

## **JEWS - RELATING ALBANIANS**

Elvira LUMI

Head of Department of Literature and Journalism, University of Elbasan "Aleksandër Xhuvani", Albania

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### **ABSTRACT**

The 'Jews in the land of the Besa', which refers to the stone memorial erected in Qarrishta of Librazhd, dedicated to the Biçaku family that sheltered and saved 26 Jews during World War II, reminded us Einstein and his theory that "Everything is relative. One thing is absolute, that everything is relative". But the 'Land of the Besa' cannot be fully understood and dealt with, without taking into consideration the famous saying: "I still taste in my mouth the corn bread that your family provided for us", of the two Jews that were sheltered by this family during 1943-1944, Mr. Rafael Faragi (Haifa, Israel, from the correspondence of 1993-1995), Simon Aorest (Buenos Aires, Argentina). This leads us to the second idea, that of: "Security, liberty and social and cultural interchange" (S.K. [www.sebastian-kurz.at](http://www.sebastian-kurz.at), 21.12.2018) which inspired us for the title and research of our paper: *Jews- relating Albanians*.

The purpose of this paper is to observe the continuity of relating between Albanians and Jews from antiquity, in ancient time to the present. The methodology used is based on the investigation of artifacts and concrete archeological, historical and contemporary evidence that testify for the direct or indirect connections between the Jews and Albanians. Today Albania calls the "House of life" in the Memory of Jews during the Holocaust time, honored by the Raoul Wallenberg International Foundation (26.01.2019). The method used is inductive as well as deductive.

**KEYWORDS:** Jews, relating, Albanians, Besa (Trust), security, cultural interchange, archeological artifacts, contemporary, historic and literature evidence

"Mens immota manet, lacrimae uoluntur inanes"

(**Gerogics 2.294-2950**)

### **THE INTRODUCTION**

The 'Jewish in the land of the Besa', which refers to the stone memorial erected in Qarrishta of Librazhd, dedicated to the Biçaku family that sheltered and saved 26 Jews during World War II, reminded us Einstein and his theory that "Everything is relative. One thing is absolute, that

everything is relative". But the 'Land of the Besa' cannot be fully understood and dealt with, without taking into consideration the famous saying: "I still taste in my mouth the corn bread that your family provided for us", of the two Jews that were sheltered by this family during 1943-1944, Mr. Rafael Faragi (Haifa, Israel, from the correspondence of 1993-1995), Simon Aorest (Buenos Aires, Argentina). This leads us to the second idea, that of: "Security, liberty and social and cultural interchange" (S.K. [www.sebastian-kurz.at](http://www.sebastian-kurz.at), 21.12.2018) which inspired us for the title and subject of our paper: *Jews- relating Albanians*.

Firstly these relations can be traced back to the beginnings of the synagogues of Saranda, Durrës, Elbasan, Berat, Prishtina, Janina, Raguza, Shkup (III BC-IV-V ) etc. "Janina was the mother of the Arts of Preveza and Filat," her towns around northern Greece today, says Zanet Batinu, Athens' ( Jewish director and sister Markos ( Arvanitas)) as Janina was a mother of the Jewish community of Albania! Secondly, we have the Star of David, carved on a round shape stone, 20 cm thick, found in the Ethnographic Museum of Elbasan, Berat and Vlora. Thirdly we have the Hebrew calendars which is well preserved on the floor of the Saint Mary Church in the Elbasan Castle, in Voskopoja churches, in Saranda, Berat etc. Fourthly, there is the heraldic of the golden yellow Star of David, on a triangular shield in the Kastrioti coat of arms which is carved on the tombstone of Scanderbeg's grandson, Kostandin Kastroti, in Naples, Italy, built under the auspices of Donika Kastrioti, Scanderbeg's wife. This heraldic possibly derives from Alexander the Great, who is thought to have died in Babylonia during his military campaign against the Persians. There are several other examples found on cooking dishes such as copper pans and trays ornamented with the Star of David and floral Jewish decorations. Many other concrete traces exist in the field of Onomastics and in the pictures of Paleo-Christian churches and mosaics in the Byzantine basilicas of the Middle Ages (the well-known medieval painter David Selenica). The national archive in Tirana houses 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century alphabets used in Elbasan and Voskopoje with symbols, graphemes or letters from the Hebraic, Latin and Greek languages, written by the Anonymous of Elbasan, Kostandin Kristoforidhi, etc. In Southern Albania the citrons are called 'çifutka' (the local name for Jews). Moreover, there are myths, accounts, legends and evidences of the Albanians from the ancient times to the present; published literary works such as: "Sibilat" of P. Bogdani, "Freed Jerusalem" of J. de Rada, "Israelites and Philistines" of F. Noli, "Great is the calamity of sin" of M. Kuteli. Although we have long spoken of Jews in the publications of "The Treasures of the Nation" (Palaj & Kurti, 1937) Lyrics of Lents and Legends Collected and edited by Father Bernandin Palaj and Father Donat Kurti in Epos "Lyrics of Highlanders", song 22 we find the song "Muji and Jevrenija" where Jevrenija (comes in two forms Jevrenija and Jevremia) is the daughter of Krajl who has fallen in love with Halil the brother of Muji. In this song we find the name of the girl Jevrenia related to the term Hebrenija (H in Greek gives J in Albanian) and starting from the song overlays we find their origins as early as 9-10 centuries AD. In Albanian folklore collected by

author Robert Elsie in "Lexicon of Albanian Popular Culture"(Elsie, 2005) (we find these popular terms for Jews: **Judy (Judy)**, **Jewish**, Jewish. The term **Judi or Xhudhi** in Albania is known as the Albanian mythological figure. This giant ghost and the personification of evil can often take the form of an animal eg a bull, an ass, a snake, a dog or a goose. When Judi takes the form of a horse, he knocks down the knight and kicks him to death. The knight can only be rescued by stroking the horse's belly. Judi roams at night and beats people , especially the drunkards. In northern Dukagjin highlands Judi is also called Julli and is mentioned as a giant race that existed before the human race .. Here are some toponyms: The graves of Xhudhise in Bad Selita, the graves of Xhudhive in Iballe, the stone of Xhudhise, and the Castle of Xhudhise in Rubik. In the mythology of the South Slaves of Macedonia, Thrace, Judas emerges devil woman with long hair, who lives near water sources and rivers , not unlike with the trellis and lubricant. Etymologically all of these forms are related to ital. old giudio "Jew" or as Maximilian Lambertz says (1882-1963) probably with "Judas Iscariot". Baron Franz Nopcsa (1877-1963) during his travels noted that the highlanders of northern Albania still the same; Jude tolerably with çifutët. In faced jidov Romanian folklore figures, 'ciklop, giant "also has origin from the Jewish word. (p 97) Apollidari great writer of the second century BC and geography of ancient Scymni show that Vidami, the son of the king of Phoenician, became king of it- Illyrian (Kotani, 2007).

Legends, stories and ancient writings of ancient authors show that the Illyrians and Hebrejts are located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Different historians as Meillet and Cohen mentioned that in Epirus (Illyria) once existed-city Paleiste today Palassa in Himare of Vlora. The toponym names in the south of Finiq, Jericho and Palasa are biblical toponyms. Josephus Flavius, an Israeli historian of the first century , based on a letter from the King of Macedonia in 135 to a large Israeli slaughterer carrying a seal with the figure of an eagle holding a snake in its grip, it said, among other things, "we are brothers with a single origin , so we must have common interests and mutual support." It is not difficult here to understand that the Hebrews could have been living in our early land. (p. 19, Apostol Kotani, Jews in Albania over the centuries ")

The fact that there were Jewish communities in Illyria dates back to AD 70 (A.Kotani, P.Xhufi, M.Korkuti). It was the period when the roman invaders headed by Emperor Titus, after breaking several weeks of Jewish resistance, had conquered their land and had destroyed by the foundations King Solomon's temple, and as a sign of triumph they had taken a number of Jews as slaves and sent them to Rome. Fortunately, one of these ships was struck by a large storm on the Albanian coast of the Ionian Sea, where many of the settlements are, including the former head of the Albanian Academy of Fterra, Myzafer Korkuti , who wrote for family names and toponymously. coasts of the Ionian Sea in Albania such as Galileo, Kofina, Shama anthropics family name like Avrec, Rahile, Kofina, some objects with the star of David etc.

In the history of religion -in . The earliest accounts of the Jews date back to the 12th century. Benjamin Ben Jonah of Tudela (d. 1173) had noted in his day that "they are not strong in the religious beliefs of the Nazarenes and call each other by name" Jews, and some say they are Jews. " Church of St. John Vladimir (English: Church of St. John Vladimir) is a church in Shijon, Elbasan, Albania. It is dedicated to Prince and Saint Dukljan Jovan Vladimir, son-in-law of the Bulgarian Tsar Samuil. It became a Cultural Monument of Albania in 1948. The first temple is the largest larger Orthodox basilica from the time of Tsar Samuil, rebuilt as a present church by the Thopia family in 1381. 18th Constantine Shpataraku painted the walls of the church. The side walls that were rebuilt in 1900 have stone with the star symbol of David in their structural walls..At the beginning of the sixteenth century there were settled Jewish settlements in most of the major cities of Albania, including Berat, Elbasan, Vlora, Durrës and Kosovo. Many of these Jewish trading families, who were of Sephardic descent and descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews expelled from Iberia in the 1490s, maintained close links with the Jewish communities of Split, Dubrovnik, Corfu and Thessaloniki. Between 1519-1520 Vlora had only 699 Jewish families, mostly refugees from Spanja, but mos of them were since antiquity. Vlora was also the seat of the synagogue, which was destroyed during World War I .On 1673, the charismatic Jewish prophet Sabbetai Sevi, called mystical messiah, was banished from the Sultan the Albanian port of Ulqini in Montenegro, where he died two years later. Fan Noli states that "Islam is a social movement of the lower classes of Mekes and first was a s Judeo-Christian sect and the New and Old Testament are declared in the Qur'an as Holy Books of Islam (F. Noli; Mohammed, Acts 2, p. 393) Religion to the Jews is not only a religion but also a nationality. On the map of nations provided by the Bible Chapter 10 Genesis in Noah's Prophecy regarding his descendants it appears that the Illyrians are descendants of Japheth (Noah's sons are Shem, Sam and Japheth) According to verse 5, we have the flow of people scattered on the islands of nations, in their various countries, each according to their own language, according to their families and their nations (Bible, Diodati ir 1991-1994). Franc Kafka with the novel "The Castle" is a mystical Kabbalah journey and human endeavor to approach the divine, but fails, and why she feels her presence. The data of historical and cultural paramount to the Illyrian-Jewish ties found in the Acts of the Apostles, especially Apostle Paul's works, which, as expressed in his mouth, was a Philistine and son of a Philistine. The first Christian preaching as the Apostle Paul writes have included the Hebrew communities that were found in the Ilyricum or Dardan and were preached by the disciple Matthew and one of his student, Juda, Iscarioti (Sinani, 2017).

In the years 1979-1980 during archaeological excavations in Saranda a church was discovered for the Paleo-Christian Period but settled in V-VI centuries AD and in its surroundings were discovered three layers of mosaics. In one of them was discovered a fragment of a Jewish candlestick, of which indicates the presence of an earlier synagogue in this city and at the same

time the presence of a Jewish civic community. It is found within the heavy walls surrounding the Castle, in its east side. Today it is the main center of the city, fact that may be related to any of the agora square type but because of the overcrowding makes it difficult the full disclosure of the monumental complex and the environments around it (Stafa, 2019).

We cannot forget to mention the article entitled "The Jew" of Herman Bernstein in the daily Bulletin of 1934, where he states that the American poet Longfellow in his "Tails of a Wayside Inn" has a poem dedicated to the Albanian national hero Scanderbeg which is told by a Spanish Jew. Visarion Xhuvani (the primate of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania from 1929 to 1937 after Fan Noli (Theofan Stilian Noli's time on 1900), had told the same author that the Orthodox Albanians bare biblical and Jewish names and in Albania there are many surviving examples of Jewish settlements and synagogues from ancient times; The Jew's Grave, the Jew's Path, Galilee's Hill, Jew's Inn, etc. are current toponymes used by present day Albanians. It is documented in Vatican that Saint Hieronym, the antiquity Illyrian, translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew to Latin. It is also documented the pact of the Albanian King, Zog I (1939) with Hitler and King Zog I order of the Interior Ministry (1939-1944) to protect the Jews from the Nazi persecution by issuing them Albanian passports and nationality in order to allow them to enter, to live in Albania and afterwards travel freely to America or the Middle East. In the State Archives in Tirana there are records from the correspondence of prominent intellectuals of the Albanian studies and politics, such as Lasgush Poradeci, Eqrem Çabej, Fan Noli, etc. with regards to the unfortunately unsuccessful attempts of issuing a passport for the Austro-Jewish Albanian studies scholar, Norbert Jokli, and the three day visit successfully in Durres of Albert Einstein on 1935. On 1933 -'39 were the group of the Jews doctors that founded the Albanian National Health Care Center, in Tirana capital.

The city of Elbasan along with Berat, Durrës, Vlora, Saranda, Struga, Skopje, Janina, etc. there have been synagogues, Jewish streets and neighborhoods, connected by Via Egnatia (Via Apia). A great deal were ruined or need to be uncovered as is the castle in Elbasan, or have already been discovered as in Saranda, Voskopoja, Berat, Durrës etc. Who financed for those cults? Of course only Jews. There are also cases when on top of their remains were built mosques, as the people of Elbasan admit is the case with King's Mosque. The Sultan Bayazit and Murat II in letters sent to the Ottoman administration in the Balkan towns ordered the collection of taxes from the Jews. This means that Jews were living in organized communities and spread up till to Dalmatia and from this economic, cultural and religious group the East Porte wanted to collect a tribute (a tax). The usual professions held by the Jews in Albania were: professors-rabbi, merchants, economists, doctors, scholars etc. They had preserved their traditions, dressings and faith. According to the above mentioned facts we believe that the link between Jews and Albanians is neither coincidental nor fragmentary, but it has a historic, economic, religious, social, linguistic

and cultural continuity, which can be traced back to the roots of the term Illyrian as well as the close and direct ties or golden belt of Albanians with the Jews. My idea is to suppose that Jews are Paleo-Illyrians, than after that we can see Jews by the metamorphoses phenomenon as Romanized and then Slavic Illyrians or suppose Jews are First- Pellasgs in Ballkan that exiled from Illyria to Greece, to in Egypt, Israel, Mesopotamia, Babylonia and Kostantinople, in the same time exiled in Roma, Europe, Russia, America and spread in all over the world etc. The purpose of this paper is to observe the continuity of relating between Albanians and Jews from antiquity, in ancient time to the present. The methodology used is based on the investigation of artifacts and concrete archeological, historical and contemporary evidence that testify for the direct or indirect connections between the Jews and Albanians. Today Albania calls the "House of life" in the Memory of Jews during the Holocaust time, honored by the Raoul Wallenberg International Foundation (26.01.2019).

From Law Dictionary, (pg, 394, Fifth Editions, by Steven H. Gifis, Barron's Legal Guides, 2003) **Prima Facie**: based on the first impression; accepted as correct until proved otherwise.

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