Arbëri, existed the terminology in the Albanian language for this discipline. Pjeter Bogdani documented the term "shqyt" meaning shield, verifying that also the borrowed words were made fit with the morphological structures of the Albanian language.



Heraldry emblem of the
New Scanderbeg
(Gjergj Kastrioti II).
Writing from the
National Marciano
Library, Venice

The Albanian emblems of the 12th- 15th century are catalogued and documented in various private and state archives in Europe, about which only few information is published. The Albanian heraldry is not at the center of research but the first steps have been taken.

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