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The Assembly of Isniq and the Role of Isa Boletini in the Albanian National Movement 1908-1910

İsniq Meclisi ve 1908-1910 Yıllarında İsa Boletini'nin Rolü

Abstract

In the study: “The Assembly of Isniq and the role of Isa Boletini in the Albanian National Movement 1908-1910”, we will discuss the role and contribution of Isa Boletini and his cooperation with the Kosovo leadership and his village of origin Isniqi.

The years 1908-1910 were important years for the Albanians, because they needed unification and union of forces to continue the fight for liberation and the establishment of the Albanian national state.

Isa thought that the war would be successful only if the Albanians were united and there would be no division between them, so it was necessary to hold an assembly, in which the alternatives in their journey for political emancipation and for national liberation.

Thus, at the beginning of April 1910, at the initiative of Isa Boletini, the Assembly of Parties was held in Isniq. In this assembly, it was decided to conclude the trust of Verrat and Llukës and the beginning of the uprising in 1910 against the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Assembly of Isniq, Isa Boletini, war, Verrat and Llukës.

Öz

“İsniq Meclisi ve 1908-1910 Yıllarında İsa Boletini'nin Rolü” adlı bu çalışmamda Isa Boletini'nin rolü ve katkısı ile Kosova liderleri ve aile kökleri bulunduğu Isniq köyü ile ilişkileri ele alınacaktır.

1908-1910 yılları Arnavutlar için önemli yıllardı, çünkü bu yıllarda kurtuluş mücadelesini sürdürmek ve Arnavut ulusal devletinin kurulması için güçlerin birleştirmeleri gerekmekteydi.

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İsa Boletini, Arnavutların savaşı ancak birleşerek ve birbirinden ayrı düşmeyerek kazanabilecekleri fikrinden yanaydı. Bu nedenle Arnavutların kurtuluş mücadelesinde nasıl bir yol izleyecekleri ile ilgili planlarının değerlendirileceği bir toplantı yapılması gerekli görüldü. Böylece 1910 yılında nisan ayının başında İsa Boletini'nin girişimiyle İsnik'te ileri gelenlerin meclisi toplandı.

Bu mecliste, Luka köyündeki meşe korusunda besa ahdinin verilmesine ve 1910 yılında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na karşı bir ayaklanma başlatılması kararı alındı.

Anahtar kelimeler: İsnik Meclisi, İsa Boletini, savaş, Lluca'nın meşe korusu.

Introduction

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Albanian people made efforts to liberate themselves from the Ottoman occupation. In addition to the war against the Ottoman Empire, the Albanians were faced with threats from neighboring countries, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria, to invade their territories which aimed to divide the Albanian territories between them after the weakening of the Ottoman Empire.

In these efforts for the liberation of the occupied Albanian lands, an important contribution was given by the village Isniqi of Deçan.¹

The war, and the efforts of the Albanians for liberation, brought out many prominent personalities and tribunes. In these circumstances, İsa Boletini will be affirmed as a prominent figure of our movement as a prominent leader², prominent strategist and warrior, whose family was originally from the village of Isniq.³

1 The village of Isniq, is part of the territory of the Municipality of Deçan in the Republic of Kosovo. It is considered one of the oldest localities of Deçan, as it contains the archeological site known as: "Kulla e Qelisë" and the cave of Bojkut. The locality "Kulla e Qelisë" is a locality of antiquity, and there we encounter old traces of the Dardanian civilization. Isniqi, lies along the course of Lumëbardhi of Deçan and has a good geographical position, which is a prerequisite for the normal development of life. See in more detail: Archive of the Municipality of Deçan, *Statute of the Municipality of Deçan*, 01 / No.IX-5, Deçan, October 31, 2019, p.7; *Lexicon - Settlements of Kosovo*, volume II, rural settlements A-LL, Prishtina: Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo, 2019, p.460-462. Initially, Isniqi in the center of the village was inhabited by the Bojkaj family, which is one of the first families settled in this village, since as we mentioned above, those centuries ago lived in the locality of Bojkaj cave which is located around Isniq mountains, a place which is geographically connected with the "Cell Tower" and then with the old settlement Bella. For the ancient traces in Deçan and the surrounding area, see in details more: Emine Kalaja-Hajdari & Premtim Alaj, *Archaeological Heritage in the Municipality of Deçan*, Magazine "Albanological Traces" - series of historical sciences, no. 48/2018, Prishtina: Albanological Institute, 2018, pp.51-56.

2 Fatmira Musaj, *İsa Boletini (1864-1916)*, Tirana: Institute of History, 2004, p.27.

3 For more on the origins of İsa Boletini's family, see: Musaj, *İsa...*; Rexhep Maskutaj, *İsniqi over the centuries*, Prishtina: School book, 2002. İsa Boletini was born on January 15, 1864, in the village of Boletin in Shala of Bajgora. Data on the life of İsa Boletin's childhood and youth, whether archival or oral, are scarce. In 1894, the Boletini family received a severe blow, after which Ahmet Boletini, İsa's older brother, was killed. After Ahmeti's murder, the head of the family remains İsa. See more: İsa Boletini and his time: material from the scientific session dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the fall of

When the Albanians were in danger of being torn apart by the appetites of the neighboring states, in these circumstances the right way was started for the beginning of an armed uprising of the Albanian people to preserve the territorial integrity of the Albanian lands. Isa Boletini, at the head of this war, along with many other patriots.

The Ottoman government, seeing Isa Boletini and his military forces as a great hostage, and on November 22, 1908, surrounded and burned Isa's tower in the village of Boletini in Mitrovica. So he and his family and comrades settled in Isniq.⁴ According to a report of the mayor of Peja, sent to the governor of Kosovo, it is confirmed that Isa Boletini on December 15, 1908, was in Isniq, in the house of Hasan Selmoni and was being treated by Tahir Sylja.⁵

For this reason, the Ottoman military forces under the command of Xhavit Pasha, besieged Isniq, Upper Strelci and lower Strelci, hoping to arrest Isa Boletini and his fighters.⁶

After the siege of Isniq, where Isa Boletini was with his comrades-in-arms, he ordered all women, children and the elderly to leave the village, while he with seven hundred (700) armed men would continue the fight against the Ottoman army.⁷ At this rate, Xhavit Pasha, asked the nobility of the besieged villages to surrender Isa Boletini and his comrades-in-arms, or else they would be attacked. The village nobility rejected Xhavit Pasha's request. He then ordered the villages of Isniq, Upper Strelci and lower Strelci to be attacked with heavy artillery.⁸

Twenty-seven (27) towers were burned during the attack of the Ottoman armies in Isniq, Upper Strelcë and lower Strelcë⁹, among which: the tower of Selmon Shabani of the Maksutaj family, Niman Hyseni of the Balaj family, Hajdar Tafa of the Tafaj family, Isuf Bardhosh of the Haklaj family, Rexhep Latif of the Mulaj family, Dervish Mula of the Mulaj family, Isuf Keqa of the Mehmetaj family, Nezir Bruqi of the Bruqi family, Tahir Sylja of

Isa Boletini, held in Prishtina on 23.XI.1996, Fehmi Rexhepi, *The keynote speech read at the scientific session 23 November 1996*, Prishtina : Institute of History-Prishtina, 1998, p.12; Musaj, *Isa ...*, pp.15-16 and p.22. It is historically proven that the first of Isa Boletini's family, around 1750, moved from Isniq, where they were originally settled in the location known as Rrazhga (in the mountains of Isniq near the Monastery of Deçan, where even today we have traces of the mill that used by the Boletini Family), where this family had lived in this part for years before settling in Isniq. After Rrazhga, the Boletini family, or known as the family of Hajdar Dema, moved to the village of Tomoc, then to Sokolica, Zhazhë and later settled in the Boletini of Mitrovica. Isa Boletini's father, Ademi, is also known as Adem Shala, so his surname was according to the Shala tribe, because in Isniq two tribes lived, Thaçi who belongs to the Bojkaj family and Shala who are other families, while the surname Boletini they took it according to the village of Boletini.

4 Musaj, *Isa...*, p.62-63.

5 Prof.dr. Ramiz Abdyli, *Albanian National Movement*, book I, Prishtina: Institute of History-Prishtina, 2004, p.160-161; Maskutaj, *Isniqi...*, pp.158-164. Tahir Sylja belonged to the Tahirsylaj family.

6 Musaj, *Isa...*, f.67; Abdyli, *Movement...*, f.172-173.

7 Abdyli, *Movement...*, f.173.

8 Right there.

9 Right there.

the Tahirsylaj family¹⁰ as well as the porch of Rexhë Ahmeti of the Rexhëahmetaj family .

While in Strelca the towers of Feriz Hoxha, Sami Kamish, Baki Tafili, Sadik Vuca and others were burned. Immediately after the attack, Ottoman armies infiltrated Isniq and subsequently arrested thirty-six (36) men who had supported and sheltered Isa Boletini and his fighters..¹¹

Historical sources prove that even in March 1909, Isa Boletini stayed in Isniq.¹² On March 25, 1909, Ottoman forces under the command of Xhavit Pasha, re-surrounded Isniq again, hoping to capture Isa Boletini and his comrades alive, but these attempts were unsuccessful.¹³

Assembly of the nobles in Isniq and the role of Isa Boletini

At the end of 1909, Isa Boletini renewed the ties he had established in the spring of 1909. At this time, Isa stayed in the province of Peja, where he met with the nobles of Isniq, the Gjakova Highlands, Deçan and Sylejman. Batusha, Lush Demen, Bajram Hasani, Deme Isufi, Elez Hoxha and others.¹⁴

At the beginning of 1910, and especially in the spring of this year, in the Vilayet of Kosovo,¹⁵ There was a difficult situation in terms of pressure from the High Gate and neighboring countries, as well as the country was gripped by a severe economic crisis.¹⁶

In these circumstances, a large number of assemblies were organized and held around Kosovo, which aimed to reconcile the bloodshed and create the best possible conditions for the Albanian movement for national liberation to be successful. Also the purpose of these assemblies was for the men capable of war to be ready to go to the front, and for this to be successful it was deemed necessary to forgive the bloodshed, where on this occasion the plan of insurgent action would be read, around the corner of the Vilayet of Kosovo.

In this context, at the beginning of April 1910, Isa Boletini talked in Isniq with the leaders of Reka and the Gjakova Highlands.¹⁷ Isa Boletini, received promises from the Isniq

10 In this tower, Isa Boletini was treated for three (3) months, after being injured in the arm. During this time, in addition to staying with the family of Selmon Shabanint of Maksutaj, he also stayed with other families in Isniq. The tower of Tahir Sylja, during the stay of Isa there, was bombed by the Ottoman army with about one hundred and five (105) cannon shells from the location Verrat and Llukës, but from this position the tower failed to collapse, and then the Ottoman army was positioned near the cemetery at Iberdemaj in Isniq, where from there they attack and destroy the first floor of this tower, which was three (3) floors. This tower is preserved even today, which is under the protection of cultural institutions of Kosovo.

11 Abdyli, *Movement...*, p.173.

12 Right there; Musaj, *Isa...*, p.68.

13 Musaj, *Isa...*, p.68.

14 Right there, p.75.

15 Or the Vilayet of Kosovo, see in more detail: Shukri Rrahimi, *Vilayet of Kosovo 1878-1912*, Prishtina: Textbooks and Teaching Aids Institute of Kosovo, 1969.

16 *Kosovo - monographic overview*, Prishtina: Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2011, p.221.

17 Tafil Boletini, *Near Isa Boletini - memories (1892-1916)*, Tetovo 1996, p.139-145.

nobles for military and logistical support in the following aspects: in the military, you were promised about one hundred (100) single soldiers from Isniq, and in the logistics, you were promised support and supply of food and armed forces .¹⁸

After many talks that Isa Boletini had with the leaders of the tribes which took place in Isniq and the surrounding villages during the whole of March 1910 (here are known the difficult negotiations with Sylejman Agë Botushë, made in the house of Rexhë Ahmeti of Rexhëahmetaj in Isniq for several days in a row), finally manages to convince everyone of the need to start an uprising,¹⁹ and binding the trust for reconciliation. Thus, Isa Boletini was very convinced that only with the conclusion of the faith, could the joint struggle for liberation from the Ottoman election and the plans of the neighboring Slavic states for the conquest of Albanian lands be continued. Therefore, it was seen that it was necessary to convene an Assembly. After many successive consultations and talks, in early April 1910, under the leadership of Isa Boletini, the Assembly of Paris was convened, which held them at the Osdautaj Tower in Isniq.²⁰ In this Assembly of Nobles it was decided for the beginning of the uprising in 1910 and the conclusion of the trust (forgiveness of bloodshed) of the logo of the Wines of Lluca in Lower Lluca of Deçan.²¹

According to the memoirs of Tafil Boletini, who was part of this assembly, from there a letter was sent to Zenel Beg Begolli, where, among other things, it was said: we decided to tie the traditional trust of Verrat and Llukës. We ask that your delegates be here within two days to participate in this trust of the whole of Kosovo. Isniq, April 1326/1910. From the leaders of the two districts, Peja and Gjakova”. The letter was written by Tafil Boletini, which was dictated by Shaban Binaku.²² Also in the Tower of Osë Dauti (Nuredin Osës) of Osdautaj was elected chairman of the assembly.²³

The Assembly of Nobles, held in Isniq at the beginning of April 1910, is of special importance because it unified the leaders of the Nobles, making the connection of the besa, which was very important for the circumstances of the time and the organization of the uprising of year 1910.²⁴

Thus, the echo of the Assembly of the Nobles and the connection of the faith of Verrat and Llukës, very quickly spread throughout Kosovo and beyond. Also, the trust of Verrat and Llukës found support from Idriz Seferi, who at this time had started organizing the

18 For more details see: Skënder Luarasi, *Isa Boletini*, Prishtina: Rilindja, 1972, p.90-93.

19 Right there.

20 Boletini, *Near...*, p.90; Luarasi, *Isa...*, p.90.

21 Boletini, *Near...*, p.88-90. I think an explanation needs to be made regarding the forgiveness of bloodshed. The Albanian people in the past, there have been troubles from various, which have ended in fratricide. Even in the first decade of the twentieth century, blood feuds were widespread among Albanians. When a family was in blood, she was forced to stay locked in her home. Thus, when the Albanians began the efforts to establish their state, it was seen that the bloodshed was forgiven, with the sole purpose of making the war a success. The mass forgiveness of bloodshed among Albanians has happened many times in history, both in the time of the Albanian League of Prizren, in 1910 and in the early 90s of the XX century. So, the forgiveness of bloodshed at crucial moments for Albanians has been done continuously.

22 Right there, p.90.

23 Luarasi, *Isa...*, p.92.

24 Boletini, *near...*, p.90.

uprising in Gjilan and the surrounding area.²⁵

Isa Boletini,²⁶ has made a valuable contribution to the battle of Caraleva Gorge. Thus, he at the head of one hundred (100) fighters left Isniq, together with Misin Bala and Balaj, Isuf Bardhosh and Haklaj, Mehmet Dervishi and Mulaj, Selmon Shabani and Maksutaj, Deli Xhemajli and Balaj, Sadri and Nuderin Osa and Osdautaj as well as Ali Musa and Ahmataj, passing in the area of Podugur then in that of Drenica, in Vushtrri and on April 19, 1910, reaches Sedllara. The total number of insurgents commanded by Isa reached five (5000) thousand people.²⁷ Sadri Osa of Osdautaj, who had received a wound in the lower jaw, was wounded among the fighters from Isniq in the battle of Caraleva Gorge.

In the end of 1912, will find the Albanian people facing great challenges. After many, many successive efforts and uprisings 1910-1912, representatives of the Albanian territories, on November 28, 1912, in the National Assembly of Vlora, declared the independence of Albania.²⁸ Isuf Bardhoshi of Haklaj, Misin Bala of Balaj, Sakë and Sadri Fazlia of Kuklecve, Canë Selmoni of Maksutaj and Arif Bajrami of Mehaj, all from Isniq, also took part in this historic event for the Albanian people. These distinguished warriors stood by Isa Boletini every time.²⁹

Even at the time when he was secretly killed in Podgorica, Montenegro, on January 23, 1916, Isa Boletini was with his cousin Misin Balen from Isniqi, who was killed along with Isa Boletini and others.

So, at the very end we can conclude that throughout his life and activity in the service of the Albanian national cause, Isa Boletini has had an active and dominant role in the Albanian National Movement.

Conclusion

In the study: “The Assembly of Isniq and the role of Isa Boletini in the Albanian National Movement 1908-1910”, we addressed the cooperation of Isa Boletini with the Nobles and the village of Isniq.

Isa Boletini, during his activity, had a special cooperation with the mayor and the village of Isniqi, as he considered them cousins, because as it is known, the Boletini family had moved from Isniq to Boletini around 1750.

Throughout the period 1908 until 1910, Isa Boletini had stayed almost in the province of Peja, respectively in Isniq and the surrounding area. He was sheltered there with his family and comrades-in-arms.

Among the most important activities of Isa Boletini during the period 1908-1910, was

25 Musaj, *Isa...*, p.78.

26 For the role of Isa Boletini in the uprisings 1910-1912, see in more detail: Dr. Frashër Demaj, *Great Britain and the Albanian issue 1875-1913*, Prishtina: Institute of History - Prishtina, 2011, pp.182-237.

27 Right there, p.82.

28 *History of the Albanian People III*, Tirana: Albanian Academy of Sciences - Institute of History, 2007.

29 Maksutaj, *Isniqi...*, p.164.

the organization and holding of the Assembly of Nobles in Isniq, an assembly which had a special importance, because there was decided to conclude the trust of Verrat and Llukës and the beginning of the 1910 uprising.

So, in the end we can conclude that the Assembly of Isniq of April 1910, has a special importance in the history of the Albanian people, because there were united the leaders of the districts of Peja and Gjakova and made a decision to forgive the bloodshed of Verrat and Llukës and the beginning of the 1910 uprising against the occupation of the Ottoman Empire.

Therefore, the actors of this event, had in mind that only by forgiving the bloodshed, the uprising against the Ottomans would be successful.

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