CHAPTER 5

The Balkans in the Early Fourteenth Century

Serbia at the End of the Thirteenth Century

Stefan Dragutin, having overthrown his father Uroš, became King of Serbia in 1276. He immediately granted his mother, Helen (or Jelena), an enormous appanage that comprised Zeta, Trebinje, part of the coast including Konavli and Cavtat, and part of western Serbia including the source of the Ibar River and Plav on the upper Lim. His younger brother Milutin, married to a daughter of John of Thessaly, took up residence at his mother’s court in Skadar. Thus Dragutin, unlike his father who eliminated appanages and centralized his state, re-established the appanage system. Evidently there existed considerable pressure for this from part of the nobility, and, in order to obtain its support in his conflict with his father, Dragutin had agreed to allow considerably more autonomy to the great nobles, who had provided his major source of support, and thus restored at least certain appanages. The creation of appanages seems to have increased the influence of the nobles holding lands within these outlying territories, whereas Uroš’ centralizing policy had favored the nobility drawn from the royal court and from the central region of Raška. To bind Zeta and Trebinje to his state, Dragutin installed his mother over that appanage; she was to be a firm supporter of Dragutin in the years that followed.

In 1282 Dragutin fell from a horse and broke his leg. The sources imply that his injury was serious enough for his future to have been in doubt; possibly the wound became infected or gangrenous. So, a council was convoked at Dežević to resolve the situation. Unfortunately, no text of the council’s decisions survive. We have only later sources, biased Serbian ones and those from Byzantine authors who were writing at considerable distance from the events they described. They report that at the council Dragutin abdicated in favor of his brother Milutin. But these sources leave much unsaid. For, if Dragutin’s health was the sole problem, why did the council not simply create a temporary regency? Thus most scholars believe there was more to the issue than Dragutin’s health. They point out that Archbishop Danilo’s account
attributes the council’s actions to the injury and to “serious troubles,” a vague phrase which Danilo does not elaborate upon. And thus they have seen the leg as an excuse for the nobles to depose Dragutin, a deposition they wanted for political reasons. What these political reasons might have been, we can only guess. Milutin seems not to have been present at the council; thus probably the nobility (or part of the nobility), rather than he, was the moving force at Deževo. Possibly the nobles who controlled the meeting decided to place Milutin on the throne in the hope that they could dominate him. Milutin became king for life.

Mavromatis argues that the council created a division of the realm; thus its results should be seen more as a division than as an abdication. In any case, regardless of which term we use, Dragutin gave up his rule over the central Serbian lands and probably also gave up the title king. In exchange he received a large appanage in northern and western Serbia, including the mining town of Rudnik, Arilje, the region of Dabar (on the lower Lim which included a bishop who resided at the monastery of Saint Nicholas), and Uskoplje near Trebinje. Their mother, Helen, kept Trebinje itself and Zeta.

There is considerable dispute among scholars as to the extent of the territory Dragutin was to hold. His richest Serbian territory (Rudnik, Arilje) lay just south of the Hungarian border and formed a compact unit. He also held, as noted, some territory on the Lim and near Trebinje. Were these last isolated holdings lying in the midst of Milutin’s kingdom from which Dragutin received income, or did he hold a narrow strip of territory stretching from his northern lands, passing across the Lim and upper Drina, down through Gacko to Uskoplje in the region of Trebinje? At present it seems impossible to resolve this question.

Many of the great nobles then chose, and were allowed, to accompany Dragutin to his appanage. Does this indicate the nobility was divided about Milutin’s succession? Did Dragutin’s appanage consist of the lands of those great nobles who remained loyal to him? Or was his appanage assigned, after which his supporters followed him thither, receiving new lands? Or did the nobles in the lands assigned to Dragutin, regardless of their own political stances, have to submit to him? Did some nobles retain lands in both realms? Did many lands undergo transfers of ownership through sale or exchange at the time? The answers to these and a host of other questions are unknown.

Milutin, as noted, received the title king. He is the only Serbian ruler called king from here on in the Byzantine sources. Western sources, however, refer to both brothers as kings. Most scholars believe that the Council of Deževo also decreed that Dragutin’s son Vladislav should succeed Milutin as Serbia’s king. Mavromatis argues, however, that this claim was made only by later Byzantine sources which, he believes, were poorly informed. Mavromatis believes the question of who to succeed Milutin was not decided at Deževo.

Dragutin was soon, in 1284, granted a second appanage by the Hun-
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garian king, his father-in-law. This appanage consisted of Mačva (stretching between the Drina, Sava, and Morava rivers and the Serbian border), Srem, and part of northern Bosnia, including Usora and probably Soli (the region of modern Tuzla). The Mačva territory lay just north of the core-lands of Dragutin’s Serbian appanage. Thus Dragutin held two appanages. But though they bordered on one another, they were not integrated into one state for one was held under Milutin’s suzerainty and the other under the suzerainty of the Hungarian king.

Relations, as we shall see, between Dragutin and Milutin seem to have been friendly at first. The Serbian nobles desired to press south against Byzantium to obtain lands and booty. Possibly Dragutin’s failure to carry out this policy had caused his overthrow. In any case, Milutin immediately joined Charles of Anjou’s coalition against Byzantium and attacked the empire. Scholars have almost unanimously followed Cantacuzenus and Danilo who state that Milutin immediately captured the important city of Skopje on the Vardar in 1282. Mavromatis rejects this claim, believing conditions in Serbia must still have been too unstable for a major campaign in 1282. He casts some serious doubts on the two just-mentioned sources’ information and concludes the main push south, including the capture of Skopje, occurred in the 1290s. Mavromatis makes a strong argument for his point of view, but, owing to the limitations of our sources, his evidence is chiefly circumstantial. And though he may be right, he cannot prove the point; thus the date of Skopje’s fall to the Serbs must remain an open question.

In any case, the Serbs did attack Macedonia in 1282, and, though we cannot ascertain the extent of their gains, they did provoke the Byzantines into retaliating. The empire summoned its allies, the Nogaj Tatars, to raid Serbia. The Serbs repelled their attack, and then in 1283 Milutin, supported by Dragutin, pressed further into Macedonia, occupying more territory. Since this campaign preceded Dragutin’s acquisition of his second, his Hungarian, appanage, it is apparent that his Serbian appanage was sufficiently large (i.e., able to provide manpower enough) to render significant help to Milutin. That year one Serbian army swept into eastern Macedonia along the Struma River, reaching the Aegean Sea at Kavalla (Christopolis), while a second army pressed westward to take Kičevo and Debar (Dibra).

In the years that followed the Serbs carried out numerous raids for plunder against the empire, which retaliated from time to time in the same way against the Serbs. In the 1290s, as these activities continued, the Serbs were able to wrest away some Macedonian territory from the empire. However, our sources do not provide sufficient concrete information to document this expansion. Finally in the late 1290s, probably 1296, the Serbs launched a major attack into Albania and took Durazzo, which they were to hold only briefly. (Durazzo is documented as Byzantine again in 1301 and it seems logical to date its restoration to the treaty of 1299.) The loss of Durazzo angered the Byzantines greatly, and in 1297 they launched a major attack on
Serbia. This attack was repelled without too much difficulty by the Serbs, so the Byzantines decided to make greater efforts for a peace treaty. By that time, they found Milutin, as we shall see, more ready to entertain this idea.

Though he supported his brother against Byzantium, Dragutin’s chief area of operations was in the north. There he created for all practical purposes a second kingdom—with its own loyal nobility—and took on all the trappings of an independent king. He maintained his Western orientation and had regular dealings not only with Hungary but also with the papacy. He allowed the establishment of a Catholic bishopric in his city of Beograd and supported in the 1290s a Franciscan mission in his northern Bosnian lands. His mother, Helen, of Catholic and French origin, probably of the Valois family, also encouraged the Franciscans in her appanage. By 1283 Franciscan missions supported by Helen existed in Bar, Kotor, and Ulcinj. The Ulcinj mission (and possibly also the Kotor mission) became a full-fledged monastery in 1288. Another Franciscan monastery was established that year in her main residence of Skadar.

Dragutin soon came up against the two brothers (probably Bulgarians of Cuman origin), Drman and Kudelin, who by this time had asserted their control over the city and province of Braničevo and had achieved their independence from Hungary. The Serbian author Danilo writes that they were very independent-minded and afraid of no one. Using Tatar and Cuman troops they caused difficulties for their neighbors, including Mačva on their western border. Mačva, prior to its assignment to Dragutin, had been under Elizabeth, the Queen Mother of Hungary, and between 1282 and 1284 she had sent troops to try to recover Braničevo. The attack had failed and the brothers had then plundered Mačva in retaliation. The Hungarians still wanted Braničevo back, and they next enlisted the help of their new vassal Dragutin in Beograd against the brothers. Perhaps Mačva was assigned to Dragutin to put a stronger figure in Mačva to defend that province from the brothers and also with the hope of regaining Braničevo. However, Hungary’s and Dragutin’s joint action in 1285 failed to dislodge them. The brothers soon retaliated, ravaging Dragutin’s lands. Dragutin then turned to Milutin for help; Milutin obliged and in roughly 1291 they jointly defeated Drman and Kudelin; Dragutin thereupon annexed Braničevo. For the first time, that province was in the hands of a Serb.

Shortly thereafter Šišman of Vidin attacked Serbia. This is the first mention in the sources of this figure, who by this time was ruling as an independent prince the province of Vidin. Thus clearly Vidin had again (or was still) separated from Trnovo. Šišman presumably was a local boyar from the Vidin region. He was well established in power by the 1290s when we first hear of him. Most scholars push his taking power back to well before that time, some dating it as far back as the late 1270s after Tsarica Maria effected Jacob Svetoslav’s murder.

Šišman’s attack on Serbia may have been in retaliation for something his new neighbor Dragutin had done to him, for by annexing Braničevo Dragutin
extended his lands to the borders of Vidin. It is also quite possible that Šišman had been a close associate, ally or vassal, of Drman and Kudelin; thus Šišman’s action against Serbia may have been in response to the Serbs’ actions against them. Šišman clearly was a Nogaj vassal. Whether these Tatars had helped to install him, or merely agreed to accept him after he had taken power, is unknown. His close ties with the Nogajs are shown by the large numbers of Tatar troops in the armies he sent into Serbia. The invaders from Vidin took no territory but carried out considerable plundering and burned the monastery of Žiča. Milutin, angry, marched against Šišman and captured Vidin. Šišman fled across the Danube to his Nogaj overlords. Peace soon followed, and Šišman returned to Vidin. At times scholars have wondered why Milutin treated Šišman so mildly and did not annex his lands, as Dragutin had annexed Drman’s and Kudelin’s Branichevo. However, the reason seems clear enough; the Tatars were not pleased with Milutin’s actions, so, to forestall a major Tatar attack, Milutin quickly came to terms with Šišman. Šišman regained the principality of Vidin, seemingly accepting Serbian suzerainty. Šišman also took the daughter of a high Serbian nobleman/official named Dragoš as his wife. Subsequently these bonds were strengthened when Šišman’s son Michael married Milutin’s daughter. This whole sequence of events concerning Vidin (except Michael’s marriage) probably occurred in 1292.

However, Šišman’s Nogaj overlords still were not happy with the turn of events, probably disliking both Milutin’s impudence in attacking their vassal as well as his increased influence in what they saw as their sphere of influence. They threatened to attack Serbia. Milutin preserved the peace by sending the Nogajs many gifts and also his eldest son, Stefan Dečanski, as a hostage. Stefan remained at the Nogaj camp several years until 1299, when, as we shall see, the Golden Horde turned against the seceding Nogajs and destroyed them as a separate power; in the chaos that followed Dečanski escaped home.

Upon his return most scholars believe Milutin gave Dečanski Zeta as an appanage. Up to this point Dragutin’s relations with Milutin appear to have been good, with Dragutin contributing to Milutin’s expansion in Macedonia and Milutin to Dragutin’s expansion along the Danube. However, now, in about 1299, relations between the two brothers became tense. If in fact Milutin had awarded Zeta to Dečanski, this award could explain the worsening of relations, for Dragutin may have seen Dečanski’s receiving Zeta as a sign that Milutin intended Dečanski, and not Dragutin’s son Vladislav, to succeed. Recently, however, on the basis of Ragusan documents that show Helen holding Zeta to 1306 and show Dubrovnik dealing with Dečanski there for the first time in 1309, Malović has argued that Dečanski was given Zeta only in late 1308 or 1309 in the course of the war between Dragutin and Milutin. Thus Malović argues that the assignment of Zeta to Dečanski should not be seen as a cause of that war. If Malović is correct, the war’s causes cease to be clear. But in any case and for whatever reason—though it presum-
ably had something to do with the succession—relations between Dragutin and Milutin worsened.

As a result Milutin became more receptive to Byzantine peace feelers. For he clearly wanted his southern border secure from Byzantine attack in the event of a war with Dragutin. Andronicus II and Milutin reached agreement on where through Macedonia the Serbian-imperial border line should run, and the Byzantine emperor offered Milutin an imperial bride, his own sister Eudocia, the widow of the Emperor of Trebizond. Milutin, who was then divorced, or at least separated, from his third wife, Anna, the daughter of the former Bulgarian tsar George Terter, agreed. But Eudocia then absolutely refused to go to Serbia. Milutin, however, demanded, as a condition for the peace, that he receive a Byzantine princess as promised. The only available bride fitting the bill was Andronicus' five-year-old daughter Simonida. So, Andronicus offered her to Milutin. At this point the negotiations, already threatened by serious opposition in Serbia, acquired strong resistance from the Byzantine Church.

The Serbian nobles in Milutin’s entourage, according to the Byzantine envoy Theodore Metohites, who made five trips back and forth between courts in the course of the peace discussions, opposed the treaty because they wanted to continue the war. They liked fighting, were in the habit of it, and wanted the booty from it. Metohites stresses their influence at Milutin’s court and, throughout the negotiations, was afraid that they would prevail on King Milutin or else that he in the long run would not be able to overcome their opposition. The Byzantines, on the other hand, wanted peace, but the Byzantine Church felt the proposed marriage between Simonida and Milutin violated Church canons. Not only was she too young, but fourth marriages were completely forbidden by the Church, and she was about to become Milutin’s fourth wife. The Byzantine court eventually overcame this objection with an elegant piece of sophistry. Since Milutin’s first wife had been alive at the time he contracted marriages two and three, those two marriages were in fact not marriages at all. However, now in 1299, since by then wife number one had died, Simonida could go to Serbia and become the second wife of the lonely widower. This reasoning at least officially satisfied the Church, so the marriage was carried out and the peace concluded.

Milutin was allowed to keep much of the territory he had conquered during the previous seventeen years as her dowry. Thus Serbia received official recognition of its conquests in northern Macedonia, including Skopje, which had already become Milutin’s main residence. The official border was drawn through the following fortified cities, which were all retained by the Byzantines: Strumica, Stip, Prosek, Prilep, and Ohrid. Since Byzantium is found holding Durazzo in 1301, presumably the Serbs restored it to the empire as part of the 1299 treaty. Thus Serbia had acquired considerable Macedonian territory. And, at peace, Milutin was now free to face whatever threat might develop from Dragutin.

Simonida and her entourage arrived in Serbia, and their presence, com-
bined with Milutin’s interest in making a policy-matter of it, brought about a great increase in the Byzantinization-Hellenization of the Serbian court. More Byzantine functional titles, as well as honorary ones, appeared, and various Serbian offices were re-named, as, for example, dijaks now became logothetes, etc. New Byzantine taxes were introduced, either bearing Greek names or literal Serbian translations of Byzantine terms. The manner of drawing up and issuing charters became even more like the Byzantine. This Byzantinization of the court was to remain in effect regardless of shifts in Serbian policy in the years to come, retained even when Serbia was at war with Byzantium. Hellenization in Serbia was furthered by the acquisition of Greek populations in the lands just annexed from the empire, and was to be further re-enforced by the conquest of additional Greek lands in the years ahead. In such annexed lands, most existing Byzantine institutions, customs, and laws were allowed to remain in force.

Also during the time of Milutin the pronoia system appeared in Serbia. By it sources of income, usually landed estates, were awarded for service (usually military). The new system was to exist side by side with the established family system of patrimonial estates held jointly by brothers. For despite the appearance of pronoias in Serbia, patrimonial estates remained common and still as late as the fifteenth century were, according to Naumov, to be the chief form of landholding. In Serbia from the start pronoias were hereditary, with the inheritor retaining the original service obligation. However, though Byzantine pronoias had started as being non-hereditary, reverting to the state for re-assignment at the death of their holders, by the early fourteenth century, they were more and more frequently becoming hereditary. Thus the Serbs probably simply took over the system as it existed at the time in Byzantium. The pronoia system was in existence in the Macedonian lands Milutin conquered from Byzantium. The first reference to a pronoia in Serbia, from 1299/1300, is to one near Skopje (village Rečica, province Polog), in territory recently conquered by Milutin. The estate had been a pronoia under Byzantium, and Milutin, according to Ostrogorsky’s interpretation of the document, disposed of the estate in the same way. If Ostrogorsky is correct, then, Milutin seems to have simply continued the system in places where it existed. Then subsequently Milutin or his successors introduced the system into the lands of Serbia proper.

Naumov, however, questions Ostrogorsky’s conclusions about the status of this estate under Milutin. He also points out that little can be said with certainty about Serbian pronoiias before Stefan Dušan (1331–55). Why, he asks, did Serbia need pronoiias? The Serbian nobility holding their patrimonial estates already owed military service. One might answer Naumov by suggesting that pronoiias would have been assigned to others—newcomers, lesser nobles—to build up a more dependable service class. However, since such a policy cannot be documented, its creation can only be a matter for speculation. Naumov also points out that before Dušan we do not have references to pronoiias in the old Serbian lands. Thus until the second quarter of the four-
teenth century the few references to pronoias in Serbia all appear in lands recently acquired from Byzantium. On occasion, Naumov also believes, the term, when it appears in Serbian documents, does not even indicate a service estate. He argues that the Greek term was sometimes taken over by the Serbs to simply mean a “holding,” as he believes was the case with the 1299/1300 “pronoia” in Rečica noted above. On other occasions, he admits, the term pronoia used in Serbian Macedonia may reflect the continuation under Serb rule of existing Byzantine land tenure relationships, with the Byzantine landholder being allowed to remain on his land on the same terms as before, but now owing loyalty and service to the Serbian ruler. Naumov emphasizes that we also do not know the tenure or status of the newly conquered Macedonian lands assigned by Milutin to his Serb followers. Though we cannot rule out the assignment of what had been Byzantine pronoias to Serbs on pronoia terms, it is quite possible that Milutin regularly assigned Serbs new lands in Macedonia as patrimonial estates. For we have no evidence that Milutin actually assigned pronoias to new people or distributed lands on these conditions. Moreover, we have, as noted, no evidence of pronoias in the older Serbian lands until Dušan’s time. And even then, Naumov stresses, patrimonial estates continued to greatly outnumber pronoias. Thus, though Milutin may have assigned some new pronoias to Serbs, it cannot be proved.

**Bulgaria at the End of the Thirteenth Century**

The Byzantines had failed in their attempt to take over Bulgaria, ca. 1279. Their candidate John Asen III had panicked and Ivajlo had twice defeated their invading armies. Then, faced with the threat from Charles of Anjou, the empire had to take a less and less active role in Bulgarian affairs. But though the new tsar, George Terter, was spared Byzantine intervention, he found the Tatar problem greatly increased. In 1280 or 1281 Mangu Timur died, and Nogaj took advantage of the increased weakness at the center of the Golden Horde to make himself entirely independent. Thereafter there was nothing to prevent his intervention in Bulgaria whenever he chose. From ca. 1280 until Nogaj’s demise in 1299, Bulgaria endured the period of greatest Tatar interference and plundering. For having become the most powerful figure in the Khanate of the Golden Horde, at times even its king-maker, Nogaj had no further serious worries about Steppe affairs and wars and thus could concentrate more on the Balkans. He asserted his suzerainty not only over Tmovo but also over Vidin, where in the early 1290s he is found as Šišman’s overlord, and even, it seems, over the emerging principality of Braničevo under the brothers Drman and Kudelin.

George Terter, who emerged as tsar out of the chaos in late 1279, ruled a very weak state. Elected in Tmovo during a siege, he had no opportunity at first to extend his authority over any part of Bulgaria beyond Tmovo itself. When the Byzantines withdrew and Ivajlo in his turn did so too, only to be murdered at Nogaj’s court, Terter found himself lacking power either to
prevent Tatar raids or to retain his outlying provinces. Soon he held only the eastern part of Bulgaria, and not even all of that. For the Byzantines held what had been Bulgaria’s lands along the Black Sea from Mesembria on south. Losses elsewhere were more extensive. The Byzantines had also taken western Thrace along the upper Marica. Various boyars, moreover, were breaking away to establish their own petty principalities; some of these were supported by the Nogaj’s. The two most important secessionist provinces were, as noted, Vidin and Braničevo. And with Nogaj asserting his protection over these two provinces, Terter was not free to try to regain control over them. It was evident that he had to reach an understanding with his powerful Tatar neighbor. This probably occurred in 1285 when, after a particularly devastating raid, he accepted Nogaj suzerainty and agreed to pay Nogaj tribute. In so doing he dropped his allegiance to the Khanate of the Golden Horde, to which Bulgaria had been tributary until then and which from the death of Berke in 1265 had been unable to protect Bulgaria from Nogaj. To seal his agreement with Nogaj, George Terter sent his daughter to become a wife in the harem of Nogaj’s son Čaka. At the same time George Terter sent his son Theodore Svetoslav to Nogaj as a hostage. This young man, along with his mother, previously had had to live in Constantinople; they had been sent there when Terter, still a boyar, had been drawn into the Byzantine coalition and had accepted John Asen III’s sister as his wife. When George Terter and Byzantium concluded peace in 1284, with Andronicus II recognizing George as ruler of Bulgaria and awarding him the court title of despot, his son had been returned to him. Now, within a year, the young man resumed his career as a hostage, this time at the Tatar court.

Terter’s agreement with the Nogaj’s reduced the number of Tatar raids against Bulgaria, eliminating at least most of those under Nogaj control. These, of course, had been the major ones. However, peace with the Tatars and Byzantium still did not allow Terter to assert his authority over what remained of his state. In fact we soon learn of further secessionist principalities, though we cannot determine whether they emerged before or after 1285. In these cases, it seems, local boyars simply asserted their independence in their home regions. First the sources mention a boyar, Smiliec, who asserted his independence in the region between Sredna Gora and the Balkan Mountains. His independence seems to have been supported by the Byzantines, which may be the reason George Terter seems to have taken no action to force him to obedience. Smiliec’s lands bordered on the territory the Byzantines had annexed from Bulgaria along the Black Sea. Furthermore, showing his close ties with the empire, Smiliec married Emperor Andronicus’ cousin, the daughter of Sebastocurator Constantine, a brother of Michael VIII. This marriage almost certainly occurred while Smiliec was still a boyar, before he captured the Bulgarian throne. A second secessionist principality was established in the region west of Sliven (Kr”nska hora), between Sliven and Kopsis (or in modern terms, between Sliven and Kazanl”k or even Karlovo) under Terter’s brother Eltimir. These were probably the family’s lands. Thus per-
haps George acquiesced or even supported the creation of this appanage. Unlike the other, it probably remained a true appanage, loyal to Trnovo and rendering its obligations. Thus his brother’s rule, rather than being disruptive, probably served as a means to tie this more distant region to Trnovo.

In 1292, a year in which a major Tatar raid occurred, George Terter fled to Byzantium. And Smiilce emerged as tsar. Since the sources report that the Byzantines hesitated to give him asylum for fear of antagonizing the Nogajis, it seems likely that the Nogajis effected this change. The existence of a Nogaj attack that year also supports this view. However, as Nikov has noted, there seems to have been no reason for the Nogajis to have taken this action. Terter seems to have been a loyal vassal, rendering his dues, with his son still a hostage at the Nogaj court. Could Terter have done something provocative we know nothing of? Though possible, this seems unlikely, for it is to be doubted that he would have dared to try any such thing. So, Nikov postulates that Terter was brought down by a boyar faction, which presumably had been intriguing against Terter at the Nogaj court and had in the end persuaded the Tatar chief to support its candidate.4 Presumably Nogaj obtained something in return for his help, probably at least increased tribute. Thus since Nogaj troops most probably drove Terter from the country and installed Smiilce, it is not surprising that Smiilce is usually seen as puppet tsar for the Nogajis. The Byzantines accepted the change. Not only did they want to avoid a conflict with the Nogajis, but Smiilce was also an imperial in-law. Eltimir fled from Bulgaria along with his brother George Terter, so we may suspect his appanage was re-absorbed by Trnovo. However, Smiilce’s principality in or near Sredna Gora remained in the hands of his two brothers Radoslav and Vojsil. Presumably he felt this a safe arrangement, tolerating it for the same reasons that Terter during his reign had tolerated the appanage of his brother Eltimir.

Throughout his reign Smiilce maintained good relations with both Byzantines and Nogajis. He seems to have undertaken no foreign adventures and done nothing to aid Vidin in its above-mentioned difficulties with Milutin. Smiilce died in 1298, and at once Trnovo again became a center of plots and violence. Smiilce’s widow, a Byzantine princess, tried to maintain power. Usually it is said she was acting for herself, but recently Božilov has demonstrated that she and Smiilce did have a son.5 Thus we can assume she was trying to hold the throne for his eventual succession. She clearly was under tremendous pressure, for Theodore Metohites, the Byzantine envoy then negotiating with Serbia to arrange the 1299 peace and the marriage of Milutin to a Byzantine princess, found his plans challenged by the Bulgarians. For on one of his five visits to Serbia, a delegation arrived from a recently widowed queen of Bulgaria, offering her own hand to Milutin. This was certainly Smiilce’s widow, seeking marriage with Milutin in order to obtain his armed support to bolster her tottering throne. As we saw, Milutin rejected this option and married the child Simonida to make peace with Byzantium. However, at some time Stefan Dečanski married the widow’s (and Smiilce’s) daughter. Though scholars usually date that marriage later, a late date makes little
sense, because the Smilc family had little significance after 1299. Malović is probably correct in dating Smilc’s daughter’s marriage (or at least betrothal) to Dečanski at this time, attributing the agreement to Milutin’s desire to maintain good relations with the Bulgarians at a moment when he risked offending them by rejecting their queen’s offer to become his wife. Smilc’s widow briefly received support from an unexpected source. Eltimir, George Terter’s brother who had fled into exile when Smilc seized the throne and had probably spent his exile with the Tatars, now returned. He soon concluded an alliance with the insecure widow, marrying one of her (and Smilc’s) daughters. This marriage probably occurred in late 1298.

However, the force of events was stronger than the widowed queen. Since 1297 Nogaj had been at war with Tokta (Tokhta, Tokhtu, Tuqta’a) Khan, the new leader of the Golden Horde, who had in fact been installed by Nogaj. However, the two men had fallen out, and Tokta aimed now to restore the khanate to its former grandeur, which meant putting an end to Nogaj’s separatism. At first the warfare had gone well for Nogaj, but by 1299 Tokta had defeated Nogaj in battle. Nogaj had been killed, and his following was dispersed over the Steppe. A large number of his men stuck by Nogaj’s son Čaka, and they fled together across the Danube into Bulgaria from Tokta who was marching west to assert control over what had been Nogaj’s lands. With Čaka in this flight was his brother-in-law Theodore Svetoslav, the son of George Terter, sent to Nogaj as a hostage at the time his sister had married Čaka. Ambitious to acquire the Bulgarian throne and yet at the same time dependent on his companion Čaka, who controlled an army and was now seeking a new land to settle down in to rule, Theodore Svetoslav decided to be patient and to assume for the present the role of king-maker. He presumably also had a variety of scores to settle with those boyars who had supported Smilc. Thus he secretly negotiated with a number of boyars and, making rich bribes, organized a plot through which the gates of Trnovo were opened to Čaka and his army. Smilc’s widow and her son fled, first to Eltimir in Krn, and then from there to Constantinople, where she was well received by her cousin, Emperor Andronicus. There her son assumed the Byzantine name, from his mother’s family, of John Comnenus Ducas Angelus Branas Palaeologus and settled down as a Byzantine aristocrat. He was never to be advanced by Byzantium as a pretender for the Bulgarian throne and eventually became a monk, dying before 1330. Since he had briefly held the throne of Bulgaria, or at least it had been briefly held in his name, Božilov argues we should call him John IV Smilc.

Meanwhile in Trnovo, Čaka, the Tatar, took over as Tsar of Bulgaria. We may suspect he had little local popularity, and, because his troops were soon scattered around eastern Bulgaria, be it to assert control or to plunder, Theodore Svetoslav’s position rapidly became stronger. He secretly forged ties with various powerful elements in Trnovo. Having organized their plans carefully, Theodore Svetoslav’s conspirators then seized Čaka and threw him in jail, where he was duly strangled. The executioner, we are told, was a Jew.
Late Medieval Balkans

The Patriarch of Trnovo, Joakim, was also executed, pitched over a cliff into the Jantra River in 1300. He was accused of treachery. It is not certain whom, if anyone, he was supporting. Possibly his treachery had occurred at the time Smilc overthrew George Terter.

Thus Theodore Svetoslav, son of George Terter, came to power in 1300. He quickly made peace with his uncle, Eltimir, who, restored to his Krn province through the help of Smilc’s widow, was happy to change sides. He declared his support for his nephew and briefly contributed to his cause before settling down to an independent existence in his own province, allied to the Byzantines. Smilc’s two brothers Radoslav and Vojsil, who had jointly ruled in Sredna Gora, fled to Byzantium for aid. Presumably they had been expelled by force, whether by Çaka’s troops in 1299 or subsequently by Theodore Svetoslav’s supporters. They received some help from the empire, and Radoslav marched into Bulgaria with Byzantine troops. His forces were met by Eltimir, who managed to capture and then blind Radoslav. Vojsil remained in Byzantium, urging further Byzantine action on behalf of his family.

Theodore Svetoslav found himself secure on his throne because the Nogaj no longer existed on his border to interfere. The Golden Horde, having wiped out the Nogajs, presumably had nothing against the Bulgarian ruler who had murdered the son of their enemy Nogaj. In fact Theodore Svetoslav seems to have immediately guaranteed himself on this front by submitting to Tokta. This freed his hands to face any Byzantine action that might follow and may even have gained him the military support of the Tatars. That he quickly submitted to the Golden Horde is confirmed by certain Eastern sources, one of which states that Theodore Svetoslav executed Çaka “by command of Tokta,” suggesting Çaka had been held in prison by Theodore Svetoslav for a period before his execution was carried out. Possibly Tokta had been consulted in the interim. A second source reports Theodore Svetoslav sent Çaka’s head to Tokta. Thus we may assume that Theodore Svetoslav at once negotiated an agreement with Tokta by which he submitted to him, presumably for tribute, and then enjoyed peaceful relations on that frontier.

The Horde not only did not interfere in Bulgaria, but it even seems to have supported Bulgaria’s expansion. For Theodore Svetoslav was able, by 1314, to extend his rule over what is now southern Bessarabia as far as Akkerman (Cetatea Alba, formerly Maurocastron) on the Dnestr, territory that had formerly been under Nogaj. From these lands he was able to recruit many Tatars for his armies. Since this had been Nogaj territory, which we can assume had subsequently been taken over by Tokta, Nikov is probably right to suppose that Theodore Svetoslav received it as a grant from Tokta. It is hard to imagine Theodore seizing it and thereby risking war with the Tatars. Moreover, such grants were in keeping with Tokta’s policy at the time. For Tokta was then making to certain of his leading followers various large grants, comprising former Nogaj territory he had occupied. If Nikov is correct that this Bessarabian territory was awarded to Theodore Svetoslav by Tokta,7
then we can assume it was part of a negotiated settlement between the two leaders and can be taken as further evidence that Bulgaria had submitted again to the suzerainty of the Golden Horde.

Bulgaria does not seem to have retained this Bessarabian territory for long. Tokta Khan died in 1321 and was succeeded by Uzbek, who took greater interest in these western lands. Soon after, if not immediately upon, his succession he seems to have taken back the territory ceded to Bulgaria at the mouth of the Dniestr as well as the lands between the Dniester and the Danube mouth that Bulgaria held. This threatened the Byzantine outpost at Vicina on the Danube mouth. And at some point, between 1332 and 1337, the Tatars occupied Vicina.

Since the Horde’s overlordship in the fourteenth century was very loose, Bulgaria may well have gained more from the relationship than the Tatars. For it is likely that the Tatar troops obtained by the Bulgarians throughout much of the fourteenth century were worth more than the value of whatever tribute the Bulgarians paid to the khan. After the death of Uzbek Khan in 1342, the Khanate of the Golden Horde declined, and surely Bulgaria’s vassal obligations soon disappeared. But this may well have been to Bulgaria’s disadvantage, for at that time it could have used strong support from the Tatars to face the developing Ottoman threat.

In the period from 1300 Tatar raids did not cease entirely. But they were rarer and smaller in scale, aimed at plunder rather than political interference. The largest known raids occurred in 1319 against Bulgaria and Byzantine Thrace and in 1331 against Vidin.

The Byzantines were not happy with the turn of events in Bulgaria. After Radoslav’s failure to install himself in power with the troops the empire gave him, the Byzantines made a second military effort against Bulgaria. On this occasion, their troops were sent on behalf of a new candidate, Michael, who was the son of Constantine Tih and Michael VIII’s niece. This effort failed as well.

Theodore Svetoslav turned to rebuilding his shattered state, reincorporating the seceded areas he was able to subdue, like Sredna Gora, whose rulers had fled to Byzantium, and allying with the rulers of other semi-independent areas, such as his uncle Eltimir. He seems also to have asserted his authority over the independent-minded boyars of Trnovo. In any case the sources at least cease making references to boyar factions and intrigues for the duration of his reign.

Having achieved these successes, he was then able to turn to the Byzantine problem. Not only had the Byzantines been warring against him and trying to install others to rule Bulgaria, but they still held the Black Sea territory which Bulgaria believed to be its own. In 1304 he launched an attack into this area and defeated a Byzantine army. On this occasion he probably recovered Mesembria and Anchialos. If he did not acquire the two towns then, he must have done so in the following year. The Byzantines responded by attempting to woo Eltimir over as an ally, giving him a warm reception in
Constantinople. However, their efforts did not at this time detach him from his alliance with his nephew. The following year, 1305, Andronicus’ son Michael IX, already crowned co-emperor, directed a new attack against Bulgaria. Smilec’s brother Vojsil commanded one unit in it. After some smaller engagements, one of which was won by the Byzantines near Sozopolis, the Bulgarians won a victory that allowed them to break through Byzantine lines and plunder the region of Adrianople. Michael IX assembled with difficulty a new force which invaded the territory of Eltimir, who shut himself up in one of his fortresses; this event shows that he was still faithful to his nephew’s cause. Soon thereafter Eltimir switched sides, possibly forced to do so by this Byzantine attack. As a result, when Theodore Svetoslav attacked Byzantium, probably late in 1305, he also overran the territory around Jambol that he had recently regained from Byzantium and had granted to Eltimir. Theodore Svetoslav took this territory back and also plundered Eltimir’s original appanage.

The Byzantines, discouraged by the above-mentioned failures and weakened also by the Catalans (whom we shall discuss shortly), made peace with Theodore Svetoslav in 1307 and recognized his Black Sea conquests. Their agreement restored to Bulgaria not only the ports but also the whole hinterland west to the Tundža River that the Byzantines had taken before. It seems this territory had all been retaken by Theodore Svetoslav in 1304 or 1305, and the treaty simply recognized Bulgaria’s ownership. Thus Bulgaria no longer had its border with Byzantium along the Tundža, but had recovered the whole region between that river and the Black Sea. Furthermore, as a result of the treaty Theodore Svetoslav acquired a wife; for shortly thereafter, probably in 1308, he married Theodora, the granddaughter of Andronicus II.

Through the ports he regained on the Black Sea, Theodore Svetoslav increased Bulgaria’s foreign trade, particularly on Venetian and Genoese ships. Bulgaria chiefly exported agricultural products and imported luxury goods. Under Theodore Svetoslav Bulgarian coins, which had begun to be issued under John Asen II, came to be issued in far greater quantities, presumably necessitated by the increased trade with the Italians on the Black Sea.

**Byzantium and Greece in the Early Fourteenth Century**

The Byzantines, meanwhile, began to have serious difficulties with a new enemy appearing on their eastern border. In meeting the threat from the West by Charles of Anjou, Michael VIII had concentrated almost all his attention in that direction and had ignored a very serious situation developing in Anatolia. The Tataro-Mongol invasions, which hit Russia and then swept across Hungary, Serbia, and Bulgaria in 1241–42 and which had also at the time plundered eastern Anatolia, had driven many Turkish tribes out of Central Asia into Anatolia. These newcomers mingled with the Turks already settled there. And as matters continued to be unstable in Central Asia in the period that followed, many more Turks were to migrate into Anatolia, seeking grazing
lands and booty, over the next half century. Since they tended to appear in relatively small groups with little or no central organization, Nicea had been able to hold its own against them. But then in 1261 Constantinople was recovered. Until that moment Anatolia had obviously enjoyed top priority for the Nicean/Byzantine state. But after the recovery of the capital, Europe rose to even greater importance, particularly owing to the growing threat from Charles. As a result many soldiers were transferred from Anatolia to Europe. Thus soon after the 1261 conquest, the eastern frontier defenses, based on Vatatzes’ military small-holdings, began to decline.

The empire’s emphasis on Europe was a god-send to the Turks. By 1300 most of Anatolia was in the hands of one or another Turkish group. The Byzantines retained only certain fortified towns in that region. The Turks established there a number of small principalities or emirates. The most important one for the future lay in Bithynia, in northwestern Anatolia; it was ruled by a certain Osman whose followers came to be called the Osmanlis (or in English, the Ottomans). This emirate rapidly began to expand, bringing under its control a growing number of tribesmen in an ever widening area. As a result Anatolia, long the backbone of the empire for men, grain, and taxes, was lost forever. Soon the Osmanlis were to be threatening Europe.

Byzantium was in dire straits, faced on its frontiers by two enemies, the Osmanlis in the east and the Serbs in the west, each growing stronger and each already stronger than it was. It held only Constantinople, Thrace, and parts of Macedonia and of the Morea. And its Macedonian holdings were gradually being annexed by the Serbs. It differed from the other states in the Balkans only in prestige and pretensions.

Byzantium’s aristocracy had suffered a brief setback under Vatatzes and Theodore II Lascaris. But under the Palaeologoi, a dynasty arising from the ranks of the high aristocracy and coming to power as a representative of aristocratic interests, the great nobility reasserted itself, converting its landed base into provincial rule. Supported by their own private armies, the great magnates became local governors of their own regions, acquiring ever increasing independence. More and more pronoiia holders made their pronoiias hereditary. Some even managed to convert these conditional holdings into patrimonial estates, severing the service obligation entirely. Having no state control over them to compel their loyalty and prevent secession, the emperor had to grant them an increasing number of privileges. These were awarded through immunity charters, many of which granted further tax exemptions freeing particular estates of various taxes or all estates of a particular tax. This led to a reduction of the state’s income at a time when it needed cash desperately. It also meant that since budgetary needs were not reduced, the burden ever increasingly fell upon those least able to pay, the peasants. Borrowing from the rich to meet their tax bills or to keep their struggling farms functioning, more and more peasants found themselves being enserfed through foreclosure.

At the same time, with less cash available to pay salaries, the bureau-
cracy declined. More and more provincial functions were either not carried out or were executed by the local magnates. The shrinking of the bureaucracy as well as of the state armies, which earlier had garrisoned provincial cities, meant the state had ever fewer means to check the local actions of the magnates. To try to prevent these uncontrolled regions from breaking away, it came to be common practice to grant whole provinces as appanages to members of the dynasty, brothers and sons of the emperor; it was hoped they could assert authority over these regions and thereby keep them both loyal to the dynasty and part of the empire. This worked frequently, but at other times the princely governor became ambitious for the throne himself and used his province as a base for revolt, offering the local nobles greater privileges to support his efforts.

As the soldier-holdings declined again under the aristocratic emperors, Byzantium found itself relying not only on the private forces of the magnates but also increasingly on mercenaries. The empire’s need for troops was enormous, but it lacked the cash to pay for as many mercenaries as it needed. In fact it lacked sufficient cash to pay for those already recruited. Thus mercenaries frequently deserted at key moments, sometimes even in the midst of battles and joined the enemy’s forces. The size of the Byzantine army rapidly declined. It was all Andronicus II could do to maintain a standing army of two thousand men in Europe and one thousand in Asia. Small armies, it should be noted, were a general feature of the whole Balkans in the fourteenth century; battles were frequently fought by several hundred on each side. But this spelled disaster when a state was faced with a coalition or with the larger army of some outside invader. The Serbs, though seemingly strong, were not really a great power. They simply were able to mobilize larger and more effective small armies.

In this crisis, to face the Ottomans, the Byzantines in 1303 hired as mercenaries a corps of sixty-five hundred unemployed Catalans. Sent to Anatolia against the Ottomans, they did very well when they put their minds to their work. They even defeated the Ottomans in a couple of engagements. But soon they lost interest in the task for which they had been hired and went off plundering. Since their pay was in arrears, their behavior is understandable. Accusations of bad faith and breach of contract were made with some justification by both Catalans and Byzantines. To try to force payment and extract more the Catalans stepped up their looting. They soon crossed back to Europe and began recouping their debts from Byzantine territory there. As they plundered Byzantine Thrace, word of their successes reached colleagues back West and further Catalans came to join them. To settle matters the Byzantines tried to single out three thousand of them to pay and retain, while dismissing the rest. But all the Catalans were determined to stay, and, as group solidarity was strong, it was impossible for the Byzantines to split them up in that way. By then the Catalans were divided into three major companies, each out for itself, but none of which was willing to submit to the Byzantines at the
Balkans in the Early Fourteenth Century

The expense of the other two; thus all three remained ready to come together to defend Catalan interests against the Byzantines.

The Byzantines then, probably in 1306, turned to deceit. Michael IX invited a group of Catalans and their leader, Roger de Flor, to a dinner under a safe conduct. At the dinner Roger was murdered by the captain of Michael’s Alan mercenaries, whose son had previously been killed by the Catalans. Roger’s escort of three hundred was then massacred. Since no effort was made by the Byzantines to punish the Alans, the Catalans held the Byzantines responsible. The infuriated Catalans plundered Thrace again for revenge and pleasure. An army led against them by the co-emperor and heir, Michael IX, was easily defeated and Michael was wounded. For the next two years they devastated the countryside of Thrace, plundering, taking and burning lesser towns and villages, chopping down orchards, and carting off captives to Gallipoli, which they had taken and made into a great slave market. They even sacked Mount Athos. In 1308 they tried to take Thessaloniki but failed.

The Byzantines by then had occupied a major mountain pass between Kavalla and Philippi. So after their failure against Thessaloniki, instead of attempting to fight their way back to Thrace, the Catalans moved off into Thessaly. Soon they hired themselves out to Charles of Valois, to whom we shall turn in a moment. Their success with such small forces well illustrates the weakness of the Byzantine empire at the time. Their early successes against the Turks in Anatolia also show that as late as 1303 the Ottomans had not yet become a major power. Thus a relatively small but disciplined force, had there been one to make the concentrated effort, might still in the first decade of the fourteenth century have defeated them and restored imperial rule to western Anatolia.

Meanwhile a new scheme, similar to Charles of Anjou’s, was drawn up to restore Latin rule over the Byzantine Empire. Its author and leader was Charles of Valois. Having married a lady descended from Baldwin II, he had in Western eyes acquired the rights to “Romania” (the empire). He began building a coalition of allies. In 1306 he obtained Venice’s support, and in 1308 he obtained (but probably, as we shall see, only nominally) the backing of Milutin of Serbia. And, of more potential significance, in that year the Catalans also agreed to join him. The pope, still ambitious to reunite the Churches, also endorsed the venture. In 1308 Charles landed in western Greece. But the Catalans almost immediately deserted him to go off plundering on their own. They lived off the land for a year, then entered the service of the Duke of Athens, served him for about a year, and then, defeating him in battle, seized control of Athens and established a duchy under their own control lasting from 1311 to 1388. Again their success illustrates the weakness of military forces in the Balkans. In 1309 Charles’ wife, the basis of his claims to “Romania,” died. By then his coalition was deteriorating. The Catalans, who had been his chief muscle, had departed southward. The Serbs, who probably never were serious in their support of Charles, never did give him any aid. And Venice, which had done little to assist his cause, now,
seeing that matters were becoming hopeless, concluded an alliance, for lucrative privileges, with Byzantium in 1310. Thus Charles’ threat evaporated away entirely.

Meanwhile, from their base in Mistra the Byzantines had gradually been expanding their rule in the Morea against the governors sent out by the Anjous. Finally in 1289 Charles II of Anjou (his father, Byzantium’s nemesis Charles I, having died in 1285), to better defend the province against further losses, decided to allow William Villehardouin’s daughter Isabelle to return to the Morea. By then she had married a Belgian nobleman named Florent. Florent was appointed bailiff, and subsequently Charles endowed him with Villehardouin’s former title, Prince of Achaea. This prince of course recognized Charles’ suzerainty. It was also specified that if Isabelle became a widow and was still without male heir, she could not remarry without the consent of the Angevin King of Naples. To secure his lands, Florent in the year of his arrival, 1289 or 1290, concluded a seven-year truce with the Byzantines of Mistra. This allowed for both the economic recovery of the whole peninsula and increased trade. Many of the local Greeks, particularly those who possessed lands in both realms—in Frankish Greece and in the area recovered by Byzantium—appreciated the peace. The Byzantine emperor was also happy to conclude the armistice, for it allowed him, as we shall see, to devote his attention to affairs in Thessaly and Epirus.

Florent was a fair, efficient, and popular prince, and matters prospered in his and Isabelle’s realm until his death in 1297. He was able to maintain peace, on the whole, with Byzantium despite the fact that on one occasion he did send aid to Epirus against Byzantium. After her husband’s death, Isabelle continued to govern her father’s and her husband’s state until 1301 when she decided to marry Philip of Savoy. Charles II violently disapproved of this marriage, for he felt that by it his family would lose its role in the Morea. By this time Charles had officially assigned suzerainty over Achaea to his second son Philip of Taranto (Tarentum). However, the pope approved Isabelle’s marriage, and Charles, though he fumed, did nothing to stop it. Philip of Savoy arrived in Achaea, and it was apparent from the start that Isabelle had made a poor choice of husband. He ignored existing policy and his wife’s advice and, supported by a retinue of Piedmont adventurers, set out to enrich himself. He soon clashed with the Morean establishment, including the Frankish families. He ruled there for four-and-a-half years, surrounded by scandals, extorting wealth from the locals, selling offices and fiefs, and skirmishing with local Greeks and any others who opposed him. He also increased taxes and revoked various exemptions and privileges granted to the local Greeks and to the Slavs of Skorta, causing them to revolt. The rebels acquired some help from the Byzantine garrison at Mistra, but the aid was insufficient and Philip put the revolt down with great brutality, devastating both Greek and Slavic villages. He then confiscated the lands of the rebels.

Meanwhile the Byzantines under Andronicus II were exerting greater influence in and bettering relations with northern Greece, which had remained
independent and divided between the two sons of Michael II of Epirus, John in Thessaly and Nicephorus in Epirus. The great enmity between Thessaly and the empire had decreased after Andronicus officially dropped the policy of Church Union. In Epirus Nicephorus, rather a passive figure, was dominated by his wife Anna, a niece of Michael VIII and leader of a pro-Byzantine party in Epirus. After the Churches in Constantinople and Epirus had made peace, Anna visited her cousin Andronicus II in Constantinople, where she was drawn into a plot against John of Thessaly. The Byzantines of course hoped the plot would contribute to the elimination of his dynasty, enabling them eventually to acquire the rich province of Thessaly. Weakening John would also have benefited Anna and Nicephorus, if there was truth in the story given that John had ambitions toward Epirus. And we find hints in the sources that John had actually carried out hostilities against the territory of Epirus, including an attack upon Jannina. In any case, both Andronicus and Anna saw John’s son Michael as a disruptive element and agreed on a scheme to kidnap him. In 1283 or 1284 Anna and Nicephorus offered their daughter to Michael as part of a plan to unite Greece. Michael took the bait, came at once to Epirus, was kidnapped, and sent to Constantinople where he languished many years in jail, until he finally died. The Byzantines then sent troops against Thessaly to finish the job; the campaign was a fiasco, however, and an epidemic of malaria wiped out most of the invading army.

In the following year, 1284 or 1285, John of Thessaly, too weak to attack Byzantium, gave vent to his anger by attacking Epirus, concentrating on Arta and its environs. His troops did considerable damage but then withdrew. Thus his invasion appears to have been a punitive raid; no permanent annexation of territory seems to have been planned. Though presumably relations between Epirus and Thessaly remained strained and though some further border skirmishes or raids may have followed, no further major confrontations occurred between John and the Epirotes. This may be owing to the fact that John died soon thereafter. Though no source gives the date of his death and though scholars have often given it as 1296, a monastic charter from March 1289 already refers to John as being deceased. At whatever point prior to March 1289 he died, he was succeeded by his son Constantine. Constantine’s younger brother Theodore shared in the rule. In what way—whether holding his own appanage or managing the whole province jointly with his brother—is not known. In the years that followed they seem to have acted in common and we have no evidence of any quarreling between them.

On their accession John’s widow, the young rulers’ mother, was worried that an outside attack might oust them from their rule. So she at once sought an agreement with Byzantium, willingly accepting Byzantine suzerainty and obtaining thereby recognition of her sons’ rule and security from Byzantine attack. By the treaty both sons received the title sebastocrator. Their father, John, at some time had also concluded a similar treaty with Byzantium and had received the same title. The vassal relationship between Thessaly and empire was to remain nominal, for, like their father, the sons soon asserted
their independence and from then on acted freely without consultation with Constantinople. The sources do not tell us why the Byzantines accepted this agreement; for one might have expected them to take advantage of the situation to attempt the annexation of Thessaly.

Anna of Epirus, already involved with Byzantium and threatened by Thessaly, hoped to make Epirus’ ties with Byzantium even closer by marrying her daughter Tamara to Andronicus’ son and heir Michael. But these plans, which might have led to the union of Epirus with Byzantium after Nicephorus’ death, as was proposed, did not materialize owing to the Patriarch of Constantinople’s objections that the proposed couple were too closely related. Nicephorus’ and Anna’s only son and heir, Thomas, was compensated by receiving from Andronicus the title despot. Thomas, at this time (about 1290), was probably less than five years old.

Meanwhile, the anti-Byzantine faction in Epirus, alarmed by Anna’s policy which they feared would lead to Byzantium’s annexing Epirus, suggested that Tamara, unable to marry the Byzantine heir, should marry Philip of Taranto, the second son of Charles II of Anjou. Though Anna opposed it, Nicephorus was persuaded and negotiations with the Angevins were begun in 1291.

The Byzantines, until then allied to Epirus, were upset by these negotiations and launched an attack against Epirus that successfully occupied much of northern Epirus and laid siege to Jannina. At this point Epirus requested and obtained support from Charles II’s and Philip’s loyal vassal Florent of Achaea. Richard Orsini, Count of Cephalonia, also sent aid. The Count of Cephalonia was rewarded with Anna and Nicephorus’ daughter Maria, who became the bride of his son and heir John Orsini. This marks the beginning of the Orsini family’s involvement in the affairs of Epirus. Florent’s and Richard’s help in 1292 or 1293 contributed not only to preventing the Byzantines from penetrating further into Epirus but also in expelling them from Jannina and most, if not all, the parts of Epirus they had occupied. Then, with the warfare over, negotiations for Tamara’s marriage were renewed with the Angevins.

After it was agreed that Philip of Taranto and Tamara, rather than Thomas, would inherit Epirus, and that Philip would respect the Orthodox faith of Tamara and of his Epirote subjects, the agreement, which had been urged by the anti-Byzantine faction at Arta, was concluded. And Epirus accepted Angevin suzerainty. The wedding took place in August 1294. Philip at once received four fortresses from Epirus, including Vonitsa, Vrachova (which Nicol identifies as Eulochos near modern Agrinion), Angelokastron, and the very important one of Naupaktos, as Tamara’s dowry. Charles II of Anjou then granted to his son Philip the rights he had inherited from his own father, Charles I, to the Latin Empire and to Greece; these rights included suzerainty over the principality of Achaea, which Charles II had until then exercised himself. Charles also awarded to Philip the island of Corfu and the
one remaining Angevin city on the Albanian mainland, Butrinti. The countryside between the four Angevin forts in the south of Epirus was also granted to Philip, who soon assigned much of it as fiefs to his supporters. As could be expected, this caused tensions between indigenous Greek landlords and the new Latin fief-holders.

Thessaly saw in these events an opportunity both to avenge Anna’s kidnapping of Michael and to expand. Thessaly launched an attack against Epirus in the spring of 1295. The Thessalians struck at two fortresses belonging, as a result of Tamara’s dowry, to Philip of Taranto, Angelokastron and Naupaktos. They also attacked Acheeloos. If Acheeloos is a misnomering of Vrachova, a possibility Nicol suggests, then it too was Philip’s; otherwise it belonged to Nicephorus. The three fortresses had insufficient garrisons and fell to the invaders. The Thessalians presumably also took other towns belonging to Epirus itself. For we have no reason to believe they directed their efforts particularly at Philip’s holdings unless they seem to have been more weakly held or Thessaly had particularly objected to the Angevins’ acquiring a foothold on the mainland. The Thessalians thus occupied part of Epirus, and our limited information suggests they concentrated their attack on the southern part of the region. But they were unable to retain their gains. Ferjančić speculates that they feared a Byzantine attack against Thessaly from the east should they prolong their absence.

A peace was concluded in the summer of 1296, by which most of the taken fortresses were restored to their pre-war holders. Angelokastron, however, was restored to the Angevins only after a second skirmish in 1301. Thus by 1301 the Angevins had regained all Tamara’s dowry. Shortly after the 1296 peace, between 3 September 1296 and 25 July 1298, Nicephorus died. His widow Anna took over as regent. Nicol has persuasively argued against attempts to advance the date of Nicephorus’ death. Soon after the 1301 skirmish and agreement (Ferjančić suggests in 1302), Thessaly attacked Epirus again. The course of the campaign and its results are unknown. In the fighting of 1301 and 1302 the local Angevin governor of Naupaktos and Vonitsa aided Anna. Though we know of only these two attacks on Epirus by Thessaly, possibly other small incidents occurred. Furthermore, tensions and expectations of new attacks remained. Thus the regent Anna suffered from considerable insecurity. But she managed to hold her own, possibly once again receiving help from Florent of Achaea during this period. Finally after Florent’s death she reached the conclusion that it made more sense to follow her own preferences and rely on the empire. So in 1304 she turned back to Andronicus II to secure his aid in restraining Thessaly. She suggested a marriage between her son Thomas, the titular ruler of Epirus, and Anna Palaeologina, the daughter of Michael IX. The Byzantines were receptive and eventually the marriage took place. The marriage is usually dated to 1313, but Nicol redates it to 1307.

Meanwhile in Thessaly Constantine died in 1303. His brother Theodore
had pre-deceased him, probably a year or so earlier. Constantine’s heir John II was a minor. The nobles of Thessaly convoked a council at which they agreed to seek support from Athens.

In Athens, after William de la Roche’s death in 1290, his widow Helen, daughter of John of Thessaly, had become regent for their minor son Guy II. As such she had maintained friendly relations with Thessaly. Guy came of age in 1294 and his suzerain, Charles II of Anjou, ordered him to submit to the Prince of Achaea, Florent. Helen, as regent, had long resisted this submission, but Guy acquiesced in it. Soon thereafter, in 1299, Isabelle Villehardouin, who at that moment was ruling Achaea in her own right, engaged her daughter Matilda to Guy. Under Guy’s rule, the Duchy of Athens, still including Attica, Boeotia, and the northeastern corner of the Peloponnesus, probably reached its height. After Constantine’s death in 1303, Guy soon took advantage of the role the nobles of Thessaly gave him to assert his influence over Thessaly. For having taken an oath to respect the rights of the heir and the nobility of Thessaly, Guy was invited by the nobles to become the guardian of Constantine’s son, the infant John II. The Thessalians expected this arrangement to last until John reached his majority. Guy established a semi-protectorate over Thessaly, appointing one of his barons to be bailiff of Thessaly. The Thessalian nobles had made a sensible decision, for almost at once Anna of Epirus, angry at Thessaly’s attacks on Epirus and thinking the time ideal for revenge, had attacked Thessaly and taken Phanarion (Fanari). Guy, with his own men and with the barons of Thessaly whom he mobilized, marched against the Epirotex and drove them out of Thessaly.

Guy of Athens was a very powerful prince in this own domain, far more autocratic a ruler than the Prince of Achaea, who had to rule with the consent of his council composed of the great barons. Compared to the barons of Achaea, Guy’s vassals were nobles of relatively low rank. Thus Guy was less obliged to consult them. Moreover, the landed base, the fiefs, of the Athenian nobles was less extensive than that of the Morean barons. In fact, many of the Athenian fiefs were held by Guy’s own relatives, and Guy himself held a far greater portion of the land in his duchy than did the Prince of Achaea in his. Furthermore much of the Athenian duchy was not assigned as fiefs at all, but was left in the hands of tax-paying Greeks; their taxes were partly used to hire mercenaries, whose presence made the Duke of Athens less dependent on the feudal knights and their demands. It also happened that in the duchy much of the land nearest the major towns had been left to the Greeks, while many of the fiefs had been assigned in more distant places; this further reduced the influence of the fief-holders on state policy. Moreover, though the Greeks were important in paying taxes and in holding land that might otherwise have fallen to knights, they did not become major actors in Athens. For the leading Greeks tended not to be landlords but clerks and merchants. As such they had a much smaller role in the Athenian duchy than did the Greeks in the Achaean state. Not only did Guy maintain a firm hand on the administration of his
state, but he also was blessed with a prosperous region possessed of a strong economic base. Under his rule trade and industry flourished in the duchy.

In 1302 Charles II of Anjou named his son Philip of Taranto to directly rule Achaea. Thus he sought to oust the unpopular and ambitious Philip of Savoy and to replace indirect Angevin rule, through Savoy and Isabelle under the suzerainty of Philip of Taranto, with direct rule by his son. Despite the appointment, however, Philip of Savoy remained in the Morea, and Philip of Taranto for the time being made no attempt to go there. At the same time, in 1304, Charles, annoyed at Anna of Epirus’ new negotiations with Byzantium and seeking to increase his son’s power base, called on Anna to fulfill her agreement and allow Philip and Tamara to take over the rule of Epirus. For, he claimed, they, rather than Anna as regent for Thomas, should have received Epirus upon Nicephorus’ death. Anna refused, claiming the Angevins had broken their agreements with her; she accused them of not respecting Tamara’s Orthodox faith and putting pressure on her to accept Catholicism. Expecting further trouble, she immediately sought Byzantine help.

In 1304 Charles II sent troops against Epirus; they were repulsed. The Epirotes then seem to have gone on to the offensive against the Angevin possessions on the mainland. For Nicol argues that in the fall of 1304 or in 1305 they took Naupaktos, Vonitsa, and the port of Butrinti in the north. But though unsuccessful on the Epirote front, the Angevins had more success against Epirus’ Byzantine allies. For in 1304 Philip of Taranto had possession of Durazzo, where he is found confirming the privileges of various Albanian nobles. Philip still had Durazzo in 1306. Still ambitious for Epirus, Charles in 1305 called on Philip of Savoy, who had aided the previous year’s unsuccessful attack, to help in a new campaign for Epirus. Knowing Charles was trying to force him out of the Morea, Philip of Savoy felt it would be ridiculous for him to absent himself from the principality he wanted to retain. Thus he refused to help. His refusal was made more pleasant by the bribes he received from Anna of Epirus to stay neutral and remain in the Morea.

This refusal was the last straw for Charles II, who now demanded that Philip of Savoy immediately leave the Morea and turn the peninsula over to Charles’ son Philip of Taranto. Charles stated he had never agreed to Philip of Savoy’s marriage to Isabelle (an agreement she had been bound to obtain). And marriage to Isabelle, of course, was the basis for Philip of Savoy’s rule, because he had entered the Morea as her husband and not by Angevin appointment. Philip of Savoy began trying to mobilize local support, but, having already acquired too many enemies, he had little success. So after Charles rejected their final appeals and protests, Philip of Savoy and Isabelle departed from the Morea for good; they soon separated from each other. And Philip of Taranto in 1307 arrived to take over his new position as Prince of Achaea.

In the interim, in 1306, Philip of Taranto had launched a second attack against Epirus. Thomas and Anna were able to bring the fighting to a close by restoring to Philip two of the fortresses that had been granted to him in 1294,
Naupaktos and Vonitsa, as well as Butrinti. Since the Angevins still possessed the first two forts in summer 1304, Nicol plausibly argues that Thomas had taken them after that date. Thus the 1306 agreement restored the pre-war territorial status quo. The Angevins still had possession of at least Vonitsa in 1314. Soon thereafter, either late in that decade or early in the 1320s, Vonitsa was again in the hands of Epirus.

In the interim the Epirotes strengthened their ties with the empire; they shared a common border north of Jannina, and the empire controlled most of the major fortresses in southern and central Albania, including Berat, Spinarizza, Kanina, and Valona. As noted, Despot Thomas married the Emperor Andronicus II’s granddaughter, probably in 1307. Relations between the two states continued smoothly for the next few years until a conflict broke out between Epirus and the Byzantine commander in southern Albania. The causes for the clash are unknown. As a result Byzantine forces carried out a major plundering raid against Epirus in 1315 that penetrated as far south as Arta, which was plundered. Thomas objected and within a year had been declared a rebel by Emperor Andronicus II. In response, Thomas imprisoned his Byzantine wife. Thomas soon, in early 1318, turned to Philip of Taranto for help; but before he could re-orient Epirus’ policy toward the Angevins again, Thomas was murdered—an event to which we shall return shortly.

Upon his arrival in the Morea in 1307 Philip of Taranto received homage from the locals, carried out a brief campaign against the Byzantines of Mistra that gained him a couple of fortresses, and tried to launch another attack on Epirus, which failed. He then lost interest in Greece and soon returned to Italy. The principality of Achaea, managed by bailiffs under his suzerainty, declined, and the Byzantines quickly regained the forts that Philip of Taranto had taken from them. The Byzantines then began a policy of steady and gradual expansion in that region. By 1316 they probably had in their hands half of the Peloponnese. Their expansion was facilitated by the acceptance of imperial suzerainty by many Frankish lords who, when threatened by Byzantine forces, quickly submitted in order to retain their possessions. As the empire restored its rule over former Frankish territory, it re-established the Orthodox hierarchy under the direction of the Metropolitan of Monemvasia.

Meanwhile, in 1309 Philip repudiated his wife Tamara for adultery. She was thrown into prison, where soon thereafter she died. Philip, now free, in 1313 married Catherine of Valois, the titular Empress of the Latin Empire. She had been engaged at the time to the Duke of Burgundy, who was quite vexed at her marriage. To console the family Philip arranged a marriage, probably also in 1313, between the duke’s brother Louis and Matilda, the daughter of Isabelle Villehardouin and Florent. Matilda was the widow of Guy II of Athens. And Philip graciously bestowed the Morea upon Louis. To obtain his new lands, Louis had to put down, with the help of the Greeks of Mistra, an attempted take-over of the Morea by Frederick of Majorca, the son-in-law of Matilda’s aunt Margaret Villehardouin. Frederick had landed at Clarenza (Glarentza) and established a foothold on the peninsula, but he was
killed in a battle there against Louis in the summer of 1316, ending that rival claim. But a month after Louis' victory, Louis too died, possibly, if rumor was accurate, the victim of a plot organized by the Orsinis of Cephalonia. For the Count of Cephalonia had been administering the Achaea as the Angevin bailiff and seems to have been unhappy at being replaced by Louis. The utilization of the Count of Cephalonia to administer the principality made sense since the island of Cephalonia lay right off Achaea's coast.

Matilda, by then in the Morea, found herself in possession of the principality; but she had only a life-interest, since succession to the principality belonged now to Burgundy, under the suzerainty of Philip of Taranto. Philip by this time wanted to revoke the right to hold Achaea that he had granted to the House of Burgundy. He decided to achieve this by marrying Matilda to his own younger brother John, Count of Gravina. So Philip next ordered Matilda to marry John. She refused, and in 1318 Philip expelled her from the Morea and appointed John to rule the principality under Philip's continued suzerainty. One story, probably apocryphal, claims that Matilda was dragged to a marriage ceremony with John by force and then jailed. In 1320 Eudes of Burgundy sold his family's rights to Achaea back to Philip of Taranto. Having failed to take Mistra in 1325, John of Gravina returned to Italy. By then John was under pressure to give up the Morea from Philip's wife, Catherine of Valois, who wanted to grant the principality of Achaea to her son by Philip, Robert of Taranto. Eventually, in 1332, John sold Achaea to Robert and in exchange was granted Durazzo by Catherine. But before his departure from the Morea John had introduced a new actor into the peninsula. For his attack on Mistra had been expensive, and to carry it out John had been forced to borrow money from the Florentine banking family of Acciaiuoli (Acciaiuoli). Lacking the cash to repay the Florentines, before his departure he had had to grant the Florentine bankers some forts in the northwestern Morea that he had offered as security at the time he contracted his loan.

In 1308 Guy II of Athens had died, probably of cancer. He had no son. His first cousin Walter of Brienne (Gauthier de Brienne), whose mother had been the sister of Guy's father William, succeeded him. Walter had lived in Naples until then and was ignorant of local conditions. He was faced at once with two major problems. First, the Catalans, who had swept into Thessaly and had been plundering it during the period 1306–09 were now poised on the border of Athens. Second, in Thessaly Constantine's son John II, by now of age, wanted to assert his own rule at home. Walter did not want this and hoped to retain Athens' role as Thessaly's protector. To try to achieve his independence, which he saw Athens did not want to allow him, John seems to have turned to Byzantium for aid, accepting Byzantine suzerainty and taking as his bride Irene, an illegitimate daughter of Andronicus II. Though it is usually dated to this time, as we shall see, Ferjančić dates John's turning to Byzantium a few years later. In any case, John II declared his independence from Athens. To assert his authority over Thessaly, Walter now concluded an agreement with the Catalans by which he hired thirty-five hundred caval-
rymen and three thousand infantrymen. They stepped up their ravages of Thessaly in 1310 and occupied a series of forts (Lamia, Domokos, Almiros, Demetriada [Demetrias], and thirty small forts), which, however, they garrisoned themselves and refused to turn over to Walter.

Walter realized that he was creating a major problem for himself. To solve it he decided to retain only five hundred Catalans to be his own guard, and to dismiss the rest. The Catalans refused dismissal and also announced that they would retain the castles they had taken in Thessaly. They stated they would be willing to hold these castles under his overlordship, but they would not yield a single one until he supplied their back pay. The Catalans at the time were concentrated on Walter's border and probably did not respect that border any more than they respected other borders they came across. Seeing the mounting danger, Walter decided to drive them out. But before he could act, in the winter of 1310–11, five thousand Catalans crossed into Walter's duchy and occupied part of Boeotia.

Walter marched out to meet them. But the Catalans had had time to entrench themselves in a defensive position of their choice before his arrival. Thus the Catalans selected both the battlefield and their placement on it and had chosen these key matters to suit their own tactics. The two armies met on the banks of the Kephissos River in March 1311; Walter's heavily armored knights fell into the prepared trap and were driven into a swamp created by the Catalans. The knights found themselves completely unable to maneuver. Walter was killed and the majority of his knights perished as well. As a result much of the upper class of the duchy was wiped out. The Catalans then took over Athens and the rest of the duchy, establishing their own rule. They divided up the fiefs of the slain, in many cases marrying the widows of the defeated knights. By taking possession of the scattered strongholds throughout the duchy, they made themselves into local strongmen. To make matters seem more respectable they sought a reputable outside suzerain, choosing one who would not interfere greatly with their activities, Frederick, the Aragonese King of Sicily. Frederick accepted, naming one of his sons the titular Duke of Athens. Thereafter he sent a vicar general to the duchy to oversee the Catalans.

The Catalans continued to plunder the lands of the duchy's neighbors. They also frequently squabbled amongst themselves. However, they were always ready to conclude truces on the spur of the moment and unite at times of danger to themselves, thereby preventing their own ouster from Athens. But, in time, as they settled down, they became less bellicose, and by the second generation the Catalans of Athens were clearly less war-like and less successful in battle than their fathers, the conquerors of the duchy, had been. The Athens they acquired seems still to have been prosperous. The historian of their order, Mutaner, speaks of the duchy's fertile land, possessing olives, almonds, fig trees, and vineyards, well watered by aqueducts and cisterns. Mutaner also mentions the existence of active commerce, particularly in textiles.
Walter’s demise liberated John II of Thessaly from the control of Athens, but his province still suffered from the plundering of the Catalans; in addition, the Catalans still occupied various of his fortresses in southern Thessaly. At the same time, within his province the Thessalian magnates were increasing their already vast estates, coming more and more to dominate local government and making themselves more and more independent of the so-called central government of Thessaly. Some of these magnates had even entered into relations with Constantinople, which gave the Byzantines a foot in the door, if and when they should move against Thessaly. In fact, the nobles had asserted themselves to such an extent that in much of Thessaly John’s authority was non-existent. Thus John’s Thessaly was hardly what one would call a coherent state. Ferjančić believes it was at this point, after 1311 and probably nearer to 1315, that John, faced with this deteriorating situation, turned to Byzantium for aid, recognizing imperial suzerainty and marrying the Byzantine princess Irene. And the Byzantines, it seems, did give John some military help against the Catalans after 1311.

In 1318 John II of Thessaly died without an heir. At his death, Gregoras reports, some of the towns of Thessaly submitted to Andronicus II, some were conquered by the Catalans, and others fell under the control of their own nobility. The Catalans, led by their new (since 1317) Vicar General Alphonso Frederick (Fadrique), the illegitimate son of King Frederick II of Sicily, quickly penetrated further into southern Thessaly, adding to the fortresses they already held in that region. Their expansion in southern Thessaly was carried out over several years, between 1318 and 1325. We know they took Neopatras (in 1319), Lamia, Lidoriki, Siderokastron, Vitrintisa, Domokos, Gardiki, and Pharsalos. The last three seem to have been held only briefly since they do not appear on lists of subsequent Catalan possessions. The Catalans divided their holdings in southern Thessaly into five communes, each under a captain. Part of this region also became the feudal domain of Alphonso Frederick, whose heirs settled down as feudal lords in the duchy. His domain was centered around six fortresses: the isle of Aegina, Salona (Amphissa), Lidoriki, Vitrinitsa, Lamia, and on Euboea, Karyostos.

Euboea, conquered by Licario for Byzantium in the late 1270s, had not long remained Byzantine. The Lombard barons were not happy with the loss of their fiefs and the Venetians were also upset by Byzantine gains on Euboea and on other Aegean islands. Licario disappears from the sources in about 1280. In about 1281 Klisura on Euboea was surrendered to the Lombards by treachery. A series of other forts were recovered by the Lombards during the next fourteen years, most of them probably by 1285. However, the Byzantines retained a number of Euboean forts including Karyostos, Larmena, and Metropyle until 1296. In that year Boniface of Verona, a younger son and relative of one of the original families of triarchs, decided to win a principality for himself. A favored knight of Guy of Athens, Boniface, through Guy’s good offices, had married a noble Lombard lady named Agnes, who was the heiress to Karyostos. Determined to obtain his wife’s inheritance, Boniface
launched a campaign that captured Karystos in 1296. He also captured various other forts on Euboëa, which he kept even though they were not part of her inheritance; presumably he was allowed to retain them as fiefs from the relevant triarchs who held title to them. By the end of 1296 he had expelled the Byzantines entirely from Euboëa and made himself into the most powerful figure on the island. His gains were facilitated by the fact that title to much of the island at the time was in the hands of women, for the triarchs (including some who could more accurately be called hexarchs) of the previous generation had all died without sons, leaving their holdings (or title to holdings) to daughters.

The Venetians were also able to strengthen their position on the island. They had aided the Lombards in their Euboëan recoveries in the early 1280s and had asserted from the start suzerainty over these restored triarchs. The Venetians had also purchased various castles from their vassals and thus come to actually hold a larger part of the island than they had previously. Boniface was not happy with the Venetian presence and entered into relations with the roving Catalans. Despite these ties, however, he and the other triarchs supported Walter of Brienne at the Battle of Kephissos. Boniface and two triarchs were captured in the battle; but whereas the two triarchs were executed by the Catalan victors, the Catalans spared Boniface. He seems to have concluded some sort of agreement at the time with his captors; one may presume they agreed to work jointly to oust the Venetians from Euboëa and to install Boniface as Duke of Euboëa under Catalan suzerainty. Such an agreement would have benefited the Catalans, surrounded by hostile states and barons, as much as it would have served Boniface. Venice seems to have expected trouble from Boniface and/or the Catalans, for at once it began raising money to beef up its Euboëan forts and fleet. However, no action seems to have been taken by either potential enemy until 1317.

Then, in that year, the new Catalan vicar Alfonso Frederick, having assumed control of his duchy, married Boniface’s daughter Marulla. Despite the existence of a son, Thomas, Marulla was Boniface’s heir. Her inheritance included various castles in the Athens duchy granted to Boniface previously by Guy of Athens, which the Catalans seem to have allowed him to retain, and also his possessions on Euboëa, which may have included by this time a third of the island. Alfonso mobilized his Catalan forces and in late 1317, or more likely 1318, invaded Euboëa. They presumably aimed to expel the Venetians and Lombard triarchs, excluding Boniface, who undoubtedly was to rule the island under Catalan overlordship. The threatened Lombards joined with Venice to resist. At this point Boniface died. Alfonso inherited his holdings and seems by this time to have planned to reduce the whole island. And he may very well have actually conquered it all, including Negroponte. The angry Venetians then complained to Alfonso’s father, Frederick II of Sicily, who, not wanting trouble with Venice, ordered his son and the Catalans to evacuate the island. Alfonso refused to obey the order, but after his fleet was defeated by the Venetians the tide turned. Soon most of the Catalans
returned to the mainland. Venice’s role in ousting the Catalans further increased its authority on the island. And, probably at the end of 1318, the doge ordered Venetian troops installed in all towns and forts on the island. He ordered the triarchs to co-operate with this order, and they did. This order, of course, did not affect Alphonso’s forts.

Meanwhile, in 1318, Walter II of Brienne, heir to Walter I and ambitious to launch a campaign to recover the Duchy of Athens from the Catalans, tried to persuade the Venetians to broaden their war against the Catalans, offering them in exchange great privileges in Attica (if and when he recovered it) and possession of all Euboea. However, the Venetians, concluding it was better to be at peace with the Catalans, avoided committing themselves and instead signed in 1319 a truce with them, renewed several times during the next decade. By this truce the Venetians renounced their claims to Karystos, Larmena, and possibly some other forts belonging to Marulla’s inheritance, while the Catalans recognized Venice’s suzerain rights to the rest of the island. Moreover the Catalans promised to renounce piracy and agreed to maintain no ships in the Saronic Gulf, though they were allowed to have ships in the Corinthian Gulf. This last clause guaranteed the security of Euboea for as long as the Catalans abided by the treaty.

Venice continued to dominate Euboea for the next decades, standing over and mediating quarrels among the various Lombard barons. On occasion certain of the triarchs tried to assert themselves against Venice, but in no case did these attempts succeed. Late in the 1320s Marulla’s brother Thomas died. He had been holding Larmena, presumably with her agreement. Marulla claimed it as did Thomas’ own heir, his daughter Agnes, married to the Duke of Naxos. Venice supported the duke’s claims and feared a Catalan war might result. Though no full-scale war was to follow, Catalan pirates did plunder the Euboean coast, and Turks from Aydin, nominally allied to the Catalans, carried out large-scale raiding from 1328 to 1333, taking many Euboeans (allegedly twenty-five thousand in 1331) as slaves. Unhappy at the extent of Turkish plundering and wanting at that moment to restore good relations with Venice (for at the time Walter of Brienne was mobilizing an expedition to try to recover Attica from the Catalans), Alphonso in 1331 made peace with Venice. Once again each recognized the other’s possessions and it seems the disputed region—Thomas’ former property—was divided in 1333 between Marulla and Agnes. In 1334 the Venetians are found in possession of Larmena, presumably the result of purchase.

The Turkish raids continued and the Catalans, who also suffered from their ravages, came to join local coalitions for mutual defense; these activities made them into more respectable neighbors. Meanwhile, in strengthening its fortifications to defend Euboea from these raids, Venice found the stronger forts useful to control the local Euboeans as well. Needing Venetian support against the Turks, the triarchs became increasingly obedient to Venetian wishes, and after Alphonso’s death in 1338 Venice had no rival on the island. Finally in 1365 Venice bought Karystos from Alphonso’s heirs.
Venice’s position improved still further in the 1380s. By then only two triarchs remained, and in that decade both died without heirs. The first, who held two-thirds of the island, died in 1383. Various claimants for his lands emerged and Venice was able to intervene, judge the claims, and grant his territories to the two claimants of its choice; the two were to basically become Venetian puppets. The other triarch died in 1390, also without issue; in this case he left his lands to Venice directly in his will. These inherited lands were distributed as many small fiefs to various Venetian candidates, most of whom had no relationship to the former triarchs. Thus by 1390 Euboea was completely under Venetian control.

Meanwhile, in 1318, the Byzantines moved into Thessaly from the north, sending troops from Thessaloniki under John Cantacuzenus. Bent on annexation, their claim to Thessaly was based on the fact that John II, who had just died, had left no heir other than his widow, Irene, Emperor Andronicus’ daughter. Byzantine rule was accepted by most of the magnates in the north, though in fact this was often a nominal submission. These nobles in fact were to be as independent of any imperial authority as they had been of John II’s. The territory to the south of what the Byzantines took, in roughly central Thessaly, remained in the hands of various major magnates who did not at first bother recognizing Byzantium at all. This central region broke up, more or less, into a series of small principalities, each under a major landlord.

Cantacuzenus had been ordered to establish imperial authority in the north and then to help the central regions defend themselves from the Catalans. It was hoped that the Byzantine presence in the center would not only prevent further Catalan expansion, but also get the Byzantines a foot in the door there. And it seems that Cantacuzenus did provide some limited aid to the nobles of central Thessaly.

However, as might be expected, the great magnates of central Thessaly soon began quarrelling among themselves and thus gave their ambitious neighbors to the north and south a chance to increase their influence. Some nobles, like the leaders of the Melissenos family, which held lands on the Gulf of Volos and also Kastri and Likonia, turned to the Catalans for support to secure their local position. Other nobles, like Stephen Gavrilopoulos in western Thessaly, who held Trikkala with lands stretching as far into southwestern Macedonia as Kastoria, turned to Byzantium for the same reason. Gavrilopoulos accepted Byzantine suzerainty and received the title sebastocrator. Thus the Byzantines gradually received nominal submission from certain nobles of central Thessaly while the Catalans received it from others.

The Venetians were not indifferent to Thessaly’s fate either. They had long traded in Euboea, which was the center from which the agricultural and pastoral riches of Thessaly were exported. Their ships loaded with these goods were a frequent target for pirates, who during the reign of Michael VIII, the Venetians claimed, had been encouraged in their crimes by the emperor. The key Thessalian port for Venice was Pteleon, which lay opposite
Euboea and from which Thessaly’s goods were shipped to Negroponte, which the Venetians, as noted, retained after Licario had driven the Latins from the rest of Euboea. At some point (some scholars place it as far back as 1204, though most recent scholars date it to the late thirteenth or even early fourteenth century) the Venetians took over the port of Pteleon on the Gulf of Volos directly to guarantee their link between Thessaly and Negroponte. They appointed a resident rector to govern the town. In the chaos following John II’s death in 1318, Venice seems to have taken control of several other harbors on the Gulf of Volos as well.

Thus, after the death of John II in 1318, Thessaly (if we exclude the Venetian ports) found itself split into three: the southern part including the former capital of Neopatras being absorbed by the Catalans who were expanding north from their duchy in Athens; the central area, under Greek magnates who were carving out various small principalities; and the northern part, once again under Byzantium, but with its magnates enjoying considerable independence.

Thomas of Epirus, probably in 1307, married Anna, a sister of Andronicus III. His own sister Maria had married John I Orsini, Count of Cephalonia, back in 1294. In 1317 Nicholas Orsini, their son, succeeded John as the Count of Cephalonia. Ambitious for Epirus, and having in the island of Cephalonia, just off the coast of Epirus and Acarnania, a fine jumping off place for Epirus, Nicholas made his move in 1318 when he murdered his uncle Thomas of Epirus. Nicholas then married Thomas’ Byzantine wife and took over Arta and much of Epirus. He even declared himself to be Orthodox. Though the Orsinis had long been Angevin vassals, the Naples court objected to the Orsinis’ getting a foothold on the mainland, since they could threaten Angevin ambitions in Epirus. However, the Angevins took no action at first. The Byzantines, also unhappy with events, nevertheless saw them as a fine chance to expand their influence into this region. So, they moved into northern Epirus, occupying a sizeable portion of it including Jannina, whose citizens submitted voluntarily. Nicholas tried to expel the Byzantines from Jannina in 1321, but was repulsed. Thus despite his claim to rule Epirus, Nicholas in fact held only southern Epirus and Acarnania. In 1321 Anna, his new wife, died. Shortly thereafter, in 1323, Nicholas was murdered by his own brother John II Orsini, who took over the rule of Epirus. He was to rule there until 1335. The Angevins, taking advantage of John’s having to devote his efforts to establishing his rule in Epirus, appropriated from the Orsinis family the Ionian islands—Cephalonia, Ithaca, and probably Zakynthos (Zacynthus, Zante)—in 1325.

Hoping to secure his position, John II Orsini came to an arrangement with Byzantium. He accepted, probably in 1328, imperial suzerainty and, on condition that he govern Epirus as an imperial estate, the emperor granted him the title despot. John had already, probably in 1324, married Anna, the daughter of Protocestiar Andronicus Palaeologus who held a Byzantine command in the north of Epirus. John also joined the Orthodox Church. The
Orsinis' willingness to adopt Orthodoxy stands in sharp contrast to the staunch Catholicism of the other Latin families ruling regions of Greece after 1204. John and Anna soon had a son, Nicephorus, and a daughter, Thomas. By the end of the 1320s John had also regained Jannina; since the town's citizens supported John, Emperor Andronicus III accepted the situation. However, to retain the empire's rights, Andronicus III depicted John as an imperial deputy for Jannina.

Soon, in 1331, John Orsini was attacked by the Angevins who were upset by their declining position in Albania and western Greece; presumably they hoped Orsini would lack support in Epirus. Philip of Taranto had granted the Angevin rights to "Romania" to his son-in-law (the husband of his and Tamara's daughter Beatrice), a second Walter of Brienne, who was the heir to the Burgundian Duchy of Athens taken over by the Catalans. In Greece, Walter still retained Argos and Nauplia, which were managed for him by vassals. Walter, visualizing a major campaign against both Epirus and Attica-Boeotia, began operations in August 1331. The Attica-Boeotian efforts were a failure. The Catalans avoided battle and the local Greeks did not support him. Running out of money, Walter was soon forced to give up his attempt to recover the Athenian duchy.

His efforts against Epirus showed more promise. He based his claims to Epirus on the Angevin rights that dated back to the marriage agreement of the 1290s between Tamara of Epirus and Philip of Taranto. Walter landed in Naupaktos, still held by the Angevins, and began negotiating alliances with various local Albanians. He then moved on to take Vonitsa, a second fortress the Angevins had received title to in 1294—and which they had actually held from at least 1306 until some time after 1314. By 1331 Orsini held it and Walter had to take it from him. Walter also took the island of Leucadia, Levkas, Santa Maura) off the coast from Vonitsa. Next Walter's armies besieged, and probably took, Arta, the capital city. Orsini, unhappy with these events, was forced briefly to accept Angevin suzerainty. And under that condition he soon recovered—if indeed he had ever lost it—Arta and whatever else in Epirus Walter had taken, excluding Leucas and Vonitsa. Walter's campaign thus petered out and soon he was back in Italy, left only with Argos, Nauplia, and his two conquests, all of which he retained under Angevin suzerainty. He appointed deputies—constables of castles—to rule these possessions. The Angevins retained Naupaktos.

Walter's cause was weakened by the death of Philip of Taranto on 26 December 1331. His widow Catherine and their son Robert received in his will title to "Romania" (the Latin Empire) and ultimate suzerainty over the Angevin possessions in Greece, including the Epirote fortresses and the principality of Achaea. Philip's brother John of Gravina, holder of Achaea under Philip's suzerainty, did not want to recognize Robert's overlordship. However, the two soon settled their differences and in 1332 John sold his rights to Achaea to Robert and Catherine and received in exchange the Angevin lands in Albania. By 1333 John was calling himself Duke of Durazzo and Lord of
the Kingdom of Albania. But he was not able to do anything about realizing his wider ambitions in Albania. In fact he probably held little more than Durazzo, whose hinterland was controlled by various Albanian tribesmen.

Meanwhile in the Latin Peloponnesus, Patras became a more-or-less autonomous city-state under its archbishop. An Italian of the Frangipani family, he seceded from Achaea, ceasing to recognize Catherine’s bailiff, and accepted papal suzerainty. The Byzantines were also continuing to expand gradually at the expense of Achaea. Thus that principality found itself shrinking. Lacking sufficient knights to defend its territory, Achaea became more and more dependent on mercenaries for its defense. This gave a greater role in Morean affairs to bankers, in particular to the Florentine banking family of Acciaiuoli, the leading bankers for the Angevin kingdom. The head of that family, Niccolo, as noted, had already acquired from John of Gravina certain fortresses and land in the Morea as security for loans. Then in 1335 Niccolo Acciaiuoli was knighted by the Angevins and given further large estates in Achaea. Through purchase he increased his holdings there still more and soon became the leading baron in Achaea, far more influential than the Angevin bailiff. His rise was facilitated by Catherine’s support. Rumor had it that Niccolo was her lover. Runciman thinks there may have been truth in the rumor; Cheetham has his doubts about it.

Catherine died in 1346. All Angevin rights in Greece went to her son Robert, who was not to reside in Achaea, but left its administration to bailiffs, who did little to improve the Angevin position there. In 1358 Niccolo Acciaiuoli was appointed governor of Corinth (including eight other dependent fortresses in its vicinity) because he could afford to repair its defenses. This he did. Soon many of his relatives arrived in Corinth, one of whom, Nerio, bought the whole coastline between Corinth and Patras. Not surprisingly, when the Latin See of Patras became vacant in 1360, Nerio’s brother Giovanni became Archbishop of Patras. When he died soon thereafter, another brother, Angelo, became bishop. When Niccolo died in about 1365, he left Corinth to his son Angelo, not to be confused with the bishop. Soon thereafter this Angelo mortgaged Corinth to Nerio, who by then had acquired vast tracts of land around Corinth. Nerio took up residence in Corinth. Though legally holding Corinth only as security for a loan, Nerio was soon for all practical purposes ruler of the town. In his lands, as in those of his other relatives, the feudal system was increasingly breaking down; for the bankers had cash to hire troops and did so. Thus they supported themselves with armies recruited for cash rather than ones based on local feudatories.

Through the 1360s into the 1370s the principality of Achaea remained under the Angevins, who administered it through bailiffs. Robert was the nominal lord until his death in 1364. His widow Mary of Bourbon then claimed the title on behalf of Hugh de Lusignan, her son by a previous marriage. She was challenged by Robert’s brother Philip. Most of the local barons supported Philip’s cause. After some skirmishing in the Morea between their partisans, Hugh was persuaded in March 1370 by a considerable
bribe to renounce his claims to the Morea. Later that year Mary died, and Philip thereafter held the title undisputed until he died in his turn in 1373.

In 1370 Philip appointed as his bailiff for the Morea Louis d’Enghien, one of several nephews of Walter II of Brienne who had inherited, upon Walter’s death in 1356, shares of or claims to various Brienne lands. Louis hoped to use his appointment to recover the most attractive part of this inheritance, the Duchy of Athens, from the Catalans. Almost immediately after his arrival, Louis attacked Attica, plundered the region, and even took the lower city of Athens. However, he soon became ill and returned in 1371 to the Morea. Louis continued on as bailiff through the 1370s but never succeeded in launching a successful campaign against Attica.

During the fourteenth century, when little or no central authority existed to defend much of Greece, large-scale migration of Albanians from the mountains of Albania occurred. This migration, particularly heavy in Epirus and Thessaly, carried them all over Greece, and many came to settle in Attica and the Peloponnesus as well.

The Byzantine Civil War between Andronicus II and Andronicus III

In 1320 Andronicus II’s son and heir, Co-emperor Michael IX, died. Michael’s son Andronicus III, was declared the new heir. Young, attractive, and popular with his grandfather, he was crowned co-emperor. He was extravagant, however, which upset the old emperor, for the times were not such as to allow extravagance. The last straw came one night when Andronicus III and his cohorts decided to eliminate a rival for a girl’s affections and by error killed Andronicus’ younger brother, who had come to the girl’s house looking for his brother. The grandfather, infuriated, excluded Andronicus III from his inheritance; his decision was made manifest when he summoned state officials and troops to take oaths to himself alone and to whomsoever he might choose as his heir.

The young heir did not take this lying down, and he had support from a variety of younger nobles who were both ambitious and opposed to the skinflint policies, as they saw them, of the old emperor. Thus in the warfare to follow the two sides were divided along clear generational lines. Two of these youthful supporters, John Cantacuzenus and Syrgiannes, bought governorships in Thrace, which shows that the sale of offices was still widespread. Finlay argues that Andronicus II was happy to appoint them to provincial posts in order to get them out of the capital, where they might have engineered a coup on behalf of his grandson. They, however, seem to have sought these posts to advance their plot, for they used them to mobilize men for a rebellion. Since the provinces were overtaxed, it was not hard for them to win support by making lavish promises of tax exemptions. One source, possibly exaggerated, has the rebel leaders promising to free all Thrace from taxes. On Easter
1321 Andronicus III came to Adrianople, where his friends and the armies they had raised were gathered. The revolt was launched immediately.

Andronicus II was at a disadvantage. It was far easier for those out of power, and seeking it, to make lavish promises. But in being responsible for the state and holding office, Andronicus II would have been expected to deliver on his promises at once. So, with the advantage of irresponsibility, the young emperor rapidly built up considerable support. However, in this phase and in subsequent phases of the civil war, both sides were forced to buy support. Thus gifts of land, conversions of normal pronoia to hereditary ones, and ever greater tax exemptions were issued widely by both sides. The magnates thus gained from the war ever increasing independence in their regions and reduced tax obligations, both of which were to weaken further the central government and the state that emerged from these wars.

Syrgiannes led a large army toward Constantinople. Andronicus II decided to negotiate, and it was agreed in July 1321 to divide the empire. Andronicus III was to receive Thrace from Selymbria, close to the capital, east to Kavalla and north to the Rhodopes. Adrianople became his capital. The young emperor poured money into his cities of Adrianople and Demotika which both prospered. To reward and retain his followers, he gave them whole towns and regions to administer, allowing them to appropriate the revenues for themselves. In theory only the grandfather, resident in Constantinople, could conduct foreign policy. Thus basically the treaty created a lucrative appanage rather than a true division of the empire into two states. However, this foreign policy restriction was not observed, and Andronicus III freely negotiated with his neighbors. Peace, however, did not last. The old emperor was still rankling at his grandson’s behavior and wanted to find a way to back out of the agreement. At the same time jealousies arose between Andronicus III’s two leading supporters, Syrgiannes and Cantacuzenus. To exacerbate the situation it also seems that Andronicus III tried to seduce Syrgiannes’ wife. When Andronicus III took Cantacuzenus’ side against Syrgiannes, the bitter Syrgiannes stormed off in December 1321 to join the old emperor in Constantinople and once there worked to stir up his anger toward his grandson.

By then Andronicus II may have been considering the appointment of his younger son Constantine as heir. At least Andronicus III, believing this to be the case, took his unfortunate uncle captive and imprisoned him for a while in a well in Demotika. Fighting followed briefly between grandson and grandfather but was to be ended in July 1322 by a new truce. When these tensions developed in 1322, the Bulgarians advanced into Thrace, taking Philippopolis. But then as noted in July the two Byzantine sides made peace, and soon thereafter, at the end of the year, Tsar George II Tertier died, setting off a succession crisis in Bulgaria. As a result the Byzantines eventually recovered the town. In 1325, after further strains in their relations, a new agreement was made in which Andronicus II confirmed his grandson’s appanage and again
recognized him as heir to the throne in a coronation ceremony that made him once again co-emperor.

The destruction caused by the fighting and in particular the further reductions in taxes through new privileges were to have disastrous effects on the economy. Moreover, while the quarrel over the succession was taking place, others took advantage of it to further their own ambitions. First, a nephew of Andronicus II, John Palaeologus, who was governor of Thessaloniki, decided to secede. His attempt gave similar ideas to two sons of Theodore Metohites, the grand logothete, who were governing Serres and Melnik respectively. These two young men for a short time also seceded. Fearing retaliation from Andronicus II, John Palaeologus turned for support to the new Serbian king Stefan Dečanski. However, before a serious war between the empire and the Serbs could develop (though a certain amount of plundering along the Struma by both John’s and Serbian troops did take place) John, having agreed to peace, died, and the empire was able to reassert its control over Thessaloniki.

The Turks, meanwhile, continued their pressure against those cities the Byzantines still retained in Anatolia, and the empire, involved with its European problems, could not effectively resist. In 1326 Bursa fell and became the new capital of the Osmanlis. Next, in 1327, warfare again broke out between Andronicus III and his grandfather. For support the old emperor turned to the Serbs. Not to be outdone, the grandson in May 1327 sought support from the Bulgarians, whose tsar, Michael Śiśman, had dropped his Serbian wife and married in 1323 or 1324 the sister of Andronicus III. Andronicus III was in possession of Byzantine Thrace before the Serbs could take the field on behalf of the old emperor. Next, after a brief military campaign in early winter 1327–28, Macedonia declared for the young emperor. Then in January 1328 Thessaloniki recognized him. He then marched on Constantinople, whose gates were opened to him in May. Andronicus II abdicated and entered a monastery. The young emperor rewarded his leading supporters liberally. The region between Thessaloniki and the Struma was assigned to one of them, Synadenos, while a Latin, Guy Lusignan, residing in Serres, was given the region east of the Struma up to the strong fortress of Kavalla to govern.

However, in the course of this last phase of the war rivalry between Serbia and Bulgaria had increased. Śiśman’s divorcing and incarcerating his sister angered Dečanski, and both rulers were ambitious for and advanced claims to Macedonia. The likelihood of war between them was increasing, and clearly Byzantium was interested in seeing what it could gain from such a war. At the inception of this rivalry Byzantium, under the victorious Andronicus III, was lined up on the Bulgarian side.

**Thessaly and Epirus under Andronicus III**

The Byzantines soon had a chance to extend their influence in Thessaly. In 1332 their nominal vassal Stephen Gavrilopoulos, who had held western Thessaly with Trikkala and part of southwestern Macedonia including Kas-
toria, died. Not only did this lead to a power vacuum there, but his heirs began quarrelling among themselves. John II Orsini of Epirus immediately stepped in and took most of Stephen’s former lands, including Stagi, Trikkala, Phanarion, Damasis, and Elasson. At once Andronicus III ordered his governor in Thessaloniki, Michael Monomachus, to intervene, and then, that fall, Andronicus III led an army into the area himself. In his history, Cantacuzenos reports that the empire extended its rule as far south as Volos on the Gulf of Volos. He also claims that this campaign expelled Orsini, restoring the old Thessaly-Epirote border, but now, with the Byzantines asserting their authority, it became the Byzantine-Epirote border. Ferjančić, however, argues that the Byzantines did not succeed in expelling Orsini but reasserted their control only over eastern Thessaly while expanding somewhat into central Thessaly. Andronicus III spent that winter, 1332–33, in Thessaly; while there he concluded agreements with the local Albanian chieftains, who lived not in towns but in the mountains, and came down into the valleys in the winter. They seem to have represented three tribes—the Malakasi, the Buji, and the Mesariti—containing twelve thousand Albanian tribesmen. Andronicus then returned to Constantinople, leaving Michael Monomachus to govern the territory the Byzantines had acquired in Thessaly as a result of their actions in 1318 and 1332. Monomachus remained in office for a decade, trying to extend Byzantine authority over a greater area and also to a greater extent over the nobles within the area that was officially Byzantine already.

Then in 1335 John II Orsini died unexpectedly (rumors had him poisoned by his wife), leaving his widow Anna regent for their young son Nicephorus II. Opposition emerged against her from the start of her regency, and Ferjančić argues that it was now that Monomachus, and once again Andronicus III himself, taking advantage of the Epirote instability, moved into western Thessaly, conquering it up to the old Epirote border. Ferjančić notes that it is only from 1336 that we have charters and privileges from Andronicus III to monasteries in the area of western Thessaly. Thus by the end of these campaigns (1332, 1335/36) the empire had gained most, if not all, of Thessaly to the Catalan and Epirote frontiers. Taking advantage of the instability in Epirus, Andronicus III was also able to regain Jannina for the empire.

After this Byzantine success, the Albanians from the regions of Valagrita and Kanina raided into northwestern Thessaly, south-central Albania, and northern Epirus. They plundered the Byzantine towns of Berat, Kanina, Skropai (Skrepacion), Klisura, and Tomor (Timoron). So, in 1337 or 1338 Andronicus led an army, composed chiefly of Turkish mercenaries from Aydin, successfully, against the Albanians, killing many and taking many others prisoner. He marched all the way to the walls of Durazzo. Next, still in 1338, Andronicus, commanding this large army just to the north of Epirus, summoned Anna of Epirus to negotiate.

Anna expected to pay homage to the emperor, recognize Byzantine suzerainty, and then continue to rule in Epirus. However, Andronicus, deciding the time was at last ripe to annex Epirus, had other plans. He used his
troops to install an imperial governor, Protostrator Synadenos, in Arta. Anna, her daughters, and Nicephorus were to be taken back to the empire and granted large estates in the vicinity of Thessaloniki. Nicephorus was then engaged to a daughter of Andronicus III’s leading counsellor John Cantacuzenus. Thus Epirus, Aetolia, and Acarnania were finally restored to the empire. Andronicus then carried out his plans, suffering only one set-back. The anti-Byzantine faction, possibly with Anna’s help, smuggled Nicephorus out of Epirus. Thus he did not accompany his mother and sister to Thessaloniki.

As a result, the transition was not to be smooth. Almost immediately, in 1339 or 1340, a revolt broke out in Epirus against imperial rule. After enjoying a long period of independence, marked by hostility toward the Byzantine Palaeologian dynasty, surely many Epirotes were unhappy with imperial annexation. At the same time the Angevins, holding titular claims to parts of Epirus which could be more easily realized at the expense of a weak independent Epirus than at that of the empire, decided to take action. Through the agency of his tutor Richard, Nicephorus had been smuggled out of Epirus and taken to Taranto. There he had been engaged to a daughter of Catherine of Valois, the “Empress of the Romans” and widow of Philip of Taranto. Through Alois Caracio, her deputy for Durazzo (did this mean the Angevins had regained Durazzo from the Serbs or did Alois merely hold an empty title?), Catherine next made contact with supporters of Nicephorus in Epirus. As a result plotters inside Epirus, led by a certain Nicephorus Basilizites, staged an uprising in the capital of Arta. Seizing and jailing Synadenos, they took control of Arta. Certain other towns, including Rogoi and the port of Thomokastron (identified by Nicol as Risa—later Riniasa—on the coast north of Preveza), recognized the rebel leaders. However, various other towns, probably the majority, seemingly troubled by the role of the Latin Angevins, remained faithful to the empire. Nicephorus, having been brought by ship from Italy to Patras, was now dispatched by a second ship to Epirus, with an Angevin regiment. He was soon established in Thomokastron. This seems to have occurred in the middle of 1339.

At the end of 1339, or possibly not until 1340, Byzantine troops under Michael Monomachus and John Angelus arrived in Epirus, followed, clearly in 1340, by Andronicus III himself. The rebel forces, believing they could best hold out inside their walled towns, avoided a pitched battle with the Byzantines. However, inside their towns pro-Byzantine factions existed; and after a matter of months through negotiations the Byzantines regained Rogoi and then, though less easily, Arta. Nicephorus, supported by an Angevin force, was then besieged in Thomokastron. The town was well supplied, and the siege continued for a time until negotiations delivered to the empire, in November 1340, that town too. Thus by the end of 1340 Byzantium had regained Epirus and Acarnania. Nicephorus, given the honorary title panipersebast (a rank slightly below that of despot), was settled in Thessaloniki. John
Angelus was appointed governor of Epirus. The rebels were pardoned and allowed to retain their possessions.

Thus after these campaigns the Byzantines had extended their control over Epirus and all Thessaly down to the Catalanian frontier. The Byzantines were also able to retain their forts in southern Albania: Berat, Valona, Kainina, and Spinarizza. However, though they were able to hold the walled towns, we may assume they had little control over the countryside which was in the hands of various Albanian tribes.

However, since throughout Thessaly the local nobles remained masters of their estates, the Byzantines were probably unable to establish an efficient military presence in that region. Thus when troops were withdrawn, matters presumably reverted to their former state, with the local nobles, on paper loyal to the empire, running their own regions independently and Byzantine suzerainty being only nominal. For example, in 1342 (granted, a moment of imperial weakness, right after the death of Andronicus III when a new civil war was breaking out) we find Michael Gavriloopoulos, a relative of Stephen, running the town of Phanarion. He issued charters to lesser local nobles in which no reference is made to the emperor in Constantinople, though the things he promised were prerogatives of the emperor. The nobles receiving charters owed Michael military service in exchange for which he promised both to reduce taxes and not to settle Albanians in the territory under his control.

The Albanians referred to in the charter were now migrating in considerable numbers into the region; and though they were good warriors, they threatened local landholding and were a force of disorder. Their raiding picked up considerably after the death of Andronicus III, who had been able to subdue some tribes and negotiate settlements with various others. In their migrations during the first half of the fourteenth century, many Albanians entered the service of local officials. Some seem to have served loyally in that capacity, being particularly effective in fighting the Catalans. The Venetian sources, on the other hand, depict all Albanians as more-or-less unruly elements out for themselves and fighting everyone in Thessaly. One suspects there is truth in both descriptions, with some tribes entering the service of local leaders and serving them loyally while others simply moved into regions to plunder or to try to establish themselves as lords of the surrounding countryside.

**Serbia in the Early Fourteenth Century**

The tensions that developed in 1299–1300 between King Milutin and Dragutin seem to have arisen over the question of the succession to the throne of Serbia. Threatened with a serious civil war in which Dragutin would have two appanages from which to raise troops, Milutin was probably more receptive to Byzantine peace feelers and thus, as noted, concluded peace in 1299 with
Byzantium. Thus freed from the danger of foreign invasion, Milutin could concentrate on the domestic problem. Ironically, peace with Byzantium seems to have lost him considerable support from the most important domestic element, the nobility, who, wanting to continue the war with Byzantium to acquire lands and booty, opposed the peace. As a result many of the nobles, according to Byzantine sources, gave their support to Dragutin, believing that he, having neither Byzantine alliance nor in-laws, would as ruler be more likely to resume the fighting in Macedonia.

However, despite their support, Dragutin almost immediately found himself faced with serious difficulties. In January 1301, upon the death of Andrew III of Hungary, the last member of the Arpad dynasty, civil war resumed in Hungary between the Angevin party supporting Charles Robert and the Hungarian opposition advancing the candidacy of Wenceslas III of Bohemia. This meant that Dragutin could not devote full attention to his Serbian war but had to concern himself also with Hungarian politics, so as not to risk losing his Hungarian lands. It also meant that should things go badly for Dragutin in Serbia, he could not count on re-enforcements from the Hungarians; they were too occupied with their own wars to spare men for Serbia. And to make matters worse for him, in 1308 or 1309, after Wenceslas and Otto of Bavaria had failed to defeat Charles Robert, Dragutin allowed the Hungarian opposition to advance his own son Vladislav as candidate for the throne against Charles Robert, whom Dragutin had supported up to this point. This last effort was a fiasco, and Charles Robert emerged victorious in 1309. As a result Dragutin found himself not only doing poorly in the last phases of his war with Milutin but also having tense relations with, and no possibilities of help from, a Hungary controlled by Charles Robert and the faction Dragutin had come to oppose.

Now let us turn to the limited information that exists on the fighting in Serbia. Dragutin in about 1300, according to Byzantine sources, was preparing to attack his brother; then the Byzantines sent aid to their new ally Milutin, and Dragutin thought better of it and did not attack. The truth of this Byzantine report is unknown. If Dragutin had actually meant to fight, could some Byzantine aid, provided at a moment of considerable Byzantine weakness, have been sufficient to deter Dragutin from carrying out his plans? Actual fighting between the brothers seems to have begun in 1301. At least in that year Dubrovnik recalled its merchants from Dragutin’s lands because of the danger of war and reported it was impossible for its merchants to cross Milutin’s lands. The latter statement implies that warfare had actually broken out in Milutin’s lands. That fighting had taken place is also suggested by the fact that in 1302 Milutin held Rudnik, the major mine that had been part of Dragutin’s Serbian appanage; for in that year Milutin gave the Ragusan merchants the right to trade at Rudnik. This town had last been documented as Dragutin’s in 1296; and 1301–02 seems the most likely time for Milutin to have taken it. Though Dubrovnik refers to peace being concluded in late 1302, it was clearly short-lived, for fighting is reported again in 1303.
The war continued for over a decade. Most scholars date its end to 1312, which is probably accurate. Mavromatis advances arguments that it actually lasted until 1314. Presumably Serbia did not endure uninterrupted warfare throughout this whole period. Undoubtedly the fighting was interrupted by various armistices, followed by temporary periods of peace. Presumably the fighting consisted chiefly of skirmishing along borders and sieges of fortresses, rather than full-scale pitched battles. Though Dragutin evidently lost Rudnik and possibly other parts of his Serbian appanage as well, there is no evidence that Milutin ever took any action against Dragutin’s Hungarian appanage further to the north.

In this warfare many (or most) of the nobles seem to have supported Dragutin. But Milutin’s great edge in the war lay in his wealth. His initial wealth came from the mines; he developed them far more extensively than his predecessors had. As a result Milutin benefited from them and the increased trade associated with them. A Western traveler says that he had seven silver mines from which he took for himself one-tenth of the produce. During his reign Novo Brdo became the richest silver mine in the Balkans. From the produce of the mines Milutin minted money on an even larger scale than his father had. His coins imitated those of the Venetians, but it seems they had a poorer silver content. Venice regularly complained about the coins, and Dante gave Milutin a place in one of the circles of Hell for his deceptive coins. But the coins were spent to advance his interests. He hired large numbers of mercenaries to balance the independent-minded nobility, and when the nobles threw their support behind Dragutin, Milutin used his mercenaries and recruited more to oppose them and carry on the war.

His wealth had also allowed him to erect many churches. One source says he vowed, and honored his vow, to build one church for each year he reigned. Not surprisingly, the Church appreciated this, so when Milutin found himself in difficulties, he enjoyed its active support; perhaps it did so particularly actively because Milutin’s opponent Dragutin had so many Catholic ties. Thus the Church, we are told, readily turned over its wealth to Milutin, who used it to purchase further mercenaries. Turkish (Oseti) mercenaries, purchased with Church money, seem to have been the key element in a major victory Milutin gained over Dragutin in about 1312, which gave him the edge in the war and enabled him to initiate peace negotiations on his own terms.

In March 1308, during his war with Dragutin, Milutin concluded a treaty with Charles of Valois. The two men also discussed a marriage between Charles’ son and Milutin’s daughter. Scholars have almost unanimously believed this indicates that Milutin had broken his agreement of 1299 with Byzantium and given his support to Charles’ anti-Byzantine coalition.

However, Mavromatis argues plausibly that such an interpretation would not be correct. He shows that Milutin’s relations with Andronicus remained cordial after March 1308. He finds that later in 1308 Andronicus gave gifts to a church in Skopje, within Milutin’s realm. Mavromatis concludes that though Milutin’s treaty with Charles was nominally against Byzantium,
Milutin did not intend it to be so. Rather it was a ploy to prevent Charles and his Western allies from supporting Milutin’s Serbian rival, as they otherwise might have done, should their forces land in the Balkans; this was a clear and present danger to Milutin, for Dragutin had close ties with the papacy and was supported by their mother, Helen, probably of the Valois family herself. Milutin was clearly worried about the West. Earlier in the course of the war, Milutin had been in touch with various other Western figures, seeking support or testing the air. Around 1304 he met Ban Paul I Šubić through the mediation of Dubrovnik. He was also in communication with the pope, holding out the hope of Church Union. And an envoy of his, the Bishop of Skadar, concluded an agreement—contents unknown—with the Angevin Philip of Taranto, who at the time was calling himself Prince of Achaea, Despot of Romania, and Lord of the Kingdom of Albania. Thus Milutin’s treaty with Charles of Valois seems to have been merely one of a series of initiatives by Milutin to prevent Western intervention in his war with Dragutin.

And small scale intervention from that direction, though reflecting local ambitions rather than support of Dragutin, did occur during the war. The activities of Paul Šubić, which we shall examine in a moment, illustrate the danger Milutin faced. Thus it was sensible of Milutin to involve himself diplomatically with these Western leaders.

Let us now turn to Šubić’s activities. In the course of the war between Milutin and Dragutin, Paul Šubić of Bribir had taken advantage of Milutin’s occupation elsewhere to expand not only into western Hum but also beyond the Neretva to take the region toward Nevesinje and also territory toward Ston. Soon, by 1312/13, “Hum” was added to the title of Mladen II Šubić, who succeeded Paul in 1312. At least part of Paul’s conquests were granted to his vassal Constantine Nelipčić. In 1313 Milutin, supported by Dragutin with whom he had concluded peace in 1312, went to war against the Šubić family. In the war that followed Milutin took one of Mladen’s brothers captive; to get him back Mladen had to agree to restore part of Hum to Milutin. One might speculate that after this agreement in 1313 the Neretva again became the border between Serbian and western (now Šubić) Hum.

Peace between the Serbian brothers was concluded, almost certainly in 1312, after Milutin’s mercenaries won a major battle over Dragutin’s forces. The Church seems to have played a role in mediating the peace. The text of their agreement, if it was written down, has not survived. Thus its terms are unknown. It seems reasonable to believe that matters reverted to their pre-war state. Dragutin seems to have regained his Serbian appanage, for by the end of 1312 he is again found holding Rudnik.

Though Dragutin received his territory back, the war represented a major victory for Milutin. To demonstrate this conclusion Mavromatis cites the elaborate reception given to Milutin’s wife Simonida at Dragutin’s court in Beograd, where Hungarian ambassadors came to visit her and behaved toward her as they would have had she been at her own court. Their behavior, of course, may also have been intended as a slap at Dragutin by the victorious
Hungarian king, Charles Robert, who probably had little affection for Dragu-
tin. Mavromatis also draws attention to a charter to the Banjska monastery
signed by both rulers: Milutin as King and Master of the Serbian Lands and
Dragutin as the king’s brother and former king. Thus Milutin remained King
of Serbia, with Dragutin subordinate to him for those Serbian lands he held
and clearly the weaker militarily. There is no evidence that Dragutin’s son
Vladislav was considered heir to the throne any longer, if he had ever really
been so previously. But there is also no evidence that Stefan Dečanski was
considered the heir either. In fact, there is no evidence that Dečanski was ever
declared Milutin’s heir. Even when he held Zeta—be it from ca. 1299 or from
1309 (when we can first document him there)—no document calls him heir
and he seems to have borne no special title. Ragusan records of the town’s
dealings with him in Zeta, which show him as ruling Zeta between 1309 and
1314, simply refer to Dečanski as the king’s son.

Milutin also maintained his good relations with Byzantium, despite his
treaty with Charles of Valois and despite a small border dispute in 1311/12,
for in 1312 or 1313 Milutin sent a cavalry unit of two thousand men to aid
Andronicus in Anatolia against the Turks.

After the conclusion of peace between them, relations remained tense
between the two brothers. When their mother, Helen, died on 8 February
1314 Dragutin, though close to her, did not attend the funeral. Scholars have
suspected he did not dare come to the funeral lest he be seized. At that time
Dragutin was found witnessing a charter for the King of Hungary; thus he
probably was also trying to patch up relations with the new dynasty there. It
seems he was successful in this, for Dragutin still held his Hungarian ap-
panage when he died in 1316. Upon Helen’s death Milutin absorbed her
appanage, which included Trebinje, Konavli, further coastal territory, and
probably the region of the upper Lim.

In 1314 Stefan Dečanski, still holding his appanage in Zeta, revolted
against Milutin. He seems to have been pushed into the rebellion by his nobles
there. According to Danilo, who may have been trying to take the blame away
from the young prince, the nobles had told Dečanski that if he did not revolt
they would desert him. Thus persuaded, he launched his rebellion. It is also
possible that he revolted to force Milutin to make him heir. For it seems
Milutin had as yet made no statement of his intention that Dečanski should
succeed to the throne. Milutin’s charters from this time state that the grants he
made were binding on him and his sons and other relatives, as if no definite
heir had been decided upon. Danilo then tells us that many of his father’s
nobles joined Dečanski’s side. Possibly these included some of those who had
supported Dragutin in the previous war and who were still seeking a ruler
who would adopt the policy they desired of making war on Byzantium.

Milutin sent troops out against his son; they won a victory, forcing
Stefan to retreat beyond the Bojana River. Stefan then agreed to meet with his
father, came to the meeting, and was taken prisoner. Soon thereafter, accord-
ing to Serbian sources, Milutin had his son blinded. In keeping with Byzan-
tine custom, this rendered the mutilated individual ineligible for the throne. Dečanski was then exiled to Constantinople with his family, including his son, the future ruler Stefan Dušan, who was then about seven years old. Dečanski and his family were allowed to return only in 1320. Whether he was actually blinded or not is a question we shall examine later; it may be noted here, however, that the Byzantine sources that comment on his stay in Constantinople make no reference to his being blind. The choice of Constantinople as his place of exile shows the continuing good relations between the two states and the fact that Milutin could trust the Byzantine emperor both to guard the royal captives well and not to use them to cause trouble for Serbia. In this way Dečanski and his family were kept away from any Serbian nobles who might have tried to use them for their own purposes.

Even after Dečanski’s exile, Milutin made no statement about the succession. Dečanski, disgraced and perhaps blinded, was presumably out of the running as far as Milutin was concerned, and it is highly unlikely that Milutin would have been favorable toward Dragutin’s son Vladislav. This left as the most likely candidate Milutin’s younger son Constantine. At some time after Dečanski’s removal in 1314, Milutin had assigned to Constantine Zeta and the coast, including Kotor. When he made this assignment is not known. In 1318 reference is made to a certain Ilija as Count of Zeta. Did Zeta in this case refer to the whole region, meaning Ilija was its holder? Or was Ilija count of the original, and smaller, Zeta county within the greater region of Zeta? The latter leaves open the possibility that in 1318 Constantine was present there, ruling the whole region and standing above Ilija who governed only a county within it. The second alternative is supported by a reference from 1321 to “Ylia kefalia.” Assuming Ylia is our Ilija, then we find him called by the Greek equivalent of župan, which usually denoted the holder of a smaller county or župa. Moreover a kephale in Byzantium, and later in Serbia, was usually the head of a town—who generally administered the town’s environs too—who was appointed by the ruler to represent him locally; he was a semi-military figure who was responsible for keeping order, managed the local garrison, and put down brigands. Thus Ilija’s presence does not contradict the view that Constantine was assigned Zeta. For the two men could easily have co-existed in Zeta, with Constantine being Ilija’s superior. Thus from whenever he received Zeta it seems probable that Constantine was Milutin’s heir.

However, despite this likelihood, Milutin made no known statement as to Constantine’s succession and took no steps to assure that succession. In fact Milutin was to die without a testament. This situation encouraged the Byzantine empress to seek the succession for one of her sons. Milutin seems to have done nothing to discourage her, though it is hardly likely that he thought well of the idea. One Byzantine prince actually visited Serbia but disliked it and left; thus the plan died a natural death, without Milutin’s having to do anything to kill it.

In 1316 Dragutin died. He seems to have become very religious in his last years; we are told that to prepare himself for death he regularly slept in a
coffin. He became a monk shortly before he died. Possibly he undertook this change of status only on his death-bed.

Dragutin, despite his Catholic ties and the privileges he allowed to Catholics in his Mačva banate, had himself remained faithful to the Serbian Church. He built Orthodox churches in Mačva and encouraged the Serbian clergy to proselytize there. He also allowed the Serbian Church to establish bishoprics in Mačva and Braničevo. Thus throughout his realm, in both his Serbian and Hungarian appanages, the Serbian Church was active; its clergy under the Archbishop of Serbia belonged to the same institution as the Serbs of Milutin’s state. The Serbian Church, as already noted, thrived under Milutin. Receiving rich gifts of cash and lands from the king, its material status greatly improved. It expanded its activities not only northward up to the Danube, under Dragutin’s sponsorship, but it also penetrated southward into the Macedonian lands that Milutin had annexed. Serbian bishops, under the Serbian archbishop, were installed in Skopje and Debar in Macedonia.

Upon his father’s death Vladislav inherited his father’s Serbian appanage. With the consent of the Hungarian king he also inherited Dragutin’s Hungarian appanage. Immediately, however, in 1316 or 1317, Milutin took Vladislav captive and imprisoned him. How this capture was effected is not stated in the sources. Scholars have suggested he was seized at Dragutin’s funeral, for Dragutin was buried back in Serbia at a monastery church in Ras. Then, without Vladislav to oppose him, Milutin seized and added to his own state Dragutin’s Serbian lands.

Despite Hungary’s title to Dragutin’s territory in Mačva and its claim to Braničevo (which Bulgaria would have disputed), Milutin was determined to strike fast and add this territory to his own realm. He quickly occupied these lands in 1316 or 1317 and continued on an even larger scale Dragutin’s policy of installing Serbian clergy in the towns there. Charles Robert, however, had no desire to permit this situation to stand; so having built up his forces, he commanded an assault that recovered Mačva for Hungary; this campaign, usually dated early to mid-1319, is now re-dated by Čirković to winter 1317–18. Charles Robert then returned to Hungary with the bulk of his forces.

Milutin counterattacked, sending his troops to overrun the territory all the way up to the Sava. During August and September 1319 Charles Robert was back in full force and regained the Mačva-Srem territory for Hungary. The Hungarian king then re-established Mačva as a banate under a Hungarian appointee. And it seems that by the end of 1319, as a result of one of these two campaigns, the Hungarians had regained Beograd. However, Milutin was able to retain the province of Braničevo which, though formerly Hungarian, had for a long time been separated from Hungary, ever since it was conquered jointly by Dragutin and Milutin in about 1291. And thus Serbia remained extended to the Danube and bordering on Vidin, which still remained a Serbian client state. In fact Vidin’s dependence on Serbia had greatly increased after 1299, when the Nogajjs had been destroyed, leaving Šišman in Vidin with no other power to balance Serbian influence.
During his war with Milutin over Dragutin’s northern lands, Charles Robert also tried to weaken Milutin by stirring up trouble elsewhere in his realm. It seems that he, his Angevin relative Philip of Taranto, and Pope John XXII all tried to incite various northern Albanian nobles to revolt against Milutin.\textsuperscript{10} Serbia’s expansion in the Albanian region seems to have been halted after the 1299 treaty with the Byzantines. At the time of the treaty Milutin had probably yielded Durazzo to Byzantium, which soon lost it to the Angevins. However, though it is not clear how much of the northern Albanian lands Milutin had been able to retain by the 1299 agreement, it seems reasonable to suppose he held the territory at least as far south as the Mati River. Thus he probably held lands the Angevins felt belonged to Durazzo, which would have been reason for Philip to seek an Albanian revolt against Milutin in 1318–19. And in 1318 or 1319 various nobles in Milutin’s northern Albanian lands did revolt. However, there is no evidence that this unrest was the result of Charles Robert’s agitation. In fact, the Albanians probably acted in their own interests. Moreover in that same year, 1319, the citizens of Durazzo staged a revolt against the Angevins. And Ducellier even argues that the rebels, who seem to have been Orthodox, submitted to Milutin. The Angevins eventually, probably in 1322, suppressed the revolt and regained control of the city. Since Dečanski is to be found holding for Serbia territory in Albania at least to the mouth of the Mati River in 1233, we may assume Milutin put down his Albanian rebels as well. If, in fact, Milutin did acquire control of—or suzerainty over—Durazzo in 1319, as Ducellier believes, we may conclude Milutin had suppressed his Albanian rebels rapidly and without much difficulty.

Disorders continued in his realm until Milutin was taken ill in 1321. He had fallen from a bed, lost the power to talk, and then lingered on a while until he died intestate on 29 October 1321. One may suppose from the description that he had had a stroke. At that time sources mention that bands of roving armed men were plaguing Serbia. Shortly before Milutin’s illness and death, probably in 1320, Stefan Dečanski had been allowed to return home to Serbia. The Continuator of Danilo states that Dečanski had written Danilo to intervene with his father. Danilo, the great biographer, had been appointed Bishop of Hum in 1317 but had quickly become disenchanted over the see’s poverty and had returned to Mount Athos to become abbot of Hilendar. Danilo, having received Dečanski’s letter on Athos, wrote Archbishop Nicodemus of Serbia who spoke with Milutin and persuaded him to recall his son. Dečanski’s other—and later—biographer, Gregory Camblak, a Bulgarian who became abbot of Dečanski’s endowment Visoki Dečani some seventy years after Dečanski’s death, credits the mediation not to Serbian clerics but to letters to Milutin from Emperor Andronicus II and some Byzantine clerics. On his return, Dečanski was given a small appanage, Budimlje (the region around modern Ivangrad). Dečanski’s son Stefan Dušan was not allowed to accompany his father to Budimlje but had to remain at court with his grandfather.
Upon Milutin’s death at the end of October 1321 civil war immediately erupted among his sons (Đečanski, who still held Budimlje, and Constantine, who had Zeta) and his nephew Vladislav, who had escaped from prison, presumably released by supporters in the confusion at Milutin’s death. Each of the three had his own supporters and each acquired mercenaries who were willing to serve the highest bidder. Milutin’s widow, Simonida, immediately fled to Constantinople. She had had no children by Milutin and clearly had been unhappy in Serbia. Once previously, when she had returned to Constantinople for her mother’s funeral, she had tried to become a nun so she would not have to return to Serbia; her father, responding to Milutin’s insistence, had, however, sent her back by force. Now in 1321 there was nothing to prevent her from realizing her ambition to enter a convent, and she thus did so.

Constantine was probably Milutin’s intended heir. Though no formal statement to this effect had been made, the fresco depicting the Nemanjić family tree at Gračanica, carried out under Milutin’s direction when Đečanski was in Constantinople, depicts Constantine alone after Milutin. He was proclaimed king in Zeta immediately and started coining money in Skadar. Freed from jail, Vladislav established himself with an army in some part of Dragutin’s former lands in the north. And Đečanski, claiming, “Look and be amazed, I was blind and now I see,” became the third claimant. The miracle of his regained sight is described in his saint’s life written nearly a century after his death by Gregory Camblak. A hostile source, Guy Adam, Archbishop of Bar, writing in the 1330s, claims that he had not been totally blinded but had hidden the fact he could see until then. Danilo also says the blinding was not total, and therefore he always could see a little. Interestingly, as noted, no Byzantine source mentioning his exile in Constantinople comments on his being blind. The Church supported Đečanski and, according to Church sources, the population flocked to him owing to the miracle, which, of course, was seen as a sign of God’s favor as well as of his renewed eligibility for the throne. On 6 January 1322 the Archbishop of Serbia, Nicodemus, crowned him king and his son Stefan Dušan, “young king.” This is the first coronation for a “young king” (Mladi kralj) in Serbian history. Was it done to create a co-ruler owing to Đečanski’s blindness? For Constantine had been claiming, in keeping with the Byzantine custom, that the blind had no right to rule. Or was that coronation an attempt to assure Dušan’s subsequent succession?

According to the later saint’s life of Đečanski written by Camblak, Constantine’s uprising broke out only after Đečanski’s coronation and after Constantine had refused Đečanski’s offer of the second position in the state and a large appanage. This version is probably a considerable distortion of reality. Since Constantine probably was the intended heir, he almost certainly asserted his claim from the moment he learned of Milutin’s death. He would have delayed action until after 6 January 1322 only if news of Milutin’s death had been successfully kept from him, which is not an impossibility.
Debeški really offered to split the realm is unknown. If he felt his position was weak, he might have done so. Otherwise it may be a fiction invented by his clerical biographer to show Dečanski's generosity and to provide a moral tale showing how the greedy, in this case Constantine in turning down the offer, came to a bad end. In any event, warfare followed Constantine's refusal to submit to Dečanski. Dečanski's troops invaded Zeta, and in the ensuing battle Constantine was defeated and killed. According to the hostile Guy Adam, Dečanski had the captured Constantine nailed through the hands and feet to a board and then had him chopped through the middle. After the victory, Zeta was granted to Dušan as an appanage. In this case the assignment clearly indicated that Dušan was Dečanski's intended heir.

Vladislav, still at large and having mobilized local support, presumably in the north from the nobles of Dragutin's former Serbian appanage around Rudnik, called himself king, issued charters, and coined money. He also seems to have received support from the Hungarians and from Ban Stjepan Kotromanić of Bosnia, though it is not clear if the latter ever provided any concrete aid. Vladislav consolidated his control over his lands and prepared to do battle with Dečanski. Thus, as in the days of Dragutin and Milutin, Serbia was again divided between two independent rulers, each of whom controlled the region that his father had previously held. In 1322 and 1323 Ragusan merchants freely visited the lands of both rulers for commercial activities.

In 1323 war broke out between the two cousins. In the fall of 1323 Vladislav still held Rudnik, for Dubrovnik sent gifts to him there. By the end of 1323 the market of Rudnik was administered by officials of Dečanski, and Vladislav himself seems to have fled north. However, some of Vladislav's supporters from Rudnik, seemingly commanded by a leading Ragusan merchant named Menčet Menčetić, had retreated to the near-by fortress of Ostrovica, where they resisted the troops of Dečanski. Dečanski sent envoys to Dubrovnik to protest this Ragusan's support of his enemy. Dubrovnik rejected Dečanski's protest, claiming that neither the town nor its merchant was holding the fortress of Ostrovica but that a group of Serbs held it; furthermore, the Ragusan merchant had fled to Ostrovica in fear of his life. This answer did not satisfy Dečanski, and early in 1324 he rounded up all the Ragusan merchants he could find in Serbia, confiscated their property, and held them captive. Dubrovnik forbade any other merchants to enter Serbia. By the end of the year, after Ostrovica (which seems to have been Vladislav's last fortress in Serbia) had been surrendered to him, Dečanski repented and released the captive Ragusan merchants and restored their property to them. Thus Dečanski took control of what had been Dragutin's Serbian appanage. Tensions between Serbia and Dubrovnik continued, however, for Dečanski's vassal Vojvoda Vojin of Gacko plundered Dubrovnik's territory in August 1325. As a result and in response to a Ragusan appeal, Dubrovnik's overlord Venice also banned trade with Serbia. But peace soon followed. On 25 March 1326 Dubrovnik received a new charter from Stefan Dečanski that reaffirmed all the privileges the town had enjoyed under Milutin. Trouble, as we shall see,
erupted almost at once again, later in 1326, when Dubrovnik and Bosnia took action against a family of Dečanski’s vassals, the Branivojević, who had been plundering the town’s caravans. However, we shall turn to that event later.

In the warfare between the two claimants for the throne, however, Vladislav was defeated, probably late in 1324, and fled to Hungary where he eventually died. In the course of their warfare, Dečanski seems to have invaded lands far to the northwest of Serbia. In July 1323 he had added “Bosnia and Usora” to his title and then in the spring of 1324 “Soli” (the region of modern Tuzla), suggesting he had occupied these regions. He was not able to consolidate his rule here, and within a year these territories were under the Ban of Bosnia, presumably because the local nobles preferred the ban over Dečanski as their overlord.

The fate of the disputed territory of Mačva during these years is obscure. The traditional view, that of V. Klaic, holds that after Charles Robert conquered Mačva in 1319 the Hungarians retained the territory for the duration of the Serbian civil war and Dečanski’s reign. Paul Garai was appointed Ban of Mačva in 1320. Klaic, allowing no role in the region at any time for Dragutin’s son Vladislav, believes Garai remained the Ban of Mačva straight through until 1328. He also finds no evidence that Mačva was involved in any of the Serbian dynastic warfare or that Dečanski ever gained control of it. He sees Dušan’s counterattack in 1335, to be discussed below, as the first challenge to Hungary’s control of Mačva. Recently, however, Ćirković, by redating certain undated references in various Hungarian charters, has presented a new interpretation: He believes that Garai’s governorship was short and that Charles Robert awarded Mačva to Vladislav by the end of 1321. Thus at that time Vladislav found himself in possession of both appanages that belonged to his father, Dragutin, with the possible exception of Braničevo, whose holder in the early stages of the Serbian civil war is simply unknown. Thus, when Dečanski defeated Vladislav and pursued him into northern Bosnia (Soli and Usora), Ćirković believes, he did so after annexing Mačva. This annexation presumably occurred in about 1324. One may assume, however, that in taking Mačva, Dečanski did not acquire the strongly fortified city of Beograd. It seems, however, that Dečanski did not long retain Mačva. A Hungarian campaign against Serbia occurred, probably in 1329, that penetrated to the Obona (the Ub) River. Assuming the Hungarians retained what they occupied, we may conclude that the Hungarians reacquired Mačva by this campaign.11

By the spring of 1323, after his victory over Constantine, Dečanski also held most of northern Albania and the coast of Zeta, for he then informed Dubrovnik he would be visiting Bar, Ulcinj, and possibly the land at the mouth of the Mati River. His success in Zeta may have been partly owing to Župan or Kefalia Ilija. That Ilija supported Dečanski is suggested by the fact that Dečanski used him as an envoy to Dubrovnik in August 1322.

Dečanski, therefore, by 1325 had finally established his rule in Serbia.
However, taking advantage of Serbia’s internal difficulties after Milutin’s death and Dečanski’s involvement in them, Hum and Vidin were able to assert their independence from Serbia.

Serbia Loses its Part of Hum

During the civil war after Milutin’s death many Serbian nobles had taken sides, presumably usually doing so to better their own local authority and increase their own landholding. Not surprisingly, even after the war was over the squabbling among various Serbian nobles continued. This situation seems to have been particularly intense in Hum. By 1325 the Branivojević family had emerged as strongest in Hum. After the death of Milutin the Branivojevići (the four sons of a nobleman named Branivoj), based on the lower Neretva and holding Pelješac (Stonski Rat) with a major court in Ston, had asserted their authority over a large number of other nobles in Hum. Though the Branivojevići had taken advantage of Serbia’s difficulties to assert considerable independence for themselves, on the whole they were willing to call themselves vassals and supporters of Serbia. Their unlicensed behavior, particularly in plundering caravans, had become a thorn in the side of the merchants of Dubrovnik, and not surprisingly, by their land-grabbing behavior, they had stirred up considerable opposition among other nobles in Hum. Orbini claims that by force the Branivojevići had ended up with most of Hum from the Cetina River to Kotor. Thus they had also been asserting their control over much or most of western Hum. They also, Orbini claims, had forced vassalage upon the former ruling family of Hum, represented by Peter, the son of Andrew of Hum, and Peter’s sons Toljen and Nicholas (Nikola), who held Popovo Polje and the coastal lands bordering on Popovo Polje. And though nominal vassals of Serbia, Orbini states, the Branivojevići had treated Serbian interests very cavalierly. They had attacked the Serbian župan, Crep, the king’s deputy for Trebinje and Gacko, and, having defeated Crep, had killed him and annexed his lands. This action seems to have occurred in, or just before, 1322, because Crep is referred to in Ragusan documents from 1319 and 1321 as alive and active and from 1322 as being deceased.

In 1326 some of these dispossessed and angry Hum nobles turned against Serbia. For though now, after his victory, Dečanski was in a position to take action in Hum, he had done nothing about it; thus the frustrated nobles viewed his failure to act as support of the Branivojevići. These alienated nobles then approached the other strong ruler in the area, Stjepan Kotromanić, the Ban of Bosnia, who in the preceding years had asserted his firm control over the Bosnian lands and made Bosnia into a strong state. Allying himself to various families of Hum and to Dubrovnik, the ban intervened in Hum, dispatching two armies thither and annexing most of it. Orbini states that two of the Branivojevići brothers were killed in the fighting. Recent research has securely dated this campaign of annexation to April–June 1326. Bosnia acquired considerably more territory than the Branivojevići holdings, because the Branivo-
jević's opponents, who supported the ban in this campaign, submitted to him in the course of it as did various other nobles of Hum who had grasped what the new balance of power in the area was to be.

Relations between Bosnia and Serbia were extremely tense in the years that followed. Certain members of the Branivojević family, including Branoje, fled to Serbia to seek aid and the release of their captured brethren, who were languishing in a Ragusan jail where unfed, at least one, Brajko Branivojević, died of starvation. Dečanski, however, trying to establish his authority at home and more concerned with the growing power of Bulgaria to his east and with the Byzantine civil war, took no action other than to make an appeal to Dubrovnik that procured the release of Brajko's wife, the daughter of Vojin of Gacko, one of his vassals. In fact it even seems that Dečanski abandoned Branoje who had fled to his court. For through bribes Dubrovnik persuaded the Serbs to arrest him and jail him in near-by Kotor, far from his supporters who might have been able to release him. There in the fall of 1326 the Ragusans succeeded in having him "die." Though presumably Dečanski was unhappy about the loss of Hum, he probably had little affection for the Branivojević. When Branoje fled to him, seeking troops to fight the Bosnian ban whose soldiers had killed two of his brothers, he emphasized to Dečanski that the lost land was Serbia's by right and he offered to submit to Dečanski once he regained it. Dečanski, however, according to Orbini, in response simply pointed out Branoje's past sins, his failure to behave as a vassal should when he had held Hum before, and cited in particular his killing of Crep. And then he had Branoje jailed in Kotor. Presumably Dečanski had taken no action against the Bosnians because he had judged his own strength insufficient to best them.

The elimination of the Branivojević permitted the Draživojević of Nevesinje, who by the 1330s were clearly vassals of the Bosnian ban, to become the leading family of Hum. They rapidly expanded their holding to the coast. We know of no actual fighting between Serbia and Bosnia after Bosnia's annexation of Hum, though a reference to an attack on the Saint Nicholas monastery in Dabar on the Lim in Serbia suggests there may have been some minor action. Possibly Bosnia had tried to extend its authority to the Lim. If Bosnia had had such an intention, it was not to be realized at this time. The eastern parts of what is now Herzegovina, including the region of the upper Drina and Lim rivers as well as Gacko, held by Dečanski's loyal vassal Vojvoda Vojin, and the territory bordering on Zeta all remained under the Serbian state, which thus still reached all the way to the Adriatic in southern Dalmatia.

At this time, not surprisingly, relations deteriorated once again between Serbia and Bosnia's ally Dubrovnik. For Dubrovnik not only had participated in the war but also had tried to annex the Branivojević's coastal holdings, which included Ston and the Pelješac peninsula. Serbia did not want to recognize the loss of this territory and diplomatic negotiations followed. Dubrovnik hoped to maintain the privileges granted to it by Dečanski's March 1326
charter, but Dečanski now demanded a huge new tribute, more or less as rent for this newly taken territory. Dubrovnik, though objecting to this suggestion, tried to keep relations cordial and sent doctors to Dečanski when he needed medical help in 1326. Matters took a turn for the better and then for the worse in 1327 when for an alleged commercial violation Dubrovnik seized a ship belonging to its commercial rival Kotor, a town under Serbian suzerainty. Kotor demanded large damages which Dubrovnik refused. War followed between Serbia and Dubrovnik lasting from summer 1327 to early fall 1328. Its course and the contents of the agreement that ended it are unknown, though by October 1328 relations appear normal again. However, Dečanski still refused to recognize Dubrovnik’s rule over Pelješac and Ston. It is also not clear which state or states held Ston and Pelješac between 1326 and 1333. But finally in 1333 the new King of Serbia, Stefan Dušan, concluding that Macedonia was of higher priority than these western lands, sold Pelješac and Ston to Dubrovnik for cash and an annual tribute.

Vidin in the First Quarter of the Fourteenth Century

The second region to loosen its ties to Serbia was Vidin. By 1313 Šišman of Vidin had died and was succeeded by his son Michael Šišman. Michael enjoyed good relations with the Serbs, having married Milutin’s daughter (and Dečanski’s sister) Anna. It seems he was also to a degree dependent on the Serbs, whose protection may have prevented Vidin from being conquered and annexed by the increasingly strong and ambitious Theodore Svetoslav. However, this dependence on Serbia probably ranked with Michael to some extent. To obtain more independence Michael Šišman appears to have tried to steer a middle course between his Serbian and Bulgarian neighbors. He seems to have been fairly successful at this. At least a Venetian source from about 1313 refers to Michael as Despot of Bulgaria and Lord of Vidin. This title was clearly derived from the Bulgarian tsar. For only a tsar (emperor) could have granted this title, and the Venetians make the Bulgarian origin explicit by saying he was a “Bulgarian” despot. To have been granted this honor suggests that Michael must have established good relations with Tarnovo. Thus he seems to have succeeded in steering the middle course upon which Vidin’s independence hinged. He also seems to have been able to maintain good relations with his Serbian overlord Milutin without being obliged to fight for him. For there is no evidence that Michael participated in any of the warfare over Mačva between Milutin and Charles Robert of Hungary. However, Serbia still benefited, for Vidin’s neutrality at least protected the eastern border of Serbia’s province of Braničevo from Hungarian or Bulgarian attack.

Then Milutin died, and chaos followed in Serbia making it impossible for the Serbs to interfere in any way in Vidin’s affairs. Though a much later Serbian source, the Tronoški Chronicle, says Michael and Byzantium supported Constantine in the Serbian civil war, Nikov doubts its statement is accurate. This late chronicle is frequently unreliable. No other source sug-
gests Vidin played any role in the war at all. There is also no evidence that Byzantium involved itself in the Serb struggle. Furthermore, other than sympathy for Constantine, which Michael may or may not have felt, how could Michael in Vidin, northeast of Serbia, have supported Constantine, whose activities took place in far away Zeta? Thus Nikov rejects the story completely and believes that Michael played no part in the war at all. Michael, however, was able to take advantage of Serbia’s inability to intervene in his affairs to establish closer relations with Bulgaria (Tnovo). In fact he was now able to take an active role in Bulgarian councils and in the politics of the Tnovo state. In this way he became a leading actor in these internal affairs and, as a powerful boyar with a huge appanage, a man for the Tnovo boyars to look up to.

Bulgaria in the 1320s

Meanwhile Theodore Svetoslav died in the fall of 1322 and his son and successor George II Terter died late in 1322; as a result the Terter line died out. Skirmishes had taken place throughout 1322 between Bytantium and Bulgaria. Then during the interregnum after George II Terter’s death Bytantium obtained by voluntary local submission a long strip of Bulgaria’s southern territory between Sliven and Mesembria. The fact that much of this region’s populace was Greek probably contributed to this submission. Philippopolis, just regained for Bulgaria by George II Terter, now, after his death, found itself besieged by Byzantine troops. Faced with this major threat from Byzantium, the boyars, some of whom had lands in the lost or threatened territory, turned to the strongest local figure they could find. Between the end of 1322 and June 1323 they elected as Tsar of Bulgaria Michael Šišman of Vidin. Michael’s election united the two parts of Bulgaria into one state again. The Šišman dynasty was to rule Bulgaria until the Ottoman conquest.

Presumably the closer ties Michael had forged with Tnovo as a result of the freedom of action given him by the Serbian civil war contributed to his election. Serbia’s involvement in its civil war also made it easier for Vidin to merge with Bulgaria. A healthy Milutin, still in power, might well have taken steps to prevent this union in order to preserve his influence in Vidin, cover the eastern approaches to his Braničevo, and prevent the strengthening of Bulgaria that was to occur when its size was increased by a third. After the unification, Michael’s half-brother Belaur became governor of Vidin. He bore the title despot. Whether he ran it as an appanage or tried to bring about more integration between it and the rest of the state is unknown.

Michael immediately went to war against Byzantium, broke the siege of Philippopolis, and won back the lost southern territory, much of which had been ceded by the Byzantines to Smilce’s disgruntled brother Vojsil, who was allied to Byzantium. A subsequent Byzantine attack obtained Philippopolis again for the empire.

Negotiations followed in 1323 or 1324 between Michael and the empire.
Michael agreed to divorce his Serbian wife, who along with their son John Stefan (who had been his co-ruler and heir but now was deprived of his rights) was imprisoned, and to marry Theodora, widow of Theodore Svetoslav and sister of Andronicus III of Byzantium. This agreement did not put an end to mutual raiding. In 1324 the Bulgarians raided the Berroia area and the Byzantines soon thereafter retaliated with an incursion into Bulgaria. Peace was renegotiated, probably in 1326, between Bulgaria and Andronicus III which remained in force until 1330. For most of the Byzantine civil war between Andronicus II and Andronicus III, discussed earlier, Michael supported Andronicus III, who eventually obtained Constantinople and became sole emperor in 1328. The Serbian civil war made it easier for Michael to divorce Anna and conclude this convenient treaty with Byzantium. Fighting Vladislav, Dečanski was in no position to make an effective protest. Possibly Michael’s divorcing Dečanski’s sister was the basis for the chronicle story that Michael was at this time opposed to Dečanski. Michael’s subsequent behavior would certainly re-enforce this view.

In any case, Michael’s relations with Serbia had deteriorated from the time of Milutin’s death. His assertion of greater independence and union with Trnovo could not have pleased any Serbs. And should the Tronoški Chronicle be correct when it claims Michael supported Constantine against Dečanski, this would have been one further annoyance. Michael’s divorcing and incarcerating Dečanski’s sister did little to improve matters. Nor did Bulgaria’s support of Andronicus III help their relations, for Serbia, with long ties to the elderly Andronicus II, father of Milutin’s wife Simonida, supported him.

**Serbia, Bulgaria, and Byzantium, 1324–32**

In his relations with Byzantium, though Dečanski more often supported Andronicus II than otherwise, his policy certainly was not to be completely consistent. The Serbs throughout sought at any given moment the policy that would best serve their own interests. The inconsistency seen in Dečanski’s sporadic desertions of his ally Andronicus II may also have reflected a struggle inside Serbia between Dečanski, probably more faithful to Andronicus II, and the nobility seeking any excuse to move south into Macedonia. In any case, Serbia’s ties with Andronicus II were temporarily tightened when Dečanski, a widower, married, probably late in 1324, Maria Palaeologina, a cousin of Andronicus II. She was the daughter of Andronicus’ nephew John. This marriage alliance soon pulled Dečanski to a third Byzantine side when his wife’s father, John Palaeologus, governor of Thessaloniki, tried to separate his city and its territory from Byzantium in 1325. He sought and received Dečanski’s support. His troops, supported by Serb units, ravaged along the Struma River in 1326. Serres seems to have been surrendered to them. It appears that John gained little, however, probably owing to a lack of local support; he soon agreed to peace with Andronicus II. Then early in 1327 John died at the Serbian court. Andronicus II, fearing new hostilities with his
grandson, renegotiated peace with Dečanski, while Andronicus III tightened his alliance with Michael of Bulgaria.

When war between the two emperors broke out again, Andronicus II called on the Serbs for help. But Serbia, though it mobilized twelve divisions at the time, took no action. Its inactivity probably facilitated Andronicus III’s final triumph in 1328. For in the last phase of the war, as Andronicus III marched through Byzantine Macedonia obtaining the surrender of fortresses held by his grandfather, Serb units were present in the area but avoided battle. The Serbs, making no attempt to defend it, even yielded Serres to Andronicus III’s troops immediately when they appeared at its gates. Possibly by then the Serbs were certain that Andronicus III would triumph and did not want to antagonize him further by opposing him in what seemed a lost cause. And possibly the Serbs were holding back their troops for other purposes, such as fighting the war with Dubrovnik, then going on, or guarding their borders against a possible Bulgarian attack. In any case, it seems the Serbs did acquire Prosek for themselves during this last phase of the Byzantine civil war. Malović argues that they may well have also acquired Veles, Crešeće, and Dobrun at this time. However, the Life of Dečanski says these three towns were obtained following the Battle of Velbužd in 1330. In any case, whenever the Serbs acquired them, the possession of these towns opened the routes toward three key Byzantine cities: Thessaloniki, Strumica, and Bitola.

But as Dečanski emerged as sole ruler he found himself faced with a stronger Bulgaria under Michael Šišman, whose ambitions in Macedonia clashed with those of the Serbian nobility. Their rivalry was also exacerbated by the fact that for much of the Byzantine civil war the two states had been lined up on opposite sides. A clash between them loomed. Andronicus III also had no reason to appreciate the Serbs who, until the end, had opposed him. He feared the Serbs as a threat to his Macedonia and saw them as a more dangerous one than Bulgaria. Thus after his triumph in 1328 he was willing to retain his Bulgarian alliance as a defense against Serbia. He and Bulgaria reaffirmed their alliance in October 1328.

Serbia meanwhile sent troops into western Macedonia, plundering the region around Ohrid in 1329. The Serbs also besieged without success Ohrid itself. Whether their ambitions were plunder or annexation is not certain. In any case, when Andronicus III sent troops into that region, the Serbs hastily withdrew.

Worried about Serbia and hostile to it, the two allies Andronicus III and Michael Šišman planned a joint attack on Serbia for 1330. Hearing of the planned invasion, Dečanski sought peace, but Michael refused to discuss it. The allied venture was badly co-ordinated and the Byzantine army did not appear. The Bulgarian army thus found itself alone at Velbužd on 28 July 1330 to face the Serbian forces that Dečanski, worried most about Bulgaria, had concentrated on the Bulgarian front. It seems there were about fifteen thousand on each side. Dušan later claimed the Serbs had fifteen thousand including a thousand experienced Spanish mercenaries. And Gregoras claims
the Bulgarians had twelve thousand Bulgarians and three thousand Tatar mercenaries. The Bulgarians, though not expecting such a large Serbian resistance force, still refused peace. Cantacuzenus claims, however, that they agreed to a one-day armistice. Not expecting battle at once and possibly feeling secure owing to the truce (if Cantacuzenus is accurate), Michael allowed much of his army to go out foraging. The Serbs, seeing this happening, launched an attack at once. In the ensuing battle the Bulgarian army, in disarray from the start, was largely destroyed. Seeing defeat looming, Michael Śiśman tried to flee, fell from his horse, and was killed. The Serb cavalry played a key role in the battle, and Dušan, who commanded a unit, also distinguished himself.

A delegation of Bulgarian nobles, led by Michael's half-brother Belaur, immediately sought out Dečanski for negotiations. Though the sources mention no territorial changes, many scholars believe the Serbs recovered Niš and its region at this time. Besides whatever territorial settlement may have occurred, Dečanski demanded the immediate return to power in Trnovo of his sister Anna and his nephew, Anna's and Michael's son John (Ivan) Stefan. The boyar delegation agreed to these terms and Serbian troops, free to accompany them to Trnovo after word came of a Byzantine withdrawal from Serbia's southern border, installed the pair in Trnovo in August or September 1330. Belaur, who had concluded the peace, remained a prominent figure, probably still governing in Vidin. Theodora and her children fled to Constantinople. Some Serbian troops remained in Trnovo to guard Anna and John Stefan and oversee matters there. It seems that the Golden Horde, if it had not already done so, at this time re-occupied Bessarabia and extended its control, directly or indirectly, down to the Danube. Thereafter the Danube was to remain Bulgaria's northern border.

Bulgaria was never to regain its former position. The battle resulted in the Serbs' gaining what was to be a permanent edge—at times even hegemony—over Bulgaria to last until Bulgaria fell to the Turks at the end of the century. It also meant that the Serbs, not the Bulgarians, would acquire the lion's share of Macedonia from the Byzantines. They were to dominate that region for the next half-century. The Byzantines, it seems, had not planned to support their allies. While the Bulgarians were facing the main Serbian army, the Byzantine forces were shilly-shallying around western Macedonia, nowhere near the location of the proposed junction with Bulgarian forces, recovering some minor fortresses Dečanski had taken in 1329. Thus they were simply taking advantage of Serbia's pre-occupation elsewhere.

The Serbs' new influence in Bulgaria did not please Byzantium, and the exile of Theodora gave Andronicus III an excuse to intervene against the weakened Bulgarians. Thus the Byzantines, who had sent no aid to Bulgaria, now dropped their alliance with Bulgaria altogether. Late to battle, possibly intentionally, they had waited on the sidelines. Then, upon learning of the Serbian victory, they had withdrawn from the Macedonian border, leaving
only small garrisons in certain forts to defend them should the Serbs attack. Deciding now to attack the losers, from whom they could gain the most, the Byzantines invaded Bulgaria and again annexed the disputed region between the Tundža River and the Black Sea, including the towns of Mesembria, Anchialos, Aitos, and Jambol. The Byzantines also regained whatever territory Michael had recovered south of the Balkan Mountains. Anna’s inability to defend this territory and the threat of further losses to Byzantium led a group of Trnovo boyars, headed by the protovestigiar Raksin and the logothete Philip, early in 1331 to overthrow John Stefan for John (Ivan) Alexander (1331–71). John Alexander, who was Michael’s nephew and the son of Stracimir and Michael’s sister, had been governing the province of Loveč and probably was party to the plot. Anna and John Stefan fled to Serbia. Soon thereafter John Stefan emigrated to Byzantium.

Belaur opposed the change. In his northwestern province he raised a rebellion, but was defeated by an army of Tatar mercenaries in the hire of John Alexander. Belaur fled from Bulgaria and later died in exile. It is usually believed that Vidin was then incorporated into the Bulgarian state, remaining part of it until the 1350s when John Alexander made it into an appanage for his son John Stracimir. However, Polyvjangnyj argues that Vidin continued to have some sort of special status during John Alexander’s first years. At that time in Vidin with the title despot is found Michael Šişman’s son Michael, known as Michael Vidinski or Michael Bulgarian Great Prince. Presumably Michael had not participated in Belaur’s revolt. Whether he simply took over when Belaur fled and John Alexander felt it the safest policy to leave him there and recognize him, or whether John Alexander installed him there, is not known. Possibly, as Polyvjangnyj points out, the presence of this young prince was a way to rally supporters of that branch of the Šişman family in the Vidin area and prevent the return of more dangerous members of the family like Belaur.

Meanwhile, right after Velbužd, the Serbs had an excuse to go against Michael’s Byzantine allies; but Dečanski chose not to, thereby alienating many nobles. By January or February 1331 Dečanski and Dušan were quarrelling. The pro-Dušan sources claim that evil advisors turned Dečanski against his son; as a result Dečanski decided to seize Dušan and exclude him from his inheritance. He sent an army into Zeta against Dušan. Reaching Skadar, these troops ravaged it and its environs. Dušan, however, fled in time across the Bojana. Anarchy followed in parts of Serbia and merchants found themselves plundered or forced to pay protection money to pass along various routes. Peace was negotiated between father and son in early spring, probably April, 1331. Shortly thereafter, about three months later, Dečanski ordered Dušan to come to him. Dušan feared for his life. His advisors persuaded him to resist. So Dušan marched from Skadar and surprised his father at Nerodimije, where he besieged him. Dečanski fled with a small retinue, while Dušan captured his treasury and family. He then set off in pursuit of his father, catching up with him at Petriće. On 21 August 1331 Dečanski surren-
dered to him. On the advice, if not the insistence, of Dušan’s advisors, Dečanski was imprisoned. Dušan was crowned king during the first week of September 1331.

Byzantine sources stress the support of Dušan by leading Serbian nobles. They wanted to campaign against Byzantium for lands and booty, but Dečanski had not approved. These nobles, according to Byzantine sources, were regularly a pressure-group for Serbian expansion south, and no ruler was safe who opposed them. Seeking a king to carry out their wishes, they were the moving force behind Dušan’s revolt; at first Dušan was more-or-less their puppet, powerless to resist when they threw his father into prison in chains and then murdered him there on November 11. Dečanski, buried in Visoki Dečani, the beautiful monastery he built, was soon canonized by the Church, and his cult became popular.

A second factor that may have played a role in Dušan’s revolt was Dečanski’s second marriage to the Byzantine princess. She had given birth to a son, Symeon, and it is possible that Dušan feared Symeon’s appearance might threaten his own succession. We can suspect that Byzantium would have pressed for the succession of the son of its princess; and if Dečanski wanted good relations with Byzantium, as his post-Velbužd behavior indicates he may have, then making Symeon his heir could advance this cause and might even have been a means to seal a peace. Whether there was any chance of a new heir’s being selected or whether Dušan merely feared there was, we do not know. But Symeon’s presence provided one more reason for the war-party to press Dušan to revolt to prevent such a peace with Byzantium, and for Dušan to be susceptible to its arguments.

The struggle between Dušan and Dečanski, culminating in Dečanski’s overthrow, created sufficient instability in Serbia to prevent Serbian intervention in Bulgaria on behalf of Anna and John Stefan. John Alexander, however, aware of future danger from Serbia once things were again settled there, immediately sought peace with Dušan. Dušan and the Serbian nobles, wanting their hands free to move against richer Byzantium, agreed to peace and to the change on the Bulgarian throne. In December 1331 (or spring 1332) the two rulers concluded peace and agreed to an alliance. It was sealed by Dušan’s marriage to John Alexander’s sister Helen (Jelena). Good relations with Bulgaria continued throughout Dušan’s reign. And though Bulgaria was weaker than Serbia, it did not suffer any legal dependence. It was simply an independent, less powerful, and generally allied state. Dušan never tried to subject it or weaken it further. This peace with Serbia enabled John Alexander to attack the Byzantines and regain the two Black Sea ports of Mesembria and Anchialos as well as the territory between the Tundža and the coast that the Byzantines had seized. Byzantium recognized his possession of them in a treaty of 1332.

Though there seems to have been some Serbian raiding into Macedonia in late 1331, the expected major Serbian attack on Byzantium was to be delayed; for in 1332 Dušan had to suppress a revolt in Zeta, where some
nobles led by a certain Bogojje seem to have tried to secede and form their own principality. This revolt is often brought forward as evidence that a Zetan consciousness was still strong and that such feeling should be seen as the explanation for the frequency with which members of the Raškan dynasty were installed in Zeta to rule it. Though possibly this conclusion has some truth to it, Malović points out that the nobility of Zeta had just played a major role in supporting Dušan in his revolt, if not actually pushing him into it. Thus these nobles may well have believed that since he owed his throne to their support, they should reap great rewards after his coronation. However, in the course of the war, and even more so at its conclusion, many of Dečanski’s leading courtiers and officials had come over to Dušan’s side, possibly even being promised this or that reward to do so. Thus, quite possibly, with much of the old establishment surrounding Dušan at the revolt’s end expecting to continue in its former roles, the provincial nobles from Zeta ended up with much less influence than they had hoped and expected. Thus bitterness at Dušan’s ingratitude may well have been what triggered the Zetan revolt. It soon spread into northern Albania, whose independent-minded chiefs did not relish subordination by Serbia. The Albanian rebel leader was a chief named Demetrius Suma. In any case, Dušan succeeded in suppressing the rebellion and in reasserting his control over Zeta in the course of 1332. The revolt, and the support it received, however, do suggest that the seeds for the splintering of Serbia that occurred after Dušan’s death were already present during his reign.

**Bosnia from the 1280s to the 1320s**

Before turning to the reigns of Stefan Dušan and John Alexander, it is necessary to return to pick up the history of Bosnia from the 1280s to the 1320s to establish in power there those two rulers’ great contemporary, Ban Stjepan Kotromanić (ca. 1318–53).

In the third quarter of the thirteenth century, as seen in the last chapter, the Hungarians reasserted their authority over the territory north of the Bosnian banate, installing various rulers, often entitled ban, over such northern territories as Soli, Usora, Vrbas, Sana, and Mačva. In 1284 Stefan Dragutin, the son-in-law of the King of Hungary, was granted Mačva and possibly Usora in this way. The territory to the west of his grant belonged to a second loyal Hungarian vassal, Ban Prijedza. Their border may have lain along the Drina River, but possibly it lay further west along the Bosna. These two figures, it seems, held all the northern territory between them. It also seems that Kulin’s Bosnian banate to the south remained independent under Ninoslav’s heirs; but we know nothing of its history or the names of its rulers. Soon Prijedza’s son Stjepan Kotroman married Dragutin’s daughter and emerged after his father’s death at some time between 1288 and 1290 as the major figure in the north.

But Kotroman was soon faced with a major threat to his position from the
Šubić family of Bribir, to his southwest, in the region between Bosnia and Dalmatia. The Šubići were soon pressing into northwestern Bosnia at the expense of Kotroman. In 1299 Paul I Šubić was called “Ban of Bosnia”—a title which probably referred at that date only to this northern territory. In 1302 Kotroman met the Šubići on the banks of the Drina. If a battle followed, its results are not known. In 1304 Mladen I Šubić was killed by “Bosnian heretics” (a label typically used when a source’s author felt hostile to the Bosnians he was describing). Whether his death occurred in the north as a result of battling with Kotroman or further south in the central banate is not known. In 1305 Paul Šubić was called “Ban of All Bosnia,” which if taken literally would suggest he governed the banate too.

Many of his acquisitions would seem, however, to have been at Kotroman’s expense. Was Kotroman expelled from his lands? Or did he retain some or even all of his lands as a Šubić vassal? We do not know. Did the Šubići expand far enough east to threaten Dragutin’s holdings? The time was promising since at the time Dragutin, involved elsewhere in his war with Milutin, was not in a position to protect his northwestern border. Again we do not know. Much of this action in Bosnia could be seen as occurring in conjunction with the Hungarian civil war, for the Šubići were allied to Charles Robert whereas Kotroman supported the Hungarian opposition. Thus the Šubići may have been urged by Charles Robert to take what they could in the north of Bosnia to win that area for his cause. In that case, we would expect that the Šubići would have tried to assert their control over as much of Kotroman’s territory as they could. Possibly, however, faced with defeat, Kotroman found himself forced to submit and declare for Charles Robert.

Kotroman died between 1305 and 1315, leaving some sort of holding, though what it then consisted of and what its legal status was in relation to the Šubići are not known. At Kotroman’s death (whenever it was) disorders broke out in his lands (wherever they then were), causing his widow and his son Stjepan Kotromanić to flee to Dubrovnik. This information is conveyed in a later history, from 1601, by Orbini. Whatever source he used has not survived; thus it is hard to judge how reliable this information is. Orbini tells us that the leading barons of the realm had risen up against Kotromanić. Later, Orbini reports, Kotromanić was allowed to return with the consent of the barons. What caused their change of heart is not known. Most scholars believe he was able to return because he agreed to accept the overlordship of the Šubići.

In about 1318 Kotromanić is documented as holding the central Bosnian banate (in the Visoko-Zenica area). Whether Kotroman had ever held any part of that territory is not known and may well be doubted. How Kotromanić acquired this territory also is not known. Was Kotroman, and thus also Kotromanić, a member of the family (Kulin and Ninoslav’s) that had ruled this land previously? If so, possibly the local nobles had invited him there as a candidate with a family right. Or had the Šubići granted him this land? By then the Šubići, with Mladen II as the family head, were already, as noted in
the last chapter, beginning their decline. They clearly recognized Kotromanić’s rule over the banate, but it is not known whether they had had a role in his installation.

In 1318 through the offices of Mladen Šubić, who was calling himself Ban of Bosnia, Stjepan Kotromanić received special dispensation from the pope to marry a Catholic lady who was a cousin of some sort to him. Mladen’s intervention shows that the earlier differences between the two families had been settled. Thus we can see his action as that of an overlord assisting his vassal. Their relations seem to have remained smooth until 1322 when civil war broke out within the Šubić family. Kotromanić was soon drawn into the war as an ally of the king against Mladen. By the end of the year Mladen was taken prisoner by King Charles Robert of Hungary and permanently removed from the political arena. This civil war, which split the Šubić family and divided the Šubić vassals, brought about that family’s rapid decline. The family now lost whatever dominance it had once had over the Bosnian banate. This war also marks the beginning of a close association between Kotromanić and the Hungarian king Charles Robert, who were allies in the war against Mladen. Their close association lasted throughout the remainder of Charles Robert’s reign (which lasted until 1342) and continued under his successor until Kotromanić died in 1353. Charles Robert still had many domestic difficulties to face. Kotromanić supported him consistently and received in return Hungarian blessing for his own activities in Bosnia. Thus Kotromanić could consolidate his state and his own rule over it without major foreign intervention.

Most scholars agree that Kotromanić’s rise to a position of full authority followed the events of 1322. From then, with Šubić recognition of Kotromanić’s right to govern his own state without consulting the Šubić or anyone else, he was free to initiate and execute his own policies. Though Hungarian and papal letters mention Hungarian suzerainty, this was clearly only nominal. Bosnia and Hungary were more like allies, and since Kotromanić was useful to Charles Robert, the king had no thought of trying to meddle in Kotromanić’s affairs. Kotromanić supported the king against his rivals, and the king supported Kotromanić at a key moment, in 1337/38, when the pope was trying to initiate a crusade against Bosnia.

The papacy had remained concerned about “heresy” in Bosnia. As early as 1318–19 the pope had called on Mladen Šubić to take action against these heretics. But it was also clear that Kotromanić was no heretic and the pope could not have considered him one. If he had, he would not have agreed to Kotromanić’s marriage with his Catholic cousin. Since Kotromanić later, in the 1340s, converted to Catholicism, it seems almost certain that originally he was Orthodox; after all his mother, Dragutin’s daughter, was Orthodox.

In 1324 Kotromanić had added “Soli” and “Usora” to his title. This territory had previously belonged to his maternal grandfather, Dragutin. Whether Kotromanić obtained it by inheritance, conquest, or acceptance by the local nobles is not known. A year or so earlier Dečanski had moved into
this area in his war against Dragutin’s son Vladislav. Presumably Kotromanić’s acquisition of these lands came as a result of Dečanski’s expulsion; but whether Kotromanić himself expelled him or whether Kotromanić benefited from actions of the local nobility is unknown. How much actual authority Kotromanić was to acquire in this area is also unknown. In any case, Usora retained great autonomy under Bosnia. The dominant figure there was the Vojvoda of Usora. He was a local nobleman; his office was hereditary.  

Then, after 1322 and before 1325, the leading family of the Donji Kraji, the Hrvatinić-Stjepanić clan, submitted to Kotromanić. This family had previously been vassal to the Šubići. Its submission to Kotromanić reflects also the decline of the Šubići. For the rest of the fourteenth century, except for the early years of Tvrtko I immediately after Kotromanić’s death in 1353, the Donji Kraji was to be nominally part of Bosnia, though in fact it was a more or less autonomous principality under the Hrvatinić family. Two charters from ca. 1324 exist showing the above and confirming the rights of certain local nobles to lands they already possessed, but asserting the ban’s suzerainty over them, in Usora, Soli, and the Donji Kraji.

After the decline of the Šubići the balance of power between the different Croatian noble families of Dalmatia, the Krajina, and southwestern Croatia changed. Old alliances collapsed and new ones were made. Nelipac of Knin rose to prominence. To face the threat from these newcomers the Šubići, trying to retain at least their family lands of Bribir, turned for help to Kotromanić. In the warfare that followed, Kotromanić’s Bosnia made tremendous gains to the west, obtaining territory all the way to the coast including the Krajina and Zavrsje, which coincided with western Hum between the Cetina and Neretva rivers and included the towns and regions of Livno, Imotski, Duvno, and Glamoč. He also acquired the port of Makarska. At Makarska and Duvno Roman Catholic bishoprics existed, both subordinated to the Archbishop of Split.

This territory was to remain part of Bosnia from then on, except for part of it temporarily lost in the early years of Tvrtko I. Of course, it must be stressed that considerable local autonomy remained in the hands of the local nobles, who seem to have simply submitted to Kotromanić’s suzerainty. In this area, regardless of other religious loyalties of various powerful figures in the banate, the Catholic Church continued to function unmolested. The area remained under the jurisdiction of the relevant bishops, subordinated to Split. No attempt was made to assign these lands to the nominal Bosnian bishop in Djakovo. And no effort was made to introduce the Bosnian Church here. And there is little evidence of that institution’s being active here. There is also no sign that state officials were sent into this area by the bans. The local nobility continued to manage local affairs, simply rendering to the ban whatever obligations he demanded from the area.

We saw earlier how Kotromanić, allied with the Draživojevići and other nobles of Hum, sent troops in 1326 into Hum to oust the Branivojevići and annex most of Hum. The Branivojevići disappeared from Hum, either killed,
chased out, or jailed. They were replaced as Hum’s leading family by the ban’s allies the Draživojević of Nevesinje—soon to be known as the Sankovići. Other families who supported the ban’s intervention also rose in prominence. On the whole, as in the western conquests, the local nobility continued to manage its own regions. However, at the lucrative customs stations along the Neretva, particularly at Drijeva (near modern Metković), Kotromanić did install his own officials to obtain the income for him. After this annexation Bosnia came to control the important Neretva valley trade route and reached the Adriatic at that river’s mouth for the first time.

On the whole Hum remained loyal to Kotromanić thereafter. At some point Toljen of Hum’s son Peter revolted, only to be captured and executed. However, the revolt seems not to have involved the whole family, and the ban maintained close ties with Peter’s uncle Nicholas—the grandson of Andrew of Hum through Andrew’s son Peter. The ban gave Nicholas his daughter Catherine to be his wife. And he allowed Nicholas to retain the family’s hereditary holding of Popovo Polje. The pair had two sons. Their descendants were to compose the prominent Hum noble family of Nikolić. Orbini’s account of this family is confirmed by documents in Dubrovnik and also by a gravestone inscription referring to Vladislav Nikolić as the nephew of Ban Stjepan. Thus the ban successfully co-opted the loyalty of Hum’s former ruling family. The only evidence of disloyalty in Hum during Kotromanić’s reign—besides Peter Toljenović’s revolt—is provided by Orbini, who claims that a certain number of nobles from Hum, including the Nikolić brothers Vladislav and Bogiša, supported Dušan when he attacked Bosnia in 1350. When that war was over the Nikolići after some difficulties seem to have made peace with the ban and regained at least some of their former holdings. Dušan’s war with Bosnia is to be discussed in the next chapter.

In Hum the overwhelming majority of the population was Orthodox. Once again no attempt was made to interfere with beliefs or Church administration. Thus Bosnia remained an area of separate communities. In the central region the Catholic organization seems to have died out, and those Bosnians there who had ties to any Church were probably associated with the local Bosnian Church until the Franciscan mission, established in the 1340s and to be discussed, won the adherence of some central Bosnians. Thereafter the two Churches—Catholic and Bosnian—co-existed in the central region, with each Church having particular areas of support. The Catholic Church did particularly well in towns. To the west and north of the central banate the Catholic Church was dominant. The Bosnian Church penetrated the Donji Kraji and lower Drina to some extent, but the majority of the population in those areas seems to have remained nominal Catholics even though there was a great scarcity of priests which left much of the population priestless. At the same time these various areas all remained under the administration of the local land-based nobility. Thus there was little or no central administration and almost no interference in local customs and way of life. At the same time
the population seems to have remained in its own original localities, and thus, with little or no migration, the different religious faiths remained in their home areas and were not spread elsewhere. Thus sectionalism remained strong, strengthened by the separation between communities resulting from the mountainous geography and by the dominance of local big-men to whom the locals remained loyal.

Thus Krotomanić was in the process of establishing a large state in Bosnia. He had more than doubled its size before 1330 and had asserted its full de facto independence from its neighbors. However, the state was held together by the ban’s own personal power and the personal ties he had been able to create. He had not created any sort of state bureaucracy to bind the outlying regions to the central state. He also had not created, or as far as we know even attempted to create, any sort of land-for-service (like the pronoia) system. The nobles in greater Bosnia and Hum were thus far more secure in their lands and independent in their localities than their Serbian and Bulgarian equivalents. As long as they provided the services the ban demanded, his state and armies were strong; but there was no state structure to force their obedience.

In the 1320s and 1330s the ban issued a series of charters to the great nobles. In two of these, and in three or four more in the century that followed, the Bosnian Church guaranteed the contents of the charter. Thus, for the first time we find evidence of this institution, which probably had arisen in the middle of the thirteenth century. Headed by a djed, literally a grandfather, its clergy (called Krstjani, “Christians”) remained based in monasteries scattered throughout central Bosnia, generally in villages. As far as we can tell all its clerics were monks based in monasteries, which makes it likely that they were derived from the Catholic monastic order seen at Bolino Polje in 1203. There is no evidence of any secular clergy in the Bosnian Church and also no evidence that Bosnia was divided up under some sort of hierarchy with abbots bishops responsible for particular territories. These charters, signed at a Bosnian Church monastery and witnessed by the djed, not only show the existence of the Church in the center of the Bosnian banate but also show the ban’s approval of the organization, for he visited its monastery and allowed its head to witness and guarantee a state document. Though such Bosnian Church—witnessed charters are emphasized in many scholarly works, some of which attempt to depict this organization as a state Church, it should be pointed out that charters witnessed by this Church are only a tiny minority of Bosnian charters; most charters were witnessed only by secular figures.

Though tolerating the Bosnian Church, Krotomanić, as noted, seems to have been Orthodox. He maintained, however, good relations with the pope, who approved his marriage in 1318. These relations soured in 1337 when the pope called on Nelipec of Knin and the Šubići of Bribir to help the Franciscans in their work in Bosnia where, he said, the ban and nobles had been aiding “heretics.” Despite this statement, it seems the Franciscans had not even tried to establish a mission in Bosnia by this time. It also seems unlikely
that the Šubići would have been interested in this venture. They were then threatened by Nelipec, and Kotromanić was their most logical ally against Nelipec. In fact, at about this time a Šubići girl married Stjepan Kotromanić’s brother Vladislav. One suspects Nelipec had written the pope to whet his interest in the crusading idea, so as to advance Nelipec’s own ambitions along the coast and against Bosnia, and maybe even against the Šubići should they refuse to help. And in fact, this seems to have happened, since in 1338 Nelipec is found attacking the Šubići town of Klis.

In the face of this threat the ban took quick action to forestall the potential crusade. He went on the offensive himself, dispatching in 1338 his armies via Trogir against Klis, which was under attack from Nelipec. The Bishop of Trogir protested the passage of “heretics,” but Trogir’s town fathers (the merchants) permitted it and received a charter granting generous trade privileges from the ban. We hear of no further military action; thus the ban’s quick action seems to have prevented the launching of a crusade. At the same time the ban was aided by the King of Hungary who, as noted, in this period had close and cordial relations with the Bosnian ban; the king forbade any attack upon Bosnia, an effective order since he was the overlord of the would-be crusaders. The following year, in 1340, the Hungarian king, assisted by Bosnian troops, was fighting in Croatia against some disloyal vassals of his. In 1346 Kotromanić sent more aid to the Hungarians to help them relieve Zadar, then under a siege from Venice. Their good relations culminated in a marriage between King Louis, Charles Robert’s successor in Hungary, and Kotromanić’s daughter Elizabeth, in 1353.

The pope needed a new scheme to oppose the Bosnian “heretics” or, perhaps more accurately, to advance Catholicism. He turned to the idea of a Franciscan mission. The General of the Franciscan order visited the Bosnian ban in 1339 or 1340 and was well received. The ban agreed to allow the Franciscans to establish a mission in his state and promised to co-operate fully with them. By 1342 the Franciscan Vicariate of Bosnia was established. Eventually its territory was to include all those parts of southeastern Europe where the Franciscans worked. By 1385 the Franciscans had four monasteries in Bosnia proper: in Olovo, Visoko, Kraljeva Sutjeska, and Lašva. Another dozen were to be built in the Bosnian state between 1385 and the Turkish conquest, which occurred in 1463. By 1347 Ban Stjepan Kotromanić had accepted Catholicism. From then on, all Bosnian rulers, except possibly Ostoja, were to be Catholics.

The Franciscan chronicles state that hundreds of Franciscans came to Bosnia and converted hundreds of thousands of Bosnians. This is greatly exaggerated. As far as we can tell, at any given moment in the fourteenth century there were in Bosnia only a handful of Franciscans. We also must note that the term Bosnia in a Franciscan context refers to the whole vicariat, which included a much greater region than the state of Bosnia. For most of the fourteenth century the Franciscan order limited the number of Franciscans allowed the vicariat to from sixty to eighty men. In 1385 the vicariat had
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...fifty monasteries, and, as noted, only four of these were in the Bosnian state. Thus one could conclude that there were at most about fifteen Franciscans in the entire Bosnian state. Since they were required to reside in their monasteries, thus in only four places, we may suspect they had very limited success. However, as three of their four monasteries were concentrated near the center of the state, possibly they did achieve some success in converting, or at least baptizing, Bosnians in that area, the central triangle between Sutjeska, Lašva, and Visoko.

However, reducing the Franciscans' effectiveness as missionaries were three other factors. The first concerns the locations of two of their four residences. Olovo was a mining town having many Saxon miners and coastal merchants while Visoko, though Bosnia's main town, also had a relatively large merchant colony. The Catholics in these places surely supported the Franciscans and protected them, should there have been opposition to them from Bosnians—something for which we have no evidence. At the same time, however, since other Catholic clergy seem not to have been present in Bosnia, the religious needs of these foreign Catholic communities surely took up much of the Franciscans' time. Second, the Franciscans had serious financial problems. Immediately a quarrel over who had the right to collect Church tithes in Bosnia erupted between the Bishop of Bosnia (resident outside of Bosnia in Đakovo in Slavonia who only had title to Bosnia) and the Franciscans, who at least were working in Bosnia. The ban supported the Franciscans, but the pope decided in favor of the bishop. This quarrel and the financial problems of the Franciscans continued for the next century. In 1347 the newly converted Catholic, Ban Štefan Kotromanić, wrote the pope requesting more Franciscans for Bosnia and asking that those sent know—or have the ability to learn—Slavic. This last remark highlights the third difficulty; for it suggests that at least some of those sent earlier—and the names of Bosnian Franciscans preserved in the sources from this period tend to be Italian—did not know Slavic. Thus the effectiveness of Bosnia's limited number of Franciscans would have been greatly reduced owing to the language barrier.

Kotromanić had very cordial relations with the first Franciscan vicar, Peregrin Saxon. And when in 1347 a vacancy arose for the Bosnian bishop, Kotromanić wrote the pope suggesting that Peregrin be named to the position. This was an ideal solution to the division of authority between Franciscans and bishop as well as a means to settle the quarrel between the two institutions. The pope wisely accepted the suggestion, and so from 1349 to 1354 Peregrin was bishop. He was the first Catholic bishop to be active in Bosnia since the middle of the thirteenth century. Thus briefly the Bosnian bishop became relevant to Bosnia again. However, after Peregrin died, instead of continuing this sensible new program, the pope selected a cleric in Đakovo, and once again the two institutions were divided and the bishop, returning to reside in Đakovo, ceased to play any role in Bosnia.

Until the fourteenth century Bosnia and Hum were economically back-
ward, less developed than many of the other regions making up what is now Yugoslavia. But under Kotromanić Bosnia’s mines, particularly silver and lead ones, were opened and thus paved the way for Bosnia’s economic development and greatly increased its commercial contacts with the coast. Further mines were to be opened under his successor Tvrtko. Technical expertise was provided by the Sasi (Saxons, chiefly from Hungary) while Ragusans took over the mines’ administration and financial operation. The laborers were local Bosnians. Dubrovnik soon acquired a monopoly on Bosnia’s silver. The most important silver mining center was Srebrnica. In these mining towns Ragusans established colonies of merchants, mining administrators, and soon craftsmen. Dubrovnik appointed a consul to govern each Ragusan colony according to Ragusan law. The Sasi were also governed by their own law code. In time artisans settled in the commercial centers growing up around the mines. Many of the more skilled craftsmen came from the coast, but soon many locals were also becoming craftsmen.

The ruler of a town (the ban or a great nobleman on whose lands the town lay) appointed a knez to keep order and be the chief legal figure. The town knez tended to be a literate and astute financier. He was frequently a Ragusan merchant. If the town was fortified, then, since the knez often lacked military knowledge, a garrison commander was also appointed. By the end of the fourteenth century the Bosnians were gradually entering the crafts and becoming merchants. By the fifteenth century some Bosnians were trading widely around Bosnia and even on the coast and in Italy. However, the major merchants continued to be Ragusans. The Ragusans kept their monopoly on silver, though certain Bosnians became successful in the lead trade. Bosnia’s prosperity grew rapidly because, by the mid fourteenth century, most of Europe’s mines were in decline. Such was not true of the newly opened mines of Serbia and Bosnia. By 1422 Serbia and Bosnia together were producing over one-fifth of Europe’s silver. This led to great urban prosperity. Certain merchants made great fortunes, and through customs revenues various nobles were also becoming very wealthy. All sorts of luxury textiles and metal products were imported into Bosnia. At the same time, certain Bosnian craftsmen achieved great skill in metal crafts; Bosnian silver-work—especially cups and belt buckles—was in demand on the coast.

The rulers in the twelfth and thirteenth century (at least Kulin and Ninoslav), wanting to encourage the circulation of more goods in Bosnia, had allowed Dubrovnik to trade duty-free. But when the mines opened, the prospect of increased revenue prompted a change in policy. Kotromanić began imposing customs duties. By the end of the century the great nobles were doing the same. Customs were of three types: export duties collected at the point of purchase (e.g., at the mine where the silver was bought for export), which seem to have been 10 percent of the purchase price in kind; import duties collected at the market where the imported goods were sold, which also seem to have been 10 percent in kind; and duties on passage, generally collected in cash at toll stations along the routes the merchants traveled. The
nobles frequently tried to establish additional toll stations on roads crossing their lands, a practice Dubrovnik regularly, and sometimes successfully, protested. The major customs collections were farmed out to particularly rich merchants (usually Ragusans) who at the time of purchase paid to the ruler the sum expected for the year and then collected the actual customs revenues for themselves, hoping for a profit. Unless there was a war or major epidemic, they usually earned good profits, but since trade could be suspended in a crisis there was risk involved. On one occasion, in 1376, a wealthy Ragusan named Žore Bokšić, with two partners, purchased all the customs stations in Bosnia.

Besides the towns growing up around commercial enterprises like mines, others grew up at major crossroads. Important commercial routes ran through Bosnia from the coast to Serbia, Bulgaria, Constantinople, and Hungary. Some places on these routes became centers for selling local goods; for example, Foća became important for selling wax, sheepskins, and other pastoral products. The Vlachs, who wandered with their flocks, had horses. By the fifteenth century certain Vlachs, particularly those of Hum, acquired great wealth running merchant caravans. Other Vlachs—as well as various nobles and their retainers—enriched themselves by plundering the caravans.

Still other towns appeared initially not for commercial reasons, but as castles, erected by a great nobleman or the ban, to defend a region from attack or maintain order in it. Naturally such a defensive center was often chosen as a local market. Such markets tended to be held once a week. But if the castle’s market became a thriving one, the area below the castle in time acquired shops in which craftsmen sold goods daily rather than only at the weekly market. The noble in control of the castle collected the market duties.

As a result of the profits from the mines and trade, we find (e.g., in lists of goods pawned in Dubrovnik), in the fifteenth century in particular, certain Bosnians with considerable wealth. Some nobles came to maintain sumptuous courts stocked with luxury textiles and metal-work from Italy and Western Europe. Actors and musicians frequently visited them to perform. These performers did not limit themselves to the courts of the nobility; documents show them playing in commercial towns as well.

Since the towns were chiefly connected to commercial enterprises, in many of them foreigners (Ragusans, other Dalmatians, Sasi) were the predominant element in the urban population, with Bosnian Slavs making up an urban minority but, of course, the great majority in the surrounding villages. Thus not surprisingly, with the Ragusans strongly supporting the Franciscans, the commercial towns that developed were Catholic in character. Documents on the towns rarely mention the presence of the Bosnian Church or its clerics.

Stjepan Kotromanjić died in 1353 and was buried in the Franciscan monastery at Visoko, the town that was his main residence. During his lifetime mention is made of a son; but at his death we find no sign of him, suggesting that he pre-deceased his father. Stjepan’s brother Vladislav was still alive, but instead of Vladislav, Vladislav’s son Tvrtko, then only about fifteen years old, succeeded. No documentation has survived explaining why the succes-
sion went the way it did. Though at first the state broke apart, Tvrtko, as we shall see, eventually was able to reassemble it, extend its boundaries to their farthest limits, and become the greatest of Bosnia’s medieval rulers.

NOTES

4. P. Nikov, *Tataro-b’ilgarski otnošenija pr”z sr”dnit v”kov’ s”ogled’ k”m caruwaneto na Smileca,* in *Godišnik na Sofijskija universitet* (Istoriko-filologički fakultet) 15–16 (1919–20).
6. Other Nogajs, including various Alans, who had been subject to Nogaj, fled to Byzantium’s port of Vicina at the Danube mouth. Entering Byzantine service, many were soon transferred to Thrace, where they fought for the empire against the Catalans.
10. For a list of the Albanian families with whom Pope John XXII was in communication, see *Istoriija Crne Gore,* vol. 2, pt. 1 (Titograd, 1970), p. 63.