

1614

Mariano Bolizza:

Report and Description of the Sanjak of Shkodra

Mariano Bolizza of Kotor was a public servant of the Republic of Venice. The main objective of his report and description of the Sanjak of Shkodra was to provide information on the land routes which could best be utilized by local couriers conveying official correspondence from Venice to Constantinople and back, and to survey the military potential of the territory. He provides a surprisingly detailed overview of towns and villages in Montenegro and northern Albania in the early seventeenth century, and of the struggle of the Ottoman authorities to put down a rebellion of the fierce and independent-minded Kelmendi tribe.

**Report and description of the Sanjak of Shkodra,
providing a full account of the towns and their locations,
of their villages, houses and inhabitants, their rites and customs,
and of the possessions and arms of the peoples in question,
as well as considerable details of everything to be found in that duchy,
done by Mariano Bolizza, a nobleman of Cattaro (Kotor)**

Fifth main part

In Pec, which is a four days' journey from Kotor, is situated the seat of the patriarch of the monks of Greek Serbian rite, where Patriarch John resides in great pomp, guarded and protected by Turkish janissaries obtained from the Porte in Constantinople and paid and lodged by him in his splendid palace. There, too, there is a very wealthy and fair church in which the bodies of diverse Greek saints are held in great veneration and in which the holy body of King Milutin of Serbia is kept, revered for the many miracles it has performed. For this reason they called him the *sveti kralj* (holy king). This patriarch reigns in spiritual affairs, though only for those who are of Serbian rite, over all of Serbia, Podgorica, Montenegro and Zuppa (Zupa) which was part and parcel of Kotor, as will be mentioned below. Situated on a very broad plain full of large villages and bathed by many rivers which, though not large, are abundant in fish, is an extremely pleasant and fertile place called Plava, once inhabited by a large number of wealthy people, but which is now destroyed for the most part by the marauding and pillaging Kelmendi highlanders who live nearby. Each day, they used to export up to two hundred horses laden with wool to Kotor, which is only three days away, as well as other types of goods such as wax, cheese and wheat. Now the original inhabitants, at the order of the Sultan, are returning from various regions of Turkey to live there once again, in particular, as will be noted below, since a fortress has recently been built at the border of Kelmendi which serves to stem the plundering and to ensure peace and quiet for the inhabitants of Plava.

72 houses - Trapane (Trapane),

- commanded by Drago Lacou (Drago Lakov),
187 men in arms;
- 37 houses - Slatka (Slatka),
commanded by Perisna Voianou (Perisna Vojanov),
78 men in arms;
- 29 houses - Tresgnicvi (Trešnjevo),
commanded by Andria Boios (Andria Bojos),
57 men in arms;
- 63 houses - Slarieka,
commanded by Vuceta Raizeu (Vuçeta Rajcev),
130 men in arms;
- 80 houses - Bosechi (Bozici),
commanded by Vucassin Raizeu (Vukasin Rajcev),
200 men in arms;
- 47 houses - Cechugni (Cecuni),
commanded by Dmithar Jovou (Demeter Jovov),
100 men in arms;
- 33 houses - Giulichi (Djulici),
commanded by Laco Milou (Lako Milov),
67 men in arms;
- 30 houses - Cormasi (Kormasi),
commanded by Vuchssan Lallecin (Vuksan Lalleçi),
70 men in arms;
- 70 houses - Panosieniza (Panosjenica),
commanded by Tomas Bratichieu (Tomas Braticev),
150 men in arms;
- 40 houses - Seoze (Seoca),
commanded by Hotas Nicollin (Hotas Nikolin),
190 men in arms;
- 60 houses - Lug,
commanded by Boio Lalou (Bojo Lalov),
130 men in arms;
- 67 houses - Arsaniza (Arsanica),
commanded by Nico Millou (Niko Milov),
148 men in arms;
- 55 houses - Ulottin piccolo (Lesser Ulotina),
commanded by Pero Juanceu (Pero Ivancev),
112 men in arms;
- 90 houses - Ulottin grande (Greater Ulotina),
commanded by Pecin Boiou (Pecin Bojov),
210 men in arms;
- 29 houses - Jouoino (Jovojno),
commanded by Boio Vuxin (Bojo Vuksin),
60 men in arms;
- 37 houses - Comorani (Komorani),
commanded by Vuchssan Nicou (Vuksan Niko),
73 men in arms;
- 45 houses - Joancouich (Jovankovic),
commanded by Rado Vuchou (Rado Vukov),
100 men in arms;

- 90 houses - Ribassi (Ribasi),
commanded by Vulatco Juuanou (Vulatko Juvanov),
220 men in arms;
- 50 houses - Cruscuno (Kruševo),**
commanded by Dabiseu Bracou (Dabišev Brakov),
110 men in arms;
- 68 houses - Grad,**
commanded by Vuch Honessin (Vuk Honesin),
140 men in arms;
- 70 houses - Trepka (Trepča),**
commanded by Lale Nico (Lale Nikov),
157 men in arms;
- 80 houses - Dossago (Dosago),**
commanded by Lale Boiou (Lale Bojov),
190 men in arms;
- 100 houses - Gustigne (Gusinje),**
commanded by Bello Juuanin (Belo Juvanin),
237 men in arms.

Thus, as was mentioned above, three hours from Gucinje and an equal number of hours from Kelmendi, the sultan constructed a fort called Città Nova (New Town) at the end of 1612 on a little hill in a well fortified position. It is as big as a field with a circumference of 400 paces, built of huge beams nailed together and filled with earth, and surrounded by wide moats which are filled with water and spanned by three drawbridges. The fort is guarded from within by two hundred foot soldiers and fifty cavalrymen. The fortification was constructed at the insistence of Sem Zaus (Cem Çausi), the main Turkish leader in Podgorica. Since he was ruler of Plava and was unable to enjoy his rule there both because of the destruction wrought by the Kelmendi and because he could not get there safely, he sent word to the sultan in Constantinople by means of the most illustrious lord, Nasuf Pasha, whose concierges and courtiers are interested in ruling over Kelmendi, for a fortress to be constructed in order to repress the furor of the rebels and keep them in check and in submission. And his request was granted. But those who guard it are still unable to prevent the Kelmendi from marauding and pillaging anywhere they want.

Mention was made above of the highland rebels in general. It is now time to go into detail to describe their land, their customs, their battles and things of importance which have occurred among them in 1612 and 1613.

Aside from the fact, as was mentioned above, that these people (who amount to over five thousand three hundred eighty men in arms) are strong because of the nature of their territory, living in such mighty and inaccessible mountains, the main factor of their strength is nonetheless their unity. This unity has been seen ever since the time they resolved at an assembly they held among themselves not to pay the usual tribute to the sultan and, what is more, not to give the individual spahes the duties owed to them, as was said above. This happened because the Turks had oppressed them heavily. They thus swore an oath, as they are wont to do, not to abandon one another but rather to remain united, to help those in need and never to allow the Turks to enter their territory. Having, in this manner, attained a more favourable situation by overthrowing Turkish tyranny and not having been worn down by indolence, they turned to robbery, travelling in hordes through the Turkish countryside right to Plovdiv and plundering towns, villages and trading caravans, and have become so rich, that

each of their 188 houses throughout Kelmendi owns twice as many furnishings as usual, including gold and silver equipment for at least one horse: i.e. scimitars, harnesses, collars, and some even have fine saddles with silver and jewelled armour, such a load being worth 150 to 200 gold *zecchini*. They also have expensive horses, exquisite garments of great value, gold and silver cups and bowls and an endless numbers of animals, small and large. They go armed mostly with swords, shields and spears, and with an endless number of slingshots which they use masterfully. They rarely have arquebuses although all those who do have them, in order to be properly equipped, carry very good gunpowder with them. There are no more than one hundred arquebus men among all the highlanders. These individuals are so agile, expert, courageous and ready for battle and they line up so well for battle that whoever sees them, can do nothing but marvel. They can be seen in armed ranks, in skirmishes, doing battle, attacking and withdrawing, cleaning up and making their escape, such that they actually look very well-trained and versed. Military veterans parade with them on all holidays, and especially on major feast days. Most of them go barefoot so that when they are walking along cliffs, they resemble mountain goats.

The court in Constantinople has been and is continuously bombarded with complaints about robbery, vandalism and uprisings on the part of these highlanders so that in 1612 the sultan finally resolved to send an expedition against them, led by a pasha, the son of the Mehmet Pasha who was murdered at the Divan, that is to say, at an audience. The new pasha was invested with the pashalik of Bosnia and resides in Banja Luka. He was also granted the Sanjak of Hercegovina as an *arpaluc* (4), which in Turkish means for his horses. He arrived in Podgorica and gathered from various regions a force of some 25,000 fighters. From there, he sent his Aga and confidant to Kotor, accompanied by many important Turks from Podgorica and with letters of credit directed to the most illustrious rector. He also wrote separately to Bolizza, the authors of these lines, to deliver them to their proper destination. Ruler at that time was the most illustrious lord, Gieronimo da Mollina who, as a noted gentleman well-disposed to public affairs, had informed the most serene Senate in Venice of what was taking place even before the pasha arrived. The Senate had rewarded this person with quite a valuable present for his troubles. Now, having read the letters and having seen that they were from the pasha's steward, who after other particularities and compliments requested in the name of his master the usual tribute, he replied that the tribute which was due to the Sanjak Bey of the Duchy of Hercegovina was ready but, although seeing that the letter had been written by the pasha's steward, he was not certain who the Sanjak Bey in question was. He asked the pasha to contact him once more using a *mühür* or a seal bearing the head of the pasha, asserting that he would then be satisfied. All this took place and was accomplished with the intervention of the aforementioned Bolizza. The letter came back, as requested, with the seal, the Turks were authorized to accept the normal present due to the Sanjak Bey of Hercegovina and, in exchange, a beautiful horse was sent to the most illustrious rector.

In the meantime, the pasha with the aforementioned army, having endeavoured on several occasions to attack the rebels, ended up by spending three months in Podgorica, realizing that he would not be able to act or to cause any harm to the rebels. He treacherously set fire to the village of Biellopaulichi (Bjelopavlici) and enslaved some eighty souls, i.e. the women and children, and seized a small number of farm animals. The men of the village had escaped with the rest of the animals and had taken refuge in other villages. The pasha thus resolved to depart and, when they broke camp and were setting out, over 300 Turkish spahes were cut to pieces by the highlanders. Their horses and baggage were also taken. The war ended thus without any other battle of significance.

In 1613, Constantinople sent Arsolan (Arslan) Pasha against the highland rebels, together with seven sanjak beys, i.e. those of Prizren, Pec, Dukagjin, Chazagnich (Kačanik), Elbasan, Zadrime and Shkodra. They brought with them the usual forces of the sanjaks and gathered together an army from various regions, adding forces from Montenegro. In all, fifteen thousand soldiers were assembled. It was alleged indeed that there were over sixty thousand. This army remained inactive for twenty four days, with nothing to do, until the pasha rose from Podgorica, taking his spahis and several local infantrymen with him, and set off for Kelmendi. There they remained for twelve days doing nothing but enslaving Kelmendi families whose members, as they had learnt from their spies, were hiding in other villages, these being eighty souls with women and children. The other village of Kelmendi agreed to give him fifteen slaves and one thousand ducats. While the pasha was waiting for the agreement to take effect, he sent one hundred horses to Podgorica for them to recuperate. The warriors of Kelmendi, however, ambushed them on a narrow path, massacring thirty Turks and seizing fifty of their horses. The pasha was horrified by this and, weeping and suspecting even worse, left Kelmendi without accomplishing anything and returned to Podgorica. He immediately called for assistance from Città Nova (New Town) and set off with them and his whole army to plunder Vassoevichio (Vasojevic), a village of eighty-five houses, as mentioned above. There they did nothing of particular interest except capture about sixty souls, boys and womenfolk, who had fled to nearby villages to save their lives. The men of the village took their revenge, however, because when he returned to Podgorica, they came up behind them and cut down about twenty Turks and seized about thirty horses. Finally, they reached an agreement with the people of Bjelopavlici for one thousand ducats and twelve slaves. Nevertheless, even after the campaign was over, the Sanjak Bey of Kačanik and that of Pec were attacked from the rear and about seventy Turks were slain, with about eighty horses captured. They even pursued the pasha himself when he set off from Podgorica. They ambushed him in a forest at a windy and narrow stretch of the road, called Chusef Lug (Husev Lug). There they slew about forty Turks and captured about sixty packhorses, being mules and horses loaded with clothes and goods. This situation went on for two years between the rebels and the other side, and came to no result at all. As such, the highlanders paid the pasha back for the 152 slaves he had taken and made prisoner under the agreement and for the one thousand ducats, by slaying 160 Turks and stealing 220 horses, including 60 packhorses loaded with goods. With the exception of this, they remained peaceful, enjoying their possessions, wealth and homes. This is said to have taken place between the highlanders and the pasha up to 10 November 1613.