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## Balshaj's Weaponry during the centuries XIV-XV

### *XV-XIV Yüzyillarda Balshaj'in Silahları*

#### Abstract

Based, mainly on written sources, in this paper we have treated weapons within the Principality of Balshaj. The purpose of the study is the treatment of used weapons, their production, historical circumstances and the way of securing them, their origin, type of offensive and defensive weapons, used by the Balshajs and other armies in the area.

Among the most important weapons of attack during the Middle Ages were swords, knives, bows, arrows, spears, etc., as well as artillery (bombers / cannons). Among the most important weapons used for defense during the Middle Ages were: armor, shield and helmet.

**Key words:** Medieval Weaponry, Principality of Balshaj, Albanians, Albania, Middle Ages, State Archive in Dubrovnik

#### Öz

Ağırlıklı olarak yazılı kaynaklara dayalı olarak, bu yazıda Balshaj Prenslığı içindeki silahları ele aldık. Çalışmanın amacı, Balshaj ve diğer ordular tarafından kullanılan kullanılmış silahların tedavisi, üretimi, tarihsel koşulları ve bunların nasıl güvence altına alındığı (arz: ticaret, ödünç alma), kökenleri, saldırı ve savunma silahlarının türleridir.

Orta Çağ'da en önemli saldırı silahları arasında kılıç, cirit, yay, ok, mızrak vb. toplar (bombardıman uçakları/toplar) vardı. Orta Çağ'da savunma için kullanılan en önemli silahlar arasında şunlar vardı: zırh, kalkan ve miğfer.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Ortaçağ Silahları, Balshaj Prenslığı, Arnavut, Arnavutluk, Dubrovnik Devlet Arşivinde

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## Introduction

Written sources for the study of the history of medieval weapons in the territories in the state of Balshaj are very limited. These sources mainly come from the documents of the State Archives of Dubrovnik, Kotor and less from those of Venice. Aids to this topic are also provided by the catalogs of weapons stored in museums, as well as some archaeological, numismatic and ethnographic data. This lack of resources also comes from the fact that along with the fall of the medieval feudal principalities, with the disappearance of the medieval armies, their weapons also disappeared. Numerous wars and long conquests destroyed the traces of this material cultural heritage.

Data that enable the simultaneous study of the origin, development and use of a certain medieval weapon are rare.

The initial material studied in this work comprises the Medieval Weaponry finds from the territory of Albania and Zeta. However, besides the fact that this material could be comprehended only within certain broader context, the interest for this topic, particularly for the late medieval swords from the territory of the entire Balkans (southeast Europe) resulted in number of finds included in this work to expand over this complete area of Balshajs.

Until recently there were almost no other works, which studied in detail large amount of finds from the broader Balkan territory.

Gavro Škrivanić<sup>1</sup> who fifty years ago published his study about the weapons of mediaeval Zeta, Serbia, Bosnia and Dubrovnik included in his work medieval weaponry from the 12th to the 15th century. The works of Djurdjica Petrović<sup>2</sup> that are rather detailed studies of the subject a comprehensive study of many local as well as foreign finds.

Two swords ascribed to George Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1405-1468), the Albanian national hero from the period of resistance to Turkey are known so far. They are today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, in Vienna<sup>3</sup> and their excellent copies are exhibited in the Skanderbeg Museum in Kruje, central Albania.<sup>4</sup> One of them is in fact a sabre and the other despite the straight blade has somewhat curved hilt, the trait also distinguishing a sabre from a sword.

## Provision of weapons (from trade, borrowing and smuggling)

In the early 60s of the fourteenth century, Balshaj Principality emerged as a consolidated feudal state that soon became an important economic, political and military factor in the

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- 1 Gavro A. Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji, Bosni i Dubrovniku* (Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Posebna izdanja; Odeljenje društvenih nauka; knj.24), Beograd: Naučno delo, 1957.
  - 2 Đurđica Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje u XIV veku* (Posebna izdanja - Vojni muzej, knj. 5), Beograd: Vojni Muzej, 1976.
  - 3 Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Hofjagd- und Rüstkammer, Inv.-Nr. HJRK\_A\_550
  - 4 Riza T. Drishti, *Armët dhe armëtarët shqiptarë*, Tiranë:Shtypshkronja "Mihal Duri", 1976.



region besides the powers of Venice and Ragusa.<sup>5</sup>

The territories under the control of this principality during the century fourteenth were named Balshaj or Zeta by foreigners and included a wide area of northwest Albania, present-day Montenegro and up to the bay of Kotor.

The strengthening and expansion of Balshaj Principality were accompanied by numerous wars and conflicts both with local, regional (Bosnian) and foreign feudal lords (Venice, Ottoman Empire, Serbia and Ragusa. Military expeditions were carried out for conquering purposes. Consequently, Venice focused a large military force near Zeta, as one of the main factors of “Venetian Albania”.<sup>6</sup>

At this time, particularly when wars and riots prevailed in areas controlled by Balshaj, the need for military capacities and weaponry was constantly increasing therefore trade, producing, looting, smuggling or obtaining them through agreements were just some of the arming opportunities. In such circumstances, the smuggling of weapons was a beneficial activity for a merchant. But, anyway, we have fewer data about this kind of trade. In fact, through insufficient documentation, it is very difficult to evaluate the impact of such trade in Balshaj’s controlled area.

There are only two documents that indicate the presence of weapons amongst other goods. On September 18<sup>th</sup> 1372 the Ragusan sailor Jurca complained that from his cargo 15 gold ducats, two swords, three shields and a bow were stolen in Saseno from two men from Vlora.<sup>7</sup> But it was not specified if those weapons were part of the goods or just weapons to defend the ship. The same example goes even for the weapons seized from Dandolo and Contarini in March 1376, which might have been in their personal use.<sup>8</sup>

On March 13<sup>th</sup> 1376, being ordered by Balsha II the people from Vlora killed Venetian nobles Girardo Dandolon and Pancraccio Contarini and looted their houses. Among grabbed goods, there were merely mentioned some weapons worth 5000 ducats.<sup>9</sup> Those weapons could be planned for sale but either might have been in the use of these nobles for defensive

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5 Pranvera Bogdani, *Balshajt: lufta e Principatës së Balshajve dhe sundimtarëve të tjerë shqiptarë kundër Venedikut në 20 vjetët e parë të shekullit XIV*, Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave Albanologjike, Instituti i Historisë, 2018, p. 25.

6 *Venetian Albania* (Ital.: Albania Veneta; Alban. Arbëria Venedikase) was the official term for several possessions of the Republic of Venice in the southeastern Adriatic, encompassing coastal territories primarily in present-day southern Montenegro and partially in northern Albania. Several major territorial changes occurred during the Venetian rule in those regions, starting from 1392, and lasting until 1797. (More about for Venetian Albania, see: Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Arbëria venedike: 1392-1479*, Tiranë: K&B, 2007).

7 *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae mediae aetatis illustrantia*, college Tholloczy, L.- Jiriček, C. –Sufflay, E., vol.II, Vindobonae, 1918, n°300, p.70, 18 septembre 1372. “...acceperunt michi ducatos auri XV, spata II et scutos III, archum I fulcitum...” [Acta Albaniae II].

8 Alain Ducellier, *La Façade maritime de L’Albanie au moyen age Durazzo et Valona du XI au XV siecle*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981, p. 602.

9 Giuseppe [Joseph] Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, Palermo-Napoli-Roma-Venezia-München: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, 1967-1972, Vol.I, n°259, pp. 231-232, 13 mars 1376. [ *Acta Albaniae Veneta I*]; *Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium vol.4*, od godine 1358 do 1403, skupio Šime Ljubić Zagreb: HAZU, 1874, p. 111.

purposes. However, it is a well-known fact that Venice and Ragusa protected the local nobles or even to other cities. Thus, during a conflict between Balshaj and Ragusa on one hand, and their enemy - noble (zhupan) Nikola Altomanon on the other hand, people from Kotor bought a large number of weapons in Venice, Market and Lombardy and delivered them to Nikola regardless of the promise and agreement they had reached with Gjergj Balshaj II against Nikola.<sup>10</sup>

In 1380 many people died due to an epidemic disease that was spread over the Balkans. But this epidemic disease did not affect people living under Balshaj II rule, therefore he (Balshaj II) started to organize his military forces that soon or later would appear on a battlefield. Paying attention to supply weapon warehouses properly, Balshaj II delegated his envoy to buy new weapons in Ragusa.<sup>11</sup> It was uncertain whether it was a political or tactical move or it was a real lack of weapons, but Balshaj's envoy achieved only to continue his journey to Zadar, securing a Ragusan ship. This ship was departing on August 24<sup>th</sup> 1380. All that Ragusans did for Balsha II was a request addressed to the captain of the Genova army to protect his subjects and particularly, the city of Ulcinj. Since Ragusans did not supply Balshaj II envoy with weapons, a merchant living in Ulcinj was robbed.<sup>12</sup>

In the July of next year (1381) Balshaj II expressed his will to buy weapons again. This time Ragusans not only fulfilled his will but even were willing to repair the damaged weapons upon being sent to Ragusa.<sup>13</sup>

At the time when he was in conflicted Karl Topia and when his lands were constantly attacked by Ottomans, Balshaj II accelerated to seek support in terms of weapons and soldiers from the Republic of Venice. Besides the war against the Ottomans, the Lord of Zeta had secret objectives, too (he was planning action against the king of Bosnia – Tvrtko). Therefore, he asked enormous support from Venice, but the Senate hesitated to approve his request without hearing the real reasons for it. He asked from Venetians not less than a few warships promising to use them only for four months. The Venetian Senate informed him about the support with weapons, but at the same time was interested to know about the scope of use of warships and how long it takes for those warships to reach the Albanian coast under Balshaj's control.<sup>14</sup>

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- 10 Jorjo Tadić, *Pisma i uputstva Dubrovačke republike*: knjiga 1(SKA: Zbornik za istoriju, jezik i književnost srpskog naroda, treće odeljenje, knj.IV), Beograd 1935, n°213, pp. 222-224, mai 1371. "...*Et in ultima nostra ambasiata pro ipsorum concordia ad dictos dominos transmissa coram dicto ambasiatore nostrum mobili diti Catharenses promiserunt Georgio de Balsa, eorum inimico, non dara arma Nicolao çuppano, suo inimico, et certa alia pacta observare... dicti Catharenses fecerunt emi arma ab uno consive in magna quantitate Veneciis et in Marchia et Lombardia et transmitti çuppano predicto...*".
- 11 Hrvatska-Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku u Dubrovniku [HR-DADU], HR-DADU, *Reformationes*, vol. XXIV (1378-1381), fol.126.
- 12 HR-DADU, *Reformationes*, vol.XXIV (1378-1381), fol.142; Giuseppe Gelcich, *Zeta dhe dinastia e Balshajve*, Tiranë: Shtëpia botuese "55", 2009, p. 132.
- 13 HR-DADU, *Reformationes*, vol.XXIV (1378-1381), fol.179r, juillet 1381. "...*Baise de Balsa possit emere seu facere emi a coraçaris...arma XXX quod ipsa arma possit extrahere de Raguse et quod possit certia mittere ragusio pro aptando certa sua arma...*".
- 14 Gelcich, *Zeta dhe dinastia e Balshajve*, p. 144.



The purchase of new weapons and renovation of old ones in Ragusa occurred even in the year 1398. At the time when Gjergj II Strazimiri arrived in Ragusa, until 27<sup>th</sup> January 1398, and when he was also threatened by Ottoman attacks, the City Council offered him a house in Ragusa for sheltering his family. Ragusans also allowed him to renovate the old weapons at his own cost and to purchase and export secretly new weapons from Ragusa.<sup>15</sup>

It might have happened that Ragusa merchants have commenced a trade with weapons, being sure about the strong demand for them. But there is not any significant trace for such a trade. However, a report from an incident that occurred later indicates a weapon trade attempt between a Ragusan merchant and Ottomans, which was prevented by the Venetian Rector of Shkodra. Taking into account the status of Ragusa in relation to the Ottoman Empire, the Ragusan merchant Marino Zinzalunoli asked permission from the captain of Shkodra Count to transport weapons in the territories of this city for the lands that were under the control of the Sultan. Submission of the request indicates the fact that he was expecting a positive response. But because of existing tensions between the Ottomans and Venice, the request was rejected. This response did not discourage the Ragusan merchant mentioned above. He disobeyed and regardless of the ban, he started to smuggle weapons. He found a way and secretly continued to pass regularly through Shkodra carrying boxes with weapons intended for Ottomans. But his smuggling activity has been discovered and a portion of weapons has been seized. Disobeying the ban means that the weapon trade should have been very profitable. It might have happened that this profitable smuggling activity was carried out even under Balshaj, but now in an official form.<sup>16</sup>

Infrequent documentary data about trade in Zeta specifies that this region exported natural products: wood, cereals and salt, whereas imported processed goods, revealing thus a “colonial” type trading economy. But this activity included weapons trade as well, which most likely, in many times, was carried out secretly by merchants. Moreover, the successful businesses were run by Ragusans and Venetians; this was the reason they hold a trading monopoly.

The resistance and war that Albanian nobles did against the Venetian rule were accompanied by the danger of Serbian and Ottoman invasion therefore documentary data indicating that inhabitants of cities Shkodra, Drishti, Tivar, Ulcinj, etc., required support from the central government in terms of weapons and defensive equipment, recruitment of soldiers and mercenaries, fortification of cities, etc. All these measures were dedicated to the protection of cities.<sup>17</sup> The inhabitants of Tivari besides others asked in 1452 the Signoria of Venice to supply Tivar with balestra, bows, small bombards, rifles (*Schiopeti*), and

15 HR-DADU, *Reformationes*, vol.XXXI (1397-1399), fol.108v.

16 AAV., vol.III, n°880, pp.238-239, 14 juin 1401. “...*quod dictus mercator ragusinus voluit prius se informari si concederetur ei licentia portandi per territorium scutari, arma, ad partes subiectas turchis, fuit ei responsum quod non. Et non obstante hoc, dictus ragusinus in quibusdam capsis portabat per territorium scutari, dicta arma oculte contra ordines...que quidem arma sic inventa portari per fraudem et contrā bannum...*”.

17 Luan Malltezi, *Qytetet e bregdetit shqiptar gjatë sundimit venedikas 1392-1478*, Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 1988, pp. 125-127; 133.

gunpowder for bombards, to strengthen the protection of Tivari castle.<sup>18</sup> The same request was repeated on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1494, but this time Tivar asked Venetia for 50 soldiers because the city lacked “*bombards and spinarcia*” and that nobody knew to repair balestras”.<sup>19</sup>

### The craftsmen and blacksmith workshops - weapons factories

The craftsmen and blacksmith workshops, located mostly in the separate neighbourhood and organized in craft societies played an important role in filling the military demands in medieval Zeta. In addition to metal works, blacksmiths were used to produce knives, swords, spears, harnesses, helmets, etc., for military needs. Blacksmiths were known for their significant economic and social position in Kotor and they mastered the production of swords, arrows, spears, shields and harnesses. The famous swordsmen asked ordinary blacksmiths to do rough work for them, and later they worked on glowing, sharpening and decorating of swords with various symbols, often in silver or gold. The demand for swords was enormous and sometimes up to 600 iron swords were ordered from an ordinary blacksmith.<sup>20</sup> In addition to Kotor a large number of gunsmiths were mentioned in the village of Pashtroviq, Palabardh (Bjelopavlic), Tivar, Budues and in some villages of Shkoder area.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the swordsmen of Kotor were known in the entire Zeta and other Albanian cities.

By the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, more than 90 blacksmiths were known in Kotor. The swords-master Radonja reached an agreement with blacksmith Andrea Mileti from Tivar, early September 1436, to work together on sword production in the next year. According to the document Andrea was tasked to forge swords, to make gloves and holsters, while Radonja had to perform final works over those black swords (*nigras*), to polish them and to put stars and skins on the holster. Furthermore, the agreement of 1436 indicates that blacksmith Andrea had to pay 1 golden ducat to Radonja for 7 swords completed. Six years later several swords have been mentioned following a dispute. The blacksmith Andrea, then a citizen from Tivar, gave to Radonja several swords for selling purposes and paying the debt of 100 Venetian ducats.<sup>22</sup>

The documentary data pertaining first part of the fourteenth century indicates a gunsmith in Prizren. It is about a swordsman from the village Çabiq in Kosovo and he was mentioned in the Chrysobula of the Deçani Monastery in 1330. Two years later a swordsman Martelo from Dubrovnik and his son were mentioned of having a weapons workshop in Prizren.<sup>23</sup>

18 Ibid, p. 135.

19 *Dokumente për historinë e Shqipërisë 1479-1506*, pjesa II (1499-1506), përg.I.Zamputi, Tiranë: Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës Popullore Socialiste të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 1979; Malltezi, *Qytetet*, p. 134.

20 *Istorija Crne Gore*, knj. 2, tom II: Od kraja XII do kraja XV vijeka, Titograd, 1970, p. 238.

21 Ibid., p. 238.

22 CG DA 1, IAK - Sudsko Notarski Spisi-Kotor (*Acta notarilia*),vol. VI, fol.13; Marko Aleksić, *Mediaeval swords from Southeastern Europe: material from 12th to 15th century*, Belgrade: Dedra, 2007, pp. 16-17.

23 Miloš S. Milojević, “Dečanske hrisovulje”, *Glas Srpsko Učeno Društvo* knj.XII, Beograd, 1880, p.



The above-mentioned Chrysobula provides data about some gunsmiths. According to it, during the years 1305-1447 there were around 90 blacksmiths in Kotor and among them, 14 were swordsmen, 4 harness makers, 2 shield makers and only 1 master working in the decoration of shields and helmets.<sup>24</sup>

According to the Croatian scholar Ciro Truhelka a type of sword called “*Albanian sword*” was very famous during the fifteenth century and it was widely used in Albania, Zeta, Kosovo, Bosnia and Serbia. A specimen of this sword is stored in the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo.<sup>25</sup>

The gunsmiths from Kotor were not able to produce all weapons used during the fourteenth-fifteenth century; they either didn't intend to fulfil local demands for the weapon. They worked under the terms of Kotor merchants and supplied customers regardless of their origin. On the other hand, the market in Kotor provided customers with weapons from other countries, as they brought good benefits to merchants. This shows that their activity was not driven by patriotic or political motives, nevertheless that Kotor as a city was in constant conflict with the Lords of Zeta.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, the documentary data from archives of East Adriatic cities do not provide information about imports from some European regions that surely has happened, primarily from German workshops or other workshops that delivered their products throughout Europe. There is also a lack of data about sword trade, respectively about the locally produced swords and the ones produced in other regions of Southeast Europe.

In some specific cases, due to the need to share certain expertise, some gunsmiths were sent on a mission to other rulers, or they were brought from other countries, particularly when dealing with war technology.<sup>27</sup>

During the second half of the century fourteenth ordinary spears were produced in Dubrovnik; this was a period when Dubrovnik worried about a possible invasion. During the war between Venice and Genova in April 1379, the City Council decided that the profit deriving from blacksmiths to be used on producing the iron spearhead. Thirteen years later, when Ottomans invaded the possessions of Gjergj II Strazimir Balsha, the residents of Dubrovnik, Rafael Gucetiq and Pashko Ristiq were appointed to supervise the spearhead production. Certainly, the blacksmith produced spearheads for the demands of city and they were not mentioned in the documents since they were private crafts, not “*salar*” (funded by the state). Undoubtedly, they produced spearheads (*ferrum ad lanceam*) that ship owners were forced to bring them back to municipality, because they borrowed them earlier.<sup>28</sup>

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91; Đurđica Petrović, “Oružje”, *Istorija primenjenih umetnosti kod Srba*, Knjiga 1, Beograd: Muzej primenjene umetnosti, 1977, p. 128.

24 Milojević, “Dečanske hrisovulje”, pp. 90-91, 96.

25 Ciro Truhelka, “Osvrt na sredovječne kulturne spomenike Bosne”, *Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine*, no.XXVI (Sarajevo 1914), p.242+fig.49.

26 *Istoria Crna Gore*, p. 239.

27 Mihailo Dinić, “Prilozi za istoriju vatrenog oružja u Dubrovniku i susednim zemljama”, *Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije*, no.CLXI, (Beograd 1934), pp. 83–84

28 Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje*, p. 50.

Helmet holds a specific position amongst defensive weapons; it was used to protect the most vital part of the body – the head. As a defensive tool helmet was widely used by all ranks of soldiers. There were several types of helmets used in Albanian lands; besides the helmet, the iron woven headgear was used in the Middle Age for head protection purposes. The internal part of helmet was usually covered by a leather hood intended to protect the head from possible injuries while using the helmet. The type of helmet, which was used until the end of century fourteenth was engraved in the coin of Balshaj, and this demonstrates the fact that the helmet was widely used in Balshaj's possessions.<sup>29</sup>

The upgrade of bows and arrows was accompanied by the change of helmet shape. Thus, the conical form helmet increasingly turned into a spherical shape with superficial or half-deep calluses. A conical helmet, with a sharp brim and cuts for sight and holes for air, appeared during the years 1360-1430.<sup>30</sup>

From the second part of the fourteenth century, Ragusa was focused towards its own resources and since then at least a gunsmith for defensive tools was constantly in use of municipal service (metal clothing: *harness, shield, breastplate*, etc.); in addition to some harness masters, who were craftsmen of the city, there were also some gunsmiths who had established a semi-formal relationship with the Municipality and who paid to rent a workshop. The internal part of the harness was covered by some iron tiles and served to protect the vital organs of the body. The knitted harness, on the sleeves and knees, was strengthened with small tiles for better protection of these parts. These tiles were called *plastron* and were used in the centuries twelve-fourteenth. In addition to *plastron* an extra part for back protection was added to harness at the end of century fourteenth.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the value and importance of metal harnesses or metal shirts as a protective tool were confirmed by the great interest of military leaders to obtain them in large amounts. An example of this interest was the case when Balshaj nobles conquered Prizren. Thus, according to a Ragusa document of September 10<sup>th</sup> 1372, the Rector and Judges of Ragusa Republic decided that each house of Ragusa merchants located in Prizren to pay "*librarum V de argento*" (a unit to measure the weight of the silver in Middle Ages) in order to buy four harnesses (*sine panceria*) as a gift to Gjergj Balsha for conquering Prizren.<sup>32</sup>

The armour masters of the city enjoyed some certain reputation as the City Council was forced to attract the attention of Balshaj II envoys, in July 1381, to be able to purchase weapons *a coracariis comunis Ragusii et non a civibus*. Both craftsmen categories sufficiently met the weapon demands for the Municipality and inhabitants of the Republic of

29 Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje*, p. 98.

30 Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj*, p. 153; Bashkim Lajçi, "Të dhëna për armët e shqiptarëve gjatë mesjetës", *Gjurmime Albanologjike: seria e shkencave historike*, nr.37/2007 (Prishtinë, 2008), p. 226.

31 Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj*, p. 136.

32 "...determinantum fuit coracias IIII, que fuerunt donate Jure de Balsa valloris librarum V de argento coracia sine panceria, per mercatores in Prisreno, quando dictus Jura cepit castrum dictum dicti loci, debeant solui per capita domorum mercatorum, qui tunc habitabant in Prisreno, et hoc ad petitionem Dymitri de Benessa tamquam procuratoris Pocre de Benessa", HR-DADU, *Diversa Cancellariae*, vol. XXIII, fol.138r (10.IX.1372); Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj*, p. 148.



Ragusa.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Senate of Ragusa in July 1381 allowed Balshaj II to purchase in Ragusa armoured defensive tools – harnesses or other metallic tools – 30 pieces of harnesses, as well as to allow transport of other types of weapons; the people of Balsha II were allowed to repair their weapons in Ragusa.<sup>34</sup>

Amongst the inventory of defensive tools of Albanians and others the shield occupies an important position. The shield has undergone to the transformation of its shape during its development, for example, spherical or oval form. In addition to those weapons or tools during the Middle Ages Albanians used other forms of shields, like ones in the triangle form that was also engraved in a Balshaj's coin.<sup>35</sup>

The Ragusa shields (*pavesius*) were made of qualitative wood, which in large amounts and sizes arrived from Ulcinj, Durres and Lezha – wood and skeleton were covered well with a horse skin and equipped with necessary belts, iron tiles and coloured paintings. The size of a shield depended on its purpose: common shape shields, guarding posts shields, ship purposes shield and small shields. The shield price depended on its size. The guarding shields were most expensive (4.5 ducats), followed by common shields – 1 ducat per piece, small ones – 3 ducats, as well as those for ships (11 ducats and 10 groshes).<sup>36</sup>

Besides the cold weapons, this period marks the use of fire weapons, as offensive weapons for distant fighting. Their attack power was chemical, while the power of cold weapons was mechanic. It was initially a unique weapon, but the improved production of tools and gunpowder provided new opportunities to fire weapons; new tasks were ahead of fire weapons. New advancements divided fire weapons into canons, bombards and rifles. Canons were of a large size, calibre and weight, while rifles were of a small calibre. With no exception, since the fourteenth century those weapons were used by Balshaj, too.

The focus of news regarding the production of bombards or canons as well as the frequency of their appearance in documentary sources indicates that the autumn of 1378 and in general, the duration of the war with Venice, may be marked as a period when the most powerful bombards of the time were produced. Furthermore, we can pretend that the century fourteenth marks a period of main and basic production of fire weapons and that the main fund for bombards created at that time was removed later by Ragusa government at its discretion.

In terms of weapon technique, the Venetians had a slight advantage in light weapons over other warring countries, but not over the Balshaj. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, Balshaj had their own artillery. Ragusa supplied Balshaj with modern weapons.<sup>37</sup>

33 Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje*, pp. 100-101.

34 HR-DADU, *Reformationes*, vol. XXIV, (1378-1381), fol. 179r ; Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj*, p. 148; Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje*, p. 103.

35 Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje*, p. 98.

36 Ibid., pp. 98-99.

37 “2 octobre 1397, De armando nostrum brigintinum pro domina Theodora Jure de Balsa, que est hic, pro conducendo et portando illam usque ad Avalonam, expensis nostri Communis”, Nicolae Jorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, Vol. 2, Paris: E. Leroux, 1899, p.71.

According to Ragusa sources, on April 18<sup>th</sup> 1379 the Ragusa Rogate Council rejected the request of Balsha II (Balsa de Balsa) to grant him a bombard.<sup>38</sup> Next year, in 1380, Balsha II addressed a new request for weapons (maybe canons as well), but he was rejected again under the pretext that the Municipality of Ragusa needed weapons.<sup>39</sup> Finally, in 1381 the Republic of Ragusa lent 3 bombards with gunpowder to Gjergj II Strazimiri, including the liability to return them.<sup>40</sup> In 1384 the Ragusa Senate rejected the request of Balsha for bombards and gunpowder but instead gave him 1 shield and 1 steel helmet.<sup>41</sup>

Since January 1393 the production of the fourteenth century, bombards were repetitively mentioned in source documents and it was related to the political situation, respectively with penetration of Ottomans in possessions of Gjergj II Strazimiri. Ragusa's reaction regarding this development was the decision to start to produce two large bombards, which at the time presented the largest range of fire weapons.

Unlike the first type (*bombarde cum crochis*), small bombards (*bombarde parve*) were the second type of bombers produced in Ragusa and their shape did not differ from the shape of large canons. Their length, indeed the length of stored samples, was up to 40 cm. Once again, those weapons were related to Balshaj again. These small bombards were a kind of small weapons, a predecessor of later rifles. These were mentioned initially on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1391 when they were loaned by Gjergj Strazimiri. The wording in the loan agreement said: "...tres de bombardis nostris de parvis..." proves their existence before the mentioned date. Bombards were mentioned again on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1397 when a small bombard was granted to arm a merchant ship.<sup>42</sup>

At the time when Venice paid efforts to strengthen the fortifications of Shkodra, Tivar and Durres, as a preventive measure against sudden invasions, Balsha III heading a considerable military force without any hesitation attacked in early March 1410 the cities mentioned above. What stands out, in this case, is a sudden event previously by Balshaj. For the first time, a well-armed combat ship appeared under the flag of Balsha, and this appearance presented a real danger for coastal zones. The apparatus of forces through which Balsha III was inaugurating the new campaign, was very powerful. The Venetian garrisons must have been seriously concerned, because even a mere presence of an armed fleet, which until then no member of Balshaj family ever had, made Venice think about dangerous surprises. Even in the terms of military troops, the number of Balshaj III army was increasing daily because a large portion of the population adhered to the army.<sup>43</sup>

38 "Prima pars est de concedendo unam bumbardam Balse de Balsa. Secunda pars est de non concendo", *Monumenta Ragusina: libri reformationum. Tomus IV, Ann. 1364-1396*, collegit et digessit Josephus Gelcich (Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, knj.28), Zagrabiae: Sumptibus Academiae scientiarum et artium, 1896, p.207.

39 HR-DAD,U *Reformationes*, vol.XXIV, (1378-1381), fol.121r.

40 Dinić, "Prilozi za istoriju vatrelog oružja, 85; Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj*, p.162.

41 HR-DADU, *Reformationes*, vol. XXIV, (1378-1381), fol.139v.

42 Petrović, *Dubrovačko oružje*, pp. 129-130.

43 Gelcich, *Zeta dhe dinastia e Balshajve*, pp. 295-296.



## Conclusions

In the end, we may say that weapons used in territories controlled by Balshaj belong to the types known in Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe during the Middle Age. The domestic weapon manufacturers were not able to fulfil all demands for weapons, particularly the modern ones and in abundant amounts, therefore, these kinds of weapons have been imported. This indicates that the manufactured or bought weapons in medieval Arberia respected the European standards of the time; furthermore, it confirms now a well-known fact that Albanian rulers, similarly to other Balkan rulers of century fourteenth, imported from the local, Italian or South European workshops that operated in Ragusa, Kotor, Novoberdo, or Hungary, the most modern weapons of the time. Axes, spears and arrows, whose shapes remained unchanged over a very long period, are almost the product of local gunsmith. The medieval sources confirm the existence of such shops on the Adriatic coast, in the North and internal regions of the country.

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