

Baxhaku, Fatos & Kaser, Karl: Die Stammesgesellschaften Nordalbaniens. Berichte und Forschungen österreichischer Konsuln und Gelehrter (1861-1917). Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau 1996. 459 pp.

Even as the twentieth century draws to a close, the mountains of northern Albania remain one of the most fascinating areas of Europe for anthropologists and ethnographers. It is here that many vestiges of an isolated tribal society are still to be found. This tribal society, or perhaps better these tribal societies, despite their allegedly wild and lawless nature, had their own system of consuetudinary law, notably the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, which regulated all aspects of social intercourse in the otherwise unruly and unruleable mountains.

In the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, these tribal societies, especially in the isolated reaches of the Albanian alps, were virtually untouched by western 'civilization' and it is to this society and to this age that the present volume *Die Stammesgesellschaften Nordalbaniens* is devoted.

The authors, Fatos Baxhaku of the Institute of History of the Albanian Academy of Sciences in Tirana (Albania), and Karl Kaser of the Institute of History of the University of Graz (Austria), rightly stress in their introduction (p. 7-26) that a book about the tribal societies of northern Albania concerns not only the distant past, but also the present. Many aspects of traditional consuetudinary law have survived there despite centuries of Turkish rule and despite radical efforts by the Communist (and mostly southern Albanian) rulers in Tirana to impose their Marxist authority in the years 1946 to 1990. The most notable aspect of this society, its ubiquitous blood feuding or vendettas, was never eradicated completely and has indeed enjoyed an unhindered revival since the end of the dictatorship.

The present volume is divided into two main sections. The first section (p. 27-204) is a compilation of ninety-nine reports to Vienna by Austrian diplomats and scholars based in Shkodër (formerly Scutari) from 1861 to 1917. It should be noted in this connection that Austria-Hungary had a particular interest in northern Albania, not only within the framework of the *Kultusprotektorat*, which gave it the legal mandate to protect the interests of the Catholic tribes of the north, but also as a Great Power rivalling with the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Russia, England and France to exert its political influence in the Balkans. These texts, prepared for the most part by consular officials, including Dubravcich, Rehm, Wassitch, Lippich, Hickel, Ranzi, Bornemisza, Kwiatkowski, Kohlruss and Zambaur, and by more noted figures such as August Ritter von Kral (1859-1918), Theodor Anton Ippen (1861-1935), and Alfred Rappaport von Arbenau (1868-1918), offer a wide gamut of information on tribal structure, organisation and history. They include reports on relations with the Ottoman authorities, economic and social conditions among the tribes, tribal wars and conflicts, leaders and *bajraktars*, relations with neighbouring Montenegrin tribes, blood feuding, the *besa* (sworn oath), as well as material on animal husbandry, agriculture and water resources. Baxhaku and Kaser, whose main interest is tribal structures, have consciously omitted reports of an exclusively political nature, which will of course be a disappointment to historians.

The second section of the book (p. 205-428) is actually a book of its own. Franz Baron Nopcsa (1877-1933), Austro-Hungarian geologist, palaeontologist, ethnographer, historian and traveller, was one of the great figures of Albanian studies in the early decades of the twentieth century. Of his many works (principally in German and Hungarian), mention may be made of *Aus Šala und Klementi, Albanische Wanderungen* (Sarajevo 1910); *Haus und Hausrat im katholischen Nordalbanien* (Sarajevo 1912); *Albanien - Bauten, Trachten und Geräte Nordalbaniens* (Berlin 1925); and *Geologie und Geographie Nordalbaniens* (Budapest 1929). Unfortunately Baron Nopcsa was plagued by ill health and bouts of depression in his later years in Vienna. On 25 April 1933 he shot his Albanian lover and

faithful secretary, Elmas Doda Bajazid, and committed suicide, leaving unpublished a major work: *Die Bergstämme Nordalbaniens und ihr Gewohnheitsrecht*. This 510 page, five-part study of the northern tribes and their consuetudinary law found its way into the manuscript collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna (Ser. nova 9392) where it remained unpublished. In this second section of their book, Baxhaku and Kaser have brought to light parts III (*Die Geschichte der nordalbanischen Gebirgsstämme*) and IV (*Das nordalbanische Gewohnheitsrecht*) of Nopcsa's manuscript, which, as they rightly stress, are the essential parts of the latter work.

After introductory remarks about the nature of the tribal system in the northern Albanian mountains, Nopcsa recounts in part III of his work (p. 207-315) the history of each of the tribes: 1. Klmeni (Kelmendi), 2. Boga, 3. Kastrati, 4. Hoti, 5. Gruda, 6. Shkreli, 7. Loja, 8. Shala, 9. Shoshi, 10. Nikaj, 11. Toplana, 12. Shllaku, 13. Dushmani, 14. Planti, 15. Kiri, Suma and Gjani, 16. Merturi, 17. Mazrek and Drishti, 18. Berisha, 19. Thaçi, 20. Dardha, 21. Dushi, 22. Komani, 23. Bobi, 24. Çelza, 25. Merdita (Mirdita). He recorded, compared and compiled these histories from oral tradition himself, i.e. from what the members of the tribes knew of their origins. Nopcsa goes on to analyze the role of the *bajraktar* (flag-bearer), the *plecnija* (modern Alb. *pleqnia*) or council of elders, the *voglija* (full male community) and the family unit. Also included is material on the functions of tribal organization, the reasons for its rise and existence, and the special role of the *Kapedan* (captain) of Mirdita.

Part IV of Baron Nopcsa's work (p. 317-428) is a comprehensive study of northern Albanian consuetudinary law. Here the essential elements of the *Kanun* are brought forth and elucidated: I.) General remarks; II.) Crimes committed against individuals (murder, frequency of murders, lawful murder, unlawful murder, punishment for murder, public sanctions, revenge on the part of the victim's relatives, measures to confine feuding, temporary interruption of a feud, termination of a feud, bodily harm, punishment for bodily harm, bodily harm to wives committed by their husbands, and attempted murder); III.) Honour (loss of honour, violations to the right of hospitality, murder of a defenceless person, slander, disarming, insults, loss of honour through insults to one's guest, and means of redeeming one's honour); IV.) Property (right to property, tribal land, family property, personal property, acquisition of property, contracts, infringements of property, theft, and damage to property); V.) Marriage law (marriage contracts, engagement, marriage, a wife's duties, dissolution of a marriage, remarriage, legal status of widows); and VI.) Legal customs (legal procedures, vows of chastity and blood feuding).

The volume concludes with a bibliography of works cited (p. 431-436), the list of documents from the first section (p. 437-442), an index of place and tribal names (p. 443-448), an index of persons (p. 449-452), and a subject index (p. 453-459).

The two authors of *Die Stammesgesellschaften Nordalbaniens* are to be commended for their successful work towards bringing the exotic society of the northern Albanian tribes to the attention of the outside world. The present volume can be seen, in particular, as another valuable addition to Karl Kaser's ethnographic studies of traditional Balkan society: *Hirten, Kämpfer, Stammeshelden - Ursprünge und Gegenwart des balkanischen Patriarchats* (Wien, Köln & Weimar 1992); *Familie und Verwandtschaft auf dem Balkan - Analyse einer untergehenden Kultur* (Wien, Köln & Weimar 1995); and Helmut Eberhart & Karl Kaser's *Albanien - Stammesleben zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Wien, Köln & Weimar 1995). Mention must also be made in this connection of the recent, monumental English translation of *The Code of Lekë Dukagjini* by Leonard Fox (New York 1989).

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