CHAPTER 10

The Balkans for the Remainder of the Fifteenth Century

The Crusade of Varna 1443–44

In 1443 the Union of Florence bore the fruit for which the Greeks had accepted it: a papally-sponsored crusade. Twenty-five thousand soldiers were mobilized under three leaders: Vladislav III, the Polish king who had recently also become King of Hungary; John (Janos) Hunyadi; and George Branković. Hunyadi, a major figure at the Hungarian court, governed Transylvania for Hungary and had had previous successes in fighting the Turks. George Branković had been living in Hungary since the Ottomans had evicted him from his realm. He led a force of Serbs who had also fled to Hungary.

In 1443 the Ottoman sultan, Murad II, was occupied in Anatolia suppressing a large rebellion of the Karamanlis. The crusaders crossed the Danube, captured Smederevo, and then marched south through Serbia. They won a victory over the Ottoman governor of Niš near that town and as a result took Niš. They then moved on and captured Sofija. Thus they liberated all the towns along the main route through Serbia between the Danube and Sofija. It should be stressed, however, that the crusaders’ victories were against the armies assigned to garrison the towns and fortresses along this route. They had not yet seen the major Ottoman army. The crusaders’ successes inspired two other major revolts, both of which we shall discuss later: the revolt of Skanderbeg in Albania and a temporarily successful attempt to liberate Ottoman-occupied areas of central Greece by Despot Constantine of the Morea, who took advantage of Ottoman difficulties to bring his troops across the Isthmus of Corinth into central Greece.

As they withdrew the Ottoman troops burned the environs of Sofija and the lands along the route east, to hinder the crusaders in finding provisions. The sultan hurried to Europe in order to establish defenses along this route to prevent the crusaders from reaching Adrianople. The crusaders made it a policy to convert mosques in the towns they took into churches. Many local Bulgarians actively assisted the crusaders, especially in supplying provisions. The crusaders soon continued their march east from Sofija toward Adrianople,
but along the route, at Zlatica, they met a strong and well-placed Ottoman defense force. After a period of facing each other, including it seems a couple of skirmishes (about which our few sources contradict one another on details and outcome), the crusaders retreated to Sofija; soon most of them had withdrawn into Serbia or even out of the Balkans entirely. Since the Ottomans seem to have taken no immediate action on a large scale to reassert themselves in this territory, it seems some sort of truce was in existence.

Faced with this critical situation in Europe and still occupied with the Karamanli revolt in Anatolia, Sultan Murad II declared himself ready to treat with the crusaders. First, in March or April 1444, he sent envoys to George Branković, offering him peace on generous terms that allowed Serbia to be restored as a state under Branković. Branković, happy to regain his state, quickly agreed to the peace. On 15 August 1444 the formal agreement between Murad and Branković was signed. By it, the territory of the reborn Serbia was defined. Serbia acquired twenty-four major fortresses, including Smederevo, Golubac, Braničevo, Novo Brdo, Ostrovica, Zvornik, and Srebrnica. This last town, in the meantime, had been picked off by Stefan Tomaš of Bosnia, who had taken advantage of the Ottomans’ troubles with the crusaders to seize it. George Branković also agreed to accept Ottoman suzerainty and pay the sultan a tribute of sixty thousand ducats. And finally, the sultan agreed to restore to him his two blinded sons. The Ottomans, it seems, retained the important fortress of Kruševac. Thus the reborn state included Serbia north of the West Morava River, Mačva, and Usora (or at least part of it) on the Bosnian side of the Drina. Already by 22 August George was found in Smederevo, assuming the rule of his regained state.

In the meantime, on the sultan’s invitation, envoys from the crusade’s leaders came to meet with the sultan in Adrianople (Edirne) in June 1444. The sultan quickly agreed to a ten-year truce, which would leave the crusaders in possession of what they had taken. After the sultan agreed to these terms he sent his own envoys to Szegedin in Hungary to obtain King Vladislav’s ratification of the agreement. The sultan, then, having apparently secured matters in Europe, returned to Anatolia to resume his actions against the Karamanlis. In July 1444 Vladislav ratified the treaty.

At times various scholars, particularly Poles, have denied that Vladislav actually agreed to the treaty; their motive seems to have been to make the Polish king look better by denying that he broke his oath when the crusaders shortly thereafter violated the agreement and resumed the war against the Ottomans. Most scholars, however, have found this scholarly attempt unconvincing and believe the evidence makes it clear that Vladislav did in fact ratify the treaty. At the moment of Branković’s and Vladislav’s ratification matters seemed promising for the Balkan Christian cause: Serbia had reappeared as a state and the Christians in the western and central Balkans had before them the prospect of an entire decade of peace during which they could reconstitute themselves.

Meanwhile, the papacy was very disappointed when it learned of the
treaty the crusaders had concluded with Murad. Rome felt that the Christians had momentum on their side and thus had a chance to drive the Turks from Europe entirely. Furthermore, and unknown to those who had signed the peace, a Western fleet had been dispatched eastward to support the crusaders. Thus the papacy was confident this expulsion could be achieved and believed that compliance with the treaty would let a great chance slip away. The papacy does not seem to have taken into consideration the important facts that the crusaders’ successes thus far had been against garrisons and that the crusaders had not yet seen the full Ottoman army, which throughout 1443 had been involved in Anatolia. Thus the pope was determined to proceed with the crusade. He sent east a leading “hawk,” Cardinal Cesarini, who quickly persuaded Vladislaw to fall in with papal plans and absolved him from his oath. Then, ignoring the treaty they had just concluded, Vladislaw, Hunyadi, and Cesarini began re-mobilizing the Christian forces. By September 1444 the crusaders were again on the march. But this time their armies were considerably smaller. The original force had been disbanded after the treaty was concluded and it had not been possible to re-assemble all the dispersed soldiers. Moreover, in this second round the crusaders were without the not small support of Branković and the Serbs.

Branković was satisfied with the treaty, for it had realized his goals. He also had the most to lose, for should the new crusade fail, Serbia, in the most vulnerable position, would most likely be re-occupied by the Turks. Thus he declared his neutrality and refused to participate. In fact, to secure Serbia’s future, he even, it seems, sent envoys to re-affirm Serbia’s vassal ties to the sultan and to warn Murad of the impending attack from the crusaders. Since the Serbs refused to participate and also refused the crusaders passage through Serbia, the crusaders crossed the Danube into Bulgaria and marched toward the Black Sea.

Having learned of the treaty’s violation, Murad rapidly mobilized his forces and in record time brought a massive army from Asia Minor to Europe. A contemporary Burgundian account accuses the Genoese of ferrying the Ottoman troops across the Bosphorus. This accusation is repeated in various later sources. It was in Genoa’s interests to aid the Turks and thereby preserve its Black Sea monopoly. However, it is worth mentioning that contemporary sources from Byzantium, Dubrovnik, and Genoa’s rival Venice do not make this accusation. The two armies met at Varna on 10 November 1444, and the Ottomans won an overwhelming victory. The Christian army was nearly wiped out, and the dead included King Vladislaw and Cardinal Cesarini. The Varna crusade, as it has come to be called, was to be the last concerted Christian offensive against the Turks. The Serbian ruler, George Branković, who had wisely remained neutral, re-affirmed his vassal ties to the Turks and remained on good terms with Sultan Murad II for some time thereafter. For the next few years the Serbs occupied themselves with trying to regain parts of Zeta from Venice. In 1445, seeing the balance of power shift from Hungary
to the Ottomans, Wallachia submitted to Murad and accepted Ottoman suzerainty.

**Hungary and Croatia after Varna**

Vladislaw was succeeded, as stipulated in the 1442 treaty, by Ladislas Posthumous, now Ladislas V (1445–57). Like his father Albert of Habsburg, Ladislas V was King of Austria and Hungary. Since Ladislas was only five years old, the brilliant general and Vojvoda of Transylvania John Hunyadi was appointed regent, assuming, in 1446, the title of governor. Hunyadi at first ruled Hungary alone, for the Habsburgs under Frederick III, Albert’s brother and Ladislas’ uncle, fearing for Ladislas’ safety, did not allow him to return to Austria or Hungary. Finally in 1452 a revolt, particularly vigorous in Austria, broke out. Frederick III, besieged by the rebels, backed down and allowed Ladislas V, then twelve years old, to take up residence in his domains. Thereafter he usually resided in Vienna. Even after his return his Hungarian lands remained under the control of Hunyadi.

At the start of his regency Hunyadi was faced by a major crisis in Croatia. For early in 1445 Matko Talovac, Ban of Slavonia and holder of vast territories south of the Drava, died. Frederick and his son Ulrich, the Counts of Celje, immediately marched into Slavonia, seizing a large portion of Matko’s lands and claiming the banship of Slavonia. In the fighting Matko’s brother John, who probably had succeeded Matko as Slavonian ban and who had been the Prior of Vrana, was killed. Having taken over the whole district of Zagreb, Ulrich appointed a new bishop for Zagreb.

Hunyadi, who at the start of this crisis had been involved in a quarrel with the ruler of Wallachia and thus unable to intervene, was infuriated. Freeing himself from other affairs, he held a council that condemned Ulrich’s actions and then sent an army against Croatia. His forces plundered large areas of Croatia and forced the Counts of Celje to relinquish the towns and lands they had seized. However, the Counts of Celje still claimed the banship of Slavonia. And Hunyadi, having many other affairs that demanded his attention, eventually recognized Frederick of Celje as Ban of Slavonia; however, to try to retain some control over the Celje counts, Hunyadi appointed John Szekely, a Hungarian, to a newly created position of Vice Ban of Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia.

The third Talovac brother, Peter, who held the Talovac lands (the former Nelipčić lands) south of Velebit and had been appointed Ban of Croatia by Sigismund, was having so much difficulty in retaining his lands—fighting a holding action and suffering various losses against Stefan Vukčić and Venice—that he could play little or no part in defending his family’s lands in Slavonia.

To the north of Peter Talovac’s banate in southern Croatia, the Frankopans remained the great landlords. They had tried their best to ignore, and
remain neutral in, the civil war between Hunyadi/Talovac and the Counts of Celje. In 1449 the eight surviving Frankapan brothers held a family council that divided the family lands into eight parts, one for each brother. To try to keep the family somewhat united and thus in possession of the influence it had enjoyed when it jointly held its vast territory, the brothers agreed that after the partition the two most important towns, Krk (on the island of Krk) and Senj, would be held jointly and the two towns’ income shared by the eight brothers. Each of the eight regions was to pass on to the son of its recipient. Should any of the eight brothers die without an heir, then the family was to hold a new council to divide the deceased’s share among the surviving brothers. This decision was reached by the family on its own; it neither consulted the king nor did it seek a charter of confirmation from him. And thus were formed the eight branches, each holding its own hereditary lands, of the Frankapan family.

Family dissensions, which had caused the 1449 division, however, did not cease after the partition council. At least one brother, John, felt he had received a poor deal. Ambitious to obtain the island of Krk, he established cordial relations with Venice to realize his ambition. After further bickering with his brothers, John obtained their consent that he relinquish all his mainland holdings in exchange for the whole island of Krk. John then accepted Venetian protection for his island and thereafter more or less broke with his brothers, ceasing to participate in family councils or affairs. Despite John’s Venetian ties, Krk remained officially under Hungarian suzerainty.

Frederick of Celje remained as Ban of Slavonia, though we may assume that his son Ulrich actually wielded the authority. When Frederick died in 1454, Ulrich became Ban of Slavonia. Shortly before Frederick’s death, in 1453, the Ban of Croatia, Peter Talovac, died. Frederick immediately claimed his title too. And the Celje counts dispatched their armies against Peter’s former lands, succeeding in acquiring a large portion of them. Thus the Celje family found itself holding also most of Croatia south of Velebit, except for the Frankapan lands and Klis. To maintain themselves against retaliation from Hunyadi, the Counts of Celje made an alliance with Stefan Vukčić Kosača. Hunyadi, needless to say, opposed the advance of the Celje counts into Croatia. Hunyadi appointed his own son Ladišlas as Ban of Croatia. The Celje family, not surprisingly, ignored this appointment. However, soon a major attack on Beograd by Sultan Mehemed II in 1456 (to be discussed below) led to a truce in March 1456 between the feuding parties to enable both sides to participate in the city’s defense.

Hunyadi successfully resisted the Turkish attack, but soon after the Turkish withdrawal he died of the plague. His son Ladišlas (or Laszlo) assumed the command of the fortress. At that moment, in November 1456, Ulrich of Celje, who had not been present at the defense, appeared at the walls of Beograd accompanied by the young king, Ladišlas V, with whom he had created close ties. These ties greatly worried the Hunyadi faction, which saw them as a threat to its position in the state. Ulrich seems to have expected
young Hunyadi to turn command of the fortress over to him. Ladislas Hunyadi granted Ulrich a safe-conduct and allowed him and the king, but not their troops, to enter the city. On the following day Hunyadi summoned Ulrich alone, without the king, to a meeting. At it the two men quarreled, and Hunyadi’s men leaped into the fray and murdered Ulrich of Celje. His death ended the powerful Celje family. Ladislas V had not been present and was furious, but, since he was in the hands of Hunyadi’s men, he had to avoid showing his displeasure. He was held as an honorary prisoner for several weeks; then after being pressured to take an oath not to retaliate against Ladislas Hunyadi, the king was allowed to depart. Ladislas V awaited his opportunity; it was not long in coming, and in March 1457 he, in violation of his oath, seized and executed Ladislas Hunyadi. Ladislas Hunyadi’s younger brother, Matthew Corvinus, was also seized, but he was sent off to Prague as a prisoner.

Later that year, in November 1457, Ladislas V died without an heir. Matthew Corvinus’ uncle Michael Szilagyi, who had been in rebellion against Ladislas V since March, when the king had executed Ladislas Hunyadi, then appeared in Pest with fourteen thousand armed retainers. He convened a council of nobles, which elected Matthew Corvinus Hunyadi as king. At the time Matthew was still imprisoned and only fifteen years old. He was immediately released and, after being crowned, took up his royal duties. However, various Croatian and Hungarian nobles did not want to recognize him. The opposition, led by Ladislas Garai and Nicholas Iločki, looked for support from Frederick III Habsburg of Germany. Since 1440, when little Ladislas Posthumous had been sent to him for safety, Frederick had had in his possession the official Hungarian crown. This meant that many Hungarians did not, or had an excuse not to, recognize Matthew’s coronation. Eventually, after considerable intriguing and some skirmishing, peace was concluded between Matthew and the opposition nobles and then between Matthew and Frederick III. It was agreed in 1463 that Matthew should be King of Hungary, but if he had no heir, then Frederick or a son of Frederick should succeed to the Hungarian throne. Then in March 1464 Matthew received a formal coronation with the true Hungarian crown, which Frederick returned. This official date notwithstanding, Matthew had actually been ruler of, and in control of, most of his realm since the end of 1458.

Meanwhile, upon Ulrich of Celje’s death his widow, Catherine, the daughter of George Branković, succeeded to his lands. Immediately various other claimants appeared, the most important of whom was Frederick III Habsburg, who claimed all Ulrich’s lands in Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola. Ladislas V, whom Ulrich had intended to be his eventual heir, showed considerable sympathy to Catherine and by March 1457 had appointed one of Ulrich’s leading associates, Vitovec, to be the new Ban of Slavonia. Vitovec was able to repel an attack by Frederick’s forces in April. But after this promising start Catherine’s affairs crumbled. Ladislas V died in November 1457; having lost her main prop, she agreed to negotiate with Frederick. They
concluded a treaty on 15 December 1457 by which Frederick obtained all the Celje castles in Carinthia, Styria, and Carniola, while she retained the family castles in Hungary and Croatia. But even this arrangement was not to last. Vitovec soon made peace with Frederick and entered his service. With the defection of her leading supporter to Frederick, and presumably under considerable pressure from Frederick and Vitovec, Catherine in 1460 sold to Vitovec all but one of her castles. She then retired to Dubrovnik, living off the income of the one castle she retained. And thus was ended the “state” and power of the Celje counts.

After this summary of Hungarian and Croatian events, we may now turn back to Serbia and its relations with the Hungarians after the Varna defeat (1444) in which Serbia had been neutral.

**Serbia after Varna**

The years that followed Varna were marked by growing tensions between Serbia and Hungary. Branković’s non-participation in 1444 had angered the Hungarians, and Branković continued to follow his policy of avoiding conflict with the Turks in the ensuing years. He consistently refused to support any of the smaller crusading efforts John Hunyadi mobilized during the years after 1444 and even refused to allow Hunyadi to march with his troops through Serbia. While so doing, Branković found himself constantly under pressure from Hungary to support wars against the Turks. Yet Branković knew that Hungary was not strong enough to truly defeat the Turks and provide real salvation for Serbia. And thus Serbian involvement could only result in Serbia’s conquest by the Turks. Knowing that even to allow Hungarian troops to pass through Serbia would endanger his delicate relations with the Turks, he consistently resisted the Hungarians when they attempted to send their troops through Serbia against the Ottomans. As a result relations deteriorated between Serbia and Hungary.

In 1448 John Hunyadi again demanded Serbian participation in a new crusade. After being again refused, he demanded passage for his troops through Serbia. Again rebuffed, Hunyadi then, according to later chroniclers, warned George Branković that if he defeated the Turks he would seize George’s realm and grant it to one worthier. Then he led his armies through Serbia anyway, plundering Serbia like an enemy land. George, angry and concerned for Serbia’s future, seems to have again sent envoys to warn Murad of the Hungarian attack and to explain that the Hungarians’ passage through Serbia was by force and against his wishes. Hostile sources, whose remarks are recorded by Orbinī, even say George passed on to the Turks information on the size of the Hungarian force and offered strategic advice to the sultan, which was followed and was responsible for the Turkish victory over Hunyadi after three days of fighting on the battlefield of Kosovo in 1448.

The defeated Hungarians fled from the battlefield in all directions, and George ordered that all Hungarian soldiers found in Serbia after the battle be
taken to his authorities. In this way George was able to seize Hunyadi himself. He held Hunyadi in prison for a time, demanding a huge ransom to compensate for the damage done by the Hungarians on their way to Kosovo. Eventually Hunyadi was released on the promise of a ransom payment, which was never to be made. Needless to say this incident made relations even worse between the two sides. And it seems to have caused the Hungarians to launch a raid to plunder Serbia in the following year. Serbian-Hungarian tensions were also exacerbated by the fact that in the civil war in Bosnia, to be discussed, Hunyadi supported King Stefan Tomaš whereas George Branković retained Serbia’s long-standing alliance with the Kosača family and supported Stefan Vukčić. As a result of these quarrels and differences, Hunyadi confiscated most of Branković’s property in Hungary.

But while Branković’s relations deteriorated with Hungary, he maintained close ties with Orthodox Byzantium. In 1446 his son Lazar married Helen, the daughter of Thomas Palaeologus of the Morea. And an inscription from the fortifications of Constantinople shows that in 1448 George had funded the repair of one of the towers of Constantinople’s walls.

In this period, to maintain itself, Serbia had to maintain close ties with the Turks. It seems the Turks also exercised far more influence inside of Serbia than they had prior to Serbia’s conquest by the Turks in 1439–41. For example, in about 1445 Branković turned down a Ragusan request for commercial privileges in the Serbian town of Priština, because, as he himself states, he was powerless to do anything about the request because the Ottomans controlled matters there.

In accordance with the 1444 treaty restoring Serbia as a state, the sultan had recognized Branković’s possession of much of Serbia proper (defined as twenty-four named fortresses), Srebnica, and Zeta. As noted, Stefan Tomaš of Bosnia had seized Srebnica early in 1444, preventing its transfer to Serbia. In April 1445 George is found in possession of Srebnica; how he acquired the town is not known. He briefly lost it to the Bosnians again in late summer 1446. At the end of that year the Serbs and Bosnians reached an agreement by which the two states were to split the income from the town’s mine. Officials from both states operated in the town, whose coins had one ruler’s name on one side and the other ruler’s name on the other. Warfare broke out over the town again in the fall of 1448. The Serbs defeated a Bosnian force and not only took the town but the whole left bank of the Drina as far south as Višegrad. Stefan Vukčić supported the Serbs on this occasion. The Bosnians, refusing to yield on the issue, were again in possession of Srebnica by early 1449. However, they could not retain it; threatened by a new Serbian attack, which had the sultan’s blessing if not his military support behind it, the Bosnians agreed to let the Ragusans mediate a peace. By the resulting treaty, in July 1451, the Serbs regained sole possession of the town.

The interior of Zeta—Upper Zeta, the region between Serbia and Bosnia/Hum and Lake Skadar—seems to have quickly submitted to Branković. As noted earlier, Stefan Vukčić restored the territory he held in this
region to George when the sultan restored George to rule over Serbia. George established his own vojvoda in Upper Zeta, whose seat was located at Podgorica. Branković soon made peace with the most powerful family in the area, the Crnojevići, whose main fortress at the time was in Žabljak. Thus Branković soon was overlord—but surely in a very loose sense—over the territory from Serbia to Lake Skadar. He does not seem to have minded that the Crnojevići also maintained close ties with Venice; presumably trying to re-assert himself in Zeta, George was in no position to object. Thus the Crnojevići were openly serving two masters. In the coastal area, Lower Zeta, George regained nothing, as Venice refused to restore the former lands of George that it held, which included Bar, Budva, and Drivast.

Skanderbeg’s Revolt in Albania

Between 1437 and 1440 the Albanian nobleman and Ottoman vassal John Castriot died; the sultan, instead of allowing the family to continue to control its holdings, ordered the Ottoman governor of Kroja, Hasan beg, to take control of all the forts in the Castriots’ lands.

Shortly thereafter, in 1443, the Christian crusade was launched. John Castriot’s son, long converted to Islam under the name of Skanderbeg and at the time in active Ottoman service, became infuriated at what was happening to his family’s lands. Seeing that the sultan was involved with the crusaders as well as with the Karamanlis, Skanderbeg decided to revolt. The sultan evidently had had no misgivings about Skanderbeg’s loyalty, for he had sent him west with an army at the time to join the Ottoman forces opposing the crusaders at Niš. Skanderbeg, however, chose the time of the battle to desert with three hundred loyal Albanian horsemen. He arrived at Kroja with a forged document, allegedly from the sultan to Hasan beg, ordering Hasan to turn Kroja over to Skanderbeg, who was to be the new Ottoman governor of the town. Hasan beg duly turned Kroja over to him. Skanderbeg then announced that he was again a Christian and began to take action against the Islamization that had been occurring around Kroja. Those who refused to accept Christianity, including the Ottoman officials he had seized, among whom was Hasan beg, were impaled. Next Skanderbeg recovered all the former Castriot fortresses taken by the Turks. Taking advantage of the events around Kroja, and the problems the Ottomans faced elsewhere in their empire, the Arianiti in southern Albania again revolted, acquiring considerable support in that region. The Arianiti concluded an alliance with Naples, but it was not to bring them any actual aid. The Arianiti also allied with the Castriots; each promised the other aid, and Skanderbeg married Andronike, George Arianite’s daughter.

Having liberated his own family’s lands, Skanderbeg set about trying to unite all the Albanian chiefs into a league to resist the Turks. In March 1444 he called a congress at Alessio, a town then held by the Venetians, who also were invited to the meeting. He received considerable support and was made
head of the league and also commander of the Albanian armies. All were aware of the imminent danger of Ottoman attack, and the tribesmen willingly provided soldiers and even submitted to central discipline in the armies. Thus, for the first time, Albania was united under an Albanian leader, and Skanderbeg, as head of the league, stood over the numerous tribal chiefs who continued to manage their own regions. Skanderbeg immediately set about repairing fortifications in Albania, in particular those of Kroja.

In the spring of 1444 the Ottomans attacked. Skanderbeg’s spies sent him advance word of the invasion and its planned route. This knowledge, combined with the rugged mountainous terrain that was ideal for a smaller army to ambush a larger one, resulted in the Albanians’ defeating the invaders in June 1444.

Meanwhile, shortly after the Albanians’ victory over the Turks, Nicholas Dukagjin killed Lek Zakarija, the Albanian lord of Danj, in a blood feud. Venice quickly sent a force into Danj and received support from Lek’s mother and the local populace, who preferred Venice to any of the local Albanians who all supported Skanderbeg’s league. The town’s hostility to the Albanian league was presumably owing to the Dukagjins’ membership in the league. Venice also took over Zakarija’s other towns of Sati, Gladri, and Dušmani, with the agreement of Lek’s mother. Skanderbeg demanded that Venice restore to him these towns and also Drivast. Venice refused. The Albanian league then sent envoys to its Serbian neighbors Crnojević and George Branković. George expressed his willingness to help against Venice, from which he was still trying to regain the parts of Zeta left to Serbia by the last Balšić in 1421. However, George made it clear that he would assist the Albanians only against Venice and not against the Turks.

Leaving four thousand armed men to guard his frontier in the event of a new Ottoman invasion, Skanderbeg then ordered the rest of his troops against Danj in 1447. The Venetians, more concerned about this town than the anti-Ottoman war, offered an award to anyone who would assassinate Skanderbeg. The Venetians also sent envoys to the Ottomans to urge them to attack Albania again. Receiving word that the Venetians were sending a large force to the relief of Danj, Skanderbeg left a small force to carry on the siege of Danj and marched from the town to meet the arriving Venetians. The two armies met on the Drin at some point in 1448, and the Albanians annihilated the Venetian force. After this victory the Venetian presence was reduced to small garrisons within a number of walled cities, including Danj. Except for these towns and their Albanian residents, all Albania accepted Skanderbeg’s leadership, including the leaders of the powerful Dukagjins who had been with him at least from the time of the Alessio congress, which had been attended by two Dukagjin chiefs. A few members of this family, particularly some residing in Skadar, remained loyal to Venice, however.

Later in 1448 the Ottomans attacked Debar, causing considerable devastation. Skanderbeg, leaving part of his army to carry on the siege of Danj, met the Turks in battle in September 1448 and routed them, causing them again to
withdraw. At roughly the same time, the Ottomans severely defeated Hunyadi at the second battle of Kosovo. Since Hunyadi was not soon to be able to mobilize a serious new force to attack the Turks, the Ottomans were now free to concentrate their attention on Albania. Aware of this danger, Skanderbeg at the end of 1448 concluded a peace with Venice, leaving the Venetians in possession of the disputed towns.

In 1449 and 1450 the Ottomans launched major attacks on Albania. In both years Murad II led his forces in person. They achieved a few temporary successes in 1449, including the conquest of Svetigrad after a siege. Moreover, in the course of the 1449 campaign Skanderbeg was briefly forced to submit to Ottoman suzerainty and to agree to pay six thousand ducats a year as tribute. However, it seems that he never paid it, and within a year he had again ceased to recognize this suzerainty. The Venetians, despite their peace with Skanderbeg, profited from the fighting by selling supplies to the Ottomans. 2

In 1450 Murad II and his son, the future Mehemmed II the Conqueror, moved against Kroja, supposedly with one hundred thousand troops. Skanderbeg left a loyal commander in Kroja and departed with an army to the mountains. From there he launched hit-and-run attacks upon the besieging Ottoman forces. These forays were successful, and the Ottomans sustained heavy losses from them while the walls of Kroja and their defenders held out. At the end of the 1450 campaigning season, the Ottomans with heavy losses were forced to retire.

Receiving no help from Venice and believing that without outside help sooner or later the Ottomans must defeat the Albanians, Skanderbeg in 1451 turned to Alphonso of Naples and accepted his suzerainty. In fact, however, Skanderbeg remained the independent ruler of his lands. A small number of soldiers, it seems, were sent from Naples to support Skanderbeg. And in 1452 the Albanians defeated in the mountains a new Ottoman force sent against Albania.

Meanwhile, tensions were developing between Skanderbeg and the Dukagjins. They were already skirmishing in a small way by 1450; and in that year some members of the Dukagjin family seem to have supported the Ottoman campaign, as a result of which they increased their own territorial holdings. It also seems that some family members remained vassals of Venice and/or residents of Venetian Skadar throughout this period. Thus one should not see the Dukagjins as a united family. In 1452 the Catholic Church began urging a peace between Skanderbeg and the rebellious Dukagjins; this peace was concluded by 1454. During this time the Ottomans, under the new sultan, Mehemmed II (1451–81), were focusing their attention on ending the Byzantine Empire. Thus the Turks were to leave Albania in peace for a few years.

George Branković and Zeta

We have seen that in 1447 Skanderbeg had launched an attack against Venetian-held Danj. At the time he had also moved against various other Venetian
possessions in that region including Durazzo and Ulcinj. He took none of these major towns, but his men carried out considerable plundering. These activities were particularly hard on the Ulcinj area, which had suffered a major earthquake in 1444 and still had not recovered. Some Venetians seem to have believed that Skanderbeg’s attack on Ulcinj was carried out at the request of, and was even financed by, George Branković. And we know from Venetian sources that George Branković in 1447 had received Skanderbeg’s envoys cordially and had expressed his willingness to see the Albanians take Danj. Whether Ulcinj was discussed on that occasion is not stated.

A second and later Venetian source—a chronicle—states that Skanderbeg attacked Ulcinj in his own interests. Upon acquiring Kroja, the chronicle states, Skanderbeg declared himself the heir of the Balšići and declared his intention to recover his inheritance. As a result, he plundered the region of Bar and Ulcinj. In this action he was supported by the Dukagjins and various other local Albanians. Fearing Skanderbeg, the Venetians began offering rewards for his assassination.

Whether George Branković was behind, or even supporting, this 1447 campaign against Ulcinj is unknown. But one may at least conclude that the raid helped soften up the area for subsequent action by Branković to restore to Serbia some of its former possessions that were then in Venetian hands. In June 1448 the despot’s army of seven thousand marched into Zeta, reaching the Gulf of Kotor. This force was immediately joined by the Crnojevići, who presumably had participated in the planning of the campaign. The villagers of Grbalj, as usual, took this as an excuse to rise up against their hated master, the town of Kotor. The Paštrovići also supported Serbia again, going against the established policy and wishes of the family leader, Grubačević, who once again remained faithful to Venice. The Serbs announced that they intended only to regain the former Serbian towns and had no ill intentions toward any of the Venetian possessions. However, by this time Venice considered the former Serbian towns to be Venetian. Having picked up support from most of the Paštrovići, the despot’s armies marched against Bar, where they met a defeat.

Expecting a new attack (though one actually did not occur for a while), the Venetians began to mend fences, in particular with Stefan Crnojević. By 1451 Venice proposed that if he submitted to Venice and broke relations with Serbia, Venice would give him a large annual stipend of five hundred ducats and recognize him as Great Vojvoda of Zeta. The negotiations dragged on for almost a year, during which Stefan had a major quarrel with his brothers, the cause of which is unknown; perhaps the brothers remained loyal to Serbia and objected to Stefan’s negotiations with Venice. Stefan triumphed over them, taking most, if not all, of their lands. After this the brothers do not appear any longer in the sources, and Stefan emerged as the sole major figure in Zeta, prominent in both Upper and Lower Zeta. The agreement between him and Venice was finally concluded on the above-mentioned terms in late 1451 or 1452 and included an alliance against the Serbian despot. From here on one
can speak of the Crnojevići as the actual rulers of Zeta. But though Stefan Crnojević dominated Zeta, his actual landholdings, which remained scattered, were never massive, consisting of a handful of villages on Lake Skadar, at least one village on the Bojana, the five villages he received from Stefan Vukčić in Upper Zeta, Žabljak, and the territory he acquired above the Gulf of Kotor that included Mount Lovćen.

As part of his agreement with Venice, Stefan Crnojević was obliged to help Kotor suppress the Grbalj rebels, which he did brutally in 1452. The rebel leaders were wiped out, though Kotor was probably responsible for the actual executions of the leaders at the rebellion’s end.

Late in 1452 George Branković’s troops again marched into Upper Zeta, proof that the agreement with Stefan was concluded in the nick of time for Venice. Stefan Crnojević defeated them, preventing them from reaching the coast. Crnojević then went on the offensive and drove the despot’s officials out of part of Upper Zeta. However, Branković’s officials seem to have remained in the region between Podgorica and Cetinje. The despot’s men also managed on this occasion to take, and temporarily retain, Žabljak, the major fortress of the Crnojevići. In September 1452 a second Serbian invasion was launched into Zeta, this one led by Branković’s brother-in-law Thomas Cantacuzenus. Stefan Crnojević defeated this army as well, almost taking Thomas prisoner. Stefan then moved on to the offensive himself and drove the Serbs from Upper Zeta as far as the mouth of the Zeta where it flows into the Morača. A series of tribes, including the Bjelopavlići, now agreed to accept Venetian suzerainty. As a recent history of Montenegro points out, this suzerainty was symbolic, but it did mean real lordship for Venice’s deputy, Stefan Crnojević. After this triumph the Venetians awarded Stefan by obtaining through negotiations the restoration of his son, John (Ivan), who had been held as a hostage for ten years by Stefan Vukčić Kosača.

Shortly thereafter, probably early in 1453, the Serbs made a final attempt to regain their position in Zeta. Once again Stefan Crnojević defeated the Serbian army. Then he went onto the offensive along the Zeta and Morača rivers and took all Upper Zeta, except for the fortress of Medun, which refused to submit. Among the fortresses he captured were Podgorica, the despot’s local capital, and Žabljak, the Crnojević family fortress recently taken by the Serbs. The Serbs could do nothing about reversing matters, for in 1453 they had to support the sultan’s troops against Constantinople. And then, despite their loyalty to the sultan on this campaign, the Serbs’ turn came next. In 1454 the Turks were already raiding against Serbia. A major campaign followed in 1455. It took Novo Brdo in June and whatever remained of the former Branković family lands in the south. Shortly thereafter, in late 1455 or early 1456, the Ottomans captured Medun. The despot no longer held any territory in Zeta. Almost all of Zeta was now under the rule or overlordship of Stefan Crnojević, who stood as suzerain over the various tribesmen and nobles of the area. But Zeta too had been reduced by the Ottoman campaign of 1455; for the Ottomans had extended their authority over all the
territory of Zeta as far west as the Morača River, which now became the Ottoman-Zetan border.

Venice now extended its suzerainty, until then limited to the coast (Lower Zeta), to what remained of Upper Zeta as well. The Venetian overlordship was nominal and Crnojević was the de facto master of the area. A new treaty, reaffirming his position and confirmed by a Zetan assembly of fifty-one counties or military brotherhoods, was issued by Venice in September 1455. The document states that the nobles of Zeta were to serve the Great Vojvoda of Zeta, owing Venice the same service they had previously owed to the Balšići. The nobles were obliged to serve only as far away from home as the Drin River and Alessio. Liking the system of a major local figure standing over the various local princes and chieftains, Venice in the following year established a new and similar “great vojvoda” for the region south of Zeta between Skadar and Durazzo. George Arianite was awarded this honor. He was not able to benefit from the position to the extent that Crnojević was able, since there were other powerful figures including Skanderbeg—who clearly was not going to submit to Arianite—within his theoretical vojvodate. The two vojvodas, similarly tied to Venice, established close relations, however, and Stefan Crnojević’s son and heir married a daughter of George Arianite.

Zeta between the coast and the Morača was to suffer from small plundering raids by Ottoman troops based in Medun off and on during the late 1450s. And mutual raiding, necessary to maintain the plunder economy, occurred along the Zetan-Kosača border. By 1459 some of the Zetan tribesmen had dropped their allegiance to Venice and had accepted Ottoman suzerainty. And thus matters continued until Stefan Crnojević died in late 1464 or early 1465. He was succeeded by his son John.

Affairs in Greece from 1443

While the Ottomans were occupied with the crusaders in 1443, Despot Constantine Palaeologus of the Morea marched across the Isthmus of Corinth into Attica. Faced with this large army, Nerio II, the Florentine Duke of Athens, at once initiated negotiations. Constantine agreed to leave Nerio in possession of his duchy if he accepted Byzantine suzerainty and paid the despot the tribute he had formerly paid to the sultan. Having obtained Nerio’s submission in early 1444, the despot then pressed north into Ottoman territory, restoring Greek rule over Thessaly up to Mount Olympus by the end of 1445. The Albanians and Vlachs of the Pindus Mountains, on Thessaly’s western borders, recognized his suzerainty. Moreover, various Albanian tribes also rose up against the Turks in parts of Epirus.

However, these successes were not to last. The Ottomans defeated the crusaders at Varna in November 1444. The Byzantines and the Morean despot were not present at this battle. This victory freed the sultan to turn his attention to Greece, where his hold was beginning to unravel. In 1446 the sultan
launched a major invasion into central Greece and quickly recovered Thessaly. Nero hastened to recognize the sultan's suzerainty again over Attica and Boeotia. The despot's troops withdrew to the Isthmus of Corinth, thereby withdrawing from all their acquisitions of 1443–45. Constantine prepared his troops to defend the Hexamilion, which he had repaired in 1444. The Ottomans arrived at the Isthmus in November 1446. Constantine sent envoys to the sultan, who refused to listen to any of Constantine's proposals but demanded the destruction of the Hexamilion. Constantine refused, so the sultan attacked the fortifications with cannons, breaking through the Hexamilion on 10 December 1446.

The Ottoman army was then divided into two forces, one sent to ravage Achaea—the geographical region of Achaea in the northwest of the peninsula—and the other, the region of Mistra. Many cities fell and were looted. The whole region was devastated, and many people were massacred or carried off as slaves. Sixty thousand were taken as slaves, according to both the Venetian and Greek sources. Then, in early 1447, the Ottomans received unconditional submission from the two despots Constantine and Thomas, who agreed to vassalage and a huge annual tribute. The two rulers also promised not to rebuild the Hexamilion. The Ottoman troops then withdrew. The despots probably escaped more lightly than they otherwise might have, since the sultan was then more concerned about the threats to his empire from Hunyadi and Skanderbeg.

In October 1448 the Byzantine emperor, John VIII, died; Constantine was his designated successor. Constantine was crowned emperor in January 1449 in Mistra by an Orthodox bishop. The manner of the coronation was chosen to win support in Constantinople, whose populace would have objected to his being crowned by the Unionist patriarch. Constantine then divided the Morea into two appanages, each under one of his brothers, each of whom bore the title despot. The western part of the peninsula from the southern tip of Messenia and Kalamata to Kalavryta and Patras in the north—including Messenia, Elis, Achaea, and most of Arcadia—went to Thomas. The young Demetrius, who formerly held the Black Sea appanage and had shown himself to be highly ambitious, having a history of intriguing with the Ottomans for his own interests, was given the eastern parts of the peninsula from the Isthmus of Corinth, with Corinth, in the north to the tip of the Malea peninsula in the south—including the Argolid and Laconia with Mistra, Maina, and Karytania.

At his investiture each despot swore to respect the rights of the other. But as soon as Constantine left for Constantinople the two began to quarrel and intrigue against each other. They quarreled over territory and religion. Thomas was a Unionist, Demetrius an Anti-Unionist. They also quarreled with Venice about the four Morean cities Venice held, at a time when both needed Venice as an ally against the Turks. Soon Thomas tried to seize the district of Skorta that belonged to Demetrius. Demetrius declared war on his brother and sought support from Turakhan beg, the Ottoman governor of Thessaly. The interven-
tion of Ottoman troops brought about peace talks, and under Ottoman pressure Thomas was forced to surrender to Demetrius the important town of Kalamata as compensation for Skorta, which Thomas was allowed to keep. Presumably the Ottomans hoped to make Kalamata into a bone of contention between the two brothers. The brothers then swore before the Ottoman commander that they would live in peace and respect the new arrangement.

Meanwhile a small remnant of Epirus, including Arta, still remained in the hands of Carlo II Tocco, who had accepted Ottoman suzerainty for it. He died in 1448, leaving his lands to his minor son Leonardo. The Ottomans in 1449 launched an assault against his lands, taking Arta and the bulk of southern Epirus, except for three isolated fortresses. Of these the Turks took Angelokastron in 1460 and Vonitsa, the last, in 1479. His islands, including Zakynthos where he usually resided, were not secure either; in late summer 1479 the Turks captured them all.

In 1451 Murad II died and was succeeded by Mehmed II. The new sultan at once began planning to take Constantinople. He built two large fortresses above the city on either side of the Bosphorus, Rumeli and Anadolu Hisari. Constantine XI, realizing the magnitude of the threat, sought Western aid, adding substance to his request by again proclaiming the Union of the Churches, which, of course, stirred up violent opposition from the local Greeks. Having lost everything else, the Greeks strongly clung to their faith.

Mehmed planned his assault on Constantinople for 1453. As a diversion, and to prevent Peloponnesian aid to Constantinople, Mehmed launched a major plundering raid into the Morea in 1452. The Greeks of the Morea fought well, even defeating one large unit of these forces. But the diversion worked. The Morea could send no aid to Constantinople, and the two despots had to reaffirm their status as Ottoman vassals. In 1453 Mehmed II slowly moved toward Constantinople. On the way he conquered Anchialos and Mesembria on the Black Sea coast. He stopped at Selymbria, but it resisted; so, leaving it blockaded (it was taken later that year), he marched on to Constantinople. On 7 April 1453 Mehmed began the siege of Constantinople. A small Greek army of only a couple of thousand and a Genoese force of seven hundred constituted the defenders of the capital. The city’s hopes depended on its magnificent walls. However, the Ottomans had a vast number of well-disciplined troops as well as cannons to use against these walls.

The city fell to a major assault on the night of 29–30 May. Constantine XI died fighting. The Ottomans plundered the city for three days, and then Mehmed entered the city, which he now made into the capital of his empire. Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque. Mehmed left most of the churches intact, however, and made a strong effort to win the support of his Greek subjects. He granted them freedom of religion under their patriarch. Moreover, to gain the Greeks’ support, he installed as patriarch the leader of the Anti-Unionist party, George Gennadius Scholarius, thereby supporting the Greek religion against Catholicism and Church Union. Thus the Union of
Florence died. Few Greeks regretted its passing, and most of those intellectuals who did emigrated to the West. The fall of the city is traditionally seen as the end of the Byzantine Empire.

Meanwhile the Palaeologus family still ruled the Morea. The two despots there were not popular with their numerous Albanian subjects. And in 1453 these Albanians, angry over a tax increase, rose up in a major rebellion. The initiator seems to have been a chieftain named Peter Bova. He also was able to win the support of various Greek archons there, including Manuel Cantacuzenus, a grandson of John VI Cantacuzenus' son Matthew. This Manuel Cantacuzenus had previously been appointed by Constantine as governor of Mani. Manuel soon rose to become the leader of the rebels against Demetrius. Many of Manuel's supporters called him despot with the hopes of installing him as the ruler of the Morea. At roughly the same time John Asen Centurione Zaccaria, a bastard son of Centurione Zaccaria, the last Prince of Achaea, and of a Byzantine woman descended from the Bulgarian and subsequently Byzantine family of Asen, escaped from Despot Thomas' jail where he had been imprisoned for an earlier revolt. Supported by a major Greek magnate named Nicephorus Loukanis, John Asen Centurione Zaccaria began to call himself Prince of Achaea and set about trying to revive his father's former principality. He soon came to lead the rebels in Thomas' lands.

The leaders of both rebellions sought recognition from the sultan. Thomas and Demetrius, finding themselves overwhelmed, shut themselves up in strongholds—Thomas in Patras and Demetrius in Mistra—and also sought aid from the sultan. Facing enough trouble from the Albanians of Skanderbeg, the sultan did not want to see a new Albanian state established and thus sent a major force into the Peloponnesus in December 1453. By the late summer or early fall of 1454 the Ottoman troops had suppressed both rebellions. In the course of their work they severely plundered the lands of the rebels. Centurione fled to Venice, while Manuel Cantacuzenus fled to Dubrovnik, which he later left to take up residence in Hungary. The Ottomans decided to pardon Peter Bova and left him as the chief of his tribe. The Albanians, having submitted, were to benefit from the further depopulation resulting from the rebellion and from Ottoman intervention; the Albanians not only expanded their landholding but also converted considerable farm land into pasture land.

The despots were then re-invested in their offices by the Turks, with the obligation to pay an even higher tribute. At the same time certain major archons sought to become direct vassals of the sultan. Seeing this as a means to play "divide and rule" more effectively, Mehmed accepted their request. Thus certain lands of the Morea, though remaining in Greek hands, became independent of the despots and came to be held directly from the sultan. This also had the effect of reducing the size of the despots' armies and of reducing their tax income, which was needed both for defense and for their ever-increasing tribute payments. As various other magnates, in theory under the despots, also failed to pay the taxes they owed, the despots were faced
with a major financial problem. By 1458 the despots’ tribute was three years in arrears.

Seeing the Ottoman threat to their lands increasing, the brothers took different approaches. Demetrios became more and more subservient to the Turks in the hopes of retaining his position, whereas Thomas sought to defend his lands by acquiring support from the West. To achieve this Thomas clung to a Unionist position. In 1458, provoked by the arrears in tribute and Thomas’ negotiations with the West, Mehmed II sent a large force into the Peloponneseus. Though it attacked the lands of both brothers, it concentrated its efforts against the less-subservient Thomas, whose lands suffered particularly severe ravages. The towns the Ottomans attacked resisted strongly; thus the Ottoman acquisition of towns was slow. But by the end of the summer, according to Kritovoulos, the Turks had gained about a third of the Peloponnesus, including Patras and Vostitsa (Aigion). The despots then had to submit to a new treaty, allowing the sultan to retain what he had taken. However, according to Sphrantzes, Patras, Kalavryta, and Greveno were not taken but were surrendered by the 1458 treaty. Demetrios also had to accept the permanent loss of Corinth, which had finally been starved into surrender after a siege lasting the whole summer. Both despots had to agree to increased tribute, something that their territorial (and therefore revenue) losses were to make an impossibility to obtain. Then, in October 1458, the sultan’s armies withdrew with many captives. However, an Ottoman governor, Omar Pasha, remained in the Peloponnesus, based in Corinth, to govern the territories annexed by the Turks. And Turkish garrisons were placed in the Turkish towns.

Demetrios decided it was best to accept the situation. However, Thomas, bitter at the loss of Patras, acquired some Western mercenaries and attacked Patras. This effort failed, but, according to Sphrantzes, his forces did recover Kalavryta. Next, Thomas attacked Demetrios and seized various forts. Presumably he was angry at Demetrios’ failure to support his Patras campaign and at Demetrios’ policy of accommodating the Turks. Thomas probably also was jealous because Demetrios had lost less territory to the Turks than he had and had thus come out better in the 1458 settlement with the Turks. Presumably, Thomas hoped to rectify the situation by grabbing some of Demetrios’ lands. Demetrios was taken by surprise and sought aid from the sultan. The sultan ordered Thomas to withdraw from Demetrios’ lands and to restore to Demetrios the forts he had taken. It seems that Thomas did not return all the forts, for Demetrios next attacked Thomas’ land. Occupied elsewhere, the sultan could only send a unit of troops based in Thessaly to pillage Thomas’ Arcadia. Then, struck down by the plague, these Turkish forces were withdrawn. Expecting a new intervention by the Turks, the two brothers then met and concluded a peace. But it was soon broken, and the two were again skirmishing and pillaging each other’s lands in the winter of 1459–60. Kritovoulos blames the Peloponnesian magnates for inciting the brothers against
each other, hoping, Kritovoulos claims, to expand their own possessions with lands taken in civil warfare.

Next, a rebellion broke out in Demetrius’ territory, during which, Kritovoulos reports, many Albanians deserted Demetrius’ lands for Thomas’. Forced by the rebels to flee to Monemvasia, Demetrius again appealed to the sultan. Occupied elsewhere, he could not at once send troops. But he did order Thomas to restore to Demetrius the forts he had taken from him, to pay an increased tribute to the Ottomans, and to report in person to the sultan within twenty days. Thomas, it seems, was ready to obey these orders, but his nobles refused to yield various of the forts in question (which they had assumed possession of) and to render the money necessary for this tribute. Thus negotiations broke down, and anarchy increased in the peninsula. The Albanians took advantage of the strife to plunder Greeks of both sides, laying waste villages and farms to create more pasture land. And, it seems, the Ottoman garrisons in the Turkish-held towns also moved into Greek territory to enrich themselves by plundering villages.

On the Albanians Sphrantzes reports:

Then the base and most useless race of the Albanians took advantage of the present situation, which was suitable to their reputation and thievish disposition. What did they neglect to do, what crime did they not commit? For they broke faith sometimes twice on the same Sabbath and were always deserting one lord for the other. They demanded, in their own tongue, castles for their estates; if they were denied by one lord they would run to the other despot, while the rest would then approach the first despot in a similar way. In the meantime, if they found anything belonging to the unfortunate Romans [Greeks] and even to the Albanians, to their relatives and dependents, they would plunder and destroy it. Who could provide an adequate lamentation over such great misfortunes?4

Mehemmed saw the time was ripe to finish off Greek rule in the Peloponnesus; he also wanted to secure the province before Pope Pius II could mobilize the new crusade he was planning. Though such a crusade was called for by Pius in 1459 and actively pursued as a policy goal, nothing in fact was ever to come of it. Moreover, Mehemmed was angry at Thomas for not reporting to him and not obeying his other orders. He probably was also annoyed at Demetrius, who, though more submissive than Thomas, was not rendering all the tribute he owed either.

So, the sultan attacked the Peloponnesus with a major force in the spring of 1460. Demetrius surrendered Mistra to him on 30 May 1460. Mehemmed then proceeded to conquer the rest of the peninsula. Two towns, Gardiki and Kastritsi (Kastrion), resisted and were taken by storm. The inhabitants of these two towns, including six thousand at Gardiki, were massacred. Thomas tried to submit, but he could not raise the vast tribute the sultan demanded. So
the Ottoman campaign continued. The massacres led Greek town commanders to resist more strongly; but this merely prolonged the campaign. The Ottomans pressed on, taking the various Morean forts one by one. By the end of 1460 the Ottomans had conquered all the Greek Peloponnesus except for Monemvasia and Salmenikon; Salmenikon held out heroically under siege for a full year until it finally fell in July 1461. With its fall all the mainland territories that had been part of the Byzantine Empire—except Monemvasia—were conquered, and the Ottomans had annexed all the Byzantine Morea. Many Peloponnesians were carted off to Constantinople to help repopulate that city. Mehemed repaired and garrisoned what he felt to be the key fortresses and leveled the rest. Thomas did not even stay to participate in the attempted defense of his lands; instead he fled via Venice’s Modon to Corfu and then to Italy, where he lived on a papal pension until his death in 1465. Demetrius, who had surrendered his person to the Turks when summoned early in the campaign in 1460, was received by the sultan with honors and promised an appanage in Thrace. He soon thereafter received it; it included Imbros, Lemnos, parts of Thasos and Samothrace, and the Thracian town of Ainos. He lived in Ainos for seven years until he was disgraced in 1467, allegedly for being involved in cheating the Ottomans of income from a local salt monopoly. He was moved to Demotika and then to Adrianople. Kept under close supervision, he died in a monastery in Adrianople in 1470. His death followed by a year that of his daughter Helen, who had been designated for Mehemmed’s harem. However, the sultan had then thought better of it, fearing she would poison him. Having rejected her, he banned her from ever marrying; so, she died a spinster.

After the fall of Salmenikon in 1461, all the Peloponneseus except for the four Venetian towns, Monemvasia, and the mountains of the Maniot peninsula was Ottoman. In 1464 Monemvasia accepted Venetian rule, and a podesta was installed. The Ottomans took Argos from Venice, most probably in 1462, though Kritovoulos dates it 1463. Kritovoulos claims that after the Ottoman governor of the Peloponneseus launched a damaging raid against Venetian Naupaktos, the Venetians in 1463 retaliated with an expedition that landed on the Isthmus of Corinth. They immediately started to restore the former wall across the Isthmus. Their presence encouraged various subjugated Greek towns to revolt. Lemnos and certain Aegean islands in the Cyclades, according to Pius II, followed suit and “threw off the Turkish yoke and deserted to the Venetians.” But then Ottoman troops from north of the Isthmus attacked the Venetians at the same time as the Ottoman Peloponnesian forces struck them from the south. Those Venetians who could, escaped to their ships. The Turks then marched on Argos, which, seeing the impossibility of holding out, surrendered on demand. A large portion of its populace was transferred elsewhere and its fortifications were destroyed. Then the Turks easily subdued the last Greek rebels.

In 1470 the Ottomans took from Venice Euboea, including Negroponte.
And they took Vonitsa from the Toccos in 1479. Modon, Coron, and also Naupaktos (Lepanto)—on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth—were surrendered by Venice to the Turks in 1500. Monemvasia and the last of the four original Venetian towns, Nauplia, were ceded, still unconquered, by the Venetians to the Turks in 1540 after a disastrous war in which the Ottomans severely bested the Venetians.

Meanwhile, the Ottomans also ended the Florentine Duchy of Athens and Thebes. In 1451 Nerio II died. His son Francesco was a minor. Nerio’s young widow, Chiara, had a lover, a Venetian, Bartholomeo Contarini, whose father commanded the Venetian town of Nauplia. Bartholomeo was already married to a lady in Venice. Wanting to marry Chiara, he escaped the sin of bigamy by murdering his Venetian wife. Then he married Chiara and, as guardian for Francesco, took over the governorship of the duchy. He seems to have been an arbitrary ruler who stirred up much opposition among the local Greeks. They complained to the sultan, who had not been happy to see a Venetian ruling the duchy. The sultan summoned Bartholomeo to his court; Bartholomeo, upon obeying the summons, was thrown into jail.

Francesco’s cousin Franco—the son of Anthony II, who had briefly ruled Athens, 1439–41—was then installed as regent by the sultan. Ambitious to take over the duchy in his own right, Franco in 1456 jailed and then murdered Chiara, Nerio’s widow and his own aunt. The murder upset the local populace, who saw it as the first step toward Franco’s deposing the rightful heir, Francesco. This provided an excuse for the sultan to intervene, and in June 1456 he attacked the duchy. He quickly took Athens. By the surrender agreement Franco was allowed to go to Thebes, from which he ruled all Boeotia as a fief from the sultan. Attica was immediately annexed by the sultan in 1456. Franco did not rule Boeotia long. In 1460, on a campaign in the service of the Ottomans, he was strangled on the orders of the sultan, and Boeotia too was placed under direct Ottoman rule. The Ottomans expelled all the remaining Latin clergy from Attica and Boeotia, while confirming the Greek clergy in possession of all the local churches, except for those that were made into mosques. Among the latter was Athens’ great Church to the Virgin, the Parthenon.

The Fall of Serbia

The Ottomans tolerated the existence of George Branković’s Serbia during the reign of Murad II. However, Murad’s successor Mehmed II intended to annex Serbia, and, having taken Constantinople, decided Serbia’s turn had come. The Serbs, who had faithfully fulfilled their vassal obligations to the sultan (including providing troops for the attack on Constantinople), tried to renew their peace treaty with the Ottomans, which had just lapsed, but the sultan refused. In 1454 the Ottomans launched a raid against Serbia that plundered extensive regions and may have picked off a few lesser forts. Ostrovica may well have fallen in this campaign. The Turks also besieged
Smederevo, but without success. They took many captives, some of whom were utilized in the repopulation of the new Ottoman capital of Constantinople.

Then in 1455 the Ottomans directed a major assault against Serbia. Southern Serbia, the Kosovo region (including all the direct holdings of the Branković family), and the richest mine, Novo Brdo, fell. It is estimated that at the time of its capture Novo Brdo yielded an income of 120,000 ducats annually. After the 1455 campaign Branković retained only the territory north of the West Morava River. These new boundaries were specified in an agreement signed between him and the Ottomans in late 1455 or early 1456. Among Serbia’s losses in 1455 was Peć, the seat of the Serbian patriarch. Not wanting the head of his Church to reside in Ottoman territory, Branković, after receiving confirmation of Serbia’s right to its own patriarch from the Patriarch of Constantinople, appointed a new patriarch for Serbia. This bishop, presumably residing in Smederevo, had jurisdiction only over the dioceses lying in the territory Branković retained. The Archbishop of Ohrid, who possessed a long memory, quickly moved in and re-asserted his jurisdiction over the Serbian lands conquered by the Turks that had belonged to Ohrid prior to 1219. After Serbia’s fall in 1455 the dioceses that had been under Peć remained divided between Ohrid and a Serbian hierarch (whose title and residence seem frequently to have changed) until the re-establishment of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1557.

In 1456 Hungarian-held Beograd underwent a full-scale siege. The city was heroically defended by John Hunyadi and Cardinal Capistrano. After the Christians won a battle against the attackers and Beograd was hit by an outbreak of the plague, the Ottomans withdrew, still in 1456. Thus the defense succeeded, and Beograd was to hold out under Hungary until 1521. However, its defense had been costly, for the plague struck down many of its defenders, including both Hunyadi and Capistrano. The loss of Hunyadi was particularly distressing to the Christian cause, for he was one of Christianity’s two most successful commanders—the other being Skanderbeg—against the Turks. Furthermore, civil war then ensued in Hungary, first a conflict between Hunyadi’s family and Ulrich of Celje that culminated in Ulrich’s murder in November 1456, and then, after Ladislas V’s death in November 1457, between the partisans of Matthew Corvinus Hunyadi and those of Frederick III Habsburg. Though Matthew had by early 1458 assumed control over most of Hungary, tensions continued between him and Frederick until 1463. These internal struggles temporarily weakened Hungary at this key moment and also limited the action Hungary could take in the defense of Serbia.

Meanwhile, on 24 December 1456, after the Ottoman campaign against Beograd that had plundered Serbia as it marched to and returned from Beograd, George Branković died. He was an elderly man by then, most probably in his eighties. The circumstances of his death are not entirely certain. Later sources, including Orbini, state that George died from the after-effects of a clash with Michael Szilagyi, the Hungarian governor of Beograd.
According to this story, which evidently takes place after the Ottoman withdrawal from Beograd, some Hungarians had been killed in a skirmish with some of Branković’s Serbs. Quite possibly the two sides had clashed as a result of Ladislas Hunyadi’s murder of Ulrich of Celje. For Michael Szilagyi was Ladislas Hunyadi’s uncle and a leading figure in the Hunyadi party, while George Branković had been allied to Ulrich, who had been married to George’s daughter Catherine. In any case, after the just-mentioned skirmish Szilagyi sought revenge and ambushed George Branković and his entourage. In the ensuing scuffle Branković was wounded—losing two fingers from his right hand—and taken prisoner, being held for ransom. That he was captured by Szilagyi and held for ransom is confirmed by the contemporary, Kritovoulus. Kritovoulus adds that George’s son and heir, Lazar, had a bad spirit toward his parents and had not wanted to pay the ransom. However, he had finally paid over thirty thousand pieces of gold, albeit grudgingly and against his will, after being urgently pressed to do so by his mother. His release procured, George returned home. According to Orbini, his wound festered and eventually proved fatal. Kritovoulus says simply that George was worn out by grief and a severe disease.

George was succeeded by his youngest son, Lazar—who, as noted, had become the heir because the Turks had blinded his two older brothers. Desperate to save his lands, Lazar submitted to the sultan in January 1457, promising to pay an annual tribute of forty thousand ducats. Lazar had no choice in this, because Serbia was unable to resist the Turks alone, and Lazar was in no position to obtain aid from Hungary. For Hungary then seemed to be in the hands of the Hunyadi faction that in the previous two months had murdered Lazar’s brother-in-law Ulrich of Celje and had attacked Lazar’s father, in the process wounding him if not causing his death. Two months later, however, new possibilities opened for Lazar, for in the middle of March 1457 Ladislas V, as noted, seized and executed Ladislas Hunyadi. This set off further civil strife in Hungary as Ladislas Hunyadi’s uncle, Michael Szilagyi, mobilized to resist the young king.

Lazar immediately in April 1457 attacked the Banat and took the district of Kovin which belonged to the Hunyadis. This district, lying across the Danube from Smederevo, stretched from the Danube to the Temes River. In May Lazar’s forces were defeated on the Temes River by Michael Szilagyi’s troops, and Lazar was forced to give up his offensive, though for the time he retained the Kovin district. It is not known whether Lazar had simply taken advantage of the Hungarian strife to avenge himself on the Hunyadis and make gains at Hungary’s expense or whether he moved against the Hunyadis after negotiations with, and as an ally of, the young Hungarian king. Had there been no such agreement, Lazar would have been inviting retaliation from the Hungarians as soon as they had concluded their strife. Yet to have made a compact with the Hungarian king would have invited trouble from the Ottomans. And would the Hungarian king have acquiesced in Lazar’s taking the Kovin district? In the light of such questions we must emphasize that we
do not know whether or not Lazar had in fact entered into a compact with the Hungarian king. However, various scholars have argued that he did and have seen this alleged agreement as the cause of the quarrel that occurred at this time within the Branković family.

In this quarrel Lazar seems to have been opposed by his brother Gregory, sister Mara, mother Jerina, and uncle Thomas Cantacuzenus. But whether they were opposed to him owing to their advocacy of maintaining close ties with the Turks and of doing nothing to provoke them or for some other reason is not certain. They may equally well have been squabbling over a succession question. Lazar had only one child, a daughter, Helen (Jelena), whom he may well have wanted to be his heir. After all through her marriage, particularly if she were heiress to Serbia, Lazar might be able to win an ally from a neighboring state. And we know that, at least after Lazar’s death, Lazar’s wife, also named Helen, was actively working for this daughter’s succession. However, there was a second Branković who had strong claims to the succession. This was Gregory’s illegitimate son, Vuk. Vuk was not only a male, but his father Gregory was George Branković’s eldest son. And Gregory, as noted, had been George’s heir until 1441, when his blinding at the hands of the Turks had disqualified him. Furthermore, we note that in the line-up of figures in this dispute Lazar and Gregory were on opposite sides. Unfortunately we can only speculate, for the sources on the Branković family quarrel are as vague as they can be.

Kritovoulos states that after his succession Lazar clashed with his mother, Jerina Cantacuzena. He refused her a share in the government and injured her in many ways, constantly bothering her by seeking a share of his inheritance and the treasure she had accumulated and hidden. She, unable to bear Lazar’s insults any longer, fled. Lazar pursued her. Being old and sick, she could not flee far; she died, after which Lazar recovered the treasure. Orbini states that after George’s death, Lazar’s position inside Serbia was challenged by his mother, Jerina, to whom George’s testament had assigned a major role in Serbia’s government. Wanting to rule alone, Lazar murdered her by poisoning her salad. This act horrified many Serbian nobles, who turned against him. Mehemed II decided the time was ripe to conquer Serbia. Realizing the helplessness of his position, Lazar took ill and died, leaving no male heir.

It is impossible to confirm either account, both of which stress a quarrel between son and mother, though one has them bickering over wealth and the other over power. Many scholars do think, however, that there had at least been some sort of power struggle within the family and that quite possibly Lazar and his mother had been on opposite sides. In any case he was in Smederevo when she, residing separately in Rudnik, died, naturally or otherwise, on 3 May 1457.

Sphrantzes and the sixteenth-century Serbian annals report that immediately on her death Lazar’s older brother, the blind Gregory, his sister Mara, and his uncle Thomas Cantacuzenus fled to the Turks, taking considerable treasure with them. Kritovoulos confirms the flight of the three to the Turks,
though he has it precede Jerina’s death. If true, their flight might indicate that they feared action against themselves from Lazar. In any case, regardless of whether or not there was a struggle for power within Serbia during 1457, Lazar, faced with the likelihood of a new Turkish attack, did die on 20 January 1458. Rumor said he was poisoned by some of his nobles. Michael Szilagyi, the commander of Beograd (who had retained control of Beograd throughout the chaos of 1457), shortly thereafter regained the Kovin district for Hungary. The Bosnians also attacked and retook Srebrnica, probably also in 1458, and eleven other lesser towns, including Zvornik, along the Drina. Thus the Drina again became the border between Serbia and Bosnia.

Lazar’s widow Helen, the daughter of Thomas Palaeologus of the Morea who had married Lazar in December 1446, and Lazar’s other blind brother, Stefan, tried to assume power in Serbia. Their position, to say the least, was insecure. The leading Serbs seem to have been divided as to whether Serbia should seek to retain what it still had by submitting completely to and cooperating with the Turks or whether Serbia should try to improve its position by seeking an alliance with the Hungarians. And following Lazar’s death, representatives of these two view-points seem to have clashed, with the result that two weeks to a month—depending on which source one accepts—passed before Serbia had any kind of government. This government, chosen at some time in February 1458, apparently by a council of some sort, was a collective affair that had Vojvoda Michael Andjelović (Angelus), the leader of the pro-Turkish faction, as its primary figure. However, he had to share power with Lazar’s widow Helen and Lazar’s brother Stefan. The Hungarians were in no position to oppose Michael’s installation, for at this critical moment they were struggling over Matthew Corvinus’ establishment as King of Hungary.

Members of the Angelus family of Thessaly, Michael and his brother had been living in exile in Novo Brdo when the Ottomans attacked that town in 1427. The brothers fled separately; Michael escaped to George Branković, who housed him at his court, while the other brother was captured by the Turks. The latter soon converted to Islam and rose rapidly in the Ottoman military establishment, becoming Mahmud Pasha, Beglerbeg of Rumeli (roughly Ottoman Bulgaria). The brothers seem to have maintained cordial ties. Meanwhile Michael, who had been appointed by Lazar to the position of great vojvoda, the highest military office in Serbia, wanted to maintain Serbia’s existence by closely tying its fortunes to the Turks and by opposing the Hungarians. Not surprisingly, when he rose to the position of first man in the ruling collective, Helen felt frustrated and, not at all interested in sharing power, set about increasing her contacts with the Hungarians in the hope that they would help her oust Michael.

Michael, meanwhile, had no intention of relinquishing his position, and rumors circulated that he was ambitious to become Despot of Serbia and hoped the Ottomans would assist him to realize this ambition. And it is reported that soon townsmen in Smederevo were calling him despot. At the same time opposition to him was growing, presumably incited by Helen. And
eight thousand Hungarian soldiers under Michael Szilagyi gathered on the Danube. So, Michael received a unit of Turkish troops to beef up his garrison in Smederevo. He clearly intended to use them to advance his own cause and saw them as allies. Upon their arrival, in March 1458, these Turks promptly raised the Turkish flag over the battlements of Smederevo. Whether this signified their intention to ignore Michael’s cause and seize the town for the sultan is not certain. In any case this proved to be more than the local Serbian citizens could take, and they staged a spontaneous uprising that killed many Turks and took Michael prisoner. Possibly the presence of the Hungarian troops a short distance up the river provided the rebels with the courage to carry out the revolt. This uprising enabled Helen, who had already opened up serious negotiations with the Hungarians (through Michael Szilagyi, the commander of Beograd), to take power in Serbia. Thus the pro-Hungarian faction, to which she belonged, won the local struggle.

However, the jailing of Michael—and diplomatic sources mention him as still being a prisoner in Smederevo in the fall of 1458—and the policy orientation of the victors were not pleasing to the Turks, particularly not to Mahmud Pasha, Michael’s brother. The Turks decided to attack Serbia and mobilized their forces. They entered Serbian territory in early April, if not at the very end of March. The Turkish forces, led by Mahmud Pasha himself, seem to have been large. Thus Helen’s Hungarian allies were in no position to support her. Matthew Corvinus, still faced with much opposition at home, had to concentrate his attention on dealing with internal enemies and consolidating his own position. He was able to provide his uncle, Michael Szilagyi, in Beograd with only eight thousand men. As they were far too few in number to intervene and oppose the Turks in Serbia, Michael based them along the Danube frontier to prevent the Turks from attempting to cross the river into Hungary.

Accompanying the Turkish forces was Gregory, Lazar’s blind brother, who was to be advanced as a pretender to the throne. Whether he had been with the Ottomans from the time of his flight during Lazar’s lifetime or whether he had returned to Serbia upon Lazar’s death only to fail in an attempted coup and flee again to the Turks—as Hungarian sources state—is not entirely certain.

Kritovoulos confirms none of the above. He simply states that Lazar had refused to pay the tribute owed, so the sultan became angry and decided to attack Serbia. When he learned of Lazar’s death, he ordered an immediate invasion.

Whatever the truth in the story of Michael Andjelović, Helen soon after taking power entered into new discussions with the Hungarians. The Hungarians, seeing the end of Serbia in sight, tried to persuade Helen and Stefan to turn over what was left of Serbia, including Smederevo, to Hungary in exchange for lands within Hungary. Some, or possibly all, of the lands offered them in Hungary seem to have been lands that previously belonged to the Branković family but which had been confiscated by the angry John
Hunyadi in 1450. These negotiations did not go smoothly. Later sources say that Helen wanted to yield only Golubac for these lands, while keeping Smederevo. Furthermore, it was claimed, John Hunyadi’s widow, who seems to have acquired many of the former Branković estates, did not want to give them up.

At some time between Lazar’s death (20 January 1458) and the arrival of Turkish forces in Serbia (late March–early April 1458), Hungarian sources state, Gregory Branković, the other blinded Branković brother, accompanied by his twenty-year-old illegitimate son Vuk, tried to take power in Serbia. If this statement is true, then Gregory, who had sought asylum with the Turks in May 1457, must have left Ottoman territory to stage this rebellion. To have been able to do this suggests he had the Turks’ blessings for his attempt. Hungarian sources then claim that Gregory and Vuk were defeated in Srem. They soon, in April 1458, were to be found back in the Turkish camp, which later authors claim was located at Kruševac. Thus it seems the Branković family was divided into two factions, each seeking power, with one enlisting the help of the Hungarians and the other that of the Turks.

In any case, regardless of the actual background for it, by April 1458 the Turks were preparing for an assault and Gregory Branković was present in their ranks. The Turks were actively on the warpath again inside Serbia in May 1458. In the course of that spring they took Resava, Žrnov (Avala), Bela Stena, and Višesav. In August they took Golubac, which seems not to have been turned over to the Hungarians. When this campaign was completed, Serbia consisted of little more than Smederevo itself. Smederevo seems to have escaped the coup de grâce in 1458 because Mahmud and a portion of his forces had to be withdrawn in the course of the summer to join a major Turkish campaign in the Peloponnesus ordered by Mehmed II.

Nevertheless, Helen was well aware that Smederevo could expect a new attack the following year. Her negotiations with Hungary had not brought Serbia any Hungarian help during the disasters of 1458, so she needed a new ally. (In all fairness to Hungary, it must be repeated that Matthew Corvinus in 1458 had had to devote his energies to securing his own authority at home against considerable opposition.) So, Helen now tried to arrange a marriage that would procure Bosnian aid for Serbia. She offered her daughter Helen (Jelena), then about eleven years old, as a bride for Stefan Tomašević, the eldest son and heir of the Bosnian king. The Bosnians were interested, for such a marriage agreement would secure their possession of Srebrnica against future Serbian attack. However, the Bosnians would enter into the arrangement only if it did not bring them into conflict with Hungary. In January 1459, at a council meeting of the Hungarian nobility, taking place after Bosnia had again agreed to accept Hungarian suzerainty, King Matthew Corvinus of Hungary agreed to the marriage and to Stefan Tomašević’s taking over as ruler of Smederevo. Matthew seems to have seen this as a means to draw Bosnia into the struggle against the Turks; he may also have dreamed that a
union between Bosnia and Serbia would result, creating a buffer state between the Turks and Hungary.

Angry at their vassal Bosnia’s lining up with Hungary, the Turks were already raiding Bosnia in March 1459. Stefan Tomašević arrived in Smederevo and took over command of its fortress, also in March. To guarantee a smooth take-over Michael Szilágyi appeared with a Hungarian force to supervise the transition. Stefan Tomašević’s wedding to Helen, who upon her marriage took the name Maria, took place in April. The title “despot”—held by Stefan Lazarević, George Branković, and even Lazar, who during his father’s lifetime had received it from a Byzantine envoy—somehow went with Smederevo to Stefan Tomašević. Perhaps Lazar’s widow, as a Byzantine princess of the Palaeologus family and in the absence of a Byzantine emperor after the fall of Constantinople, felt she had the right to grant the title. A week after the wedding, on 8 April, the new regime in Smederevo exiled Stefan Branković from Serbia.

The Ottomans then launched a major assault against Smederevo, taking it on 20 June 1459. Serbia again disappeared as a state. This time Ottoman control was to last until the nineteenth century. Stefan Tomašević and his new bride fled to Bosnia. The Hungarians eventually attacked and recovered in 1476 the region of Šabac in Serbia; they held it until the major Ottoman campaign of 1521, which not only reconquered the Šabac province but also took Beograd.

After the fall of Smederevo, Matthew Corvinus accused Stefan Tomašević and the Bosnians of selling out to the Turks. He also seems to have placed some blame on the Branković, or at least used the fall of Smederevo as an excuse to do so, for he took from the Branković family the town of Tokai and its district, a major possession of the family within Hungary.

Matthew’s accusations were at once taken up by the papacy, and Pope Pius II, writing at about that time in his diaries, later published as the Commentaries, states,

A few months after he [Stefan Tomašević] entered it [Smederevo], he called in the Turks and sold them the town for a great weight of gold. This was as crushing a blow to the spirits of the Hungarians as the loss of Constantinople had been. For Senderovia [Smederevo] is, as it were, the gate from Rascia [Serbia] to Wallachia, a most convenient base for making war against the Hungarians. . . . The Bosnian envoys, however, had left Mantua before the betrayal was generally known and it was reported first to the Hungarian ambassadors.⁶

Pius makes his source for this information clear, stating that it was reported to, and we may conclude circulated thereafter by, Hungarian ambassadors. Confirmation for the substance of this accusation is found only in Hungarian sources or in sources derived from them. No Turkish source sug-
gests a betrayal. Most modern scholars believe the accusation to be slander and have concluded that the Bosnian prince, unable to resist the superior strength of the Turks, was forced to surrender the town. The pope soon dispatched an envoy to look into the charges; he found the Bosnian king conciliatory. In fact Pius states, “The King of Bosnia, to atone for having surrendered Senderovia to the Turks and to give proof of his religious faith . . . forced the Manichees . . . to be baptised or to emigrate. . . .” Suggesting Bosnian innocence of the Hungarian charge is the fact that Pius simply uses the neutral expression “surrendered Senderovia” rather than a more loaded term like “sold” or “betrayed.” Also suggesting Bosnian innocence is the friendliness subsequently regularly shown by Pius to Stefan Tomasevic when he succeeded to the Bosnian throne in 1461. Pius would hardly have been so supportive of the young man if he had actually sold the fortress to the Turks. Thus we may conclude that Pius at first believed and thus recorded the Hungarian accusation but soon, as a result of his own investigation, found the charges unfounded. He therefore did not repeat them. However, he failed to go back and correct the statement he had made earlier in his text.

Bosnian innocence of the charge of betraying Smederevo is also confirmed by Chalcocondyles, who states that the Smederevo Serbs ("Raškans"), unhappy with Bosnian rule and believing they could not resist the Turks, went out to meet the sultan, turning over to him the keys of the city of Smederevo. Constantine Mihailović, the Janissary chronicler, supports this view of events, insofar as he writes that the Smederevo Serbs, unhappy with Bosnian rule, preferred the Turks to the Hungarians. Given the context, Constantine’s remarks imply this Serbian attitude played a role in the city’s surrender.

As a postscript to this discussion of Smederevo and the Serbs it should be noted that the Turks soon thereafter, in the course of a small skirmish, took Michael Szilagyi prisoner. The Turks took him to Constantinople, where they beheaded him in 1461.

The long years of Ottoman raiding followed by the Turks’ eventual conquest of Serbia caused large-scale migrations of Serbs from Serbia. The refugees ended up in one or the other of three regions: (1) the highland regions of Hercegovina or Zeta, where Ottoman control was always to be less direct and heavy; (2) Bosnia (from which some of them moved to the coast or up to Croatia, when Bosnia in its turn fell; as a result of this migration Orthodox populations appeared in parts of Bosnia where they had not been found at all previously, particularly in Lika and in the Krajina); and (3) Hungary, in particular in the region that came to be known as the Vojvodina. The Vojvodina, which had had no Serbs to speak of before the fifteenth century, acquired a large Serbian population that came to be the majority in many of its southern reaches along the border with the Turks. Many of these Serbs were to play an important role in defending the Hungarian frontier from Ottoman attack and in raiding the border lands of the Ottoman Empire. In the centuries
that followed more Serbs were to emigrate from the Ottoman Empire to settle in this region.

Moreover, the raids and warfare drove many peasants settled on lands near main routes into more out-of-the-way places, particularly into the hills and mountains. This resulted not only in demographic change within the Balkans but also in a change of livelihood. The mountains were more conducive to stock rearing than agriculture. Moreover, in the event of an attack one's fields were vulnerable, whereas one might hope to escape with some or all of one's animals. Thus, these years were marked by an increase in the number of mobile pastoralists with flocks and a decline in the number engaged in agriculture.

**Bosnia from 1443**

In the last chapter we brought Bosnia's story down to the death of King Tvrtko II and the succession of Stefan Tomaš (1443–61). Stefan Vukčić Kosača in Hum did not participate in the new king's election and immediately refused to recognize him. He announced his support of the new king's brother Radivoj, the long-time anti-king frequently supported by the Turks, who was then residing at the Kosača court. At this time, 1443, the papacy was trying to create a great counter-offensive against the Turks and sent envoys to both the king and to Stefan Vukčić about it, but neither could consider participation in any sort of league because civil war had quickly broken out between them. It is often stated that the Bosnians did not participate in the 1443 crusade at all. Recently, however, Živković has found that one of the major second-level nobles of eastern Bosnia, Peter Kovač Dinjičić, was a participant, leading six to seven hundred men.7

While this major confrontation between Christians and Turks took place to their east, the Bosnian rivals also went to war. Ivanš Pavlović joined the king's side and the pair attacked Stefan Vukčić. Doing poorly, and further threatened since John Hunyadi also recognized the new king, Stefan Vukčić sought outside support from Alphonso of Naples. Alphonso accepted Stefan Vukčić as a vassal and admitted him to his knightly order of the Virgin.8 But he sent no troops, so Stefan Vukčić's position remained precarious.

Once the Turks had defeated the crusaders, Stefan Vukčić, whose relations with the Ottomans were usually cordial, found his difficulties at an end. He received help from them and also from another Ottoman vassal, the restored George Branković, who also had had good relations with the Kosača family. Hunyadi, though recognizing Stefan Tomaš, sent the king no troops. Thus strengthened, Stefan Vukčić rapidly recovered the lands he had lost the previous year. The Bosnian civil war continued into 1446. By that time, as papal correspondence shows, the king had become a Roman Catholic; presumably until that time he had been a member of the Bosnian Church to which his father, Ostoja, had adhered.

Early in 1446 Stefan Vukčić and Stefan Tomaš finally made peace;
Stefan Vukčić agreed to recognize Stefan Tomaš as king, and the pre-war borders were restored. The peace was sealed by a marriage between the king and Stefan Vukčić’s daughter Catherine, who had to become a Catholic in order to marry the king. In this period many Bosnian nobles were becoming, or are found in the sources already as, Catholics. Vladislav Klešić and George Vojšalić had become Catholics. Ivaniš Pavlović became a Catholic in 1446, though he returned to the Bosnian Church in 1449. Even Stefan Vukčić expressed interest in becoming a Catholic, though he did not do so. A considerable number of Catholic churches, including a couple built by the king and several new Franciscan monasteries, were erected at this time. There were both political and cultural reasons to accept Catholicism in these years. When the Bosnians wanted to create alliances with Western figures, either for internal reasons or against the Ottomans, the Westerners exerted considerable pressure on the Bosnians to become Catholics. At the same time Western cultural influences—musical, artistic, architectural, dress styles, etc.—that were closely intertwined with the Catholic faith were penetrating Bosnia from the Catholic coast.

The peace concluded between Stefan Vukčić and the king was not pleasing to the Turks, whose aim was to encourage divisions within Bosnia. George Branković, quarreling with Stefan Tomaš over Srebrnica, was also displeased. Thus in 1448, when the Turks sent an expedition to plunder the king’s lands, they sent troops to plunder Stefan Vukčić’s as well. Stefan Vukčić sent envoys to George Branković to try to improve his relations with Serbia; possibly he also hoped that George would intervene on his behalf with his Ottoman suzerain. And in 1448—possibly to bolster his case with the Ottomans—Stefan Vukčić declared his separation from Bosnia by dropping his title Vojvoda of Bosnia (which his predecessors Vlatko Vuković and Sandalj Hranić had also borne) which indicated the holder’s subordination to the King of Bosnia. He assumed a title suggesting his own independence: Herceg (Duke) of Hum and the Coast. A year later he changed his title to Herceg of Saint Sava, calling himself after the famous Serbian saint whose relics lay in the monastery of Mileševo, which stood in the eastern part of Stefan Vukčić’s principality.

This second title had considerable public relations value because Sava’s relics were considered miracle-working by people of all Christian faiths, who flocked to Mileševo for cures. The Serbian connotations of the title may also have reflected the restoration of good relations between Stefan Vukčić and George Branković. The improvement in their relations is seen by the fact that when in 1448 or 1449 a Serbian-Bosnian war broke out over Srebrnica, Stefan Vukčić supported the Serbian side against Stefan Tomaš. He and his successors were to call themselves hercegs until the Ottoman conquest. From this title his lands became known as Hercegovina (the herceg’s lands), a name that stuck throughout the Ottoman period and has lasted to the present.

At the time Serbia fell to the Turks for the first time (1439–41), the Serbs had held Srebrnica. In 1439 or 1440 the Turks took that city, retaining it until
the crusaders’ invasion of 1443. The Bosnians seem to have taken advantage of the Turks’ and Serbs’ occupation with that event to seize Srebrnicë. Meanwhile, in the treaty of 1444 that restored Serbia as a state, the sultan recognized Srebrnicë as belonging to the resurrected Serbia. The Serbs were back in possession of the town in April 1445. The Bosnians were not happy with this and, in late summer 1446, immediately following the peace concluded between the king and Stefan Vukčić, attacked and took the town back. Before the year ended the Serbs and Bosnians had concluded an agreement to administer the town jointly and to split its income. Neither side was happy with this arrangement and after a year or so each was trying to oust the other from the town. This led to further fighting in 1448 or 1449. After three years of sporadic fighting Serbia, which enjoyed the support of the Ottomans, gained in 1450 or 1451 sole possession of the town. Since Herceg Stefan supported the Serbs in this dispute, fighting also occurred between him and the king in 1449 and 1450.

While this warfare went on, the Ottomans stepped up their attacks on Bosnia. And now they began to annex parts of eastern Bosnia. Their gains were chiefly at the expense of the Pavlovići, whose main territories lay just west of the Drina. Ivaniš Pavlović died in 1450. The following year the Ottomans took Vrhbosna. Vrhbosna, under its new name Sarajevo, was to develop rapidly under the Ottomans to become the major city in Bosnia during the Turkish period. Greatly weakened by territorial losses, Ivaniš’s brother and successor Peter became a vassal of Herceg Stefan. Thus the Pavlovići ceased to be numbered among the great nobles and joined the ranks of the second-level vassal nobility.

Meanwhile the Ottoman tribute owed by the king and herceg was regularly increased, particularly after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Funds were also needed by both men to maintain the luxury of their courts and to finance their frequent wars. With several mines on his lands, the king was in a better financial position than the herceg, whose lands had no mines. Yet even so, the king had insufficient funds for his needs. His financial difficulties were the root cause for the frequent wars over the rich Srebrnicë mine. Ćirković has calculated that between 1453 and 1457 the king had to turn over to the sultan 160,000 ducats in tribute, a sum that constituted the bulk of Bosnia’s silver production from all its mines during those years.

The herceg, dependent on tolls and customs levies, was in a weaker financial position. So in the late 1440s he began trying to develop Novi and make it into a major port. The reader may recall that Tvrtko I, after he had acquired territory on the southern Dalmatian coast, had established Novi and had tried to develop its port facilities. His efforts had not succeeded, chiefly owing to the opposition of Dubrovnik. The herceg now made a new attempt, and Novi came to be called, as it still is, Herceg-Novi. He created ties with southern Italy, whence he imported weavers to establish a weaving industry. Then he tried to market salt, challenging Dubrovnik’s near monopoly on selling salt to land-locked Bosnia and Serbia. To support this effort the herceg
forbade his Vlachs to buy salt in Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik and Kotor—which to a lesser extent was also a marketer of salt—complained. Dubrovnik also accused the herceg of interfering with the activities of its merchants in Hercegovina. The herceg replied that everyone should look out for his own interests and asserted that he was free to do what he liked in his own lands. Tensions increased, and in protest Dubrovnik banned its merchants from Hercegovina. In June 1451 Herceg Stefan, having received permission from the sultan to make war on Dubrovnik, invaded Konavli. He met little opposition, for Dubrovnik was never able to field an army of any size or quality. The Serbian despot did not like this turn of events, and Herceg Stefan’s relations with him grew strained.

Meanwhile tensions were also developing inside the herceg’s own family. Some merchants, knowing that the herceg’s eldest son, Vladislav, sought a bride, brought a girl of low reputation but great beauty from Siena to the herceg’s court. Hoping to be richly rewarded, they claimed she was of noble birth. Vladislav was much impressed with her, but immediately his father made her his mistress. Angry words followed between father and son, resulting in the herceg’s locking up Vladislav. Vladislav was quickly released by some nobles. He and his mother, who was jealous over the Sieneese girl, then left court. They were soon—in August 1451—approached by envoys from Dubrovnik, which hoped to capitalize on this family feud. Vladislav readily agreed to enter the war against his father. Treachery was, in fact, operating in both directions. For in 1451 Dubrovnik instructed envoys to Hercegovina to discover who, in violation of the town’s laws, was smuggling firearms to Herceg Stefan from Dubrovnik. As far as we know the culprit was never discovered. In November 1451 the King of Bosnia also agreed to aid Dubrovnik. However, two of his nobles, Vladislav Klešić and George Vojšalić, did not want to attack the herceg and instead attacked the king’s lands. Next, and illustrating the growing authority of the Catholic Church in Bosnia, a papal legate was sent to Bosnia who persuaded the two dissident noblemen to make peace with their king. This mediation occurred by April 1452, for in that month they joined the king in his invasion of Hercegovina.

The previous month Vladislav Kosača had launched his well-planned revolt. Immediately a series of the herceg’s fortresses, including some major ones like Blagaj, surrendered to him. By April Vladislav held all western Hum and the lower Neretva except for the region of Ljubuški. The herceg’s position deteriorated further when in April the Bosnian king and his nobles invaded Hum.

The herceg received some temporary relief when the Ottomans launched a major raid through Bosnia, causing the Bosnian invaders to return home to defend their own lands. The herceg also concluded an alliance with Venice. Shortly thereafter the region of the Krajina revolted against its new master, Vladislav, and declared its loyalty to Venice. Venetian ships, in support of the herceg, then appeared in the mouth of the Neretva River and temporarily occupied the customs town of Drijeva. By this time the Ottoman raiders had
withdrawn from Bosnia, enabling the Bosnian king to resume his invasion of Hercegovina. Stefan Tomaš marched on Drijeva and expelled the Venetians, claiming that from then on the town was to be his. Then, to reassert Bosnian control over Hercegovina, which, as noted, had more-or-less completely separated itself from Bosnia in the course of the 1440s, the king laid claim to Blagaj. Vladislav, who held it, however, refused to turn it over to the king. The king then offered to confirm Vladislav as ruler of all the land from the Čemerno Mountains to the sea in exchange for Blagaj. Vladislav wisely retained Blagaj, pointing out to the king that the whole region, which the king was so generously offering, was still held by Herceg Stefan. The king then threatened to abandon Vladislav’s cause and return to Bosnia.

The war continued with considerable destruction of villages and crops until July 1453. At that time the herceg, through the mediation of Bosnian Church clergies, made peace with his wife and son. Their treaty stipulated that matters were to be restored to their pre-war condition. Pre-war conditions seem to have included the herceg’s continued liaison with his Sienese mistress, for later documents continue to refer to her as living at his court and receiving gifts from Ragusan embassies. In concluding his peace, Vladislav left his ally Dubrovnik, still at war with the herceg, to make its peace as best it could. The town finally obtained peace in April 1454 after long negotiations with the herceg’s ambassador Gost Radin, who clearly was in it for himself, mediating the peace efficiently but also receiving enormous bribes from the town in the process. However, since this peace also simply restored matters to their pre-war condition, all the causes of tension—Novi, the salt monopoly, etc.—remained. The herceg’s wife died at the end of 1453; his mistress remained at his side.

In 1456 the Ottomans demanded that King Stefan Tomaš surrender four major towns to them. After he refused, Ottoman attacks on Bosnia became more frequent. The king also continued to squabble with Serbia and Herceg Stefan; occasionally their quarrels flared up into minor skirmishes. In late 1458 or early 1459, after the deaths of George Branković and his successor Despot Lazar, King Stefan Tomaš took advantage of Serbia’s weakness to seize eleven towns along the Drina, including Srebrnica. Very shortly thereafter he made peace with Lazar’s widow, the weak ruler of Serbia; as a result his son Stefan Tomašević married Lazar’s daughter Helen/Maria. As a dowry Stefan Tomašević, now bearing the title despot, received Smederevo. He took control of Smederevo in March 1459. On 20 June 1459 the Turks took the city, thus absorbing all Serbia again—this time for keeps. The Hungarians accused the Bosnians of selling the fortress to the Turks, which did little to help Bosnian-Hungarian relations at this critical time. As noted earlier, it seems this accusation was unfounded.

As the Ottoman threat increased, Stefan Tomaš sought papal aid. The pope, however, stated he would provide help only if action were taken against the Bosnian Church. So, the king agreed to initiate a forceful policy. He may also have been accommodating to papal wishes in order to reduce the effect of
the Hungarian accusation that the Bosnians were not good Christians and therefore had surrendered Smederevo to the Turks. Thus, now, for the first time, a Bosnian ruler adopted the policy, long demanded by international Catholicism, of persecution. It is worth emphasizing this, for until the last four years of the kingdom Bosnia’s rulers, most of whom were Catholics, had abstained from persecutions and had remained tolerant of—or perhaps it is more accurate to say indifferent to—the religious beliefs of their subjects. In 1459 the king gave Bosnian Churchmen—most probably meaning the Bosnian Church clergy—the choice of conversion or exile.

Pope Pius II reports that some two thousand chose conversion, whereas only forty chose exile. This suggests that by that time morale had become very poor within the Church. The exiles emigrated to Hercegovina where, protected by Herceg Stefan, they were not persecuted. At the same time the king confiscated considerable land belonging to the Bosnian Church monasteries, which surely made this action more attractive for him. He also sent three heretics to Italy; taken before the inquisition, they, not surprisingly, converted to Catholicism. The inquisition documents depict the three as dualists. No evidence exists to show that the three belonged to the Bosnian Church. If the description of their beliefs is accurate, which is doubtful, the three could well have been adherents of the small dualist current that seems to have co-existed with the Bosnian Church.

The persecutions were successful. This is not surprising when we take into consideration the Church’s low morale. Furthermore, the Bosnian Church seems to have simply been a monastic order. For no evidence exists that it had a secular or preaching clergy. Thus its clerics, excluding those few resident at secular courts, were restricted to monastic communities. Such a clustering would have made it easier for the king to seek the clerics out and face them with his ultimatum and to seize their buildings and land. Thus the elimination of the Bosnian Church as an institution could have been quickly effected. Furthermore, there were extensive regions of Bosnia and Hercegovina where Bosnian Church monasteries do not seem to have existed; in such regions the Church probably had little or no following. Thus a large portion of Bosnia’s peasantry had probably rarely or even never seen a Bosnian Church cleric. Thus the peasants were probably even more indifferent to formal religion than Bosnia’s nobility and thus also indifferent to the royal attack on the Bosnian Churchmen. And since the majority of the Church’s clerics chose conversion over exile, showing their morale was not high, it is likely that such clerics had not instilled strong faith even in those peasants living near their monasteries. Thus after the conversion of most of its clergy and the exile of the handful who felt strongly about the Church, the Bosnian Church’s lay adherents were left without leaders or any sort of clergy. The result, then, was the undermining, if not the destruction, of the Bosnian Church in Bosnia between 1459 and 1463, even before the arrival of the Turks. It is not surprising that it was to disappear completely soon after the Ottoman conquest, as its members were absorbed by Islam, Orthodoxy, and
Catholicism. It is also worth stressing that despite the Bosnian king’s submission to papal demands, no papal aid was to be forthcoming.

In July 1461 Stefan Tomaš died. He was succeeded by his son Stefan Tomašević (1461–63). The new king immediately sent to Pope Pius II two envoys, described by the pope as tall and dignified old men. The text of Stefan Tomašević’s long letter is given in Pius’ Commentaries.9 The king first sought a crown from the pope, noting that his father had been offered a papal crown but had been afraid to accept it, fearing such action would provoke the anger of the Turks. Stefan Tomašević stated that he himself, however, having been baptized as a boy and, having learned early the faith and Latin, did not fear being crowned. He also sought bishops. The plural is worth stressing, for Bosnia at the time had only one bishop, still residing outside the kingdom in Djakovo. Thus it seems that Stefan Tomašević wanted new ones created, presumably to be installed within Bosnia, to bring about a more efficient Church organization to Catholicize his country.

The king also told the pope that he had been informed that the Turks planned to invade Bosnia the following summer. Since Bosnia was not in a position to withstand such an attack alone, the king sought aid from the pope, saying that if he received substantial help, then the Turks might change their minds; and if the Turks still went through with their plans, then this aid might give the Bosnians more hope to fight more bravely. And if morale was high, Bosnia might be able to hold out. After all, it had numerous almost impregnable fortresses. He also pointed out that during the reign of his father the pope had given orders that arms should be collected in Venetian-controlled Dalmatia to be sent to Bosnia, but that the Venetian senate had countermanded these orders. Could the pope not bid the Venetians to allow these arms to be sent to him? He also asked the pope to send an envoy to Hungary to commend Bosnia’s cause to the King of Hungary and urge him to join arms with Bosnia. He then stated:

The Turks have built a number of fortifications in my kingdom and are showing a kindly disposition toward the peasants. They promise that all who desert to them shall be free and they welcome them graciously. The inexperienced rustics do not understand their wiles and think their liberty will last forever. The people will be easily induced by such tricks to desert me unless they see me fortified by your aid, and the nobles, if they are deserted by the peasants, will not hold out long in their fortresses.

There was truth to the king’s statement, for the peasants could see that in Ottoman Serbia and in occupied parts of Bosnia the peasants did pay lower taxes. And taxes in the Kingdom of Bosnia, both to prepare the land’s defense and to meet the ever-increasing tribute demanded by the Turks, were extremely high.

Stefan Tomašević’s letter then went on to say that it was in the papacy’s interests to take action now, for the Turks had no intention of stopping with
Bosnia, but next would move against Croatia, Dalmatia, Hungary, Venice, Italy, and Rome itself. He concluded:

Such are the enemy’s plans. I tell you what I have learned that you may not one day say you were not warned and accuse me of negligence. My father predicted to your predecessor and the Venetians the fall of Constantinople. He was not believed. Christianity to its great hurt lost a royal city and a patriarchal see and the prop of Greece. Now I prophesy about myself. If you trust and aid me I shall be saved; if not, I shall perish and many will be ruined with me.

The pope promised to fulfill the king’s requests, stating only that since Bosnia was vassal to Hungary, permission had to be obtained from the King of Hungary before he could send a crown to the Bosnian ruler. If the Hungarian king did not object, the pope would promptly send the crown, which was ready, to Stefan Tomašević by an ambassador. The pope also urged the Bosnian king to do everything he could to conciliate the powerful Matthew Corvinus, whose support Bosnia needed if it wished to resist the Turks. Having dismissed the embassy with encouraging words, the pope then sent envoys to Hungary and Venice. In November 1461 Stefan Tomašević received his crown from the hands of a papal legate.

Bosnia’s fate was, in fact, as inevitable as matters can be in history. It was merely a question of when. In 1462, a decade after his first revolt against Herceg Stefan, his son Vladislav sought an appanage from his father. When his request was rejected, he revolted again. Unable to capitalize on an existing war as he had in 1452, he sought aid from the willing Turks. Besides this Hercegovinan invitation, Bosnia too may have provoked Turkish action. For, after the fact, Pius II placed some of the responsibility for the Turkish attack upon Stefan Tomašević himself, claiming that the king, “relying no one knows on what hope,” had refused tribute to the Turks. Furthermore, Stefan Tomašević’s close ties with the papacy surely were in themselves also a contributing factor to the Ottoman invasion.

The Turks launched massive attacks on Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1463. They cleverly concealed their plans by making it appear as though the army being assembled were intended for Hungary, and then re-directing their troops against Bosnia in a surprise attack at the last moment. Despite the fact they were partially responding to Vladislav’s call, this time they came in their own interests. They were clearly-bent on putting an end to Bosnian independence. Bosnian fortresses fell rapidly one after the other. The king fled from Jajce up toward the Donji Kraji, while the queen fled to the coast. The Turks, in hot pursuit, caught up with the king at the fortress of Kluč on the Sana. They persuaded him to surrender the fortress on condition that he would be allowed to escape. They immediately broke their promise and took him as a prisoner back to the sultan who was then staying at Jajce. There, still believing his life would be spared, he was made to issue an order for the surrender of all
Bosnia’s fortresses. Then he was beheaded. The Ulema, the Turkish religious authorities, justified the broken promise by stating that the general who had issued the safe-conduct did so without the knowledge of the sultan, and therefore the promise was not binding. The late king’s written instructions were then sent to the Bosnian commanders of the various citadels that were holding out. They all obeyed the orders, and Pius claims that seventy strong fortresses were surrendered in eight days and over a million ducats fell into Turkish hands.

Most of Bosnia fell in a matter of weeks. The speed with which it fell, despite its inaccessible mountain fortresses, surprised everyone. Predictably, charges of treason were bandied about in the aftermath. However, it is hard to document treason. To explain the Turks’ success we may, however, note the fact that the Turks, having succeeded in making their attack a surprise one, exhibited great speed of movement and military efficiency. We may also stress the lack of organization and co-ordination among the Bosnians, as well as the numerous surrenders following the capture of King Stefan Tomašević. Moreover, Bosnian morale seems to have been low. Presumably many Bosnians believed it was just a matter of time before their country fell and thus were defeatist. Many scholars have presented the religious issue (of forced conversions to Catholicism) as another reason for poor morale. Though this may have been a factor in some cases, we cannot document it as such, and since most Bosnians, about whom we do have documentation, seem to have been indifferent about religious matters, we certainly should not over-emphasize religion in explanations of Bosnia’s rapid fall.

Many Bosnians seem to have felt it was inevitable that Bosnia would fall to the Turks or to the Hungarians and to have preferred the Ottomans to their long-time enemies the Hungarians. That this was a Bosnian attitude is shown by the fact that after the conquest a delegation of lesser nobles went to Venice to seek aid from Venice and to offer the kingdom to Venice. The delegates stated that if Venice would not help they would prefer to remain under the Turks. For under no circumstances would they accept being under the Hungarians.

The Ottoman attack also struck Hercegovina. The herceg retreated with his armies to the coast, while the Turks occupied his lands. At the end of the invasion, the main Ottoman forces withdrew, leaving behind garrisons in certain major fortresses. Their withdrawal allowed for the partial recovery of the conquered lands. The herceg, who had withdrawn to the coast to keep his armies intact, now marched back into Hercegovina and quickly regained most of the fortresses that had fallen. Vladislav, making peace with his father, participated in the recovery and received his own appanage that included the region of the Lim River. Thus Hercegovina was restored as a state, and in name it was to remain independent until 1481. However, the date 1481 marks only the fall of Hercegovina’s last fortress. For in the period 1465–81 the Turks made numerous attacks on Hercegovina, usually seizing territory; thus it was to be steadily reduced in size.
While Herceg Stefan was restoring his state at the end of 1463, the Hungarians, who had remained inactive until the main Ottoman armies were withdrawn, stormed into Bosnia from the north and recovered a large portion of northern Bosnia including Jajce, Sana, and Usora. They also pressed down from Jajce into the region of western Hum toward the Neretva. And, assisted by Herceg Stefan and Vladislav, who had by this time made their peace, they recovered the Krajina and Završje. The Krajina was granted by the Hungarians to the herceg, on this occasion their ally, on condition that he retain it under Hungarian suzerainty. Završje including Rama (with Prozor), Uskoplje (with Vesela Straža), and Livno were granted to Vladislav by King Matthew.

The northern territory taken by the Hungarians—not including the Krajina and Završje—was made into a new Bosnian banate under Hungarian control and Hungarian governors (bans). In 1464 the Turks laid siege to Jajce, but despite two vigorous assaults they were unable this time to take the city. During the late 1460s the Turks were able to pick off other Hungarian fortresses in northern Bosnia.

The Turks returned in 1465 with a large force that took the Lim region, thereby eliminating the appanage Vladislav had received from his father. In the spring of 1466 Vladislav still held Livno. But before the summer was over the noble family of Vlatković possessed Livno. That August Ivaniš Vlatković was calling himself Count of Vratar and Vojvoda of the Land of Hum and Livno. Vladislav moved to the coast and soon emigrated to Hungary.

Upon seeing the size of the Ottoman force that attacked Vladislav’s appanage, Herceg Stefan sought help from the Hungarians. He invited them to assume control of a series of his fortresses and promised that he would pay for the maintenance of their garrisons. However, the Turks succeeded in taking all the forts he had offered the Hungarians—including Samobor—before the Hungarians had time to respond. By September 1465 the Turks, having taken the Lim region, Gacko, and Ljubomir, had reached the coast and occupied Popovo Polje. The herceg’s territory seems to have been reduced to the two walled ports of Risan and Novi (Herceg-novi), the Neretva valley plus the Krajina (lying between the Neretva and Cetina rivers), and a few other fortresses lying in the midst of Turkish regions that had resisted assault. Expecting the Turks to attack the Krajina also, the herceg offered that region to Venice. The Venetian Prince of Split responded immediately and that fall occupied the Krajina, the mouth of the Neretva, and the important customs station of Drijeva on the Neretva.

The Hungarians were not happy with these Venetian gains, for the Krajina had been held by the herceg under Hungarian suzerainty and now it had passed completely out of Hungarian control. The Hungarians seem to have been determined to take a more active role in the region and to establish their own forces there. As a result they pressed talks to allow them to assume garrison duty in various Hercegovinian forts. The herceg gave in (whether willingly or not is uncertain), and in the fall of 1465 five thousand Hungarian soldiers arrived to occupy the forts the herceg held along the Neretva, includ-
ing Počitelj. By May 1466, when the herceg died, more than half of his lands, including almost everything east of the Neretva, found itself again in Ottoman hands. Most of his remaining lands were being defended by Hungarians or Venetians, and thus for all practical purposes out of his control. His direct
holdings were reduced to a small strip of land with the two ports along and near the coast, and a few scattered forts inside the Turkish zone.

Though it is often stated that everything east of the Neretva was annexed by the Turks in 1465, this is not completely true. Ključ and Blagaj held out until 1468. Shortly thereafter, in 1468 or 1469, the Turks carried out a survey of their territories in this region; certain areas east of the Neretva do not appear in the cadaster (deftor) created on this occasion. Their absence indicates that the Ottomans did not have, or at least did not hold firmly, those few places. Moreover, we know that Herceg Stefan’s successor Herceg Vlatko still held Klobuk in 1469. By 1477 Klobuk was to be in Ottoman hands.

Herceg Stefan was succeeded by his second son, Vlatko, who also bore the title herceg. Vlatko’s succession should surprise no one. The peace made between Herceg Stefan and Vladislav had been based on mutual need to face the crisis of the Ottoman invasion. To seal it, the herceg had had to award Vladislav a principality of his own. His anger at Vladislav, who had caused him so many difficulties, had continued, and he seems to have felt that that anpanage fulfilled his obligations to Vladislav and to have from that time on planned to leave the lands he retained to Vlatko. Then after 1465, when the Turks conquered Vladislav’s lands, depriving Vladislav of his power base, the herceg had had no further worries about him as a danger, and he certainly felt no sympathy for his position. The disinherited Vladislav departed for Hungary, where he was soon granted lands in Slavonia by King Matthew. Thus all that remained of Herceg Stefan’s principality went to Vlatko.

Vlatko also inherited the obligation to maintain the service of the Hungarian troops garrisoning his Neretva fortresses. Having lost much of the economic base that might have enabled him to finance this service, Vlatko sought to avoid payment, which caused tensions between him and the Hungarian king. In order to secure the money, the Hungarians ordered their vassal Dubrovnik not to deliver to Vlatko the money Herceg Stefan had deposited in Dubrovnik for safe-keeping and which he had left to Vlatko in his will. The quarrel over this money led to a deterioration in the relations between Vlatko and Hungary. Hungary began to ponder the possibility of restoring Vladislav to rule in Hercegovina and worked to create and maintain good relations with the leading family of the local nobility, the Vlatkovići.

As a result, in 1470—at some point prior to July of that year—Vlatko turned to the Turks, concluding a treaty with them by which he accepted Ottoman suzerainty and agreed to pay tribute. The sultan seems to have been agreeable to this, for he was concerned with the Hungarian presence in Hum and interested in separating Vlatko from his Hungarian alliance. As a reward the sultan returned to Vlatko, either in 1470 or early 1471, Trebinje and Popovo Polje. He probably also granted him Bijela; for in March 1471 Vlatko
is found in possession of it. Moreover, with the Ottomans standing behind him and intervening diplomatically, Vlatko was now able to obtain his money from Dubrovnik. And in the summer of 1470 Dubrovnik turned the money over to Vlatko. Vlatko by his submission presumably also sought to safeguard the territory he still held. For in the preceding years, particularly in 1468, the Ottomans had been campaigning in and around Hum, taking Blagaj and Ključ from him. They also at that time had attacked Završje via Bosnia and taken, probably from the Vlatkovići, most of that region.

Almost immediately after Vlatko’s submission to the Turks, Žarko Vlatković, a Hungarian vassal who surely used Vlatko’s new allegiance as an excuse, seized Vrgorac near Makarska from Vlatko. The Turks now intervened and in 1471 launched a major attack on those forts of Hum, including Počitelj, held by Hungarian troops. Počitelj fell to the Turks in September 1471. Shortly thereafter Žarko Vlatković submitted to the Turks, though his brother Ivaniš managed to avoid doing so. By campaign’s end the Turks had taken all the fortresses along the Neretva and had eliminated the Hungarian presence from the Neretva region, except for a couple of forts at the river’s mouth that the Hungarians may have retained. The Christians were pushed back toward the Cetina River; in the region on the left bank of the Cetina, the Vlatkovići still retained some lands, and the Hungarians were drawing up plans to create a strong defense along that river to prevent the Ottomans from expanding across it into the territory on and beyond its right bank. However, even if they created such a defense, the Cetina region was still vulnerable to attack from Ottoman-held Bosnia.

Vlatko clearly was not happy with the course of events, for it seemed likely that all his lands, and probably sooner rather than later, were going to be annexed by the Turks. Therefore he had been careful to maintain his relations with Venice throughout. It seems these ties annoyed the sultan and possibly caused a cooling in his attitude toward Vlatko. In any case, in 1473, the sultan took back Trebinje and Popovo Polje from Vlatko; in 1476 the sultan granted the two regions to Herak Vraneš, a Vlach from the Lim region.

It seems that in their 1471 campaign the Turks did not attack the territory held by the Venetians in the Krajina, the inland territory just behind the coast between the Neretva and Cetina rivers. And most of it, including the region around Imotski, remained Christian until the Turks conquered it along with the Makarska coast in 1492 or 1493. Šabanović believed the Venetians retained control of this territory until its fall. Recently Atanasovski has argued that the Hungarians encouraged their vassals the Vlatkovići to oppose the Venetians; this, he believes, resulted in the Vlatkovići’s taking control of part of the Krajina, including part of the Imotski region.

In response to the 1471 disaster, that fall Matthew Corvinus convoked a council to re-organize the defense of his Bosnian and Croatian lands. Having settled his differences with the powerful nobleman Nicholas Iločki, Matthew made him governor of Bosnia, and, to increase the prestige of his shrinking region of Bosnia, he increased the governor’s title from ban to king. Nicholas
remained “King” of Bosnia until his death in 1477. Blaž the Magyar, who at that moment—and since early 1470—had been joint Ban of Croatia, Dalmatia, Slavonia, and Bosnia, did not attend the congress; it seems that he had already joined a group of Hungarian and Croatian nobles who were trying to organize a revolt against Matthew Corvinus. At this moment, however, it seems Blaž lost only Bosnia; but soon thereafter, probably early 1472, Nicholas Iločki seems to have been made Ban of Slavonia, Croatia, and Dalmatia as well. This appointment apparently indicates that Blaž had gone into rebellion by that time. This additional assignment to Iločki could have been intended to serve two purposes: to retain his loyalty to Matthew at this critical time and to co-ordinate more effectively the defense of this whole region should the Turks attack again in 1472.

Nicholas Iločki did not retain his joint positions for long, however. Damian Horvat had been from mid-1471 a junior colleague of Blaž, bearing the title ban and having responsibilities in Slavonia. Horvat, it seems, had retained this function in Slavonia under Iločki, which had allowed Iločki to concentrate his attention on the critical frontier region of Bosnia. Now, before the end of 1472, Horvat was appointed Ban of Slavonia, Croatia, and Dalmatia; Iločki was left with only Bosnia. In November 1473 Horvat’s region was divided between two bans, with Horvat retaining Croatia and Dalmatia and a new actor named Ernušt being assigned the banship over Slavonia. Despite these reforms and appointments, the Turks succeeded in conquering most of the Bosnian banate (now “kingdom”) in the 1470s.

In 1481, upon news of the death of Mehmed II, King Matthew sent armies into Bosnia with the aim of major recoveries. His troops reached Vršbosna (Sarajevo). Their gains were only temporary, however, and within a year the Turks were again in control of whatever the Hungarians had occupied. The Hungarian Kingdom of Bosnia after the 1470s consisted of only a handful of fortresses; Ottoman campaigns continued to reduce its size until, in the third decade of the sixteenth century, it had been reduced to a strip of territory just south of the Sava and the fortress of Jajce itself. Then in 1527—the year after the Turkish victory over the Hungarians at Mohacs—the Turks took Jajce and put an end to the Hungarian province of Bosnia. All Bosnia was now Ottoman and was to remain so until the Austrian occupation after the Treaty of Berlin (1878).

Despite Bosnia’s years of hostility with the Turks, many Bosnians entered Ottoman service. As we have seen, various Bosnians had long been allying themselves to the Turks in the course of their mutual domestic warfare, and as shaky Christians probably many were not bothered by the Turks’ Islam. We find for example that the third son of Herceg Stefan, also named Stefan, went to Constantinople in about 1473 and soon converted to Islam, taking the name of Ahmed. Known as Ahmed Hercegović, he rose to high rank in the Ottoman administration and twice—from 1503 to 1506 and from 1510 to 1514—was to serve as Grand Vizier under Sultan Selim the Grim. These were extremely long stretches of time to have held that position under
that sultan, and, unlike many other Grand Viziers of Selim, Ahmed was not executed, but died a natural death in 1519. A young son of Stefan Tomaš and the herceg’s daughter Catherine, named Sigismund, was captured as a teenager by the Turks in 1463 and taken to Constantinople. He also converted to Islam and in 1487 is found serving as a sanjak-beg in Karasi in Asia Minor. These examples are only two among many Bosnian cases.

The preceding remarks should not be taken as idealizing matters. For the Ottoman conquest was bloody; many Bosnians were carried off as captives or killed, including many executed after the conquest. The executed included the king and members of the greatest families. The members of the Bosnian nobility who were allowed to submit and keep their lands tended to be from second-level families. The great nobles who sought and were accepted into Ottoman service were usually removed from Bosnia and given lands and posts in Anatolia.

**Croatia after 1463**

After the fall of Bosnia in 1463 Turkish raiding parties began with some regularity to penetrate into Croatia. Already in 1463 they had plundered Krbava and the Frankapans’ province of Modruš. And in 1468 and 1469 they carried out major incursions through Krbava and Modruš to the coast. Each raiding party returned with large numbers of captives—sometimes as many as several thousand. Unable to successfully defend their lands and seeing that King Matthew Corvinus was involved in too many other affairs to defend Croatia effectively, the Frankapans opened discussions with the Habsburgs—who, holding Slovenia, were also threatened by the Ottomans—and then turned to Venice for help. Fearing the latter negotiations would lead to Venice’s acquisition of the important port of Senj, Matthew sent against the Frankapans a large army under a brutal but able general, Blaž the Magyar, that captured Senj for Matthew in 1469. This loss was bitterly resented by the Frankapan family, most of whose members now became enemies of King Matthew. Matthew, faced with their enmity and worried about Venice, next procured for himself most of the northern Adriatic coast from Senj to Trieste. The Frankapans retained Novigrad and a couple of other ports. King Matthew also annexed most of the province of Vinodol. To further these efforts, Matthew in early 1470 appointed Blaž the Magyar, who was directing the campaign against the Frankapans, as Ban of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia. And to concentrate on subduing the Frankapans, the new ban took up residence in the town of Senj, recently taken from them. Since Blaž’s efforts were directed at Croatia, in mid-1471 he was given a junior colleague, also with the title ban, to be responsible for Slavonia.

In the 1470s the Turks regained much of the Bosnian territory the Hungarians had retaken late in 1463. Then the Turks stepped up their action against Croatia. Particularly hard hit were Lika, Krbava, and northern Dalmatia. The raids penetrated even as far as the region of Kranj in Slovenia.
In 1479 Martin Frankopan became seriously ill. His brother John, holder of Krk, who since 1451 had been a loner, avoiding the family assemblies and maintaining close ties with Venice, landed in Martin’s lands and took Novigrad and Bribir. Martin ordered him to leave, but John paid no attention to his brother’s wishes. Matthew Corvinus, interpreting John’s action as a Venetian plot to acquire Senj, ordered Blaž the Magyar (no longer ban) to expel John from the mainland. In late 1479, after Martin’s death in October, Blaž drove John back to Krk and captured the mainland forts that John had taken from Martin. Blaž then decided to finish John off by taking the island of Krk, whose populace included many people dissatisfied with John’s rule. He procured ships from Senj, transported his army to the island, and laid siege to the fortress of Krk.

In response to John’s call for help, Venice sent ships to Krk’s waters. The Venetians tried to obtain Blaž’s withdrawal through negotiations, but the general refused even to discuss the matter. There was a strong pro-Venetian party in the fortress of Krk, and Venice would not have had much difficulty in gaining the fortress by a coup. However, the island was legally Hungary’s, as John Frankopan was holding it under Hungarian suzerainty. And since Blaž’s troops were there to punish a rebel against Hungary, Venice, which had no desire for a war with Hungary, had no legal basis to assist John. The Venetians explained to John that they could not help him as matters then stood; however, if he would voluntarily surrender the island to Venice, then the Venetians could take action. John, faced with a hopeless situation (besieged by a strong Hungarian force and not trusting the loyalty of his own subjects, many of whom disliked him), had little choice but to accept the Venetian plan. As a result—and without even consulting the Croatians at his court—John surrendered Krk to Venice in February 1480. A Venetian then took command of the local garrison.

As a large portion of the island’s population supported the Venetians and as a Venetian fleet now sailed into the harbor of Krk, Blaž realized he could not take Krk. He tried through negotiations to obtain Venice’s recognition of Hungary’s possession of those parts of the island he then occupied; however, the Venetians refused, demanding that he totally evacuate the island. Blaž finally gave in, surrendering the fort of Omišalj, which he held, and his prisoners, and the Venetians helped transport his soldiers back to the mainland.

John Frankopan expected at this point to resume the rule of his island. And it is quite possible that the Venetians, in the negotiations that led to his surrender of the island to them, had promised to install him as the island’s governor after the Hungarian threat was over. However, if they had made such a promise, they certainly had no intention of keeping it. And shortly thereafter John and various of his Croatian courtiers, who were considered unreliable, were sent off to Venice, where they could not cause trouble. The island, though Catholic, had, in the face of opposition from the international Church hierarchy, long been a center for Slavic language books and services.
In 1481 the Venetians chased out the Slavic monks and declared Latin to be the language of all churches and monasteries on the island.

Meanwhile the Hungarians were furious at Venice’s acquisition of the isle of Krk. However, lacking a navy of any quality, they could do little about it. But, the angry Blaž occupied the rest of the lands of the late Martin Frankapan, including the rest of Vinodol. Thus the Frankapan family, though left much of Martin’s land in his will, received none of it and was more or less eliminated from the Adriatic coast. The family retained little more than Modruš and the territory east of it to a little beyond the Glina River, including Cetin. After these Hungarian successes the Frankapan family was sufficiently weakened for Matthew Corvinus to have no further worries about it. And since he was concerned about defending Croatia against the Turks and since the family had considerable popularity among the local populace, in March 1481 Matthew restored a portion of the family’s lost lands to Stjepan, the Frankapan brother who had been the most loyal to the Hungarian king. He issued a charter granting Stjepan the eighth of the Frankapan lands—including much of Modruš—Stjepan had received at the 1449 assembly as well as various new towns, some of which lay in the family’s former province of Vinodol and some of which lay in the region of Zagreb. When Stjepan died later that year his son Bernard inherited all of his father’s holding.

In 1490 Matthew Corvinus died. Many Hungarian and Croatian nobles disliked his policies of centralization and taxation—for Matthew had violated many tax privileges and attempted to raise extensive money from the nobility for warfare against the Turks. Thus these nobles refused to accept as king Ivanis, his only son, whose cause was further weakened by the fact that he was illegitimate. A council of nobles met at Pest and elected Vladislav II of Bohemia as king. Supported by few major figures other than Lovro Iločki, Ivanis accepted the decision and received the position of hereditary Duke of Slavonia. Soon, to enable him to better co-ordinate his defensive responsibilities, Ivanis was also named Ban of Croatia and Dalmatia. He eventually married Beatrice, a Frankapan, and established his main residence at Bihac, where he remained until his death in 1504.

However, Hungary found itself faced with a new crisis, for Vladislav’s election violated the 1463 treaty between Frederick III Habsburg and Matthew that stipulated that if Matthew had no son, a Habsburg should succeed to the Hungarian throne. Maximilian of the Habsburgs now claimed the Hungarian throne as his right and attacked Hungary. He found many allies inside Hungary; Lovro Iločki had never been happy with the choice of Vladislav and immediately agreed to support him. Maximilian also was able to mobilize support from various disgruntled Frankapans, in particular from John and Nicholas, and from the Talovac family. The free city district of Zagreb (Gradec) also declared for Maximilian, though the bishop’s district remained loyal to Vladislav. However, various other Croatian nobles and the overwhelming majority of Hungarian nobles, including Ivanis, remained loyal to Vladislav. Seeing that the strength of the opposition was sufficient to thwart
his ambition, Maximillian agreed to a new treaty in 1491; it declared that should Vladislav have no son the Habsburgs would succeed him as King of Hungary. The treaty also provided amnesty for those who had supported the Habsburg cause.

A council met in Buda in 1492 at which the nobility expressed much opposition to any eventual Habsburg succession. But in the end the council accepted the treaty. The nobles, however, took advantage of the situation and Vladislav’s weakness to assert themselves at the council to reduce taxes and eliminate various hated tax measures established by Matthew. The Frankopans also tried to take advantage of the dynastic crisis to recover Senj. They failed, and then, when they found themselves faced with a large Ottoman attack in 1493, they made peace with the king. This Ottoman incursion, which ravaged not only Croatia but Slovenia as well, was a massive raiding party. The king decided to oppose it on its return; his forces and those of the Frankopans met the returning Turks at Krбавa Polje (modern Udbina) in September 1493 and suffered a massive defeat. Thereafter Ottoman incursions into Croatia increased; furthermore, Croatia suffered many smaller raids for plunder from the Muslim inhabitants of Bosnia. By 1494 certain Croatian noblemen—including the Blagajski, Kurjaković, and Zrinski families—were paying tribute to the Turks, in exchange for which their lands were guaranteed. These families were also obliged to allow the Turkish raiders passage through their lands into the non-tributary parts of Croatia.

Believing that King Vladislav was doing little to prevent these incursions, Lovro Iločki, the ruler of Srem and the Vukovska župa, led a movement in 1494 to overthrow Vladislav. It failed, and Lovro was forced back into obedience in 1495. Opposition to Vladislav and to his treaty of 1491 with the Habsburgs remained and enabled the rising Zapolja family of Transylvania to convocate an assembly in 1505 that issued a law stating that no foreigner could occupy the Hungarian throne, thereby renouncing the treaty between Vladislav and the Habsburgs. Before the Habsburgs could respond, Vladislav had a son, thus delaying the relevance of this law. However, faced with the Ottoman threat and not wanting the Habsburgs as enemies, Vladislav defied his opponents and concluded a new treaty with Maximillian, affirming the earlier agreement and stating that whenever his line died out the Habsburgs were to succeed. And to strengthen their relationship, he married his daughter to a grandson of Maximillian.

Ottoman raids continued to be frequent; however, until about 1520 they were carried out for plunder and captives, and no Croatian territory—excluding the area between the Neretva and Cetina rivers—was annexed. However, after one major raid into Modruš and into the Kupa region in 1511 and another that reached as far as Skradin in 1512, various Croatian towns became alarmed. The district of Poljica rapidly dropped Venetian suzerainty and accepted Turkish suzerainty with tribute. In 1515 Skradin began to pay tribute to the Turks.

King Vladislav died in 1516, to be succeeded by his ten-year-old son
Louis (1516–26). Vladislav has been accused by scholars of doing little against the Ottoman threat. In his defense, it has been pointed out that he spent a quarter of his state income on the defense of Croatia; yet even so, his major project in this theatre was the hiring and financing of fourteen hundred professional soldiers who were then divided among various forts along the Croatian border. This was clearly a drop in the bucket compared to the forces that were needed.

King Louis was surrounded by a circle of corrupt advisors, so a struggle soon emerged between the court and an opposition led by John Zapolja. The Ottomans stepped up their incursions. Kamengrad between the Sana and the Japra became the center from which many attacks were dispatched. All of Bosnia except the very northern regions and Jajce itself fell. The Ban of Croatia, Peter Berislavić, responsible for the defense of Croatia, worked heroically but with limited success until he himself was killed battling the Turks on the Una in 1520. The Turks then began to annex significant chunks of Croatia, including major cities. Having taken Beograd and Šabac in 1521, thereby opening the route to Pannonia, the Turks took part of Srem and then moved against Croatia from the east, at first just plundering eastern Slavonia. They did not forget the region to the west of Bosnia, either. In 1522 they captured Knin and Skradin as well as the region of the Cetina River, except for Klis and Obrovac. In 1523 they conquered Ostrovica on the Una River. (This Ostrovica, mentioned here for the first time, should not be confused with the Ostrovica near Bribir.) And that winter, 1523–24, they pressed on from there to raid the region of the Kupa.

Then in 1526 they launched a major attack, which, having taken Petrovaradin, moved along the Sava, taking eastern Slavonia with Osijek and Đakovo. As a result the Turks came to possess almost all of Srem and the plains of Slavonia. Having made these gains in Slavonia, the Turks then swung north along the Danube and met the Hungarians and Croatians in a massive battle at Mohacs, on 29 August 1526. The Turks gained an overwhelming victory over their Christian opponents. King Louis was killed in the battle. The following year the Turks captured Jajce, Obrovac, and Udbina. They then completed the conquest of Krbava. In 1528 they took Lika along with the northern Bosnian territory just south of the Sava, including the courses of the lower Una, Vrbas, Ukrina, and Bosna rivers. As a result all of Bosnia was Ottoman. By 1528, after these annexations, the Turks held southern Croatia up to a line slightly south of Senj, Karlovac, Sisak, and Bjelovar. Along that line the Hungarians established a Croatian Military Frontier March; its history belongs to the period that was to follow.

The Turks did not stop their expansion with these successes. In 1536, operating beyond the Sava, they took the region of Požega. And finally in 1537 they captured the fortress of Klis in the west, which had long eluded them. After that they began putting more pressure on Hungary itself, conquering a large portion of Hungary, including Budapest, in 1541.

Dubrovnik had managed to save itself from conquest by accepting Otto-
man suzerainty in 1483. Thereafter the town worked hard to keep itself secure by maintaining good relations with the Turks; to do this it readily sold and shipped to the Turks whatever goods they required. The other Dalmatian towns had unwittingly saved themselves by falling to Venice. Thus their independence from the Turks was guaranteed as long as Venice maintained correct relations with the Turks. These towns were also fortunate to lie at considerable distance from Ottoman centers. Thus when Ottoman-Venetian wars occurred, the Ottomans concentrated their attention on the Venetian possessions nearer to Constantinople, the Greek islands and the Venetian ports on the Greek mainland.

Meanwhile, after the death of King Louis at Mohacs, the Hungarian nobility split over whether the new king should be Ferdinand of the house of Habsburg, who was the legal heir to the throne according to several treaties, or whether it should be the nobleman and leader of the anti-Habsburg party John Zapolya, Duke of Transylvania. The Croatians too were divided. Those south of the Kupa, north of which lay the Habsburgs’ Slovenia, believed that the Habsburgs would provide serious aid in order to prevent the Ottomans from expanding up to their own border; so, in general they supported Ferdinand. The Croatians of Slavonia, however, were chiefly for Zapolya, who was elected king by a Hungarian assembly in November 1526. Slavonia immediately accepted Zapolya’s rule. On 31 December 1526, however, an assembly held by the Frankapans at their town of Cetin elected Ferdinand King of Croatia. By 1528 Ferdinand had also acquired what remained of Slavonia, including Zagreb. After Ferdinand’s election and his acquisition of the non-Turkish parts of Slavonia, the Croatian lands that went to him—like the neighboring lands, fallen or about to fall to the Turks—entered a new period. Thus this is a good moment to bring our account of medieval Croatian history to a close.

**Albania and Zeta after 1455**

**Albania to the Late 1470s**

In the fall of 1455, after the completion of that year’s Serbian campaign, the Ottomans launched raids through parts of Albania, causing much destruction and taking many prisoners. Some of the captives were made into slaves while the rest were massacred. A major assault directed at Berat failed to take the town and cost the Turks five to six thousand men. Skanderbeg’s heroics were becoming widely known in Europe and various Westerners came on their own to support him. For example, in 1456 a French knight with fifty retainers enrolled to serve Skanderbeg for a year. And that same year among the defenders of Kroja, besides the Albanians, were to be found Germans and Serbs.

In 1456 a new Ottoman attack led by an Albanian renegade was defeated by Skanderbeg. The defeated leader sought and obtained forgiveness from
Skanderbeg, receiving back his lands that had been confiscated. A second
Ottoman force that year defeated the armies of the Arianiti near Berat. As a
result the Arianiti accepted Venetian suzerainty and the family chief became
the Venetian captain for his lands—as well as the theoretical Great Vojvoda
of Albania—until he died in 1470. Treason continued to frustrate Skanderbeg
in 1457. In that year a fortress was sold to the Turks by its Albanian com-
mander, and Skanderbeg’s own nephew (the son of his deceased older
brother), jealous of his uncle and believing that, since he was the heir of the
ever brother, he should head the family and the Albanian league, went over
to the Turks.

In the fall of 1457 a large Ottoman army, said to have had sixty thousand
men, occupied the plains of Albania up to the borders of Venice’s Alessio.
The Albanians, avoiding battle, took to the mountains and harassed the Otto-
mans when they marched through the mountains with guerrilla hit-and-run
raids. The Ottomans besieged but failed to take Kroja; however, they did
cause considerable damage to its region and again took many prisoners.
Finally that fall the Albanians won a substantial victory over a large Ottoman
force at Albulena. Mehemed II then proposed an armistice, but Skanderbeg,
his hopes raised by papal plans for a crusade (which, of course, was not to
materialize), refused to negotiate. In 1458 Skanderbeg repelled a new Otto-
man invasion, despite further treason in his ranks; this time Lek Dukagjin
went over to the Ottomans.

Lek had already since 1456 been fighting with Venice over Danj and its
district. In 1456 he had seized the town, but Venice had attacked him and
regained it in August 1457. Lek’s desertion to the Turks may well have
resulted from this struggle with Venice. He officially made peace with Venice
in 1459, presumably recognizing Venice’s possession of Danj, but he re-
mained unhappy, for his territorial ambitions still clashed with Venice’s. Thus
efforts in the early 1460s to persuade him to break with the Turks failed.
However, in 1463 the Venetians, after long efforts to avoid clashing with the
Turks, finally were drawn into a Turkish war. They began now to make every
effort to bring about peace between Skanderbeg and the Dukagjins (Lek and
Nicholas) and to mobilize the Dukagjins against the Turks. The archbishop of
Venice’s Durazzo took an active role in this effort and mediated peace be-
tween Lek and Skanderbeg in 1464. Thereafter the Dukagjins again took an
active role against the Turks as allies of Skanderbeg.

This Lek Dukagjin is often credited with compiling the Albanian tribes’
traditional oral law code known as the Law of Lek. As noted, sometimes his
namesake from the 1390s is also credited with the compilation. However, the
code is clearly a traditional work, surely far older than either Dukagjin, and
Božić points out that there is no solid evidence to connect either Lek Dukagjin
with the oral code.10

The Turks attacked Albania again in 1462; this time they dispatched two
armies, one from the north and one from the south, that were intended to
effect a junction. Skanderbeg managed to defeat the first before the junction
was made and then hurried through the mountains to defeat the second force. After this, he and Mehemed II finally agreed to a peace, which was signed in April 1463. Gegaj believes Skanderbeg was now willing to conclude such an armistice because he realized a Western crusade was not going to occur; thus, it made sense to conclude a truce immediately after a victory when he could gain the best terms.\textsuperscript{11} He presumably realized he could not defend Albania forever, and thus it made sense to obtain Ottoman recognition of the status quo, at a propitious moment when there were few, if any, Turks in occupation of Albanian castles and when the Albanians were united behind him.

Venice, then at war with the Turks and desperately trying to defend its eastern possessions, in particular the isle of Lesbos, from Ottoman attack, tried unsuccessfully to prevent Skanderbeg from concluding peace with the Ottomans. However, the treaty with the Turks did not last long. It is not known who broke it. Skanderbeg, seeking to capitalize on Ottoman involvement in the war with Venice, may well have violated the truce by some action against a Turkish position. Thus the Ottoman attack of 1464, the first violation of the truce appearing in extant sources, may well have been in response to some act of Skanderbeg rather than the initial act that broke the peace. In any case, in 1464 another renegade Albanian led an Ottoman army against Albania that carried out considerable destruction as well as much violence against the population. So, when Skanderbeg finally defeated this force late in the year, he massacred without pity the Ottoman troops who surrendered. The renegade leader escaped and returned in 1465 with a second army, which Skanderbeg defeated handily.

The resumption of war with the Turks led Skanderbeg to enter into closer relations with Venice. In 1464 he concluded a treaty with Venice that provided him with a pension, the right of asylum in Venice, and a guarantee that any Venetian treaty with the Turks would include a guarantee of Albanian independence. Venice also promised that, as a deterrent, each year from April to June its fleet would cruise off the Albanian coast. This pact differed from Skanderbeg's earlier treaty with Naples, for then Skanderbeg declared himself a vassal, whereas now Skanderbeg stood as an ally and independent ruler.

Meanwhile Mehemed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, Serbia, and the Morea, was becoming infuriated at his failure to subdue little Albania. Moreover, he dreamed of acquiring a port on the central Adriatic, on the Albanian coast, to threaten Italy. The annexation of the interior would facilitate that goal and also provide such a port with security after he obtained it. In 1466 the sultan led in person a massive army, said by the sources to have contained from two hundred to three hundred thousand men, against Kroja. Skanderbeg left a small garrison in the city under a member of the Thopia family, while he and his main forces retreated into the mountains above Kroja. In June 1466 the Ottomans arrived, devastating the lands and villages through which they passed. Fourteen ship-loads of Albanians fled to Italy at their approach. The Ottomans reached Kroja without difficulty and com-
menced their siege. Skanderbeg and his men directed hit-and-run forays against the besiegers. After several weeks it became clear to Mehmed that the walls were strong, the defenders well supplied, and no one inside could be persuaded to betray the city. At the same time Skanderbeg’s forays were causing the Ottomans severe losses. So, late that year Mehmed raised the siege and returned to Constantinople.

Inalcik believes, however, that on his withdrawal the sultan left troops to garrison the forts along the route between Kroja and Macedonia. Thus from this time, late 1466, Skanderbeg no longer controlled most of the territory east of Kroja. Moreover, Mehmed did not give up his goal. He returned the following year, once again leading his forces in person. This time instead of Kroja he had as his aim the towns along the Albanian coast. Should he conquer the coast, then Kroja would be cut off from the sea and from the supplies it received from Italy. Thus he hoped to bring about Kroja’s fall by isolating it from outside help. He took various small castles along his route; he left small garrisons in these. Finally reaching the coast, he laid siege to Durazzo. This siege failed, as did a second brief siege of Kroja itself. Skanderbeg mounted a strong opposition, defeating an Ottoman army led by Bala- ban beg. However, when Mehmed withdrew, he again left garrisons in the lesser forts he had taken. Thus he had a stronger foothold inside Albania than he had had previously. The 1467 campaign also resulted in many more Albanians being taken prisoner by the Turks or fleeing to Italy to escape them. Then in January 1468 Skanderbeg died.

He had been a brilliant military leader and became a heroic figure for both the Albanians and for the Christian anti-Turkish cause. But dramatic as his victories were, one should not lose sight of the fact that the numerous invasions Albania suffered caused enormous destruction. They greatly reduced the population and destroyed flocks and crops. At the same time, though Albania could hold its own, there was no way, short of surrender, that Skanderbeg could put a stop to these invasions. For his manpower and economic base were insufficient to expand the war and drive the Turks from his borders. Thus Albania was doomed to face an unending series of attacks until it should eventually fall. Its only hope lay in a successful foreign crusade to drive the Turks back from its borders. Foreign aid given merely to bolster the defenses of Albania could not solve the long-term problem. Thus the grants received from the papacy, Dubrovnik, Venice, and Naples were nowhere near sufficient to meet the huge defense needs Albania had.

Thus Skanderbeg, assisted by the rugged mountainous terrain, had been able to defend a limited territory. But he could only delay the final conquest. After his death Albanian unity was to weaken. Feuds resumed, including a major one within the Dukagjin family, between Nicholas and Lek. As a result, Lek was once again to briefly join the Turks until a new peace was brought about between the two brothers, who then both submitted to Venice.

Skanderbeg’s son John succeeded to leadership of the Albanian league. He immediately sought and gained Venetian protection. Venice soon assumed
responsibility for the defense of Kroja. John, however, had luck on his side for a time. For the Ottomans were to be diverted through much of the 1470s by a war with Venice. The Ottomans directed their attention against Venice’s Greek possessions—particularly the island ones. By the end, as noted, the Turks had acquired Euboea with Negroponte as well as various islands. Then once again, in 1477–79, they were to turn their attention to Kroja. But before we can turn to this major Ottoman offensive, it is necessary to go back and pick up the story of Zeta to that point, since the Ottoman campaigns were to be directed against that region as well as against Albania.

Zeta in the Decade before the Ottoman Onslaught of 1477

John (Ivan) Crnojević, married to Gojiscava, the daughter of George Arianite of Albania, succeeded to the rule of Zeta after the death of his father. His main residence was in Zabljak. He opened his rule in 1465 by quarreling with Kotor; when Venice announced its support of Kotor, John marched to the Gulf of Kotor. He immediately received support, as usual, from the villagers of Grbalj and from the Paštrovići. Venice put a price on John’s head, but after a few skirmishes peace was concluded in 1466.

By this time the Ottomans had weakened his Kosača neighbor, Stefan Vukčić. For, as we saw, the Turks launched major attacks against the Kosača lands in 1463 and 1465 that resulted in Ottoman occupation of most of them. In 1466 Stefan Vukčić died, to be succeeded by his second son, Vlatko. The removal of Stefan Vukčić made it possible for John Crnojević to make peace with the Kosače. This was promptly done, and for the next decade John and Vlatko maintained close and cordial ties. After Gojiscava died, John in July 1469 married Vlatko’s sister Mara. In 1470, under pressure from the Turks, Vlatko accepted Ottoman suzerainty; early the following year John Crnojević followed suit.

In 1474 the Ottomans directed a major attack against both Zeta and the Venetian Zetan lands around Skadar. To meet this threat Venice and Crnojević concluded an alliance. The Turks first took Danj, held by Venice at the time, by storm. The Ottomans did not try to retain it, being content to demolish its fortifications. The Ottomans then besieged Skadar. After a major assault failed, the defenders erupted from the city and defeated the Ottoman attackers, causing the Ottomans to withdraw. But though the Turks failed to wrest away any of Venice’s territory, they occupied another large chunk of Zeta, taking the lands between the Morača and Zeta rivers. Expecting the Ottomans to resume their offensive in the near future, John sought from the Venetians munitions and money to repair defenses and to enable him to launch a counter-offensive to recover some of his losses. Afraid that such efforts would only provoke the Turks to further action, the Venetians refused.

Not giving up his plan, John then turned to Vlatko Kosača, who was also looking for a chance to recover lost lands. The two then, in 1476, jointly attacked the Turks. They achieved some limited successes among the former
Zetan-Kosača border. Then for some reason—probably over the division of their limited spoils—the two quarreled. John withdrew his troops, and the Turks who had been garrisoning various fortresses in the area were able to put together an army and easily recover everything the two Slavic lords had taken. Vlatko immediately sought peace and forgiveness from the sultan, who, seeing John as the initiator of the previous attack and the more dangerous of the two, owing to his ties with Venice, accepted Vlatko’s homage at the end of 1476 and encouraged him to attack John. The sultan offered to support Vlatko in this and promised to allow him to keep whatever he was able to take.

The Ottoman Offensive of 1477–79 against Albania and Zeta and of 1481 against Hercegovina

However, before Vlatko could go into action (if he really planned to do so), the Ottomans in 1477 launched a massive two-pronged assault into the western Balkans. The first wave, directed at the Venetian holdings in Albania and Zeta, had Kroja as its first objective. Kroja underwent a year’s siege; finally in June 1478, owing to shortages in supplies and misinformation by its commanders, Kroja fell. The Ottomans massacred all the males of the city and carted off the women as slaves. They then continued the offensive, taking Drivast in September 1478 and Alessio shortly thereafter. Most of the town of Alessio was burned. The Turks converted the cathedral of Alessio into a mosque. Thus Venice lost three of its major towns. The Ottomans then attacked, but again failed to take, Skadar. Of Venice’s interior territory, Skadar, now alone, held out. And the sultan had gained for himself a firm foothold in northern Albania. The fall of the remainder of the region was just a matter of time. Lek and Nicholas Dukagjin fled to Italy.

The second Ottoman wave of 1477 overran much of Zeta, taking Žabljačak and then little in 1477 or early 1478 meeting and defeating John Crnojević’s main army. The Ottomans then concentrated their forces at Skadar, which finally surrendered to them in March 1479. The Ottomans established a sanjak-beg in Skadar. By the agreement, the Ottomans allowed those inhabitants of Skadar who wished to depart to do so unmolested. Many did, appearing as refugees in Bar and Ulcinj. Soon many of these refugees emigrated to Italy. Then in 1480/81 a peace was concluded that left Venice in possession of a strip of coastal territory that included Ulcinj, Bar, Budva, and Kotor. The region of the Paštrovići was also recognized as Venetian and was to remain Venetian until 1797. The Venetians tried to include John Crnojević in the treaty as a Venetian subject. However, the Ottomans refused to recognize him with that status, seeing him as an Ottoman subject who had defected and ceased to pay tribute. Therefore, since the Ottoman-Venetian treaty did not discuss Zeta, the Ottoman campaign continued against John until it had completed the conquest of his lands. He fled to the coast, and his state came to an
end. Thus, all that remained of what we might consider Zeta was the above-mentioned coastal strip that Venice was allowed to retain by the treaty.

Vlatko of Hercegovina, who had made peace with the sultan in 1476, was spared the Ottoman invasion of 1477–79. However, his downfall was soon to come, and he brought it down upon himself. In 1481 when Sultan Mehemed II died, Vlatko decided to take advantage of the Turks' momentary difficulties to expand his rump state. His forces were driven back by local Turkish garrisons. But his actions annoyed the new sultan, Bayezid II, who dispatched Ottoman forces into what remained of Hercegovina. These troops defeated Vlatko's army in June of that year. Having no hope of resistance, Vlatko fled to his coastal territory and took refuge in his fort of Novi (Herceg-novi). He sought help from the Hungarians, which was dispatched. However, the Turks took Novi before the Hungarians arrived in September 1481. With Novi's fall, Hercegovina disappeared as a state.

After having to surrender Novi to the Turks, in the fall of 1481, Vlatko received, probably as part of the terms of the surrender, a small piece of land back from the sultan. However, as Atanasovski emphasizes, it was purely for his economic support and for his lifetime only. Since the sultan held title to it, the territory was the sultan's; thus Vlatko was no longer really a ruler. Soon thereafter, in 1486 or 1487, Vlatko fell into some sort of difficulty with the Turks. Fleeing from Ottoman territory, he sought sanctuary with Venice. He took up residence on the Venetian island of Rab, where he died before March 1489.

Novi had been the last town held by Vlatko. However, a few odds and ends of Hercegovinian territory in the hands of other Christian commanders—local nobles or representatives of foreign states—held out a bit longer. In the 1480s Augustin Vlatković, as an Ottoman vassal, still retained the districts of Vrgorac and Ljubuški. The fortress of Koš (modern Opuzen), on the Neretva, about fifteen miles up-river from its mouth, was still held by a Hungarian garrison in 1488. The Ottomans took Koš in 1490 or shortly thereafter. The Makarska coast and the Krajina with Imotski seem at this time to have still been holding out. It has generally been believed that these regions were still under Venetian control. Atanasovski argues, however, that part of the Krajina, including part of the region of Imotski, was by this time held by certain Vlatković as Hungarian vassals. In any case, and regardless of how much besides Makarska Venice held and how much the Vlatković may or may not have acquired, in 1492 or 1493 the Ottomans took possession of it all.

**Albania after 1479**

The Albanians, however, were not ready to quit. Taking advantage of the death of Sultan Mehemed II in 1481, a revolt, led by Skanderbeg's son John Castriot and supported by the Himariot tribesmen, broke out, liberating much of the territory of central Albania and putting to rout an Ottoman army sent
out against them. Both Dukagjin brothers returned from Italy to take an active role in the rebellion. By 1488 the revolt was in full swing, with tribesmen from the territory between Kroja and Valona participating in it and defeating the Ottoman detachments sent out against them. However, finally in 1488 the Ottomans sent their fleet into the harbor of Valona; at the same time Western help promised to the rebels failed to materialize. As a result the tide turned, and soon thereafter the revolt was suppressed. In 1501 the Ottomans finally took Durazzo. The Venetians, however, were able to hold onto Bar and Ulcinj until 1571 when the Ottomans finally took those two towns. Budva remained Venetian until 1797.

This warfare led to a great deal of Albanian emigration to Italy. A particularly large number departed during the decade after Skanderbeg’s death in 1468 and settled as farmers in southern Italy. A large exodus also occurred in 1481 as hundreds of Albanians sought to escape the Ottoman armies sent against the rebels in that year. Another large exodus occurred in 1492.

But it should be stressed that though Albania was conquered, it remained a tribal land; thus it was very difficult for the Ottomans to administer it or even to treat it as a unified province. Soon many tribes were breaking away, refusing to pay tribute. This forced a cost-accounting administrative decision, for the large losses sustained in campaigns against the Albanians were more costly than the value of the tribute this poor land could render. And the religious situation was to make such a decision palatable.

For many tribesmen in the north had early on come to accept Islam. This fact allowed the Ottomans thereafter to leave them to their own devices as long as they did not disrupt the smooth functioning of the machinery of state; thus to keep the Albanians peaceful, the Ottomans granted them tribal autonomy, including the right to bear arms, in exchange for a minimal tribute. At times this tribute was not delivered, and frequently the Ottoman authorities rather than force the issue chose to ignore these lapses. In time these northern tribesmen came to be numbered among the most loyal servitors of the sultan, proud of their privileges and the right to bear arms. They flocked to the sultan’s armies and even provided a special body-guard corps for the sultan.

**Zeta after 1479**

When John Crnojević fled to the coast in 1479, he dreamed of regaining his lands. Venice made no effort to help him, fearing to jeopardize the peace it had concluded with the Turks. John’s chance came in 1481. Taking advantage of the death of Mehemmed II and the Albanian revolt that followed, he returned from Italy to the Zetan coast. Venice still showed no interest in his plans. So, he began recruiting Montenegrin tribesmen in the inland region behind the Gulf of Kotor. Having created an effective force, he established himself in the village of Obod. Next, in late 1481 or early 1482, he sent envoys to the new sultan, Bayezid II, offering his submission and requesting a
restoration of the conditions existing in 1471, when John had submitted to Mehmed II and been allowed to hold Zeta for an annual tribute.

Bayezid, trying to establish himself in power, concerned with the Albanian revolt, and wanting to avoid a similar manifestation in Zeta/Montenegro, was receptive and recognized John as the ruler of a small vassal principality. John, owing tribute, was to have complete autonomy at home but was not to have independence in foreign affairs. No Ottoman officials were to reside in his small Montenegrin principality, which lay between the coast and the Zeta River and then extended down to Lake Skadar. John soon moved his capital to the town of Cetinje below Mount Lovćen. The move to Cetinje was made before 1489. To secure John’s obedience, Bayezid in 1485 took John’s youngest son Staniša to reside at his court as a hostage. The young man soon converted to Islam, taking the name Skanderbeg.

The Orthodox Church had suffered many disabilities during the previous decades from Venetian rule and from Kotor, whose bishop carried out a policy of converting Orthodox villagers in the vicinity of Kotor to Catholicism. Now under John the Orthodox Church had a chance to revive, and John Crnojević strongly supported its efforts. The Metropolitan of Zeta moved to Obod. Soon John was financing the building of a Metropolitan church and monastery in Cetinje, which was completed in 1484 or 1485. Then the metropolitan (the vladika) moved to Cetinje.

George (Djuradj), John’s eldest son, was his heir. By 1489, still in John’s lifetime, George had already come to be the de facto ruler of Montenegro. George was tall, brave, a fine horseman, and a lover of books. When John died, early in July 1490, George officially became the ruler, soon thereafter receiving official recognition from the sultan. George is most famous for the printing press he established; it was the first Cyrillic printing press to be established among the South Slavs. Modeled on presses existing in Italy, the machine and the letters were actually made in Montenegro. Its products were of the highest quality, in particular aesthetically. Church books made up the bulk of its products. George also produced a text of Dušan’s law code, which seems to have been recognized as the law in Montenegro.

George’s reign was to be brief. King Charles VIII of France was trying to create an anti-Turkish league to carry out a new crusade. The venture was widely advertised in Italy and soon drew into its fold Constantine Arianite, who had taken the surname Comnenus. Constantine was the brother of Gojissava, John Crnojević’s first wife, and thus the uncle of George. Constantine set about planning a new Albanian uprising, which he duly launched. The French king had promised him aid once his venture was under way. Needless to say this help never materialized. It seems that George was drawn into Constantine’s plans. At least it was rumored that he supported the venture. Bayezid, faced with this new outbreak in Albania and hearing that George was involved, decided to prevent any Montenegrin support of the revolt by putting an end to Montenegrin independence and ridding the region of the Crnojevići. In 1496 he gave George three days to report to the sultan or else
get out of Montenegro. George chose to get out. Taking as much treasure as he could carry and accompanied by some Cetinje monks with the treasures of the Cetinje church, George left for Budva, whence he took a boat to Venice, arriving there in December 1496. George’s brother Stefan, who had played only a minor role in Montenegro up to this time—at least, his name appears as a witness on a few charters—hoped to succeed George. However, Bayezid ignored him and re-absorbed Montenegro into the regular Ottoman administration. Subsequently, in 1513, one of its governors was to be Skanderbeg—Staniša Crnojević.

Explanation for the Ottoman Success

The last chapters have traced the Ottoman conquest of southeastern Europe. We have seen what happened, but we have not seriously paused to address the question: How could what began as such a small emirate in northwestern Anatolia have achieved such great success?

The first point to emphasize is the weakness of the Ottomans’ opponents. The Byzantine Empire was no longer an empire and after Dušan’s death neither was Serbia. And we have traced the territorial fragmentation of Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Greek lands. As a result these regions became split into a number of petty principalities in the hands of nobles who fought for their own independence and expansion. Not only did they refuse to co-operate with one another, but they were also frequently at war with one another. We have also noted the general military decline of all the Balkan states. None had large armies, and in their wars usually only hundreds, rather than thousands, were to be found on a given side. The Turks were able to participate in these wars, at first as mercenaries. From their participation they could see the weakness of the Balkan armies and also learn the techniques and strategies of warfare in the Balkans. After the death of Dušan, no state in southeastern Europe was strong enough to prevent the expansion into the Balkans of a state with a large army.

How did the Ottomans obtain large and strong armies? Probably their geographical position was most responsible. The Ottomans happened to hold the principality nearest to Constantinople.

In the first half of the thirteenth century Muslim states had dominated eastern and central Anatolia, but they had not been able to gain control of the western regions. However, toward mid-century the Mongol invasions dislocated large numbers of Turks from Central Asia and eastern Anatolia. Looking for booty and lands upon which to graze their flocks and settle, many migrated into Anatolia. The Byzantine Empire, after the transfer of its capital to Nicea in 1204, had given Anatolian affairs top priority and had been able to defend its borders in central Anatolia. However, in 1261 the Byzantines regained Constantinople; priorities shifted, and, fearing an attack from Charles of Anjou, the Byzantines became much more concerned with the
West. To obtain sufficient troops for their European needs, they denuded their eastern frontier. This enabled the Ottomans—and other emirates—to establish themselves in western Anatolia and to expand. The Ottomans consolidated their position in northwestern Anatolia, and as the Byzantines became involved in foreign and long-term domestic wars in their European provinces, they lost sight of Anatolia and lost it.

By 1300 much of Anatolia—apart from the nominally Seljuk territories under Ilkhanid rule in the central and eastern parts of the peninsula—was in the hands of one or another of these Turkish emirates. The emirates’ populations were swelling owing to the influx of refugees from Central Asia. These refugees, many of whom were nomads, were difficult to control and caused considerable domestic disorder. Most of the emirates were led by warriors and lacked educated people to administer their territories. To survive they needed ever new conquests and booty. When expansion and booty ceased, they were unable to create efficient financial administrations to raise domestic taxes, and most crumbled from within. Best situated were those emirates in a position to fight Christian states—i.e., Aydin (until the Hospitalers took Smyrna in the middle of the 1340s) and the Ottoman emirate in northwestern Anatolia. And these two states attracted large numbers of would-be ghazis (Muslim warriors for the faith). We need not exaggerate the religious side—fighting for faith and paradise—as a motive. For there was also a strong worldly side to it; one who fought against other Muslims was in theory restricted in the extent he could loot. When one fought against infidels one could loot freely, within the rules governing the division of spoils within the army. Thus many were certainly attracted to the Ottomans for the chance to fight infidels and freely enrich themselves. And whenever I speak of ghazis this materialistic aspect is to be understood.

The emirate of Osman in northwestern Anatolia had the advantage of bordering on Byzantium, which was Christian territory and, as such, attracted large numbers of these would-be ghazis. Osman’s principality also lay on major trade routes between Byzantium on the one hand and Central Asia or Syria on the other, allowing the Ottomans to rob or tax the caravans passing along this route. Thus its location produced considerable wealth. Being the only emirate that bordered on Byzantium not only put the Ottomans in the best position to fight Christians but also meant that they were the Turks most frequently hired as mercenaries in the Balkans by the Byzantines to fight in their domestic and foreign wars from the mid-1340s. The position of the Ottomans improved further from this time as a result of three events: the fall of their rival Aydin to the Hospitalers in the mid-1340s; their absorption of Karasi, giving them control of the southern shore of the Dardanelles, in 1345; and their acquisition in 1354 of Gallipoli on the European side of the Dardanelles, giving them control of the Straits. The Ottomans now had free access to Europe, and from then on the Ottoman emirate became a magnet for thousands of Turcoman nomads who, finding no open pastures in Anatolia,
saw marauding in Europe as the best means to alleviate their lot. Thus wars in
or against Europe attracted many such nomads and the Osmanli emirate was
the point of departure for such activities.

And so, thousands came to the Ottoman emirate and either joined its
armies or else, having expressed loyalty to the Ottoman emir (later sultan),
passed on to Europe under their own warlords. In the beginning of their
conquests these Turcoman refugees and nomads pushed out on their own
against the Christian Balkans. Many of the Turkish conquests in the Balkans
into the 1370s were actually carried out by various warlords, often leading
bands of these Turcomans. Thus instead of causing domestic problems, they
plundered and weakened Balkan territories and eventually even conquered
some of these lands.

Then subsequently the Ottoman sultan could move in with a larger force
and take over the conquests carried out by these warlords and their bands.
Thus the Ottomans were able to escape population pressure from these
nomads, whose numbers regularly grew from new arrivals, by sending them
away from the state to settle the lands of their Christian neighbors and thus
keep them busy at something useful to the Ottomans. During the later 1370s
and after, the Ottomans were able to consolidate their hold not only over the
territories taken by these bands but also, by the end of the fourteenth century,
to assert their control over the warlords themselves. The Ottomans did so by
diluting, and in some cases replacing, the warlords with a new service class,
the devşirme, raised from Christian children levied in the Balkan lands,
forcibly converted to Islam, educated, and then enrolled in Ottoman service.
For an intelligent elite this service meant posts in the administration; for the
rest, assignment in the army as Janissaries. The Janissaries came to balance
the older Turkish cavalry and in time came to supersedes it as they eventually
acquired fire-arms. And the soldiers and administrators from the devşirme,
totally dependent upon the sultan, were able to balance the power of the old
Turkish aristocracy for the benefit of the sultan.

Thus we may conclude the following: Geography gave the Ottomans
access to the Balkans, which, being potentially exploitable and Christian,
attracted to their state a large amount of manpower. The other ghazi emirates
that lacked Christian neighbors declined when they no longer had proper
enemies to keep remunerative warfare going and to keep their states expand-
ing. Without such wars, they had no way to defuse the restless nomads, who
became major internal forces of disorder and thereby weakened these states.
The Ottomans, however, by dispatching these excessive nomads across the
Dardanelles into Europe, were able to keep them engaged in activities useful
to their state and outside of the state, thereby preventing them from carrying
out internal disturbances.

A second problem of the other ghazi states that were led by warriors was
the lack of educated people to administer their lands. The Ottomans mastered
this problem. Fighting against stubborn resistance from fortresses between
1330 and 1360, Ottoman conquests were relatively slow, making it easier for
them to incorporate new conquests into their state. The sultans were also intelligent enough to see the need for experienced, literate administrators, and thus they attracted to their state educated Muslims from the former Seljuk centers in Anatolia. The sultans respected their learning and wisely gave these educated Muslims influence and state positions. The Muslim educated class, known as the ulema, established schools, brought administrative techniques, and also advanced the old Islamic ideal that people of the Book, Christians and Jews, should be allowed to keep their faith if they paid a special tax for this privilege. Thus the Ottoman sultans followed a policy of toleration toward their subjects who belonged to other faiths. And since this policy was practiced, Christians became more willing to surrender to the Ottomans when they found themselves hard pressed. That the Ottoman rulers were receptive to the ulema’s teachings made them more respectful of civilization; it also made them see the need to establish efficient administrative institutions.

The quality of the sultans and their talent for organization also contributed heavily to Ottoman success. The sultan was a clearly recognized leader. The Ottomans were able to overcome the Balkan tendency toward feudal fragmentation and jealousies of the “if I can’t lead, I won’t follow” type. Though certain warlords and border lords of the mid- to late-fourteenth century manifested symptoms of this tendency, the sultans were able to suppress them and eliminate this problem. The sultans for the first two and a half centuries were all capable leaders and most of them enjoyed long reigns. The sultans also—with the possible exception of Bayezid I—were not hot-heads, but were willing to move gradually, annex a small region, consolidate their hold on it, and then move on further. In this way, they could effectively absorb a small region, establish the ulema, administrators, and cavalry on vassals, and truly make it part of the state before expanding further. Moreover, they did not spread their elite too thin, but annexed at a given moment only as much territory as they could effectively absorb. All the early sultans were able generals. Successful in their campaigns, they amassed considerable booty and thus attracted many followers to their standard. They then were successful in establishing discipline over their followers, which resulted in effective armies.

Furthermore, the Ottomans effectively incorporated new territories into their state because they carried out their conquest in stages. The gradualness of conquest made the Balkan people less likely to resist as strongly as they might have otherwise. At first the Ottomans merely established contact with the Balkan states. Then they began to play upon disorders within these states. They provided mercenaries in civil wars who at times retained the fortresses they had taken; they encouraged these civil wars and local rivalries, giving support to one or the other side in a quarrel in exchange for submission. They offered advantages to pro-Turkish parties and built up such factions within countries by supporting the leaders of such factions. Even before they reduced a state to vassalage they often had certain local nobles already under their suzerainty. For example, in Bosnia various nobles submitted years before
King Tvrtko II did. The Ottomans’ position was helped further by the fact that the small Balkan states were also faced with a threat from Hungary. Thus certain Balkan leaders saw no chance for permanent or even long-term independence and realized they would have to reach an accommodation with one or the other of these outside powers. To many the Ottomans seemed the better choice. Orthodox Christians, who knew of Ottoman religious tolerance, often came to prefer the Turks to the intolerant Hungarians who were likely to force Catholicism upon them. And many Bosnians, after a long history of wars in which the Hungarians tried to assert their authority over Bosnia, clearly preferred the Turks to the Hungarians, as was shown in the statement of the Bosnian delegation to Venice in 1463.

Next in the process of conquest came the vassal stage. For the Ottomans usually did not immediately conquer or annex a region, but left a local prince in office—be it the existing prince or a newly installed member of the ruling family whose loyalty they counted on—who accepted the sultan’s suzerainty and promised tribute and military service. In this way the Ottomans bettered their own economic position while weakening that of the tribute-paying state. By this means they also increased the size of their own armies. And by leaving a Christian prince to rule the region, they did not spread their own limited pool of educated administrators too thin. Thus they could collect wealth from the region without having to maintain the bureaucracy necessary to collect that wealth. Moreover, the continued rule of the native prince made revolts—at least those that could endanger the Ottoman position—less likely.

And because of the Ottomans’ willingness to accept vassal submissions, a Christian prince, when faced with the Ottoman armies, usually was not presented with the either/or situation that if he did not fight to the finish he would lose everything. Instead of being faced with total losses, he was given the opportunity to remain in power and submit to only limited disabilities. The degree of the disabilities—i.e., the amount of tribute—tended to be small at first, increasing with time as Ottoman power grew. At times accepting Ottoman suzerainty even enabled a native prince to increase his own strength vis à vis his neighbors or his own nobility, for the Ottomans could and often did provide him with troops. And we saw how Stefan Lazarević of Serbia, by leaning on the Ottomans against his own nobility, was able to consolidate his state and again make Serbia into a relatively large and strong state.

As a vassal state the country was weakened and the population became used to the Turks. Frequently during this phase the Ottomans also acquired footholds within the vassal state by establishing garrisons in certain of its fortresses, as they did in the lands of the Brančević and in Bulgaria. And the Ottomans frequently weakened the state further by seizing from time to time portions of its territory. Moreover, as time passed, the Ottomans regularly upped their tribute demands, forcing the rulers to constantly increase taxes, the burden of which fell on the peasants. Thus life became harder for the peasants, both from the increased native taxes and also from the regular Ottoman raids that were launched against vassal states on one pretext or
another. These raids caused destruction and lowered morale. Thus the position of the peasantry deteriorated. Next came Ottoman propaganda promising to a region that accepted direct Ottoman rule the benefits of lower taxation—Stefan Tomašević’s letter showed the Turks were promising this to his peasants—and an end to warfare and raids. According to Stefan Tomašević’s letter, the peasantry was receptive to such propaganda. This enabled the Ottomans to initiate the next, and final, stage, direct annexation, which meant the removal of the native dynasty and the incorporation of the state under Ottoman administration.

This step was clearly necessary since the vassal system did not provide permanence; there was always a question of a vassal’s loyalty, and when the chance presented itself—crusades, Hungarian promises, etc.—various vassals had shed their vassalage, on occasion at critical moments, and joined the enemy. Thus the Turks needed to carry out frequent campaigns to enforce obedience. Since the Ottomans had not had the strength to absorb the whole Balkans rapidly, the vassal stage had been a fine temporary expedient. But it made sense, once the states were softened up, to gradually put them under direct rule. And Bayezid I (1389–1402) began carrying out a policy of direct annexation, absorbing into his growing empire much of northern Greece, Bulgaria, and the lands of Marko and the Dejanovići. However, Bayezid made the mistake of annexing the lands of various Muslim emirates in Anatolia as well, which brought upon himself Timur’s attack. Bayezid’s loss at Ankara, followed by civil war, set back the Ottoman time-table for annexation. But after recovery and a new period of consolidation, Murad II (1421–51) and Mehmed II (1451–81) again launched a policy of replacing the vassal system with direct rule. And during their reigns most of the until then unannexed parts of the Balkans were incorporated into the empire.

At this stage the native dynasty was eliminated. And by this time, when it did make sense for the Christian prince to fight to the finish, his state had been weakened sufficiently to make effective resistance impossible.

The experience of the vassal stage made the subsequent process of annexation easier for both ruling Turks and subjugated Christians. Moreover, making the pill easier to swallow for those absorbed were the policies the Ottomans at first applied to their new populations. First, as noted, they tolerated Christianity. Second, they provided for a time occupational opportunities for those with talent and energy. For through the fourteenth, and much of the fifteenth, century, after incorporating a region, the Ottomans, in order to maintain large armies, allowed Christians from that region to enter military service and on many occasions even awarded fiefs (timars) to Christians. And as they absorbed new territories, they also permitted Christians to serve in administrative positions; thus they could avoid spreading their own administrative talent too thin and at the same time, by leaving former administrators in office, avoid the local unrest caused by changing the way administrative tasks were carried out. In this way, at the time of annexation, the Ottomans co-opted part of the Christian military and administrative elite. And whole
vassal contingents—often of Vlachs—as well as thousands of individual Ottoman soldiers, officers, administrators, advisors, and wives were to serve and remain Christian or Jewish. And allowing Christians honors and positions even made annexation attractive to some of them.

But annexation from the start also meant the establishment of Ottoman institutions and personnel. For it was this that guaranteed the permanence of Ottoman control. The region’s lands were divided among the Ottoman establishment, and the Ottoman cavalry was settled on fiefs inside the conquered region, giving the Ottomans a loyal, landed power base within the locality. Ottoman administrators were sent to serve in the cities, who at once carried out a cadastral survey and soon efficiently set about collecting the region’s wealth in taxes. Garrisons were established in key fortresses, and the others were razed so they could not become centers of resistance. And though Christians were co-opted to serve in these tasks and even at times given fiefs, they were still a small minority in the ruling institutions; thus they benefited as individuals but were no threat to Ottoman interests.

In time, after Ottoman success was achieved, policy changed. With most of the Balkans conquered, there was less need to attract Christians in newly annexed or unannexed regions, and the devşirme provided sufficient Muslim soldiers and administrators for the empire’s needs. So, the Ottomans no longer had to utilize infidels in the military or administration. Thus late in the fifteenth century—after most of the conquests were completed—Islam became a requirement in most cases for membership in the Ottoman army or administration. (There were exceptions in specific situations; for example small local units to oppose brigands and maintain law and order.) Moreover, those Christians who now (from the mid- to late-fifteenth century) entered Ottoman service, besides having to convert, with far greater regularity were sent to serve in far away provinces, usually Anatolia, where they had no personal ties. The members of the pre-conquest elite who did not enter Ottoman service or flee tended to be eliminated. Thus the conquered people were deprived of their natural leaders. And the Christians now found themselves not only in a Muslim state, but also in one almost entirely staffed by Muslims.

The Islamicization of government and army, thus, was also carried out gradually through stages; first the state co-opted and utilized Christian talent and then subsequently, when control was firmly established and the services of Christians no longer needed, excluded participation by infidels. The gradualness of establishing Ottoman control, from vassal arrangements to direct annexation (but at first utilizing local Christians in running things) to a fully Muslim-run administration, facilitated the establishment of an efficient regime and thereby contributed greatly to the long-range success of the Ottomans.

However, many Ottomans and Balkan Christians would have explained Ottoman success more simply, seeing it as resulting from the will of God, be it divine favor toward the Ottomans or divine anger at the Christians for their
sins. This belief surely contributed to Ottoman success, for it gave to their troops confidence, an intangible, but important, factor in the winning of battles. Having won the Balkans and firmly established their state apparatus in the manner described, the Ottomans were then able to retain the Balkans under their rule far more successfully than any of their predecessors. Thus when a strong sultan died, the empire’s hold on its peripheral territories did not falter as had been the experience of the various Balkan empires and even of Byzantium. However, the history of the Balkans under Ottoman rule, which includes the manner in which the Ottomans were able to retain their conquests, is a subject for a book itself; it goes well beyond the task that I have undertaken of surveying the medieval Balkans.

NOTES

1. On the Frankapans, see V. Klaić, Krčki knezovi Frankapani (Zagreb, 1901).
2. Venice’s failure to support Skanderbeg and its conflict with him at this critical time have led scholars to condemn the Republic. However, in addition to the actual towns of contention between them, Skanderbeg’s activities put Venice in a very difficult situation. Venice wanted to maintain peace with the Turks in order to safeguard its extensive commercial interests in the East. Thus Venice was in no position to support Skanderbeg actively. Moreover, the Albanian coast was of secondary importance to Venice as compared to the Aegean. Thus the sultan’s good will was far more important to it than whether or not Albania resisted the Turks. Thiriet goes so far as to say that a spheres of influence understanding was in effect in the 1450s between the Ottomans and Venetians, with the Venetians willing to see the Ottomans hold Albania in exchange for Ottoman recognition of Venice’s position on Crete and Euboea (F. Thiriet, “Quelques réflexions sur la politique Vénitienne à l’égard de Georges Skanderbeg,” Studia Albanica, 1968, no. 1: 87–93).
5. The Commentaries of Pius II have been translated by F. Gragg and provided with introduction and notes by L. Gabel. They were serialized with consecutive pagination in Smith College Studies in History 22, nos. 1–2 (1936–37); 25, nos. 1–4 (1939–40); 30 (1947); 35 (1951); 43 (1957). I have utilized Gragg’s translation in all my citations. The reference to the specific passage cited here is vol. 35, p. 201.
6. This section on Bosnia, and in particular on Stefan Vukčić Kosača, is heavily indebted to S. Ćirković, Stefan Vukčić-Kosača i njegovo doba, SAN, posebna izdanja, 376) (Beograd, 1964). The reader is also referred for Bosnian matters to Ćirković’s Istoriija srednjovekovne bosanske države (Beograd, 1964).
7. P. Živković, Tvrtko II Tvrtković, p. 207.
8. It is worth pausing to examine this event; for Stefan Vukčić was a leading supporter of the Bosnian Church, and one of that Church’s leaders, Gost Radin, was more-or-less his foreign secretary and resided at his court. His wife was Orthodox. And now, having sent a Ragusan Catholic abbot as his envoy to Alphonso, Stefan was admitted to a Catholic knightly order. These alliances strongly suggest that the Bosnian Church could not have been a heretical, neo-Manicheen institution.