ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research paper is to examines the historical significance of Dyrrhachium (modern-day Durrës), as a pivotal economic, commercial, and political center in the Adriatic region from antiquity to the medieval period.

The scientific novelty resides in its meticulous exploration of Dyrrhachium’s economic, commercial, and political significance in during Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The research elucidates the city’s remarkable ability to navigate and thrive amidst various external challenges, offering invaluable insights into the dynamics of the Adriatic region during both ancient and medieval periods. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of regional interactions and socio-economic dynamics, shedding light on the intricate interplay of factors that shaped Dyrrhachium’s enduring prominence.

Conclusion. Dating back to its establishment by Hellenic settlers around 625 BCE, Dyrrhachium witnessed a remarkable trajectory of development under various rulers, including the Romans and Byzantines, despite enduring significant external threats such as Ostrogoth and Slavic invasions. Notably, the construction of the Egnatia road served as a catalyst, amplifying Dyrrhachium’s economic importance by facilitating trade between the Eastern and Western regions. Through tumultuous times, Dyrrhachium showcased remarkable economic resilience, ultimately emerging as the preeminent city in the Byzantine Empire’s Balkan region.

The despite facing numerous political upheavals and external invasions over the centuries, Dyrrhachium emerged as an exemplar of resilience, establishing itself as a stalwart economic and political nucleus in the Adriatic region. Its strategic location, complemented by robust commercial activities and administrative autonomy, fortified Dyrrhachium’s position as a formidable player in regional affairs, ensuring its enduring prominence across antiquity and the medieval era.

Keywords: Dyrrhachium, Durrës, Egnatia road, Byzantine Empire, Adriatic region, Bulgarian Kingdom, economic resilience, political center
АНОТАЦІЯ
Метою роботи є вивчення історичного значення міста Діррахій (сучасний Дуррес) як головного економічного, торговельного та політичного центру в Адріатичному регіоні від античності до середньовіччя.
Наукова новизна полягає у ретельному вивченні економічного, комерційного та політичного значення Діррахія у період античності та раннього середньовіччя. Дослідження з'ясовує надзвичайну здатність міста маневрувати та процвітати серед різноманітних зовнішніх викликів, пропонуючи безцінне уявлення про динаміку Адріатичного регіону як у стародавній, так і в середньовічний періоди. Це дослідження сприяє розумінню регіональних взаємодій і соціально-економічної динаміки, проливаючи світло на складну взаємодію факторів, які сформували постійну популярність Діррахія.
Висновок. Починаючи з моменту свого заснування еллінськими поселенцями (ближко 625 р. до н.e.), Діррахій став свідком дивовижної траєкторії розвитку за різних правителів, включаючи римлян і візантійців, незважаючи на значні зовнішні загрози, такі як остготи та слов'янські вторгнення. Примітно, що будівництво Егнатієвої дороги (Via Egnatia) послужило каталізатором, посилавши економічне значення Діррахія, сприяючи торгівлі між східними та західними регіонами. У бурхливі часи Діррахій продемонстрував надзвичайну економічну стійкість, зрештою став провідним містом у балканському регіоні Візантійської імперії. Незважаючи на численні політичні потрясіння та зовнішні вторгнення протягом століть, Діррахій став прикладом стійкості, утвердившись як міцне економічне та політичне ядро Адріатичного регіону. Його стратегічне розташування, доповнене потужною комерційною діяльністю й адміністративною автономією, зміцнило позицію Діррахія як потужного гравця у регіональних відносинах, забезпечивши його незмінну популярність у давнину та середньовіччя.
Ключові слова: Діррахій (Дуррес), Егнатієва дорога, Візантійська імперія, Адріатичний регіон, Болгарське царство, економічна стійкість, політичний центр

INTRODUCTION
Nestled along the shores of the Adriatic Sea, Dyrrhachium, known today as Durrës, stands as a testament to the enduring resilience and economic prowess of ancient and medieval civilizations. From its inception around 625 BCE with the arrival of Hellenic settlers, Dyrrhachium has played a pivotal role as an economic-commercial and political-military center in the region. Its strategic location facilitated connections with other Illyrian hinterlands, enabling the exchange of raw materials and goods that fueled its rapid economic development.
Throughout its history, Dyrrhachium weathered the tides of conquest and invasion, transitioning from the rule of various powers, including Glaucus, the Romans, and
ultimately the Byzantines. Despite facing external threats such as the Ostrogoth tribe and Slavic invasions, Dyrrhachium’s economic prosperity remained largely unscathed. The construction of the Egnatia road further solidified its importance as a vital link in the trade network between the East and West.

**The purpose of the research paper** is to examines the historical significance of Dyrrachium (modern-day Durrës), as a pivotal economic, commercial, and political center in the Adriatic region from antiquity to the medieval period. By exploring Dyrrhachium’s enduring resilience in the face of external challenges and its pivotal role as a strategic hub in the Adriatic region, we can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of ancient and medieval civilizations and their impact on regional development.

Through a comprehensive analysis of historical sources and archaeological evidence, this study seeks to unravel the complexities of Dyrrhachium’s past, shedding light on the factors that contributed to its economic stability and prominence. By doing so, we can better understand the broader historical context in which Dyrrhachium thrived and appreciate its lasting legacy in the annals of Mediterranean history.

**Literature Review**

Scholarly discourse on the history of Dyrrhachium spans a wide range of disciplines, including archaeology, ancient history, and economic studies. Researchers have long been captivated by Dyrrhachium’s strategic significance and economic vitality, leading to a rich body of literature that sheds light on various aspects of the city’s past.

Archaeological excavations have played a crucial role in uncovering Dyrrhachium’s ancient roots and unraveling its urban development over time. Studies such as those by Paul Reynolds have utilized archaeological evidence to trace the city’s evolution from its Hellenic origins to its later Roman and Byzantine phases. Through careful analysis of artifacts, architecture, and urban planning, scholars have pieced together a comprehensive picture of Dyrrhachium’s physical and cultural landscape.

Economic historians have also contributed significantly to our understanding of Dyrrhachium’s commercial activities and trade networks. Works such as those by Stephenson delve into the intricate webs of commerce that linked Dyrrhachium to other Mediterranean centers, highlighting the city’s role as a crucial node in regional trade routes. These studies explore the types of goods exchanged, the mechanisms of trade, and the socio-economic implications of Dyrrhachium’s commercial endeavors.

Furthermore, studies focusing on Dyrrhachium’s political history provide valuable insights into the city’s governance structures and interactions with external powers. Scholars like Angold have examined Dyrrhachium’s relationships with neighboring states and the impact of conquest and political upheaval on its administrative systems. By contextualizing Dyrrhachium within broader geopolitical dynamics, these studies offer nuanced interpretations of the city’s political significance.

While existing literature has shed considerable light on various aspects of Dyrrhachium’s history, there remain gaps and avenues for further research. Future research...

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studies could explore topics such as the social dynamics of Dyrrhachium’s diverse population, the religious landscape of the city, or the role of cultural exchange in shaping its identity. By building upon existing scholarship and integrating diverse methodological approaches, researchers can continue to deepen our understanding of Dyrrhachium’s rich and complex past.

DURRËS IN THE ANCIENT PERIOD

The beginnings of the city of Durrës belong to the proto-urban period. In ancient sources it is mentioned with the names Epidamnos (the name of the city) and Dyrrhachion (the name of the port)⁴. According to Appian⁵, there was one barbarian king, named Epidamnos, who had founded a city bearing his own name, which he describes as the upper city. And according to him, the son of the daughter of Epidamnus and Poseidon, Dyrrhachos added a port to the city, which he called Dyrrhachion. These two mythical foundations, brought by Appian, are much earlier than the Korkyra-Corinthian colonization. Archaeological research so far does not distinguish two cities installed next to each other. This double settlement, according to Thucydides, was built by the barbarian tribe of the Taulants (Illyrian ethnos), while according to Pseudo Skymit (437-438 BC), the settlement was inhabited by the Angels⁶. Coins that start to be minted in the 4th century BC bear the first three letters of Dyrrhachion (Pausanias). From the period of Roman rule onwards, the city-port is known only by the name Dyrrhachion⁸. In Old French documents it is known as Duras, while in Italian it is known as Durazzo⁹.

Regarding the location of the city-port, historical archaeological evidence locates it in the southern part of a row of hills (with a length of about 10 km and a dominant height of 184 m), located in the northwest-southeast direction. The northern wing of the hills was bordered by ‘Bishti i Palla’, mentioned by Anna Komnena (12th century) under the name Palia, Palus and in the Ragusan documents (14th century) under the name ‘Portus Pali’ and ‘Ad Palos’¹⁰, while the southern wing where it lay city-bordered

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⁷ Pausania, Descriptio Graeciae, VI, 10, 8. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...
⁹ Ibidem.

Finally, the author S. Xhyheri, starting from the archaeological data, has come to the conclusion that the Egnatia Road, with its greatness and the sources written about it, has remained in place not only the other roads, but also one of the most important bays in Vlora, where not only the armies but also the
by the sea. According to Thucydides, the city was built on a connecting strip, while according to Strabo\textsuperscript{11} (a contemporary of Augustus), the city was located on a peninsula (Chersônesos)\textsuperscript{12}.

The establishment of this center on the shores of the Adriatic was favored, first of all, by the development of relations with the Illyrian hinterland. The port represented the most active part. The market (emporion) was concentrated there, in which both goods of Illyrian origin\textsuperscript{13} and those attracted to the sphere of the Mediterranean economy circulated. After a few dozen years, the port settlement turned into a literal settlement. Among the foreign trade contacts of Epidamnos-Dyrrhachium, those with Greece dominated during the Protogeometric (1050-900 BC) and Geometric (900-700 BC) periods\textsuperscript{14}. The development of the export-import process gave new development impulses. It traded agricultural products, timber and minerals in exchange for handicraft products.

The long process of economic relations with Greek cities transformed in 625 BC into the first Hellenic settlement in the Illyrian coast, under the name of Epidaumnos, founded by settlers from Corinth and Kerkyra\textsuperscript{15}, a process that is evidenced by the cultural layers\textsuperscript{16}. The extent of the colony city was limited. The border with the Illyrians did not extend far from the city walls, where the Illyrian owners had their properties and pastures. In the first half of the 6 century BC Dyrrhachium reaches the stage of a developed city, with an extension of about 100 ha and in the 5 century BC was not simply a supplier of raw materials for a metropolitan city. The city reached a level of development that the production covered not only the demands of the citizen population, but also of the centers in the Illyrian hinterland. It operated as an economic unit independent craft and trade, oriented from the production of items for wide consumption to the minting of coins. The export of iron, copper and silver from...
Dyrrhachium, extracted from the mines of Pirust and Dardan became the main source of the city’s prosperity. Imports were limited to luxury items and works of art.\(^{17}\)

The Hellenic settlement of Dyrrhachium had an original political organization, which differed almost entirely from that of neighboring Apollonia. Legislative power was exercised by the prytan, by a council and by a popular assembly. According to Aristotle\(^ {18}\), the prytani had at his side the college of fylarki (chiefs of the city’s tribes). The magistrate of the polet was special. This institution, according to Plutarch\(^ {19}\), was given powers in the field of developing commercial relations. The city pariah elected every year a representative (called polet), with powers to meet the barbarians, supply the market and create for all citizens the opportunity to sell. The presence of this institution shows the importance of trade relations with the Illyrian hinterland for this city. Through this policy, it was intended to neutralize possible irritations or revolts of the Illyrian population.

Dyrrhachium was present in all the developments that characterized the Hellenic cities of that time. According to Herodotus\(^ {20}\), in 572 BC, a citizen from Epidamnni, took his place among the thirteen Greek contenders who competed in one of the most important ceremonies of the time. While according to Pausanias\(^ {21}\), in 516 BC, another citizen from Epidamnos, Cleostenes, wins the sporting competition of running with four-horse chariots in the Olympia games. Dyrrhachium until the middle of the 5th century BC was a constantly flourishing civic center, equal to Greek cities and with stable and peaceful relations with its Illyrian neighbours. After this time, as a result of internal crises and clashes with external rivals, Dyrrhachium’s economic splendor and political independence began to fade. The first blow came from the civil war (435 BC), which, according to Thucydides, was a consequence of the tension between the demos and the aristocrats that culminated in an armed conflict. Although the aristocrats, after securing the support of Kerkyra, managed to own the city, the losses in the economic plane left traces that will be felt in the following period.

The conflict of Dyrrhachium-Epidamnos, which began as an internal city war, soon turned into a war that involved many states of the time. It also served as a pretext for the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BC)\(^ {22}\). Meanwhile, contacts and relations with the Illyrians were always sensitive and, at this stage, even influential. The flourishing period of the Illyrian kingdom (393-300 BC) was accompanied by the effects of coastal cities, including Dyrrhachium. After the death of Alexander the Great, Glaucia (king of the Taulantians) realized the unification of the Illyrian lands, restored the Illyrian state and took the title ‘king of the Illyrians’\(^ {23}\). According to Diodorus\(^ {24}\), Epidamnos, after the Macedonians left (after the intervention of the Kerkyra ally, for which Macedonia’s exit to the Adriatic coast also harmed the economic and political interests of Kerkyra) passed into the hands of Glaukia.

In 295 BC new Bardyli (Bardyli II) is mentioned as king of the Illyrians, who came


\(^{18}\) Aristoteles, Politica, V 1, 10-11, 1301 b. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...

\(^{19}\) Plutarch, Quaestiones Graeciae, 29. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...

\(^{20}\) Herodotus, Historia, VI, 127. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...

\(^{21}\) Pausania, VI, 10, 6. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...

\(^{22}\) Jirecek K.J. Die Lage... S. 156, Jirecek K.J. Pozita e kaluemja e qytetit të Durrësit... P. 100.


\(^{24}\) Diodorus, Bibliotheca historica, XIX, 78. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...
to power with the help of Pyrrhus, giving him a part of the Illyrian kingdom\textsuperscript{25}, including Dyrhachium (297-272 BC)\textsuperscript{26}. Another testimony brings by Anna Komnena\textsuperscript{27} mentions the Epirote presence of the time of Pyrrhus in the port city. It was a period of contraction and at the same time the decline of the power of the Illyrian state, but that did not last long. It was Monuniuss\textsuperscript{28} (of the Glauca dynasty) who restored the Illyrian state over the entire former territory by strengthening the power deepened in the relations with Dyrhachium. Even in the reign of Mytilus (the last of the Glaucian dynasty), the same power as the predecessor is exercised over Dyrhachium\textsuperscript{29}.

In the middle of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century the Illyrian state has experienced a period of internal unrest, the causes of which still remain unstudied. This was used by Dyrhachium to break away from the Illyrian state\textsuperscript{30}. At the time of the reign of Agron and his wife, Teuta, historians and archaeologists\textsuperscript{31} have selected information about the ownership of Dyrhachium. Taking Polybius\textsuperscript{32} as a reference, in the spring of 229 BC, Epidamnus was attacked twice in a row by Queen Teuta, but without success. It was the help that came from a Roman expedition, which made it possible to free the city from the Illyrian siege and place it under Roman rule. Appian\textsuperscript{33} (Illyria 7-8), brings a slightly different information. According to him, Agron became lord of Epidamnus, but after the Roman intervention and the peace signed by Queen Teuta (228 BC), the coastal cities (including Dyrhachium) were put under the Roman protectorate. It continued with this status until the end of the third Illyrian-Roman war (167 BC). During this period, the city-port served for the landing and installation of troops, armaments, food, clothing, etc., for the various wars, especially with the Macedonians and the Illyrians, with whom Rome, according to Titus-Livi\textsuperscript{34}, was in constant conflicts.

The large and continuous turnover, mainly of a military nature, was a primary factor in maintaining and strengthening economic stability. The city, in addition to being an important economic and political center\textsuperscript{35}, also became one of the main military centers of Rome. With the passage of Illyria under Roman rule (167 BC), the vast majority of Illyrian cities lost a lot in terms of economic and political functions.

For Dyrhachium, with its acquisition of the status of a colony city, economically and culturally connected with Rome and organized according to the Roman model, another period of prosperity begins. At the same time, it continued to remain an important military base for later military actions of Rome in the Balkans\textsuperscript{36}. For participating in the war against the Illyrian state, the Roman senate donated a significant part of the fleet as part of the spoils captured in the war. Dyrhachium, starting from the 1\textsuperscript{st} century BC, benefited from the trade with the Italian Peninsula. It was further strengthened as an

\textsuperscript{25} Anamali S., Bicoku K., Duka F. et al. Historia e Popullit Shqiptar. Vell. I... P. 74
\textsuperscript{27} Anna Comnena. The Alexiad (III, 12, 8). Dawes E.A.S. (Transl.). Cambridge, Ontario, 2000.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{29} Anamali S., Bicoku K., Duka F. et al. Historia e Popullit Shqiptar. Vell. I... P. 75.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. P. 110
\textsuperscript{31} Bace A., Korkuti M., Ceka N. Harta arkeologike... P. 247-248.
\textsuperscript{32} Polybius, Historia, II, 9-12. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...
\textsuperscript{33} Appianus, Historia Romana, Illyrike. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...
\textsuperscript{34} Titus-Livius, Ab Urbe Condita, XLV 43, 10. In Prendi F., Ceka H., Islami S. (Eds.). Ilirët dhe Iliria...
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. P. 140
important trading center. In its port, bulk goods were unloaded that took the journey eastward and vice versa. Exports of Illyrian products (cheese, wood for construction, iron ore, etc.) continued to be a source for the economy of Dyrrhachium\(^{37}\).

The values of the Dyrrhachium increased enormously, with the construction of the Via Egnatia (Egnatia Road)\(^{38}\) built in the middle of the 2 century BC, the main branch of which started in this city to continue eastward, joining the branch coming from Apollonia in the Shkumbin valley to continue in Ohrid, Thessaloniki and ending in Constantinople. It was about 9 meters wide and 861 km long\(^{39}\). It was the shortest way since connected Constantinople with Southern Italy and along the Roman road ‘Via Apia’\(^{40}\), which started from Rome and went south to the port city of Brindisi\(^{41}\). In the 11-15 century is known as ‘King’s Road’\(^{42}\).

The Egnatia road, with its greatness and the sources written about it, overshadowed not only the other roads but also one of the most important bays, that of Vlora, where not only armies but also merchants and travellers descended. It was the safest route\(^{43}\), a factor that turned Dyrrhachium into one of the largest commercial centers in the Mediterranean. The construction of an aqueduct for the city that brought water from the river Ululeus (today’s Erzen)\(^{44}\) also belongs to the time of the Roman occupation. Administratively, Dyrrhachium, in the 1st-3rd centuries AD, was included in the Province of Macedonia, centered in Thessaloniki. After the administrative reform of the emperor Diocletian, Dyrrhachium became the capital of the coastal province of New Epirus (Epirus Nova)\(^{45}\). According to the evidence of the time, a powerful earthquake of the 348 BC\(^{46}\) destroyed the city, which somewhat dimmed the city’s splendor.

**Dyrrhachium during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages**

After the division of the Roman Empire into two parts in 395 AD, the Illyrian-Arber lands became part of the Byzantine Empire. The interests of Byzantium to maintain close ties with Rome determined the exceptional role of the Illyrian territories. Such a role was favored by the presence of ports on the Adriatic-Ionian coast, especially the port of Dyrrhachium, from which the Egnatia road began.

As part of the Byzantine Empire, the Illyrian-Arberian lands faced the barbarian invasions. The Ostrogoths, who under the leadership of Theodoric, released from their temporary settlements in Thrace and penetrating through the Egnatia road, approached Dyrrhachium in 479 AD, were forced to retreat after imperial...
interventions\textsuperscript{47}. A relative calm was created that lasted until the first decade of the 6 century. This affected the preservation of the compactness of the urban and rural population. Then the Slavic invasions of the 548 AD until the vicinity of Dyrrhachium\textsuperscript{48}, their repetition in the following years and especially the phenomenon of the creation of Slavic settlements (slavery) were a terrible pressure. But the Sclavin phenomenon for the Western Balkans (Preval, New Epirus and Old Epirus) was negligible and temporary. The Illyrian population of the western territories not only escaped the phenomenon of sclavinism, but was increased with Illyrian populations coming from the interior regions where the Slavic invasion was massive, especially after the fall of Nis (612 AD)\textsuperscript{49}. Dyrrhachium, compared to the interior Illyrian provinces, continued develops until the 6 century experienced a further flourishing\textsuperscript{50}.

The writer of the 6th century, Procopius from Gaza, describes Dyrrhachium as a city that “has an abundance of what the earth and the sea can produce”\textsuperscript{51}. It continued to be a rich and important city, with stability in goods-money ratios, with a significant increase in the number of coins, especially during the time when Justinian was emperor. It was the capital of the New Epirus province and the Episcopal seat. Dyrrhachium continued to be the oldest city large in the Balkan part of the Byzantine Empire. Ships from different Mediterranean countries were docked and processed there. The roads leading from this city continued to be important arteries for the movement of goods. Here were located the workshops and arsenals that supplied weapons and other tools to the army and the imperial fleet. It experienced a flourishing phase at the time when the empire was headed by Anastasius (491-518 AD) originally from this city\textsuperscript{52}. Parts of fortifications and ruins of monumental objects date from this period.

The destructive action of another powerful earthquake at the time when the emperor was Justinian I, destroyed a significant part of the city. Although very large expenses had to be made to rebuild the city, the boom phase was not interrupted. After 6-7 centuries, the effect of the inland floods of the Illyrian-Arber lands, avoided Dyrrhachium from its important role in the commercial communication between the West and the East. Along the Shkumbin valley (Egnatia road), Devolli and Osum, the Slavs had established their settlements. From the end of the 6 century without any special role and neglected, Egnatia road was closed for the great movement. But the Byzantine Empire at the time of Justinian II, in order to ensure the vital connection with the Adriatic coast through Egnatia road, moved to Asia Minor entire groups of Slavs who had settled in the radius of this road\textsuperscript{53}.

**DURRËS AND TRADE ROUTES AFTER THE SLAVIC INVASIONS**

After the Slavic invasions and the Bulgarian invasion, Egnatia road did not return to

\textsuperscript{47} Anamali S., Biçoku K., Duka F. et al. Historia e Popullit Shqiptar. Vëll. I... P. 204-205.


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. P. 169-176.

\textsuperscript{51} Ceka N., Korkuti M., Mato M. Arkeologjia... P. 414.


its former glory. During the following centuries, the Byzantine administration was not interested in opening a gateway through which conquests could flow both from the east to the coast and vice versa. With the establishment of the Bulgarian kingdom, since Durrës remained outside it, the Egnatia road was almost cut off, and then the road starting from Vlora began to play an important role. The Normans and then the Angevins followed more the new roads of Devolli, Vjosa or the difficult road of Mati. The lack of this road axis probably explains the dialectal and subject culture division between Northern and Southern Albania, which, as recent studies show, was born in 7-8 centuries, time that coincides exactly with the closure of the Shkumbin road. Until the Ottoman occupation, the Royal Road, as well as other arteries in the forest lands, were mainly used for military purposes during the clash between opposing states or empires, as well as during incursions to suppress uprisings of the peoples against the rulers. In their multitude are witnessed: the march of the military expedition of the emperor of Byzantium, Basil II against the Bulgarians 11 century; partly used as a bridge-passage for the Crusader armies, which landed on the eastern shore of the Adriatic beginning with the first expedition of King Robert Guiscard of Sicily, in 1081; the passage of the Acropolis army to suppress the Arber uprising of 1257-1258, etc.

As a result, this road was limited as the most important economically factor for Durrës. The benefits were limited only to the needs of the armies for military and food supplies or for the movement of goods to the east or west according to the interests of the armies that controlled this route. Even in these turbulent situations, this road with Durrës in entrance and exit gate was the safest in west-east connections. In quiet periods, the genuine commercial function of road to grew. According to an anonymous witness from 1308, from Durrës and through Arberia you can go to Greece and Constantinople very easily without any difficulties on the road or dangers at sea. While Milan Shufija gave Durrës a special position. He labeled it as "the key to the Balkans in the Middle Ages"59, the starting point of the road that connected Constantinople with Rome.

In addition to the Royal Road, from Durrës there was also the beginning of another important trade route, the one that connected it with Lezha, Shkodra and further with the northern and north-eastern arboreal regions as well as with the Serbian ones. This road was given priority especially when Durrës was under Venetian rule. These rulers asked local princes, Ottoman Turks or Slavic nobles to guarantee the circulation of

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goods on this road. Traffic on this road was vital for Durrës. The Zenta road (Via de Zenta), which joined Danja with the Durrës-Lezhë-Shkodër-Kosovo-Serbia road, had very great economic value for Durrës. This connected the city of Shkodra with Ulqin and Tivar. It summarized the routes starting from the Adriatic coast between Kotor and the mouth of the Drin, which converged at the castle and at the same time the customs point of Danja (on the Drin side). The heyday of the flowering of this trade route belongs to the late Middle Ages. After the conquest and establishment of Ottoman rule, the Royal Road seemed to have regained its luster. The Ottoman army reopened the Shkumbin road in 1466. All these roads made the city of Durrës and, in general, the surrounding forests quite important during the Middle Ages.

**The Issue of Durrës during the Byzantine-Bulgarian Clashes**

Durrës until the 6-8 centuries continued to be the center of the province of New Epirus, formed at the end of the 3 century by the emperor Diocletian that included the provinces between the rivers Mat and Vjo. This administrative unit maintained the same name and scope even in the framework of the Byzantine Empire, until the creation of the theme system.

After the influx of Slavic colonization, the province of Durrës (New Epirus) as well as the other provinces in which the forested region were included, lost direct connections with the empire. The state-administrative structures did not work. Local self-government structures began to emerge and develop, a political process that led to the creation of a relative autonomy from Byzantine power. In Durrës, a group of influential and powerful local aristocrats (the archons) was distinguished. The empire, not being able to prevent or neutralize these trends or developments, applied specific forms of relations, the exercise of power jointly with the natives. A kind of dual power was institutionalized, where the local element played a primary role in the administrative organization. The most typical model of these relations was Durrës (New Epirus), which in the 7-8 centuries represented an archondant. Power was exercised by local archons. This governance phase continued until the early 9 century.

**Formation of the Durrës Theme**

From the end of the 7 century from the fusion of the Slavic tribes with the Bulgarian ones, the first Balkan Slavic state, the Bulgarian Kingdom, was created. It soon became a danger for the Byzantine Empire, which included the Albanian territories. This danger to the Western Balkans and the deterioration of the situation

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60 Archivio Stato di Venezia (ASV) Senatus Deliberationes Mixtae (Sent. Misti.), R. 42/87 (86)-88 (87); r. 42/109 (108) v; /sen. Secr. 6/142 (141)-143 (142).
63 Ibidem.
65 Ibid. P. 171.
66 The themes were the main military and administrative divisions of the middle Byzantine Empire.
67 Ibid. P. 215.
in Southern Italy as a result of the attacks of the Franks, prompted the Byzantine Empire to move to the administrative organization of themes (military provinces). It was a process that was implemented piecemeal (7-9 centuries), starting in provinces with military emergency. Notices of interest about the organization and spatial extent of the Durrës theme are brought by the Byzantine emperor and writer Constantine Porphyrogenet.

The Durrës theme was founded in the first decades of the 9 century. The evidence comes from a letter from the year 826 of the patriarch of Constantinople, Teodor Studiti, to the archbishop of Durrës, Anthony, in which a secular functionary, Thomai, with the office of hipat and cartulary in Durrës is also mentioned. Theme constituted the main defensive system on the western side of the empire. In special cases, under the orders of the strategist of Durrës, the military forces of the neighboring themes, as well as of Byzantine Italy, were placed, and the primary military task was the defense of the western wing of the empire (the Balkans and Southern Italy). The main military force consisted of local recruits (enkoroi dynameis). Under its jurisdiction were the territories between Tivar in the north, the bay of Vlora in the south, the Drin river in the east, as well as the Byzantine possessions of Puglia (Italy)69. The core was the territory of Arbër, so it was also referred to as ‘Theme of Durrës and Arbër’70. It was the territory where political processes had earlier led to the creation of relative autonomy with Byzantium71.

At the top of the hierarchy was the strategist who held the title of duke, katapan, hypastos or sebastos. He was a certain viceroy of the emperor, who exercised military and civil power and had the right to enter into relations with other states on behalf of the emperor72. In 10 century is evidenced by the title katapan that had under the jurisdiction and Byzantine possessions of Pula (Italy), while in the 11 century with the title duke. Other functionaries in the leadership hierarchy are also witnessed, such as sub-strategists, klisurkas (they performed entirely military tasks in sectors of special strategic importance), cartulary (with the task of secretary to the katapan/Duke)73.

THE DURRËS THEME AND THE BULGARIAN KINGDOM

The creation of the theme and its equipping with military power and autonomous self-administration served as a counterweight to the Bulgarian attacks, which failed to take Durrës and its surroundings. The Bulgarians penetrated first to the belt between the rivers Devoll and Vjosë74. The largest extent belongs to the period of King Simeon75, with the conquest of the overwhelming part of the territories, with the exception of Durrës and Shkodra. The conquest of the inner forest land and Simeon’s ambition to form a Bulgarian empire instead of the Byzantine one remained for decades a present pressure for Durrës and its surroundings. But, after his death (May 27, 927), the successors, Peter and Boris, did not continue the ambition of the

69 Ibidem.
74 At this time, the head of the Bulgarian state was King Boris (852-879).
75 King Simeon was in power in 894-927.
latter. They recognized Byzantine sovereignty. The situation of Arbero-Byzantine cooperative relations was temporarily restored. Administrative power was mainly exercised by the local aristocracy, especially by the Krisil family from Durrës. Byzantine sovereignty over Bulgaria lasted only a few decades. Byzantium faced movements of a decentralizing nature in its various provinces, such as the Caliphate of the Fatimids (Egypt), in the last quarter of the 10th century.

The death of Emperor John I Tzimiskes (January 976) was a loss that also affected the confrontation of the growing movements against the central government. At the end of the 10th century Anti-Byzantine movements in the Balkan provinces come to the fore. First, the rebellion broke out and was crowned with success in the provinces of Macedonia, led by the Bulgarian brothers: David, Moses, Aaron and Samuel. The latter managed to come to the head of the reformed Bulgarian state and stayed in power in the period 976-1014.

King Samuel, focused his attention on the wooded territories to soon become involved in a long conflict with the Byzantines. The forested areas overlooking the entire stretch of the Adriatic coast with Durrës as a metropolitan city, for important economic, political and strategic interests, were included in Samuel’s plans. It aimed at the destruction of the Byzantine Empire and the establishment of a Bulgarian state all over the Balkans. In order to achieve the goal, Samuel paid special attention to the cooperation with the forested lands, especially the one of Durrës. Entered into conversation with the main representative, Gjon Krisil. The talks ended with the signing of an alliance between the Durrsak pariah and the Bulgarian king, which was also strengthened by the marriage of Gjon Krisil’s daughter, Agatha, with Samuel. After the signing of the alliance, the Albanian territories, between Ulcinj in the north and Vlora in the south, including Durrës, came under Bulgarian jurisdiction. Based on the alliance agreement, Samuel did not bring changes in the administrative-military structures of the Albanian territories. In Durrës, it did not affect the privileges and power of the city council, represented by the rich family of the Krisils. The Krisil-Samuel alliance, which lasted about 20 years, has been appreciated in historical opinion for the advanced degree of autonomous administration. Durrës and its surroundings spent an almost independent period under the leadership of the Krisil family.

CONCLUSION

Since the period of the city’s construction, known as the proto-urban era, the city of Durrës has been known by two names: Epidamnos and Dyrrhachion. In general, the good geo-strategic position of this center on the shores of the Adriatic, enabled it to develop relations with the Illyrian hinterland, as well as to be included in the sphere of the Mediterranean economy. Thus directly affecting the economic development of the city. Especially the period when Epidamnos became the center of the first Hellenic

78 Ibidem.
80 Dulaj E. Zhvillime politike të Durrësit… P. 132.
81 Ibidem.
settlements on the Illyrian coast, in 625 BC, the city experienced a rapid economic development. Thus, Dyrrhachium ensured not only the demands of its citizens but also of the centers in the Illyrian hinterland.

The economic prosperity of the city took its first blow from the civil war of 435 BC between the aristocrats and the demos. Very quickly the city fell into the hands of the state of Glaucia, which achieved the unification of the Illyrian lands. While the later Roman occupation, for Dyrrhachium, marks another period of prosperity. Already the export and import of this coastal city was closely connected with the Italic Peninsula. The value of Dyrrhachium multiplied, when in the second half of the 2nd century BC, the Via Egnatia (Egnatia road) was built, which started in Dyrrhachium and ended in Constantinople. Via Egnatia, with Dyrrhachium as its main station on the Adriatic, influenced the economic rise of Dyrrhachium as one of the largest centers of the Mediterranean.

Despite the influx of Germanic tribes, the city of Durrës continued to maintain a high level of economic development, as the largest center of the Byzantine Empire in the Balkans. The Slavic insistence affected the interruption of commercial communication between the East and the West. The benefits that came from the trade were quite limited by the military needs as well as the interests of the armies that controlled the Egnatia road. After the Slavic invasions, local self-governing structures were also born. The differentiation of the aristocrats of Durrës and the impossibility of the Byzantine Empire to extend its full power, forced the latter to apply other forms of extending influence. The administrative organization was left in the hands of the locals. Durrës was the most specific example of the representation of an archon in the 7-8 centuries.

The danger from the Bulgarian state forced the Byzantine Empire to take steps in its administrative reorganization. In the first decade of the 9th century, the Durrës theme was created, whose main task was the protection from the western wing of the empire. This subject included the lands between Tivar in the north, the bay of Vlora in the south, the river Drin in the east and the Byzantine possessions of Apulia (Italy). Military and civil power was exercised through the strategist, and he could enter into relations with other states on behalf of the emperor.

The creation of the Durres theme served as a counterweight to the Bulgarian attacks, which in Simeon’s time managed to extend its possessions to near Durres. The danger from the Bulgarian influence was strengthened at the time when Samuel (976-1014) came to the head of their state. In the focus of his interests, Samuel especially forested lands. For this reason, he entered into a relationship with Gjon Krisil, the representative of the Durrës parish. The signing of the alliance between these two made the areas between Ulcinj and Vlora pass under Bulgarian jurisdiction. The Krisil-Samuel alliance did not affect the internal functioning of the city of Durrës.

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Надійшла до редакції / Received: 03.02.2024 Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 13.04.2024