CHAPTER 1

The Balkans in the Late Twelfth Century

By 1172 Manuel I Comnenus had recovered for the Byzantine Empire all the Balkans except for what is now Slovenia and the Croatian territory north of the Krka River, which Hungary retained. But the Hungarian presence was not a major danger to Byzantium because the Hungarian throne was then occupied by King Bela III (1172–96), an imperial in-law (having married the step-sister of Manuel’s wife) who after a long residence at the imperial court had been allowed to return to Hungary to take its throne after having sworn allegiance to Manuel. In the warfare against Hungary, prior to Bela’s assumption of power, the empire had recovered from Hungary Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Srem. Probably in Croatia and Bosnia little or no direct imperial rule existed, which would have left these lands in the hands of local nobles who only nominally accepted Byzantine suzerainty. Closer to imperial centers, the Serbian lands of Raška, Zeta, and Hum were under vassal princes at the time loyal to the empire, while Bulgaria and Macedonia were still annexed and under regular Byzantine administration. These last two regions, Bulgaria and Macedonia, were divided into three themes (i.e., militarized provinces under military governors entitled strategoi). However, although the empire seemed to be in a strong position with direct control over much of the Balkans and indirect control (through vassal princes) over the rest, seeds of destruction existed that threatened the maintenance of this situation.

First, as we saw in the previous volume,¹ the theme administration was in decline. No longer did the military governor have sufficient forces directly under his command to control and defend his province. Provincial magnates had been increasing their estates and building up large private armies. In order to carry out its military needs when it found its thematic army (i.e., the state troops directly under the strategos) insufficient, the state had had to turn to these magnates and award them additional lands as fiefs (called pronoias) in order to obtain military service from them. The pronoiar (or pronoia holder) owed for his fief military service accompanied by a given number (depending on the size of the fief) of retainers. By Manuel’s time in most provinces the retainers of the pronoiaars plus mercenaries made up over half of a province’s
armed forces. Thus in a time of weakness at the center, the strategos might well have been unable to force obedience from the magnates; as a result more and more local authority was falling into the hands of local magnates, setting the stage for separatism. We shall soon return to this problem when we turn to the imperial Balkans (especially Greece and Thrace) in the period after Manuel’s death. Second, the vassal princes, though cowed by Manuel’s successful military campaigns against them, culminating in his forcing submission from Stefan Nemanja of Serbia (Raška) in 1172, were not necessarily happy with this situation. Thus the people in the border regions were more or less waiting for Manuel’s death to re-assert themselves. This was particularly true of Serbia.

Stefan Nemanja Acquires Power in Serbia

The previous volume traced the course of events in Serbia under Vukan, Uroš I, Uroš II, and Desa through the mid-1160s. It discussed the large number of Serbian revolts (often aided by Hungary) for full independence. Each time, the Byzantines were able sooner or later to suppress these uprisings, but Serbia never remained pacified for long. Even when Byzantium changed rulers in Serbia—as it did upon occasion—it could not prevent new rebellions from breaking out. Finally in about 1166 a major change occurred in Serbia. The old dynasty was replaced by a new one headed at first by a certain Tihomir who was quickly replaced by his brother Stefan Nemanja. This new dynasty was to reign in Serbia until 1371.

Where the founders of this new dynasty came from and what—if any—connection they had to the preceding dynasty is a matter of great controversy. Unfortunately, very little is really known about the subject. In the years prior to 1165/66 Serbia had been ruled by a family related to the dynasty of Duklja or Zeta (what is now Montenegro). This Serbian or Raškan branch of the family traced its descent to a certain Vukan, a nephew of Constantine Bodin of Duklja, who had been appointed governor of Raška by Bodin in 1083/84. After Vukan’s death, succession went to his son Uroš I who was then succeeded by his son Uroš II. With a brief interruption when the Byzantines ousted him in favor of his brother Desa in 1155, Uroš II ruled Serbia until 1161/62, when the Byzantines intervened again and restored Desa. Desa, under pressure, supported Byzantium in its campaign of 1163 or 1164 against Hungary.

In the late 1160s Uroš and Desa disappear from the scene and four brothers (Tihomir, Stracimir, Miroslav, and Stefan Nemanja) came to rule Serbia. Who were they and where did they come from? Most scholars have concluded that the four were somehow related to the preceding dynasty. Later Serbian and Dalmatian sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries state Nemanja was the son of Desa. A relationship to the previous dynasty is also suggested by the fact that both Nemanja’s charter issued to Hilandar in 1198 and the biographies of him written by his sons state that he came to
power in his grandfather’s patrimony, implying he had a right to inherit it. They also state that Nemanja’s great-grandfather and grandfather had ruled the land but make no such claims about his father. The natural inference from this is that Desa could not have been his father. Also militating against Desa as his father is an inscription written in a Gospel by Nemanja’s brother Miroslav that states Miroslav was the son of Zavid. Nothing else is known about Zavid, but he might well have been an otherwise unknown son of Uroš I. Also suggesting descent from Uroš I is the fact that several of Nemanja’s descendants who were to rule Serbia bore the name Stefan Uroš.²

The life of Nemanja by his son Stefan states that Stefan Nemanja, the youngest son of a man whose name is not given, was born in Zeta near Podgorica (modern Titograd) after his father, having involved himself in a power struggle with his brothers, had fled Raška for Zeta. There Nemanja received a Catholic baptism, for that region was under Catholic jurisdiction. This statement reflects the strength of Catholicism in western Zeta and shows that that faith was not limited to Zeta’s coastal cities. When the family returned to Raška, Nemanja was re-baptized in an Orthodox ceremony. The father presumably had either tried to oust Uroš II or Desa or else had tried to acquire an appanage of his own and, failing in his attempt, had then fled. Subsequently when this father, presumably named Zavid, eventually died at an unknown date, each son received a hereditary appanage. Thus his lands were divided among his sons with precedence going to the eldest, Tihomir. Nemanja’s appanage lay in the region of the Ibar River and included Toplica. Though no dates are given in any source as to when Nemanja received this appanage, it was probably about 1166, the approximate date when the four brothers replaced Desa as joint rulers of Serbia, with seniority belonging to Tihomir.

In fact, it seems likely that this family was installed by Manuel, and one would expect him to turn to the existing ruling family, for its members would be more likely to gain acceptance from the Serbs than would leaders from an entirely new family. Manuel’s role and the approximate date of 1166 for the change of ruler find support in a Byzantine oration published by Robert Browning and referring to events of about 1166. The oration states that Manuel easily reduced the Serbs to submission; they repented and accepted the change of ruler that Manuel imposed on them. Thus quite possibly Desa did something to displease Manuel, leading once again to Byzantine intervention and a change on the Serbian throne. Or possibly since a major war with Hungary had flared up in 1166, Desa’s ties with Hungary simply made his continued presence as leader of Serbia seem too dangerous. Since 1166 is about the date other sources give for Tihomir’s coming to power, it makes sense to conclude that Tihomir was the ruler appointed in that year over the Serbs by Manuel. From the start of Tihomir’s reign Serbian territory was divided among the four brothers: Tihomir, Stracimir, Miroslav, and Stefan Nemanja. Tihomir, the eldest, bore the title Grand župan.

Now, with Tihomir on the throne, we can turn to the Serbian sources,
which unfortunately provide no dates for events. The near contemporary ones are two lives of Stefan Nemanja (each in the form of a saint’s life) written by two of his sons early in the thirteenth century, after Nemanja’s death. One was written by Stefan Prvovenčani (the First-Crowned), his successor on the throne of Serbia (1196–1227), and the other was written by his youngest son Sava, who became a monk and later, in 1219, the first Archbishop of Serbia.

These biographies state that Nemanja received his inherited lands from his father. As noted, these consisted of the Ibar region with Toplica. Whether he received this territory before or after Tihomir acquired the throne is not known. We are told that Nemanja also received Dubočica as an appanage from Manuel. Most scholars believe that the Dubočica appanage was the same as the appanage of Dendra near Niš, which Manuel had assigned to Desa previously when he deposed him and restored Uroš II to the throne in 1155 or 1156. As a result Nemanja was not only the vassal of his elder brother Tihomir but was also a direct vassal of Manuel for Dubočica. This direct tie to Byzantium probably alarmed Tihomir, who must have seen it as a threat to his own rule. Stefan Prvovenčani’s biography also states that Nemanja built a church to the Virgin at Toplica and a second church dedicated to Saint Nicholas on the near-by River Banja without seeking Tihomir’s approval, as Tihomir believed Nemanja should have. Nemanja, on the other hand, considered himself free to erect churches on his own initiative. Thus it seems Nemanja was, or Tihomir at least thought he was, trying to assert his own independence, possibly through an alliance with the Byzantines.

Tihomir summoned Nemanja, and when he came had him thrown in jail in chains. He then seized Nemanja’s lands. Nemanja’s supporters made Tihomir’s actions appear to be a response to Nemanja’s church building, and thus the Church was mobilized against Tihomir, be it at the time or subsequently, by using this issue to justify the revolt that won Nemanja the throne. Nemanja prayed to Saint George, who effected his escape. He fled to his own province. Since a clash was inevitable, Nemanja began mobilizing an army. Warfare followed, and through the help of God and of Saint George Nemanja triumphed and expelled his brothers. The other two brothers presumably suffered expulsion for continued support of Tihomir. Very likely the real miracle behind Nemanja’s victory was Byzantine help. Manuel may well have been displeased with Tihomir for acting on his own against Nemanja, who was also Manuel’s vassal. By depicting Nemanja’s victory as a miracle, Stefan Prvovenčani was able to imply God’s favor for Nemanja. Moreover, having Nemanja do it alone (or with God’s help) was more in keeping with Serbian pride than an admission that he needed Byzantine help. Nemanja’s expulsion of Tihomir and assumption of the throne probably occurred in 1167 or 1168. Niketas Choniates refers to Nemanja as being Grand župan in 1168 but does not give the date he assumed the title.

Nemanja, having acquired all Raška after the expulsion of his brothers, had quickly become a powerful figure. Presumably his success had made him stronger than Manuel liked. In any case, Manuel soon gave his support to
Tihomir and the two other brothers, who had all fled to Byzantium. After all, the Byzantines had initially installed Tihomir and presumably did not like his expulsion; surely they wanted to see Serbia divided among several princes to keep it weak. When Nemanja was the weaker figure, they had been willing to support him, but they had not sought his total triumph. So, claiming that Nemanja had acted against the legal rulers of Serbia, the Byzantines provided Tihomir with an army. Choniates describes the background of this new campaign as follows:

Then the emperor [Manuel] turned west to Philippopolis, for he had learned that the Serbian satrap, who was Stefan Nemanja, had become bolder than he should have, and being a man who evilly used his free time and who was filled with unsated desires, he strove to expand his authority over all the neighboring provinces, cruelly attacking his own family, and not knowing any limit he tried to take Croatia (?) and Kotor.

This Byzantine force, as well as the Serbian troops collected by the brothers, invaded Raška from Skopje. This attack posed a serious danger to Nemanja; not only was he worried about the size of the armies against him, but he also found himself for the first time fighting against the troops of his suzerain Manuel. Possibly, however, the presence of Byzantine troops tarnished Tihomir’s cause in the eyes of the independent-minded Serbs. In any case, Nemanja was able to raise a large army. The two armies met at the village of Pantino near Zvečan on the Sitnica River. Nemanja won a major victory, again with Saint George’s help, and Tihomir was killed, drowning in the Sitnica. The two remaining brothers, Stracimir and Miroslav, made peace with Nemanja and recognized him as Grand župan of Serbia and as their suzerain. Nemanja allowed them appanages, presumably restoring to them their former holdings. Miroslav obtained Hum, and Stracimir a territory in northern Raška on the West Morava River centered near modern Čačak. The two brothers were allowed broad autonomy in ruling their lands; they remained loyal to Nemanja thereafter. Then, if not later, Tihomir’s son Prvoslav submitted to Nemanja and seems to have been allowed a small appanage, Budimlje (near modern Ivangrad) on the Lim, in which he built the well-known church of Djurdjevi Stupovi, the seat of the subsequent Bishop of Budimlje. The important battle of Pantino occurred between 1168 and 1171; most scholars now accept a date nearer to 1168.

At this time Hungary, still under the anti-Byzantine Stephen III, and Venice, angry at Manuel’s massive arrest of the Venetians residing in the empire in 1171, were trying to create an anti-Byzantine coalition. A Venetian embassy visited Nemanja, who was probably expecting further Byzantine action against himself for his resistance against the Byzantine army that had supported Tihomir. Thus he willingly joined the coalition. His troops moved against Kotor while those of Miroslav attacked Omiš. The Serbs were also active against various Byzantine forts along the Niš-Beograd (Belgrade)
route. When a domestic naval revolt ended the Venetians’ participation and the death of Stephen III in Hungary made it possible for Manuel’s candidate, Bela III, to mount the Hungarian throne, Stefan Nemanja was left high and dry. Manuel, now free to turn against him, marched into Raška. Nemanja, seeing that resistance against a major Byzantine force was hopeless, went forth to surrender and submit to the emperor. The emperor made him go through a humiliating ceremony at the imperial camp and then took him back to Constantinople for another humiliating ceremony there that featured long orations celebrating his submission. Some wall-paintings depicting Nemanja at this ceremony bareheaded, barefooted, and with a rope around his neck were painted. Then, as a sworn loyal vassal, Nemanja was allowed to return to Serbia as its Grand župan. Nemanja remained loyal to the oath he took to the emperor for the next eight years, the duration of Manuel’s life. During this period Nemanja, though a Byzantine vassal, firmly established himself as ruler of Raška.

Byzantine Difficulties in the Balkans under Andronicus I

Manuel died in 1180, and a brief and unsuccessful regency for his minor son, Alexius II, followed. What had held Bela III of Hungary and Nemanja loyal had been personal ties to Manuel. Now those ties were broken, and in 1181 Bela recovered Srem, Dalmatia, and most probably Croatia as well. It seems this was a bloodless recovery; perhaps the Byzantines even acquiesced in it. It was a time of anarchy and intrigue at home, and Byzantium was in no position to send troops to Dalmatia. Presumably it seemed better to lose Dalmatia to friendly Hungary than to Venice, with which Byzantium was at war. Venice had in fact already seized Zadar (Zara), and the Hungarians had to take it by force in February 1181. Meanwhile, the regency for the young Alexius was unpopular, and an elderly cousin named Andronicus Comnenus, who had long been a dissident against Manuel and had been exiled all over the map, appeared with an army in Asia Minor. At first he seemed appealing to the population of Constantinople. He was willing to pose as being anti-Western (for the Westerners under Manuel’s widow, a Latin princess, held great influence) and anti-rich. And he was to ride to power on the coat-tails of a riot in which hundreds of Westerners in the city of Constantinople were massacred. He awaited the end of the bloodbath and then entered the city, whose gates were opened to him. He became regent for the little boy in 1183. He quickly had Alexius’ mother strangled, then made himself co-emperor, and finally had Alexius strangled. As a result he became the sole emperor. These murders gave Bela the opportunity to step forward to avenge the victims. Bela’s wife was the step-sister of Manuel’s murdered widow. Bela moved at once and occupied Beograd and Braničevo. Then, picking up the Serbs as allies, he headed down the main invasion route (the modern Orient Express route), driving out imperial garrisons from Niš and Sardika (modern Sofija) and sacking them both. Six years later, passing crusaders spoke of the two
tOWNS AS BEING DESERTED AND PARTLY IN RUINS. THE HUNGARIANS WERE TO KEEP
CONTROL OF THIS HIGHWAY AND THE TOWNS ALONG IT FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS.

AT HOME ANDRONICUS WAS FIGHTING CORRUPTION, BUT HE ALSO SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN INTENT ON ELIMINATING ANY AND ALL POWERFUL AND RICH FIGURES WHO MIGHT CONCEIVABLY HAVE SOUGHT HIS OVERTHROW AND ON AVENGING HIMSELF ON THOSE WHO HAD OPPOSED HIM EARLIER. FALLING VICTIM TO A PERSECUTION MANIA, HE UNLEASHED A REIGN OF TERROR IN THE CAPITAL, WHICH LED TO VARIOUS PLOTS AGAINST HIM. THE HUNGARIANS, WHO OCCUPIED MUCH OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN BALKANS, WERE IN THRACE AND THREATENED TO ATTACK THE CAPITAL. THEN IN JUNE 1185 THE NORMANS FROM SOUTHERN ITALY LAUNCHED AN ATTACK ON DURAZZO (DYRRACHIUM, DURRÉS). THE COMMANDER OF DURAZZO, ALEXIUS BRANAS, IMMEDIATELY SURRENDERED THE CITY TO THEM, FOR HE WAS OPPOSED TO ANDRONICUS. THE NORMAN ARMY THEN MOVED ACROSS THE BALKANS TOWARD THERSONIKI (SALONICA), WHILE THE NORMAN FLEET, HAVING OCCUPIED CORFU (KERKIRA, CORCYRA), SAILED AROUND INTO THE AEgeAN AND OCCUPIED VARIOUS OTHER ISLANDS. IN AUGUST 1185 THIS FLEET FINALLY REACHED THERSONIKI. THE ARMY ARRIVED THERE AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, AND AFTER A BRIEF SIEGE THE NORMANS TOOK THERSONIKI ON 24 AUGUST AND SACKED IT, MASSACRING LARGE NUMBERS OF ITS CITIZENS. PART OF THE NORMAN ARMY THEN MOVED TOWARD SERRES AND TOOK THAT CITY; OTHER NORMANS WENT OFF PLUNDERING INTO THESSALY, WHILE STILL OTHERS HEADED FOR CONSTANTINOPLE.

SERBIAN EXPANSION AND MILITARY ACTIVITIES, 1180–90


NEMANJA’S ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN DALMATIA BROUGHT HIM INTO CONFLICT WITH
Dubrovnik. Fighting seems to have broken out in 1184. The issues of dispute seem to have been both territorial and ecclesiastical. As Nemanja acquired Hum (formerly Zahumlje) and Zeta, which as principalities had controlled much of the territory around Dubrovnik, Nemanja and Dubrovnik laid overlapping claims to certain borderlands. Furthermore, Nemanja had acquired Bar, whose bishop had been made an independent archbishop by the pope in 1089. Since this change had meant a considerable loss of territory for Dubrovnik’s archbishop, Dubrovnik had protested long and hard against it. Finally in 1142 Dubrovnik had triumphed when the pope reduced Bar’s archbishop to a bishop and again subordinated Bar to Dubrovnik. Outraged by this reversal of policy, Bar was still protesting when Nemanja acquired Bar in the 1180s. Furthermore Hum had now been annexed by Raška and assigned as the holding of Nemanja’s brother Miroslav. Having as its capital the coastal city of Ston, Hum was oriented toward coastal affairs and had economic and territorial ambitions that clashed with Dubrovnik’s. One such ambition was to control the island of Korčula.

In 1184 Nemanja’s brother Stracimir, presumably with Nemanja’s blessing, launched an attack against Korčula. The action failed as the islanders, aided by Dubrovnik, repelled the invaders, and Hum was soon forced to give up its claim to Korčula. Dubrovnik’s support of the islanders of Korčula rankled with the Serbs. It is not clear whether Nemanja had already gone to war against Dubrovnik, making its support of Korčula part of its war against Nemanja, or whether Dubrovnik’s assistance to Korčula was the last straw leading Nemanja to initiate his war against Dubrovnik. But in any case in 1185 Nemanja attacked the city of Dubrovnik itself and laid siege to it. Later chronicles from Dubrovnik (written three hundred or more years later) state that the siege failed. However, a Church document prepared for the pope in the 1250s (probably in 1255) in connection with the Dubrovnik-Bar Church quarrel, explaining the loss of certain documents, states that Nemanja captured Dubrovnik. Although most historians have accepted the statements made by the chronicles, Foretić argues plausibly that the city fell. After all, the 1255 document was prepared only seventy years after the event and is far older than the chronicles. Foretić thinks Nemanja penetrated into the town or at least into part of it. For the 1255 document states he plundered part of the city, including the archives, which as a result lost certain documents. The archival losses were not wanton theft, but included the calculated removal of certain materials that argued against Bar’s claims.

The Serbs were unable to hold the town. Did a Ragusan counter-attack force them out, or did Dubrovnik receive outside help? Since Dubrovnik in 1186 is found under Norman suzerainty, it seems likely that the town received Norman assistance. Either the threat of Norman intervention or even an actual Norman campaign may well have forced the Serbs to depart. By autumn 1186, for whatever reason, but most probably one related to Ragusan negotiations with the Normans, Nemanja had given up the idea of conquering and retaining Dubrovnik. He made peace with the city. The treaty was signed 27
September 1186 in the city of Dubrovnik “in the lands of lord King William,” the Norman ruler of Sicily, and before his representative, thereby showing the existence of Norman suzerainty. The treaty was also signed in the name of all three Serbian brothers by two of them, Nemanja and Miroslav, showing that their rule was a family enterprise and that Nemanja as Grand župan, though senior, was obliged to consult his brothers.

The treaty ended the war. Both sides agreed not to seek damages for destruction occurring during the fighting. It re-established the pre-war borders, enabling Dubrovnik to retain rights to its “patrimony,” which had been under dispute (presumably to Rožat and Kurilo mentioned in the document). Dubrovnik received the right to trade duty-free in Nemanja’s and Miroslav’s lands, particularly along the Neretva and at the customs station at Drijeva. Dubrovnik also received the right to carry out other economic activities (including chopping wood and grazing flocks) without hindrance in Serbian lands in the vicinity of Dubrovnik, according to former custom. The tribute that Dubrovnik had formerly rendered partly in wine and partly in cash to the princes of Hum and Trebinje, presumably in return for these economic privileges, would henceforth be paid entirely in cash. Joint courts were to be established; thus legal disputes between Serbs and Ragusans were to be settled by a court composed of an equal number of Serbs and Ragusans. Hum renounced its claims to the islands of Korčula and Vis. Each party to the treaty received the right to give asylum to the enemies of the other but was obliged to see that such enemies did not use this asylum as a base to attack the other.

**Isaac Angelus Assumes Power in Byzantium and Expels the Normans**

On 12 September 1185 Andronicus ordered the arrest of a Constantinopolitan nobleman, Isaac Angelus. Isaac resisted arrest, and since his family stood jointly responsible for the correct behavior of all its members, his resistance threatened the whole Angelus clan. The Angeli began stirring up mob action. This was not difficult to do, for there was much popular dissatisfaction with the reign of terror unleashed by Andronicus and there was widespread belief that he was doing nothing to resist the Normans who were rapidly approaching the city. The uprising was made easier by Andronicus’ being outside the city at that moment. The revolution succeeded. Isaac Angelus, a cousin of the Comneni, obtained the throne. He was to rule for the next decade, 1185–95. Andronicus was seized and tortured to death.

Isaac’s first task was to expel the Normans from the Balkans. He quickly mobilized a large force and sent it out against them under the able commander Alexius Branas. Unaware of Andronicus’ overthrow and in considerable disorder—for they were out plundering in small bands—the Normans were quickly defeated. Thessaloniki was recovered and then the Byzantine forces pushed west to regain Durazzo and Corfu. Isaac also made peace with the Hungarians, whose justification for their action had been to avenge Manuel’s
family. Isaac’s elimination of Andronicus had resolved this issue. Isaac agreed to marry Bela’s nine-year-old daughter, Margaret. For her dowry the Byzantines recovered at least certain cities along the Morava—Orient Express route. Beograd, Braničevo, and probably Niš were returned. Various other cities along the middle and upper Morava may not have reverted to the Byzantines at once since they were in the possession of the Serbs. In exchange for this territory and Bela’s agreement to withdraw all his troops beyond the Danube, the Byzantines recognized Hungarian possession of the Dalmatian cities. The royal wedding took place, probably in November 1185.

Bulgarian Uprising, 1185–88

In the interim, when the Byzantine campaign against the Normans was still underway, Isaac had gone to the fortress of Kypselas (modern Ipsala) near the mouth of the Marica. Over the previous weeks he had been actively recruiting troops to fight the Normans and granting pronoias (fiefs) in large numbers for service. By the early fall he had raised a large enough force for his present needs, and his troops under Branas were rapidly clearing the Normans out of the Balkans. Thus, Isaac was no longer seeking recruits and granting pronoias for that purpose.

At that moment, in the fall of 1185, two brothers named Theodore (soon to take the name of Peter) and Asen, from the region of Trnovo in Bulgaria, arrived at Kypselas to seek audience with the emperor. They hoped to obtain a mountain district in the Balkan (Haemus) Mountains—one, according to Choniates, of little value—as a pronoia for service to the emperor. Not needing more troops, the emperor refused. Asen tried to argue his case and became quite heated in his words. At that point Isaac’s uncle, Sebastocrator John, ordered Asen struck across the face. The two brothers withdrew in a huff and, returning to their region of Trnovo, immediately began to raise a rebellion. Before turning to that rebellion, I want to draw attention to two odd features of this story noticed by Mutafčiev. First, it had not been necessary for the brothers to go directly to the emperor for a pronoia of little value; these were usually distributed by relevant bureaucrats. Thus, Mutafčiev wonders, could the brothers in fact have been seeking something considerably more significant, like a provincial governorship? Second, Asen’s insolent manner of protesting to the emperor was most unusual behavior. That he dared to behave in this manner and also that he was not immediately pitched into prison or worse suggest to Mutafčiev that the brothers must have been people of considerable stature. Whatever the explanations for these two oddities, it is also strange that, having refused their request and insulted them in the bargain, Isaac and his officials allowed the brothers to return freely to Bulgaria.

Bulgaria at the time was not calm. Choniates mentions that Bulgarians, holding small fortresses in inaccessible places, were already acting uppity toward the Romans. Dujčev thus sees the first stirrings of revolt in Bulgaria as occurring even prior to the Theodore and Asen incident. These stirrings,
Dujčev believes, were probably spontaneous and quite disorganized, carried out by small, scattered groups of peasants and shepherds and lacking unified leadership or even any defined goals. The Bulgarians were dissatisfied with taxes, which increased rapidly in the first months under Isaac, who sought cash to award his followers and to establish the luxurious court he was to maintain. At the time, taxes also included a special wedding tax to finance the elaborate ceremonies for his wedding with the Hungarian princess. Presumably other Bulgarians sought independence as well. Memories of the First Bulgarian State, which existed from the late seventh century until the second decade of the eleventh, were not dead. Subsequent Byzantine administration had weighed heavily upon the Bulgarians. Furthermore, the success of the Serbs in winning their independence surely whetted some appetites for a similar liberation of Bulgaria. Thus Dujčev argues that a revolutionary situation, including a number of small groups up in arms, already existed in Bulgaria when in the fall of 1185 Theodore and Asen returned to Bulgaria. The wedding tax had been announced by then and was being met with widespread opposition.

The two brothers called for a full rebellion. Still, many hesitated. The brothers then made use of a major catalyst. When Thessaloniki had been under siege from the Normans, some Bulgarians had saved, by bringing back to Bulgaria, several miracle-working icons of Saint Demetrius, the patron saint and long-time savior of Thessaloniki. They had set up a chapel to Saint Demetrius to house these icons in Tarnovo. The brothers now procured some Vlach shamans, who at a gathering of many Vlachs went into a trance and prophesied the success of the forthcoming Bulgarian rebellion. Saint Demetrius had deserted Thessaloniki, as was clearly shown by the city’s fall to the Normans. But the saint had come to Tarnovo, and the success of their uprising with the great saint as its patron was assured. According to Chroniastes, this persuaded the doubtful, and crowds flocked to the standard of the brothers. Thus now and in the weeks that followed they managed to coordinate the various small dissident groups into a coherent force, while at the same time mobilizing new support.

They were also able to mobilize many Cumans. These nomads had a loose state in the Steppes extending into what is now Wallachia in southern Romania. Cumans had also come to settle in Bulgaria, some of whom had received large pronoias from the Byzantines to defend the Danube frontier or to garrison various interior regions. By the late twelfth century many of these Cumans in Bulgaria had become Christians. Friendly contacts were maintained between the Cumans in Bulgaria and those beyond the Danube. Now large numbers of these Cumans, both from within Bulgaria and from beyond the Danube, flocked to Asen’s standard; they were probably as interested in booty as anything else. They provided a key element in the Bulgarian rebel army. That the rebellion was to succeed was probably owing in great part to Cuman participation. The close relations with the Cumans also meant that Bulgarian fugitives could flee across the Danube for asylum and there regroup
for subsequent offensives that would often be more effective than the preceding one owing to increased manpower from further recruitment among the Cumans.

Recently there has been much dispute over the ethnicity of the rebels. The Byzantine sources almost exclusively call the rebels Vlachs. And in the early thirteenth century, the Western historians of the Fourth Crusade, which took Constantinople and established the Latin Empire (1204–61), also usually refer to the Bulgarians, who by then had established their independent state, as Vlachs. Bulgarian sources from the early thirteenth century as well as Serb and Ragusan sources refer to the new state and its people as Bulgarian. The term Vlach refers to an ethnic group related to the modern Rumanians. The Vlachs seem to have been descended from the pre-Slavic Dacians, who took to the mountains and other security zones during the Slavic invasions of the mid-sixth and seventh centuries. For several centuries thereafter nothing is heard of Dacians or Vlachs. Then in the eleventh century the sources begin to have quite a lot to say about Vlachs. So many Vlachs were to be found in Thessaly that Thessaly was called Valachia or Great Valachia in the late eleventh century. A century later the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela describes the Vlachs of Thessaly as descending nimble as deer from the mountains into the plains of Greece, committing robberies and taking booty. Nobody, Benjamin states, ventured to make war upon them, nor could any king bring them to submission. He adds, accurately or not we cannot say, that they also did not profess the Christian faith. Sources of the late eleventh and twelfth century also begin to mention Vlachs in Bulgaria. Since many of these mountain Vlachs were shepherds, the term Vlach came in time also to denote a shepherd. Were they emphasized in the Byzantine and Crusader sources because they had a major role in directing or manning the uprising? Was the Bulgarian state created after the successful revolt primarily Vlach, Bulgarian, or both? Modern Bulgarian historians have tended to downplay or even deny the role of Vlachs in the uprising, finding various ways to explain away the term used in these sources. Rumanian historians, not surprisingly, have tended to insist that the leadership of the uprising was in the hands of Vlachs and to make them the creators of this Bulgarian state.

Though it is impossible to resolve the problem on the basis of the surviving sources, it is worth pointing out that the issue is not as important as many twentieth-century scholars think. The twelfth century was not a period of nationalism. Bulgarians and Vlachs had been living together amicably in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and northern Thessaly for years. They had jointly participated in a revolt in 1076 in Thessaly against the Byzantines. They jointly inhabited Bulgaria, where the Bulgarian Slavs, the largest element in the population, were chiefly peasants farming the lowlands, while the Vlachs with their flocks dominated the mountains. They do not seem to have been in competition for land, and trade by which each obtained the other’s produce surely benefited both groups. Both groups also would have suffered similar annoyances from the Byzantine authorities. Thus one would expect them to
come together in common cause and would expect people from either group to follow an impressive leader who seemed likely to succeed regardless of which "race" he belonged to. There is no evidence of any "national" conflict or rivalry between these two people at this time. Thus the modern academic controversy, being over an issue of little relevance to the Middle Ages, is probably best dropped.

What is important is that Bulgarians and Vlachs flocked to the standard of Theodore and Asen. The brothers may well have been Vlachs, and they clearly were associated with the Vlach population of the mountainous regions around Tarnovo. The prophets who went into trances to call for revolt exhibited behavior in keeping with Vlach shamans and surely were Vlachs, as Choniates states. What followed was a Bulgarian-Vlach-Cuman uprising that produced a state in which all three peoples participated. The state called itself Bulgaria, and both Vlachs and Bulgarians belonged to the revived Bulgarian Church. The name Bulgaria for the state may be derived as much from historic Bulgaria, the territory on which it was established, as from its largest ethnic group. When documents from this state begin to appear in the thirteenth century, their authors write in Slavic and consider themselves Bulgarians. Why the Byzantine and Crusader sources emphasize Vlachs is not clear. The possible Vlach origin of the ruling house may be the explanation. Another possibility is that the term Vlach had for these foreign authors a more derogatory connotation, and they stressed the term Vlach for that reason. In any case, the rebellion was clearly a joint venture and we should not become bogged down in a senseless nationalist polemic that reflects nineteenth- and twentieth-century rivalries rather than the feelings of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century actors.

Having mobilized this support, the brothers began to attack and take various fortresses in the vicinity of Tarnovo. The uprising broke out at a considerable distance from imperial centers, at a time when many troops had presumably been withdrawn to repel the Normans; thus there seem to have been few loyal imperial troops north of the Balkan Mountains. So the revolt grew quickly. The chronology of the revolt is not secure. Many scholars believe that substantial fighting began only early in 1186. Dujčev argues persuasively that significant fighting had broken out by November 1185. In the discussion of the early phases of the uprising that follows, I have basically employed Dujčev's dating of these events. Other scholars have given dates from six months to a year later.

The rebels benefited from the shortage of Byzantine garrison troops in Bulgaria, for until the end of November 1185 the Byzantine armies were actively completing their action against the Normans and at first Byzantine officials did not realize the seriousness of the uprising. Thus the revolt was given time to grow, and by the end of the year raiders were crossing the Balkan Mountains into Thrace, both plundering and recruiting more rebels. With their successes the rebels' ambitions grew, and they soon began to dream of full independence. One of the brothers, Theodore, put on the purple
The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest
John V. A. Fine
http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=7807

boots, a symbol worn by an emperor—in this case Emperor (Tsar) of Bulgaria—and was proclaimed Tsar. He took the name of Peter, after the canonized Tsar Peter I who had ruled Bulgaria in the middle of the tenth century; Theodore’s assumption of this name shows that the subsequently much maligned Peter still had a good reputation in late twelfth-century Bulgaria. I shall hereafter call Theodore, Peter. Peter attacked Preslav, once the capital of the First Bulgarian State, but its walls and garrison held out. So, for their capital the brothers then settled on the naturally well-fortified settlement of Trnovo in the region from which they themselves came and where presumably they had their own power base. They strengthened Trnovo’s fortifications and erected a church to Saint Demetrius.

At the very end of 1185 (or during the first days of 1186) Emperor Isaac was finally prepared to take action. He dispatched an army under his own uncle, Sebastocrator John Ducas, the official who had ordered Asen struck in the face at Kypselia. But before this force had had time to achieve anything Isaac became worried that John might revolt; so, he quickly recalled him. Isaac then sent out John Cantacuzenus, his brother-in-law, who being blind (probably blinde... by Andronicus) was ineligible for the throne and thus not a threat to Isaac. But by now the rebels had established themselves in the Balkan Mountains, the natural fortifications that separated the rebellious Bulgarian territory from imperial Thrace. Cantacuzenus did not take proper precautions and fell into an ambush, losing a large number of soldiers. Cantacuzenus was recalled and a third army under Alexius Branas was dispatched.

Dujčev believes the sending of the first two armies and the appointment of Branas occurred between the end of November 1185 and February 1186. Unknown to Isaac, Branas already had ambitions for the throne. Having penetrated rebel territory, probably reaching the vicinity of Jambol, Branas decided not to pursue the campaign but to utilize the army in his own interests. He led the troops to his own hometown of Adrianople (modern Edirne), where they proclaimed him emperor. By this time he had added to his force various Bulgarians and Cumans. Branas then marched on Constantinople. While he was laying siege to the city, soldiers loyal to Emperor Isaac emerged from the city and put Branas’ troops to flight. In the course of the fighting Branas was killed. Isaac offered broad amnesties to the rebels, but some of their leaders, either still disgruntled and ambitious or distrusting the proffered amnesty, fled to Bulgaria. After Branas’ revolt was suppressed, Isaac decided to lead the armies against the Bulgarian rebels himself.

Dujčev argues persuasively that the whole Branas rebellion lasted no more than three months, from Branas’ appointment as commander in early February 1186 to its demise. Branas’ defeat probably occurred in late April 1186. Thus Isaac’s attack on Bulgaria, which followed Branas’ defeat, probably began in late May or early June 1186. Still, all these Byzantine troubles meant that the rebels had had at least six months to organize themselves, to
mobilize more troops, and to establish themselves in better defensive positions. Isaac seems to have been a fairly effective commander, however. He successfully drove the rebel armies, including Peter and Asen, across the Danube. To have subdued all the remaining fortresses in the mountains of Bulgaria, some of which still had rebel garrisons inside, would have been a major task that the emperor, still not taking the revolt very seriously, did not feel was worth the effort. He returned to his capital without even leaving new garrisons in Bulgaria. Meanwhile, across the Danube the two brothers had been recruiting more Cumans and soon, probably in the fall of 1186, returned to Bulgaria and regained control over it, while Cuman armies poured through Bulgaria to raid Byzantine territory both in Thrace and along the Black Sea.

Isaac was thus forced to take action against the Bulgarians again. Once more he chose to lead his troops himself. His second campaign probably began in September 1187. His forces marched first to Adrianople, which was under siege from a Cuman force. There they almost fell into a trap, for upon their appearance the Cumans fled in apparent disorder, hoping the Byzantines would break ranks in pursuit. However, when the Cumans wheeled around for the counter-attack, Isaac just barely managed to regroup his forces and win the day. The Cumans retreated beyond the Balkan Mountains. As it was already late in the season, Isaac did not think it sensible to pursue them or to make any effort against Bulgaria itself. So, he dispatched part of his army to winter at Sardika, while he returned to Constantinople.

During these Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts, Stefan Nemanja of Serbia was expanding his state in all directions at Byzantine expense as noted earlier. In 1188 he is found in possession of Niš. Whether he had acquired it from the Hungarians before their peace with Isaac in the fall of 1185 or whether the Byzantines had regained it as part of Margaret’s dowry only to lose it subsequently to Nemanja is not known.

In 1188 Asen directed further raids into imperial territory and thereby amassed considerable booty. Isaac crossed the Balkan Mountains into Bulgaria but failed to force an engagement with Bulgarian forces. In general the Bulgarians, Vlachs, and Cumans tried to avoid major battles with the Byzantines, preferring to carry out raids against places with weak defenses or else to ambush smaller units. But though he failed to engage Asen’s main forces, Isaac did manage to capture Asen’s wife. To get her back Asen had to enter into treaty negotiations. He did so from a position of considerable strength, however, as is seen from the fact that he came out of the negotiations with a very advantageous treaty. The treaty recognized the existence of an independent Bulgarian state that included the territory between the Balkan Mountains and the Danube. Thus the empire recognized that this region was no longer imperial. Asen regained his wife, but he was obliged to send a third brother, Kalojan or Ioanica, to Constantinople as a hostage. In spite of the treaty, raids continued over the next years, although the brothers were not necessarily responsible. They very likely had little control over many of the Cuman and
other local leaders who surely found such incursions profitable. Thus much of the raiding during this period should probably be seen as small-scale private enterprise.

Trnovo was retained as the capital of the newly recognized state. The brothers decided that it should have an archbishop. Previously Trnovo had had a bishopric under the major autocephalous Bulgarian Archbishop of Ohrid. However, the liberation of Bulgaria had not included Macedonia and so Ohrid had remained Byzantine. The new Bulgarian leadership, not surprisingly, did not want its Church to be under a Byzantine archbishop, so the brothers unilaterally removed Bulgaria from Ohrid’s authority and placed all Bulgaria under the Bishop of Trnovo, whose rank they now raised to archbishop. And in 1187 they appointed one of Asen’s close supporters, a certain Basil, to that office. However, all these actions violated Church canons. So, when the brothers ordered the Greek Bishop of Vidin, whom they had brought to Trnovo, to install Basil, he refused and fled, only to be re-captured and executed. Basil, who thus remained unrecognized by the Byzantine Church, took up his duties nevertheless. Shortly after assuming office, he crowned one of the brothers tsar in a splendid church coronation. One account has the archbishop crowning Peter, who, as noted, had already been proclaimed tsar by his followers. According to this version, shortly thereafter Peter turned the rule over to Asen and departed for Preslav, over which he took control. A second account states that it was Asen whom the archbishop crowned. The conflicting stories should not bother us too much, for both accounts agree that shortly thereafter, and certainly by early 1190, Asen had become the senior ruler. But the two brothers continued to rule as colleagues, with Asen in Trnovo and Peter in Preslav.

After nearly two centuries of Byzantine rule many former Bulgarian institutions had become extinct. They had been replaced by the Byzantine administrative and landholding system. Mutafšiev argues, though he does not prove, that the leaders of the rebellion, Peter and Asen, and presumably some of their chief lieutenants as well, acquired their positions of leadership because they were already leaders—magnates and pronoia holders—in their regions prior to the rebellion. Thus Mutafšiev argues that the existing landed aristocracy provided the leadership first for the rebellion and then for the new state. Inheriting the Byzantine system, the rulers of the Second Bulgarian Empire, as the newly liberated state came to be called, retained it and modeled their state institutions and court ceremony on those of Byzantium. Yet despite the model, institutionally the Bulgarians were never to achieve a truly nation-wide, Byzantine-style bureaucracy. The boyars (nobles) in the new state were no longer from ancient Bulgar families dating back to the previous Bulgarian empire. The boyars in the revived state rose to prominence from their role in the liberation struggle or from royal appointment. Thus, many boyar families began as service nobility, with certain figures gaining their eminence because they were relatives of Peter and Asen. In time, however, some boyars, either through building upon lands held under the Byzantines or
else through acquiring landed power from royal grant, accumulated vast estates and with them considerable local authority, enabling them to become in times of central government instability autonomous rulers in their provinces. In this period, and continuing throughout the thirteenth century, many important boyars were of Cuman origin. It has even been argued that Asen is a Cuman name, and one theory, though unproven, has Asen descended from a Cuman prince on his mother’s side.

The overwhelming majority of the Bulgarian population remained peasant. Our limited sources suggest that most of these peasants were serfs on royal, boyar, or monastic estates. The liberation from Byzantium did not bring social liberation. Conditions on the land did not change; the peasants simply continued to work the estates of their masters, whether new ones or, in the case of those on estates of landlords who had supported the rebellion, the same.

**Bosnia and Hum to ca. 1198**

Meanwhile, late in the twelfth century, sources begin to speak more of Bosnia and Hum (formerly Zahumlje). Bosnia had long been a very obscure area. It had nominally gone over to Hungary in 1102 when Koloman annexed Croatia. In 1167 a Bosnian ban named Borić had, as a Hungarian vassal, provided troops for the Hungarian armies defeated by the Byzantines at the major battle of Zemun. After that defeat Bosnia was recognized as Byzantine. Byzantium’s role in Bosnia was probably only nominal during the brief period of imperial rule, 1167 to ca. 1180. After all, Bosnia was distant and, owing to its mountainous terrain, possessed of a poor communications system. Probably the various nobles in Bosnia simply continued to manage their own local affairs. After 1180/81, when Hungary reoccupied Dalmatia and southern Croatia, it also laid claim to Bosnia. And in 1185 Emperor Isaac Angelus recognized Hungary’s claim to Bosnia. Bosnia was mentioned in the title of the King of Hungary, and some of the nobles in the northern parts of Bosnia probably even recognized his suzerainty. There is no evidence, however, that the Hungarians actually occupied any part of Bosnia. And the regions of central Bosnia, including the župa (county) of Bosnia—the Visoko-Zenica-Sutjeska-Vrhbosna (Sarajevo) area—seem, despite Hungarian claims to the contrary, to have been in fact independent. In the 1180s Bosnia was ruled by a Ban named Kulin.

Under Kulin in the 1180s and 1190s there is no sign of direct Hungarian influence within Bosnia, be it the presence there of any Hungarian officials or of any Bosnian troops from Kulin’s banate (or banovina) aiding the Hungarians in their campaigns. Hungary probably had more influence over the rulers, also often called bans, in the north of greater Bosnia.

Bosnia’s location put it between East and West, and it is often referred to as a meeting ground between the two worlds. But, owing to its mountainous terrain and poor communications, it was more a no-man’s-land than a meeting
ground between the two worlds, until the fifteenth century when increased trade opened it up to greater Western cultural influences. The mountainous terrain encouraged localism. Bosnia was divided into various large regions, e.g., the Po-Drina (the region of the Drina River), Bosnia (the central region), Soli (Tuzla), Usora, the Donji Kraji, and eventually, after its annexation in 1326, Hum (more or less corresponding to modern Hercegovina). Each region had its own local traditions and its own hereditary nobility. A region was divided into župas, each ruled by the most important local family, whose head often bore the title of župan. The Bosnian tendency to form local units that resisted control from the center, which we shall see throughout Bosnia’s subsequent history, was already in existence in Kulin’s time. It is highly doubtful that Kulin had much control over regions away from the center of his state or even much knowledge of what was happening in these distant parts. This tradition of local rule, which lasted throughout the Middle Ages, made the ban’s task of centralizing Bosnia difficult. And periods of expansion were regularly followed by separatism. Regionalism was expressed in cultural phenomena (e.g., grave-stone motifs, folk-songs, folk-costumes) and later was to be intensified by uneven economic development and differing foreign influences. Different religious faiths prevailed in different areas; the Orthodox predominated in the east near Serbia and the Drina and in most of Hum, while Catholics predominated in the west, the north, and also in central Bosnia, until an independent Bosnian Church emerged in the central region in the middle of the thirteenth century. From that time Catholicism was eclipsed in the center until it began a revival there in the middle of the fourteenth century.

As this volume opens, in the late twelfth century, when Hum was still separate from Bosnia, Bosnia was nominally Catholic and under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Dubrovnik. The Bosnians then had a single bishop entitled the Bishop of Bosnia, whose diocese stretched beyond Kulin’s banate all the way to the Sava River. This bishop was a local cleric, who was chosen locally and then sent to Dubrovnik to be consecrated. Thus Dubrovnik interfered very little in Bosnian affairs and was content to simply consecrate as bishop the man chosen by the Bosnians themselves. Bosnian Catholics—even though they were under the pope who elsewhere insisted on Latin as the language of Church services—used the Slavic liturgy. A later chronicle (here based on earlier documents subsequently lost) reports that in 1189 the Archbishop of Dubrovnik consecrated Radigost (note the vernacular name) as Bishop of Bosnia. Radigost “knew no Latin, nor other language, except the Slavic; so, when he swore his oath of faith and obedience to his Metropolitan, he swore it in the Slavic language.” Kulin had good relations with Dubrovnik and issued a charter in 1189 granting Ragusan merchants the right to trade throughout his banate duty-free.

To Bosnia’s south and southwest, and less isolated than Bosnia, was Hum. Like Bosnia Hum was mountainous. However, it was a rockier, more arid region and its valleys were less fertile. Thus transhumant pastoralism (with sheep the predominant animal) played a major role in Hum’s economy. In
addition to its Slavic, Serbo-Croatian, speaking population, Hum had a large number of Vlachs. The Vlachs, as noted, were descended from the pre-Slavic population of the northeastern Balkans that had migrated into mountainous regions and adopted a pastoral way of life at the time of the Slavic migrations. Related to the Rumanians and originally speaking a language related to Rumanian, the Vlachs of what was Hum are today Slavic speaking. When they ceased to be Vlach speaking is unknown. The main evidence we have on this subject for the later Middle Ages is drawn from Vlach gravestone inscriptions and names. These inscriptions are all in medieval Serbo-Croatian, suggesting the Vlachs were already Slavic speakers. This evidence is not conclusive, however, for Vlach was not then a written language; thus even if these individuals spoke Vlach, they (or the stone-carvers who wrote the inscriptions) would still probably have written in Slavic. However, since many, or even most, of them also had Slavic names, it seems likely that their linguistic assimilation was well under way, if not completed. By the end of the medieval period, as noted, the term Vlach was coming to have a second, non-ethnic meaning—that of shepherd. So some non-ethnic Vlachs probably acquired this label. Nevertheless, the profession or occupation of shepherd seems to have been dominated in Hum by ethnic Vlachs, and we find that, despite their linguistic assimilation, they have retained to the present a variety of special customs (in dress, death rituals, etc.) derived from their pre-Slavic, pre-Christian heritage. Since they had horses, the Vlachs of Hum came to dominate the carrying trade and caravans across the Balkans. Hired by the coastal merchants, they led and protected the caravans from brigands who were common in the area, many of whom were also Vlachs. Through this role some Vlachs became extremely rich, built up large estates, and came to dominate whole regions of Hum.

Partly as a result of its mountains Hum, like Bosnia, developed as a series of lesser regions, each under a local noble family, whether Slavic or Vlach. Thus regionalism was strong and little feeling existed for the broad region or for being a Hum-ite. These nobles feuded with one another. Increasing its own lands and independence by supporting and relying upon first one neighboring power and then upon another, a particular family might build up a large principality within Hum. But such creations were usually short-lived, until the end of the fourteenth century when one family, the Kosače, began expanding and subduing its neighbors permanently. By early in the following century this family had absorbed most of Hum and created what for all practical purposes was an independent state.

From about 1166 (i.e., when Tihomir assumed power in Serbia) to 1326, Hum was ruled by princes from the Serbian dynasty. From this starting point until ca. 1190, excluding a brief expulsion by Nemanja when he overthrew Tihomir, Hum was ruled by Nemanja's brother Miroslav. Between 1190 and 1192 part or even most of Hum may have been removed from Miroslav's jurisdiction and assigned to Nemanja's youngest son Rastko, the future Saint Sava. However, after Rastko ran away to Mount Athos to become a monk in
1192 Miroslav may well have regained all Hum, though our sources do not allow us certainty about this. Miroslav was married to Ban Kulín’s sister. He was to die in about 1198. Hum then extended from the Lim River to the Adriatic coast. Most of Hum’s interior was settled by Serbs and belonged to the Eastern Church (under the Archbishop of Ohrid until 1219 when Hum was subordinated to the new independent Serbian Church). The coastal region of Hum, including its capital Ston, had a mixed population of Catholics and Orthodox. Miroslav was Orthodox himself and built a major church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul on the Lim River, for whose support he gave over twenty villages.

The existence of two Churches and the favor of Miroslav toward the Orthodox caused a certain amount of tension in the coastal area of Hum. This tension came to a head in about 1180 when Rainer, the Archbishop of Split, was murdered and robbed “on the Neretva.” This phrasing is vague, and while it could refer to any place along the course of this major river, it almost certainly refers to the region of the river’s mouth controlled by the Kačić family, whose members were prominent pirates. Only nominally Catholic, these pirates probably had little respect for the archbishop and saw him simply as a rich target for predation. Since Rainer was a zealous champion of the rights of Split, it is also possible that he brought his fate upon himself by visiting the area to force submission and Church tithes upon its independent-minded people. Since Miroslav was the region’s overlord, the pope complained to him and demanded that he punish the murderers and restore to the Church the sum taken. We know nothing about Miroslav’s relations with the Kačići and their retainers, but regardless of whether or not he approved of their action, to have forced them to cough up their plunder would have required considerable military action, which Miroslav might well have been reluctant to take. So, Miroslav refused the pope’s demand. When the dispute escalated, Miroslav expelled the Catholic Bishop of Ston from his capital. The pope then excommunicated Miroslav. This act does not seem to have troubled Miroslav particularly. He simply allowed Orthodox priests to take over various Catholic Church buildings in the vicinity of Ston.

Miroslav, as noted, as an ally of his brother Stefan Nemanja, was also at war with Dubrovnik in about 1185. However, peace was concluded in 1186 and each party allowed the merchants of the other to trade in its own territory. As far as is known cordial relations existed between Miroslav and Dubrovnik from 1186 until his death.

In both Bosnia and Hum the traditional patterns of Slavic family structure remained strong and retained more archaic forms than elsewhere in the Balkans. Families regularly retained their lands under collective leadership, with an elder dominant but managing the lands in the name of his whole family. Frequently, charters were signed, “N. and brothers.” In these regions the rulers were not able to enforce conditional landholding and link possession of land to service obligations as rulers were in the Greek lands, Bulgaria, and Serbia. In Bosnia and Hum lands were held unconditionally with the noble in
full possession. The ruler did not have the right to confiscate the land in the event of a noble’s failure to render services demanded of him. Only out-and-out betrayal provided justification for an estate’s confiscation, and even then a council of nobles had to approve such action. This meant families could feel secure about their landed possessions; for dispossessing them was so difficult, it rarely happened. This secure landed base in its turn provided the foundation of the nobles’ great strength and independence. Thus the Bosnian ruler, unable to create ties between land and service, was relatively weak militarily, whether against an outside enemy (unless the great nobles shared the ruler’s enmity against that enemy) or against the great nobles within his state. Only Stjepan Kotromanić and Tvrtko I in the fourteenth century overcame this disadvantage. And neither of them was able to institutionalize his temporary assertion of authority. By the end of the fourteenth century this weakness was to necessitate, as we shall see, the frequent convocation of councils on military matters in order to procure in advance both the nobles’ assent to an action and agreement to participate in it.

Croatia

The previous volume discussed the annexation of Croatia by Hungary. In 1102 King Koloman of Hungary had marched against Croatia and, if we can believe later sources, was met by a delegation of Croatian nobles interested in retaining their own local power. The two sides negotiated a settlement, by which a dual monarchy was created. The King of Hungary also became King of Croatia, for which he needed a second coronation in Croatia. The Croatian nobles kept their local power, retaining their lands plus local administrative and judicial authority, and were freed of taxes. They lost independence in foreign affairs and owed the King of Hungary military service. But if they had to cross the Drava (into Hungary), they were paid for it. Moreover, the king assumed the obligation to defend Croatia. Thus the Kingdom of Croatia continued to exist. And despite the new Hungarian dynasty, it was to be little altered, for matters continued more or less as they had prior to 1102, with the same noble families on top and the peasantry, with unchanged obligations, still subjected to them.

What could be called “Croatia” had previously been divided into three parts: Dalmatian Croatia (excluding the Roman-Byzantine cities in Dalmatia), Pannonian Croatia (the interior region between Hungary, Bosnia, and Dalmatia), and Bosnia (which sometimes was under the Croatian state and had a mixed population of Serbs and Croats). By 1107 the Hungarians had annexed most of Dalmatia (including the Byzantine cities) and come to conceive of Dalmatia as part of what it called Croatia. Owing to Dalmatia’s importance, however, Hungary was regularly involved in a struggle, often unsuccessful, with Venice and Byzantium for this region. Thus for much of the period after 1107 much of Dalmatia was not Hungarian. Furthermore, as noted, Bosnia also was a special case. Acquired by Hungary in the 1130s, it was surrendered to Byzantium in 1167. After Manuel’s death in 1180, though in theory it reverted
to Hungary, in fact it was administered by its own rulers and became more or less independent. Hungary, however, was able to retain Pannonian (interior) Croatia throughout the rest of the Middle Ages (except for the brief surrender of Croatia south of the Krka River to Byzantium from 1167 to 1180, which region, as we saw, was regained for Hungary by Bela III immediately after Manuel’s death). The Hungarians divided what we call Croatia into two parts: Croatia (including whatever parts of Dalmatia Hungary held) and Slavonia. Croatia was the territory bounded to the west by the Dalmatian coast (from the headland of the Gulf of Kvarner in the north to the mouth of the Neretva in the south), bounded to the east by the courses of the Vrbas and Neretva rivers, to the south by the lower Neretva, and to the north by the Gvozd Mountain and Kupa River. The territory between Dalmatia and the Neretva, western Hum, was not always in Croatia’s possession. Slavonia was the region east and north of the Gvozd Mountain, extending north to the Drava River, east to Srem, and south to the Sava (and sometimes extending beyond the Sava to include the lower Una, Vrbas, and Bosna rivers).

Croatia and Slavonia were ruled by a deputy for the king, a governor called a ban. Then in 1196 after the succession of Imre (Emeric), his younger brother Andrew demanded Croatia and Dalmatia as an appanage. When Imre refused, Andrew in 1197 revolted successfully and by early 1198 obtained his demands from his brother. He became Duke of Croatia and Dalmatia. Andrew and his successors ran their duchy as independent rulers, though usually as close associates, vassal-allies, of the king. They provided the monarch with military forces and were supposed to (and usually did) refrain from conducting independent foreign policy. The dukes installed bishops, settled disputes among the great nobles, warred with the states on their borders, and issued charters of privilege and land grants.

Thus from the late 1190s Croatia and Slavonia were under the Duke of Croatia. This office was usually filled by a son or brother of the Hungarian king. The dukes coined their own money and, as the king’s deputies, ran their duchy (which was also still known as the Kingdom of Croatia) like kings, presiding over a court and entourage modelled on the Hungarian royal court. The duke had residences in Zagreb, Knin, Zadar (when Hungary held it), and later also in Bihać. Under the duke there also stood a ban or governor. The ban was generally a major nobleman, sometimes of Croatian origin, sometimes Hungarian. From 1225, though possibly regularly only from the 1260s, the duke divided the territory between two bans: the Ban of Croatia and Dalmatia and the Ban of Slavonia. We shall also meet other bans in this general region, including those of Bosnia and of Mačva (the territory south of the Sava between the Drina and Kolubara rivers).

Slavonia was to be much more a part of Hungary than was Croatia. A considerable number of Hungarian nobles settled in Slavonia, and Western-style fiefs were granted here to the nobility (both Hungarian and Croatian). Thus Slavonia’s nobility was ethnically mixed. Moreover, the exemption from taxes granted to the nobility of Croatia was not in effect in Slavonia, whose
nobles paid a land tax unless they received a special charter of exemption. Furthermore, the courts of Slavonia were run according to Hungarian law. Finally, the Church in Slavonia (divided into three dioceses), like Bosnia after 1252, was subjected to the Hungarian Archbishop of Kalocsa. In contrast, the Croatian bishops remained under Split, while Croatia’s nobles were exempt from the land tax and managed their law courts under the customary law of Croatia. Furthermore, there was no Hungarian settlement in Croatia. The king himself seems to have acquired certain estates of the previous Croatian kings within Croatia, but it is evident that his lands there were not extensive. As a result he had little land to grant there to acquire the loyalty of local nobles. He could merely grant titles or confirm these nobles in the lands they already held. Such grants were not very enticing; thus lacking lands in Croatia to grant, the king lacked the leverage to assert himself in Croatia. So, his authority, and that of the Duke of Croatia, was chiefly felt in Slavonia. Moreover, the Dalmatians and Croatsians identified far less with the king’s administration than the Slavonians; N. Klaić has noted in this connection that the former frequently referred to the Hungarian king as the King of Hungary rather than the King of Croatia.

The territory of both regions (Croatia and Slavonia) was divided into counties (županijas), each under a župan (count). Once again there was a difference: in Croatia the župans were local nobles in hereditary succession ruling as they had before 1102; in Slavonia the župans were royal appointees. Occasionally, instead of appointing a župan as temporary administrator of a Slavonian county, the king made the individual an out-and-out hereditary grant of a county. In this case, instead of being a župan the holder became a hereditary prince (knez) or grof.

The merger with Hungary brought about various changes, to a greater extent in Slavonia than Croatia. Commerce with Hungary increased, which increased the overall volume of trade, expanded the monetary economy, and furthered the development of towns. As a result, particularly in Slavonia, the merchant class grew rapidly, aided in its growth by the arrival of a certain number of Germans, Hungarians, and Jews in these towns. The Church of Croatia, particularly that of Slavonia, increased its ties with international Catholicism. The nobles, in preserving their privileges and local authority, were clearly satisfied; for though they participated in civil strife as members of factions, not once in the Middle Ages did a single Croatian nobleman (I do not include Bosnians) revolt against Hungary to separate Croatia from the Hungarian state.

The Third Crusade (1189)

In 1187 a Saracen counter-crusade under Saladin recovered Jerusalem. The fall of this holy city resulted in a new Christian campaign, the Third Crusade, led by the German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. In 1189 he led his army through Hungary and reached the Byzantine border at Braničevo on the junction of the Danube and Mlava rivers. Having had various differences with the Byzantine
authorities in Braničevo, he moved on to Beograd and then proceeded down the Orient Express route toward Niš. Accounts describe the thick forests then existing in this area, part of which is still known as Šumadija (derived from the word šuma, “forest”); along the route the army was troubled by the bandits who infested the forests and skirmished with peasants, described as people of Serbian, Greek, Bulgarian, and Vlach nationality, who resented and resisted crusaders foraging in their fields. Eventually the crusaders captured some of the bandits who had been making hit-and-run attacks upon them. The captives stated that they had been acting under the orders of the governor of Braničevo. This information incited the ire of Frederick against the Byzantine authorities.

Finally, in late July, Frederick reached Niš, recently taken from the Byzantines and then the main residence of Stefan Nemanja. Nemanja had previously sent envoys to Germany, offering Frederick free passage through Raška. Now Nemanja received the emperor with great ceremony. Bulgarian-Vlach envoys from Tsar Peter had also come to Niš. That only Peter’s name is mentioned in crusader reports suggests that in 1189 he was still the dominant figure in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were clearly on good terms with the Serbs; in fact, a Western chronicle states they were allied. The Slavs sought to persuade Frederick to create a joint alliance against the Byzantine empire and expressed their willingness to recognize Frederick as their suzerain. Nemanja offered Frederick twenty thousand troops while the Bulgarians offered forty thousand archers. Frederick was tempted. However, he was seriously interested in his crusade and in the recovery of Jerusalem and did not want to be diverted against Byzantium, with which he was not certain he needed to remain on bad terms. So, he turned down the offer. But to seal good relations with the Serbs, a marriage was arranged between the daughter of a German nobleman, Duke Berthold of Andechs, and a certain “Tohu,” called in the Western source Vojvoda of Dalmatia, on the condition that Tohu inherit his father’s land before his other brothers; this phrasing suggests that Tohu was not an eldest son. Jireček has convincingly shown that Tohu was in fact Toljen, a son of Nemanja’s brother Miroslav. It seems that the marriage never actually took place.

The Byzantines, hearing reports of the meeting between Frederick and the two Slavic states but not knowing the results of their talks, became alarmed. As Frederick moved along the Orient Express route beyond Niš, he and the Byzantines each grew more worried and suspicious of the other. Afraid of an attack from Frederick, the Byzantines made peace with Frederick’s main enemy, Saladin. Word of this reached Frederick, who was still angry about the bandits sent against him by the governor of Braničevo. Next, when the first crusading armies reached imperial Thrace, the Byzantines, fearing an alliance of crusaders and Slavs, took hostages, including the Bishop of Munster. Frederick demanded their release. Then the two emperors began quarreling over the use of the title emperor, to which each side claimed its ruler had sole right. So, when Frederick reached Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv), he took the town. Many of its inhabitants fled, but the Armenians, who had long resided there, remained and, according to Greek sources, got along well with Frederi-
ick. While Frederick rested in this city, further angry letters were exchanged between the two emperors. Frederick then allowed his men to plunder imperial territory in Thrace, particularly in the vicinity of Philippopolis. He also entered into negotiations with the Sultan of Iconium (Konya). This figure, who controlled a large state in central Anatolia bordering on Byzantium there, was Byzantium’s leading enemy in the East. Though Frederick seems only to have been trying to arrange free passage for his armies overland through the sultan’s state and to assure the sultan he had no hostile intent toward him, the Byzantines had no way to know this and feared Frederick was arranging an alliance that might result in simultaneous attacks against Byzantium’s eastern and western borders.

Frederick, whose letters to Isaac continued to threaten, then moved on to Adrianople, only a five-days’ march from Constantinople. He took this city and established his winter quarters there. Again Serbian and Bulgarian envoys visited him, still hoping to form an alliance to attack Byzantium. Isaac, finally realizing the magnitude of the danger, yielded; he now recognized Frederick’s title and agreed to arrange Frederick’s passage through imperial territory. After the two emperors made peace, Frederick once again turned down the Slavs’ offer, explaining to them that his aim was to recover the Holy Land. Receiving supplies and transport across the straits, Frederick and his army began marching across Anatolia. They were never to reach the Holy Land, however, for Frederick fell into a river in his heavy armor and drowned. Harried by attacks from Anatolian Muslims and suffering considerable losses, his crusaders became disillusioned and the movement broke up.

Serbs and Bulgarians, 1190–95

While Frederick was in Adrianople, many Byzantine troops had been withdrawn from Thrace to the capital in case they were needed to defend it. In their absence much of Thrace had been occupied by Bulgarians and Vlachs. But early in 1190, having seen the crusaders out of the Balkans and on their way through Anatolia, Isaac was free to turn against his Slavic neighbors. He led his army against the Bulgarians; he failed to take Trimvrio, and the Bulgarians successfully avoided meeting his forces until late summer. Then en route home Isaac’s army fell into a Bulgarian ambush in the Balkan Mountains and suffered a major defeat. Probably fewer Greeks were killed than Niketas Choniates (an author hostile to Isaac) claimed, for the following month the Byzantines were able to win a victory over the Serbs. After their victory, however, the Bulgarians found themselves relatively unopposed and sent raiding parties both south into Thrace and east against various Byzantine cities on the shore of the Black Sea. Varna, Anchialos, and Sardika all suffered pillaging.

Stefan Nemanja had also been active that summer raiding into imperial territory, so in September Isaac ordered his Thracian troops to move against the Serbs. The Byzantines won what they described as a major victory on the
Morava River. After the battle the two sides concluded a peace treaty. Since Nemanja emerged from the negotiations with a considerable portion of his conquests intact and recognized, it appears that the Byzantine victory was not as complete as Byzantine sources claim. The Byzantines recognized Serbian independence; thus they had been forced to recognize the independence of both their Slavic neighbors, the Bulgarians in 1188 and the Serbs in 1190. The Byzantines regained the territory they had lost along the Morava (or Orient Express route), including Niš and Ravno (modern Čuprije), and thus regained control over the overland route to Beograd, which along with Braničevo was recognized by the Serbs as being Byzantine. The Byzantines also regained their northern Macedonian losses, the territory along the upper Struma (Strymon) and upper Vardar, including Skopje. Further they recovered part of Kosovo-Metohija, including Prizren, as well as the territory between the Morava and Timok rivers. However, Nemanja was recognized as the ruler of the territory between the South Morava and West Morava rivers, most of Kosovo-Metohija, Zeta, part of northern Albania (including the region of Pilot), southern Dalmatia, Trebinje, and Hum. Thus Serbia ended up with a consolidated territory bordering Hungary along the low mountain range on the north side of the West Morava River and extending south well into Kosovo and Metohija and west to the coast, including Zeta, Trebinje, Hum, and southern Dalmatia. The Byzantines were clearly on the defensive, although Braničevo, Niš, and Velbužd (modern Kjustendil) were to remain Byzantine for almost a decade, being documented as imperial in 1198. It also seems that the Serbian-Byzantine treaty was sealed by the marriage of Nemanja’s second son, Stefan, with Isaac’s niece Eudocia, though some scholars believe this event occurred earlier, in 1187. Eudocia was the daughter of Alexius Angelus, who was to depose Isaac and become emperor in 1195.

Following his peace with the Serbs, late in 1190 or early in 1191, Isaac went north to Beograd where he met with King Bela of Hungary. The two had a cordial meeting though Isaac was unable to obtain a commitment from Bela for joint action against Bulgaria. Byzantine-Serbian relations remained friendly after the 1190 treaty. In 1192 Bela attacked Serbia and occupied some territory south of the West Morava River. This Hungarian action against Serbia distressed Isaac, who sent the Serbs some military aid and also appealed to the pope. The pope effected a Hungarian withdrawal from Serbia that seems to have again left the Serbian-Hungarian border north of the West Morava River.

During 1193, after the Byzantines had successfully repelled a Cuman raid against the region of Philippopolis, the empire received word of a split between the two Bulgarian leaders, Peter and Asen. Some court orators report that Peter had been won over to the Byzantine side, and soon Asen would also be won over or else he would suffer destruction. Whether there was any truth to the rumor is not known; later in 1193 Niketas Choniates, in reporting Byzantine successes against some Vlachs who had been raiding in the vicinity of Berrhoia and Philippopolis, states these raids had been ordered by Peter and Asen. If Choniates is accurate in attributing the order to both brothers,
then any quarrel that may have arisen between them seems to have been quickly patched up.

Next Isaac’s cousin Constantine Angelus was sent at the head of an army to invade Bulgaria. He revolted, hoping to acquire the throne, thus ending the planned offensive. To suppress Constantine’s revolt Isaac employed the troops who had remained to defend Thrace. Their removal enabled the Bulgarians to plunder the regions of Philippopolis, Sardika, and Adrianople. To face these regular and increasingly larger raids, Isaac next brought a large number of troops from Anatolia to attack the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians met this army near Arcadiopolis and annihilated it. As a result the Bulgarians were free to pour into central Thrace, part of which they annexed. Until this time the Balkan Mountains had formed the Byzantine-Bulgarian border; but after the victory near Arcadiopolis the Bulgarians and Vlachs began assuming control over and stepping up their settlements in territory to the south of this range. The future conflict zone was to be southern Thrace, the Rhodope region, and Macedonia.

In deep trouble, Isaac patched up his quarrel over Serbia with Bela and sought his aid. Bela agreed to attack the Bulgarians from the north in conjunction with a Byzantine attack from the south. This joint action was scheduled for 1195. In that year Isaac assembled a new army to replace the experienced regulars he had lost at Arcadiopolis and left the capital, accompanied by his brother Alexius. The army reached near-by Kypselia near the mouth of the Marica. While camped there, Isaac went hunting. Alexius, claiming not to feel well, remained in camp. Upon Isaac’s departure, Alexius met with a group of conspirators who had been scattered throughout the army; they won over a significant portion of the camped army and then declared Alexius emperor. Hearing what had happened, Isaac fled; however, he was soon captured by his brother’s men and blinded. So ended what was to have been Isaac’s sixth personal campaign against the Bulgarians. After ten years of warfare, the situation was still deteriorating; Bulgaria, having achieved its independence, was now expanding successfully beyond the Balkan Mountains. Furthermore, this warfare was sapping the strength of the Byzantine empire both in manpower and financially at a dangerous time when the empire was threatened from the West. Byzantium had escaped the dangers of being conquered by the Third Crusade but the empire was to prove no match for the crusaders of the Fourth. Part of its weakness in 1204 must be attributed to losses incurred in the Bulgarian wars.

To solidify his position in the capital, Alexius immediately called off the campaign and returned to Constantinople. His policy at first was to buy support; he distributed large land grants and numerous gifts. To pay for these he had to increase taxes. Yet to obtain support he also had to grant various tax exemptions to rich and important figures; so the tax burden fell increasingly on the overtaxed poor. Though Isaac had been no great statesman, he had at least been brave and a relatively able military commander. Alexius lacked those saving graces. The splendor at the imperial court and the sale of offices
increased; and such abuses had clearly already been serious under Isaac who, we are told, had sold offices like vegetables at the market. Under Alexius positions were auctioned off and a larger number of posts and honors were assigned to relatives and in-laws.

After the overthrow of his daughter’s husband (which probably resulted in Margaret entering a convent) Bela’s relations with the empire cooled considerably. Shortly thereafter the Hungarians occupied Beograd. The Byzantines were able to retain Braničevo a little longer; it was still theirs as late as 1198. But soon thereafter, in any case by 1203, Hungary had regained Braničevo.

Alexius sought to solve the empire’s difficulties with Bulgaria by negotiation. However, Asen’s terms were so demanding that Alexius was unable to reach agreement with him. So, the Bulgarian raiding continued. In the fall of 1195 the Bulgarians overran the region south of the Rhodopes and reached the environs of Thessaloniki. They defeated the garrisons of various fortresses, including that of Serres, which they captured. A Byzantine relief force dispatched under Isaac Comnenus, Alexius’ son-in-law, ran into a Cuman raiding force on the Struma River. The Cumans defeated the Byzantine army and captured Isaac, who was sent to Trnovo where, bound in chains and pitched into prison, he soon died.

Ivanko and Dobromir Chrysos

That fall Asen discovered that one of his boyars, a Vlach named Ivanko, was having an affair with Asen’s wife’s sister. Considering this an insult to the royal family, Asen wanted to have the woman executed. Not surprisingly, the Bulgarian queen objected and argued that instead of her sister, Ivanko should be killed. Asen was persuaded, and late one evening he summoned Ivanko to his tent. Sensing danger, Ivanko secreted a knife under his robes. The two men quarreled; tempers soon flared, and Ivanko stabbed Asen to death. Ivanko then succeeded in winning enough support to take over in Trnovo.

Upon receiving news of his brother’s murder, Peter raised an army from his Preslav lands, marched on Trnovo, and laid siege to it. Unable to disperse the besieging troops, Ivanko managed to slip an envoy through Peter’s lines to Constantinople to seek Byzantine aid. The envoy claimed that Ivanko had murdered Asen because he had been called on to do so by Isaac Comnenus, the emperor’s son-in-law who had died in Asen’s prison shortly before. He added that, as a reward for this act, Isaac had promised his own daughter as a bride for Ivanko. Alexius, faced with a fine opportunity, dispatched an army for Trnovo. But when it reached the Balkan Mountains, the army mutinied and refused to proceed further. Byzantium’s chance was lost, and so was Ivanko’s, for without military help he had no chance to break Peter’s siege of Trnovo. Realizing that he was doomed if he remained, Ivanko secretly slipped out of Trnovo and fled to Constantinople. Well received by the emperor, he was at once offered Isaac’s daughter (who was also Alexius’ granddaughter)
as a bride. Upon seeing the girl, Ivanko claimed she was too young and expressed a preference for her mother, Alexius’ daughter. Annoyed, Alexius forced Ivanko to betroth the younger princess. Then he dispatched Ivanko to Philippopolis, which seems to have been an isolated Byzantine outpost in the midst of hostile territory. Having established himself there, Ivanko was very successful for a time in repelling Bulgarian and Vlach raids and in restoring imperial rule over various settlements in the area.

Meanwhile, a Vlach named Dobromir Chryosos (in Slavic Hrs) with a personal retinue of about five hundred Vlachs joined the ranks of imperial opponents. He had originally fought for Byzantium against Peter and Asen, but at some point, probably in about 1194, he had been captured by the Bulgarians and, having agreed to switch sides, been released. Unaware of his changed allegiances, the Byzantines had allowed him and his men to assume control of the important fortress of Strumica. Once in control of the fortress, Chryosos showed his new colors and began to extend his authority over the surrounding countryside, which was inhabited by large numbers of Bulgarians and Vlachs. The emperor marched against him, besieged him unsuccessfully for two months, and then returned to the capital.

**Kalojan Assumes Power in Bulgaria, 1197**

Upon Ivanko’s departure, Peter took over in Trnovo. His rule was short, however, as he died in 1197, allegedly slain by a relative. He was succeeded by the third brother, Kalojan. Kalojan had been sent as a hostage to Constantinople after the 1188 treaty. Having soon thereafter escaped back to Bulgaria, he had then taken up a career of leading raids against imperial territory. He was the ablest warrior of the three brothers. Under his rule the number of raids against the empire increased as did the amount of plunder procured by the raiders. This helped him not only to retain the loyalty of the boyars but also to recruit further manpower. The increasing ineffectiveness of Byzantine defenses also contributed to his successes.

The demoralization of the Byzantine army is seen clearly in the following incident recounted by Choniates: A fair was held in a certain Thracian village on Saint George’s Day, every year. The local governor, knowing he would be unable to protect the fair-goers from raiders who would be likely to attack the fair, ordered the fair canceled. However, a near-by monastery that had a right to collect a sales-tax on goods sold at the fair, not wanting to lose its income, suppressed the order. The fair was duly held and the Cumans duly swept down upon it. However, the peasants fortified the fair-grounds by encircling it with carts and beat off the attack. Discouraged, the Cumans departed, finding captives and booty elsewhere in the vicinity. A near-by Byzantine garrison, which had made no effort to protect the fair, realizing that the raiding party was small, emerged from its fortress, overtook the Cumans, and relieved them of their booty and captives. However, instead of returning the loot, which had been acquired from their own neighborhood, the Byzant-
tine soldiers began to quarrel among themselves over the division of spoils. At this point the Cumans regrouped, attacked the Byzantines, defeated them, and regained their booty. If this Byzantine unit was typical in its corruption and lack of discipline, it is hardly surprising that Byzantine armies were so often unsuccessful during this period.

Meanwhile in 1197, Alexius decided to launch a new campaign against Dobromir Chrysos, who had by this time also occupied the fortress of Prosek (Proskon, modern Demir Kapija) on an inaccessible cliff overlooking the Vardar River. Chrysos’ forces were well supplied at this fortress since his flocks were housed inside the walls. Alexius’ army contained many Turkish mercenaries and, as they moved through Thrace, the Turks continually broke discipline to plunder and take captives, many of whom were Vlachs.

The siege of Prosek was a fiasco. The weather was hot, little drinking water was to be found outside the walls, and Chrysos’ men launched surprise raids on the Byzantine camp at night. With morale growing worse among his men and with no chance of success, the emperor almost immediately sought to negotiate a treaty. Alexius must have felt great need for concluding peace at the time, for his terms were most generous. He allowed Chrysos to retain all the fortresses he then held and offered him an imperial in-law as a bride, the daughter of a general named Kamytzes. Chrysos, though married at the time, agreed to dispose of his wife and accepted the terms. When Alexius returned to the capital, he actually sent the girl to Chrysos, who married her despite his dislike of her dainty manners and her refusal to drink heavily at the wedding feast. That the emperor and his armies were unable to expel a brigand chief with only five hundred men from a key fortress and in the end felt the threat from him was of such magnitude that it necessitated concluding a humiliating treaty with him illustrates vividly the decline of the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Triumph over Ivanko

Until 1199 Ivanko, holding a Byzantine command post at Philippiopolis, had been very useful to the empire. He had been successful in stopping raids, had recovered a number of small fortresses in the area, and had trained his troops well. By 1199, having organized a disciplined army loyal to him personally, Ivanko decided to use his army for his own ends. His army included many Vlachs and Bulgarians. Whether these individuals were among the Byzantine troops assigned to him or whether they had been recruited recently by Ivanko is not known. Alexius had by then received a number of warnings that Ivanko was not to be trusted. It is possible these warnings had a basis in fact, but it is also possible that they originated from Greeks jealous of Ivanko who were simply trying to turn the emperor against him. Thus it is possible that Ivanko was driven to revolt not because he wanted to but from fear that the emperor might believe this slander and take action against him.

In any event, whether from ambition or from fear, Ivanko revolted. Imperial missions failed to dissuade him because Ivanko supposedly in-
terpreted the emperor’s willingness to negotiate as a sign of weakness. Byzantine troops sent against him began picking off certain of Ivanko’s lesser fortresses. Ivanko decided to trap these forces. He dispatched a large herd of cattle and a collection of captives across a plain near the Byzantine camp, while placing his men in ambush along the route. The bait worked, as the Byzantines rushed out in disorder to loot the procession. The Byzantine troops were routed, though most succeeded in fleeing to Philippopolis (which shows that the empire, despite the revolt, had succeeded in retaining or regaining this city). However, the Byzantine commander Kamytzes was captured. Ivanko sent him to Kalojan as a gift. In need of allies against Byzantium, Ivanko was undoubtedly had no love for the murderer of his brother Asen. Ivanko then proceeded to raid along the Struma River down to the Aegean coast. Next, moving east he took various towns including Xantheia and Mosynopolis. He also took much booty and many prisoners. Choniates reports that, when drunk, Ivanko for amusement liked to have Greek captives torn apart alive before him, while he ransomed off other nationalities, except for the Vlach prisoners, whom he encouraged to join him by offering them land. This is the only sign of ethnic-national feeling in this period that I have come across; other leaders, whether Byzantine or Bulgarian, seem to have favored no particular ethnic group in administering multi-ethnic states.

Ivanko thus seems to have been trying to build up local support from the Vlachs to establish a principality near the coast between the Struma and Marica rivers. In 1200 Alexius en route to oppose him had reached Adrianople when he heard a rumor that Ivanko had begun to wear purple boots, an emperor’s insignia. If true, did this mean that this petty chief had actually begun to dream of becoming the Byzantine emperor? Alexius sent an embassy to Ivanko, suggesting a meeting. Oaths of safe conduct were exchanged and Ivanko, stupidly not insisting on an exchange of hostages, came. Upon his arrival, Ivanko was at once seized and executed by order of Alexius. The Byzantines immediately recovered all Ivanko’s fortresses, expelling Ivanko’s brother who had tried unsuccessfully to retain Ivanko’s holdings on the Struma. Thus, briefly, central Thrace and the southern Rhodopes were restored to the empire.

The Byzantine Treaty with Kalojan

Kalojan’s Bulgarians, however, continued to raid. In 1201, on Good Friday, Kalojan took Varna; ignoring the season, he put all his captives into the moat and filled it in with earth. He spent Easter Sunday levelling the walls of the city. He then departed. Unlike many of the petty brigand leaders of his time, Kalojan was a master of siege-craft. He employed huge wooden towers on wheels to take Varna. But soon thereafter conditions declined for Kalojan and improved for the empire, for in 1201 the Russians of Galicia and Volynia attacked the Cuman lands in south Russia. This caused many Cumans to leave
Bulgarian service and return beyond the Danube to defend their homeland. Thus for several years the number of Cumans available for service in the Balkans was reduced, which in turn diminished the size, and thereby the effectiveness, of the Bulgarian armies. As a result, in late 1201 or early 1202 on the eve of a Byzantine expedition, Kalojan agreed to a peace with Byzantium that re-established the Balkan Mountains as the Byzantine-Bulgarian border. This allowed the Byzantines to recover whatever territory they had lost to the Bulgarians in Thrace. Kalojan also promised to put a stop to the raiding of Thrace. Dujčev and Nikov accept 1201 as the date for this important treaty, while Zlatarski dates it 1202.

Chryso and Kamytzes

While this was occurring, Alexius was also able, after considerable difficulty, to more-or-less tame Chryso. When Kalojan acquired General Kamytzes as a gift from Ivanko, he had demanded a large ransom from Alexius for his return. Alexius not only refused to pay it, but took advantage of Kamytzes’ absence to seize his estates. Kamytzes was the father of Chryso’s recent bride, so Chryso then paid the ransom and acquired Kamytzes. However, he refused to release the general until he was reimbursed for the ransom money he had paid. The two jointly sought the money from Alexius, who once again refused to pay it. Angry, the two decided to avenge themselves on the emperor and recoup Chryso’s investment from the neighboring Byzantine territory, which they began to raid. They seized a major monastery in Prilep and then raided into Thessaly, part of which they took control of, allowing Kamytzes to establish a more-or-less independent principality in northern Thessaly. Chryso then returned to Prosek.

Alexius dispatched a force against the two trouble-makers but ahead of these troops he sent envoys to split the two rebels’ alliance. He offered Chryso a new bride, Ivanko’s fiancée or (if the marriage had ever taken place) his widow. (She was the emperor’s granddaughter, thus of better family than Chryso’s present wife, Kamytzes’ daughter.) In turn, Chryso would have to send away Kamytzes’ daughter, who, unless she had changed her habits and taken to drink, probably still was not appreciated by her husband. Presumably a dowry was also offered. Chryso agreed to change wives. Alexius sent to Constantinople for his granddaughter, who was fully dispatched and married to Chryso. In this way the Chryso-Kamytzes alliance was broken and Chryso agreed to restore Pelagonia (the region around modern Bitola) and Prilep to Byzantium. Alexius then sent his armies into Thessaly. They expelled Kamytzes, who fled into the Rhodopes. Imperial troops pursued him thither and drove him out of that region as well. Nothing more is heard of him; if he did not die, presumably he fled to Kalojan.

Before he returned to Constantinople, the emperor used his troops to pick off various fortresses belonging to his new ally, Chryso. He then forced Chryso to accept a new treaty that recognized these losses and also gave the
Byzantines Strumica. However, Chrysos remained in control of Prosek, which the Byzantines again had besieged without success.

Thus during the years 1200–02 the empire had had considerable success. It had put an end to Ivanko’s attempts to establish a principality first in the Philippopolis region and subsequently along the Struma. It had also recovered northern Thessaly from Kamyzzes. Chrysos’ power was reduced and a number of his forts, including Strumica, had been recovered. At the same time a Byzantine magnate and general named Spiridanakis had tried to carve out an independent principality for himself at Smolenia; imperial troops had driven him out and recovered his territory. And most importantly, a peace that again pushed the boundaries of the Bulgarian state back to the Balkan Mountains had been established with a temporarily weakened Kalojan. Thus Thrace and Macedonia south of the Balkan Mountains, except for Chrysos’ small holding on the Vardar, were all Byzantine again.

Greece at the End of the Twelfth Century

While imperial Greece was spared from most of the raids by various Slavs, Vlachs, and Cumans, it was not spared from abuses by imperial authority or separatism by magnates. By the first half of the eleventh century, excluding the region west of the Pindus range (Acarnania and Epirus), which continued as the separate theme of Nikopolis, most of Greece—the themes of the Peloponnnesus and the Helladikoi (central Greece: Thessaly, Attica, Aetolia, Euboea, and the island of Aegina)—had been combined into one theme.

The theme’s governor, generally now called a praitor, was a non-local appointed from Constantinople who generally held office for about three years. Many of these governors, who were drawn from Constantinopolitan court circles, did not actually go to their post but remained in Constantinople, sending memos and orders to the lesser administrators who were present. The main task of the governor was to collect taxes, a task which was often turned over to tax farmers—individuals who at the start of their tenure paid the sum sought by the state and then went to their “farm” and tried to extract not only the taxes actually owed but a healthy profit for themselves as well. Since the governors also often purchased their office at court, they too, either acting for themselves or through their agents in Greece, tried to recover their investments. There was a long tradition of raising money from the populace for the support of governors; since the introduction of the theme system the earlier military governors (the strategoi) of the Helladikoi and of the Peloponnnesus had never received government salaries but had had to support themselves by raising their salaries from the local population. Thus Greece suffered from excessive taxation.

The governor’s residence, when a governor actually took up residence in Greece, was in Thebes, where he assembléed a huge court in imitation of the imperial court in Constantinople. The governor also frequently traveled around Greece with a huge entourage, expecting to be maintained by the
unwilling towns that had to host him. Michael Choniates, Archbishop of Athens (1182–1205) and brother of the historian Niketas Choniates, speaks of the plague of government officials oppressing the city of Athens. The governor, though his position had arisen centuries earlier as a military commander (the strategos who had been assigned the province to defend and administer), had by now become chiefly a civil official. He had only a small number of troops under his command, little more than a body guard which, though worthless to provide defense from raiders and pirates, was sufficient for him to extract and extort the hospitality and funds he demanded from the townspeople.

Within Greece there were also a small number of garrisons that guarded certain important castles on key routes or key mountain passes. It was difficult to find the manpower to maintain them, for here too there was corruption. Volunteers were needed to man them, but volunteers were few since the peasants who entered such service—voluntarily or under compulsion when volunteers were not forthcoming—frequently found their lands expropriated in their absence by local landlords or even by the government official who had recruited them. Illegal occupation of peasant land was a common abuse in Greece in the twelfth century.

The chief official under the governor, the praktor, was a financial official responsible for the assessment and collection of regular taxes, land taxes, and irregular services. When a governor chose to remain in Constantinople, the praktor tended to become the de facto governor. The praitor and/or praktor, living at a considerable distance from Constantinople, enjoyed freedom from imperial supervision and thus exercised more-or-less unrestricted authority in Greece. Appeals made by local citizens to the emperor about abuses tended to be ignored. After all, the individuals against whom they complained were court favorites.

Many locals must have dreamed of resistance. But only a few were able to act upon this dream. They tended to be the powerful local magnates who had amassed large estates with large retinues of armed men. Governors, with their limited forces, were not able to challenge the most powerful of these warlords, so they tended to ignore them and concentrate their extortion on the militarily unprotected towns. When the governors were absenteees, the warlords were able to increase their local authority even more easily. Thus in various provinces of Greece powerful local figures emerged, patrons and protectors of large numbers of locals, with sizeable armies. Since they were strong enough to resist the governor, they tended to be left alone by him. In their localities such magnates, depending on their proclivities, could exploit and rob or protect the rural population.

Since the governor had become mainly a civil official, military affairs were transferred to a second figure, the megaduke. This official’s role in Greece was more theoretical than actual, however. As a grand admiral responsible for maritime affairs throughout the empire, the megaduke had a zone of responsibility far broader than just the Greek themes of the Helladikoi
and Peloponnesus. And though he was in theory the supreme military commander for Greece, he was in fact almost never present and thus exercised almost no actual authority. Though in some areas (Crete, Cyprus, the Adriatic) the megaduke appointed a subordinate to be resident and supervise defense, he appointed no such resident subordinate for Greece. Each area of Greece was to be taxed to support local naval defense under the overall authority of this commander. By the early twelfth century, however, more and more of the money, though raised throughout the empire in areas needing naval protection, was being diverted to Constantinople, where a large portion of it ended up in the pockets of the megaduke and his associates.

After Manuel’s death, the actual number of ships and sailors under the megaduke had declined significantly, and the sailors tended to consist of unreliable foreigners. Indigenous fleets in Byzantine harbors were frequently allowed to decline to almost nothing. Thus any port was at the mercy of an attack from an effective fleet, be it Norman, Venetian, or Genoese. Ports were also at the mercy of pirates, some of whom were local Greeks while others were Italians. The islands off the coast, particularly Salamis, Aegina, and Makronisos (Makronisi), were pirate strongholds. The government was unable to defend Attica from them. Even though they were Christians, many of the pirates plundered churches. The Genoese pirates Vetrano and Caffaro also ravaged the coasts and isles of the Aegean. Finally in 1197 or 1198 an ex- pirate, John Steiriones, was sent with thirty ships against Caffaro, who was based in Calabria, and rid the Aegean of him. While this was occurring, however, the megaduke of the fleet, a certain Michael Stryphnos, whose wife was the sister of Alexius III’s wife, enriched himself by sharing in the plunder of pirates and privately pillaging on his own the ships and dockyards of the Aegean whose duty it was for him to defend.

Thus the two major officials responsible for the administration and defense of Greece were almost always (in the case of the megaduke) or frequently (in the case of the praitor) absentees. They did almost nothing for the benefit or defense of their area of responsibility but drained its resources for their own benefit. Not surprisingly, a major role in protecting the population and sending appeals to the emperor about abuses fell to the Church. The ecclesiastical organization was spread throughout Greece, and the bishops, holding sees for life, were in office for long terms and actually resided in the areas of their responsibility.

The worthlessness of the imperial government’s local defenses, as Herrin points out, is illustrated by the lack of provincial resistance against the crusaders when they appeared in Greece in 1205 and the ease with which they conquered Greece. No opposition was offered by any provincial military or naval force under the praitor’s or the megaduke’s command. The only opposition to the crusaders came from independent locals, most frequently landlords supported by their own retinues.

While the number of garrison soldiers, unwillingly serving the state, was small, and the forces making up local harbor patrols disintegrated as funds
meant for their maintenance were drained off and sent to Constantinople, imperial authority weakened. As a result local landlords began taking matters more and more into their own hands until eventually some of the more powerful ones began hacking out independent principalities.

The Greece dominated by such provincial warlords not surprisingly had become, in the eyes of the few intellectuals present (namely, certain of the higher clergy) a cultural backwater. Michael Choniates complains that whereas once the Athenians had spoken classical Attic, now their language was barbaric; only with the greatest difficulty had he achieved an understanding of the language which they spoke. In fact, he claims, it had taken him three years to learn the Attic dialect of the twelfth century. Unless the whole statement is simply exaggerated rhetoric, one might conclude this reflects more on Michael’s inability to learn languages than on the actual speech of the locals. He bemoans the fact, if it truly was a fact, that there were no longer any philosophers and that most of the clergy was uneducated. The ignorance of the Athenians shocks Michael. They attended church but rarely, and when they did so it was chiefly to chatter among themselves. The city was in ruins; weeds and grass grew in the streets and animals grazed about in them. The women and children were ill-fed and ill-clothed. There were even few ordinary workmen. Michael claims there were no sword-makers, iron-workers, or brass-workers in Athens. He could not even have a carriage built in Athens but had to have it ordered from a town on the Gulf of Corinth. Agriculture was in decline; the fertility of the soil had become poor and local agricultural implements were poor. Though the olive and vine still flourished, Athenian wine was poor, sharp, and bitter (possibly, if the suggestion is not anachronistic, it was retsina, to which he was not accustomed) and there were frequent shortages of wheat. The ordinary bread was wretched. However, the Athenians did make soap, and the local honey from Mount Hymettus was still famous.

Presumably to some extent Michael is exaggerating when he speaks of the decline of Athens. Some towns in Greece were clearly prosperous then. Thebes, Corinth, and Patras seem to have been rich by any standard. All three had flourishing silk industries. Though the Normans had captured many Theban silk-makers and carted them off to Palermo to establish the industry there in 1147, Thebes’ industry had quickly revived. When Benjamin of Tudela visited Thebes in the 1160s he raved about its silk industry, many of whose leading practitioners were Jews. In fact, Benjamin states that there were two thousand Jewish inhabitants in Thebes. “Among them are many eminent Talmudic scholars and men as famous as any of the present generation. No scholars like them are to be found in the whole Greek empire, except at Constantinople.” The northern regions (Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace), when spared from raids, were rich in wheat, and Euboea and the islands of Chios and Rhodes were famous for their wine.

However, the magnates and warlords, often called archons, were the dominant figures in Greece. At the same time that Kamytzes was trying with
the help of Chrysos to carve out his own principality in northern Thessaly, several magnates in the Peloponnnesus asserted their independence and put an end to all imperial authority south of the Isthmus of Corinth. The Chamaretos family, under Leo, its head, took over in Laconia, the region of ancient Sparta. Three families parceled out the region of Monemvasia: the Mamonas family, which was to be prominent for the next 250 years, along with the Sophianos and the Eudaimonoioannes families. And most important of all was the revolt of Leo Sgouro (Sguras), hereditary archon of Nauplia. By seizing Argos and Corinth, he gained control over the Isthmus of Corinth. Then in about 1201 he launched an attack against Athens. The city, led by Michael Choniates, its bishop, resisted until an imperial general arrived with an army to relieve the siege. Choniates would have had little to hope for should his city have fallen. Sgouro had already murdered the Bishop of Argos. He had also invited the Archbishop of Corinth to dinner, only to blind him before pitching him to his death from the heights of Acrocorinth.

Soon Sgouro attacked Athens again and, according to Choniates, also waged naval war against the city’s port. As a result, in 1202 communications were cut off between Athens and Constantinople. While Sgouro left troops to carry on the siege, other “brigands” under his command began raiding to the north, subduing various other towns including Thebes. His men then moved north into southern Thessaly. Only Athens seems to have held out, frequently under siege. When the knights of the Fourth Crusade reached Attica on their way to the Peloponnnesus, they found Athens encircled by the brigands of Sgouro. Sgouro thus succeeded in creating an independent principality centered in the northeastern Peloponnnesus that extended well into Attica and Boeotia, which the Byzantine state was in no position to oppose. Quite likely, it was only the arrival of the crusaders that prevented it from becoming a lasting affair. Not only did these warlords resist orders from the central government, but they also quarreled and fought with each other, squeezed the rural population, and blackmailed the towns.

A fitting final example of a warlord robber baron is Alexius Kapandrites. He captured the widow of an archon from Durazzo who, to escape a grasping imperial tax collector who had been trying to enforce an extremely high inheritance tax, had packed up her valuables and tried to flee to her relatives. En route, however, she had fallen into the clutches of Kapandrites, who forcibly married her and thus acquired her valuables. He and his private army so completely dominated his part of western Macedonia that he had no trouble in obtaining a certificate from the local Bishop of Devol attesting that no force had been used to carry out the marriage.

Thus on the eve of the Fourth Crusade the trend for magnates to build up huge estates supporting private armies had increased to the extent that they were setting up independent principalities that frequently ceased recognizing Constantinople’s authority; in some cases, owing to distance or the strength of certain of these warlords, Constantinople was helpless to oppose them. Alexius III had contributed to this situation; for to obtain support after his seizure
of the throne he had increased the privileges and exemptions of such figures, who then took advantage of the power gained thereby to bring about the secession of whole districts. This type of revolt was very different from the rebellions the empire had been familiar with earlier. For previous rebels had declared themselves emperors and then marched on Constantinople to try to seize the capital and realize their claim. Though rebellions of that sort did still occur from time to time, now for the first time, this new type of revolt, by separatism, had become endemic, causing the empire to disintegrate from within.

Abdication of Stefan Nemanja

On 23 or 24 March 1196 Stefan Nemanja abdicated at a sabor (council) of nobles and people that he had convoked at the Church of Saint Peter at Ras. Presumably he called the council and acquired its agreement in order to guarantee a smooth succession, particularly since his heir was to be Stefan, his second son, rather than Vukan, the eldest. And by abdicating in his lifetime, when he was still influential, Nemanja was in a position to secure the succession as he wanted it. Then, on the 25th, he was tonsured as a monk, taking the name Simeon. His wife became a nun. Nemanja first entered Studenica, the magnificent monastery he had built. By 1198 he had joined his youngest son, Sava, on Mount Athos.

Sava, born Rastko, had run away from home to Athos in 1191 or 1192 as a teenager. He first entered the Russian monastery Saint Panteleleimon there, where he was tonsured and took the name of Sava. Nemanja’s arrival attracted considerable notice since it was not common for rulers to become monks on the Holy Mountain. By that time various nations, such as the Russians and Georgians, had their own monasteries there. Nemanja and Sava dreamed of a monastery for the Serbs. Nemanja also had the resources behind him to carry out this dream. The council of monks for Athos quickly approved the plan to build a new monastery. Then Sava went to Constantinople, where in 1198 the Emperor, Alexius III, granted the Serbs Hilandar, an abandoned monastery on the mountain that had fallen into disrepair. Sava and Nemanja restored it and made various additions to create a magnificent monastery church and complex. For its support Nemanja gave it considerable lands back in Serbia. He also obtained for it other lands nearer by in the Chalcidic area. Sava drew up the monastery’s typikon (rule or charter), which was his privilege as kitiors (founder) of the institution. He based his Rule on that of the monastery of the Virgin Benefactress (Evergetis) in Constantinople. Hilandar grew rapidly. When Nemanja died in February 1199 it had fourteen monks. By the time Sava returned to Serbia bearing Nemanja’s body, probably in 1207, it had two hundred. Under the guidance of Sava and various other Serb intellectuals who resided there during the following centuries, Hilandar rose to become the cultural center of the Serbs.

Athos, over the previous two centuries the center of Byzantine mon-
asticism, was becoming international with its Russian and Georgian houses. Now it had become more so with the establishment of a Serbian monastery. Soon it was to acquire a Bulgarian one. Before the 1220s the Bulgarians acquired ownership of an older monastery, founded back in the tenth century, known as Zographou. Thus Athos became a center for international Orthodoxy. However, it should be stressed, as one might expect for an international faith, that monasteries, though acquiring national labels as rulers established, endowed, and showered with gifts their own special houses, did not become purely national. Membership cut across national lines; Serbs did not limit themselves to Hilandar but also resided in various Greek monasteries as well as in the Russian Panteleimon and the Bulgarian Zographou, and various non-Serbs dwelt in Hilandar.

Athos, under its protos (first chief elder), was administered by a central council composed of representatives from different monasteries. The council had a prescribed number of members; thus as new monasteries were created the number of council members did not change. As a result, some monasteries did not acquire representation. In the early thirteenth century, for example, neither Hilandar nor Zographou had delegates on the central council.

For the Slavic lands Athos served as a model of how monasteries should be organized and how monks should ideally live. Its ideals of the Christian life also penetrated into Slavic societies. Scholars frequently speak of an Orthodox synthesis being created on Athos, since there alone monks from all over the Orthodox world gathered, exchanging ideas. Generally, Greek ideas predominated on the mountain, and they were then carried back from Athos to the other Orthodox lands, for it was common for monks, after spending a period on Athos, to return home to monasteries in their native land. Thus Athos was a major source for the spread of manuscripts, texts, and theological ideas, as texts were copied and translated on the mountain and then carried back to the different Orthodox lands. Athos was also the source from which the Slavs drew ideas about Church law and Church organization. For example, as we shall see, Byzantine Canon Law was to reach Serbia via Athos. Athos was also a center from which various political ideas and Byzantine secular legal texts spread to the Orthodox world. Byzantine charter forms came to the Slavic lands via Athos because monasteries, receiving grants from Slavic rulers, expected them to be couched in traditional form. The earliest Serbian and Bulgarian charters in existence today were those issued by their rulers to monasteries on Athos. Soon the Slavic rulers were issuing their own charters to native monasteries and to their nobility using the same form.

Stefan Nemanja, now Simeon, died in February 1199. His body was brought back to Serbia by Sava, probably early in 1207, and buried at his monastery of Studenica. He was canonized, and his sons Stefan, the ruler of Serbia, and Sava each wrote a life of him, couched as a saint’s life in which he was called by his monastic name Simeon. Nemanja and Sava forged the close ties between Church and state that were to continue in Serbia thereafter. Serbian rulers were to be very generous to the Church. Each built at least one
major monastery church, an obligation for the salvation of his soul. Most rulers were also generous in donating lands and cash to the Church. As a result of this generosity and the Church’s gratitude, Nemanja and several of his successors were to be canonized. In appreciation, and from the time of Nemanja, the Church supported the dynasty. Following the lead of Sava, who of course was the dominant Serbian Church figure of his time, the Church depicted Nemanja as the founder of Serbia. Its previous history faded into a fog.

The Nemanja depicted, however, differs in the two biographies. Sava’s, written before Nemanja was canonized, emphasizes him as a good man and good Christian monk. It speaks little of his secular life and focuses on two moments in his life: his abdication to become a monk and his death. It was probably intended to advance his candidacy as a saint while also serving as a model for others to imitate. Nemanja’s successor Stefan the First-Crowned, on the other hand, wrote a longer life, which emphasizes his deeds as a ruler: Nemanja as a military leader, his conquests, his actions against heretics. Stefan presents him as the founder of a state and a dynasty. Nemanja, by then already canonized, is depicted as a patron saint for Serbia (akin to Saint Demetrius for Thessaloniki) who after his death had become the protector of the state. And since Nemanja was effective in this role, his ability to protect showed God’s favor for Serbia and for its dynasty. Such a depiction thus reinforced the dynasty’s right to rule Serbia, and, of course, it also advanced Stefan’s own claims to rule, not only over rivals from other families, but also (since Nemanja had personally selected Stefan over his older son Vukan to be Grand župan of Serbia) against Vukan. And Stefan found it easy to insert a great deal about himself and his successes in the life he wrote, making this relevant by seeing Nemanja’s supernatural help behind his own successes. At the same time, to bolster the ruler, himself and his successors, Stefan also moralizes about the duty of subjects to obey their ruler and to render services and taxes to him.

The cult of Nemanja, developed from the start by his sons Stefan and Sava, proved useful to his heirs. All his reigning descendants until the last Serbian Nemanjić, who died in 1371, benefited from being descended from a saint, for descent from the holy king strengthened their right to rule. Nemanja also became a protector for the state whose miraculous intervention from time to time either saved the state or proved useful to explain certain events, like the death of Strez (whom we shall meet soon) who was on the verge of attacking Serbia. A miraculous intervention by Nemanja provided a more pleasing, less embarrassing explanation than what was probably the true one: that Stefan, if not Saint Sava himself, hired someone from Strez’s own entourage to murder him. On the subject of cults, it is interesting to note that Saints Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles to the Slavs and the creators of Slavic letters, who were very popular saints and cult figures in Bulgaria and Macedonia, received little notice in Serbia. There they rarely were mentioned in literary works and seldom appeared on frescoes.
No source gives a reason for Nemanja’s abdication. Since this act followed immediately upon the succession of Alexius III in Byzantium in 1195, and since Alexius was the father of Stefan’s wife, various scholars have tried to connect the two events. However, the abdication need not be linked to Alexius’ succession. Nemanja seems to have been genuinely religious. He had long been active in Church affairs and church building. In fact his church building had been an issue between him and his brother Tihomir back in the 1160s. He had continued to build churches in the decades that followed. He also donated land and gifts not only to Orthodox churches but also to Catholic churches on the coast, in Bar and Dubrovnik. Further, he held a large Church council in about 1170 that had condemned a heresy about which we learn only that the heretics did not teach that Christ was the Son of God. The heretical leaders were branded and exiled. Most scholars believe these heretics were Bogomils; however, though quite possible, we cannot be certain about this conclusion since the information about their beliefs is much too scanty to permit any conclusions to be drawn. We shall find very little about heretics thereafter in Serbia, though Dušan’s law code from 1349 does contain a couple of articles against heresy.

Therefore I do not agree that Nemanja’s abdication in 1196 was a result of Alexius’ succession in 1195. However, that Stefan, the second son, rather than Vukan, the eldest, succeeded to the throne of Raška may well be owing to the fact that Stefan’s wife was the emperor’s daughter. In fact it could easily have been agreed at the time of the marriage arrangements—as Sava actually reports—that Stefan was to succeed. The emperor, then Isaac, might have agreed to give his niece to Stefan only on that condition. But by 1196 Byzantium was too weak for Serbia to gain any advantage from having a Byzantine princess sharing its throne. Hungary and the papacy were to have far more influence than Byzantium in Serbia during the years that followed.

**Rivalry between Stefan and Vukan in Serbia**

Vukan, the eldest son, was given Zeta, Trebinje, and the coast (southern Dalmatia) to rule. This territory had been assigned to him several years before the abdication—by 1190, when Vukan is referred to in a charter to Split as ruling in this region. Some scholars believe that Vukan’s possession of this territory during his father’s reign indicates that at the time of his appointment he had been the intended heir to the throne and had been given this territory in order to acquire experience and prestige for his subsequent rule. This was to be the case for intended heirs later on toward the end of the thirteenth and into the fourteenth century. However, others have seen Vukan’s appointment as being similar to Hungary’s policy in the twelfth century of granting a banate (the banate of Croatia and Dalmatia) to a younger son not in line for the throne, as compensation. If this Hungarian model applies to Nemanja’s Serbia, then Stefan’s succession should not be seen as a
post-1190 policy change. In any case, regardless of when and why, Nemanja decided that Stefan rather than Vukan should become Serbia’s Grand župan. The granting to Vukan of a large appanage reflects the typical South Slavic custom of dividing an inheritance among the various heirs rather than having the whole realm devolve upon a single heir. If Vukan had by then acquired a large number of associates and supporters, the grant of an appanage to him may also have been made to avoid rebellion. However, though the territory was divided, Nemanja expected the unity of the state to continue. He did not visualize Zeta becoming a separate kingdom under Vukan. His final instructions were for his sons to co-operate in brotherly love and peace.

Scholars have debated on how much independence Zeta actually had under Raškan rule. However, it must be stressed that there are theoretical and practical aspects to this question. Sava states that Stefan was to have suzerainty; he adds that Nemanja made Vukan “Great Prince,” gave him sufficient land, and asked him to obey Stefan, who was ordered to hold his brother Vukan in honor and not to offend him. Presumably in theory, then, Vukan was to have internal autonomy and the right to his territory’s income, but as a subordinate prince he owed military service when Raška was at war and did not have the right to carry on independent foreign affairs.

However, regardless of the theory, what is of importance is what actually happened. And Vukan at once asserted himself as an independent ruler. Thus even though it may have violated the “constitution” or spirit of his assignment, Vukan carried on his own foreign policy. He did this not because of a right to do so, but because he was strong enough to get away with it. He immediately began calling himself king and was called king by the pope. In fact a dated inscription from 1195, before Nemanja’s abdication, from the Church of Saint Luke in Kotor calls Vukan King of Duklja. Since Stefan Nemanja at his abdication shortly thereafter called Vukan “Great Prince” it is evident that Nemanja did not give Vukan, or agree to his having, a royal title. Thus we can conclude that Vukan was a self-styled king. Most probably Nemanja was not aware that Vukan was doing this. Probably Vukan simply assumed the title of the former rulers of Zeta (Duklja), who had been kings until about 1146. He may well have found it convenient to claim that this title went with the territory he had been assigned. Furthermore, since the previous Dukljans and Serbian dynasties were related (and if, as seems evident, Nemanja was related to the previous Serbian dynasty), then Nemanja and Vukan were descendants of the former Dukljan royal house, enabling Vukan to advance a family claim to the title as well. By calling Vukan king, the pope, with whom Vukan had cordial relations (for there were many Catholics in the western parts of Zeta, particularly along the coast), provided support for Vukan’s use of the title. He may eventually have sent him a crown. If Vukan was using this title in 1195, however, he clearly was using it prior to any grant he may have had from the pope, who would not have granted a crown when Nemanja still ruled all Serbia.
From the above it is evident that since Vukan’s title was self-taken and against Nemanja’s wishes, it cannot be used to argue, as some scholars have in the past, that Nemanja had tried to divide his realm into two independent principalities, each under its own dynasty, with Stefan and his descendants ruling Serbia and Vukan and his heirs ruling Zeta. However, even though Nemanja did not want this, it was what Vukan sought to realize. It has also been stated that Vukan played upon Zetan feelings of separateness to create a second state. This is an anachronistic theory. Both Raška and Zeta were populated by Serbs. But the loyalty of most people then was to a far more local unit than a region like Zeta. It was to a village, or possibly to a county or to a family. Few, if any, would have had strong awareness that they were Zetans. Those Zetan nobles who supported Vukan (and as far as we know most of them did) surely did so for the personal advantages they saw in this policy, and not because of any Zetan consciousness. The localism within Raška and Zeta makes it hard to speak of these regions as states. In fact the term frequently used for them was država, which now means a state but is derived from the verb to hold and meant a holding, one’s patrimony. Under Vukan stood a whole series of Zetan nobles holding their smaller county patrimonies to which their interests were attached. Each noble with his family and retainers gave service to the prince when he had to or wanted to and avoided such service when he saw it to be in his own interests and if he felt strong enough to get away with it.

Vukan, then, was clearly dissatisfied with being excluded from the succession in Raška and felt he, not Stefan, should rule there. In order to realize his ambitions and assert his independence from Stefan in his own territory, he began to seek assistance. Presumably, though we know nothing about this process, he carried out a policy to win the support of the nobles of Zeta. He also opened up cordial relations with foreign powers, especially with the papacy and Hungary. The result of Vukan’s policy, despite Nemanja’s wish that his sons co-operate and jointly manage their realms as two parts of one state, was to divide the state into two independent realms. Each ruler, though, dreamed of a united Serbia, but one under himself at the expense of his brother.

Alliances and Church Policy Involving Zeta and Bosnia

Vukan sought to advance his cause by involving himself in the wrangling over Church jurisdiction then going on in the western Balkans. In 1190 Dubrovnik’s archbishop stood over all the churches under the pope in Bosnia and southern Dalmatia. Split’s archbishop stood over all the central and northern Dalmatian churches. Thus the Catholics of Zeta and Bosnia were under Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik, as noted, tolerated Bosnia’s local customs, allowing Bosnia to use Slavic in its liturgy and to choose its own bishop who simply went to Dubrovnik for consecration. Hungary was the overlord of the town of
Split, and the Archbishop of Split, though directly under the pope, had close ties to the Hungarian court and higher clergy. Hungary was in theory also the overlord over the state of Bosnia. However, Bosnia under Kulin had, for all practical purposes, made itself into an independent state. Thus Hungary was seeking a chance to reassert its authority over Bosnia.

In 1192 the Hungarian king succeeded in persuading the pope that Bosnia should be removed from the jurisdiction of Dubrovnik and placed under the Archbishop of Split. Bosnia, wanting to retain its independence and seeing the pope’s decision as a means to extend Hungarian influence, seems simply to have ignored the change. At least, if we can believe later Ragusan chronicles, throughout the 1190s Bosnia continued to send its bishops to Dubrovnik, not Split, to be consecrated. And an Archbishop of Dubrovnik traveled to Bosnia to consecrate two churches in 1194. Dubrovnik, wishing to retain its jurisdiction over Bosnia and objecting to the growth of Split’s authority, thus supported Bosnia in resisting subordination to Split. Needless to say, the behavior of Bosnia and Dubrovnik annoyed both Hungary and the Archbishop of Split.

Vukan also had reason to oppose Dubrovnik. In his realm lay the important Catholic bishopric of Bar. With great effort the earlier Dukljan (Zetan) rulers had persuaded the pope to remove Bar and various other bishoprics in Zeta from the jurisdiction of Dubrovnik’s archbishop. They met with success in 1089 when the pope removed Bar from the jurisdiction of Dubrovnik and made Bar into an independent archbishopric standing over a series of southern Dalmatian suffragan bishoprics that had also been taken from Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik protested this change vehemently. Eventually, as the state of Zeta declined, Dubrovnik was able in 1142 to persuade the pope to rescind this reform. In that year Bar was reduced again to a bishopric and, along with its former suffragans, was restored to Dubrovnik’s jurisdiction. Now it was Bar’s turn to protest. In the 1170s Bar even entered into the scheming of Archbishop Rainer of Split. Rainer was then trying to restore Split to the position it had held in the tenth century when all Dalmatia, including Dubrovnik, had been subordinate to Split. Bishop Gregory of Bar, angry at Dubrovnik, had thrown his support behind the intrigues of Rainer and had agreed to recognize Split as Bar’s suzerain. However, this plan petered out when, as we saw earlier, Rainer was murdered by the Kačići in about 1180. Soon thereafter Zeta was annexed by Nemanja, who took up Bar’s cause. We noted earlier that in the course of a war with Dubrovnik, Nemanja had pilfered documents supporting Dubrovnik’s claims to Bar from the Ragusan archives. However, as an Orthodox ruler, rather than a papal subject, Nemanja was not able to effect a change.

But then in the 1190s Vukan assumed power in Zeta. To assert his independence from Raška he needed allies, in case his policies led to war. As a power and one bordering on Serbia, Hungary was a valuable ally to gain. Vukan soon entered into negotiations with Hungary and the papacy. Both
these rulers recognized his title of king and his independence from Raška. In fact he may have eventually received a crown from the pope. It was natural for him to turn to the pope; it would get him into the good graces of Hungary. In addition there were many Catholics in his realm, not only along the coast but also inland as far as Podgorica, whose support he wanted. As a result of the negotiations that established his alliance with the pope and brought him recognition as king, Vukan accepted papal supremacy and became a Catholic. As a Catholic he was now also in a better position to fight for Bar’s cause. Hostile to Dubrovnik and forging closer ties with Hungary, not surprisingly he soon came to support Hungary against Bosnia and involved himself in plots against that state. Vukan’s relations with Hungary seem to have become closer after 1198 when Andrew, brother of King Imre and now Duke of Croatia and Dalmatia, conquered part of Hum, probably western Hum down to the Neretva. If Andrew’s conquests extended that far, it would have brought Andrew and his officials physically into the proximity of Vukan’s Zeta. The Hungarian presence in Hum may well have encouraged Vukan to enter into a more active and aggressive policy.

At this time Split had ulterior motives to criticize matters in Bosnia, to show that Dubrovnik was managing Bosnia’s Church affairs badly and that Bosnia’s ruler was lax or even worse on Church matters. Vukan, to support his Hungarian allies and to discredit Dubrovnik as a means to advance Bar’s cause, had similar motives. Thus in 1199 Vukan wrote the pope that Ban Kulin of Bosnia, his wife, his sister (the widow of Miroslav of Hum who had been living at Kulin’s court since Miroslav’s death in ca. 1198), various other relatives, and ten thousand other Christians had been seduced by heresy. He gives no description of this so-called heresy, and the emphasis on the alleged involvement of these political leaders makes one think Vukan had ulterior motives for writing his letter. In the years immediately following, the Archbishop of Split, whose ulterior motives are obvious, began to complain about heretics in Bosnia as did Split’s supporter the King of Hungary. The pope also took an interest. Thus Bosnia was faced with an impressive array of opponents, all concerned with its internal affairs. We shall return to Bosnia’s reaction shortly. Dubrovnik, accused of laxness, however, also found itself under considerable pressure. And it seems that the combination of Vukan, Hungary, and Split were sufficient to persuade the pope once again to remove Bar and its former suffragans—the most important of which were the Bishops of Ulcinj and Drivast—from Dubrovnik’s jurisdiction. Bar’s bishop was again raised to archbishop. This change occurred in 1199.

Bar’s restored status was announced at a Church synod held at Bar in the summer of 1199 and attended by bishops from Vukan’s lands. The decisions of the council were binding only on those lands and reflect the degeneracy of Catholicism in southern Dalmatia at the time. The council banned various forms of simony and forbade priests to undergo judicial ordeals—showing that the ordeal to decide legal quarrels was then practiced in Zeta. The synod
also insisted that priests shave their beards and be celibate; these last two demands suggest that certain Orthodox Church practices may have been adopted by Zeta’s Catholic clergy. The council also forbade laymen to expel their wives without a Church hearing.

The reforms do not seem to have improved Church conditions. Throughout the early thirteenth century we find it was the practice for citizens to loot the homes of bishops on their deaths which frequently led to brawls, some of which even took place inside churches. Such looting was a widespread practice; in fifteenth-century Rome it was still customary to plunder the house of a cardinal when it was announced he had been elected pope. The citizens of Drivast on one occasion murdered their bishop. And in 1249 when the Archbishop of Bar tried to suspend a suffragan bishop until he had been cleared by the pope, the bishop ignored his superior’s orders and continued to serve mass. Finally the pope suspended all the bishops of the archdiocese until they appeared before him in Rome. Only the Archbishop of Bar was excluded from this order, for he was said to have been too elderly to travel to Rome.

Needless to say, Dubrovnik protested Bar’s restored status, and the issue remained under heated discussion throughout the first half of the thirteenth century. Each time an Archbishop of Bar died, Dubrovnik tried to prevent the selection of a new archbishop. Dubrovnik regularly sent protests to the pope and issued frequent appeals to Bar’s suffragans to try to steal their recognition from Bar. At times Dubrovnik’s attempts were met with violence. According to a later chronicle, when early in the thirteenth century an Archbishop of Dubrovnik tried to visit Bar officially he was driven away with stones. At other times Dubrovnik achieved small successes such as occurred in the 1240s, when the Bishop of Ulcinj, with the consent of local authorities, decided to submit to Dubrovnik. The fight was to continue until 1255 when Dubrovnik finally gave up the struggle.

Presumably Stefan of Serbia also felt threatened by Vukan’s alliances, for in 1198 Stefan entered into negotiations with the pope. Evidently he hoped that if he created ties with the papacy, the pope would restrain Vukan and the Hungarians from acting against Raška. Indicating his willingness to submit to Rome, Stefan also sought a crown from the pope. He had expectations of success until King Imre of Hungary got wind of the plan and persuaded the pope to drop it. In 1200 or 1201 (previously scholars had dated it 1198) Stefan accused his queen, the emperor’s daughter Eudocia, of adultery. He chased her from Raška. She left on foot with only the clothes on her back. This action provides another example of the decline of Byzantium’s prestige. It is evident that Stefan had no fear of antagonizing the empire and also no hope that the empire could supply him with effective support should his conflict with Vukan result in war. The ousting of the Byzantine princess may also reflect Stefan’s attempts to align himself more closely with the pope, from whom he was then still hoping to receive a crown. The lady fled to Zeta, where Vukan befriended her, feeding and clothing her until, recovered, she went to Durazzo where a Byzantine ship arrived to take her home.
The Bosnian Church Council of 1203

Meanwhile between 1199 and 1202 the verbal attacks continued against Ban Kulin of Bosnia. He was accused of warmly receiving heretics (the heresy unspecified) who had been expelled from Dalmatia. His accusers claimed that many Bosnians, and possibly even Bosnia’s ruler, had become tainted with heresy, if not out and out heretics themselves. Kulin wrote to the pope that he thought these refugees were good Christians, and he sent some to Rome to be examined. Whether or not they were really heretics is not stated in any surviving source. But one could not have expected the uneducated Bosnian ruler to have discerned the difference. He clearly considered himself a faithful Catholic; he maintained ties with the Archbishop of Dubrovnik, sent gifts to the pope, and built Catholic churches. But Bosnia was clearly in a vulnerable position. Split, Hungary’s tool, was seeking to assert its ecclesiastical control over Bosnia, which would increase Hungarian influence in Bosnia and threaten Bosnia’s independence. And furthering Hungary’s ambitions, the pope, probably incited by Hungary, was calling on Hungary to take action against heresy in Bosnia. Clearly a crusade against heretics would serve as a fine excuse for Hungary to assert its overlordship over Bosnia.

Kulin, however, defused the threat against himself by calling a Church council. It was held on 6 April 1203 at Bolino Polje. The Catholic Church was represented by an archdeacon from Dubrovnik rather than a representative of the Archbishop of Split. Thus Kulin was able to stand fast, ignore the papal order to change his Church’s suzerain bishop, and continue to deal with Dubrovnik. Presumably his clear loyalty to the pope, at a time when heresy was threatening so much of southern Europe including (at least so the pope feared) Bosnia, led the pope to look the other way and not insist on the jurisdictional change. For though it might be lax, Dubrovnik was a zealously Catholic city.

The Bosnians at the council renounced a whole series of errors (mostly errors in practice) that probably arose through ignorance of how practices should be carried out. Few, if any, seemed related to the doctrines and practices of any known heresy. They promised to reform their Church, recognized the pope as head of the Church, and reaffirmed their loyalty to Rome. Kulin also reaffirmed his allegiance to Hungary and sent envoys to the Hungarian court to confirm this and swear again to uphold the decisions of the Council of Bolino Polje. Despite these verbal assurances, however, Hungary’s authority in Bosnia remained nominal. Kulin seems to have died the following year; the name of his successor is not known.

Vukan Seizes Raška

In the spring of 1202 Vukan, with Hungarian aid, attacked Raška and deposed Stefan, who fled. Vukan took over in Raška, taking also the title Grand župan and recognizing Hungarian suzerainty. The Hungarian king added “Serbia”
to his title. Hungarian kings were to retain the name “Serbia” in their title throughout the Middle Ages, even though they usually held no Serbian territory to base this title upon. An inscription from 1202 describes Vukan’s holdings as follows: the Serbian land (i.e., Raška), the Zeta region, the coastal towns, and the Niš region. Such a description reflects the unintegrated character of this territory and shows that Niš, recently regained by Raška, still retained a special identity.

In November 1202 Ban Kulin of Bosnia attacked some “Hungarian lands.” Since it is unlikely that he would have launched an attack against the strong Hungarian monarch, it seems probable that he had actually attacked Vukan, who had been trying to make trouble for Kulin earlier and whose submission to the King of Hungary would explain the reference to “Hungarian lands.” Whether Kulin attacked Vukan in Raška or in Zeta is not known, nor do we know whether he attacked him for his own reasons or in an attempt to support Stefan. We do not know what, if anything, resulted from Kulin’s attack. Finally we also do not know where Stefan fled from Raška; it is usually claimed that he fled to Bulgaria. This is perfectly possible, but he might also have fled to Bosnia.

In March 1203 the pope ordered a Hungarian bishop, the Archbishop of Kalocsa, to go to Serbia to strengthen the position of the Catholic faith there. Presumably, then, with Vukan in power there, the pope aimed with Vukan’s help to win Raška over to the Catholic Church. There is no evidence that the bishop actually made this trip. And no information exists about Church affairs in Raška during Vukan’s brief reign. Kalojan of Bulgaria, however, was surely alarmed at the strengthening of his Hungarian rival’s position in Serbia along Bulgaria’s western border. In the summer of 1203 Bulgaria attacked Vukan’s Serbia, plundering Raška and annexing the Niš region. Whether Kalojan’s attack was made to support Stefan or simply to take advantage of the unstable situation to benefit Bulgaria is not known. In any case Bulgaria did take advantage of matters to annex the Niš region. Kalojan established a Bulgarian bishop in that city. The pope now found himself caught in the middle between his Hungarian friends and Kalojan, whom he was trying to woo. In September 1203 he wrote to Kalojan asking him to make peace with Vukan. The letter seems to have had no effect.

It is often stated that Stefan was returned to his throne in 1203 and his restoration was a result of Kalojan’s attack. This view is mere speculation, however. First, no source states that Kalojan had any role in restoring Stefan. In fact, no source provides any information at all on how Stefan regained his throne. His restoration could easily have been the result of Bulgarian aid, but he also could have regained his throne with Bosnian help or even through the support of local Raškans. Furthermore, it is not at all clear when Stefan regained his throne.

There certainly is no evidence that Stefan returned to his throne during the summer of 1203, though this is often stated. In fact, in the autumn of 1203 the pope wrote Kalojan to make peace with Vukan. This suggests that a state
of enmity still existed between the two after Kalojan’s attack in the summer and that the pope wanted peace between them to secure Vukan from danger. That Vukan could be in danger from Kalojan suggests the two still had a common border. If Stefan had by then regained Raška, then his lands would have separated Vukan’s from Kalojan’s and Kalojan would not have threatened Vukan except possibly as an ally of Stefan. Next, early in 1204, the pope wrote King Imre of Hungary about arranging a coronation for Vukan. Since Vukan was already crowned King of Zeta, this presumably referred to a coronation for Raška. Unless this was to be an empty ceremony that would award a meaningless title for propagandistic purposes, this statement suggests that Vukan was still in Raška.

If these two imprecise statements are to be interpreted in the most obvious way, then Vukan was still in power in Raška early in 1204. Stefan’s return, about which we have no information, then would have followed this date, presumably coming later in 1204 or early in 1205. In any case, Stefan was back in Raška and the brothers were still in a state of war when Sava returned to Serbia with Nemanja’s body and mediated peace between them. Exactly when between late 1204 and April 1207 Sava arrived in Serbia is not certain either, though early 1207 has long been accepted as the most reasonable date.

The view that was formerly popular among scholars, that Stefan was restored to power by Kalojan in the summer of 1203, attributes the pope’s continued interest in Vukan after that date to slow communications and ignorance. It was argued that the pope had not received information as to what was happening in Raška and thus still believed Vukan was in power there after he had actually been deposed.

Raška and Zeta, 1206/07 to ca. 1216

Stefan retained Raška from the time of his return to power until his death in 1227. Vukan returned to Zeta, and tensions continued between the two brothers, breaking out in skirmishes from time to time, until about 1206/07 (an argument can be made for February 1206 or February 1207) when their brother Sava returned from Athos with their father’s body and mediated peace. This peace restored the pre-war status quo of two separate realms. Sava’s mediation almost certainly preceded an April 1207 Kotor-Dubrovnik treaty since that document refers to Stefan and Vukan together, suggesting that at least officially the two were then at peace and recognized one another. Sava then settled down in Serbia as abbot of Studenica. Vukan seems to have abdicated in his lifetime, for his son George is referred to as king in 1208, while Vukan is referred to as alive, interestingly enough as “Great Prince,” in an inscription from 1209 at Studenica. His reduced title may not reflect Vukan’s view of matters but rather how Sava or other Raškans regarded him. We do not know why he abdicated. Possibly he wanted to secure his son’s succession when he was still alive and able to play a role, perhaps fearing that
if he died before George’s installation, Stefan might take advantage of an interregnum to gain Zeta for himself. Vukan seems to have died in 1209 or shortly thereafter.

The struggle between the two branches of the family continued, however, under Vukan’s son George. In order to procure further security for his lands against any threat from Stefan, George accepted, probably in 1208, Venetian suzerainty. Though this submission may well reflect tensions between George and Stefan, his acceptance of Venetian suzerainty need not have been from that cause. Venice at that time, right after the Fourth Crusade (which it had played a major role in), was trying to assert its control over many Balkan ports. For example, in 1205 Venice had obtained submission from Dubrovnik, which was allowed to retain its own autonomy and customary civil government but had assumed the obligation to provide Venice with ships for military needs when called on to do so. George may well have submitted to Venice to prevent Venice from taking over his own ports in southern Dalmatia.

George of Zeta, bearing the title king, was soon allied militarily with Venice against a second, theoretically Venetian vassal, an Albanian named Dimitri who from his mountain stronghold at Kroja (Krujë) dominated that part of Albania toward the end of the first decade of the thirteenth century. George promised military support to Venice should Dimitri attack Venetian territory. This alliance and conflict may have been related to the Raški-Zeta struggle, for Dimitri had close ties with Raška, having married Stefan’s daughter. After concluding the alliance George temporarily disappears from the sources, and by 1216 Stefan had obtained control, probably through military action, over Zeta. Thus he finally put an end to Zeta’s separatism and independent kingship. He may eventually have assigned Zeta to his own son Radoslav. Recently, however, this assignment has been questioned by scholars who believe that Stefan retained Zeta for himself. In either case, Stefan seems to have been making an effort to make Zeta the patrimony of his own family rather than that of Vukan’s heirs. Until Dušan’s death in 1355, Zeta remained part of Raška with no special privileges. Frequently it was administered by the heir to the Raški throne, who bore a title connected not with Zeta but with his position at the Raški court. Agreements and grants made by the young holder of Zeta generally had to be confirmed by the ruler of Raška. However, though Zeta retained no special legal position, its nobles tended to be unruly. They frequently revolted or supported revolts by the holder of Zeta against the ruler of Raška.

Vukan’s descendant George was to continue the struggle beyond 1216, as we shall see, but his descendants of the next generation had no special positions and they are found as common župans (county lords) lost in the crowd of Zeta’s nobility. Then Zeta, with its special dynasty eliminated, became juridically no different from the rest of the Serbian state, except in its frequently being managed by a special governor from the reigning family, whose presence may be explained by the need to keep closer supervision over
this unruly area and whose actions, in turn, remained under the close supervision of the Grand župan, later King, of Raška.

The Region of Albania in the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries

The Albanians were not to create any structure resembling a state until the fifteenth century. However, organized in tribes under their own chieftains, the Albanians dominated the mountains of most of what we today think of as Albania. The Albanians were and are divided into speakers of two distinct dialects: the Ghegs in the north and the Tosks in the south. The Shkumbi (Vrego) River marks the approximate boundary between the two linguistic groups. The second major boundary within Albania is the Drin River. The territory to its north was oriented toward Serbia and/or Zeta. One or the other of these two Serb entities frequently ruled this territory and Serbian influence had a major impact on its political organization, commercial affairs, and culture. At the close of the twelfth century the Serbs held the town of Skadar (Scutari, Shkodër, Macedon) and presumably controlled, possibly only loosely, the territory to the Drin.

South of the Drin (and increasingly so the further south one went) Greek influence was strong. This territory had been incorporated into the Byzantine theme of Durazzo, and the Greek Church organization, headed by the Metropolitan of Durazzo, had authority over it. Along the coast, including in Durazzo, Latin peoples were also to be found, and the Roman Church worked actively to maintain and improve the position of its institutions in Durazzo and other coastal cities. Despite the rivalry between Orthodox and Catholic institutions, the local Durazzans of both rites seem to have coexisted peacefully and were to continue to do so. Durazzo had long been a major trade center, the point of arrival or departure for goods to and from Macedonia, Thrace, Constantinople, and points further east, as the via Egnatia (from Constantinople through Thessaloniki and Ohrid) ended in Durazzo. Though Durazzo had an active citizenry that participated in local affairs—as we saw in the first volume of our history—the Byzantines (and their various successors who were to hold Durazzo during the later Middle Ages) were usually able to keep the local citizenry under control and manage the town. Thus Durazzo was not to achieve the level of local autonomy that was found in the towns of Dalmatia. In fact, no town south of Bar was able to create an autonomous commune or city-state governed under its own law code and by its own local council.

At the close of the twelfth century, excluding the tribesmen in the mountains, many of whom functioned freely regardless of which state they owed theoretical submission to, the only known Albanian political entity was that of Kroja. A certain Progon seems to have gained possession of this castle and come to control the territory around it. Possession of the fortress remained in his family, and by 1208 his son or grandson Dimitri, against whom, as we
have just seen, Venice and Zeta formed an alliance, had become lord of Kroja.

**Hum at the End of the Twelfth and the Beginning of the Thirteenth Centuries**

The history of Hum in this period is almost impossible to unravel. In about 1190 part or even most of Hum had been assigned to Nemanja’s youngest son Rastko. However, after this grant Miroslav, who prior to 1190 had held all Hum, continued to hold at least the region of the Lim River with Bijelo Polje, where he built his church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. Since Rastko was only a teen-ager at the time it is not certain that he actually occupied his appanage. Perhaps Nemanja was chiefly planning for the future, hoping to prevent Hum from breaking away under Miroslav’s heirs. Soon thereafter, probably in 1192, Rastko decided to become a monk and fled to Mount Athos where he realized that ambition, being tonsured and taking the name Sava. Whether Nemanja then allowed his brother to regain his former Hum holdings or whether these were assigned to some appointee of Nemanja is not known. Miroslav continued to manage at least part of Hum until his death in about 1198, after which, according to various poor and unusually unspecific sources, most of which were written considerably later, various claimants struggled over Hum. Usually it is not stated how much of Hum any of them held or which parts they were seeking to gain.

Hungary immediately laid claim to Hum, considering it part of the Bosnian lands it claimed. Imre, King of Hungary, appointed his brother Andrew Duke of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Hum in 1198. Whether he was ever able to obtain actual control over any part of Hum is not certain. However, it seems likely that he acquired some of Hum, for a Hungarian charter refers to a military victory over Raška and Hum. Thus it seems he obtained part of Hum, presumably the region north and west of the Neretva extending up to the Cetina River. It is inconceivable that he acquired any of the region stretching east from the Neretva to the Serbian border.

If we can believe Orbini, who wrote a history of the Slavs in 1601, using an unknown source now lost, a ten-year-old son of Miroslav named Andrew (Andrej) succeeded Miroslav. No mention is made of Toljen, who was to have been Miroslav’s heir back in 1189 when the marriage was negotiated between Toljen and the German crusader’s daughter. Presumably this Andrew held Hum east of the Neretva while the Hungarians held the western part. Soon after Andrew’s succession, according to Orbini, the nobles of Hum rose up and chose as their lord a prince born in Hum named Peter. Though Orbini does not make Peter a descendant of Miroslav, most scholars think he was actually Andrew’s brother. When Peter came to power, Andrew and Miroslav’s widow were exiled. And we have noted that Miroslav’s widow did take up residence outside of Hum at the court of her brother, Ban Kulín of Bosnia. Andrew fled to Nemanja. Here Orbini’s chronology is wrong and he
shows this clearly when he proceeds to discuss Nemanja’s war of 1190 with Byzantium. If, as seems reasonable, we place Andrew’s flight after the deaths of Miroslav and Nemanja, then it was Nemanja’s son Stefan who gave Andrew asylum.

Then Orbini, clearly allowing for a considerable passage of time, continues his narration by reporting that Peter controlled all of Hum and frequently fought successfully with the ruler of Bosnia and his Croatian neighbors, the latter presumably residing around and beyond the Cetina River. Next, after his accession to the throne Stefan of Raška took up Andrew’s cause and attacked Peter in Hum. Peter was defeated, crossed the Neretva, and took control of that part of Hum beyond (west and north of) the Neretva. This, of course, is the part of Hum that Duke Andrew of Hungary would have held if he had assumed actual control over any part of Hum. Possibly Duke Andrew had held this territory only briefly and lost control over it when he became involved in a war with his brother, King Imre, in 1203. If Duke Andrew had been forced to withdraw from affairs in Hum, then Peter may have stepped into the power vacuum and assumed control over this part of Hum as well. This could explain Orbini’s statement about Peter’s fighting with his Bosnian and Croatian neighbors.

Having defeated Peter, Stefan gave most of Hum to his own son Radoslav; to his “nephew” (actually, his cousin) Andrew he gave only the district of Popovo and the coastal lands of Hum, including Ston. Soon thereafter, according to Orbini, when Radoslav died, this Andrew, with Stefan’s agreement, took control of all Hum. Since in fact Radoslav did not die then but lived to succeed Stefan, something is clearly wrong here. Whether the statement is completely erroneous or whether Stefan for some other reason removed Radoslav from Hum and turned over all eastern Hum (i.e., up to the Neretva) to Andrew is not known.

Then, Orbini continues, some nobles and župans of Nevesinje revolted and placed themselves under the protection of the Ban of Bosnia, leaving Andrew only the coast with Ston and Popovo. Later Orbini returns to this event to say that the Bosnian ruler also acquired Dabar and Gacko. Whether Bosnia really acquired any of this territory at this time is unknown. Orbini also states that Peter retained the territory of Hum beyond the Neretva. Late in the second decade of the thirteenth century other sources mention a Peter as Prince of Hum, presumably the same figure Orbini spoke of. By then Peter seems to have had cordial relations with Serbia. How much of Hum Peter then controlled is not certain. Whether Andrew was still alive then is also unknown.

How much of Orbini’s account can be believed is difficult to determine. One would expect Miroslav’s heirs, supported by various of Miroslav’s courtiers, to have tried to retain power. That two sons should have struggled over the inheritance would not have been strange either. Furthermore, Stefan of Raška, then striving to retain control over Zeta, could well have tried to step in to secure Raška’s control over Hum and prevent it from seceding under
its own dynasty of Miroslav’s descendants. But it is unknown whether Stefan actually made any efforts in this direction and, if he did so, whether he at first supported one weak heir of Miroslav (to make into a puppet ruler) and subsequently, after he had installed his “legitimate” puppet, turned against him and put most of eastern Hum under closer Raškan control by installing there his own son Radoslav.

However, the establishment of his own son as ruler of Hum does seem the sort of policy we might expect Stefan to have aimed for, if he had had the power to carry it out. Thus we may conclude that what happened in Hum after Miroslav’s death in about 1198 was roughly as follows: The Hungarian Duke Andrew tried to seize Hum. He won a victory over some Serbs in Hum in about 1198 and acquired that part of Hum lying northwest of the Neretva. He was either pushed out of this territory by Peter, probably a son of Miroslav who was supported by local nobles, or else was forced to withdraw his men from this part of Hum when war broke out in 1203 between him and his brother King Imre. In the second alternative, Peter probably simply assumed control of western Hum after Andrew’s withdrawal. Next, Peter expelled his brother Andrew, who had succeeded in eastern Hum, from his lands. In this Peter was supported by various local nobles. Stefan of Raška then intervened on behalf of the expelled Andrew and regained Hum to the Neretva. This intervention may not have occurred until considerably later, possibly in about 1216. Stefan campaigned in the name of Andrew, thereby presumably acquiring support from some nobles of Hum, and, upon achieving victory, established him as a puppet prince. Then later, either because he then felt strong enough to do so or else because he felt the puppet arrangement was not going to succeed in closely binding Hum to Raška, Stefan removed Andrew from the lands of eastern Hum bordering on Serbia and installed his own governor there, quite possibly his son Radoslav. Andrew was left with only Popovo and Hum’s coast. Whether Bosnia also intervened to pick off part of Hum is not known. Presumably Serbia retained control of this eastern territory thereafter, though we may imagine actual authority was in the hands of the local nobility. Soon Andrew disappeared from the scene, and Peter acquired Andrew’s coastal and Popovo holdings, which he added to his holding between the Neretva and Cetina rivers. And it is there that we find Peter in about 1218.

**Kalojan on the Eve of the Fourth Crusade**

Kalojan, who, as we saw, annexed Niš from Serbia in 1203, was reaching the height of his power. Thus the Serbs were in no position to object to this annexation. Even after Stefan regained power, Raška probably remained in a position of some dependence upon Bulgaria until Kalojan died in 1207. Kalojan’s armies were strong again. The Cumans’ difficulties with the Russians were over and once again they were free to join Kalojan’s armies, and many of them did so.

Soon Bulgarian troops moved north where they clashed with the Hun-
garians near the junction of the Danube and Morava. In 1202 they failed to take Braničevo. In 1203 Kalojan wrote to Pope Innocent III that Hungary held territory belonging to his state, surely a reference to Srem, Beograd, and Braničevo, which had belonged to the First Bulgarian State. That year Hungary found itself embroiled in a civil war, when Duke Andrew revolted against his brother, King Imre. It seems Kalojan took advantage of the Hungarians’ difficulties to regain for Bulgaria Beograd, Braničevo, and Vidin, since all three fortresses are found in his possession in 1204. Kalojan installed a Bulgarian bishop in Braničevo. The Hungarian king protested to the pope about Kalojan’s conquest of Beograd and Braničevo, but the pope, in the midst of discussions with Kalojan, in which he promised the Bulgarian a crown if he would recognize papal suzerainty, wanted to do nothing to threaten these delicate negotiations. Thus he showed little sympathy for Imre and in a letter of October 1204 ordered him to take no action against Bulgaria over these cities. The pope stated that he would consider mediating the problem later, but only after Kalojan’s coronation. Imre complied and called off military preparations against Kalojan. The delay gained for him by the pope was useful to Kalojan, for it enabled him to consolidate his power in the region just south of the Danube.

Unlike the First Bulgarian State, Kalojan’s state did not extend beyond the Danube, which he sought to establish as the border with Hungary. Thus it was important for him to possess and fortify strongly these major fortresses on the south side of the Danube. In the thirteenth century Vidin also rose to importance as a border fortress. Throughout the thirteenth century Bulgaria and Hungary were to remain rivals for these major cities on the south shore of the Danube, and were to fight a series of wars over them.

On 30 November 1204 King Imre of Hungary died. He tried to leave the throne to his five-year-old son, Ladislas. But within a year his brother Andrew had ousted the infant and established himself as king. Earlier that year, as we shall see, the Fourth Crusade had taken Constantinople. Kalojan took advantage of the chaos that followed this conquest to pick off much Byzantine territory in Macedonia and Thrace. In most of the towns he took he expelled the Greek bishops and replaced them with Slavs. Various Greeks in these cities whose loyalty he doubted found themselves transferred from their homes and resettled in Kalojan’s Danubian lands. In this case, Kalojan was following a centuries-old Byzantine practice.

During the years just before the Fourth Crusade, Kalojan seems to have begun worrying whether the self-claimed crown he received from the hands of his own Archbishop of Trnovo really had legitimacy. The great powers (the papacy and Byzantium) believed that to have legitimacy a tsar’s crown had to be granted by one or the other of them. Kalojan seems to have felt a need to have his crown confirmed by one of these two and to have decided the means to achieve this end was to play Byzantium and the papacy off against each other. He held out to the pope his willingness to recognize the pope as suzerain over the Bulgarian Church if he would send Kalojan a tsar’s crown.
and award Bulgaria a patriarch; he also threatened the empire that if it did not recognize the titles he claimed, he would turn to Rome. Finally, after prolonged negotiations and after the crusaders' conquest of Constantinople, on 7 November 1204 Kalojan received a crown from a papal legate, a cardinal; at the time he officially recognized papal supremacy. However, following papal orders, the cardinal crowned Kalojan king and consecrated the Archbishop of Trnovo, whose autocephaly was recognized, as a “primate.” Kalojan was told that the titles king and primate were more or less the same as the tsarist and patriarchal titles that he was seeking. Kalojan, slightly rebuffed, certainly not fooled, and by then on the verge of joining an anti-Latin coalition, ignored the fine distinctions explained by the cardinal and simply continued to call himself tsar and his bishop patriarch anyway.

The papacy seemed on the brink of phenomenal success: Bosnia had submitted and re-affirmed its loyalty to the pope in 1203. The ruler of Zeta had converted to Catholicism and had now conquered Raška, giving the pope optimism about converting that land. Bulgaria now seemed added to his fold. Furthermore, in 1204 the crusaders had taken Constantinople and established a Latin patriarch there, and during 1204 and particularly 1205 a Latin Church was being established throughout most of Greece in the wake of successful crusading armies. Thus the pope had reason to hope for the submission of the Greeks as well. It might well have seemed to optimists at the papacy that the Greeks and Orthodox South Slavs were on the verge of recognizing papal supremacy, and that the Schism of 1054 was about to be ended. Appearances, however, were misleading. Despite Kalojan’s assurances, events soon swung the Bulgarian tsar into opposition to the crusaders and the whole Latin cause. And his submission to Rome faded from being nominal to becoming a dead letter. However, even had Kalojan’s relations with the crusaders been cordial, it is unlikely that the papacy would have achieved any actual authority in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were attached to their traditions and Kalojan was not a ruler to be dictated to. Presumably he would have resisted at the first sign of papal interference in the management of the Bulgarian state or Church. Moreover, as we shall see, it would take much more than the establishment of a Latin hierarchy in Greece to bring about the conversion of the Greeks. And finally, as seen, the Catholic candidate, Vukan, did not last as ruler of Raška. He was soon replaced by the Orthodox Stefan. Yet, even this change did not necessarily doom papal hopes for Raška’s conversion, as Stefan remained for a considerable time (until 1219) quite willing to negotiate with Rome.

GENERAL NOTES

Certain general histories of medieval states and regions contributed in a major way to this chapter and the subsequent chapters of this work. It seems fitting to acknowledge their contribution once at the outset and thereafter cite them only if specific reference is relevant to a discussion of a controversial point.
Albania

Bosnia

Bulgaria
P. Mutafchiev, *Istorija na b”lgarski narod*, pt. 2 (Sofija, 1944). Mutafchiev died before completing the work and I. Dujčev wrote the concluding section, covering the period 1323–93.

Byzantine Empire

Croatia

Greece (as a whole)

Epirus

The Peloponnesus (Morea)

Thessaly

Hum (to 1326 see histories of Serbia; after 1326 see histories of Bosnia)

Serbia
Zeta (Duklja, Montenegro)  

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. For the period to the 1180s, see J. Fine, The Early Medieval Balkans (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983).

2. D. N. Anastasijević (Otac Nemanjin [Beograd, 1914]) makes the best case against the view presented above. Arguing that the term brat (brother) can also mean a cousin, he suggests that Miroslav and Nemanja may have been first cousins. In that case Zavid need not have been Nemanja’s father but instead could have been his uncle. Then he turns to Stefan the First-Crowned’s Life of Saint Simeon (i.e., Nemanja), which, after describing Nemanja’s father’s flight from Raška to Zeta, states that after Nemanja’s birth in Zeta the father returned to the “stol’noje mesto” (literally, “the place of the throne”). Anastasijević believes that this phrase refers to the throne itself and thus that Nemanja’s father returned to rule. Thus he in fact had been a ruler of Serbia. He then concludes that Nemanja’s father was Desa. However, it seems to me that this statement could just as well mean that he returned to the capital as a place and need not imply he returned to become the actual ruler. Moreover, if Nemanja’s father had been Desa (or any other Serbian Grand župan) one would expect one of our sources to have stated it directly.


4. This section—and subsequent sections on Byzantine politics and Byzantine relations with Bulgaria and with various Bulgarian and Vlah chieftains in Thrace—is indebted to C. Brand, Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180–1204 (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).


9. In the early Middle Ages the region we are calling Zeta and which subsequently became Montenegro was called Duklja (derived from Dioclea). Vukan, possibly to justify his royal title from possession of the former kingdom of Duklja, called his state Dalmatia and Duklja (Dioclea). And the name Duklja-Dioclea lasted for some time among intellectuals. However, the name Zeta, originally referring to a county within Zeta, came more and more in this period to be used for the whole area that had been
Duklja. Zeta, though occasionally still used for the county, had become the regular term used for the region in Serbian and Ragusan/Dalmatian documents. Thus I shall use the name Zeta for this region throughout my work, unless a different term is relevant to a particular moment, event, or claim.