CHAPTER 8

The Balkans in the Late Fourteenth Century

The Turks and the Balkans after the Battle of Marica

The Turks stepped up their activities in the Balkans in the years following the Battle of Marica (1371). Most Turkish activity through the 1360s and well into the 1370s (including probably the Marica victory itself) was carried out by free-ranging Turkish bands, whose members were sometimes called “ghazis,” under their own begs (chiefs). Though these begs frequently recognized the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan, on the whole their activities were independent of his control. The term ghazi designates a warrior for the Muslim faith. However, though the term had romantic and propaganda value within the Ottoman realm, we probably should give it a more worldly meaning, for the Turkish bands themselves were probably motivated primarily by a quest for plunder and grazing lands. The Ottomans in Anatolia, finding their lands flooded by an increasing number of Turcoman nomads from Central Asia and not wanting them to disrupt life within the Ottoman state, encouraged these tribesmen to move on to Europe to plunder and occupy Christian lands. Such activities increased in the late 1360s; at that time a group of Turks (probably not Ottoman) took Adrianople in 1369. Until recently, scholars, making use of late sources, dated Adrianople’s fall to the period 1361–63. However, a eulogy to Emperor John V, commissioned in late 1366 by Adrianople’s Metropolitan Polycarp, shows Adrianople was still Byzantine that late; in that case it makes sense to accept the information of several short Greek chronicles, based on an early but now lost chronicle, that date the Turkish capture of Adrianople to 1369. Thus 1369 is coming to be accepted in recent scholarship. Thereafter Turkish raiding was stepped up against the Balkans, facilitated by the weakening of the Serbs’ potential to resist after their defeat at Marica in 1371. Bulgaria’s internal disturbances at the same time greatly reduced the effectiveness of Bulgarian resistance.

In the mid-1370s the Ottomans under Sultan Murad I became seriously involved in the Balkans. The Ottomans now began seizing the Balkan acquisitions of other Turkish military groups. In 1377 the Ottomans acquired
Adrianople for themselves. Though many scholars have stated that Adrianople became the Ottoman capital, we should stress that the word capital is misleading. The sultan traveled with a huge retinue that included his whole court, central state ministers, clerks, archives, treasury, and a large military force. Thus the capital was located wherever the sultan happened to be. When he was physically in Adrianople, then it could be called a capital. And because it was his major European city, he visited it frequently and issued many documents from it. However, since he was frequently there in connection with campaigns aimed to penetrate deeper into the Balkans, maybe the word base-camp better describes the city’s function.

Many scholars have stated that Bulgaria became vassal to the Ottomans in 1372 or 1373 as a result of the Battle of Marica (1371). Most Ottomanists, however, prefer to date Ottoman suzerainty over Bulgaria to 1376. This later date corresponds to the time when the Ottomans themselves, as opposed to the various ghazi bands, became active in the Balkans. Vassalage, as noted, meant that the vassal had to pay tribute and supply troops for Ottoman campaigns, often led by a member of the ruler’s family in person. At times it also meant that a Balkan Christian princess had to enter the sultan’s harem. This was to be the fate of Tamara, the sister of Bulgaria’s Tsar John Šišman. Since an anonymous chronicle discusses the “marriage” of Tamara right after it discusses the Battle of Marica and just before it mentions the Ottoman recovery of Gallipoli in 1376 (after the Turks had briefly lost it), most scholars date Tamara’s “marriage” to the period 1371–76. Some date it to the first year, seeing John Šišman’s compliance with Murad’s demand as a desperate measure to avoid a threatened invasion from the victorious forces after Marica, while others associate it with Bulgaria’s formal submission to Murad in 1376.

Vassalage did not stop Turkish raids for plunder, and raiding parties continued to sweep through Bulgaria from time to time. Nor did vassalage prevent the Ottomans from conquering towns belonging to their vassals. Thus in 1385 they took Sofija from John Šišman and Štip from Constantine Dejanović. These activities of the 1380s, which wrested much of Thrace from Byzantium (including Serres in 1383) and parts of southern Bulgaria, reflected the direct participation of the sultan, who was playing an ever greater role in them. In these years around the mid-1380s—though the exact dates are unknown—the Ottomans took Kavalla, Kastoria, Bitola, and Veria, though Veria may not have been retained for long. In April 1387, after a four-year siege, the Ottomans took Thessaloniki. Byzantine sources suggest the defenders were demoralized and its fall owed itself more to poor morale than to Ottoman strength.

In 1388, it seems, the Bulgarians tried to shed their vassal ties, but they succeeded only in provoking a major Ottoman attack that took Preslav, Šumen, and Silistra. John Šišman, besieged in Nikopolis, was forced to agree to a very disadvantageous peace. The Bulgarians became Ottoman vassals again and suffered a considerable loss of territory. Moreover, the Ottomans acquired the right to establish garrisons inside Bulgaria and to move
their troops freely through Bulgaria. The presence of the Ottomans on the borders of the Principality of Vidin during this campaign seems to have caused Vidin to submit to Ottoman suzerainty as well.

The Ottoman raids brought about great instability in the regions of the Balkans they penetrated. As crops were destroyed and peasants carried off as captives, agricultural production was disrupted. Moreover, the raids caused large numbers of refugees from the countryside or small towns to flee to the better-fortified towns, presenting the towns with the problem of feeding and sheltering them at a time when they were having difficulty in providing food for their own citizens. And, as so often had happened in previous eras when rural life was disrupted, many destitute or uprooted peasants took up brigandage, disrupting commerce and in general making the roads unsafe for would-be travelers.

Brigandage, always a Balkan problem, became an acute one in the years of Turkish raids and conquest. Needing more armed men to guard routes and passes, local rulers frequently recruited brigands, who had the skills, for this assignment. In addition, underpaid guards were frequently tempted to loot the rich caravans they had been hired to protect. Thus in this period, as was to be true through much of the Ottoman period, there was a gray area between the klephths (brigands) and armatoloi (highway guards). Moreover, many soldiers, at loose ends at a campaign’s end or angry at being poorly rewarded, deserted from official ranks to take up brigandage. As Bartusis puts it, “Few threats to society are as great as that presented by a significant group of unpaid, underpaid, or unemployed warriors.” And he finds many examples of soldiers, or ex-soldiers, taking to brigandage on their own or in the hire of powerful local figures. And since soldiers often deserted as bands, possessing and skilled in the use of weapons, they may well have been the element that provided the most effective brigands. 1

In the mid-1380s the Turks began to raid Lazar’s region. In 1386 they took Niš and possibly at this time forced Lazar to accept their suzerainty. In 1388 a Turkish raiding party penetrated into Hum. On this occasion the Christians scored a triumph when Vlatko Vuković, a leading nobleman in Hum, met them with his forces at Bileća and wiped them out. If Lazar had actually accepted Turkish vassalage in 1386, he now in 1388 repudiated it; otherwise, in that year he refused an initial Turkish demand that he accept Ottoman suzerainty. His repudiation or refusal caused the Turks to mobilize for a major campaign against Lazar. Serbia seemed ripe for the picking, and, besides punishing Lazar’s insolence, Murad wanted to avenge the defeat at Bileća.

Kosovo

This then was the background for the most famous battle in Serbia’s medieval history, the Battle of Kosovo. The battle is the subject of the most important Serbian epic cycle. Kosovo epics are documented as being sung in the six-
teenth and seventeenth centuries. We may assume that they date back to near the time of the battle. These epics influenced the Dalmatian historians who wrote about the battle in the seventeenth century. We should note that these historians also had access to written documents which have subsequently been lost. Some of the written sources they used seem to have had some reliable data, but without the original texts it is hard for us to evaluate the accuracy of their information. The epics are suspect since their early versions had propagandistic motives. Not only were they partisan on behalf of the Serbs and Christians against the Turks and Muslims, but they also supported certain Serbian families against others. Furthermore, the epics couched the battle in New Testament terms, having Lazar’s experiences imitate Christ’s. Thus many matters concerning the battle have remained controversial.

The Turks first demanded that Lazar accept, or re-accept, Turkish suzerainty and pay tribute. He refused and, realizing that he would be faced with an invasion, sought aid from his neighbors Tvrtko and Vuk Branković. Tvrtko sent a large contingent under the command of Vlatko Vuković, the commander who had defeated the Turkish force at Bileća. Vuk Branković came himself, leading his own men. Thus the Serbian army was composed of three contingents under these three leaders, none of whom was then a Turkish vassal.

According to Orbini, who at least to some extent was following the oral epics, there were dissensions in the Serbian camp. The leading Serbian warrior was a certain Miloš Obilić (or Kobilić) who, Orbini says, was from Tijentište. Previously his wife had quarreled with Vuk Branković’s wife over the relative bravery of their husbands. One lady struck the other which brought their husbands into the quarrel and finally resulted in a duel on horseback. In the first charge Miloš unseated Vuk but was prevented from finishing him off by the intervention of other noblemen who were present. Though these nobles mediated a verbal agreement of peace between the two men, hatreds still seem to have remained. The relations between Lazar and Vuk have also attracted much attention from both scholars and epic singers. Until the late 1380s Lazar had maintained close and cordial relations with Vuk Branković, who had married Lazar’s daughter and who recognized Lazar as his suzerain. Relations between them seem to have cooled somewhat after 1386/87 when Lazar married a second daughter to George II Balić, a rival of Vuk’s. At about this time Vuk dropped Lazar’s name from his coins; scholars have suggested this was caused by Vuk’s annoyance at Lazar’s concluding that marriage.

The Turks advanced into Serbia in June 1389 and the Serb forces marched to meet them. The two armies camped at Kosovo Polje. Lazar commanded the Serbs and Sultan Murad I commanded in person the Ottoman troops. According to the epic, on the eve of the battle Lazar had a dream offering him either a heavenly or an earthly kingdom and, being a man of the fourteenth century, he chose the heavenly. Furthermore, it was prophesied that he would be betrayed in the battle. As the epic account was paralleling the
New Testament, a Judas was needed. Thus the presence of a traitor in the epic may have been entirely fictional, added to fulfill this function. However, the existence of a literary requirement does not give us grounds to reject the possibility that there might also have been actual treachery. When the prophecy was revealed, Miloš Obilić was accused of being the one who on the morrow would betray his master. Vuk Branković charged him with being in secret contact with the Turks. When Lazar faced Miloš with the charge, Miloš denied it, saying, “Tomorrow my deeds will show that I am faithful to my lord.” To prove his loyalty, shortly before dawn on 28 June (the day on which the battle occurred) Miloš slipped out of the Serbian camp and announced himself to the Turkish sentries as a Serbian deserter. Taken to the sultan, he pulled out a knife he had secreted in his garments and stabbed Murad, fatally wounding him. We do not know whether there had actually been any accusations in the Serbian camp before the battle, but it is a fact that a Serb named Miloš Obilić (or Kobilić) did desert and murder the sultan.

The news of the murder was kept from the Turkish troops, who were commanded by Murad’s son, who was to be the new sultan, Bayezid I. A wild battle between the two armies then followed which resulted in the bulk of both armies being wiped out. In the course of the battle Lazar was captured and, upon being taken to Bayezid, executed. The Bosnians fought well, as did Vuk Branković, depicted in the epics as the actual traitor. In fact it would be difficult to prove that any Serb was a traitor in the battle. At the end of the battle the remnants of the Turkish army held the field while the remnants of the Serbian (Lazar’s and Branković’s) and Bosnian (Vlatko Vuković’s) troops withdrew. However, then the Turks withdrew as well, for Bayezid needed to hurry back east to secure his position as sultan against his brothers and, moreover, he did not have enough troops remaining to carry on an offensive against the Balkan Christians. Thus since the Turks also withdrew, one can conclude the battle was a draw.

Because of the Turkish retreat from Serbia, Vlatko Vuković claimed a Christian victory in his message to Tvrtko, and Tvrtko depicted it as such in a message he sent to Italy. Thus Tvrtko was hailed as a savior of Christendom in Italy and France. However, though the actual battle may have been a draw, a major difference between the two sides made the Turks the real victors.

In providing a massive army for the Balkans at the time (estimates vary from twelve to twenty thousand men), the Serbs had brought to Kosovo close to the total of their fighting strength. The Turks, though they lost a vast number of troops (from an army estimated at between twenty-seven and thirty thousand men), had many more troops in the east. Thus in the years that followed the Turks were able to return and raid. Small Turkish raiding parties actually appeared later in 1389; the Ottomans then directed a campaign through Serbia against Hungary in 1390, and they carried out larger raiding campaigns into Serbia in 1391 and 1392. Thus the Turks were able to continue their successful push into the Balkans, whereas the Serbs were left with too few men to resist successfully. Thus, though the Serbs did not lose the
battle, in the long run, over the next two to three years, they lost the war because they were no longer able to resist the Turks effectively; and the losses they had suffered at Kosovo were, of course, the major reason they had so few men left to defend Serbia. Thus one can say the immediate result of Kosovo was a draw, but the long-term result was a Serbian loss. And this is shown by the fact that after Kosovo, as we shall see, Lazar’s and the other Serbian principalities one after the other became Ottoman vassals.

Lazar was succeeded by his son Stefan Lazarević. He was still a minor, so his mother, Milica, became regent. Almost immediately, in November 1389, she was attacked by the Hungarians under Sigismund, who hoped to take advantage of Serbia’s weakness after Kosovo to regain at least some of the territory, formerly belonging to Hungary, that lay south of the Danube. The Hungarians took a series of the Serbs’ northern fortresses and penetrated as far south as Kragujevac. Scholars disagree on the results of this attack and of the further fighting that occurred between Hungary and Serbia in the ensuing years. Moreover, because the Ottomans intervened in 1390, it is possible that places taken by the Hungarians in 1389 were subsequently abandoned, allowing the Serbs to recover some of them.

Concrete information on Mačva and its environs in the 1390s is slight and, as we shall see, able to be interpreted in two ways; for a charter reference can refer to actual possession or it can have been inserted to claim what is seen as a legal right. Thus it is impossible for scholars to arrive at a firm conclusion. For example, to suggest Hungarian acquisitions in the area is the fact that Hungarian “Bans of Mačva” are found witnessing charters in the 1390s. However, as noted above, the presence of men bearing this title does not prove Hungarian possession of Mačva, because at various times in the past men with this title co-existed with Serbian possession of Mačva. On the other hand, to suggest Serbian retention is the fact that in 1395 Milica and Stefan Lazarević issued a charter, confirming an earlier grant by Lazar, to the Saint Panteleimon monastery on Mount Athos that, among other places, awarded to the monastery Dragobili in Deboš, which is located in Mačva. However, possession of this place does not demonstrate that Milica held all Mačva. Furthermore, it does not even prove that she held the place mentioned; she may have simply been confirming her agreement that the monastery had rights to the village. In spite of the fact that evidence about Mačva’s fate in the 1390s is lacking, most scholars believe that Hungary regained some, if not most or even all, of Mačva in the 1390s. If we could settle the question simply on the basis of the relative strength of the two countries—without having to concern ourselves with Turkish actions—this conclusion would be warranted.

Thus the Serbs, weakened after Kosovo, found themselves caught between two aggressive foreign powers, Hungary and the Ottomans. Since the Serbs could not stand up to both, it was necessary to ally with one to oppose the other. Not surprisingly, opinions differed; and though, presumably, supporters of each viewpoint could be found in any given city, the pro-Ottoman faction triumphed in one part of Serbia while the pro-Hungarians predomi-
nated in another. Geography was decisive to explain the decisions Serbian leaders took on this question. Milica’s lands lay to the north and bordered on Hungary, which had just attacked her; not surprisingly, she was particularly worried about Hungary. Thus she was inclined to reach an agreement with the Ottomans. Vuk Branković, on the other hand, possessed lands in the south; he had no border with Hungary and a large frontier with the Turks. Not surprisingly, he was more concerned about the Turks. Wanting to find allies to resist them, in July 1389 he opened negotiations with the Hungarians.

Vuk also seems to have become ambitious to head a greater Serbia and succeed to the Nemanjić heritage. With Lazar dead and his son a minor, there was no Serb leader strong enough to prevent or even challenge such an assertion. Vuk had presumably accepted Lazar’s suzerainty earlier only because Lazar had been sufficiently strong for Vuk to fear crossing him. But after his death, Vuk freely acted as if Lazar had left no heirs, thereby enabling Vuk to assume Lazar’s role. For example, in a charter he issued to Hilandar in late 1389 or early 1390 Vuk calls himself “Lord Stefan [the Serbian royal name] Vuk.” He also sought, though without success, the Saint Demetrius’ Day tribute from Dubrovnik after Tvrtko died in 1391. Vuk presumably also had ambitions to increase his own holdings. However, it is not known whether he actually took any territory from Milica.

As a result, Milica found herself caught between two ambitious enemies, the Hungarians and Vuk, who were now negotiating together and on the verge of forging an alliance. She may well have feared the partition of her principality between them. Thus it is hardly surprising that when Ottoman armies, moving toward Hungary, reached Milica’s border in the summer of 1390, Milica, on the advice of the Church (as pro-Milica sources hasten to say to justify her action), submitted to them at once. She accepted Ottoman suzerainty and allowed the Turks free passage through her lands. One account says that Milica and her son then had to travel to Sivas, where the sultan was based at the time, to submit formally. The Serbian patriarch then held a Church council, which endorsed her decision. Now Lazar’s (Stefan Lazarević’s) state owed the Ottomans tribute and military service. Stefan Lazarević also had to send his sister Olivia to join Bayezid’s harem. These obligations, of course, were not yet binding on Vuk, who had made no such submission; thus relations seem to have been broken between Milica’s Kruševac and Vuk’s Priština.

Then in 1391 the Ottomans launched major raids against Greece, Zeta, Albania, and Durazzo. That winter, 1391–92, Ottoman troops were active all around Vuk, who was forced to surrender Skopje to them on 6 January 1392. Soon Vuk sued for peace and accepted Ottoman vassal obligations, military service and tribute. These vassal ties are documented in a charter of November 1392, but surely they date from late winter or early spring 1392, to about the time, if not the very moment, of Skopje’s surrender. Thus by the end of 1392 all the Serbian lands, except for Hum under Tvrtko, had accepted Ottoman suzerainty.
This quarrel between Vuk and Milica, though short-lasting and of limited significance (no battles were ever fought between them in this period), seems to have led Milica’s partisans to unleash a propaganda campaign of slander that was to have an effect on the epics and even on the written historical tradition that was to follow. Orbini’s history of the Slavs (1601) states that Vuk betrayed Lazar on the field of battle. Orbini’s statement is the earliest written accusation against Vuk, and the way he phrases it suggests that he was not certain that the charge was fact: “Vuk saved himself with almost all his troops because beforehand (as some say) he had had secret negotiations with Sultan Murad to betray (as he indeed did) his father-in-law and procure” Lazar’s state. The phrase “as some say” shows that Orbini is reporting hearsay and strongly suggests that his source for this item was oral. This claim of Vuk’s treachery is also found in the epics. Though these songs were all collected long after Orbini’s time, they surely went back to the fifteenth, if not the late fourteenth, century. While traveling through Serbia in 1530, Kuripešić crossed Kosovo, where, he reports, he heard the tale of a battle about which many today sing in Serbia. Thus most scholars have plausibly concluded that Orbini’s source for this statement was an oral, and probably epic, one.

It is true that Vuk did leave the field of battle, but he left after the Bosnians and after it was clear that the battle could not be won. Turkish sources report that Vuk had commanded the Serbian right wing and had fought well during the heat of the battle, achieving considerable success against the Ottoman left wing. He had withdrawn only after the Bosnian left wing had collapsed and was retreating and the Serbian center was falling. It should also be noted that Vuk was the last Serb prince (excluding the Serb nobles under Tvrtko) to accept Ottoman suzerainty. Why then should he be called a traitor? Possibly the Serbs needed a scape-goat for their defeat—the Serbs had not lost a battle but had been betrayed. But, perhaps, one should seek the cause of Vuk’s damnation not in what occurred during the battle but in what happened after it. Vuk had opposed the widow of the sainted Lazar— for Lazar was canonized in the 1390s very soon after the battle. One may hypothesize that the epics were created in Lazar’s territory and thus were pro-Milica works designed to blacken the reputation of the man who became her opponent in the years immediately following the battle. Furthermore, the need for propaganda against Vuk did not end in 1392; thereafter he and his sons continued to be rivals of, and frequently at odds with, Lazar’s son Stefan Lazarević. As a result Saint Lazar was made into the hero of an epic whose contents were made to parallel the New Testament, with Vuk cast into the role of Judas.²

Before leaving the matter, I think it proper to note that a circumstantial case has been advanced against Vuk. Besides the oral accounts and Orbini’s written statement, scholars have noticed that Serbian historical writing from the fifteenth century ignores Vuk. The silence of certain early fifteenth-century works can be tied to the fact that they originated at Stefan Lazarević’s
court. However, even after Vuk’s son George succeeded Stefan Lazarević as ruler of Serbia in 1427, Vuk continued to be ignored, even in George’s charters. Some scholars have taken this as evidence that there was something shameful in Vuk’s past, possibly something associated with Kosovo. Furthermore, though Orbini was the first to specifically name Vuk as a traitor, his work was not the first to suggest treachery at Kosovo. In the late fifteenth century Constantine of Ostrovica states that the Battle of Kosovo was lost because of unfaith, jealousy, and disagreements between bad and unfaithful people. Like Constantine, certain sixteenth-century writers also mention some sort of treachery at Kosovo without naming the traitor or traitors. Some scholars have argued that these statements should be taken to refer to Vuk. However, all the above arguments can be accepted and still not increase the evidence against Vuk one jot. If slander against Vuk was started in the 1390s when he and Milica were rivals, the slander could easily have entered the oral tradition and then come to be believed. Thus the above items may all reflect negative feelings about Vuk, but they cannot be used as proof against him. They only suggest that various people in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries believed he behaved badly.

This relatively insignificant quarrel between Vuk and Milica that may have had such an impact on subsequent historiography also seems not to have lasted long. For we find Milica visiting Vuk and her daughter Mara, Vuk’s wife, in Priština in August 1392. Though we do not know how Milica and Vuk felt toward one another, it at least shows they were not in a state of open hostility. It also could be taken as evidence, circumstantial of course, that Milica did not believe Vuk betrayed Lazar; for had she believed that, would she have accepted his hospitality? Soon thereafter, according to Mošin between 1392 and 1398, Vuk allowed Lazar’s body to be taken from Priština to the Monastery of Ravanica, built in his own principality by Lazar. This act had to have occurred in the earlier part of that period, before Vuk lost Priština which occurred, as we shall see, in 1396 (according to Dinić) or by 1394 (according to Purković).

Albania and Zeta

The years following Kosovo were marked by an increase in Ottoman military activity, which directly annexed certain territories and imposed suzerainty upon various hitherto independent princes and tribes. In 1392 the Ottomans launched a major raid through southern Serbia into Bosnia and a second one through Macedonia that reached Zeta and the coast. As noted, this campaign forced Vuk Branković to accept Ottoman vassalage.

The divided Albanian tribesmen were unable to band together to create any sort of unified resistance. There were several major Albanian families (or tribes) at this time. If we take them from south to north, we find: The Spata were dominant in Epirus; to their north lay the city-state of Jannina. To the north of Jannina two major tribes had emerged: The Arianiti (Araniti) and
Musachi. The lands of the former extended from behind Valona in a north-easterly direction to Mokro on the west shore of Lake Ohrid. In this same south-central region the Musachi family held lands between, as well as on both, the Vijosê (Vjosa, Voyoussa, Aoos) and Shkumbi rivers; their lands extended east along the Devolli and Osumi rivers and beyond to the region of Kastoria. The Musachi lost the city of Kastoria itself to the Turks in about 1385. The family also held some estates near Durazzo, and the family head, Andrew III (1388–93), regularly resided in a house in Durazzo. Holding Valona itself, and maybe not much more, were Mrkšê Žarković and his wife Rugina. As we move further north we come to the lands of the Thopias stretching roughly between the Shkumbi and Mati rivers. They also held the major fortified cities of Kroja and Durazzo. They were being challenged by the emerging Castriots and may already have been pushed away from the territory on the left bank of the Mati near that river’s mouth. The Castriots’ holdings between the upper Mati and upper Drin stretched east almost as far as Debar. The Castriots were pressing north beyond the Mati, where they came into collision with the Dukagjins, who, by then split into two branches, held much of the territory between the Mati and middle and lower Drin. The Dukagjin family seat remained the important town of Alesso; the family’s lands extended to the northeast as far as Djakova (Djakovica) in Kosovo. The Dukagjins also pressed beyond the Drin, controlling considerable territory between it and the Bojana. In this area they came into conflict with their old rivals, the Balšići, who controlled Zeta and most of the lands north of the Bojana (excluding the territory that had seceded under the Crnojevići); the Balšići still sought to assert themselves south beyond the Bojana. In the territory between the Drin and Mati, the Jonima were also trying to assert themselves, but they were clearly smaller fry.

The so-called borders—which needless to say were rarely stable—given here are of the roughest nature. The tribes were mobile with their flocks; their routes passed over considerable distances and were not necessarily entirely under their constant control. Moreover, territories changed as certain tribes became more or less powerful, and tribes sometimes split in two, giving birth to new tribes. There also were many smaller families living within the broad territories I have outlined. Thus the great families did not necessarily control the whole region specified, although they may have frequently exerted some sort of dominance over the lesser tribes whom they had as neighbors. Further adding to our difficulty is the fact that certain tribal chiefs had houses in towns; these towns did not necessarily lie within their zones of pastoral activities. However, when documents are lacking, as they often are, one can easily arrive at a mistaken conclusion: for example, that because a chief lived in Kroja, the tribal lands must have lain around or near that city.

Unlike most of Serbia, whose economy was based on settled agriculture, with peasants residing in villages and farming fields, most of Zeta and Albania were mountainous and unsuited in many parts for agriculture. Stock-raising, particularly of sheep, dominated. Thus, families practiced transhu-
mannance; this practice indicates an annual migration by some or all of a family from the valleys where its members lived in the winter up to mountain pastures in the summer. In a region like Zeta political fragmentation was natural; for it was difficult for any governmental authorities to establish firm control over its inaccessible territory. Mobile pastoralists with horses are obviously harder to control than settled villagers. As conditions became more unsettled, as they did when the Turks began raiding into the area, larger numbers of people left the lowlands and foothills to find refuge in the wilder mountains. This caused greater instability, as the mountains could not support a larger population. Furthermore, the new arrivals had to support themselves on territory already claimed by the old-timers. In such unstable times the family became increasingly important, and to be part of a large family gave one advantages. Thus cousins banded together to secure control of their pastures and of their flocks’ migration routes.

The central government of the Balšići—if we can call it that—had never been able to control what went on in the mountains, and as conditions became more chaotic owing to the Turkish raids and large-scale migrations, it became less and less able to do so. The decline of, or lack of, central government caused an increasing need for self-help, for a family could not call upon the Balšići to bring forces and provide justice for it against, say, the Crnojevići or Dukagjins. And if one needed to rely on one’s own family, it became important to be part of a powerful and large family. Thus the institution of the tribe became increasingly important. And as tribes supplemented families, the larger and more powerful a tribe was, the better off were its members. Thus in the fourteenth and particularly in the fifteenth centuries throughout Zeta, parts of Hum, and northern Albania, the tribes became increasingly prominent. And we find increased mention of them in the sources.

Since the state apparatus could not guarantee order, the families became more self-reliant in enforcing their own rights; they themselves punished crimes committed against themselves or insults to their honor. Thus the institution of the blood feud increased in importance. In such a society, loyalty came to be felt toward the family, rather than toward a province or a state; and a strong “we-they” mentality developed that demanded a certain pattern of conduct toward members of the tribe and allowed a less honorable mode of conduct toward outsiders.

Since these mountainous regions were also economically poor, unable at the best of times to support their populations, they produced a “plunder” economy under which the tribesmen plundered their richer neighbors in the plains—an activity encouraged by, and in turn further encouraging, the “we-they” mentality. And we have previously noted various cases of Albanian tribesmen plundering settled Greek society in Epirus and Thessaly. Later, mutual raiding came to be the way of life for the tribesmen of Zeta (Montenegro) and Hum (Hercegovina). The tribesmen also could and did plunder the caravans of merchants passing through their lands. Brigandage was a
regular Balkan institution, particularly in the mountains. Though always present, it increased whenever conditions became unsettled.

The tribes were composed of brotherhoods, one of which usually was the strongest and regularly tended to dominate the whole tribe. In such cases that brotherhood’s leader was regularly the tribe’s knez or vojvoda. Tribes settled their own affairs according to their own customs; important decisions often were made by tribal assemblies—one such assembly is documented in 1423 when the Paštrovići decided to submit to Venice. Thus Zeta, much of Hum, and northern Albania were dominated by these autonomous, often mobile, self-governing units. And a “central government” like that of the Balšić rulers dealt with the tribes through their chiefs. And when the Balšići, the Venetians, or later the Crnojevići obtained submission from a tribe, the overlord did not interfere with the internal affairs of the tribe, but simply extracted allegiance and an agreement as to what services were to be rendered. The leaders of the larger tribes became the major noblemen of an area. Thus the nobility in these regions differed greatly from the also family-oriented but settled nobility of the plains and agricultural areas like Thessaly, Serbia, or Bulgaria.

George II Balšić found it impossible to take advantage of the Battle of Kosovo to reassert his family’s former position. At home the Crnojevići refused him obedience and were managing to extend their sway over an ever greater part of Zeta. Moreover, a major rival to George appeared within his own family: Constantine Balšić, his first cousin, the son of George I. Constantine’s mother, Theodora, had remained active after George I’s death and had continued to manage a fairly large territory between the Drin and Bojana rivers where she resided with her son. Constantine had been excluded from participating in the government of Zeta, first by his uncle Balša, and then by his cousin George II. Wanting his rightful inheritance and supported by his mother, Constantine in 1390 or more likely 1391 broke with his ruling cousin and visited the court of Bayezid I, where he became an Ottoman vassal. He did not limit himself to one alliance but also established good relations with Vuk Branković, a long-time rival of the Balšići in Zeta. He also had various powerful relatives. His mother’s niece Helen had, most probably in 1392, married the new Byzantine emperor, Manuel II (1391–1425). His half-brother Mrkša Žarković, the son of his mother’s earlier marriage with Žarko of Zeta, had by marrying Rugina, John Comnenus Asen’s granddaughter and Balša II’s daughter, acquired the city of Valona. Constantine maintained close relations with his half-brother, frequently residing at his court. He also performed a major service for Mrkša; through his cousin the Byzantine empress, he arranged to have the Patriarch of Constantinople sanction Mrkša’s marriage to Rugina, which had violated canons and not been recognized by the Church because the couple were too closely related.

Meanwhile, immediately after Tvrtko’s death, George II had brought his troops to the walls of Kotor and demanded that the town pay him tribute.
Since matters were then unstable in Bosnia, the town yielded and agreed to pay George tribute. The following year, 1392, George was at war with the Crnojević. The Ottomans, wanting to discuss the quarrel with him, summoned him to a meeting with the Sanjak-beg of Skopje. When George answered the summons (in 1392), he was taken prisoner; the Ottomans demanded a number of towns from him as the price for his release. The Ottomans may well have seized George on behalf of Constantine, who seems to have hoped to obtain Skadar at this time. With George out of the picture, his Crnojević rival, Radić Crnojević, immediately brought his troops to the coast and took Budva (which George seems to have regained; at least he is documented as being in that town in 1389) and various towns held by George on the Gulf of Kotor. Radić then moved south and expelled the Dukagjins from Alessio. His occupation of that town was very temporary, however, for the Dukagjins regained it early in 1393.

Faced with the Ottoman threat, the seriousness of which was vividly illustrated by George’s capture, and challenged by various domestic or neighboring opponents who had become Ottoman vassals to obtain support for their local ambitions, the other local rulers found themselves in severe difficulties. If they did not choose to submit to the Turks, they had only one alternative: Venice. Venice, however, was not an ideal protector. Lacking an army, it could only assume the role of protector with its fleet; this limited Venice’s usefulness to coastal cities or the few river ports attainable from the sea. Moreover, in the process of establishing commercial relations with the Turks, Venice was often hesitant about assuming obligations to various cities or petty princes for fear of antagonizing the Turks and possibly losing the commercial privileges it was acquiring. Yet Venice also had strong ambitions to dominate the Adriatic, and thus usually, after debate in its senate, it agreed to assume control over the Adriatic ports that offered to submit to it. However, Venice’s interests were always connected to its commerce; thus once established it immediately strove to increase its business activities in its new acquisitions. These activities often clashed with those of local, or neighboring Dalmatian, traders and, moreover, by increasing the volume of business and of circulating coinage, had an unsettling effect on the newly acquired towns and their hinterlands.³

In 1392 George Thopia, the weak and ill son of Karlo Thopia, surrendered Durazzo to the Venetians. They immediately set to work to improve Durazzo’s already most impressive fortifications. (As early as the eleventh century its walls had been so thick that four horsemen could ride abreast on top of them.) The Venetians were to hold Durazzo until 1501. Later that year George Thopia died without issue. The bulk of his holdings, for he surrendered only Durazzo and environs to Venice, went to his sister Helen. (A small piece was left to his younger sister Vojiva, who was married to a patrician of Durazzo known as Lord [Kyr] Isaac. That couple continued to reside in Durazzo under the Venetians.) Helen was married to the Venetian patrician Mark Barbadigo, who became the actual ruler of Helen’s lands. Usually
residing in the strong fortress of Kroja, Mark for a time held his and Helen’s possessions under Venetian suzerainty. Radič Crnojević also recognized Venetian suzerainty over his lands, concluding a treaty with Venice on 30 November 1392. In early 1393 the Dukagjin brothers regained Alessio from Radič and, realizing that they could not defend it against an Ottoman assault, surrendered it in May or June 1393 to Venice. In return for the town the Venetians granted them titles and an annual pension. The Dukagjins, however, retained all their inland territory, which Venice, lacking the means to defend, had little interest in.

Losing territory to the Crnojevići and threatened by his cousin, George II did not dare stay away from the action for long. He negotiated his freedom from Turkish captivity by submitting once again to Ottoman suzerainty, agreeing to pay an annual tribute, and by surrendering to the sultan the cities of Skadar, Drivast, and Sveti Srdj, an important market on the Bojana. George then returned to his major residence in Ulcinj, which he was allowed to retain.

Constantine Balšić had hoped to obtain Skadar upon the Ottomans’ acquisition of it. Some scholars believe that he may have briefly held it. In any case, if he did, it was only very briefly, for in 1393 the town is found under the governorship of Šahin, the Ottoman commander who had received the town from George’s commander. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that Skadar was immediately placed under Šahin. Constantine may have quarreled with the Ottomans over this, for he fled for a short time to an Adriatic island from which he corresponded with Venice.

Meanwhile, having occupied Skadar, the Ottomans set about strengthening their influence among the Albanian lords of the area. They won over Demetrious Jonima, who soon arranged a meeting between Ottoman officials and Mark Barbodigo of Kroja, who had recently been quarreling with the Venetians. Presumably Mark also found himself under threat of attack from the Ottomans unless he submitted. These negotiations resulted in Mark’s accepting Ottoman suzerainty; he was allowed to retain Kroja and his other lands, which stretched all the way to Durazzo. Ceasing to regard himself as a Venetian deputy, as he had until then, he began plundering Venetian lands in the neighborhood of Durazzo. As a result the Venetians ordered Nikola (Niketas) Thopia, who had been governing Durazzo for them, to take measures. Thopia led his troops against Barbodigo and defeated him badly. Presumably the Ottomans were disappointed by Barbodigo’s failure, for now—probably late in 1394—they installed their vassal Constantine Balšić as governor of Kroja. Barbodigo went into exile, seeking asylum at the court of George Balšić. Thus if a quarrel between Constantine Balšić and the Ottomans had taken place, it was a brief one. In 1395 Constantine was fighting for the Ottomans at the Battle of Rovine. The Venetians were incensed at the turn of events and approached Constantine to yield Kroja to them, but he refused. Constantine soon married Barbodigo’s wife, Helen Thopia, who had the hereditary rights (such as they were) to Kroja. Con-
constantine’s mother, who by now had become a nun, joined him in Kroja, playing an active role at court. Soon Constantine was also in possession of the town of Danj (Dagno) with its lucrative customs house.

In 1395 George II Balšić, after repelling an attack that year—if not in the previous one—from the Dukagjins, secured his relations with Venice. He hoped thereby to smooth his relations with the Dukagjins, Venetian vassals. It also strengthened his own position. And with the Ottomans occupied elsewhere, he discarded his vassalage to them and in October 1395 mobilized his forces to regain his lost cities. In short order he recovered Skadar, Drivast, and Sveti Srdj from the small Turkish garrisons in residence. He also took Danj from his cousin Constantine. But knowing he could not hold his conquests against an Ottoman counter-attack, in 1396 he yielded to Venice Skadar, Drivast, Sveti Srdj, Danj, Lake Skadar and its islands, and the right bank of the Bojana River. (Danj did not actually go to Venice. By then it had fallen into the hands of a restless soldier of fortune, Koja Zakarija, who had become an Ottoman vassal and refused to yield it.) George retained for himself only Ulcinj and Bar with their districts. His borders with Venice now ran along the southern shore of Lake Skadar and the right bank of the Bojana; it was agreed that neither would fortify its bank of the Bojana. Skadar was to remain Venetian until 1479.

Thus Venice had strengthened its position in the southern Adriatic, acquiring direct rule over many of the coastal towns while asserting suzerainty over various Slavic or Albanian lords of other coastal towns and even of the interior. Expecting success from the Christian anti-Turkish crusade of 1396, Venice at that moment had less fear of the Turks and was willing to take a more active role in the area. Moreover, though Skadar on its lake might seem to the reader to be fairly far inland, it was approachable by ship since the Bojana River, running between Lake Skadar and the Adriatic, was navigable for large ships as far as Sveti Srdj. And when weather and water conditions were right smaller ships with shallower drafts could reach the lake itself.4

Meanwhile, when George was regaining his cities in the late fall of 1395, Radić Crnojević moved down to the Gulf of Kotor and took Grbalj, whose peasants were happy to escape from the control Kotor had asserted over them. He then laid siege to Kotor. He was unable to take the town, but its council agreed to pay him tribute and so, satisfied with a new source of income, he withdrew his troops. At the same time Radić obtained submission from the major tribe in that region, the Paštrovići, who occupied the mountains above the Gulf of Kotor. Other Orthodox families in the mountains above Kotor not only submitted to Radić but gave him military support. Whether their Orthodoxy was a factor in their supporting him against the Catholic Balšići, as has sometimes been suggested, is not known, but it seems doubtful to me. Venice tried to mediate a settlement of this growing quarrel between its two Slavic Zetan vassals, but without success. Then in May 1396, during a skirmish with George’s army, Radić Crnojević was killed. George seems to have at once seized some of Radić’s lands from his weaker brothers, Dobrovoj and
Stefan, but George was not strong enough to take much. He had lost much local support and was economically too poor to raise a large enough army to go on the offensive. His lands had suffered greatly from the plundering of Radić’s men in 1395; moreover, in 1396 a major earthquake had severely damaged his coastal cities of Ulcinj and Bar.

George also had to face a new and more dangerous enemy than Radić had been. For Sandalj Hranić of Bosnia, successor to Vlatko Vuković and the leading nobleman of Hum, had acquired Tvrtko’s coastal holdings which, including Novi, stretched to the north bank of the Gulf of Kotor. He looked upon the two Zetans’ forcible assertion of suzerainty over Kotor as a usurpation of Bosnia’s rights, for Kotor had been under Bosnian suzerainty since 1384 or 1385. Sandalj’s tribute demands were smaller than those of the Zetans, so through diplomacy the town of Kotor accepted Sandalj as its suzerain. The death of Radić Crnojević made this submission less risky for the town. Sandalj also restored to Kotor its lordship over various towns and districts along the coast—in particular over the Svetomiholjska Metohija—that Radić had liberated from Kotor. Sandalj then took Budva. He soon had won over the Paštrovići, and thus probably briefly asserted his lordship over the mountain districts behind Kotor that had formerly accepted the Crnojevići. Sandalj’s presence on the coast led to a quarrel with Dubrovnik over its salt monopoly, for, like Tvrtko before him, Sandalj imported salt from Italy into Budva and Novi. He also skirmished in the late 1390s with George Balšić, who still claimed this area. In these fights the Paštrovići split. Many ardently supported Sandalj, and when he was soon forced to retire from the coastal area, many Paštrovići retreated with him and received lands on the Neretva in Hum.

After the death of Radić, the Crnojevići family, under his brothers Dobrovoj and Stefan, suffered a major decline. They not only suffered territorial losses to George and then, as seen, to Sandalj, but also to a second family, probably related to them, the Djuraševići, led by the brothers George and Lješ. They, though first referred to in sources in 1403, seem to have been actively supporting George Balšić against the Crnojevići already in the late 1390s. The Djuraševići played a major role in George Balšić’s campaign that expelled Sandalj from Budva in 1403. As a reward George assigned Budva to them; he also awarded them the region of the Svetomiholjska Metohija, which was once again taken away from Kotor. In this period the Djuraševići also took advantage of Balšić support to win for themselves much Crnojevići land in the mountains behind Kotor, some of which seems to have been briefly held by Sandalj. The Crnojevići, in decline, still retained three villages near Lake Skadar and possibly some interior territory.

After defeating the Christian crusaders at Nikopolis and expelling the Brankovići from their lands (events to be discussed below), the Ottomans resumed an active role in Zeta and Albania. Their raiding was resumed again, probably in 1398. At that time Progon, the Dukagić family head and a Venetian vassal, was killed trying to oppose the Turks. Not surprisingly, one after the other, various Albanian and Slavic lords of the Albanian-Zetan
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interior had to accept Ottoman suzerainty. Those submitting included the Dukagjins—now led by Tanush Major—for their lands along the Drin. So as the fourteenth century came to a close, the Venetian presence came to be limited to possession of or suzerainty over just the towns along the Adriatic, the Bojana River, and Lake Skadar.

In the cities they controlled the Venetians, who took advantage of their rule to further their own commerce, carried out few measures to strengthen local defense, even though they taxed the local population heavily for that purpose. The indigenous local leaders, who had agreed to submit to Venice because they felt Venice better able to defend their towns from the Turks, became disheartened. A large revolt broke out against Venice in 1399, continuing for two years, among the overtaxed villagers in the vicinity of Skadar and Drivast. And riots, including acts of arson, also took place inside Skadar itself. The Venetian troops were able to hold out in Skadar and Drivast themselves, while the surrounding countryside ceased to recognize Venetian officials. Disillusioned with Venice’s policy in his former lands and with its trade monopoly policy that caused economic stagnation in the ports he still retained, George Balšić brought troops into the districts he had previously yielded to Venice. He captured a large quantity of salt at Sveti Srdj, which he then sold. The Venetians attributed to him a major role in initiating the uprising. It is not certain whether or not this judgment was accurate; it is possible that he simply took advantage of a situation that arose spontaneously. The Turks also sent raiding parties through these rebellious Venetian territories. The rebellion was finally put down in 1402 and peace was re-established.

In 1402, when many Albanian vassals of the Ottomans—Koja Zakarija, Demetrios Jonima, John Castriot, and probably Tanush Major Dukagjin—led their retainers personally to support Bayezid against Timur at Ankara, Constantine Balšić remained in Albania. He promptly launched an attack against Venice’s Durazzo. The attempt failed and he was captured. The Venetians tried and then executed him. His city of Kroja was quickly seized by Nikola Thopia, acting for himself. The Venetians, whom he had previously served loyally and well, soon acquiesced and, in 1404, recognized him as governor of Kroja.

The Ottoman Conquest of Bulgaria

During the winter of 1392–93 John Šişman of Bulgaria entered into secret negotiations with Hungary’s King Sigismund, who was then planning a major expedition against the Ottomans (an expedition that in fact was not to occur until 1396). Presumably John Šişman saw Hungarian support as a means to shed the heavy vassalage the Ottomans had imposed upon Bulgaria. The Ottomans, learning of these talks, launched a major invasion against Bulgaria. The country was devastated. Trnovo fell, after heroically resisting a
three-month siege, in July 1393. The Ottomans, then, decided to annex the country. Bulgaria was placed under direct Ottoman administration; it was to remain under Turkish rule for nearly five hundred years. The Turks sent in their administrators and settled their cavalry on military fiefs (timars), which provided the Turks with a strong and loyal force within Bulgaria. They quickly and effectively established such firm control over Bulgaria that Bulgaria remained Ottoman even after the Ottoman defeat at Ankara (1402) and throughout the Ottoman civil war (1403–13). Only Vidin was not conquered. John Stracimir reaffirmed his vassalage to the sultan and remained as ruler of Vidin a few years longer.

The only other piece of “Bulgarian” territory that did not fall in 1393 was the disputed region along the Black Sea coast; it survived the 1393 attack since at the time it was not under Bulgaria. After 1366/67 the “Bulgarian” Black Sea coast had been divided. The southern half with Mesembria, Anchialos, and Sozopolis had been returned to the Byzantine Empire, while the central and northern part—Emona, Varna, Kavarna, Kaliakra—remained as part of the Dobrudja state of Despot Dobrotica, who was succeeded in about 1385 by his son Ivanko. Ivanko concluded a treaty with Genoa that gave the Genoese broad privileges, in 1387. These relations may have been partially intended to pave the way for an alliance with Genoa against Trnovo, which then enjoyed good relations with Genoa’s rival Venice. However, Ivanko was not able to maintain the independence of his state. Perhaps he died. In any case the Dobrudja state was annexed by Mircea of Wallachia in early 1390 and was held by him to mid-1391. At least, this possession is suggested by Mircea’s charters from 1390–91 in which, in addition to his other titles, he calls himself “Despot of the land of Dobrotica.” His charters from 1392 and later omit this title, indicating that by then he had ceased to hold this territory.

Soon these Black Sea lands were held by Emperor Manuel II’s nephew John VII, who also held an appanage, centered in Selymbria, that stretched from the region of Mesembria along the Black Sea shore to very near Constantinople. John held his appanage under Ottoman suzerainty. This territory had been the base from which John in 1390 had briefly seized Constantinople from John V. After his succession Manuel was unhappy about John VII’s appanage but could take no effective action since the sultan, playing divide and rule, placed John VII under his protection. Presumably the Dobrudja was acquired by John in 1391 or 1392, when the Ottomans were raiding in the area. We may suspect that either John took advantage of the raiders’ presence and the general instability caused by the raids to seize the lands—obtaining Ottoman confirmation afterward—or else the Ottomans occupied them and, supporting John as a rival to Manuel, decided to strengthen his position by granting them to him. The Turks took the Dobrudja in 1395, but John was to continue to hold the rest of his appanage until the Ottomans took Selymbria in 1399. We may suspect that at that time they took the Black Sea cities lying to its north as well. The conclusions presented above are based on the research
of Naumov, who persuasively argues against the view, which prevailed until recently, that the Ottomans took Mesembria and the other Black Sea towns in 1380, if not even earlier.5

The Battles of Rovine and Nikopolis and their Results

In 1395 the Ottomans attacked Wallachia to punish its ruler, Mircea, for raiding into Ottoman territory. At Rovine, where the Turks met the Wallachians (Vlachs) in battle on 17 May 1395, on the Turkish side, fulfilling their vassal obligations, were Stefan Lazarević, Vukašin’s son Marko, and Constantine Dejanović. Constantine and Marko were both killed in the battle. After their deaths, the Ottomans annexed their lands. Marko’s territory around Prilep and Constantine’s around Kumanovo were combined into a single Ottoman province centered in Kjustendil (formerly Velbužd). Despite the role which history forced upon him, Marko (called Marko Kraljević, “the king’s son”) became in the epics the greatest Serbian opponent of the Turks. But though many of his actual military activities between 1372 and 1395 were in support of the Turks, Marko’s heart does not seem to have been with them. Constantine the Philosopher reports that on the eve of the Battle of Rovine Marko said to Constantine Dejanović, “I pray God to help the Christians and that I will be among the first dead in this war.” The Wallachians won at Rovine and were thus successful in preventing the Turkish occupation of their lands beyond the Danube. However, the campaign did result in the Turks annexing the Dobrudja. Thus by the end of 1395 the Ottomans had taken Bulgaria (except the Vidin province), eastern Macedonia, Thrace, and—as we shall see—Thessaly.

Mircea of Wallachia not only managed to survive the Ottoman attack of 1395, but he also was able to take advantage of Timur’s (Tamerlane’s) successful war against the Golden Horde, which resulted in the destruction of the Horde’s capital of Sarai. Capitalizing upon the weakened Horde’s preoccupation with this major crisis, Mircea seized Kilia, an important port at the mouth of the Danube where the Genoese had a major colony; Kilia in the second half of the fourteenth century had replaced Vicina as the major port at the mouth of the Danube.

In 1396 King Sigismund of Hungary, against whom the Ottomans seem to have been planning a campaign, organized a major Christian crusading venture. The bulk of the Christian troops were drawn from Hungary and from France. The Christian armies crossed the Danube and reached Nikopolis, where they were met in September by the advancing Turkish army. The Christian armies lacked co-ordination, and the French knights refused to follow the plans suggested by Sigismund, who at least knew Turkish battle strategy. The divided command plus Turkish skill led to a massive Turkish victory. Thousands of Christians were captured and held for ransom; some spent years in Turkish captivity. Sigismund, almost captured, managed to escape on a Christian ship. Since Stracimir of Vidin had supported this
The crusade, the Turks swept through his lands after their victory at Nikopolis. It did not take them long to conquer them, and the Vidin province, the last bit of independent Bulgaria, was annexed as well. The following year the Turks poured into Greece again, overran Attica, and raided into the Peloponnesus. During these years they also blockaded Constantinople. Lacking a fleet, they could not take the city. However, by 1399, when they took Selâmbria, Constantinople was completely surrounded by territory directly under Ottoman control. Thus many felt that it was only a matter of time before it fell.

**Serbian Affairs**

Toward the middle of the 1390s the Ottomans became angry at Vuk Branković. They had at least two legitimate causes: Vuk had not attended the Serres meeting of Bayezid’s vassals in the winter of 1393–94—to be discussed below—and in April 1394 he had concluded an alliance with Venice. Thus they attacked him and drove him from his lands. This attack was long believed to have occurred in 1398. Recently Dinić, with strong evidence, has advanced the date to 1396. Subsequently Purković has presented evidence to argue that Vuk lost his lands even earlier than Dinić believes. For Purković has discovered that Stefan Lazarević donated lands near Peć to the Athonite monastery of Saint Panteleimon in the split year 1394/95 (i.e., between 1 September 1394 and 31 August 1395). That Stefan could make this donation shows that Vuk no longer possessed the whole Peć region. Thus, if Vuk lost all his lands in one Turkish action (something we cannot be certain of), then this action, and the subsequent award of Vuk’s lands to Stefan Lazarević, must have occurred before the date the Saint Panteleimon charter was issued.6

In any case, before his expulsion Vuk had succeeded in getting much of his money out to Dubrovnik, where he banked it. Accounts of his fate differ, though in all versions he does not seem to have lived long thereafter. Orbini gives two variant stories, both presumably from oral sources and neither of which was considered reliable by the seventeenth-century writer. In the first Milica had him poisoned. In the second, having been jailed by Bayezid’s son Musa, Vuk escaped to the Ballšići, who beheaded him for treason. Other stories or rumors have him fleeing north to die in Beograd, fleeing into Macedonia where he was poisoned by order of Bayezid, or being captured by the Turks and dying in captivity. Ćirković has accepted this last version.7 A later Serbian chronicle dates his death 6 October 1398. Recent scholarship has corrected this and concludes he died 6 October 1397. His widow (Lazar’s daughter Mara) and sons, still as Ottoman vassals, retained only a small portion of Vuk’s Macedonian lands, Trepča and Drenica with environs.

The Turks directly took and installed garrisons in two of his fortified towns: Jelče and Zvečan. The bulk of Vuk’s Kosovo area holdings went to Stefan Lazarević, a loyal Ottoman vassal. The Ottomans seem to have installed further troops in certain towns assigned to Stefan Lazarević. Thus despite the large grant to Stefan, the Ottomans still acquired considerable new
authority in this region. Stefan, who had reached his majority in 1393, was by this time by far the strongest Serbian lord. Stefan’s loyalty to the sultan had gained him the sultan’s support, enabling him to expand the lands under his control and to acquire greater authority over the remaining much-weakened Serbian nobles. It has been suggested that he, or his mother Milica, had a role in inciting the Turks to move against Vuk; however, there is no evidence—other than Stefan’s acquisition of some of Vuk’s territory at campaign’s end—to support this supposition.

Stefan Lazarević’s good relations with the Ottomans also eliminated any serious external threat to Serbia. The Ottomans seemed content to leave him be and the Hungarians, fearing the Turks, also left him in peace. This enabled Stefan to concentrate on domestic affairs; he was able to use his time and energy to subdue and subject to himself the various nobles within his state.

And Stefan Lazarević did have certain difficulties with his nobility. The most serious case occurred in 1398 when a group of nobles led by Novak Belocvrkić of Toplica and Nicholas (Nikola) Zojić, seeking greater independence, organized a plot against the young ruler. They contacted the sultan and accused Stefan of being in secret contact with the Hungarians. Hoping to shed their vassalage to Stefan, they sought Ottoman help to overthrow Stefan and expressed a desire to submit directly to the sultan. Stefan, who learned of the plot near its inception, thus found himself threatened by a local revolt and Ottoman action, should the Turks believe the accusation. Stefan acted quickly; luring Novak to his court, he seized and executed him. Learning of this, Nicholas Zojić fled to the fortress of Ostrovica near Rudnik. Pursued, he surrendered to Stefan, who spared his life on the condition that he become a monk. And thus the plot was put down before the Ottoman troops made their appearance. Whether they appeared in answer to the plotters’ request and what, if anything, they actually did are not known. But since they soon withdrew and Stefan Lazarević seems to have remained in the sultan’s good graces, it seems that he cleared himself of the charges against him. According to Constantine the Philosopher, Stefan was actually guilty of the charge; admitting it at once, he sought and gained the sultan’s forgiveness.

Stefan thereafter remained loyal to Bayezid, who seems to have liked him; thus the sultan encouraged him to put down the unruly nobles. This was in the sultan’s interests, for it meant that Serbia would be a stronger state with stronger armies able to provide more effective service to the sultan. And Stefan, fulfilling his vassal obligation to lead his own troops in person, led effective Serbian units in the Ottoman armies at the major battles of his time: Rovine (1395), Nikopolis (1396), and Ankara (1402).

Bayezid, however, at some point between 1398 and 1402, restored to Vuk’s sons, Gregory and George, most, if not all, of the lands taken from Vuk in ca. 1396. The young men seem to have been forced to purchase the territory back with the wealth that Vuk had banked in Dubrovnik. It is clear that the territory had been returned to the Brankovići before the Battle of Ankara in July 1402. Some scholars believe the territory was restored in 1398
or 1399; they argue that at that time the sultan, suspicious of Stefan Lazarević’s ties with the Hungarians, would have wanted to weaken him. Others argue that the restoration occurred just before the Ankara campaign, when Bayezid, mobilizing to fight Timur, needed all the help he could find and thus decided to give them back their lands. Unless their lands were returned in two installments, the latter dating is preferable, for Stefan Lazarević is found holding the important Branković city of Priština as late as March 1402. Having received their lands back, Gregory and George did fight for the sultan at Ankara. In the restoration the Turks retained the two towns they had taken direct control of in ca. 1396, Jeleč and Zvečan.

In the meantime, Dubrovnik began to feel threatened. The Ottomans were operating in the vicinity of the town, which sooner or later might be directly attacked; moreover, much of the territory the town traded in was being absorbed into the Ottoman Empire and thus lost to its trade. Thus it made sense for Dubrovnik to enter into relations with the Turks. Through the mediation of Stefan Lazarević, who had achieved an excellent rapport with the sultan, Dubrovnik in 1392 was able to conclude a trade treaty with the Ottomans. This treaty was followed by a new one, granting the town even more extensive privileges, in 1397.

Affairs in Greece

Meanwhile, as noted, in April 1387 Thessaloniki fell. Manuel Palaeologus, who had been holding it as his appanage, fled to Lesbos. He soon went to the Ottoman court and submitted to Murad I. It has been claimed by Loenertz that his submission was graciously accepted and that Murad granted Manuel as a fief Kavalla, which the Ottomans had taken in the summer of 1387. If Manuel received Kavalla, it is not certain whether he retained it until the Serres meeting, which probably occurred in the winter 1393–94, or whether the Ottomans assumed direct control over it prior to that date, possibly in 1391, as Loenertz and Lemerle believe. In any case, Manuel, who until then had been the leading anti-Turkish hawk in the Palaeologus family, acquiesced in the new situation and remained a loyal vassal to the Turks from this point, probably late in 1387, until the Serres meeting in the winter of 1393–94. His brother Theodore, Despot of the Morea, also accepted this policy and remained a loyal Ottoman vassal until the Serres meeting as well. After the fall of Thessaloniki the Greek lords of Thessaly, with the prospect of impending doom before them, also submitted to Ottoman suzerainty.

At this time the Greek magnates of the Peloponnnesus, seemingly never happy with Theodore’s rule, or maybe better to say with any central authority, rose up in rebellion. Theodore, who along with Manuel had submitted to the Ottoman sultan, received aid from the Ottomans, who sent an army to assist him under the able commander Evrenos beg. These troops appeared in the fall of 1387 and ravaged much of the countryside while the rebel leaders holed themselves up in various fortresses. The Turks collected much booty and
forced the rebels to submit once again. Theodore accepted their submission, but he clearly was not pleased with them. In the years that followed he confiscated the lands of several of these individuals. Those suffering confiscations included Paul Mamonas, the Lord of Monemvasia.

Meanwhile, Venice was acquiring a more active role in Greece. In 1386 it took Corfu from the Angevins. Then it decided to increase its holdings in the Peloponnesus, which until then had been limited to the two southern ports of Coron and Modon. In 1388 it purchased Argos and Nauplia from the Brienne family which had held these towns throughout the fourteenth century. However, before Venice could occupy these towns the two allies Nero Acciajuoli and Despot Theodore attacked them, Theodore taking Argos and Nero Nauplia. The Venetians arrived and soon managed to expel Nero and occupy Nauplia, but they could not take Argos. Angry, they allied with the Navarrese Company. They also broke off commercial relations with Nero and blockaded the port of Athens. The Navarrese in 1389 took Nero prisoner, by violating a safe-conduct they had offered him. They then linked his release to Theodore’s surrendering Argos to Venice. Theodore saw no reason why he should be penalized for Nero’s stupidity in trusting the Navarrese and thereby falling into their trap, so he refused. Nero was held captive for well over a year, until he was released in 1391 for a huge ransom and the surrender of Megara to Venice. The Venetians, it was agreed, were to hold Megara until they acquired Argos, at which point Nero would regain Megara. Needless to say, Nero was angry at Theodore’s leaving him in captivity for so long; their relations cooled. Angry at Theodore, Venice encouraged his local Greek enemies, the disgruntled magnates. Venice provided both supplies and asylum for them.

Led by Paul Mamonas, several of the dissident magnates, who had lost their lands, sent complaints to Sultan Bayezid. Bayezid decided to hold a court to judge their complaints and also to settle various other Balkan issues. So, in the winter of 1393–94, he set up court at Serres and summoned all his Balkan vassals: the new Emperor Manuel II (1391–1425), who had recently succeeded after John V’s death in 1391; Manuel’s brother Despot Theodore of the Morea; Manuel’s nephew John (VII), who then held an appanage centered in Selymbria; Constantine Dejanović, the lord of Kumanovo; Stefan Lazarević of Serbia; and various lesser figures. Our major sources do not provide a date for this meeting, and various scholars have argued that it actually occurred in the previous winter of 1392–93. Though the evidence is not conclusive, I feel the case made for 1393–94 is stronger. However, if it did occur the previous year, then the dates given for the Ottoman campaign that followed the meeting, described in the pages that follow, should be put back one year.

Mamonas laid his grievances before Bayezid, who, we are told, became furious at Manuel. Manuel subsequently claimed that Bayezid hatched the plan to murder all the assembled vassals, which probably would have resulted in the direct annexation of at least Macedonia and Serbia. However, accord-
ing to one story, the servant responsible for murdering them in their beds failed, through conscience, to execute the order, and Bayezid, having repented of his order by morning, was pleased that the order had not been carried out.

At this meeting Bayezid had the chance to come to know Stefan Lazarević, and came to like him. Their association, as already noted, was to be friendly for the next decade; and Stefan was to provide effective military support for various Ottoman campaigns and Bayezid was to support Stefan against his nobles, enabling Stefan to restore Serbia as a relatively strong state. According to Constantine the Philosopher, Stefan’s biographer, the sultan gave the young prince valuable advice: depend on a strong army, repress the nobles, rely on new retainers whom you have selected rather than the hereditary nobles, and keep power centralized in your own hands.

It is often stated by scholars that at Serres the marriage between Manuel II and Constantine Dejanovic’s daughter Helen was arranged. Loenertz, however, argues that this marriage was not concluded at Serres but had been carried out several years before. He claims that Manuel’s son and heir, John VIII, was born of Helen prior to the Serres meeting. Barker concurs, dating the marriage to 1392. Regardless of when concluded, Manuel’s marriage to the daughter of a petty magnate of Macedonia illustrates the come-down of the Byzantine emperor’s prestige. But in those years it was clear that the Byzantines and Serbs would have to create closer bonds and work together if they were to have any hope of extricating themselves from their predicament. Serbian-Byzantine ties were to remain friendly in the years that followed; and en route home after the Battle of Ankara in 1402, Stefan Lazarević paid a visit to Constantinople, where Manuel granted him the title despot. In any case Manuel’s marriage to Helen was a successful one, and she bore him several children including two future emperors, John VIII and Constantine XI, the last Byzantine emperor.

The chief order of business, that we know of, at Serres was to address the complaints against Despot Theodore presented by the Peloponnesian archons. Bayezid demanded that Theodore turn over to him the various disputed fortresses in the Peloponnesus, including Monemvasia, so that he could decide their fate. Loenertz concludes that Bayezid regarded Theodore, Mamonas, and the other magnates simply as his own vassals. They all had submitted directly to him and thus their claims were all equal. Therefore the disputed lands should be given to him as their suzerain to dispose of as he saw fit. He compelled Theodore to sign over to him a series of fortresses, including Monemvasia. Thus Bayezid now had title to the disputed towns; he planned to occupy them, after which he could distribute them as he chose; presumably he also had the option, if he chose to exercise it, of retaining them. Theodore, having signed, was requested to remain with Bayezid, a request he was unable to refuse, while the other Balkan lords, having reaffirmed their vassal ties with the sultan, were allowed to depart.

Meanwhile, Turkish envoys, bearing Theodore’s letter and accompanied
by a small force, appeared, probably in February 1394, before Monemvasia. The citizens of the town did not want to obey the order and, refusing to open their gates, secretly sent an embassy to the Venetian bailiff in Negroponte, offering the city to Venice. The Venetian senate debated the offer in March and, not wanting to involve Venice in a war with the Turks, refused the offer. Rebuffed by Venice, it seems the town then opened its gates and a small Turkish garrison was admitted. Though certain scholars claim Monemvasia did not ever submit at this time, Loenertz makes a strong case that it did admit this garrison, probably in late March or early April 1394.\(^\text{12}\)

Meanwhile, Bayezid and his army, with Theodore accompanying them as an honorary captive, began marching through Thessaly. Theodore’s release had been promised as soon as the sultan received word that Monemvasia had been turned over to his mission. Ottoman envoys were then dispatched ahead of the main force to the Morea, bearing Theodore’s signed orders to the commanders of the various other forts, including Argos, to turn their forts over to the Ottoman representatives. Next, Theodore left the Ottoman retinue. It is not certain whether the sultan released him upon receiving word of Monemvasia’s surrender, or whether he escaped. In any case Theodore hurried to the Peloponnese, beating the Ottoman officials to Argos and the other forts due to be surrendered, and countermanded his earlier signed orders. He then quickly set about preparing for the defense of the Peloponnese, beefing up key garrisons, deploying troops to guard the main routes into the Peloponnese, and repairing walls and fortifications. He also was determined to recover Monemvasia. The Turks did not have many troops in or around Monemvasia, and the routes by which they might bring re-enforcements to the town were blocked, so Theodore led his forces thither and laid siege to Monemvasia.

Anticipating a major attack from the Turks, Theodore clearly also needed to improve his relations with Venice. So he made peace with the Venetians, concluding the Treaty of Modon, 27 May 1394, by which he turned over to them the disputed town of Argos. The Venetians then restored Megara to Nero. Procedures for arbitrating disputes between Venice and the despot—and between citizens of their two states—were also established by the treaty. Theodore prolonged negotiations with Venice and finally in July 1394 persuaded the Venetians to take action to prevent the Turks from supplying the besieged in Monemvasia by sea. As a result, Monemvasia shortly thereafter surrendered to the despot.

The Ottomans meanwhile moved through Thessaly, which they occupied as far south as Neopatras, Livadia, and Lamia. This area was directly annexed by the Ottoman Empire. We have no sources that describe the conquest of Thessaly, but we can suspect there must have been considerable resistance from the Greek lords; otherwise it is hard to explain why the Ottomans’ main army, which was already in Thessaly early in 1394, did not attack the Morea when the despot defied them and relieve the siege of Monemvasia. However, after Thessaly was conquered, the Ottomans were that much closer to the
borders of the Morea and ready to take action. They also stood directly at the borders of Nero’s Duchy of Athens and Thebes. Not surprisingly, Nero submitted at once, accepting Ottoman overlordship for his duchy. Meanwhile that same year, in September 1394, Nero died after changing his will because of his anger at Theodore. Megara, Corinth, and his Peloponnesian possessions were left to his second daughter, Francesca, who was married to Carlo Tocco, the Duke of Cephalonia.

The Ottomans launched a massive raid into the Peloponnesus in 1395, which broke through Theodore’s main defenses and took a great deal of booty. They came partly in answer to a request for aid from Carlo Tocco, who was being besieged in Corinth by Theodore, who had been led to understand at the time he married Nero’s other daughter that he would inherit Corinth. The Ottomans, led by Evrenos beg, defeated Theodore’s army before Corinth and put an end to the siege. The Turks then proceeded on into the Peloponnesus to plunder a good part of it. The campaign was violent but brief, and the Ottoman forces, having taken no territory, were soon withdrawn. The campaign’s purpose seems to have been entirely punitive. Presumably the main reason for their rapid withdrawal was that Evrenos and this troops were needed for the war against Mirce of Wallachia that culminated in the Battle of Rovine in May 1395. The Ottomans next found themselves faced with Sigismund’s crusade, which prevented them from taking further action in Greece until that threat had been met; they duly handled the crusaders, but not until September 1396 when they achieved their victory at Nikopolis.

As soon as the Ottomans departed in early 1395 Theodore again besieged Corinth but failed to take it. However, Theodore’s luck soon changed. In 1396 the commander of the Navarrese Company, Peter of San Superano (Pedro Bordo de San Superano), proclaimed himself Prince of Achaea. At about the same time Carlo Tocco, needing support against Theodore, entered into an alliance with the Navarrese. Shortly thereafter, still in 1396, Peter’s Navarrese agreed to provide aid to some Greek subjects in rebellion against Theodore. Theodore met them in battle and won a decisive victory, capturing a large number of Greek rebels and also Peter. Theodore pardoned the Greeks and allowed them to go free; however, he retained Peter as a captive, demanding Corinth as well as a large cash settlement for his release. Through the mediation of Venice Peter’s release was negotiated, allowing Theodore finally to acquire Corinth.

In 1397, the Ottomans returned to Greece to carry out a second major plundering expedition. First they pillaged the countryside of Boeotia and Attica, though they took no towns; then they moved into the Peloponnesus. Among the towns they broke into there was Venice’s Argos, which in early June 1397 was badly sacked; many people were massacred. They also badly mangled the army Theodore sent out against them. Once again, the Ottomans withdrew at campaign’s end. The Ottomans were probably not ready to take the Peloponnesus. They still did not have Attica and Boeotia, and the fortresses in the Peloponnesus were too numerous—Venetian sources state there
were 150 strong castles in the Morea—to be taken all in one season, particularly since many of them were ports, easily supplied by Venice, which dominated the sea in that area. Theodore, however, felt it was only a matter of time before the Ottomans returned with the aim of conquest. So he tried to obtain further commitments from Venice. It seems that previously, during the Ottoman attack of 1397, Theodore had tried to turn Corinth over to the Venetians, but they, trying to avoid further conflicts with the Turks, had refused to take the town. It seems Theodore made several proposals to Venice again in 1400, offering either to surrender certain territory to Venice or to submit to Venetian suzerainty. But the Venetians, still not wanting to provoke a war with the Turks or to take on so large a commitment, particularly for territory not on the coast, refused.

Having no luck with Venice, Theodore turned to the Hospitaller Knights of Saint John. They had given up on the Morea earlier and, not interested in renewing their lease to Achaia after its expiration, had departed from the peninsula in 1383. Now, however, they were willing to give it another try. So in 1400, if not a year or so earlier, Theodore turned Corinth over to them. Then in May 1400 he turned Kalavryta over to them to have and defend. The population of Kalavryta was unhappy and attacked the Knights, trying to prevent them from occupying the city. Though Zakynthinos claims the resistance was successful and the Knights were forced to retreat, most scholars—Loenertz and Cheetham included—believe the Knights actually took over the rule of Kalavryta.

The Knights then began demanding other towns, including Theodore’s capital of Mistra. Theodore, hard-pressed, was ready to yield to some of these demands. In fact, it seems he was prepared to move his court to Monemvasia and surrender Mistra. However, the local population of Mistra rioted and began to prepare the town’s defenses to resist the Knights. Loenertz thinks the Knights succeeded in occupying the citadel of Mistra after Theodore somehow managed to temporarily pacify the town’s inhabitants. However, most other scholars believe the Knights did not take Mistra. In any case, the Knights were establishing for themselves a firm foothold in the Peloponnese, winning acquiescence from Theodore but provoking considerable opposition from the local Greek population, which had no use for Catholicism or the Knights. The Knights began to fortify the Isthmus of Corinth.

The Ottomans objected to this and planned to take action about it. However, Bayezid realized he had to delay his response to the Knights’ provocation in order to prepare for his impending war with Timur (Tamerlane). So, in 1401 Bayezid sent an envoy to try to arrange a peace with Theodore; the sultan hoped that by taking pressure off Theodore it might then be possible to separate Theodore from the Knights. After all, Bayezid understood very well that Theodore had no desire to see the Knights establish themselves in the Peloponnese but acquiesced in their activities only because he saw the Knights as the lesser of two evils. Bayezid, preferring Theodore to the Knights, hoped to conclude an agreement with him. By it he hoped to at least prevent the
Knights from acquiring further territory and possibly to even get Theodore, once he felt freed from the Ottoman danger, to demand the restoration of certain of his cities. Such a demand, the sultan hoped, would lead to tensions, if not a major quarrel, between Theodore and his knightly allies. It seems they did conclude a treaty, in which Theodore agreed to try to oust the Knights from the Peloponnesus.

Meanwhile, in July 1402, the Ottomans were defeated at Ankara by Timur. It at once became clear that the Peloponnesus was to be spared further Ottoman ravages, for the near future at least. Since the Knights were no longer needed, Theodore and the Greek population wanted them out. Theodore, it seems, had legal grounds to recover his cities, for the initial agreement he made with the Knights had given him a right of re-purchase. He now sought to exercise this right. He and Emperor Manuel entered into negotiations with the Knights. Procuring their departure was facilitated by the fact that Timur, after defeating Bayezid, had moved west across Anatolia and among other places had sacked the Knights’ Anatolian town of Smyrna. Needing cash to rebuild it, the Knights agreed to depart for a large cash payment, recompense for the money they had spent on Corinth’s defenses plus an additional forty-three thousand ducats.

The Knights were slow to vacate, but it seems this resulted from the fact that Theodore, having trouble in raising the money, was slow to pay. Nevertheless, it seems that after their agreement the Knights allowed the Greeks to assume the administration of the towns the Knights held, while the Knights occupied only the citadels. Upon receiving payment, the Knights departed; the last fortresses they held, Corinth and probably Kalavryta, reverted to Theodore in June 1404. Now that Corinth was securely Greek again, the prestige of its metropolitan bishop, prior to 1204 the major prelate in the Peloponnesus, rose rapidly. He soon came to rival and then eclipse the metropolitan in Monemvasia. And when the Metropolitan of Corinth demanded that the suffragan bishoprics of Maina and Zemenos be taken from Monemvasia and restored to Corinth, which historically had stood over these sees, the emperor granted the request. Not surprisingly, tensions developed between the two sees, and the citizens of Monemvasia, loyal to their prelate, had one further reason to be annoyed at Theodore and the Byzantines.

Throughout this whole period Theodore continued to have trouble with the local nobles, whose loyalty remained dubious. In 1397 a Venetian envoy reported that the despot was hated by his lords (nobles) to the extent that they even aided his enemies. The aristocrats not only desired local independence from central officials and resisted new or increased taxes, but they also particularly resented the appearance of newcomers to the landed aristocracy. For when Theodore (and it was to be true for his successors as well) arrived from the court of Constantinople, he brought with him a considerable number of retainers from the capital, to whom he granted not only administrative and court posts but also large landed estates. And we may suspect that in local politics, at least in the early years of their tenure, these newcomers supported
the despot against local independence. Finally, these newcomers would certainly have had more influence at court than the indigenous nobles.

In time the balance of power between despot and rebel nobles came increasingly to favor Theodore. Besides the settling in the Morea of numbers of his own retainers, he also benefited from the migration into the Peloponnnesus of many Albanians; it has been estimated that in the late fourteenth century some ten thousand crossed the Isthmus and demanded the right to settle. The despot agreed and enrolled many in his armies, which gave him many additional troops to use against the rebels. The Albanians, who continued to migrate into the peninsula during the following decades, increased the population; and as numbers of them settled down as peasants and shepherds, they increased the productivity of the area. Albanians were found throughout the peninsula, with their largest settlements located in Arcadia.

Theodore continued to rule the Morean despotate until he took ill in 1407, became a monk, and died. Emperor Manuel then visited the Peloponnnesus, awarding it to his second son, who was also named Theodore and was then about twelve years old. Manuel installed a group of efficient and loyal administrators, many of whom came from Constantinople, to administer the province and who could also be trusted to look out for Theodore’s interests. We shall continue with the despotate’s story from 1407 under Theodore II in the next chapter.

Achaea, by this time, was a narrow strip of land in the western Peloponnnesus that also included Arcadia. Under its leader Peter of San Superano, who styled himself Prince of Achaea, the Navarrese Company continued to rule Achaea until 1402 when Peter died. His widow Maria Zaccaria, of the Genoese family that held Chios, tried to rule Achaea after his death. However, her nephew Centurione Zaccaria, who had obtained huge estates in Arcadia from his uncle, ousted her and took over in Achaea. He was to be the last Latin to rule on the peninsula as Prince of Achaea. He quickly obtained recognition, both for his possession of Achaea and for his title, from the King of Naples. Centurione held a very unstable, threatened realm. The Greek despotate did not leave him in peace, gradually annexing bits and pieces of his territory. And at the start of Centurione’s reign Carlo Tocco of Cephalonia, having been expelled from Corinth, returned with an expeditionary force to the Morea. But instead of directing his attack against Theodore, who had taken Corinth, he used his men to seize most of Elis, which until then had been part of the Achaean principality. At various times Centurione’s state was reduced to little or nothing more than his own personal lands in Arcadia. We shall also pick up the end of the Principality of Achaea in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, upon Nerio’s death in September 1394 his heir, his brother Donato, inherited Attica and the title Duke of Athens. He received Athens except for its Acropolis, which was left to the Catholic Archbishop of Athens, to whom Nerio owed a huge debt for ransoming Nerio from the Navarrese. Just before his death Nerio had won recognition of his conquests in Attica and had been granted the title Duke of Athens by Ladislas of Naples. Meanwhile,
not getting along with the new duke, the Greek Archbishop of Athens called on the Turks to end Latin rule in Athens. The Turks sent a small force to besiege the Acropolis. Donato, feeling himself too weak to resist, sent a messenger to the Venetian bailiff in Negroponte on Euboea to offer Athens to Venice. The Venetian bailiff sent a small force that was sufficient to break the Turkish siege; the Ottomans withdrew and the Euboean Venetians took over in Athens. When it learned of the Negroponte bailiff’s action, the Venetian senate approved it. Promising to respect existing rights, Venice established its typical colonial administration in Athens under a podesta and garrisoned the Acropolis.

The Venetian protectorate was short-lived. Nerio’s illegitimate son Anthony, who had inherited Boeotia with Thebes from his father, launched a surprise attack in 1402 against Attica, which he conquered easily including the lower town of Athens. He laid siege to the Venetian garrison in the Acropolis. The furious Venetians sent an army from Negroponte to break the siege. However, Anthony managed to ambush these troops and force their retreat back to Euboea. Finally, after a siege of seventeen months, the starved Venetian garrison surrendered to Anthony in January or February 1403. For a cash payment and recognition of Venetian suzerainty over Athens, Venice accepted the situation and recognized Anthony as Duke of Athens. Anthony held the whole duchy until his death in 1435, when it was passed on to his heirs, who continued to rule the duchy until the Ottoman conquest of Athens in 1456. Under Anthony Catalans were still to be found in Athens as mercenaries.

Anthony was half-Greek through his mother, and his wife Maria Melissene was also Greek. She was from a major aristocratic family that held lands all over Greece. Under Anthony Athens revived. He resided there regularly, rather than in the duchy’s former capital of Thebes. Athens’ economy improved, and the city became famous for its stud farms. The archons of Athens then included Chalciocondyles, the father of the well-known historian Laonikos.

Religion and Culture

The fourteenth century, despite its tragic political history, was a period of cultural flowering for Bulgaria. Bulgaria was part and parcel of the Byzantine “Palaeologian Renaissance,” for in these years Orthodoxy was truly an international movement, with an international culture in which the different Churches cross-fertilized one another. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries fine Byzantine-style churches with Byzantine-style frescoes were built in Trnovo and other towns. Particularly splendid are the frescoes of the Bojana Church, outside Sofija, painted under Constantine Tih.

A large number of major churches and monasteries were erected in the Second Bulgarian Empire, particularly in the fourteenth century. Many were built under the patronage of the rulers and nobles. John Alexander (1331–71)
was a particularly generous patron. Certain monasteries acquired the reputation of being educational and literary centers; many of these had been established through, and thereafter remained under, the tsar’s patronage. Primary education—reading and writing—tended to take place at town churches or monasteries. Some monasteries also provided what may be called secondary education, which included more advanced grammar as well as the study of the Bible and theological texts. Many of these advanced monastic schools instructed only monks or would-be monks, but some educated laymen too. Some of them also taught Greek. When an individual had completed this course of advanced study, he was entitled to be called “gramatik.” Some of the figures known to have held this title were laymen.

Trnovo on the Jantra River was built on two hills, Carevac (the site of a huge fortified enclosure containing the royal palace, patriarchal residence, cathedral church, and other related buildings) and Trapezica (containing the palaces of the leading nobles and many private chapels). Below the two hills lay the market quarter where merchants and artisans plied their trades. The lower town also contained the various quarters for local residents, foreigners (defined as Franks), and Jews respectively.

Trnovo became a major cultural center whose influence extended beyond Bulgaria to have impact on Slavic culture in general. Its cultural activities were strongly supported by the court, particularly during the reign of John Alexander, who was also a great patron of art and literature. An educated man himself, he knew Greek well and had a large and fine library. Under his patronage many earlier works were copied, and many new translations from the Greek as well as original compositions were carried out. The translations included not only religious works—liturgical works, writings of the early Church Fathers as well as of more contemporary Byzantine theologians, saints’ lives, and accounts of Ecumenical councils—but also secular works including Byzantine chronicles, popular tales (e.g., the Fall of Troy, the medieval Alexander), legal works, and works on medicine and natural science subjects. The Bulgarians at this time also produced original works, some of which were secular in character, including chronicles, apocryphal tales, and lives of Bulgarian saints. John Alexander commissioned an encyclopedia, which had a heavy theological emphasis and was based to a considerable extent on Byzantine learning. He also had produced the famous London Gospel, which was beautifully illustrated with some 366 miniatures, showing both biblical subjects and portraits of the tsar and his family. In fact many Bulgarian texts of this period were illustrated with outstanding miniatures.

In the fourteenth century paper increasingly replaced parchment; at first, paper, imported through Varna, was expensive, but in the course of the century it became more plentiful and cheaper, resulting in an increasing number of books produced. Some figures—usually monks—made careers of copying books; one John of the Saint Athanasius monastery on Mount Athos copied sixteen known books, while his disciple Methodius copied twenty-one. The rulers of Vidin, particularly John Alexander’s son John Stracimir
and his wife Anna, were also patrons of literature and art. The famous Bdinski (Vidin) sbornik (compilation), under the patronage of Anna, included many saints’ lives, thirteen of which were of women. A variety of Bulgarian works on medicine, focusing on the cure of disease, have survived from this period. Many were based on Byzantine medicine or were simply translations of the writings of Byzantine doctors. However, there were also works of a more popular sort that tended to be collections of herbal-plant recipes, or magical (utilizing spells), or both. Some of these too were translated from the Greek, while others were original. At this time, as in Byzantium, certain Bulgarian monasteries had hospitals in the monastery complex, run by monks.

The mystical movement of Hesychasm had an impact on certain Bulgarian monasteries. The ideas and practices of Hesychasm were centuries old and can be found in the writings and practices of John Climacus (died ca. 650) and Symeon the New Theologian (eleventh century). But in the fourteenth century they experienced a revival and acquired wider popularity. The catalyst was Gregory of Sinai (1290–1346) who left his monastery on Mount Sinai and traveled west visiting various Byzantine monasteries on the way, before settling for a while on Mount Athos. At each stop he taught the monks a mental prayer, which, when repeated with the proper breathing, might enable one to see a divine light. His teachings were received enthusiastically in various places, particularly on Mount Athos, which became the center of the movement.

Hesychasm’s highest goal was to see the Divine Light. This was to be achieved through prayer and meditation during which one employed specific ascetic techniques. In solitude the Hesychast repeated the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” again and again, blending the prayer with his breathing so that the full prayer coincided with one breath. The successful supplicant had to have already purified himself by conquering his passions and rising above all distractions through a long period of meditation. This purification enabled a Divine Energy that had entered into the man at his baptism to become visible. Thus the successful supplicant, through contemplation, proper breathing, and the repetition of this prayer, achieved a feeling of ecstasy and of seeing himself overwhelmed by rays of supernatural divine light. The Hesychasts believed this light was the same light as that seen by the disciples of Christ on Mount Tabor; this light, they believed, was permanently visible to those able to achieve its vision.

The Hesychasts’ claim that this was a worthwhile way for monks to spend their time, as well as their explanation for the light, was opposed by Barlaam, a Greek monk from Calabria in Italy who had come to Constantinople. His attack on Hesychast ideas was countered vigorously by Gregory Palamas (born 1296), who was by 1333 a monk on Athos. Barlaam said it was impossible to see the Light of Tabor, for it was not eternal but temporary like all God’s creations. If the monks believed it to be permanent, then they were claiming to see the God-head itself, which was impossible for That was invisible. Palamas replied that one must distinguish between the Divine Es-
sence (Ousia) and Divine energies. These energies, he claimed, are active in the world and manifest themselves to man. They are not created but are emanated in an endless operation of God. This emanation is what is seen in the visions, for God’s energies are manifested in many different ways, one of which was the light seen on Tabor, and this emanation is eternally visible to those mystically illumined. Hesychasm, by providing a means to see the light, was therefore a means to bridge the gulf between man and God.

In a council held in Constantinople in 1341 and presided over by Emperor Andronicus III, Hesychasm, championed by Palamas, won a victory. Barlaam, whose views were condemned, returned West in disgust. However, the emperor promptly died, and Hesychasm’s opponents resumed their attack upon the movement. The patriarch, John Kalekas, who had been indifferent to the issue and had tried to avoid passing judgment on it, had been forced by the emperor to hold the 1341 council. He then had signed the decisions of the council. After the emperor’s death, as we saw earlier, Cantacuzenus became regent, only to be ousted by the trio of Andronicus’ widow Anna of Savoy, Apocauacus, and John Kalekas. Since Palamas was a close associate of the regency’s opponent Cantacuzenus, the patriarch now became anti-Palamas and took an anti-Hesychast position. He pointed out that the council of 1341 had banned further discussion of the issue and criticized Palamas for continuing to write and speak about it. Palamas replied that he was only replying to the on-going attacks upon his views. However, Kalekas, ignoring the activities of Palamas’ opponents, kept up his attacks on Palamas until he finally jailed him in 1343; then in January 1344 Kalekas held a synod of the Constantinopolitan clergy to excommunicate Palamas.

Popular works often make Hesychasm out to be an active ingredient in the Byzantine civil war. This interpretation is unwarranted. The Hesychasts played no role in the war as such. Moreover, the lines were not clear-cut; certain opponents of Hesychasm supported Cantacuzenus, while some supporters of the regency, including one of the regents, Empress Anna, had sympathy for Palamas’ ideas. However, as a result of Kalekas’ policy, Hesychasm suffered eclipse and disgrace during the regency years. Then in 1347, when Cantacuzenus was on the verge of triumphing, the emperor released Palamas from jail; as a major figure and friend of Cantacuzenus, Palamas then played a role, as an individual, in mediating peace between the two sides, which resulted in Cantacuzenus’ being accepted as emperor early in 1347.

Cantacuzenus’ triumph led to a reversal of Hesychasm’s fortunes. Patriarch John Kalekas was deposed and a Hesychast monk and friend of Palamas named Isidore became patriarch. He was to be succeeded by another Hesychast, Kallistos (1350–53, 1355–63). And Palamas was soon appointed Archbishop of Thessaloniki by Isidore. Then in 1351, under Patriarch Kallistos, a new council was held in Constantinople that recognized the orthodoxy of Palamas and excommunicated the leading opponents of the movement. Its decisions were confirmed for Bulgaria by a council held in
Tnovo in 1360. Opposition to the 1351 council’s decisions continued in Russia and Antioch for a while longer, but by the end of the fourteenth century opposition died out and Hesychasm became officially accepted and approved by the whole Orthodox Church from then on. We should stress, however, approval meant the Orthodox Church accepted the idea and the theory behind it. The number of its actual practitioners remained small. Pala-mas died in 1357 and was canonized in 1368. After Saint Demetrios he became Thessaloniki’s most popular saint. Hesychast ideas were not limited to Byzantium but spread to the Slavic lands, fertilized chiefly by the spread of these ideas around Mount Athos, where Hesychasm was popular and where the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Russians all had monasteries.

However, Bulgaria had a second major source for Hesychast ideas. For Gregory of Sinai, unhappy with “barbarian raids” on Athos, had settled in the Bulgarian monastery of Paroria, whose exact location is unknown but which lay near the Byzantine border in what was said to be a wild and remote place, making it ideal for meditation. There Gregory enjoyed the patronage of Tsar John Alexander. Gregory acquired a number of Bulgarian disciples. The most prominent of these was the monk Theodosius of Tnovo, who after residing in various monasteries had come to Paroria. Theodosius knew Greek well and translated various of Gregory’s Hesychast works into Bulgarian, thereby making them accessible to the Slavs.

Gregory also had Serbian disciples. The Life of Gregory, written by Patriarch Kallistos of Constantinople, refers to one, a Serb named Jacob (Jakov) who returned to Serbia, subsequently to become a metropolitan there. He probably was the Jacob who is documented later as Metropolitan of Serres, after Dušan’s conquest of that town. The likelihood of this identification is enhanced by the fact that Jacob of Serres sent several books to the Monastery of Mount Sinai in 1360. Ties between Serbia and Sinai had long existed. Milutin had financed the building on Sinai of a church dedicated to Saint Stephen and a fair number of Serbs resided in the Sinai monastery, some of whom after residing there a while later returned to Serbia. Thus in tracing the spread of ideas, we should not ignore direct ties between Sinai and Serbia, and the libraries of Mount Sinai still contain a few manuscripts in Old Church Slavonic.

Brigands frequently bothered Paroria, so John Alexander who had given many gifts to that monastery built fortifications around it. After Gregory died in 1346, his disciples traveled off to various places, especially Athos. Theodosius of Tnovo went first to Athos, then to Thessaloniki, then to Berroia, before returning to Bulgaria to establish on the mountain of Kefalarevo, far from Tnovo and other towns, a series of cells. His fame attracted other monks and soon about fifty monks were living on the mountain, changing the “desert” into a town. Certain of these disciples who knew Greek well were also active translators of Greek works into Slavic. These included Dionysius, who translated various writings of John Chrysostom, and a certain John, who translated John Climacus.
Theodosius, however, remained a restless figure, not liking to stay long in one place; furthermore he was highly interested in Church affairs in this world. So he soon returned to Trnovo, and the tsar then financed for Theodosius near Trnovo a new monastery, the Kilifarevski monastery, whose rule was based on one that Gregory of Sinai had brought from Sinai. Theodosius became its abbot. He remained there nearly a decade, frequently, it seems, advising the tsar, defending Orthodoxy, and refuting and suppressing various minor heresies. This monastery in the interior of Bulgaria, far from barbarian raids and brigands, became a new Hesychast and translating center.

Theodosius acquired many disciples, some of whom went off to convert other monasteries into Hesychast ones or to establish from scratch new Hesychast monasteries. Soon Hesychast monasteries were existing near Mesembria, Madara, and Červen. According to the Life of Romylos, one of Gregory’s and Theodosius’ disciples, the monasteries stressed obedience to the Hesychast master, with the monks spending specific days with the master and others in solitude. Hesychast ideas also continued to be brought to Bulgaria from Athos, as Bulgarian monks, many of whom—like Theodosius—were already Hesychasts when they went to Athos, passed to and fro between Athos and Bulgarian monasteries.

Theodosius visited Constantinople with several disciples in 1363. There he took ill and died. Then, illustrating the international character of Hesychasm, the Hesychast Byzantine patriarch, Kallistos, wrote a Life of Theodosius. This Life was soon translated into Bulgarian.

At present we have a Slavic text of a Life of Theodosius. For a long while it was believed to be the Life written by Kallistos. However, Kiselkov presents many reasons to support his plausible view that, though Kallistos wrote such a Life, the text we have is not his. Kiselkov argues that the surviving text has Kallistos’ work as a core to which a great deal of other material has been added. He proposes that the surviving text is a fifteenth-century re-working by a Trnovo monk.13

The surviving Life devotes several chapters to Theodosius’ work against heretics. These are odd chapters. First, they depict the Bulgarian patriarch as being so ineffectual that Theodosius had to leave his monastery to more- or less run the councils summoned to put down error and defend Orthodoxy. However, as Kiselkov notes, this does not seem an accurate depiction of the contemporary patriarch. That individual was also named Theodosius. And Kiselkov wonders if the common name may not have led the later editor of the Life of Theodosius to add items about the patriarch of that name to the Life of the Hesychast. This second Theodosius became patriarch in 1348 and remained in office through 1360. He was interested in books, had studied at Zographou on Athos, and later sent that monastery various manuscripts. He was a forceful figure, strongly supporting the independence of the Bulgarian Church, over which he clashed with Kallistos. For Kallistos elsewhere accused him of not mentioning the names of the Patriarch of Constantinople and the other Eastern patriarchs in Bulgarian Church services and of not sending
to Constantinople for holy oil but preparing his own. Patriarch Theodosius also strongly supported the independence of the Serbian patriarch, at whose installation Theodosius’ predecessor Symeon had participated. Possibly, if the depiction of the patriarch belongs to the original core by Kallistos, Kallistos’ dislike of him was responsible for the demeaning depiction.

The first heretic the monk Theodosius attacked was a certain Theodorit who had come to Trnovo from Constantinople. He was learned and a disciple of Barlaam and Akindynos (i.e., anti-Hesychast) and also practiced magic, effecting cures by magical means. He attracted many of the well-born to himself and soon had a large number of followers. Among other things, they bowed before an oak tree and sacrificed sheep. The second heretical group consisted of the adherents of a nun in Thessaloniki named Irene. She taught the Messalian heresy—in this period the term Messalian usually means Bogomilism—and attracted many followers. Her ideas, which seem to have been more mystical and individualistic than classical Bogomilism, soon spread to Athos, where unopposed they infected many over a three-year period. Finally in 1344 a Church council was held against these heretics, who were condemned and exiled from the Byzantine Empire.

Two of Irene’s exiled followers, named Lazar and Kiril “Bosota,” came to Trnovo. Lazar went crazy and ran around town naked with only a pumpkin leaf to cover his private parts. Some scholars assert he was not insane but an Adamite, seeking to return mankind to its paradisaical state. Bosota, however, was a more serious enemy; he attacked icons, the cross, clergy, marriage (encouraging divorce), and advocated, if we can believe the hostile source, giving in to the desires of the flesh because the body was the devil’s creation. He attracted a number of disciples, including a priest named Stefan. Since the patriarch did nothing about these heretics, according to the Life, the monk Theodosius went to the tsar and, explaining to him the serious situation, persuaded him to summon a council. A major council was then held, attended by patriarch and clergy as well as the boyar council. Theodosius played a dominant role, making a major speech to defend Orthodoxy. Not surprisingly, he won the support of the council. Lazar repented, but the other two, Bosota and the priest Stefan, did not. They were branded on the face and exiled.

But heretics did not disappear from Bulgaria. Theodosius soon had to refute the teachings of an Adamite who advocated the shedding of one’s clothes in imitation of the first man and, if we can believe the hostile source, encouraged group orgies among his followers. Next, the Life claims, certain Jewish heretics (presumably Judaising Christians), who seem to have had the support of some real Jews, began to attack various aspects of Christianity like icons, church buildings, the clerical class, and the institution of monks. The Life notes that John Alexander’s second wife had been a Jew. And the reader senses in the text here a certain hostility toward her and also toward the Jews in general.

The tsar was again persuaded to call a council, this one is dated 1360. It was attended by the royal family, patriarch, bishops, and many monks. The
council concentrated its efforts against the Judaisers and condemned the anti-Christian Judaising teachers. One converted, but the other two refused and suffered torture. This council also condemned Bogomilism and Barlaamism. This reference is to be the last we shall have to Bogomilism in Bulgaria. That the heresy was condemned suggests there still were a few who were Bogomil, or believed to be such, in Bulgaria, possibly in the vicinity of Trnovo, which made it worthwhile to add their condemnation to the decisions of the council. After all, some of Bosota’s views, condemned at the previous council, had a Bogomil flavor, and he was said to be the disciple of a “Messalian” (surely meaning Bogomil) nun. However, after 1360 no document refers to Bogomilism in Bulgaria. Not one Turkish source from the years after the conquest mentions Bogomils either. Moreover, since these references from the Life of Theodosius are the only evidence of the existence of Bogomils in Bulgaria since the early thirteenth century, it seems reasonable to conclude that by this time whatever Bogomils remained in Bulgaria were part of a very small and weak sect.

The most prominent disciple of Theodosius was Euthymius, the last Patriarch of Trnovo (1375–93). He was born, ca. 1325, into a Trnovo boyar family. He entered Theodosius’ Kilifarevski monastery shortly after its foundation, around 1350. Then subsequently, ca. 1362, he went to Constantinople with Theodosius, and after his mentor’s death in 1363, entered the famous Studios monastery in Constantinople, where he studied for about a year before moving on to spend several years on Mount Athos. Returning to Bulgaria shortly after 1370, he founded the Trinity monastery, about three kilometers north of Trnovo, which he made into a major literary center modeled on Zographou on Athos. A famous religious writer, he turned out a series of important saints’ lives, eulogies, and letters.

Euthymius was also concerned that Bulgarian Slavic texts lacked standardization and reflected localisms, local dialects, and popular speech. The texts also had variations in spelling and grammatical errors. Euthymius therefore devoted great effort to linguistic reform, both orthographic reform—standardized spelling—and the establishment of literary standards, stressing style and grammar.

To eliminate linguistic differences, Euthymius called for, and then presented, a model, standardized language. His ideal language was found not in the present-day language but in the past, in the Old Church Slavonic of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius. Thus one should look back to their language for correct forms and model one’s writing on theirs. His purified language thus stressed archaisms over contemporary speech. And in keeping with his international view of Orthodoxy and Orthodox culture, it also favored a general Slavic language—which Old Church Slavonic had been—over the specific spoken ones, Bulgarian or Serbian. Thus he sought to re-create a common literary language for the Orthodox Slavs differentiated from contemporary speech, and he regretted Slavonic’s break-down into local forms—
Bulgarian Slavonic, Serbian Slavonic—that reflected regional vocabulary, grammar, or spelling based on local pronunciation. He also sought more exact translations of Greek terms, which at times led him to introduce new terms into Slavonic. He urged that texts be corrected by going back to the Greek originals and carrying out rigorous checking and comparisons. And he himself corrected and revised various liturgical and theological texts which had been inaccurately translated from the Greek.\textsuperscript{14}

As patriarch he tried to prevent the appearance of new, corrupt texts by banning newly copied texts from use until they had received patriarchal approval. And he ordered that each new book manuscript copied in Bulgaria be sent to the patriarch for approval. He also tried to limit copying to those people who had had proper training. Tsar John Šišman supported him in these efforts, endorsing his edicts on texts.

Euthymius also battled against heresy, repressing some further Barlaamites, namely, one Piron, who had come from Constantinople to Trnovo, and his disciple Theodosius, a monk known as Fudul. However, these two went beyond criticizing Hesychasm; they also attacked honoring the higher clergy and icons and, if we can believe our hostile source, occupied themselves with magic and devilish thoughts. They influenced various people from the upper classes and even the clergy. Euthymius succeeded in having them expelled from Bulgaria. Euthymius was also an advocate of strict morals; he took a firm stand against divorce as well as against third and fourth marriages for widowers or widows. As a result, we are told, many Bulgarians who sought to carry out these acts went to Wallachia and Moldavia, where standards were more lax.

Euthymius and his disciples, like the intellectuals of the previous generation, were responsible both for translations from the Greek and original works. As should be clear from the above, many Bulgarian Church intellectuals in this period knew Greek well. And the traveling of educated monks from monastery to monastery, including monasteries across international borders—in Byzantium, Athos, Bulgaria, Serbia—facilitated the circulation of ideas. Migration from monastery to monastery seems to have been common at this time. At times it was caused by the desire to escape Turkish or brigand raids, but the monks seem also to have been restless individuals. The Life of Theodosius’ disciple Romylos mentions ten different changes of monastery for its protagonist, and Theodosius himself seems to have lived in about as many different monasteries.

When Bulgaria fell to the Turks, the Turks originally sentenced Euthymius to death. However, they quickly commuted the sentence, and in 1394 he was exiled to the Bačkovo monastery—a major foundation built under John Alexander’s patronage and in possession of a good library. There Euthymius began a new school, where he taught until he died, probably in 1402. The school continued after his death under the direction of Euthymius’ pupil Andronicus. The latter’s students included Constantine Kostenečki, better
known as Constantine the Philosopher (Konstantin Filozof). Constantine re-
mained a monk at Backovo until he moved to Serbia in 1411. There he
achieved considerable prominence. We shall return to his career shortly.

Turkish raids and the eventual conquest of Bulgaria by the Turks in 1393
caused the emigration of many Bulgarian intellectuals to Serbia, Moldavia,
Wallachia, and Russia, where they brought their talents and many texts. The
above-mentioned Romylos had been residing on Mount Athos at the time of
the Battle of Marica. Expecting the worst from the victorious Turks and also
suffering from a famine then plaguing the Holy Mountain, Romylos joined
the large-scale exodus of monks then taking place. He first went to Valona
on the Albanian coast. Little known in the religious world, it seemed obscure
even to favor solitude. However, it proved an unhappy place to live.
According to the Life of Romylos, the people of the region were ignorant and
savage, accustomed to brigandage and murder. The governors of the region—
presumably appointees of Balša Balšić, who obtained Valona in 1372—were
very unjust, killing innocent men, while the monks were full of error and
vindictiveness, and the priests ministered unworthily. As a result Romylos
eventually moved on to Serbia, settling in the monastery Lazar had just
completed in 1381, Ravanica, where Romylos remained until his death.

So many texts were brought to Russia after the fall of Bulgaria that
scholars speak of a Second South Slavic Influence on Russia. These emigrant
intellectuals often rose to high places as bishops and abbots in their new lands.
They had a major impact on Serbian, Moldavian, Wallachian, and Russian
letters, bringing to these lands not only Bulgarian culture, but also Byzantine
and Hesychast ideas. Particularly important in this regard were the two
Camblaks and Constantine the Philosopher. Cyprian Camblak became Metrop-
olitan of All Russia from 1390 until 1406 and made major efforts to correct
Russian liturgical texts, which contained many errors, and also to revise
Russia’s canon law.

His nephew Gregory Camblak was on Mount Athos when Bulgaria fell
to the Turks. He then went to Constantinople and soon seems to have been
sent to Moldavia as an envoy by the patriarch. After the Turkish defeat at the
Battle of Ankara in 1402 took pressure off Serbia, Gregory went to Serbia,
where he became abbot of the famous monastery Visoki Dečani. He found
that though this monastery had been erected by a king subsequently can-
onized, there was neither a service nor a saint’s life of him—for the Life of
Dečanski by the Continuator of Danilo, written before Dečanski was can-
onized, was not couched in the form of a saint’s life. Gregory rectified the
situation. He also altered the viewpoint of the Continuator of Danilo’s shorter
Life, for the earlier work, possibly because it was written during Dušan’s
reign, did not glorify Dečanski but made him somewhat of a sinner against
both his father, whom he rebelled against, and his son, whom he turned
against, leading Dušan to revolt and overthrow him.

Gregory presents a different view, in both incidents supporting Dečanski
and condemning Milutin and Dušan. His work, unlike the earlier biographies of rulers written by Serbs, moreover, does not have as a motive the glorification of Serbia and its dynasty. In fact, he condemns Dušan’s coronation as tsar, seeing it as a usurpation. And throughout he expresses more interest in general Orthodoxy than in Serbia. Gregory’s work, like a more typical saint’s life, makes Dečanski into a martyr. Besides emphasizing Dečanski’s martyrdom, Gregory also stresses miracles. For instance, when Dečanski was blind Saint Nicholas appeared to him in a dream, promising his sight would be restored, which in due time occurred. Gregory also stresses the miracles that occurred at the martyred king’s grave, which brought in his time, and still brings in ours, a large number of the sick to the monastery seeking cures.

Eventually, like his uncle, Gregory too moved on to Russia, probably arriving in Kiev in about 1409. He soon, in 1415, became Metropolitan of Kiev, a town then belonging to the Lithuanian-Polish state. He was part of a delegation sent by the Lithuanian ruler to the Council of Constance, where he had a cordial meeting with the pope and is usually thought to have expressed an interest in Church Union. Muriel Heppell, however, has presented a strong case that Gregory was not willing to consider Union if it meant submitting to the papal position and has raised serious doubts as to whether the text of a conciliatory sermon, allegedly delivered by Gregory at Constance, really was his work.\textsuperscript{15} Gregory died in 1419 or 1420.

A final major Bulgarian emigré figure was Constantine Kostenečki (so called because he was born in the Bulgarian town of Kosteneć); he is better known as Constantine the Philosopher. Having studied at Bačkovo monastery, where he became a monk and resided for several years under Euthymius’ disciple Andronicus, Constantine emigrated to Serbia in 1411. He took up residence at the court of the ruler, Stefan Lazarević, and soon became the major figure at Stefan’s very culturally oriented court. Constantine knew Greek well and besides the Slavic languages also seems to have known some Rumanian and Turkish. He established a school in Beograd and also served Stefan Lazarević at times as a diplomat. His first major work, written during the reign of Stefan, was his famous \textit{On Letters}, which advocated the linguistic reforms proposed and enforced by Euthymius, which Constantine actively propagated in Serbia. He also wrote a travelogue of the Holy Land and a cosmological-geographical work, of which only a few pages survive, that shows Constantine believed the world to be round. After his patron died in 1427 and the Hungarians re-occupied Beograd, Constantine left Beograd. He settled in the lands of a vojvoda holding Vranje, where in the 1430s he wrote his famous biography of Stefan Lazarević. Constantine died at some point after 1439.

Monasteries flourished in medieval Serbia as well; we have already discussed many of them, noting royal patronage and the practice for each ruler to build at least one major monastery for the salvation of his soul. Many of these monastery churches are architectural masterpieces and their frescoes are
stunning. Particularly worthy of note (and major tourist attractions to visit) are: Studenica, Žiča, Sopoćani, Mileševa, Gračanica, Visoki Dečani, the Patriarchate (Patriaršija) at Peć, Manasija, and Ravanica.

In Serbia, as in Bulgaria, many if not most schools were probably located in monasteries. Besides this source of education, one could study with priests, if they were willing and qualified, or with private lay tutors. Ćirković points out that there is no way to tell which form of education was most common. He also stresses the absence of any regular school program (or curriculum) or even calendar. One might still expect to find common elements in most programs—reading and writing, with an emphasis on religious texts. Length of study and subject matter were probably dictated by the individual instructor; sometimes they may have been decided on in an agreement between parent and teacher with the teacher contracting to teach such and such for so much pay. In some cases the instructor might hold a group class; at others, if his pupils were at different levels, he presumably treated them as individual tutees. There seems to have been no standard length of time to obtain an education; thus some individuals completed shorter and some longer terms of study, just as there was no standard curriculum, leading some to study more broadly and to cover more subjects than others.

Particular needs might also have influenced study. By the fourteenth century there were two writing styles—a good hand for copying manuscripts and a fast hand for legal documents. Unless the latter was learned only on the job, as may have been the case, we might expect young men seeking secular bureaucratic careers to have engaged a tutor beforehand to teach them the fast hand. Foreign languages might also have been part of special programs aimed for specific ambitions. However, diplomacy probably was not one of these, since most frequently individuals who were naturally bi-lingual were used on diplomatic missions. However, in Serbia as in Bulgaria, Greek was presumably a major subject of study at the schools held in the major monasteries.

Education reached a higher level on the coast than in the interior. But interestingly enough, as far as we know, only Kotor had a town school. It was founded in the thirteenth century.

The Jews in the Balkans

The Jews of Greece

Benjamin of Tudela, who traveled through the Levant in 1168 visiting Jewish communities, noted large ones in Thebes, Corinth, Negroponte, Naupaktos, Patras, Kriassa (modern Khrisa?), Ravennica, Lamia, Almiros, Thessaloniki, and Arta. I do not give his figures on community size since scholars dispute their accuracy as well as whether they referred to numbers of families or individuals. In the Byzantine world the Jews were more integrated into society as a whole than they were in Western Europe. Thus sometimes they were not restricted to special quarters, and even when such quarters existed Jews
were often found outside of them. Moreover, cases have been found of Jews and Christians working together and even being members of the same guild.

The best known community over the years was that of Thessaloniki. Though Benjamin of Tudela said the Jews there were much oppressed, other sources suggest he may have been exaggerating or else criticizing a specific and temporary hardship. For instance, the letters of Eustatius, Bishop of Thessaloniki (ca. 1175–94), make it clear that the Jews of Thessaloniki were not confined to one quarter and were buying and renting houses from Christians (including some with holy pictures on the walls, which bothered the bishop). In a sermon Eustatius criticized the lack of charity shown by Christians to other Christians, comparing it to the tolerance the Christians showed to the Jews. And we know the Jews joined the Christians in defending the city against the Norman attack in 1185. Under Theodore of Epirus’ rule the Jews of Thessaloniki did suffer disabilities; he confiscated much of their wealth and a later chronicle suggests he even issued an edict against the practice of Judaism in his realm. Whether this chronicle was accurate is not known, and, if it was accurate, it still is not known how widely the edict was enforced. In any case, Theodore was removed from the scene in 1230, a little more than six years after he took Thessaloniki. And it is clear that any general restrictions existing against the Jews were abrogated by Michael VIII Palaeologus (1261–82) soon after his accession.

A second Jewish community about which something is known is that of Negroponte on Euboea. The Jewish quarter of Negroponte, with its synagogue, lay outside the town walls, making it vulnerable to attack from pirates and brigands. As a result the Venetians allowed the Jews to rent homes and buildings inside the walled area. Thus many Jews came to live outside of the Jewish quarter. Though a protest seems to have been made about this in 1402, causing the Venetians to order the Jews back to the ghetto, the order seems not to have been enforced. The lack of enforcement suggests public opinion did not care where the Jews resided. In 1423 the Venetians again banned the Jews from owning land or buildings in the city of Negroponte or to have any property outside the ghetto. Yet a 1429 document mentions Jewish property inside the city. In 1425 the Jewish quarter, which had been suffering from thieves, was allowed to build a wall. In 1439/40 the Jewish community, which seems to have been growing, was allowed to expand the area of its quarter and at the same time to erect new walls to include the new part. At the time the Venetians recognized that the Jews were beneficial to the city, stating, “for it is largely they who carry on the trade and enhance our receipts.”

Though scholars heatedly debate whether or not the Jews of Byzantium in this period had to pay a special tax, it is evident that the Jews of Negroponte did pay a collective tax. Its rate went up and down. The Jewish community also was given special duties, to annually produce the Venetian flag for the town, to pay a special galley tax, and to pay for guarding the clock-tower. From time to time the community was hit with a special tax, like that of 1304
when it had to finance the building of a gate for the Venetian compound. In 1410, owing to defense needs against the Turkish threat, the community’s collective tax was doubled from five hundred to one thousand hyperpera. In 1429 a document confirming this doubled assessment was issued. The Jewish community was also responsible for supplying the town’s executioner, an obligation it bore until abrogated in 1452. Furthermore, whereas the Venetians gave their own merchants the right to import and export goods duty-free, Jewish merchants of Negroponte had to pay 5 percent import and export duties. In 1318, as a reward for helping to defend Negroponte against the Catalans, this import-export duty was removed. However, it was restored in 1338 when the Venetians needed cash to heighten the wall around their own commune.

Besides the collective tax, other special obligations, and the laws (often not enforced) issued from time to time ordering Jews to live in the Jewish ghetto, the Jews were also denied the privilege of acquiring Venetian citizenship, a privilege extended to many other non-Venetians of Euboea. However, once again, though this denial was Venice’s stated policy, exceptions were made; for special services certain prominent Jews did receive Venetian citizenship, including David Kalomiti, the head of the Jewish community, the individual responsible for representing the community in its dealings with the Venetian authorities. In 1267/68 he not only received Venetian citizenship, but also the right to pass it on to his heirs. David Kalomiti was not only a leading political figure, but also an important merchant for silks and dyes who had estates with serfs outside of town. He also was a learned man who built the community’s synagogue and was a patron for various learned scholars, including some who came to Negroponte from Thebes and elsewhere.

Benjamin of Tudela mentions that some of the Jews of Krissa (modern Khrika?) farmed their own land. Farming, a pursuit rarely followed by medieval Jews, is also documented for Patras, where Jews are found in both urban and rural occupations. Shortly before 1430 a Jewish money-lender is found leasing a farm to a second Jew. This arrangement continued, at least for a while, after the Byzantines regained Patras in 1430.

Turning to Jewish communities under Byzantium, we are faced with the question: did these communities owe a special tax? They clearly did under a law of 429. This law, however, disappeared from the books in the legal compilations of Basil I (867–86) and Leo VI (886–912). It is not certain that it was ever re-instituted on an empire-wide basis. However, communities in certain towns did owe such a collective tax. The Jews of Zična in Macedonia clearly owed it, for in 1333 Andronicus III assigned the money raised by this tax to a monastery. Stefan Dušan, who soon thereafter took Zična, continued this policy by confirming this income for the monastery in a charter of his own. We also know that when the Venetians took over Thessaloniki from the Byzantines in 1423 a collective tax on the local Jewish community was then in existence; it is not known how old it was. The Venetians maintained this tax, though reducing it from one thousand hyperpera to eight hundred in response
to a community petition that stressed the community’s inability to pay the original large sum owing to large-scale Jewish emigration, including that of many of its richest members, from Thessaloniki because of high taxes and the Turkish danger. However, though such collective taxes existed in certain Byzantine and non-Byzantine Balkan cities, they can be documented only for a small number of cities. No post-ninth-century law code or text ever suggests that an empire-wide law instituting such a tax existed. And documents like Andronicus III’s charter of 1319 to Jannina’s Jews stating they were to enjoy freedom and not be molested suggests they did not have such a tax burden. Thus it seems probable that for specific reasons certain communities acquired this tax obligation, but it happened on an individual basis.

It also seems that in the Greek world, in theory, the Jews should have been restricted to ghettos. However, it is evident that in various places, including Thessaloniki, this legal ideal was not enforced. For example, in the 1220s when Durazzo belonged to Epirus, the Metropolitan of Durazzo wrote his superior, the well-known canonist Demetrius Chomatianos, Archbishop of Ohrid. The Metropolitan asked if the Armenians (who had their own schismatic Church owing to their rejection of the Council of Chalcedon) should be allowed to build churches in the midst of Orthodox communities. The question gives us evidence that among its minorities Durazzo had an Armenian community. Demetrius replied that minority groups, including Jews and Muslims, should be permitted no more than a limited degree of freedom. And he stated that their houses of prayer should not be tolerated outside of the quarter assigned for their residence. This not only shows the ghetto principle but, in recognizing it, it also suggests that at roughly the same time Theodore was allegedly banning Judaism, Theodore’s leading bishop was recognizing the religion’s right to exist. Is this evidence that Theodore never issued such a ban, or, if he did, does it show that it was not supported or enforced by his leading adherents? Or was Demetrius’ letter, recognizing the right of synagogues to exist in ghettos, written prior to Theodore’s edict?

The Jewish community of Durazzo continued to exist after Theodore’s reign, and it also survived a later edict, issued by Charles II of Naples, which banned the practice of Judaism in his kingdom, which included Durazzo. (However, no information exists as to whether or not an attempt was made to enforce the ban in Durazzo.) For when Venice acquired Durazzo in 1392, it found the town’s Jewish community owed the town’s suzerain over ten yards of luxurious velvet cloth annually. The community, owing to its alleged poverty, petitioned Venice in 1401 to be exempted from this burden. It is not known which of Durazzo’s many rulers instituted this obligation. Nor is it known how Venice responded to the 1401 petition.

The Jews in Bulgaria and Macedonia

Already in the eleventh and twelfth centuries documents mention the existence of Jewish communities in Sofija, Silistria, and Nikopolis on the
Danube. Soon after the re-establishment of Bulgarian independence the rulers of the Asen dynasty, in order to stimulate commerce, began to encourage Jewish merchant families to settle in Bulgaria. It seems that under this stimulus the number of Jews in Bulgaria significantly increased. In this period the Bulgarians also ruled two towns in Macedonia, Kastoria and Ohrid, that were leading Jewish intellectual centers producing learned scholars. Among these figures was Rabbi Tobias ben Eliezer from Kastoria, who became the leader of the Rabbanite community among the Romaniote (Byzantine/Balkan) Jews at the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century. He wrote an important commentary on the Pentateuch known as Midrash Legah Tob. Much of this work’s argument was directed against the Karaites, who were numerous in Constantinople and also present in Thessaloniki and Adrianople. One of his pupils, Leo Mung, converted to Christianity and became Archbishop of Ohrid. A second leading scholar was Judah Leon Mosconi, born in Ohrid in 1328, who in the course of his studies traveled widely to such diverse places as Chios, Cyprus, Negroponte, Egypt, Morocco, Italy, and France. A philosopher and metaphysician, he also wrote commentaries on the Pentateuch and, like his Slavic contemporary Euthymius of Trnovo, was interested in grammar and believed incorrect interpretations of scripture often resulted from neglect of it. He left among his many works an unfinished treatise on grammar.

In the 1360s and 1370s the Jews were expelled from Hungary and Bavaria. Many came to Bulgaria and to Macedonia (then a battle ground among various Serbian nobles). One of the places where many of these immigrants settled was Kastoria. As Weinberger has discovered:

Friction soon developed between the native Jewish settlers, followers of the Romaniote ritual, and the newcomers from the north, due, probably, to the differing Romaniote marriage and divorce customs, such as their refusal to accept the decree of Rabbenu Gershom b. Judah of Mainz (11th century) banning the practice of polygamy. To deal with this conflict a special assembly was called in 1376 to reinforce R. Gershom’s ban on polygamy and to address the several issues in dispute by the two parties. It was probably at this time that one Bulgarian Jewish community, the Kastoreans, decided to publish their own prayer-book according to the ritual in use in their synagogues and thereby preserve the special character of their congregational life. A section of this prayer-book . . . has survived.

At the same time in Bulgaria contact between Christian and Jewish communities resulted in conversions (for example the second wife of John Alexander was a Jewess who converted to Christianity) and a certain degree of Christian-Jewish syncretism among certain Christians, which was rejected as heretical by the Orthodox establishment. This is seen in the trial, discussed above, in 1360 in Trnovo of three Jewish heretics. After their views were
condemned, one repented and accepted Orthodoxy, whereas the other two, who did not, were subjected to torture. The *Life of Theodosius*, our source for this event, states that the three had been actively preaching against certain Christian practices. Therefore, since it was their own activism that brought the Church authorities down upon them, we cannot conclude that this trial reflected anti-Jewish public opinion or state policy in Bulgaria. And we know that over the next two decades Bulgaria, like the provinces of Macedonia, received a large number of Jewish refugees from Bavaria and Hungary.

NOTES


2. On the Battle of Kosovo and these related issues, see G. Škrivanić, *Kosovska buška* (Cetinje, 1956).


6. M. Purković, *Knez i Despot Stefan Lazarević* (Beograd, 1978), pp. 34–37. If Purković is correct in re-dating to before January 1394 a second document that refers to Stefan Lazarević’s assigning a Priština kefali—showing that at the time Stefan held Vuk’s Priština—to investigate a land dispute for a second Athonite monastery, then it seems Vuk lost his lands before January 1394. If the Serres meeting (winter 1393–94) had occurred in late November or early December 1393, possibly Vuk’s disobedience in not attending had brought upon him immediate punishment from Bayezid. However, though Purković makes a strong case for this document’s being issued in January 1394, it is not entirely certain that the charter was issued that early.


9. On the death of Walter II of Brienne in 1356 his towns of Argos and Nauplia had been left to his nephew, Guy d’Enghien. Guy had administered the towns through bailiffs. Guy died shortly after October 1376, leaving his holding to his daughter Maria, under the guardianship of his brother Louis, who was then the Angevin bailiff in Achaea. In 1377 Louis arranged Maria’s marriage to a Venetian, Peter Cornaro. The newlyweds then took up residence in the Argolid. Venice found the increased commercial opportunities, made possible through Cornaro’s rule, advantageous and supported him actively until his death in 1388. By then Peter Cornaro had come to be considered by many as the lord of the Argolid, and Venice had come to have considerable interest in the two towns. Immediately after his death Maria, either uninterested in these possessions or possibly pressured by Venice, sold the two towns to Venice for an annual stipend.

11. Ćirković argues that after the Serres meeting, and probably because of the scare received at it, the positions of Serbian nobles became polarized. Whereas Stefan Lazarević, Constantine Balšić, Constantine Dejanović, and Marko remained loyal to Bayezid, others, having lost confidence in the sultan, went into opposition. These, Ćirković argues, were George II Balšić, who submitted to Venetian suzerainty early in 1394; Vuk Branković, whose lands were confiscated by Bayezid shortly thereafter; and Marko’s brother Andrew, who in 1394 appeared in Dubrovnik and soon thereafter moved to Hungary. See S. Ćirković, “Poklad Kralja Vukašina,” Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta (Beogradski univerzitet) 14, no. 1 (1979): 159–61.


14. Though certain scholars have claimed that Euthymius was the founder or initiator of the movement to standardize language on the basis of Old Slavonic, recent scholarship shows that this movement was afoot and reflected in certain texts dating back to the thirteenth century. However, though not its initiator, Euthymius certainly was its leading exponent, pushing the reform and having great impact on its spread and enforcement.


17. This section is indebted to J. Starr, Romania: The Jews of the Levant after the Fourth Crusade (Paris, 1949).
