

SCANDERBEG

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In the city of Lezhë overlooking the Adriatic Sea, there is a memorial to Albania's national hero, Scanderbeg (1405-1468). Born Giorgi Kastrioti in this city of northern Albania, he earned the title of "Lord Alexander" – Scanderbeg in Albanian – for his military genius in leading his Christian army against the Moslem armies of the Ottoman Empire. For 25 years (1443-1468), his 10,000 Christian Knights consistently inflicted defeat after defeat upon always much larger Moslem forces.

His victory in the Battle of Albulena in 1457, where he destroyed an Ottoman army of 70,000, killing 15,000 and taking 15,000 prisoners, so astounded all of Christendom that Pope Calixtus III appointed him Captain-General of the Holy See, and gave him the title of *Athleta Christi*, Champion of Christ.

By the 1500s with Scanderbeg but a memory, the Ottomans conquered Albania and Islamized it for almost 400 years. With the rise of Albanian nationalism in the late 19th century, Scanderbeg's memory was revived. Today he is revered by Albanians who only ostensibly remain Islamic yet idolize a Christian King who devoted his life to defeating their country's Moslem oppressors. (*Glimpses of Our Breathtaking World #247 photo ©Jack Wheeler*)

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