CHAPTER 9

The Balkans in the Early Fifteenth Century

Bosnia after the Death of Tvrtko

Tvrtko died in 1391 and was succeeded by a cousin, Dabiša (1391–95). An obscure figure somehow related to Tvrtko, Dabiša was clearly elderly. He had been mentioned in diplomatic records as far back as 1358. According to the seventeenth-century writer Orbini, he was a first cousin of Tvrtko and had supported Tvrtko’s brother Vuk in the rebellion against Tvrtko in 1366. Dabiša may well have been chosen as ruler because he was elderly and weak and thus could be made into a puppet by the nobles. A council of nobles now becomes prominent in the sources.

According to most Yugoslav scholars, at this time (1391) the Bosnian state not only did not fall apart, as had occurred after the death of Kotromanić, but remained united because by this time a feeling for a Bosnian entity had come into existence. This unity, they argue, is illustrated by the institution of a state council of nobles, which met frequently in the 1390s and the first two decades of the fifteenth century. The council actively involved itself in the selection of kings as well as in domestic and foreign affairs. I do not accept this interpretation. The council clearly did exist and play this dominant role; however, I think it reflects not unity but the weakness of the king and of the central state. Too weak to assert their authority, Dabiša and his successors had no choice but to summon the leading nobles to obtain their agreement on important matters and thereby assure themselves that a particular course of action was acceptable to the nobles and thus would obtain support and not provoke a revolt. The king could not enforce decisions of moment unless he had aid in enforcing them from at least one or two of the most powerful nobles.

The council does not seem to have been a regular institution, but came together when summoned rather than holding sessions according to an established schedule. And, though it is often claimed, it is not certain that the council had a set membership who attended by right. Generally, however, the same major figures were in attendance almost every time, for the king clearly
needed agreement from those who were the most powerful. One scholar
speaks of the council’s having the right to elect and dethrone kings. However,
this was not a question of right in any juridical sense but of the de facto
balance of power. If two or three great nobles wanted to dethrone a king, they
had sufficient power (their own supporters) to do so. Rights and contracts
meant almost nothing, and raw power counted for everything; and this be-
came particularly true in the Bosnian state after Tvrtko’s death. There is little
evidence of loyalty to such abstractions as “the Bosnian state.” If it was in the
nobles’ interests to co-operate—for example, against a Hungarian threat—
they did so, but if their policy advanced the interests of a Bosnian state it was
purely coincidental.

So on Tvrtko’s death, the Bosnian state did not fragment into small units
as it had in the 1350s. It did not fragment because the nobles decided it was in
their interests to co-operate and hold it together. Thus the Bosnian state
seemed to remain united. But this unity and apparent strength were illusory,
for the authority of the king (and his limited central apparatus) was not what
held the separate counties together. If several nobles had wanted to secede
with their counties, they would have succeeded unless the other nobles de-
cided to unite against them. Thus it was the general and voluntary co-opera-
tion of the nobles that really held the state together.

However, separatism remained strong, and the great nobles took advan-
tage of Dabiša’s impotence to gain more autonomy for their regions. As
noted, regionalism had been strong in Bosnia throughout the Middle Ages,
aiding the nobles at times in their separatist aspirations and regularly prevent-
ing the development of a feeling for state unity. The ban (now king) was the
ruler of the central county (or župa) of Bosnia, and though Kotromanić
and Tvrtko had been able to assert their overlordship over the neighboring
regions, as they generally had since the 1320s, and called their whole greater
state “Bosnia,” they had not integrated the outlying regions into the state.
Each region retained its own traditions and dominant hereditary noble fami-
lies, both of which had far more appeal to the region’s inhabitants than any
concept of Bosnian unity. The lesser nobles of a region remained far more
loyal to their local lord (e.g., Hrvoje) than to the king. The mountainous
geography aided this localism, as did Bosnia’s different religions; for the
existence of three faiths, generally only one of which was prominent in any
given area, prevented the development of the kind of state Church that in
other Balkan lands had been a force for unity. The Bosnian Church, though
sometimes depicted as such, was certainly no state Church. And though
certain nobles had ties to it there is also no evidence that it supported the
political aspirations of particular nobles or the nobles as a group against the
central state, as many scholars have claimed.

It is generally believed that Bosnia’s banship (kingship) was limited to
members of the royal family. Tvrtko had no legitimate sons. Tvrtko II, who
was to rule subsequently, was almost certainly Tvrtko’s illegitimate son, but
he does not seem to have been a serious candidate in 1391. He was at the time
most probably a minor, but that in itself should not have bothered the nobility, which seems to have been seeking a puppet ruler. In fact the nobles probably selected Đabiša because he was elderly and ineffective. We have no evidence on how the selection of Đabiša occurred. V. Klaić argues that it followed the traditional Slavic system of inheritance by which the right to property belonged to a family collective and the eldest member of that family succeeded. Though we cannot refute Klaić’s view for this occasion, this principle does not seem to have been practiced on previous occasions, for Kotromanić and especially Tvrtko I were extremely young at the time of their succession. However, it seems the “system” for succession was vague, with possession of the throne by the particular family the only binding principle. This vagueness would have encouraged a struggle for succession among different candidates, which in fact was to follow (and was to continually take place until Bosnia’s fall to the Turks), and allow the nobles, by supporting weaker figures, to acquire greater power and influence for themselves.

Thus from 1391 Bosnia had weak kings and powerful nobles, a handful of whom had massive lands that they were ever trying to increase. Several of them had holdings as large if not larger than those of the king and, consequently, stronger and larger armies than the king did. Thus the king’s superior title and theoretical overlordship over the nobles did not count for much. And the great nobles should be seen as the rulers of semi-independent principalities which, by their agreement, were joined in a loose federation, the Bosnian state. They and the king ran this federated Bosnia as a collective through the council.

At this time Bosnia had three leading noble families. First were the Hrvatinići, led by Hrvoje Vukčić, the son of Vlak Hrvatinić. In the 1390s the Hrvatinići were Bosnia’s most powerful family; after Hrvoje’s death in 1416, their role in state affairs declined, though they continued to be masters of the Donji Kraji. Hrvoje also had some territory west of the Neretva and dominated the nobles who held lands there or nearby. Before 1391 he had already been active in Dalmatia as Tvrtko’s lieutenant, and when Tvrtko died actual control of Bosnia’s Dalmatian holdings fell into his hands. After Tvrtko’s death he became Ladislav of Naples’ (Sigismund’s rival for the Hungarian throne) deputy for Dalmatia and extended his authority and overlordship over still more Dalmatian towns, ending up as overlord of most of them. And like earlier Dalmatian overlords, he did not interfere in the towns’ administration but left them under their own laws and councils. He established his main residence in the town of Jajce, where he built a major fortified castle, which later was to be the last capital of the Bosnian kingdom.

Second was the Kosača family, led by Vlatko Vuković until his death in 1392. Vlatko was succeeded first by his nephew Sandalj Hranić (1392–1435) and then by Sandalj’s nephew Stefan Vukčić (1435–66). The Kosača at first controlled a district in Hum east of the Neretva and the territory of the upper Drina, Tara, and Piva rivers. The family began its expansion immediately after Tvrtko’s death, taking advantage of a local crisis. For in 1392 Radić
Sanković, lord of Nevesinje, Popovo Polje, and Konavli (probably then the strongest nobleman in Hum), sold his part of Konavli to Dubrovnik. A council meeting was convoked by the king or by the nobles who objected to this sale. Vlatko Vuković and Paul (Pavle) Radenović, whom we shall meet in a moment, received the council's blessing to march against Radić. They captured Radić and occupied Konavli which, despite Ragusan protests, they then divided between themselves. Vlatko then died, to be succeeded by Sandalj. He continued the struggle with Radić Sanković, who regained his freedom in 1398. Sandalj again took him prisoner and, having blinded him, kept him in prison until he died in 1404. As a result Sandalj was able to acquire Radić's lands from Nevesinje to the coast. When the dust settled Sandalj had almost all Hum. He then expanded south down the coast toward Kotor, making various gains at the expense of the Balšići, as we saw in the last chapter. However, other priorities closer to home prevented him from establishing lasting control over the territory on the Gulf of Kotor. In this period Sandalj was closely associated with Hrvoje, whose niece Helen (Jelena) he married in 1396. After Hrvoje's death in 1416 Sandalj became the most powerful figure in Bosnia.

Third, Raden Jablanić (who was succeeded at about the time of Tvrtko's death by Paul Radenović, who after 1415 was in turn succeeded by his sons the Pavlovići) had a huge holding in eastern Bosnia between the Drina and Bosna rivers. The family's main seat was at Borač; it also held Vrbobosna (the future Sarajevo).

These great nobles had independent political-economic domains. Ruling their lands like kings, they exercised, as Ćirković points out, in their own lands all—and the same—powers that the king exercised in his. The nobles collected taxes from their populauses; farmed out the management of and collected dues from the mines in their territory; established customs and toll stations on routes through and at markets in their lands and collected these dues; and maintained their own law courts, settling quarrels between their subordinates and judging criminals. They also carried out their own foreign relations, concluding foreign alliances and issuing commercial treaties with foreign states independently and without consulting the king. As Ćirković has noted, Dubrovnik generally dealt with the king only on issues concerning his own direct holdings; when the town had a problem in a part of Bosnia that belonged to a nobleman, the town dealt with that nobleman, only turning to the king if it needed him as a mediator. Ragusan records speak of the "country" (contrata) of Sandalj just as they speak of the "contrata" of the king. And when they spoke thus of the king's contrata, they tended to refer only to the king's personal holdings in the central župa. Thus the king, though in theory the ruler of the whole kingdom, in fact fully ruled only his own direct holdings.

By the 1390s the king and the great nobles—the above-mentioned three families and, until their final elimination by 1404, the Sankovići—among
themselves held all Bosnia. In fact, the Hrvatinići and, after the elimination of the Sankovići, the Kosače each possessed more territory than the king. All the other, and lesser, nobles found themselves and their lands on the territory of, and thus under the suzerainty of, the king or one of the great nobles. At times a powerful but lesser family would try to assert its full independence from the king or a great nobleman; though occasionally successful, these attempts were always short-lasting, and soon the family found itself back in a subordinate position. The great nobles had solidly established themselves and, as Čirković notes, there was no room for newcomers in their ranks. The victory of the great nobles is reflected in the fact that by the early fifteenth century in Bosnia the title župan (count), held previously by the old-timer hereditary nobles holding a county, had disappeared. This happened because in the course of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the kings and great nobles succeeded in removing the hereditary local county rulers from their positions as fortress commanders and replacing them with their own appointees, whom we find in the fifteenth century bearing the title knez and commanding the castles within the lands of the king and the great nobles. The king, of course, was able to do this only in his direct holdings. His appointees were not installed in the lands of the great independent nobles. Thus by the early fifteenth century, as noted, all the lesser nobles had become subjected to one or the other of the few great ones.

In the early 1390s King Sigismund had temporarily secured his position in Hungary and thus was prepared to take a more active role in subduing the recalcitrant Bosnian and Croatian nobles. They still supported Ladislas, though it is more accurate to say they were using his cause to advance their own interests. Sigismund’s main ally in the area was John “Frankapan,” who had assembled under his authority all the family lands, thus giving him control of Senj, Krk, and the regions of Vinodol, Gacka, and Modruš. In 1391 Sigismund appointed him Ban of Croatia and Slavonia, an appointment valid only in the areas that recognized Sigismund, and called on him to lead the counter-offensive. Though our knowledge of specific events is very limited, it seems this counter-offensive had considerable success, for in 1393 Hrvoje submitted to Sigismund. One may assume Hrvoje had been pressured to do this.

John “Frankapan” then died in 1393, and Sigismund appointed Butko Kurjaković as Ban of Croatia. Butko was Prince of Krbava; his appointment suggests Sigismund must have won that family and its region to his side. (In about 1390 some of the Kurjakovići had been supporting Ladislas.) John “Frankapan’s” son Nicholas inherited all the “Frankapan” lands. In 1394 Sigismund improved his position still further by defeating the Horvats in battle at Dobor in Usora on the lower Bosna River. Sigismund captured the brothers. John was executed for treachery by being tied to a horse’s tail and dragged to death, and Bishop Paul was imprisoned in a monastery, where he died the same year. This ended the Croatian uprising of the Horvats and it
seems Croatia was now Sigismund’s. With Croatia subdued, Sigismund found himself in a position to interfere more actively in Bosnia. So he summoned Dabiša to Dobor.

Unable to stand up to Sigismund, whose victorious army at the moment was in the north of Bosnia, Dabiša went to Dobor and made peace with Sigismund, recognizing him as his overlord. He also renounced the Croatian-Dalmatian kingship asserted by Tvrtko, and returned to Hungary the Dalmatian and Croatian territory Tvrtko had gained. And under very decided pressure, Dabiša made Sigismund his own heir for the Bosnian throne. Some scholars have suggested Dabiša may not have been entirely unhappy with this agreement, for Dabiša may have hoped to use Sigismund’s support to assert himself against the nobility. In any case, we can be certain that the nobles were horrified at the agreement Dabiša concluded.

In 1395 Dabiša died. Sigismund, presumably hoping to collect his inheritance, appeared in near-by Srem with troops. The Bosnian nobles, unwilling to let this happen, convened a council and elected Dabiša’s widow Helen (Jelena)—also known as Gruba—as queen. She was of the Nikolić family of Hum. That family had acquired considerable influence in the state under Dabiša and had obtained from him in 1393 the right to collect the Ston tribute from Dubrovnik. Helen-Gruba was to be the nobles’ puppet for the next three years. Sigismund, apprehensive about taking on the united nobility in a war, withdrew. Hrvoje, once again actively opposed to Sigismund and allied with his fellow nobles, took advantage of the situation to renounce his submission to Sigismund and proclaim again his support for Ladislas. Sigismund was not able to respond to this disobedience at once, for other difficulties had overwhelmed him. In 1394 or 1395 his wife, Maria, died. She was the foundation for his position in Hungary, where he still had many opponents. Thus he had to devote his efforts to retaining and consolidating his authority there. Seemingly successful in this by the end of 1395, he returned to his long-put-aside crusading plans. Then the following year, as noted, he was crushingly defeated by the Turks at Nikopolis. Taking heavy losses, he found himself in no position to attack Bosnia. Moreover, his defeat made him even more unpopular in Hungary. Thus once more it was necessary for him to concentrate his efforts on maintaining his rule there.

Sigismund’s failure at Nikopolis also revived the hopes of Ladislas and his party. Ladislas now appointed Stjepan Lacković as his deputy for Croatia, and they began organizing in the hopes of resuming the warfare. To prevent this Sigismund called a council at Križevci to which Lacković was invited on a safe-conduct. At the gathering Lacković was murdered, which set off a new Croatian-Hungarian uprising in the name of Ladislas. This uprising was led by Hrvoje Vukčić, whom Ladislas soon named as his deputy to replace Lacković. Hrvoje took a very active role in Croatia and particularly in Dalmatia, where in Ladislas’ name he was able to extend his own authority over much of Dalmatia.

Helen-Gruba continued to rule as a puppet of the nobles—with all her
extant charters specifically noting that they had the agreement of the great nobles—until 1398, when she was deposed under uncertain circumstances. It is often said that she then departed for an exile in Dubrovnik. However, Živković has shown that she actually remained in Bosnia, treated with honor. Nevertheless, it seems that some of the leading Nikolić, her brothers and nephews, who opposed her deposition, did for a while have to seek asylum in Dubrovnik. By 1403 they are found back at home as vassals of Sandalj Hranić. Thus if, as seems likely, the Nikolić tried to take advantage of Dabiša’s and Helen’s support to raise themselves to the level of independent barons, the attempt failed. Possibly Helen’s overthrow was a move to suppress the family to which she belonged and which through her favors was becoming strong enough to pose a threat to the monopoly of power held by the established barons.

Helen was replaced by Ostoja, a member of the ruling family, though it is not certain how he was related to it. He had not been mentioned in earlier sources. Ostoja’s first reign was to last from 1398 to 1404. All the powerful nobles who had supported Helen remained around Ostoja, so it seems none had strongly opposed his election. Why some, or all, of them had wanted him as king, however, we cannot say. Like Hrvoje, Ostoja once in power declared his support for Ladislas. At about this time Radić Sanković regained his freedom and, closely associated with Ostoja, set about recovering the lands he had lost to the Kosač. Sigismund tried to take advantage of the situation to attack Bosnia in 1398, but he was repelled. Bosnia also suffered a Turkish raid that year.

In 1400 Ostoja and Hrvoje sent a complaint to Dubrovnik about the sale of slaves in that town, many of whom were Bosnians. According to town law, Catholics could not be sold as slaves there. Thus most of the slaves were presumably members of the Bosnian Church—or at least passed off as such. Both Hrvoje and Ostoja had close ties with the Bosnian Church. Hrvoje was a member of it, while keeping cordial relations with the Catholic Church, and Ostoja almost certainly was also a member of the Bosnian Church. Their protests may be seen, then, as an effort to help their co-religionists. In 1416 Dubrovnik was to ban entirely the sale of slaves in Dubrovnik.

In 1401 Ostoja and Hrvoje moved onto the offensive on behalf of Ladislas. In that year Zadar submitted to Hrvoje, while retaining its existing institutions and privileges. Hrvoje then moved to regain the other Dalmatian towns for Ladislas; presumably many had gone over to Sigismund in 1393 at the time Hrvoje had capitulated to him. Split, which had earlier been taken by Tvrtko, refused now to submit to Hrvoje and went so far as to attack and besiege Hrvoje’s town of Omiš. Dubrovnik, though a vassal of Sigismund, also maintained good relations with Hrvoje and shipped grain to those besieged in Omiš. Hrvoje was allied to his brother-in-law Ivanš Nelipčić, who controlled most of the Cetina župa; he seems to have mobilized his forces to help Hrvoje against Split. Seeing the threat against itself increased, Split gave up its resistance and submitted to Hrvoje by 1403.
Meanwhile, matters went from bad to worse for Sigismund. In 1401 a group of Hungarian nobles seized and jailed him in Buda. Nicholas Garai and Herman of Celje eventually succeeded in procuring his release by making peace with his captors. Sigismund then left for Bohemia to raise an army, leaving a very unstable situation in Hungary. As a result, during these years (1401–03) he lost, as we have seen, most of Dalmatia to Hrvoje and Nelipić, while also suffering losses in Croatia and Slavonia. The most important defection in Croatia was that of John “Frankapan’s” son and successor Nicholas, who held Senj, the župas of Vinodol, Modruš, and Gacka, and also some castles in the vicinity of Zagreb. Probably the strongest Croatian prince of the time, he declared for Ladislas in 1403. However, Sigismund was able to retain the loyalty of a number of powerful northern Croatian and Slavonian princes: the Kurjaković of Kršava, the Berislavić of Požega, and the princes of Zrin and Blagaj. In 1401 even the pope, Boniface IX, declared his support for Ladislas. Finally, encouraged by Hrvoje and other supporters, in July 1403 Ladislas arrived in Zadar, declaring his intent to assume control of his lands and to campaign actively for the throne. His allies hoped and Sigismund feared that he would now march on Buda to claim his throne. Hrvoje, who came to Zadar to greet him, and a large number of other supporters urged him to act quickly, stressing Sigismund’s numerous difficulties at the time and the great likelihood of success. However, Ladislas hesitated, seemingly afraid to go to Buda where his father had been murdered. Finally, after extracting oaths of loyalty from a large assortment of nobles and naming Hrvoje as his deputy for Dalmatia (granting Hrvoje the title Herceg of Split), Ladislas returned to Naples.

Ladislas’ failure to act distressed his followers, who became less zealous in his cause, and gave Sigismund an opportunity to rally support. For in the face of Ladislas’ passivity, many Hungarian and Croatian nobles came to the realization that sooner or later they would have to make peace with Sigismund. To facilitate this, the alert Sigismund now offered an amnesty to all those who had opposed him. And many Hungarian and Croatian nobles, concluding it was the time to do so, accepted and, deserting Ladislas, submitted to Sigismund in late 1403 and 1404. These included Nicholas “Frankapan” in 1404. It was chiefly the nobles in peripheral regions like Bosnia, freer of Sigismund’s retaliation and preferring a lethargic and distant suzerain in Italy to a more interfering one in near-by Hungary, who stuck by Ladislas.

Dubrovnik, though throughout recognizing Sigismund, tried to maintain correct relations with Sigismund’s Bosnian opponents, Hrvoje and Ostoja. However, this attempt met with severe difficulties both at home and abroad. First, the Bosnian leaders objected to the sale of slaves in Dubrovnik; and second, the town’s merchants had grievances against various Bosnian nobles—particularly those in Hum, including Sandalj—who had been arbitrarily establishing new customs stations and raising the amounts of customs and tolls, which cut into the profits of these merchants. The merchants also suffered from attacks on their caravans by brigands in Bosnia and Hum,
brigands whom the Bosnians could not or would not control; and the Bosnians were not interested in giving the merchants restitution for their losses. Ostoj a further complained that Dubrovnik was granting asylum to Bosnian deserters. This issue became a critical one in 1403 when a member of the Bosnian royal family, Paul (Pavle) Radišić, fled from Bosnia to Dubrovnik. It seems he had been involved in an unsuccessful plot for the Bosnian throne. At least Ostoj a suspected that he was. Ostoj a wrote Dubrovnik and insisted that it expel Radišić. He also demanded that the town accept him, Ostoj a, in place of Sigismund, as its overlord. If his demands were not met in fifteen days, Ostoj a threatened to expel its merchants from Bosnia and attack the town.

The town was caught by surprise; throughout the Middle Ages, and often at great cost to itself, it had insisted on its right to grant political asylum to anyone who sought it. It was not about to compromise this principle. Dubrovnik immediately sent envoys to Ostoj a and to a number of Bosnian nobles who, it was hoped, could exert some influence on Ostoj a. Hrvoje seems to have been upset and apparently tried to intervene with Ostoj a on Dubrovnik’s behalf; at least Dubrovnik believed he did. Such intervention had no effect. In July 1403 Ostoj a’s armies attacked the territory of Dubrovnik, sending refugees from the hinterland flocking to the town. Radič Sanković, Dubrovnik’s direct Bosnian neighbor, who had long had good relations with the town but who was closely allied to Ostoj a, to further his own attempt to regain his lost lands from Sandalj, joined Ostoj a’s attack. Dubrovnik confiscated his house inside its walls. In September Ostoj a sent envoys to Dubrovnik, but they could not reach any agreement. So the town wrote Hrvoje again, suggesting he overthrow Ostoj a and put Radišić on the throne. Hrvoje at the time rejected the plan but assured the town he wanted it to have peace with Ostoj a.

By this time Hrvoje was clearly angry at Ostoj a. He was unhappy with the war. But also he must have been angry at Ostoj a’s forcing the flight and seizing the lands of Paul (Pavle) Klešić, the lord of Glamoč and Duvno, who had sought asylum in Dubrovnik in June 1403. The location of his lands makes it probable that he was Hrvoje’s vassal. Ostoj a seems to have felt threatened by Dubrovnik’s negotiations with Hrvoje and with Sigismund, particularly since Hrvoje, miffed at Ostoj a’s behavior, had cooled in his attitude toward the Bosnian king. Moreover, Sigismund was well on the way to victory, having regained the allegiance of large numbers of nobles and having recovered Buda, Višegrad (Visegrad), and Esztergom in Hungary; soon he would be in a position to involve himself once again in Bosnian matters. Should Hrvoje join the ranks of the Hungarian and Croatian nobility flocking at the time to Sigismund’s camp, it could spell the end for Ostoj a. So at the end of 1403, to prevent such an alliance against himself, Ostoj a opened negotiations with Sigismund and soon agreed to accept him as his overlord. This submission occurred just six months after Ostoj a had gone to war with Dubrovnik, at least in part because the town recognized Sigismund as its suzerain.

Ostoj a’s recognition of Sigismund was surely opposed by many, if not
most, of the Bosnian nobles. Opposition from them would explain the change of heart Ostojac now was to show toward Klešić. For in January 1404, after intervention on Klešić’s behalf by members of the Bosnian Church including the djed, Ostojac allowed Klešić to return and regain his lands, which Ostojac had taken from him “illegally.” This intervention also reflects the influence on Ostojac of the Bosnian Church. Such influence was probably limited to this period when Bosnia had a ruler who almost certainly was one of its members. The Bosnian kings who preceded and followed Ostojac were all Catholics. It is further possible that Ostojac was receptive to the djed’s plea, not to please the djed but to placate the powerful Hrvoje, who was also probably supporting Klešić’s cause.

It is worth pausing a moment here to examine the case of Klešić more closely. For it was declared when Klešić was restored to his lands that this was right because the king had taken his land “illegally.” What triumphed here was the principle that regardless of one’s fault (regardless of what Klešić had done to anger the king), his lands were inviolate. Thus the Bosnians were not going to allow anyone to connect their landholding with their relation to state authority. This attitude, which they staunchly defended, clearly made it extremely difficult for any king to carry out the policy attempted by Ostojac of confiscating land as a punitive measure. This meant it was also impossible for a king to tie landholding to state service as the Byzantines and Serbs had done under the pronoia system. As a result the Bosnian kings, unable to make such a connection and obtain military service through land, were to remain weaker militarily in general and weaker vis à vis their nobles in particular than their eastern neighbors. Landholding was to remain free and not tied to service until the end of the medieval Bosnian state.

In January 1404, at the same time that Ostojac, surely under pressure, was allowing Klešić to return, Hrvoje and Dubrovnik were in the midst of discussing the question of overthrowing Ostojac and replacing him with Paul Radišić. If Ostojac had any inkling of these discussions, it is easy to understand why he changed his policy on Klešić. Klešić’s return seems to have done much to improve Ostojac’s relations with his nobles, and tensions seem to have dissipated. In March 1404 Ostojac made peace with Hrvoje and even concluded a truce with Dubrovnik. And it seems that Hrvoje was even considering making peace with Sigismund. Had that happened, the last major issue separating Ostojac and Hrvoje would have been resolved. Then suddenly the pieces of the kaleidoscope radically formed a new pattern, seemingly the result of new disagreements that surfaced when discussions were initiated between Ostojac and Dubrovnik on the terms for a formal peace between them.

The town demanded the restoration of all territory seized by Ostojac. Ostojac was reluctant to agree to this. However, Hrvoje, supported by Sandalj Hranić and Paul Radenović, wanted him to accept this demand. Ostojac, seeking support to bolster his stand, then sent an envoy, authorized to offer privileges, off to Venice to seek an alliance there. Dubrovnik and Hrvoje, who was overlord over much of Dalmatia, seeing Venice as a dangerous rival,
were both much opposed to this idea. At this point Hrvoje, having Sandalj with him, seems to have broken with Ostoja, for a draft charter offered to Dubrovnik by Ostoja in late March 1404 had neither Hrvoje nor Sandalj as a witness; moreover, neither nobleman attended a council meeting Ostoja held at Visoko in late April.

Shortly thereafter, at the very end of April or even May 1404, the Bosnian nobility convened a council that ousted Ostoja and put on the throne Tvrtko II, who was, according to Orbini, the illegitimate son of Tvrtko I. His election was almost certainly effected by Hrvoje supported by Sandalj. Tvrtko was clearly Hrvoje’s puppet at first. In fact, in the beginning of his reign he was frequently found residing in Hrvoje’s Sana province. And in the spring of 1405 Tvrtko granted to Hrvoje Bosnia’s richest mining town, Srebrnica. We may assume this lucrative gift was not granted happily. As long as Hrvoje and Sandalj, the two strongest figures in Bosnia, remained united, Tvrtko would have no chance to assert his independence.

Sandalj immediately took advantage of the situation to attack Radič Sanković, who had been able to maintain himself, it seems, chiefly because of Ostoja’s support. Sandalj quickly occupied the lands Radič had regained; he even managed to capture Radič whom he blinded and then jailed. Radič never emerged from prison again, and all his family’s lands were taken by the Kosače, who from then on held almost all of Hum. One wonders if Sandalj’s support of Tvrtko II’s candidacy was not motivated by his desire to eliminate Radič’s prop and thereby facilitate this massive land grab. Peace with Dubrovnik was finally concluded in June 1405. Its conclusion was delayed owing to a dispute between the town and Sandalj over certain villages.

The nobles in general had probably turned against Ostoja because he was head-strong and wanted to act independently of them and assert his authority, as was shown by his war with Dubrovnik, which, as far as we can tell, was desired by none of the nobles, with the possible exception of Radič. The nobles also disliked Ostoja’s new ties with the hated Sigismund. Further, they must have disliked Ostoja’s willingness to turn to foreign powers, even unpopular ones, to find allies to support his interests against those of his nobles, as he had done with Sigismund and then tried to do with Venice.

Ostoja, who had patched up his relations with Sigismund, avoided capture by his opponents and fled from Bobovac to the Hungarian court. He at once was promised Hungarian military support. In June 1404 two Hungarian armies struck Bosnia, the first hitting Uso and taking among other places the fortress of Uso, which the Hungarians retained for a period thereafter. The second army took the major royal residence of Bobovac. Faced by strong resistance from the nobles, the Hungarians could not advance deeper into Bosnia. But though they could not extend their conquest further, they were able to retain Bobovac. And there Ostoja remained, propped up by a Hungarian garrison and ruling as a puppet king for Sigismund, while almost all the nobility of Bosnia supported Tvrtko II. The only relatively major noble family that stood by Ostoja at this time were the Radiovojevići of western Bosnia.
However, by 1406 they too were found in Tvrtko’s camp. After that, we may suppose, Ostoja’s kingdom consisted of little more than Bobovac itself.

However, Tvrtko was never able to oust him, and thus throughout Tvrtko’s first reign (to 1409) Ostoja remained in Bobovac and, which was particularly galling to Tvrtko, in possession of the Bosnian crown. He was also more than simply a thorn in Tvrtko’s side, for there was an ever-present danger that Ostoja’s Hungarian allies might launch a major expedition to gain for him more, if not all, of Bosnia. The likelihood of this seemed strong, for not only had Sigismund declared his support for Ostoja, but Ostoja’s major opponent Hrvoje was still working for Ladislas and had easily made his puppet Tvrtko take this position as well. Thus Sigismund had added reason to attack Bosnia and rid that neighboring land of Ladislas’ followers. Thus Hrvoje’s continued support of Ladislas made Sigismund take a more active role in Bosnian affairs, which was certainly not in Bosnia’s interests, and the quarrel between Tvrtko/Hrvoje and Ostoja/Sigismund that continued until 1409 can be viewed as a phase of the broader civil war between Sigismund and Ladislas.

Hungary took almost annual military action against Bosnia, though generally it was not on a major scale. In August 1405 the Hungarians attacked Bihać in the north of Bosnia. Hrvoje was able to expel them, regaining the town while the Hungarians withdrew their forces to Krupa on the Una. In 1406 a Hungarian attack was launched along the Drina and seems to have taken Srebrenica, a logical target, for not only was it a rich town, but it was then possessed by their enemy, Hrvoje. In 1407 the Hungarians raided Hrvoje’s own lands of the Donji Kraji and also raided along the Bosna River valley. Though they do not seem to have made lasting conquests, the Hungarians did carry out considerable destruction and carried off much booty. Thus they made life a constant hassle for Tvrtko. In 1407 Sigismund was able to briefly acquire the submission of Hrvoje’s brother-in-law Ivaniš Nelipić. This submission was rendered in a meeting arranged through the mediation of Nelipić’s neighbor, Nicholas “Frankapan.”

By this time Sigismund had basically put an end to the unrest in Hungary and Croatia. His major allies in this effort had proved to be the counts of Celje (Cilli). Celje lay south of Maribor on the Savinja, a tributary running into the Sava, in present-day Slovenia. Herman II of Celje had bravely supported Sigismund during the battle of Nikopolis, and the two had escaped the battle on the same fishing boat and then taken the long trip back to Hungary together. On his return Sigismund rewarded Herman II with the district of Varazdin as well as various districts in Zagorje in the borderlands between Slovenia and Croatia. He remained loyal to Sigismund when Ladislas’ faction resumed the war, and, when Sigismund was captured and imprisoned in 1401, Herman II had a major role in procuring his liberation, by threatening to invade Hungary if he were not released. Having regained his freedom, Sigismund became even closer to this loyal supporter. In 1405 Sigismund, as noted a widower, married Herman’s daughter Barbara and awarded Herman vast
tracts of land in Slavonia; soon, in 1406, Sigismund named Herman the combined Ban of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia. For his major contributions to the pacification of the Croatian nobles, Sigismund also granted Herman the right to mint money, exact tolls, and to receive the revenue from various mines. Thus the counts of Celje, now of Celje and Zagorje, rapidly rose to become the major family in the Croatian lands.

The skirmishing, which took place chiefly in the north of Bosnia, between the Bosnian nobility and Sigismund continued until early 1409. It finally culminated in a battle fought at Dobor in Usora in September 1408, when Sigismund won a great victory over the Bosnian nobility. Later sources say 170 Bosnian noblemen—but not any of the major figures—were captured and pitched to their deaths over the town’s battlements. This statement may well be exaggerated, for the same source claims Tvrtko II was captured. That certainly was not the case, however, for Tvrtko is found seeking tribute from Dubrovnik in February 1409. By that time Sigismund had basically won the war; for in January 1409 it was announced in a letter from Sigismund to Trogir that Hrvoje had submitted to him.

By this time Ladislas was openly planning to sell Dalmatia to Venice, a sale he actually carried out shortly thereafter, in July 1409. Thus Hrvoje’s submission was probably motivated by two considerations: Sigismund’s increased power in the region of Bosnia after his victory at Dobor, and Hrvoje’s desire to retain Dalmatia for himself. For if he submitted to Sigismund, he could do so on the condition that he retain his position in Dalmatia; moreover, by serving Sigismund, he could then ignore Ladislas’ sale of Dalmatia to Venice, something he could not do if he was still Ladislas’ deputy there. At the same time Hrvoje’s conditions could benefit Sigismund, for Hrvoje’s presence in Dalmatia could keep Venice from acquiring its purchases and thus keep this region at least nominally his. And, surely as Hrvoje anticipated, the agreement between the two stated that Sigismund would allow Hrvoje to retain his titles and lands including Dalmatia, simply stipulating that Hrvoje held the region from Sigismund and not from Ladislas. Hrvoje now became an honored nobleman at court and was made a member of the newly established Dragon Order.

This order had been established by Sigismund in December 1408 in the midst of colorful ceremonies. Its aim was to defend the Hungarian royal house (i.e., Sigismund) from domestic and foreign enemies, and the Catholic Church from pagans and heretics. That Hrvoje was a member of the Bosnian Church did not appear to bother anyone, a fact suggesting that that Church was not, as has been claimed, Bogomil or dualist. The order included foreigners as well as Hungarians; the Orthodox rulers of Serbia (Stefan Lazarević) and Wallachia were made members. As a footnote it is worth mentioning that in the Wallachian case membership went from father to son. The son, famous for his brutality and known as Vlad the Impaler, was also known as Vlad Dracul, the name Dracul (dragon) being derived from his membership in the Dragon Order. A whole series of tales about Dracula, based on the
activities of Vlad the Impaler and all ending in impalements, circulated around Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Though these stories were not supernatural, their protagonist eventually became so when Bram Stoker converted him into a vampire, also mistakenly making him into a Transylvanian.

Hrvoje was to remain loyal to and on good terms with Sigismund, who, of course, provided him with a legal basis to hold Dalmatia against Venice’s claims, until 1413. Most of the other Bosnian nobles soon came to accept Sigismund and/or Ostojich shortly thereafter. Nonetheless, Ostojich’s position remained precarious until Tvrtko was deposed. In February 1409 Tvrtko sent an envoy for tribute to Dubrovnik; he is not heard of again until the very end of 1409, when he sent another envoy to Dubrovnik. Throughout that year Tvrtko, though losing support rapidly, seems to have remained in Bosnia, calling himself king. By the end of 1409 Ostojich was effectively back as King of Bosnia, clearly holding most of the country and accepted by all the nobles whom we have record of. Tvrtko is not mentioned in the sources again until 1414, when he is found living on some lands belonging to Paul Radenović, a day’s trip from Dubrovnik. And Tvrtko seems to have played no further role in Bosnian affairs until about that time.

Venetian sources credit Sandalj with playing the major role in Ostojich’s restoration. If this claim be true, we do not know why Sandalj supported Ostojich. However, since Radić Sanković was dead and his lands were safely in Sandalj’s possession, Sandalj no longer had a major reason to oppose Ostojich. However, even though Ostojich by the end of 1409 was universally recognized as king, his position was still weak. In his state the great nobles retained their independence, giving their own personal interests top priority, and negotiated on their own with Sigismund. In fact some of them, like Hrvoje, submitted to Sigismund directly and not to the Hungarian king through Ostojich, the Bosnian ruler. This gave Hrvoje great freedom of action and the means to use Sigismund on his own behalf against Ostojich. This was particularly dangerous to the king because some, like Hrvoje, were clearly stronger than Ostojich was. At the same time, and adding to the confusion, certain nobles like Sandalj, who came in 1409 to accept Ostojich, still did not recognize Sigismund. Sandalj remained loyal to Ladislas, with whom he corresponded through the summer of 1409, until forced to submit to Sigismund in October 1410.

Ostojich remained hostile to Hrvoje and tried through grants to assign to other noblemen, in particular to the Radivojevići, lands belonging to Hrvoje or to his vassals. Seeing this feud developing, Sigismund, interested in maintaining good relations with the powerful Hrvoje, began to cool toward Ostojich. Threatened by these two and jealous of Hrvoje, whose presence prevented Ostojich from truly ruling Bosnia, Ostojich worked hard to improve his relations with the other barons, Paul Radenović and Sandalj Hranić. Ostojich’s opposition to Hrvoje and his patching up relations with these two powerful noblemen, both of whom still supported Ladislas, led Sigismund and Hrvoje to go to war against Ostojich in 1410. Hrvoje had already, during 1409, expelled
the Radivojević from their newly granted lands, including the rich customs town of Drijeva. Now, in 1410, and allied to Hrvoje, Hungarian troops struck northeastern Bosnia, capturing several fortresses in that area, including Vranduk, Srđibnik in Usora, and Srebrenica. Then the allies took the important town of Visoko, forcing Ostoj to flee.

Sandalj, meanwhile, took advantage of this fighting to seize Drijeva for himself. This act pleased neither Hrvoje nor Sigismund. The latter, who had also hoped that the campaign would force Sandalj and Paul Radenović to give up their support of Ladislas and submit to him, now decided to direct his army’s attention against these two nobles. By October 1410 he had forced both of them to capitulate to him. According to Dubrovnik’s records, Sigismund’s success led him to consider, in the fall of 1410, having himself crowned King of Bosnia, in place of Ostoj then in disfavor. It seems he even was able to force Sandalj and Paul to acquiesce in this plan. For some reason—presumably Hrvoje’s opposition, or at least Hrvoje’s persuading him that such an act might have undesirable consequences—Sigismund soon gave up the plan. In the winter 1410–11, Ostoj, finding himself without support, made a trip to Djakovo to meet Sigismund and submit to him. Sigismund recognized him as King of Bosnia, while Ostoj recognized Sigismund as his suzerain and yielded to him Soli and Usora. At that time these two regions were probably still under Hungarian occupation. Thus Ostoj was recognizing a fait accompli; however, his agreement gave up Bosnia’s claim to the area. These two regions were then assigned to deputies chosen by Sigismund.

In the course of this warfare, as noted, in early 1410 Sigismund had seized the richest silver-mining town in Bosnia, Srebrenica on the Drina. Later, probably in 1411, Sigismund assigned Srebrenica to his loyal vassal Stefan Lazarević of Serbia, whose state lay just across the Drina from Srebrenica. For most of the rest of the fifteenth century—until the Turkish conquest—Srebrenica was to be Serbian, and Bosnian attempts to regain it were to cause several wars with Serbia.

In these years Hrvoje and Sandalj had each vastly increased his holdings and power; each clearly outstripped the king in lands and size of armies. A struggle between the two noblemen seemed likely; not only were they rivals for influence in state affairs, but Sandalj was probably unhappy with the closer ties between Bosnia and Sigismund that were developing as a result of Hrvoje’s policies and which culminated in Sigismund’s campaign against and victory over Sandalj himself in 1410. Had Hrvoje not gone over to Sigismund voluntarily and then become his active ally, Bosnia might well have retained greater independence from Hungary and have avoided the territorial losses in the north. In 1411 Sandalj divorced Hrvoje’s niece and married Helen (Jelena), the widow of George II Balšić of Zeta and the sister of Stefan Lazarević. This marital change reflected both Sandalj’s deteriorating relations with Hrvoje and his forging closer ties with Serbia. He was to send help, as we shall see, to Stefan Lazarević in the latter’s war against the Ottoman pretender Musa in 1412 and 1413. Good relations between the Kosače and
Stefan’s family were not new, for Sandalj’s predecessor Vlatko Vuković had led the Bosnian forces that had fought for Lazar at Kosovo.

In 1412 peace seemed to reign in Bosnia. Sigismund held a major festival in Buda that year attended by among others the leading Bosnians, Ostoja, Hrvoje, Sandalj, and Paul Radenović. A Polish chronicler speaks of the prowess of the Bosnians in knightly games. Shortly thereafter, in the spring of 1413, Sigismund declared Hrvoje a rebel and accused him of dealing with the Turks. Hrvoje, he said, had attacked Sandalj’s lands when Sandalj was absent from them, fighting the Turks (Musa) in Serbia. Živković, noting Hrvoje’s anger at Sandalj’s seizing Drijeva from him in 1410, believes the charge was true, though of course his treachery was primarily against Sandalj rather than Sigismund. However, since Sigismund was supporting the coalition against Musa, he did have cause for anger. As a result Sigismund withdrew the titles and authority he had granted Hrvoje in his realm. Sigismund’s action had immediate effect in Dalmatia, for, beginning with Split, one after the other the Dalmatian towns ousted Hrvoje’s representatives and declared their loyalty to Sigismund. Thus Hrvoje’s rule seems to have been unpopular on the coast. Hrvoje pleaded in letters to Sigismund and to the Hungarian queen that the charges were unjust and that he was still loyal to Sigismund. His protests had no effect. In disgrace, Hrvoje now had no choice but to do what he was accused of; he turned to the Turks and received mercenaries from the Ottoman governor of Skopje. He was also joined by Tvrtko II, who reappeared as mysteriously as he had disappeared four years earlier.

Tvrtko at the time was living on lands belonging to Paul Radenović near Dubrovnik. The Turks decided to seriously involve themselves in the issue and in May 1414 launched a major expedition of thirty thousand troops, according to contemporary Venetian sources, against Bosnia. They concentrated on plundering the lands of Ostojć and Sandalj, Hrvoje’s major enemies at the time. The Ottomans also proclaimed Tvrtko II as King of Bosnia. Thus they seem to have hoped to weaken Bosnia by provoking a civil war for the throne. At once Paul Radenović and his son Peter Pavlović declared their support for Tvrtko, with whom they seem to have maintained good relations, allowing him to reside on their lands. After a major plundering expedition, the Ottomans withdrew, leaving Bosnia divided with two kings present in the land. Most of the nobles, headed by Sandalj, seem to have remained loyal to Ostojć. Paul Radenović was the leading—and in fact only known—powerful local supporter of Tvrtko. Though it would have been logical for Hrvoje to have supported Tvrtko too (since Hrvoje was hostile to Sandalj and since his allies the Turks were supporting Tvrtko), we have no documentation that Hrvoje really did so.

In February 1415 Sigismund sent troops into Bosnia. We may presume they were directed against the lands of Hrvoje. Soon the Ottomans were back, raiding Ostojć’s lands. These foreign armies soon met in battle. Hrvoje and the Turks of Ishak beg (governor of Skopje, 1415–39) won a major victory over the Hungarians in August 1415. The battle, generally said to have taken
place at Doboj, probably actually took place near Lašva. As a result Hrvoje regained Usora, which Sigismund had taken early in 1411. Many Hungarian prisoners were taken, including some high nobles. A Hungarian chronicler depicts Hrvoje’s magnanimity as a victor as well as his sense of humor: Among the Hungarian prisoners was a nobleman who had amused the Hungarian court by mocking Hrvoje’s stocky stature and hoarse voice by imitating a bull whenever Hrvoje entered a room he was in. Hrvoje now had this nobleman sewn into an ox hide and said to him, “If you bellowed like a bull when in human shape, now you have the shape of an ox with which to bellow.” He then had him, still sewn inside the hide, thrown into a river to drown.

The Turkish victory marked the end of Sigismund’s influence in Bosnia and the beginning of an active Turkish role in Bosnian politics. Sandalj and Ostoja quickly made peace with Hrvoje. In their triumph Hrvoje and the Turks forgot about Tvrtnko II, who had supported them in the war, and confirmed their recent opponent, Ostoja, as king. Why they did so is not known. After their victory, the Ottoman troops raided into Croatia for the first time, plundering all the way to Celje, the hereditary lands of one of Sigismund’s closest supporters. For the next twenty years Ottoman soldiers, usually supplied by Ishak beg, were to be active in Bosnia as mercenaries in various Bosnian civil wars.

In late August 1415, Ostoja and Sandalj, still closely associated, convoked a council at Sutjeska and invited various nobles including the powerful Paul Radenović. He came with his son Peter, leaving his other son Radoslav at home. After their arrival, the hosts suggested a pleasant ride in the country. Radenović and his son accepted. Shortly into the ride, the king, Sandalj, and their retainers turned on the pair. Paul Radenović was killed, allegedly for trying to escape, and Peter was taken prisoner. Sandalj, it was reported, planned to blind Peter; however, for some reason he did not carry out this act. Sandalj later told a Ragusan ambassador that this action had been necessary because the pair were traitors. What their treachery consisted in was not stated, though it seems probable it was their recent—and possibly still ongoing—association with ex-king Tvrtnko II. Paul’s son Radoslav, still at large, immediately went to war to avenge the murder and also to prevent the division of his lands between Sandalj and Ostoja, which seems to have been planned and had been the fate that met Radič Sanković’s lands earlier. Radoslav’s enemies grabbed what they could; his losses included the rich mining town of Olovo, which was taken by Sandalj’s ally, the second-level nobleman Vukmir Zlatonosović. Radoslav procured a Turkish contingent and, joined by his brother Peter, who had either escaped or been released, regained his lost lands. Then he and the Turks proceeded to ravage Sandalj’s lands.

Hrvoje played no part in this. He had not even attended the Sutjeska gathering. He died in 1416. His death ended the enormous influence of the Hrvatinčić in Bosnian affairs. He was succeeded by a very weak son, but authority soon passed to a more dynamic nephew, George (Juraj) Vojsalić,
who, though able, was still no Hrvoje. George, though he was to have much less influence in general Bosnian affairs, did obtain a dominant role in the Donji Kraji. His reduced influence was partly owing to the considerable loss of territory that immediately followed Hrvoje’s death. Omiš and the Krajina were grabbed by Ivaniš Nelić, Hrvoje’s brother-in-law. Furthermore, right after Hrvoje’s death Ostojka divorced his own wife to marry Hrvoje’s widow, who brought with her considerable territory, including Jajce which was to be the last Bosnian capital. Ostojka’s divorced wife was also a relative of the murdered Paul Radenović—further reason for him to rid himself of her at this time. Sigismund acquired Hrvoje’s Korčula, Brač, and Hvar. His possession of these islands was brief, as Venice took them in 1420.

Ostojka’s increased strength from his acquisition of these extensive lands that had formerly belonged to Hrvoje alarmed the sultan, who did not like Ostojka and certainly did not want to see anyone in Bosnia becoming too powerful. He ordered a council meeting, which was attended by both Sandalj and Radoslav. The council was clearly designed against Ostojka, who did not attend and who was assigned the blame for Paul Radenović’s murder. Since Paul’s alliance with Tvrtko II had chiefly threatened Ostojka, this verdict may well have been true. Under Ottoman pressure Sandalj and Radoslav did conclude a truce, but it was not to last; the two had too many grievances against one another for it to work. Among Ostojka’s many enemies at this meeting—if we can believe Orbini—was his son Stefan Ostojić, who was then angry at his father for divorcing his mother, Kujava, to marry Hrvoje’s widow. Ostojka, severely threatened, fled to the lands of the Radivojevići, who through his various ups and downs had probably been his most consistent supporters.

In the months that followed, Ostojka somehow extricated himself from this major crisis. Probably playing upon the differences between the new, but still hostile, allies Sandalj and Radoslav, he somehow made peace with Paul Radenović’s sons, the Pavlovići, and joined them in their new war, which resumed in 1417, against Sandalj, Ostojka’s former ally who had helped him destroy their father. Their combined forces, ably supported by Turkish troops, pushed Sandalj back toward the sea and occupied much of his land. Ostojka acquired Blagaj, a major Kosača fortress, and also the key customs town of Drijeva on the lower Neretva. Once in possession of the latter he banned the sale of slaves there. Then suddenly in 1418 Ostojka died. His son Stefan Ostojić (1418–21) succeeded him. Sandalj and his allies the Zlatonosovići refused to recognize him. However, Sandalj’s other major vassals, the Nikolići, probably hoping to assert their own independence again, did support Stefan Ostojić.

In 1419 Sandalj, needing cash for his war, sold to Dubrovnik his—the eastern—part of Konavli that he had seized back in 1392 when Sanković had tried to sell Konavli to Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik had protested Sandalj’s and Radenović-Pavlović’s possession of the two parts of Konavli ever since that time. (Radoslav still retained his—the western—half; he eventually was to sell it with Cavtat to Dubrovnik in late 1426 or 1427. As a result of the sales,
the two noblemen and their heirs were to receive an annual tribute thereafter.)
The new king confirmed Sandalj’s sale. At this point he and Sandalj con-
cluded a truce—and confirmation of the sale was probably a condition for it—
but it was not to last. For Stefan Ostojić entered into negotiations for an
alliance with Venice that was partially directed against the Balšići, with
whom Sandalj then had good relations. So Sandalj broke his truce and in 1420
procured Turkish help to launch a counter-offensive against the lands of the
Pavlovići and of the new king. Tvrtko II was with the Turks now, and they
clearly had under consideration his restoration. Sandalj immediately occupied
the Pavlović half of Konavli, which the Ragusans tried to persuade Sandalj to
sell to them, while the Pavlovići protested violently. Sandalj did not oblige
the town, as he felt it was then more important to work out a peace with the
Pavlovići. For each was able to see that all this fighting would profit no one
but the Turks, whose goals were booty and the weakening of Bosnia. Thus in
late spring 1420 a peace conference was convened, attended by the Pavlovići,
Sandalj, and Ishak beg, the commander of Sandalj’s Turks. In the course of
the discussions Ishak beg killed Peter Pavlović. As Sandalj later explained it,
Ishak took this action because Peter had been faithless to the sultan. Needless
to say the conference broke up. As a result of this murder and Sandalj’s
continued alliance with Ishak beg, Sandalj was able to regain most of the
territory he had lost to Ostojja and the Pavlovići in the earlier phase of the war.

Realizing the strength of the force mobilized against him, in early 1420
Stefan Ostojić tried to make peace with Sandalj, but it was too late. In July
1420 Stefan was ousted from power, through the action of Sandalj. The ex-
king fled to the coast; there he entered into various intrigues to regain his
throne. These were ineffective and soon he found himself ignored by the
Bosnians. He was dead before April 1422. His supporters, the Nikolići, also
had to flee to Dubrovnik. The town mediated a peace between them and
Sandalj, enabling them to return to their lands in Hum. Thereafter, as far as
we know, they remained loyal vassals of the Kosače.

Tvrtko II, always ready, and now having Ottoman support, became king
again. He established himself in Visoko, surrounded by the leading Bosnian
nobles except for Radoslav Pavlović, whose name is conspicuously absent
from the charters issued by Tvrtko that summer. Presumably Radoslav still
supported Stefan Ostojić. In October 1420 Radoslav finally agreed to peace
with Sandalj; in doing so he also agreed to accept Tvrtko II as king. Rados-
lav’s hesitancy in recognizing Tvrtko provides confirmation for the view that
Tvrtko was Sandalj’s candidate. To seal their peace, in 1421 Radoslav mar-
rried Sandalj’s niece Theodora; she was the sister of Stefan Vukčić, who was
to be Sandalj’s successor. Their agreement did not lead to a permanent peace;
the two were fighting again briefly in 1422 or 1423, after which a new peace
was concluded.

Tvrtko, having received a formal coronation at a council meeting in
August 1421, ruled through the early 1420s without serious challenge. The
narrative that follows of Tvrtko’s second reign relies heavily on the recent
reconstruction of events by Živković.¹ Involved elsewhere, the Turks bothered Bosnia less until 1426, giving Bosnia about five years to enjoy greater independence and to improve its economic situation. Bosnia’s mines reached the height of their activity in this period under Tvrcko. And the number of Ragusan merchants in Bosnia increased considerably in the 1420s. Moreover, in December 1422 Tvrcko concluded a trade treaty with Venice that increased Venetian commercial activity in Bosnia. Dubrovnik was unhappy, but Bosnia benefited from the competition, especially by acquiring cheaper salt. More Bosnian goods also found their way to Venice. This new association with Venice alarmed the Turks, who were struggling with Venice over the Albanian-Zetan region, and prompted an Ottoman raid against Bosnia in the early spring of 1424. It was not a major raid, and Tvrcko was able to repel it, but the message was clear to Tvrcko: do not associate too closely with Venice. And since Venice was in no position to help Tvrcko defend his lands against Turkish attack, Tvrcko had to take the message to heart. Thereafter his relations with Venice became less close and the two states gave up various plans—then being discussed—for joint Bosnian-Venetian action on the Dalmatian coast.

Dubrovnik was pleased with the cooling of these relations; however, it was not to enjoy improved relations with Tvrcko because in 1424, following its traditional policy, it granted asylum to a member of the ruling family named Vuk Banić who had fled from Bosnia after an unsuccessful plot to seize the throne. Events in 1425 made these relations worse. In that year, Tvrcko took advantage of a Turkish raid against Serbia to direct an attack on the rich, and formerly Bosnian, mining town of Srebnaica. The Serbian garrison received assistance in defending the town from the local Ragusan merchants; they held out until the Turkish raiders withdrew from Serbia, enabling Stefan Lazarević to bring his main forces to Srebnaica and drive the Bosnians away. The victorious Serbian troops then pursued the retreating Bosnians, plundering Bosnian territory.

Needing an ally in the event of further Ottoman attacks and seeing that Venice was useless in this respect, Tvrcko decided to patch up his relations with the Hungarians; their renewed relations were sealed by a treaty in 1425 or 1426. Construing this treaty as an act of defiance against them, the Ottomans launched damaging raids against Bosnia, causing particular harm to Usora, including the lands of the Zlatonosović there. This action caused Tvrcko to submit to the Ottomans; he accepted their suzerainty and agreed to pay an annual tribute. After his submission the Ottoman forces withdrew. Ragusan records indicate they had departed from Bosnia by August 1426.

Tvrcko was back to square one. He still had no protector against the Turks, and his submission to them was no guarantee against future raids. The only serious choice he had was Hungary. The Hungarians, seeing his desperate plight, upped their terms. They insisted that Tvrcko, who had no children, should make Herman II, Count of Celje, his heir. Herman could be considered a member of the Bosnian royal family because his father, Herman I, had
married Catherine, the daughter of Stjepan Kotromanić, in 1361. Hearing of this demand, the Bosnian nobles became most unhappy. They had no desire to see Hungary acquire a stronger role in Bosnia, which it certainly would get should this Hungarian count become their king. The nobles wanted to control the Bosnian succession and, in fact, saw the election of Bosnia’s kings as their right. They also feared that the creation of such close links with Hungary would provoke a major Turkish attack. And finally, they feared that if this plan were realized, Tvrtko could use Herman and the Hungarians as props to assert himself and reduce the power and privileges of the nobility. The nobles began discussions among themselves about ways to oppose this scheme. The leading opponents of Herman’s succession were Sandalj and his allies the Zlatanosović. Soon Radoslav Pavlović, who also opposed the plan, made peace with Sandalj.

Learning of their concern, the exiled plotter Vuk Banić, who as a member of the royal family was also eligible for the Bosnian throne, contacted the dissident nobles from his Dubrovnik exile. Realizing that opposition was building up against himself, Tvrtko felt it necessary to tighten his Hungarian ties to gain assurance of Hungarian support in the event of a revolt. He agreed in the fall of 1427 to the succession of Herman and then in 1428 married Dorothy, the daughter of the prominent Hungarian nobleman John Garai (Gorjanski). Sandalj, Radoslav, and Paul Zlatanosović showed their opposition by not attending Tvrtko’s wedding with Dorothy. As a result Tvrtko found himself in effect under two suzerainties; he again had accepted Hungarian overlordship, while still paying tribute to the Ottomans.

Tvrtko was able, somehow, to come to an accommodation with Sandalj, though on what terms is not known; for shortly after his wedding Tvrtko visited Sandalj at Sandalj’s Blagaj court. We may conclude that Paul Zlatanosović remained obdurate, for in 1430 Tvrtko marched against him. Tvrtko won a resounding victory after which the Zlatanosović family disappears from the sources. Presumably Tvrtko annexed their lands. Interestingly enough, Paul’s overlord and long-time ally Sandalj did not come to his defense and in fact took no action against Tvrtko for this attack other than to complain that Tvrtko had acted without consulting the council.

Meanwhile, in late 1429 a quarrel broke out between Radoslav Pavlović and Dubrovnik. He believed the town owed him money, and it refused to pay. So, Radoslav collected his debt by seizing the goods of a Ragusan merchant caravan. As the quarrel heated up, he declared he had changed his mind over the sale of Konavli and wanted it back. Then in 1430 he attacked Konavli, which, as a result of his and Sandalj’s sales, was now entirely the property of Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik, not prepared for war, sent envoys to Tvrtko, Sigismund, the sultan, and Sandalj. Though sympathy was expressed for the town, no one took any action, except for Sandalj, who took advantage of the situation to grab some land from Radoslav. However, he sent no aid to help Dubrovnik defend itself. All he did was to propose a league to be composed of himself, Tvrtko, and Dubrovnik to oppose Radoslav. However, after Bosnian
Church clerics visited both noblemen’s courts, talk of such a league ceased. The Church may well have been instrumental in quenching the growing quarrel between Radoslav and Sandalj, two of its adherents.

Threatened by Tvrtko’s opposition to his policies, Radoslav in late 1430 came up with a plan to depose Tvrtko and replace him with Radivoj, a son of Ostoja. With the proposal for the league dropped, Radoslav was soon in contact with Sandalj to discuss this plan. Envoys from George Branković, the new ruler of Serbia, also visited Sandalj’s court to discuss it. Alarm ed by these discussions, Tvrtko, probably in the summer of 1431, made peace with Radoslav, who soon, in late 1432 or early 1433, ended his war with Dubrovnik. However, Sandalj remained interested in Radivoj’s candidacy, be it for the possibilities of utilizing him as a puppet or be it from anger at Tvrtko’s relations with Hungary and/or at his destruction of the Zlatonosović. Until late 1430 Radivoj had been living at the Ottoman court. Now in 1431 the Ottomans, at the moment angry at Tvrtko for turning down an Ottoman offer to mediate Radoslav’s quarrel with Dubrovnik but surely even more so for his agreements with Hungary, decided to let Radivoj press his candidacy. Given some military support, Radivoj entered Bosnia where Sandalj welcomed him, promising him his support as well. He settled down at Sandalj’s court, calling himself king and sending envoys to Dubrovnik to collect the tribute the town owed Bosnia. Needless to say, the town refused to pay it.

Tvrtko was disturbed, particularly by the Serbian envoys at Sandalj’s court. Tvrtko and George Branković had had bad relations over Srebrnica, and Tvrtko seems to have feared that George might provide military support for Radivoj. His fears were serious enough for him in October 1431 to ban the transit of Ragusan merchants across Bosnia to Srebrnica. The prohibition was soon lifted, but in the summer of 1432 Tvrtko is found at war against George on Bosnian territory near the Drina. At the time George received support from Sandalj, who, as noted, had maintained cordial relations with the Serbian court over the previous twenty years and was married to Stefan Lazarević’s sister. Since Radoslav had by then made peace with Tvrtko, he was drawn into the fighting; his men were soon clashing with Sandalj’s along their common border. Tvrtko, if we exclude Radoslav, found himself increasingly isolated. His Hungarian allies would provide him no aid because they sought to maintain good relations with George Branković, also a vassal of theirs. Furthermore, the Turks, supporting Radivoj, were opposed to Tvrtko and at that moment also favorable toward George. In fact, they launched a raid against Bosnia early in 1432; however, it seems to have been aimed for plunder rather than to realize any particular political objective, for the raiders soon withdrew.

The forces against Tvrtko did well. After a lull in the fighting over the winter 1432–33, George Branković was back in action on the Bosnian side of the Drina in the spring of 1433. In the course of this campaign he occupied the former territory of the Zlatonosović from Zvornik to the Spreča. The Turks also launched a raid for plunder into Bosnia in August 1433. Since Tvrtko was
clearly doing badly, his ally Radoslav saw no advantage in sticking to his cause, particularly if the campaign was to result in Tvrko’s being ousted by Radivoj. So, he made peace with Sandalj in April 1433 and with George Branković late that summer. This left Tvrko completely isolated, except for the limited support provided to him by Hrvoje’s nephew and successor George Vojsalić and, it seems, by the Radivojevići. Tvrko retreated to Visoko. However, the fates were then good to him. Sandalj took sick in September 1433 and dropped out of the action, and George Branković, having annexed the Zlatanosović lands, decided he was satisfied and withdrew from the warfare. Presumably he feared, if indeed he had not been explicitly informed, that Sigismund disapproved of any further action against his vassal Tvrko.

However, Bosnia itself was now divided. Tvrko held much of central Bosnia, and the lands to his north and northwest were loyal to him. However, Radivoj resided at Sandalj’s court and was recognized by Sandalj and Radoslav; as a result eastern Bosnia and Hum were lost to Tvrko. Moreover, as a result of the fighting Sandalj was in possession of part of Tvrko’s own personal lands, including the important town of Kreševo. And most important, the Turks still were declared for Radivoj. And they, under Ishak beg, seem to have been present inside Bosnia, for a Ragusan report of September 1433 says that Tvrko was shut up inside the fortress of Visoko, awaiting Hungarian help. Many scholars claim that Tvrko, faced with this massive opposition, actually fled to Hungary in late 1433 only to return in 1435. However, Živković has found documentation that Tvrko was still inside Bosnia in late 1433 and through 1434. The Ottomans continued their campaigning in Bosnia on behalf of Radivoj through late 1433 and early 1434, even taking, we are told, the fortress in which the Bosnian crown was then kept. If the crown was still housed in its traditional location, it can be concluded Bobovac was sacked.

Though worried about provoking the Turks against themselves, the Hungarians finally realized that they had to come to the rescue of their beleaguered vassal. In the middle of 1434 Hungarian troops finally entered Bosnia in support of Tvrko and recovered, or at least occupied, for him: Jajce, Vranduk, Boćac, Hodidjed (the fortress for Vrhbosna), and Komotin. Clearly, Živković shows, Tvrko had remained in Bosnia, awaiting this aid and then participating alongside the Hungarians in their campaign. In the course of 1434 Sandalj tried to extend his territory into western Hum across the Neretva at the expense of Tvrko’s ally George Vojsalić; but George repelled him. However, excluding Vojsalić’s success, 1434 was not a good year for Tvrko. For his cause depended on the presence of Hungarian troops; and when at the end of the campaigning season of 1434 they withdrew, Tvrko seems to have felt unable to retain what they had gained. So, it seems, he went to Hungary with the withdrawing forces. In any case, at the beginning of 1435 he is found at the Hungarian court.

However, as Živković notices, even though Tvrko seems to have de-
parted, Radivoj remained based at Sandalj’s court. He did not try to establish his residence in the royal lands at the center of the kingdom. Thus one may conclude that a significant part of that region’s population was opposed to him and loyal to Tvrtko. But despite the likelihood of such local support, Tvrtko had still felt it necessary to withdraw; presumably he had felt incapable of resisting an attack from the outside, particularly one from the Turks in support of Radivoj. This central region presumably was left under deputies appointed by Tvrtko. Possibly some of them were expelled by Sandalj’s forces, which may have occupied some of central Bosnia. Meanwhile in Hungary Tvrtko met with Gerohe Branković and through Sigismund’s mediation they concluded a peace. This peace seems to have allowed George to retain the territory he had taken in Usora. Possession of Usora would have provided greater security for George’s Srebrnica.

Meanwhile Sandalj died in March 1435. The early historian Junius Resti (1669–1735), who on the basis of local records compiled an excellent chronicle on medieval Dubrovnik, provides the following apt but brief obituary for Sandalj:

He was a prince with lively spirit, with great intelligence and with much delicacy [!], who was always able to penetrate the heart of the matter with great facility, whose memory would have been immortal, if his life had not been stained and his fame obscured with the error of schism and the Patarin [Bosnian Church] rite in which he was born and in which he died.²

Sandalj was succeeded by his nephew Stefan Vukčić, who inherited a vast direct holding from the lower Neretva to the upper reaches of that river at Konjic, and from Onogošt (Nikšić) in “Montenegro” and the upper Drina and Lim rivers to the “Monteneigrin” coast. Stefan continued the policy of supporting Radivoj, who remained in residence at his court.

Meanwhile, having again accepted Hungarian suzerainty and sworn fealty to Sigismund, Tvrtko returned to Bosnia in April 1435, accompanied by Hungarian troops. With Sandalj dead and the Turks occupied with suppressing a rebellion at the time in Albania, Tvrtko found himself in a position to reverse his fortunes. Supported by Hungarian troops and George Vojalsić, Tvrtko’s troops moved along the Neretva. They immediately obtained the support of the Radivojevići, a major family of that region, who had been forced against their will to join Sandalj in the earlier warfare. The Radivojevići, it seems, recognized Sigismund’s suzerainty, hoping to become independent of any figure inside Bosnia. Sigismund surely encouraged them in this, if, indeed, he did not pressure them into it, for it seems he hoped that this campaign, which he ordered to concentrate on Hum, would result in Hungary’s acquisition of Hum.

Since the Ottomans were temporarily out of the picture and since Tvrtko had support from the Hungarians, Radoslav saw a chance to regain some of
his lost lands from the Kosače, if not to grab some of their lands as well. So he dropped his alliance with the Kosacie, divorced his wife (who was Stefan Vukčić’s sister), allied himself with Tvrtko, and attacked Stefan Vukčić’s lands. Radoslav and Stefan were actively fighting by April 1435. Tvrtko, evidently in the meantime, quickly regained whatever lands he had lost in central Bosnia over the winter. His losses may have been few, for, as Živković argues persuasively, throughout all the warfare these lands had been loyal to him. And with the lords to his west, north, and now—with the Pavlovići—to his east supporting him, Tvrtko found himself by mid-1435 master of all Bosnia, except for the large territory under Stefan Vukčić.

Faced with this large coalition against him, Stefan sought aid from the Turks, who by late summer 1435 were able to, and did, send him troops. Until their arrival, Stefan had found it difficult to hold his fortresses and had suffered various losses. Fifteen hundred Turks arrived to help Stefan in July; they plundered the lands of Stefan’s opponents and of those who had defected from his cause in Hum. More Turks followed, sufficient to defeat a Hungarian unit in Hum in August and force the Hungarians out of all the parts of Hum they had occupied. By the year’s end, Tvrtko did not hold a single fort in Hum. With the Turks again active in Bosnia, Tvrtko again that winter (1435–36) left Bosnia to reside at the Hungarian court. There, as we shall see, he had to defend himself against charges made by the Franciscan vicar Jacob de Marchia that he was a heretic. He succeeded in defending himself before the Hungarian Diet but had to agree to support the Franciscans in their work, which included support of various reforms Jacob sought to impose and Tvrtko opposed.

In March 1436 the Turks and Stefan Vukčić carried their raids up to Croatia. Meanwhile, it had become clear to Tvrtko that Hungarian help would not be sufficient to regain his throne. He would have to change sides and accept Ottoman suzerainty once more. To realize this would not be easy, for it required persuading the Turks to drop Radivoj’s cause and accept him. Furthermore, he would have to carry on the negotiations with the Turks secretly while still a guest at the Hungarian court, which would not have favored any contact between him and the Turks.

The Hungarians could provide him with no aid that year because their troops were needed to defend the Banat from a major Ottoman raid. Tvrtko, still opposed by the Turks and Stefan Vukčić, thus could not return to Bosnia. Nevertheless, still residing at the Hungarian court, Tvrtko somehow managed to secretly dispatch envoys to effect his changing sides. These envoys were successful, and in mid-1436 Tvrtko was able, with the agreement of the Ottomans, to return to Bosnia as king. He again became a tribute-paying Ottoman vassal. He also made peace with Stefan Vukčić in June 1436 and became his ally against Hungary. In return, Stefan gave up his support of Radivoj’s candidacy for the throne. Presumably all these alliances had been agreed upon before Tvrtko actually made his return. Thus once again the Ottomans—and a pro-Ottoman orientation in Bosnia—had triumphed, and
the policy of dependence upon Hungary was dropped. Tvrtko’s peace with Stefan Vukčić did not result in lasting peace between Stefan and Radoslav, however. There were too many disputes and grievances between them. Though they did make peace early in 1436, they were again at war in the second half of the year. When their war resumed, Tvrtko threw his support behind his new ally Stefan Vukčić. As long as that alliance held, Tvrtko had no reason to worry about the anti-king, Radivoj. And since Tvrtko had again become a tribute-paying vassal of the Ottomans, they ceased their raids against his lands for the remainder of 1436 and 1437. Though this new orientation could have led to trouble with Hungary, it did not; for the Hungarians were occupied in 1436 and 1437 with other problems. In fact to deal with these concerns, Sigismund wanted to be at peace with his Bosnian neighbors and even made peace with Stefan Vukčić, recognizing Kosača rule of Hum. Then Sigismund died in late 1437. Both Tvrtko and Stefan Vukčić recognized the suzerainty of his successor, King Albert. But their recognition was only words; both were active tribute-paying vassals of the Türkş.

Sigismund was followed by a weak successor, Albert, who then died in 1439, setting off a civil war in Hungary. Despite the many difficulties Sigismund had caused the Balkan peoples during his reign, his death was to hurt the Balkan states of Serbia and Bosnia. For now Hungary was less able to intervene in Balkan affairs. At earlier periods this would have been seen as a blessing, but the Turkish threat altered everything. Sigismund had seen himself to some extent as a protector of the Balkans, if for no other reason than that he wanted to have a buffer between himself and the Turks. Moreover, seeing himself as the suzerain of Bosnia and Serbia, at times he did come to their assistance. Now these states were to be deprived for a time of significant aid from Hungary. This meant an increased Ottoman presence; moreover, since the Ottomans knew they would not be faced with serious Hungarian opposition, they could carry out further direct annexations of territory. That in fact was to be the fate of Serbia, the bulk of which, as we shall see, was to be conquered by the Turks in 1439.

It thus came as no surprise that the Turks were back raiding in Bosnia again in 1438. These raids were stepped up at the very end of the 1430s and in the early 1440s. During this period the Ottomans were again frequently supporting the claims of Radivoj. However, though they declared support for him, their attacks consisted of raids for plunder; they directed no campaign against Tvrtko himself with the aim of actually effecting his deposition. Thus in the years after 1436 Radivoj was primarily a threat held over Tvrtko’s head and a way for the Turks to extract increased tribute from Tvrtko, rather than an actual danger. Neither the Turks nor Stefan Vukčić, who again came to declare support for Radivoj in December 1439, were ever to go to war against Tvrtko with the purpose of expelling him in favor of Radivoj. The Ottomans’ increased raiding in Bosnia came about, in part, naturally, for after their conquest of Serbia in 1439 their territory came to border on Bosnia. But though the number of Ottoman raids increased, the Turks took no Bosnian
towns in the 1430s, other than various towns along the Drina itself, some of which had actually been in Serbian possession at the moment of their conquest. This point is worth stressing since scholars have frequently claimed that various Bosnian towns, including Vrhbosna (Sarajevo), were taken in 1436. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that these eastern Bosnian towns fell between 1448 and 1451.3

Stefan Vukčić, still at war with Radoslav, took advantage of the 1438 Ottoman raids that plundered Radoslav’s lands to take Jeleć (on the Čotina near where it enters the Drina) and Trebinje from him—towns Radoslav had seized on the death of Sandalji. Having made peace with the Turks and seen their withdrawal, Radoslav resumed his war with Stefan. Tvrtko, having made peace with Radoslav in April 1438, remained on the sidelines this time. In early 1439 the Turks again raided Tvrtko’s lands in central Bosnia. Finally in May or June 1439 Radoslav and Stefan Vukčić concluded peace, and Radoslav agreed to take his wife back. The Ottomans were active in Bosnia for much of that year, plundering; by the end of the year, in December, presumably as a result of Ottoman pressure, Stefan Vukčić again was recognizing Radivoj, the Ottomans’ declared candidate. However, since they could clearly have installed him, had they wanted to, we may conclude they were not committed to his cause but were actually just using him to divide and weaken Bosnia for their own benefit later. By recognizing Radivoj, Stefan effected a general improvement in his relations with the Turks. But, not surprisingly, his recognition of Radivoj annoyed Tvrtko. So, when fighting again erupted between Stefan Vukčić and Radoslav in 1440, Tvrtko sent aid to Radoslav. By this time the Ottomans, having conquered Serbia, had become a major factor in Bosnian events. They had a much greater role in mediating Bosnian quarrels than King Tvrtko. Not only were the nobles increasingly taking their grievances to the Turks, but even Dubrovnik had come to seek Ottoman guarantees for trade matters inside Bosnia.

In November 1441 Radoslav Pavlović died and was succeeded by his son Ivaniš Pavlović. Ivaniš was not the equal of his father, and thus Radoslav’s death had the effect of greatly increasing the relative strength of Stefan Vukčić, who also at the time had of all the Bosnian leaders the best relations with the Turks. Radoslav’s demise meant that Tvrtko no longer had a strong possible ally inside Bosnia against Stefan’s pretensions. Ivaniš had a brief quarrel with Stefan Vukčić, but Stefan soon agreed to peace, for he was then far more interested in expanding into Zeta toward the coast. For after the fall of Serbia, the interior of Zeta, in the hands of various often feuding nobles and tribesmen, seemed up for grabs. So Stefan advanced into Zeta, reaching Lake Skadar and then the coast. There he clashed with Venice, taking Bar and threatening Budva. In 1443 Tvrtko tried to take advantage of Stefan’s absence in Zeta and of the Ottoman concern with the Christian crusade of that year to attack Stefan’s lands. This forced Stefan to withdraw from Zeta to defend his own territory. Consequently Tvrtko was unable to achieve anything by this attack. Dubrovnik soon mediated peace between the two. The only benefi-
ciary from this warfare was Venice, which after Stefan’s withdrawal regained what Stefan had taken from it.

The decentralized nature of Bosnia, which was basically a federation of autonomous units, is well illustrated by a Ragusan report from 1441 that discusses the activities of a Bosnian Church cleric (Gost Gojšav) who administered a border post—customs station for Stefan Vukčić on his border with the Pavlovići. This report shows that Ragusan merchants—and presumably anyone else as well—had to present to this official a safe-conduct or passport to cross the border from the territory of one Bosnian noble to that of the other. Without proper documentation, their goods were confiscated.

Many scholars, Ćirković notes, have accused the Bosnian nobles of selfishness and of having no feeling for general Bosnian interests. Ćirković would modify this charge. Their council and the fact that the great nobles remained members of it, and thus remained Bosnians, rather than entirely seceding, shows that they had some idea of a general Bosnian interest. One might argue against this that if they had seceded entirely and thus lost their other Bosnian allies, whom they retained through joint membership in the council, they would have been quickly swallowed up by more powerful neighbors like Hungary, Serbia, or the Ottomans; thus it was still a particular, rather than general, interest that bound them to Bosnia and its council. But Ćirković insists the issue was not separatism, but the constitution of the state. The nobles, he argues, wanted Bosnia to be a loose federation; and this they had succeeded in creating at Tvrtko I’s death in 1391. Thus they had a feeling for Bosnia, but it was a Bosnia along these particular lines. And in fighting for their rights, they opposed any move to centralize the state or concentrate more power in the king’s hands. This did, of course, have the effect of producing a weaker state to oppose the Ottomans, and it also provided the Ottomans with chances to intervene in Bosnian quarrels to advance Ottoman interests. And, moreover, all the resulting warfare did cause further losses of manpower and economic resources and thus contributed to weakening Bosnia even more. But all this, Ćirković argues, was a result of the existing constitution of the state, which the nobles fought to preserve. Given their desire for independence, the concept they held of Bosnia and their maintenance of this loose federation still gave Bosnia more power to resist than the region would have produced had a Bosnian idea not held them and had they separated entirely as, for example, the Dejanovići did from Serbia.

Though there is truth in this view, the warfare between the nobles was not always or even usually over constitutional interests. Wars were frequently fought between two nobles trying to wrest territory from one another, as in the endless Pavlović-Kosača wars. Fighting over such issues with the Ottomans at the gates, if not actually participating in the fighting, can only be described as selfish and detrimental to the general interest. Such warfare cannot by any stretch of the imagination be said to have been fought over any constitutional principle. And the nobles’ acceptance at various times of Ottoman support
Religion and Culture inside Bosnia

In earlier chapters we have encountered the Bosnian Church, an institution that grew out of a Catholic monastic order which broke, probably in the middle of the thirteenth century, with international Catholicism. Its existence as a specific institution, however, can be documented only from the early fourteenth century. Documentation from that century and especially from the fifteenth, when we have more sources, shows the Bosnian Church, under its own bishop called a djed (literally, grandfather), to be a monastic institution. No sources suggest that any change of theology occurred at the time it broke with Rome and almost all later local and Ragusan sources on the Bosnian Church suggest it was mainstream Christian in its theology throughout its existence. Thus the Bosnian Church most probably retained the beliefs and practices it had held up to its schism with Rome. But though it retained its “Catholic” theology, its peasant composition and the absence of any educated elite surely led to various errors in practice.4

Throughout its history, the Bosnian Church retained both its more-or-less Catholic theology—though it used the Slavic language—and its monastic character. Its clergy (except for a few resident at royal or aristocratic courts) resided in monasteries called hiža (sing. hiža, meaning house). The clergymen bore the title of Christians (krstjani)—usually rendered as Patarini in Ragusan Latin language sources. The head of a monastery (hiža) was often called a gost. The djed and his council of twelve strojnici, chiefly composed of gosto, provided what overall supervision there was. Their monasteries were not found throughout Bosnia but were clustered in the center of the state, extending east to the Drina and south toward and beyond the Neretva, with a few on the lands of the Kosača family in what is now Hercegovina. Some of their monasteries served as hostels for travelers and were used by Ragusan merchants. The Bosnian Church never established a secular clergy or any sort
of territorial organization. Thus calling it a “Church”—even though they themselves did—may be somewhat misleading. The institution seems to have consisted only of a series of scattered monastic houses, usually in villages, each having a relatively small number of monks. Probably peasants could go to these monasteries for services. Gravestone inscriptions at least show that krstjani participated in the burials of laymen.

The Bosnian Church was tolerated by the state even after the 1340s when a Franciscan mission was established inside Bosnia and the rulers became Catholic. The tolerance, or indifference, of Bosnian rulers and nobility regarding religious issues is a prominent feature of medieval Bosnia. The Bosnian Church did not play a major role in the state and was not a state Church, though various scholars have said so. For most of its existence—other than occasionally allowing its hierarchs to witness charters—it had no political role in the state. In fact a political role can be shown chiefly in the early fifteenth century—particularly between 1403 and 1405—when the djed was an influential advisor at court. His influence then was probably owing to the particular sympathy for his Church on the part of King Ostojić, who most probably was an adherent of the Bosnian Church and the only post-1340 ruler who was not a Catholic. This djed’s influence may also have been owing to his particular qualities as an individual. Since Bosnia’s rulers from the 1340s—except Ostojić—were all Catholics, it is not surprising that the Bosnian Church was not a major state institution.

Though some scholars have argued that an alliance existed between the Bosnian Church and the nobility, this statement too is greatly exaggerated. Connections between the Bosnian Church and specific noblemen can be shown for fewer than ten families, and all these documented ties fall into the last seventy years of the state. The Church’s supporters, however, did include the major nobles; Hrvoje Vukčić, the Radenović-Pavlović, Sandalj Hranić and Stefan Vukčić, and Paul Klešić were among its adherents. However, we find in the sources that for most of these nobles the services performed for them by the krstjani were entirely religious. For only a very small number is the Bosnian Church found providing political or secular services; in those cases the krstjani usually served as diplomats or mediators in quarrels. And for only two families—the Kosače and Radenović-Pavlović—did these ties last longer than one generation. Documents from the 1430s show that by then most of the nobility, including Paul Klešić’s and Hrvoje’s successors, were Catholics. Moreover, no document shows any Church figure supporting the nobility against the state or working to advance decentralized interests. And the close ties between the Church and King Ostojić, who as king was the main representative of centralization, cast strong doubts on the theory that the Church favored or supported the nobility against the king or against centralization by the state. The evidence strongly supports the view, which I have argued at length elsewhere, that the Church’s political or secular role was minimal.

Few Bosnian Church texts survive. Of these, most important are the
surviving pages of Gospel manuscripts. Some are beautifully illustrated: the Radosav Ritual, the Hval Gospel, Tepčija Batalo's Gospel. These Gospels are completely Orthodox in character, and one Gospel even has the words “beginning” and “end” in the margins through the text in the very spots that readings begin and end in the Orthodox service. Certain other surviving Bosnian Gospels may also have been from Bosnian Church circles, but proof is lacking. The last will and testament from 1466 of Gost Radin—a Bosnian Church leader and important diplomat, first for the Pavlovići and later for Stefan Vukčić—survives; it testifies not only to Radin’s great wealth but also to the orthodoxy of his religious beliefs. A letter written by the džed in 1404, concerning the dispute between the king and the nobleman Paul Klešić, also provides some information on the Church.

Many scholars have depicted the Bosnian Church as dualist (Bogomil). Domestic sources about the Church (Bosnian and Ragusan) do not suggest this. They show that the Bosnian Church, unlike the Bogomils, accepted an omnipotent God, the Trinity, church buildings, the cross, the cult of saints, religious art, and at least part of the Old Testament. Radin’s will, for example, begins with a cross, refers to his patron saint, and leaves money to build a church at his grave. He also left money to the Catholic Church in Dubrovnik and sought its prayers for his soul. The Bosnian Church Gospels are not iconoclastic, but are beautifully illustrated and even depict favorably John the Baptist, rejected by dualists. Furthermore, the cordial relations, shown in the sources, between Bosnian Churchmen and both Catholic officials (from Dubrovnik and zealously Catholic Hungary) and Orthodox clerics could not have occurred had these Bosnians been neo-Manichees: Sandalj was invited to Catholic Church services in Dubrovnik; Patarin diplomats to Dubrovnik were well received by the town and showered with gifts; King Matthew (Matthias) Corvinus of Hungary gave Gost Radin a luxurious robe (mentioned in his will); Alphonso of Naples made Stefan Vukčić a member of the Virgin’s Order; and Hrvoje was enrolled by Sigismund in his Dragon’s Order, one of whose aims was to defend the Catholic Church from heretics. Hrvoje also stood God-father to a daughter of Sigismund. The Bosnians, just mentioned, were all members of the Bosnian Church.

The only contemporary sources describing dualists in Bosnia are foreign (chiefly Italian). They come from the inquisition or the papacy. The papal sources date almost entirely after the late 1440s. Most of these sources simply call the Bosnian dualists they describe “Bosnian heretics.” Moreover, most of these sources do not state or even imply that these dualist “Bosnian heretics” were members of the body known as the Bosnian Church. To the degree that they are accurate, these sources probably refer to a separate and small dualist current also existing in Bosnia that was derived from a Dalmatian dualist Church (Ecclesia Selavonia), some of whose members fled to Bosnia at the time of Ban Kulin. This heresy, attracting few followers but seemingly surviving in Bosnia until the end of the Middle Ages, throughout remained a separate institution, distinct from the Bosnian Church.
One of Bosnia’s main differences from other Balkan lands lay in the fact that no Church had a central role in the life of the state or of the nobles. Noblemen were distributed among all three faiths: Bosnian, Catholic, Orthodox. Excluding Albania, which in medieval times never became a unified state, Bosnia was the only country in the Balkans where membership in the community was not dependent on a common religion. And formal religion does not seem to have been important to the Bosnian nobles. They freely changed faiths and freely associated and allied with figures of different faiths. Religious institutions simply were not a central part of Bosnian life. And thus tolerance, or rather indifference, marked Bosnian religious issues until the very end of the state, when papal pressure finally forced, as we shall see, King Stefan Tomaš to turn to persecutions.

The Catholic Church in Bosnia was represented solely by a limited number of Franciscans, who were also limited, at least from the time of Jacob de Marchia’s reforms in the 1430s, to a small number of monasteries. And though Catholicism became important to the last two kings and to a few nobles, the Catholic Church, too, never became a major institution in the state. The Catholics also had no territorial organization in Bosnia. The Catholic bishop, the titular Bishop of Bosnia, resided outside the state in Đakovo in Slavonia and played no role in Bosnia, possessing only theoretical authority there. And like the Bosnian clerics, the Franciscans were based in monasteries, though theirs tended to be in, or on the outskirts of, towns. Catholic clerics also played a very limited role in the Bosnian state, witnessing charters and serving as diplomats, but little more.

The Orthodox Church, existing in Hum and the region west of the Drina, possibly as far west as Vrhbosna, was not a major institution in Bosnia either. The Orthodox did have a major bishop, a metropolitan, at Milešev, a famous Orthodox monastic center which presumably had considerable influence upon the population of the Lim region. Moreover, Milešev, housing Saint Sava’s relics, which were believed to work miracles, was a major shrine that attracted Christians of all faiths, and even Jews, for its cures. Excluding the Kosače, the overwhelming majority of noblemen in Hum were Orthodox. And those who lived toward the east, particularly the nobility in the regions annexed late by Tvrtko, in the 1370s, did considerable church building, as did Sandalj and Stefan Vukčić; these two Kosače at one time or another had Orthodox wives who took an interest in their Church. Orthodox clerics tended to be found alongside Bosnian ones at the Kosača court. However, the influence of the Orthodox was limited to these regions. Orthodox clerics were not found at the royal court or in most of Bosnia. And the number of Orthodox clerics in Hum and the Drina region, as a whole, does not seem to have been large.

The existence of three faiths in Bosnia prevented the development of a national Church and blocked any Church institution from acquiring a major role in the state. And since none of the Churches became strong it also meant that few Bosnians became firm Christians. Both the Bosnian and Catholic
Churches had few clergymen in Bosnia—there were clearly fewer than a hundred Franciscans in all of Bosnia—and since they were monastery based, it meant that the few they did have were clustered. The Orthodox do not seem to have had a large number of clergy present either, though that Church did have priests in addition to monks. Since the number of clerics and churches was small, we may assume that many Bosnians rarely saw a priest of any faith and thus had little understanding of Christian doctrine or practice and little or no sense of being members of a Christian community. Given the weak religious institutions and the conditions that resulted from them, it is not strange that many Bosnians were to convert to Islam after the Ottoman conquest. In fact, the only two Balkan regions where large-scale conversions to Islam occurred were Bosnia and Albania; and Albania, with its many mountains and poor communications, also had few priests and a very weak Church organization in the interior.

In the 1430s the Franciscans became more active in Bosnia, building several new monasteries. In this work they received considerable impetus from Jacob de Marchia (later a saint) who was special visitor to the Bosnian vicariat in 1432–33 and then its vicar from 1435 to 1439. Jacob tried to establish discipline among the local Franciscans and also struggled against heresy. Much of his anti-heretical work was carried out in Srem and regions north of Bosnia against the Hussites. He also fought with Tvrtko II over disciplining the Franciscans in the Bosnian kingdom. Jacob often found them living not in monasteries, but in private homes, and earning incomes rather than living on alms. Horrified, Jacob expelled the guilty Franciscans from Jajce. Tvrtko ordered them to return. Though his actions encouraged the local Franciscans to violate their rule, still, considering Bosnian conditions, Tvrtko’s actions made sense. If the Franciscans had to live in monasteries, then they could not work in Jajce and various other places where monasteries did not yet exist. Thus to insist that the Franciscans live in the handful of monasteries then existing in Bosnia meant that they would have much less success in teaching the “heathen.” And since the Franciscans had very little support from Bosnians who, whether they were Catholic or belonged to other faiths, were indifferent to formal religion and thus would not be generous in their alms to the friars, one wonders how Jacob expected them to live.

Tvrtko’s letters show him to be a faithful Catholic, interested in the Franciscans’ work and anxious that the work be carried out effectively under the conditions then existing in Bosnia.

However, in 1433, after Tvrtko recalled the errant Franciscans to Jajce, Jacob stormed out of Bosnia and went to Hungary, where he made all sorts of accusations against Tvrtko, including the charge that he was a heretic. And in the general Franciscan sources, supporting Jacob, Tvrtko is depicted as an evil man; he is said to have sent a magician against Jacob who by incantations was to kill him or cause him to go mad. However, Jacob confounded the magician by striking him dumb for life. Then Tvrtko’s queen, who is depicted as being every bit as evil as Tvrtko if not more so, ordered robbers to ambush
Jacob. But the saint made them completely rigid, until he thought it safe to restore their mobility. They then begged their forgiveness from him. The evil queen, it should be noted, was also a loyal Catholic, namely, Dorothy Garai, of Hungarian origin, whom Tvrtko was allowed to marry only after he had convinced the pope of his own Catholicism. This depiction of the royal pair was entirely owing to their resistance to Jacob's reform efforts, in which they defended the local Franciscans. In the years after Jacob's return to Bosnia as vicar in 1435, he had complete freedom of action. For Tvrtko, as we have seen, as a supplicant for Hungarian help, had had to agree in the winter of 1435–36 to support the Franciscans, which entailed supporting Jacob's reforms.

In these years from the mid-1430s to the fall of the Bosnian state, Catholicism made great gains. Considerable Catholic church building took place and many nobles accepted Catholicism. We find, for example, Vladislav Klešić and George Vojtašić—the successors of Paul Klešić and Hrvoje, who had both been members of the Bosnian Church—becoming Catholics. The towns in which the Franciscans were active, a high percentage of whose populations were Catholic merchants from the coast, appear as essentially Catholic. Despite Catholic gains, however, the Bosnian Church—whose monasteries were chiefly rural—continued to be tolerated. The Orthodox Church maintained its dominance in Hum (though Sandalj and Stefan Vukčić supported the Bosnian Church) and had some following in Bosnia near the Drina.

The Franciscans were also active in bringing about the conversions of Orthodox believers in the region of Konavli, which Dubrovnik purchased from Sandalj and Radoslav Pavlović in 1419 and 1426/27 respectively. The town dispatched the Franciscans into the newly acquired region and in the course of the 1430s seized most of the property belonging to the Orthodox Church, which it then turned over to the Franciscans. In this way the Orthodox priests, though legally able to remain and preach, lost the basis for their support. In 1426 there had been about fifty Orthodox churches in the district of Konavli. One by one in the years that followed they were taken over by Latin rite clergy. As a result no Orthodox clergy can be found in the sources about Konavli from the 1450s.

Bosnia and Hercegovina (roughly, Hum) are now famous for their enormous medieval gravestones (particularly those from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) known as stećci. They are sometimes called "Bogomil Tombstones." This label is derived from the belief that the Bosnian Church was Bogomil and the further belief that since these stones seem to have been idiosyncratic to Bosnia and since the Bosnians had their own local Church, the stones must be related to that Church. However, this view has not held up under more serious examination. First, the stones are found in a broader area of Yugoslavia than that in which the Bosnian Church had been active. Secondly, the inscriptions on them indicate that they were in fact erected by wealthy people of all faiths, Catholic, Orthodox, and Bosnian. Thus they
reflect a regional cultural phenomenon and should not be tied to membership in a particular faith. The stones were carved into various shapes such as great sarcophagi (though these were solid blocks having the deceased buried beneath them), standing slabs, and great crosses. Though the majority are unmarked, some have carved motifs. These vary from simple geometrical designs (e.g., spirals, rosettes, crosses) to elaborate scenes (e.g., tournaments, hunting scenes, round dances, etc.). Some of their creators were excellent artists. The most elaborate and interesting motifs are found on stones erected by Vlachs, especially in the area of Stolac. Particularly famous are the stones of the Orthodox Vlach family of Miloradović at Radimlja.5

Bosnia was studded with imposing stone fortresses. Certain of the palaces (e.g., the king’s at Bobovac) were not only impressive architecturally, but were also decorated with excellent stone reliefs and frescoes. Bosnia also had many medieval churches. In general they were small and do not compare favorably with the handsome Catholic churches along the coast or the Orthodox monastery churches in near-by Serbia. That Bosnian patrons invested less in their churches probably reflects the indifference of the Bosnian nobles to formal religion. It is often stated that the Bosnian Church rejected church buildings, thus the ruined churches found in Bosnia must be Catholic or Orthodox. This statement almost certainly is false. We know Gost Radin left money in his will to build a church. Furthermore, church ruins occur beside medieval cemeteries that contain tombstones belonging to Bosnian Church clerics, and ruined churches show up in villages where Bosnian Church hižas are mentioned in the medieval sources. Thus it is almost certain that some, and possibly even many, of these ruined medieval churches were Bosnian Church buildings.

In addition to stone-carvers and stone-masons, Bosnia also had fine metal-workers. Though most of its known goldsmiths came from Dubrovnik, Bosnians themselves worked in silver. And as noted earlier, certain silver products in the Bosnian style were in demand on the coast. Bosnia was also the first inland Balkan country to produce fire-arms and cannons. It seems the original masters of this trade were Germans working in Bosnia. Bosnian textile products never were comparable to those produced by the coastal cities; however, we suspect that quite early the different regions of Bosnia already had the elaborately embroidered home-made folk-costumes for which Bosnia later became famous. Bosnians also, as noted, produced several surviving Gospel manuscripts, some of which had exquisite miniatures.

Mining was a major Bosnian industry. In the beginning, the technical/engineering side was dominated by Sasi (Saxons) whereas the commercial and business side was run by Ragusans. Bosnians provided the labor. As time went on more Bosnians came to be involved in the technical side. The most lucrative were the silver mines, which lay in the king’s lands, except for the richest of all, Srebrnica, which had passed into Serbian hands. Dubrovnik soon procured a monopoly on the silver trade. Individual Ragusans (or a group as partners) “farmed” the mines, rendering a set sum of money to the king and
then managing the mine for a term (usually a year) in the hopes of earning a handsome profit. The major non-royal mine was found at Olovo. As its name indicates, it was a lead mine. During most of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Radenović-Pavlović family owned Olovo. Lead was less important than silver, so there was only a small Ragusan colony there. However, the Franciscans did set up a monastery at Olovo, so it became a Catholic center. Furthermore, lead never became a Ragusan monopoly like silver. Thus the domestic, Bosnian element acquired a major role in the lead trade.

Dalmatia

We saw in the last chapter Venice’s acquisition of various southern Adriatic towns on the Albanian and Zetan coasts in the 1390s. We shall discuss Venice’s further activity in this region below when we continue our treatment of the Balsići and Zeta. In the discussion of Bosnia, given above, we traced the shifting fortunes during the Hungarian civil war of the northern Dalmatian towns, all belonging to Hungary after the 1358 treaty between Hungary and Venice. We saw how, willingly or not, the different towns found themselves under vassals of Sigismund or Ladislas. These vassals were frequently Bosnians, and for a time Tvrtko and then after his death Hrvoje actually exercised royal authority in Dalmatia. Hrvoje dominated Dalmatia for much of the 1390s and throughout most of the first decade of the fifteenth century. For most of this time he acted in the name of Ladislas. After his submission to Sigismund in 1409 he exercised his authority in the name of Sigismund. Though he issued charters, allowing the towns to retain their existing privileges of self-government, his rule seems to have been unpopular. And in an effort to escape him, or possibly to avoid the warfare in connection with the Hungarian civil war that also was occurring in and around Dalmatia at the time, various Dalmatian towns in the period 1401–03 decided the best way out was to seek Venetian suzerainty. Venice had not yet shown the dominating policy it was soon to show in that area. Venice at this moment was hesitant to become involved in Dalmatian affairs.

However, by 1408, as Ladislas’ fortunes went from bad to worse (though in name Dalmatia was still his since Hrvoje, who directed the region, was his nominal vassal), he sought support from Venice for what had become a half-hearted war. Venice, which until then had been neutral in the war, saw a grand opportunity. It began discussions with Ladislas to purchase Dalmatia from him. Meanwhile, Sigismund defeated the Bosnians at the Battle of Doboj (or Lašva). Under pressure from the victorious Sigismund and knowing that he would lose the legal basis for his position in Dalmatia should Ladislas sell Dalmatia to Venice, Hrvoje switched sides in 1409 and submitted to Sigismund. In his agreement with Sigismund, Hrvoje retained all his titles and territory, including Dalmatia. Thus, by switching overlords, Hrvoje was able
to carry on as before. Of the major coastal towns, only Zadar objected to the new arrangement and refused to accept Sigismund.

Then in July 1409 Ladislas carried out his sale to Venice of his only actual possessions—namely, Zadar, Vrana, Novigrad, and the isle of Pag (all of which Venice assumed control of at the time)—and of his “rights” to the rest of Dalmatia. These “rights” came from his claim to be King of Hungary. As Venice sent ships into Dalmatia to conclude treaties with Zadar and its new possessions, the populations of the town of Nin and the islands of Rab and Cres, and then shortly thereafter of the towns of Skradin and Ostrovica, all sent envoys to Venice to submit. Venice accepted their submissions, basing its right of overlordship on its purchase of Dalmatia from the man who it claimed was the legitimate King of Hungary. With these successes, Venice increased its presence along the Dalmatian coast, directing its ships to sail into the towns’ harbors to seek submission. In this way it asserted itself over much of northern Dalmatia. It also gained all the islands north of Zadar, except for Krk, held by its hereditary princes the “Frankapans”. In this process Venice took advantage of the break in 1413 between Hrvoje and Sigismund. For when Sigismund deprived Hrvoje of his “rights” in Dalmatia and urged the towns to expel his officials, many towns, disliking Hrvoje, did just that. They then had to decide whether to submit to Venice, which had an active presence in the area and could provide actual help should Hrvoje direct a counteroffensive into the area, or to Sigismund. Within the towns, pro-Venetian and pro-Sigismund factions quarreled, at times coming to blows. Overall the pro-Venetian factions tended to be the stronger, and thus frequently the Venetians actually received invitations to take suzerainty over various towns.

King Sigismund protested Venice’s actions, but he was ignored. Finally in 1411 Venice attacked the town of Šibenik, which had remained loyal to Sigismund. This attack finally caused Sigismund, who of course never recognized Ladislas’ sale of Dalmatia and saw the region as an integral part of his kingdom, to declare war on Venice. Sigismund does not seem to have been able to take effective action in the area; his most active supporter, Nicholas “Frankapan,” had already lost Rab to the Venetians and clearly was no match for the Venetian navy, which immediately established an effective blockade of Senj, the “Frankapans’ ” main port. Afraid of losing Krk, whose position was very vulnerable, “Frankapan” seems to have remained fairly passive. In the course of 1412 the besieged town of Šibenik fell to Venice. And soon Sigismund, not being successful and fearing to lose what he still possessed, agreed to a five-year peace with Venice that he hoped would secure his remaining possessions. He agreed to sell to Venice the cities it then held, but Venice was to leave the other towns alone. Venice signed the peace; however, wanting all Dalmatia, it was not satisfied. Its appetite was whetted and it realized that the balance of power in the area now favored it over Hungary.

In the meanwhile the two strongest Croatian nobles in the Dalmatian region, Ivaniš Nelipčić and Nicholas “Frankapan,” made an alliance. Nelip-
čić, without sons, agreed to the marriage of his eldest daughter, Catherine, whom he declared to be his heir, to Nicholas “Frankapan’s” eldest son, John. Thus upon the death of Nelipčić the “Frankapans,” already holding the counties of Vinodol, Modruš, and Gacka with the port of Senj and the isle of Krk, would greatly expand south of Velebit by inheriting the extensive Nelipčić lands including the Cetina Župa and much of the Krajina. In 1412 Sigismund both approved the marriage and renounced the rights he had claimed to these lands in the event Nelipčić had no male heir. The marriage took place amidst elaborate ceremonies in 1416.

Venice, meanwhile, ambitious to re-open its Dalmatian campaign and extend its authority over the rest of the region, took advantage of the expiration of the five-year peace with Sigismund to resume its naval action. Most probably in 1418, though Živković claims it was actually in 1419, the Venetians sent their ships to various ports to request submission. Venice rapidly acquired in this way the islands of Korčula, Brač, and Hvar. But when it sent its ships into the harbors of Trogir and Split, it met with strong resistance. Eventually, however, since no Hungarian aid was sent to them, these two towns had no choice but to open their gates to Venice. Pro-Venetian parties existed in each of these towns; they were led by members of the elite. Tensions, not surprisingly, existed between the aristocracy and the general populace. And in the end it was the aristocracy that brought about the towns’ submission to Venice. In both cases, Venice won considerable support among aristocrats, by promising to support their desire to keep the patriciate a closed corporation barred to new members. Venice was to follow this policy of alliance with the nobility, supporting its social and class ambitions, throughout Dalmatia. Upon assuming power in Trogir and Split, Venice allowed the leaders of the anti-Venetian faction to depart in peace. Hungary soon declared war on Venice; but it was far too slow in mobilizing and fought even less effectively in this war than in the previous one.

The Venetians next attacked Omiš and the region of Poljica, two former possessions of Hrvoje that had been taken over by his brother-in-law Ivaniš Nelipčić when Hrvoje died in 1416. Ivaniš strongly resisted, and the attack failed. Venice soon opened negotiations with Bosnia’s new king, Tvrtko II, to try to create an alliance against Nelipčić. These discussions, as noted, did result in Tvrtko’s granting broad trade privileges to Venice in Bosnia—followed by increased Venetian trade in that land—and considerable talk about an alliance against Nelipčić. This alliance would have given Venice the coastal towns and Tvrtko the hinterland behind the coast, Nelipčić’s Krajina holdings. However, as noted, before a treaty could be concluded and any action taken, the Turks in 1424 attacked Bosnia, and Tvrtko, made aware of Ottoman opposition to his co-operation with Venice, dropped all plans for the alliance.

However, well before this, in 1420, the Venetian-Hungarian war had come to an end. By then Venice was in possession of most of Dalmatia, the northern part taken from Hungary by purchase, submission, and conquest,
and the southern—Zetan and Albanian—part through surrender from local nobles, unable to resist the Ottomans. In the middle of its possessions stood Dubrovnik, independent under Hungarian—i.e., Sigismund’s—suzerainty. Venice had made no attempt to attack Dubrovnik. The only other coastal territories not held by Venice were those in the direct possession of the powerful Croatian nobles, who having been present, had been able to command effective defenses. These territories included Ivaniš Nelipčić’s town of Omiš and the region of Poljica, which Venice had tried and failed to take, and the “Frankapan” possessions including the town of Senj, the Vinodol coast, and the isle of Krk, which as far as we know the Venetians had not even considered attacking this time.

To briefly look ahead: Omiš and Poljica remained in the Nelipčić family until Ivaniš Nelipčić died in 1434. The fate of Nelipčić’s territory then became the subject of a major dispute, resulting in warfare and the eventual assignment in 1436 of his whole principality, including Poljica and Omiš, to the Croatian ban appointed by Sigismund, the region’s overlord. Then, in the course of the warfare between Stefan Vukčić and Hungary, Stefan took much of that region, including Nelipčić’s former coastal lands. Stefan’s holding of them can be documented in 1440. In 1444 Venice was finally able to acquire Poljica and Omiš. From that time Venice held all northern-central Dalmatia from Zadar to the mouth of the Neretva, as well as the towns noted earlier in the southern coastal region. With its conquest of Bar in 1443, Venice acquired the whole Zetan coast. The Frankopans held on to their coastal holdings longer; but in 1469 the King of Hungary was to seize Senj and Vinodol and put them under his direct control. Venice was to finally acquire Krk in 1481.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, fire-arms—in particular, cannons of various sizes and later, as we move into the fifteenth century, harquebuses—were added to the weaponry of Balkan, and especially Dalmatian, warfare. The earliest references to cannons on the coast, one for Dubrovnik and one for Zadar, come from 1351. Over the next decades Dubrovnik became a center for the firearms industry, producing cannons of all sizes. Generally these cannons fired stone cannon balls. The early craftsmen tended to be Italians, but Hungarians, Germans, and locals were also found producing these guns in Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik soon became a major exporter of these weapons, selling them and gunpowder along the Dalmatian coast and in the Balkan interior to those states with which it was at peace. The earliest surviving record of such a sale is an order from Tvrtko I of Bosnia in 1378. Tvrtko seems to have had a small number of cannons and to have put them to only limited use. However, the number of cannons bought and used increased greatly in Bosnia in the fifteenth century; then we find the great nobles as well as the king purchasing them in Dubrovnik. By the mid-fifteenth century Bosnia was producing fine cannons itself; then even Dubrovnik turned to Bosnia to find cannon-makers. Zeta followed quickly on the heels of Bosnia; it is documented for the first time importing these weapons in 1379.

Serbia’s situation is less clear. Orbini, writing in 1601, claims Lazar
used cannons in his victory over Nicholas Altomanović in 1373. Since this is not documented in any earlier source, some scholars have rejected this testimony. In any case, in 1386 Lazar can be documented ordering craftsmen from Dubrovnik to construct cannons. One Turkish chronicler, though from the late fifteenth or the early sixteenth century rather than a contemporary, claims cannons were used in the Battle of Kosovo (1389). Scholars are not agreed on whether or not to accept this testimony. However, it is clear that cannons were used in the Serbian-Bosnian wars over Srebrenica in the mid-1420s and by both sides in the Turks’ successful attack on Smederevo in 1439.

Despite their availability, cannons are not documented as being employed in Dubrovnik’s wars in the fourteenth century. The first reference to their use by Dubrovnik—though almost certainly it was not the first time they were actually used in urban defense—comes in August 1402, when Dubrovnik, worried about a possible attack on Ston from King Ostoja of Bosnia, ordered the installation of cannons on Ston’s walls. We may presume that in the warfare that followed, Dubrovnik also had cannons placed on its own walls. There is no evidence that the Bosnians employed cannons for their attacks upon Dubrovnik during this war. When warfare broke out between Dubrovnik and Radoslav Pavlović in 1430, Dubrovnik offered cannons to Sandalj, presumably for use against Radoslav. In the war, to be discussed below, between Stefan Vukčić and Dubrovnik between 1451 and 1454, both sides used firearms.

Dubrovnik seems to have usually kept its guns in arsenals, bringing them out to the walls only when needed. The city also stock-piled gunpowder, which exploded on a couple of occasions (1435 and 1463), causing considerable damage and serious fires. Dubrovnik and Serbia were both in the habit of christening their largest cannons with pet names. By the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the best harquebuses were produced in Senj; Dubrovnik and even various Italian cities imported them from Senj.6

Effects of Venetian Rule7

The Dalmatian town we have the most information about is Dubrovnik. But the other towns were similarly administered, each having its own written statute, town council, and knez (prince or mayor). And we have seen that each town through the fourteenth century kept its own autonomy regardless of changing overlords, whether the overlord was Byzantium, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Hungary, or, despite a few restrictions, even Venice. But things were now to change. As we have seen, at the end of the fourteenth and during the early fifteenth century, Venice extended its suzerainty over most of the towns on the Dalmatian coast. Though in theory the towns were still to be allowed their autonomy and rights, Venice now demanded to examine and confirm all statutes. As a result certain articles were dropped from the law codes and some new Venetian laws were added to them. Furthermore, some of the existing laws that were confirmed remained dead letters. The indigenous
nobles, who had dominated local administration up until then, rapidly or gradually lost their prerogatives and ended up with advisory roles. They were kept occupied, struggling for their class privileges and economic interests, while the Venetians walked off with the power to make political decisions.

The chief town figure, the knez, was no longer a local. Now he and his major assistant, the treasurer, were sent from Venice. The locals had no role in their selection. The knez was responsible to Venice, not to a local council. The knez chaired the town council meetings, which could be held only when he summoned them or agreed to their being held. All council debate had to be in Italian, for the presiding knez usually did not know Slavic and had to understand the debate. Though in many cases the Dalmatian nobles knew Italian well, this excluded from debate all who did not. The knez had to approve all the council’s decisions; he also ran the civil and criminal courts. Moreover, he named the elders of villages within the territory of the town. No local control over the knez existed. The knez was in charge of internal and external security. He supervised the state of fortifications, was responsible for their being in good repair, and also commanded the garrison. In some major towns, like Zadar, a separate kapetan commanded the garrison; however, he too was sent from Venice. The garrisons were small—fifty to three hundred men, depending on the town. But they were not recruited from the town in which they served. The Venetians raised levies of Dalmatians for garrison duty, sent the recruits to Venice, and then sent them back to Dalmatia to serve wherever the Venetians required them. Needless to say, they were not assigned to their own towns.

Furthermore, prior to Venetian rule each town had its own autonomy. Venice now introduced a certain degree of centralization, dividing Dalmatia into ten great regions, each centered around a major town. Each of these ten towns had a knez and a bishop. All other towns found themselves assigned to one of these ten regions and thus under the knez of one of the ten large towns. As a result the lesser towns lost their autonomy and were subordinated to the larger ones. This, not surprisingly, was resented by the smaller towns, which sought, without success, to regain their autonomy and be subjected directly to Venice under their own local knez.

The former Great Council of Nobles, now meeting only when the knez called or permitted it to meet, was a closed corporation of the nobility. From it the local functionaries (now those holding the second level positions, since Venetians held the major posts) were drawn. The social position of this council, its limited membership, and the status of its members were confirmed in each town by Venice, which in this way gained the loyalty of and acquired a hold over these local nobles. For the nobles were afraid to oppose Venetian political power for fear that Venice might turn to the middle or lower classes. The nobles wanted to keep the ranks of the nobility closed, and from the beginning of its rule Venice usually supported this desire. However, Venice was very clever in playing off one faction of the nobility against another. Venice throughout was harsh toward any opposition, and when on occasion
local nobles did involve themselves in plots against Venetian rule, they were usually punished by exile and the confiscation of their property.

Taxes were increased, for Venice’s needs were far greater than the earlier and limited needs of the individual towns. Part of Venice’s demands for revenue may have actually been necessary for meeting the Ottoman threat. Venice did to some extent use local taxes for local needs, but it also tended to raise a tax income in excess of these; the excess was sent back to Venice. When still more income was needed the Venetians sold offices, frequently farming out local tax collection. But the most serious abuses carried out by Venice concerned local commercial activities; and the fears that had led many Dalmatian merchants to prefer Hungarian rule to that of Venice, a commercial rival, now became a reality. For now Venice told the towns to whom they could sell goods and what they could sell. If Venice was at war with Hungary, then the Dalmatian merchants could not trade with Hungary. If Venice sought a monopoly on a particular product (either a general monopoly or a monopoly on a product for a particular region), then it banned its export from Dalmatian towns. Thus the Dalmatian merchants found themselves greatly hindered in their commerce. And when war broke out with Hungary between 1418 and 1420 Venice banned trade with Hungary; this ban included all commerce with Sigismund’s Croatian vassals. As a result the Dalmatian towns were blocked from trading with their own hinterlands. Thus the commerce of all the towns was damaged in the name of what was for them a foreign war. Furthermore, if Venice sought a particular product, the towns had to send it to Venice rather than market it where it would receive the best price. Moreover, Venice could set the product’s price; and Venice, of course, was then free to re-export it at the price it chose. Thus the free Dalmatian market that had existed up to this time was eliminated.

In the 1430s the Venetians began to limit the towns’ imports to internal needs and forbade the towns to re-export goods. At times Venice also insisted that the carrying trade from a given town’s harbor be limited to that town’s ships and those of Venice. Thus by the 1450s few foreign ships were to be found in Dalmatian harbors. Not only did Venice actively oppose the presence of foreign ships, but by then there was little for them to buy in Dalmatia. Protests by the towns occasionally resulted in mitigation of particularly onerous laws, but the changes were usually short-lasting and the restrictions were soon re-imposed.

Up to this point (ca. 1400, with the exact date depending on the town) the Dalmatian towns had been growing in size, the town government institutions had been thriving, and their trade had been increasing. The towns had been carrying on their own foreign affairs, concluding treaties according to their own interests, and trading whatever goods with whomever they wanted. Now under Venetian rule, this all ceased. Local activities and commerce became subordinated to Venice’s interests, much to the detriment of the Dalmatian economy but of course to the benefit of Venetian profits. Thus in
the fifteenth century there took place a marked decline in the trade and prosperity of the Dalmatian towns. Dalmatian merchants had fewer sales and thus became economically poorer; the local artisans had fewer buyers for their goods, and thus local productivity and industry also declined. In fact local industry became reduced to what was necessary for domestic needs.

Dubrovnik was not affected by this decline, for, remaining under Hungary, it escaped Venetian dominance. Thus while the rest of Dalmatia declined, Dubrovnik prospered. In fact the decline of its neighbors aided Dubrovnik’s economic development. However, the Venetian presence did negatively effect Dubrovnik at times. For once Venice obtained control of the Albanian ports, it insisted that all their grain be shipped to Italy, thus depriving Dubrovnik of what had been a major source of relatively inexpensive grain.

Croatia

Meanwhile, in the interior of Croatia, two families struggled for hegemony. First were the Frankapans, headed by Nicholas, the first to take the name Frankap (which was recognized by the pope in 1430); he held the family seat of Krk, the town of Senj, and the counties of Vinodol, Modruš, and Gacka, as well as Lika in Croatia and Cetin, Slunj, and Ozalj in Slavonia. Sigismund appointed him Ban of Croatia in 1426, an office he held until his death in 1432. In the year of his appointment Nicholas made a huge loan to Sigismund, for which he received as security the royal fortresses of Bihać, Knin, Lapac grad, Vrlika, Ostrovica (near Bribir), Skradin, Sokograd, Ripač, Čoka, Rmanj, Lab, and the Lučka county (between the Krka River and the Zrmanja). As a result he held just about all of Croatia—excluding, of course, Croatian Slavonia—except for Krševi, held by the Kurjakovići, and the large Nelić holdings to the south, to which, as noted, his son John, married to Catherine Nelić, was heir. The second family struggling for hegemony was that of Herman II of Celje, who was Ban of Slavonia. The father-in-law of Sigismund, he held, as we noted earlier, much of Slovenia and Zagorje while possessing enormous tracts of land in Slavonia.

A marriage was contracted between the two families in about 1405 when Nicholas’ daughter Elizabeth married Herman’s son Frederick. A huge cash dowry was agreed upon, but since Nicholas lacked the cash at the time he gave Frederick as security half the island of Krk and three fortresses in Vinodol. Thus Frederick took possession of certain castles (and their income) within the Frankapans’ lands. His father, Herman, then granted Frederick Kranj and certain castles in Slavonia. Frederick settled down with Elizabeth, and in about 1406 a son, Ulrich, was born. All went well until about 1414 when Frederick met the luscious Veronica; leaving Elizabeth, Frederick took up housekeeping with her. Both fathers were distressed and pressured Frederick in every way possible to go back to Elizabeth, for there was the dowry at
issue. Finally in 1422 Frederick knuckled under to the pressure and returned to Elizabeth; in the morning, it seems after his first night back, Elizabeth was found murdered in her bed.

Furious, Nicholas Frankapan seized the dowry castles within his lands and then invaded Frederick’s holdings, sending troops into both Slavonia and Kranj. Frederick fled to the Hungarian court to seek asylum with his sister Barbara, Sigismund’s wife. Shortly thereafter Elizabeth’s brother John appeared at court and, accusing Frederick of murdering his sister, challenged him to a duel. The king prevented the duel from taking place. John accused Frederick of cowardice in getting royal intervention rather than fighting, and laid his accusations against Frederick before the Hungarian court. Through the influence of Barbara, Frederick was allowed to leave the court; he returned to Slavonia and married his beloved Veronica. The Frankapans were pressuring Sigismund to take action, and Frederick’s father, Herman II, was also furious at Frederick for marrying Veronica; so, when Sigismund finally responded to the complaints and sentenced Frederick to death in absentia, his father seized him, incidentally saving his life, and put him in a dungeon, where he remained until 1429. Herman’s anger against Veronica simmered for a while until, unable to repress it, he brought her to trial as a witch; found guilty, she was drowned in a fishing pond under the castle of Celje. But though Sigismund was able to prevent a major war between his two vassals, bad feeling remained strong between the two families.

In 1432 Nicholas Frankapan died, leaving nine sons. With seniority going to John, the eldest, the nine ruled the lands jointly, each residing in a different castle. John was soon appointed to replace his father as Ban of Croatia; the appointment probably came almost immediately in 1432, though some have argued that he did not receive the appointment until 1434. He also retained the royal fortresses his father had held as security for the large loan to Sigismund.

In 1434 Ivaniš Nelipčić died, and, as noted, since he had no sons his lands were left to his daughter Catherine, the wife of John Frankapan. The Nelipčić inheritance was enormous, including roughly all Croatia between Velebit and the Cetina River. John moved south to reside in his new holdings, living usually in Klis or Omiš, leaving his brothers to manage the family’s holdings in the north. Sigismund, fearing the increase in power these lands would give the Frankapans, now forbade the carrying out of Ivaniš’ testament and, on the basis of a law that awarded to the king the property of holders dying without male heir, demanded the Nelipčić inheritance for himself. John and Catherine, in possession of a charter from 1412 signed by Sigismund himself, in which he agreed to the arrangement, refused. So, Sigismund declared John Frankapan a rebel to be deprived of all lands and titles. Since John still refused to submit, Sigismund called upon Matko Talovac, who had been appointed Ban of Slavonia upon the death of Herman II of Celje in 1435, to enforce his wishes. Making Matko also Ban of Croatia to replace the rebel
John, Sigismund told Matko that his family could keep whatever lands he
took from John.

Fierce fighting followed in 1436, but it seems Matko was able to take
only one town, Sinj, on the Cetina River. That winter he was back in Zagreb,
and in his absence John recovered Sinj. But then at the end of 1436 John died,
leaving a widow and an infant son. Encouraged by the new situation, Matko
began preparing for another campaign. Feeling incapable of resistance,
Catherine, through a mediator, entered into negotiations with Matko and in
1437 ended up agreeing to a treaty that surrendered her whole inheritance to
Sigismund. She and her son then sought refuge in the Frankapan castle of
Rmanj on the Una.

The behavior of John’s eight brothers during these events is not known;
there is no evidence that they participated in the warfare during 1436 and there
is no sign that they tried to stick up for their sister-in-law when she was left a
widow. The eldest remaining brother, Stjepan, throughout these events in
1436–37, was clearly in Sigismund’s good graces, for he was frequently at
court witnessing charters. And shortly thereafter Stjepan, still a favorite,
received large grants in Kranj and Slovenia, including Ljubljana. Thus one
suspects that to stay in the king’s good graces the other Frankapans simply left
Catherine to her fate.

The victorious king then assigned the Nelipčić inheritance to Matko
Talovac and his three brothers. The Talovac family also greatly expanded its
holdings in the north, for it received from Sigismund large grants in the Drava
region as well as in Slavonia. When the Nelipčić problem had been success-
fully settled, Sigismund thought it best to split the banships of Slavonia and
Croatia. Leaving Matko as Ban of Slavonia, a post he held until his death in
1444, he appointed Matko’s brother Peter Ban of Croatia in 1438. Peter
remained in that office until he died in 1453. However, though greatly favoring
the Talovac family, Sigismund seems to have worried that it might be-
come too strong. He evidently sought a balance between the Talovac family
and the Frankapans, who had now been cut down to size. And we find a letter
from 1437 by Sigismund forbidding Matko Talovac to interfere in the affairs
of the county of Bužane and the town of Potogan, for they had been assigned
to the Frankapans. The Frankapans soon increased their lands further; in the
late 1430s one of the brothers, Martin, married Helen (Jelena) Mučina of
Lipovac. When her father died in 1442, Martin inherited his lands, including
the major market town of Jastrebarsko between the Sava and Kupa, and also
his two fortresses in the county of Dubica.

Meanwhile, to defend the approaches to Croatia from Ottoman and Ve-
etian attacks, Sigismund in 1432 (with additional reforms in 1435) formed
three military marches based on owed military service from the local nobles
and on forts with garrisons. The three were: (a) Croatia, directed toward the
Adriatic with responsibility falling on the Croatian ban, Dubrovnik, and the
Krbava (Kurjakovići), Cetina (Nelipčić, then Talovac), and Senj (Frankapan)
princes; (b) Slavonia to the Una, with responsibility falling on the Ban of Slavonia, the Prince of Blagaj on the Una, the Prior of Vrana, and the Bishop of Zagreb; and (c) Usora, supported by the nobles of lower Slavonia and southern Hungary.  

Croatian-Hungarian affairs became more complex after Sigismund’s death in 1437 and that of his successor Albert of Habsburg, who was married to Sigismund’s daughter Elizabeth. Albert died in 1439, leaving a pregnant widow. She tried to take over as ruler, hoping to secure the inheritance for her yet unborn child. She based her claim upon her parentage, for after all Albert had acquired Hungary as Sigismund’s son-in-law, and upon some powerful supporters, including certain of the Frankapans, Prince Nicholas Iločki, and the Counts of Celje, Frederick and his son Ulrich. Ulrich had more or less run the affairs of the family from the time of his grandfather’s death in 1435. His father, Frederick, seems not to have minded and lived a life of retirement in a Slavonian castle.

Despite Elizabeth’s assets, however, the majority of Croatian and Hungarian nobles, led by Ladislas Garai, Ban of Mačva, opposed her. In 1440 these nobles held a council at Buda that elected Vladislav Jagiellon, the King of Poland, as their king. He was the son of Louis the Great’s daughter Hedwiga. Envoys were sent to bring him the good news, while Elizabeth gave birth to her baby, a son named Ladislas, known as Ladislas Posthumous. His mother immediately crowned him in Alba Regalis (Székesfehérvár). Vladislav was thrilled at the chance to add Hungary to his rule and to participate in a new Hungarian civil war that could provide him with excitement for years to come. He appeared in Buda, still in 1440, with an army. The presence of his forces caused most of Elizabeth’s supporters to change sides and recognize him, though Ulrich of Celje remained faithful to her. For safety Elizabeth sent her little son and the Hungarian crown to the court of Frederick III, her Habsburg brother-in-law.

While these struggles were occurring, the Turkish sultan sought to take advantage of them by attacking Beograd. However, the city was ably defended by John Talovac, Matko’s and Peter’s brother, and after a six-month siege Murad II gave up and withdrew his forces.

Elizabeth, still supported by Ulrich, now acquired German help from the Habsburgs, and civil war erupted in Croatia and Hungary. However, in the face of the Turkish threat, the war was finally ended through the mediation of the Church; Cardinal Cesarini played a major role in the negotiations. The two sides agreed to accept Vladislav as King of Hungary on the condition that his heir for Hungary be Ladislas Posthumous. Elizabeth then died unexpectedly in 1443.

While this fighting was going on, as noted, Stefan Vukčić of Hum took advantage of Hungary’s preoccupation with its dynastic struggle to occupy most of the region between the Neretva and Cetina rivers. And though Venice was to grab Omiš and Poljica from him in 1444, Stefan Vukčić was able to retain the Krajina, the interior area behind this strip of coast.
The Battle of Ankara

We have by now brought Byzantium and Serbia down to 1402, the year of the Battle of Ankara. We have traced the Ottomans’ extensive expansion into Europe. The Ottomans during the same period had also been extending their control over western and much of central Anatolia. As they pressed east there, they expelled various Turkish, and Muslim, emirs who had been ruling in that territory. The displaced emirs complained to the great Tatar conqueror Timur (Tamerlane), who controlled a vast empire in Central Asia. Timur wrote Sultan Bayezid, demanding tribute. Bayezid refused this demand in an arrogant reply. Timur, then, having mobilized a huge force of Turks and Mongols, marched into Anatolia in 1402. Bayezid assembled a large army to oppose him, containing contingents under his sons and under his various European vassals, including Stefan Lazarević and George Branković.

The two armies met outside of Ankara on 28 July 1402. The battle has been described by my colleague Rudi Lindner as the equivalent of the college football all-stars against the professional football league champions, for Bayezid’s talented and able troops, fighting as separate units, were far less coordinated and disciplined than the polished machine of the professional Timur. The battle ended in a rout for Timur. His victory was owing not only to the superiority of his forces and his superior qualities as a leader, but also to the fact that, even before the battle’s results were assured, the sultan’s sons, fearing defeat, deserted with their armies, hoping to keep them intact to fight for their own advancement in the post-Bayezid world.

The largest of these deserting forces were those of Suleyman, who returned with his troops to Ottoman Europe. Bayezid was captured and, according to tradition, put in a large cage, where he remained for about a year until he died. According to Stefan Lazarević’s biographer, Constantine the Philosopher, the Serbian ruler fought bravely. After Bayezid was surrounded, three times Stefan entered the struggle to try to free him, but without success. After the battle Timur penetrated to the Aegean, ousting not only the Ottoman governors but also the Hospitaller knights from Smyrna. He then restored the displaced emirs to their thrones, under his suzerainty. His plan for the restoration of legitimate rulers included the Ottomans, but he limited them to a smaller territory in northwestern Anatolia. There he confirmed Bayezid’s son Mehemed as sultan. Having settled affairs in Anatolia according to what he felt was the principle of legitimacy, he returned to his own Central Asian realm, where he died shortly thereafter.

This battle at first sight would seem to have been a massive defeat for the Ottomans, for they did lose much of Anatolia. However, they still held northwestern Anatolia; moreover their European possessions were still intact under an unimpaired military occupation that maintained firm control over the Ottoman European provinces. The elite of the army, the feudal cavalry, were established on service estates (timars) within the various provinces, which they managed. These fief-holders had also assumed a major role in local
administration. Moreover, the Ottoman governors, administrative officials, and religious judges were still ensconced in their offices when Suleyman returned to Europe with much of his army intact. Thus the whole system was functioning smoothly on his return and he, at first unchallenged in Europe, quickly took control of the European army and administration, whose leaders all recognized him. Thus there was little or no chance for the Christians of Bulgaria and Macedonia to take advantage of the Ottoman defeat to rise up and regain their independence.

But we must also stress that the Ottomans were still weakened; they had lost over half their lands in central Anatolia, they had taken large manpower losses at Ankara, and their remaining forces almost immediately were to become divided among the surviving brothers, who at once became rivals for the throne of their father. At first the empire was split into two parts, with Mehmed holding Anatolia and its armies, and Suleyman Europe. Soon the two were to be at war, which led to further losses in manpower. But, except for some peripheral European territories surrendered to Byzantium by Suleyman to gain allies, the Ottomans—represented by Suleyman—were to retain intact the bulk of Bayezid’s European holdings. However, as Ottoman forces came to be divided and involved in a civil war for the next decade, Ottoman expansion was to be halted until the civil war was over. The war was concluded in 1413, and then the victor, Mehmed, was to need nearly another decade, to 1421, to consolidate his control over his lands before a new wave of expansionist activity could be launched. Thus the unconquered Balkans—Serbia, what remained of Byzantium, including Constantinople, and the Balkan lands, like Bosnia, lying beyond them—received a breather that allowed them to survive longer. The Byzantine empire, thus, was to last, in its reduced size, for another fifty years.

Serbia after Ankara

Stefan Lazarević, who had been a loyal Ottoman vassal and had fought well at Ankara, survived the battle along with a good portion of his troops. He stopped at Constantinople on his way home. He was well received by the emperor, who granted him the title of despot, by which he was to be known from then on and by which his successors were also to be known.

On his return to Serbia, Stefan immediately faced opposition from his nephew George Branković. As we recall, George’s mother was Stefan’s sister. George had no love for Stefan, who may well have had a role in inciting the Ottomans to expel George’s father, Vuk, from his lands between 1394 and 1396. In any case Stefan had ended up with the lion’s share of these lands at the time, and it was only later, probably on the eve of the Battle of Ankara, that George and his brother were restored to the bulk of these lands by the sultan. Who bore the responsibility for the new dispute that erupted in 1402 is not certain. Our sources are generally late and leave much to be desired. The basic surviving story claims that after Ankara George at once
concluded an agreement with Suleyman. What they agreed upon is not stated. But Stefan feared that George, with his new ally’s help, planned to attack Stefan and seize his realm. So, Stefan tried to persuade the Byzantines to seize George when he returned from the battle through their territory. According to Orbini’s version, the Byzantines obliged and actually jailed George, who then escaped and fled to the Turks (presumably to Suleyman) who gave him troops with which he returned home. Dinić doubts this account, which at least partially tries to justify Stefan. Dinić believes that Stefan was the aggressor, and that he incited the Byzantines to jail George so that he himself could take advantage of George’s absence to regain the Branković lands, which he had acquired between 1394 and 1396 but which had been restored by Bayezid to the Branković shortly before Ankara. In any case, George got home safely and soon was at war with Stefan.

At first Stefan’s policy seems to have been to take advantage of Ankara to shed Ottoman vassalage and to assert Serbia’s independence. George Branković, however, seems from the start to have been bent on increasing his strength by relying on Ottoman support. At once he established close ties with Suleyman, recognizing his suzerainty and maintaining close relations with the Ottoman governor in Skopje. Moreover, after Ankara the Ottomans retained garrisons in the two Branković towns they had directly taken between 1394 and 1396. As a result they had an active presence inside George’s lands and a means to compel him to toe the line. Thus possibly George’s relations with the Ottomans (i.e., Suleyman) were not entirely by choice.

The tensions between Stefan and George soon led to actual warfare. This brought about strained relations between Stefan and the neighboring Turkish leader, Branković’s suzerain Suleyman. Not surprisingly, Stefan was receptive when Sigismund of Hungary approached him for an alliance.

At this time Sigismund of Hungary was in difficulties. In 1401, as noted, a group of nobles in his capital had revolted and briefly imprisoned him. This encouraged the Naples party to step up its activities. At the same time Pope Boniface IX had recognized Ladislas. Upon his release from prison, Sigismund had gone to Bohemia to raise an army. In Hungary the nobles remained divided and his partisans continued to fight those of Ladislas. Much of 1402 was spent by Sigismund in winning support from Austria, which he won by promising that Albert of Austria would be his heir if he died without male issue. The Naples party was successful in the southern and western lands, and Hrvoje, who dominated in this region, was urging Ladislas to come to Dalmatia so that together they could march on Buda to install Ladislas there as king.

In these difficulties, it is not surprising that Sigismund sought allies. It seems that it was he, with an alliance in mind, who initiated negotiations with Stefan Lazarević, probably still in 1402. Stefan, probably still at war with George Branković, was not averse to good relations with his neighbor to the north, assuming, of course, that Sigismund did recover his position in Hungary. Sigismund was very generous in his terms; he offered Stefan Lazarević
Mačva, including Beograd, for Stefan’s life-time if he would accept Hungarian suzerainty for it. Since it seems Ladislas had some support in Mačva, turning the region over to a Serb ally could actually strengthen Sigismund’s position; after all in 1402 he was in no position to take any sort of action toward asserting himself in Mačva. And by granting Stefan Mačva, Serbia’s territorial ambition, he could prevent Stefan from allying at some point with Hrvoje and reviving the former anti-Sigismund coalition that briefly existed at the time of Tvrtko and Lazar. Moreover, putting Mačva in friendly hands would allow Sigismund to concentrate on Bosnia and Croatia, without fear of a revolt in his rear. Stefan, finding a way to regain Mačva bloodlessly, agreed. It is not certain whether their treaty was concluded in late 1402, or, as is more likely, early in 1403. It clearly was signed before April 1404, when Sigismund wrote to the Duke of Burgundy that Stefan had submitted to him.

In the interim, in November 1402, Stefan defeated Branković’s forces (which included troops from Suleyman) at Tripolje, ending for a time their warfare. Peace was concluded a few months later between Stefan on the one hand and George and Suleyman on the other. Thus for a time Stefan found himself secure in his Serbian lands, to which was added for his life-time Mačva with Beograd; and for the newly granted lands he had accepted Hungarian suzerainty. This suzerainty could also be useful if and when an Ottoman victor emerged to resume pressure on Serbia. Moreover, the Hungarian alliance and suzerainty gave him greater freedom in dealing with Suleyman. At this time Stefan also acquired from Sigismund the important fortress of Golubac on the Danube.

Stefan decided to make Beograd his capital. It had the advantage of being distant from both the Ottomans and the Brankovići and was a strong fortress. He repaired and added to its fortifications, making them even stronger. This was to be the first time that Beograd was a capital for the Serbs. Its being made into a capital also illustrates the process by which the center of Serbia was ever withdrawing further to the north. The city had fine fortifications, an impressive palace, several churches, an active market, and even a hospital, located at the Church of Saint Nicholas beyond its walls.

Stefan, as a result, also became more involved in northern matters, in particular in the on-going Hungarian squabbles. As an ally of Sigismund, he soon found himself at war against Sigismund’s Bosnian opponents across the Drina from Serbia. Because of his support, in 1411 Sigismund awarded him the rich mining town of Srebrnica, taken from the Bosnians, on the Bosnian side of the Drina. Sigismund’s motives were probably as much to weaken the Bosnians as to reward the Serbs. The income from the Srebrnica mine at the time has been estimated at thirty thousand ducats annually. The town, and its mine, was to be a constant source of conflict between Bosnia and Serbia for the next forty years, weakening both to the Ottomans’ advantage. Neither Slavic state could yield on the issue, for both needed the income from the mine—particularly later, in the 1420s and thereafter, when the Ottomans had regained their strength and demanded large tribute from both countries. Thus
the rivalry over this mine was to keep the two states divided and prevent them from uniting against the Ottomans, who threatened both.

The Ottoman Civil War

The main event of the decade 1403–13 was the civil war between the three sons of Bayezid, each of whom wanted the Ottoman throne. At first it was fought between Suleyman, who held Europe, and Mehemmed, residing in Bursa, who held Ottoman Anatolia. In the early phases of the war the third brother, Musa, was residing in Anatolia and supporting Mehemmed. He soon was to become an independent actor out for himself. However, before we turn to the war, it cannot be stressed too much (particularly since many works fail to explain it) that though the Ottomans were involved in a civil war, they, represented by Suleyman, still firmly held their European provinces. There was no way for the Balkan people under Ottoman rule to rise up successfully against the Ottomans. The Ottomans controlled the cities and kept garrisons in them. The spahis, their feudal cavalry, remained inside the provinces, holding feudal estates that collectively included a large portion of the agricultural land and villages. Thus the Ottoman structure was hardly altered by Ankara and the civil strife that followed. Furthermore, the forces of Suleyman alone were not only sufficient to put down an uprising but were also larger and stronger than the armies of any one of his independent neighbors, be it Byzantium or Serbia. What would have helped the Balkan Christians would have been a split within the Ottoman forces of Europe. However, at first this did not happen. The European provinces remained united under Suleyman. Furthermore, in the first years there was no fighting between the brothers in Europe itself, which might have weakened Suleyman’s position there.

The only hope, then, would have been for all the Christian neighbors to form a coalition and march against Ottoman Europe. But, this was not to happen. Whether it was even seriously considered is not known. However, Suleyman, either fearing such a possibility or else simply needing to acquire allies against his brother, at once approached various neighboring Balkan leaders and offered them in certain cases good terms to become allies. Thus by drawing them into his affairs, Suleyman prevented them from working out among themselves independent policies that might have threatened him.

Suleyman immediately, in 1403, concluded a treaty with Byzantium; it terminated Byzantine vassalage to the Ottomans, ending both tribute and required military service. He offered better commercial terms to Greek merchants. He returned all the Christian prisoners he had to the empire. And finally he restored considerable peripheral territory to the empire: Thessaloniki and its environs, including the littoral of the Thermaic Gulf at whose head Thessaloniki lies, the Chalcidic peninsula, and the Thracean coast from that peninsula probably to the mouth of the Struma, the north shore of the Sea of Marmora from Panidos to the capital, the Black Sea coast from the capital up to Mesembria, and various Aegean islands. It is not certain how much
of the Thracian coast was restored. The Ottomans clearly retained Kavalla and its hinterland with Serres. Thus I have followed Lemerle’s conclusion that the Struma River mouth became the new border, with the Byzantines holding the territory to its west and the Ottomans the coast east of it. Ducas claims the restored Black Sea coastal territory went beyond Mesembria, including the coast as far north as Varna. Most scholars, however, have rejected this claim and have accepted the contemporary Venetian report, which includes what alleges to be an Italian translation of the treaty text; this text gives Mesembria as the furthestmost Black Sea city restored.

It also seems that Suleyman came to some sort of arrangement with Stefan Lazarević. It is sometimes said that Suleyman, probably in 1403, concluded a treaty with Stefan and released him from all vassal obligations and returned to him a limited amount of territory which, it is often claimed, included the important town of Niš and its district. The Venetian text, however, gives no such generous terms but reports that Suleyman recognized Stefan’s authority only over his existing state (the lands he held from the time of Bayezid) and expected him to continue with his existing obligations, tribute and military service. Thus Serbia in theory remained a vassal of the Ottomans. However, for much of this period Stefan behaved as if he were a free agent and not under any Ottoman overlord.

Thus the Byzantines were released from their vassal status to become, as they did at first, Suleyman’s allies. However, as such they were drawn into the Ottoman civil war on the side of one Ottoman faction and thus prevented from becoming active against the Ottomans in general. And any successes they were to have, which were at the expense of their own manpower, benefited one or the other Ottoman side, rather than themselves. Thus throughout their civil war, the Turks, whether one side or the other, continued to hold their European lands, with no loosening of this hold—except for the peripheral lands they restored to the empire. The issue at stake was not whether the Turks were to be or not to be, but which Turk was to emerge as victor. And though the civil war was to last for ten years, no subjected Balkan Christians, except those in the territories surrendered in 1403 by Suleyman, were able to extricate themselves from Turkish rule.

In fact, the civil war tended to weaken the Balkan peoples further, since the leading Balkan rulers were drawn into the Ottoman strife, supporting one side or another and thereby suffering the loss of many of their own troops. And it is hard to see how they could have failed to be drawn in, since the armies of either Ottoman claimant were stronger than those of any individual Balkan state. Thus the Christian rulers seem to have felt fortunate to become Ottoman allies. And though Manuel II seems to have hoped at times to play one Ottoman side off against the other, the chance to do so and thus gain some major advantages for the empire never arose. Manuel might have been able to do this at the very start in 1402–03, but at the time he was in the West, seeking aid for the empire, whose demise, in the days before the Battle of Ankara, had seemed imminent. By the time he returned home the chance had
been lost. His nephew John VII, who had ruled in his absence, had already concluded the treaty with Suleyman, and the empire was committed to an alliance and involvement in the Ottoman civil war.

By 1407 things were prospering for Suleyman. He marched into Anatolia and seized Bursa. However, Mehemmed’s ally Musa soon outflanked Suleyman, sailing across the Black Sea for Wallachia, where he acquired the Vlachs as allies. Mircea of Wallachia had taken advantage of the Ottomans’ difficulties after Ankara to take over the Dobrudja as well as the important fortress of Silistra on the Danube. Since Suleyman, possessor of the rest of Bulgaria, could be expected to try to regain these lands, it made sense for Mircea to support Suleyman’s rival. Having assembled his army in Wallachia, Musa soon crossed the Danube into Bulgaria, thereby attacking Suleyman’s rear. This forced Suleyman to return to Europe. And Mehemmed regained Bursa and soon had again solidified his hold on western Anatolia. By 1409 Suleyman found himself in a serious struggle to retain his Balkan possessions against Musa. In 1409 Suleyman visited Constantinople to confirm his treaty of friendship with the empire and to seek aid.

While this was occurring, Stefan Lazarević of Serbia defected from Suleyman’s camp and agreed to support Musa’s campaign. With this defection, Suleyman, seeking allies and wanting to reduce the support Stefan could provide for Musa, entered into negotiations with Stefan’s brother Vuk. He encouraged him to revolt against Stefan. Vuk was ambitious and at the time hurt by his brother’s treatment of him. Orbini says Stefan was not treating Vuk like a brother and refused to give him a share of their father’s state. So Vuk departed to Suleyman accompanied by many nobles who were in his service. Suleyman gave him many honors and lands in his realm. Constantine the Philosopher, Stefan’s biographer, gives a somewhat different version. According to him, Vuk initiated the crisis by concluding an alliance with George Branković and then, on the strength of that, demanding an appanage from Stefan. When Stefan refused his demand, in late 1408 or early 1409, Vuk revolted, acquiring troops from both Suleyman and Branković. After an initial military failure, Vuk returned for a second attempt, still supported by his allies; it was successful and he established a principality in the south of Serbia. Orbini claims that Suleyman provided him with the unbelievable number of thirty thousand troops. His troops and those of his allies were said to have plundered Raška (presumably meaning the territory under Stefan) for six months. It clearly was in Suleyman’s interest to encourage Vuk’s attempt, since it would weaken Stefan, who had by then joined Musa’s camp. In the course of this warfare, in 1409, Sigismund of Hungary gave some aid to Stefan against Vuk. It is not certain how much territory Vuk seized. Orbini reports that Vuk forced a territorial settlement on his brother; however, the division Orbini presents makes no sense. Radonić thinks Vuk took a truly substantial area, possibly all of Serbia itself, leaving Stefan only the Mačva lands he had received from Sigismund after Ankara. Vuk’s lands were held under Ottoman (Suleyman’s) suzerainty.
In 1410 Musa, still supported by Mircea of Wallachia and Stefan Lazarević, launched a two-pronged attack on Suleyman’s Bulgarian lands. In February 1410 their forces defeated Suleyman’s beglerbeg. Then they marched toward Constantinople, where near its walls they met Suleyman’s own forces, which had Byzantine support. Byzantine envoys secretly approached Stefan to try to detach him from his alliance with Musa. They failed. In the ensuing battle, Suleyman emerged victorious and Musa fled. Pursued, Musa was defeated a second time but once again escaped. Then with a small force Musa took to the mountains and carried on a guerrilla war against Suleyman.

In the course of this action, Musa maintained close ties with Stefan, at one point even seeking asylum at his court. Musa also put an end to Vuk’s principality. Vuk, it seems, had briefly switched sides, also joining Musa. But then, on the eve of the first 1410 battle near Constantinople, he had deserted Musa and returned to Suleyman. Suleyman, as we have seen, won that battle. Stefan, who had been on Musa’s side, fled. Vuk, then, with Suleyman’s blessing and a small retinue, hurriedly set off for Serbia to take over the lands still retained by Stefan after the events of 1409. Suleyman had agreed that Vuk could have all Stefan’s lands. While he was en route to Serbia, some of Musa’s men captured him. They took him to Musa, who then beheaded him, probably in July 1410. Though some of the details given above, drawn from Orbini, may not be exact, it is certain that Vuk did fall into Musa’s hands and, as a result, was executed.

The liquidation of Vuk allowed Stefan to recover his lost lands. In June 1411 in a charter to Hilandar Stefan calls himself “lord of all Serbia, having united all of it after the death of Vuk.”

Suleyman did not follow up his advantage and pursue Musa further. He allowed his advantage to deteriorate and fell, we are told, into lethargy and debauch. This enabled Musa to regroup his forces. He was also able to win support from many of Suleyman’s former followers. Wittek believes he was able to do this by playing upon ghazi ideology, since many ghazis (warriors for the Islamic faith) allegedly were unhappy with Suleyman’s tolerance of and alliance with Christians. This seems far-fetched, for alliance with Christians had been general Ottoman policy for decades and, furthermore, Musa too was allied with Christians. But regardless of their motivation—possibly Musa was simply a more inspiring and successful war leader, offering more opportunities for booty—Musa was able to rebuild his armies, partly through the winning over of many of Suleyman’s former supporters. This gave him the advantage in the next round. In 1411 he returned to action, and as he marched through Bulgaria large numbers of Suleyman’s followers deserted and went over to him. Suleyman was captured near Adrianople; taken to Musa, he was strangled in February 1411. George Branković, who had remained loyal to Suleyman throughout, now submitted to Musa.

Musa by this time was no longer campaigning for Mehemmed but clearly was out for himself. Furthermore, he now posed a threat for Stefan, who at
the very end of the warfare, probably early in 1411, switched sides again and rejoined Suleyman. Musa, having eliminated his brother, immediately turned against the neighboring Christian states that had not supported him, Serbia (which had deserted his cause) and Byzantium. Attacking Serbia, he took Pirot and its district. Faced with this threat, Stefan strengthened his ties with Sigismund, visiting him in July 1411 in Buda. It seems on this occasion—if he had not already done so in 1409 when he received aid from Sigismund against Vuk and Suleyman—he accepted Hungarian suzerainty for all of Serbia. At least, it has been plausibly argued that the suzerainty he accepted in 1403 was only for the nominally Hungarian lands of Mačva (with Beograd), which he then was granted, while that agreement left him as an independent ruler over his other lands. However, if he now in 1411 wanted Hungarian aid to defend his original Serbian lands, then he had to accept that suzerainty for the whole kingdom which would then obligate Hungary to take an interest in this other territory as well. Their relations, already cordial, became even more so at this point, and in 1411, as noted, Sigismund granted Stefan the rich mining town of Srebrnica, which Hungary had just captured from the Bosnians.

Musa continued to apply pressure to his Christian opponents, laying siege late in 1411 or in 1412 to Byzantium’s Thessaloniki and Constantinople and to Serbia’s Novo Brdo. He failed to obtain any of the three, and the Ragusan merchant colony played an active and important role in the defense of Novo Brdo. However, Musa did succeed in sacking Stefan’s town of Vranje. Faced with this threat, Emperor Manuel II tried to build up support among the Turks for a new candidate, Suleyman’s son Orkhan, whom he provided with troops and hoped might become a Byzantine puppet. However, Orkhan was betrayed to Musa and executed. So for help Manuel turned to a stronger figure, whom at first he probably had hoped to avoid strengthening, Mehemmed in Anatolia. Manuel offered him an alliance against Musa, who, now acting for himself, had replaced the late Suleyman as Mehemmed’s main enemy. Mehemmed agreed to the alliance and his armies were ferried to Europe from Anatolia on Byzantine ships. An insufficient number were brought over, for in the first engagement, in July 1412, Musa’s forces won.

That fall Stefan, having earlier (possibly even in 1411) lined up with Mehemmed against Musa, patched up his differences with George Branković through the mediation of George’s mother, who was Stefan’s sister. This time their peace was to be a lasting one. In fact George was eventually to become Stefan’s heir. As a result, George also joined the coalition against Musa.

That winter, 1412–13, Stefan also encouraged a Turkish border-lord, Hamsa, who had been serving Musa on the upper Timok, to desert from Musa. Learning of this defection, Musa in March 1413 had Hamsa seized and executed. And then, using Stefan’s tampering with his vassals as an excuse, he attacked Serbia shortly thereafter, taking Bolvan (or Bovan, between modern Soko-Banja and Aleksinac), Lipovac (below Ozren), Stalać (on the Morava), and Koprijan (near Niš). Expecting further action against himself,
Stefan set out to build up a major coalition against Musa, including George Branković and Sandalj Hranić of Bosnia, who in late 1411 had married Stefan’s sister (also George II Balšić’s widow), Helen. He also negotiated with his suzerain, Sigismund, and with Mircea of Wallachia. Sigismund was just then in the process of concluding a five-year treaty with Venice, which would free him for Balkan involvement. Meanwhile, in April 1413 Mehmed’s armies returned to Europe, once again ferried on Byzantine ships. These forces joined up with those of the Slavic coalition, Stefan’s, Sandalj’s, Branković’s, and those provided by Sigismund, led by John Maroti, titular Ban of Mačva. At this moment, the trend among the Turks was to desert Musa for Mehmed, supposedly owing to Musa’s cruelty and arbitrariness. The final battle occurred on the upper Iskar, below Vitoša, in July 1413. Musa was defeated, captured, and strangled.

Mehmed thus triumphed and found himself the master of all the Ottoman Empire, including now its European provinces. Musa, as Musa Kesedjie of the three hearts, was to become the epic enemy of Marko Kraljević (the Serb epic hero who, as noted, died in 1395). The choice is interesting, for, like Marko, Musa was a relatively minor figure. Possibly his days as a brigand guerrilla leader made him easier to identify with and thus more appealing to Balkan imaginations.

Mehmed kept his agreement with Byzantium throughout the remainder of his reign, 1413–21. He recognized Byzantium’s rule over the territory restored to it by Suleyman in the 1403 treaty. In fact, a new peace was signed between him and the empire to this effect. He also issued a charter to Stefan Lazarević for his services that either awarded to him, or confirmed his possession of, Niš and environs and the region of Znepolje, lying east of Vranje. As a result Stefan’s territory stretched all the way to, but did not include, Sofija. Mehmed kept peace with Stefan too for the duration of his reign. Mehmed’s policy was to be one of consolidating his control over his expanded empire and gaining the loyalty of the Turkish servitors; presumably a special effort was needed to secure the loyalty of the European-based leaders and cavalry men who had for a decade fought for Mehmed’s opponents. Thus working to unite his new European possessions to his Asiatic lands, he did not try to expand Ottoman territory beyond its existing borders. However, both the Byzantines and Ottomans realized that the peace could be only temporary.

And thus the Turks emerged from their civil war in 1413 with most of their European holdings intact, and the Balkan subjects residing in them had no further chance, if they had ever had one, to liberate themselves. The sole survivor of the internecine feud, Mehmed I, ruled from then until his death in 1421. By 1421 he had succeeded in solidifying his authority over the former territories of Suleyman in the Balkans. He also, probably in 1417, recovered most, if not all, of the Dobrudja, which had been taken by Mircea of Wallachia after the Battle of Ankara. 9 During this period he also restored the Ottomans to their former position of power in Anatolia, where he re-
covered a large portion of the territory Timur had returned to the various emirs in 1402. His reign, by restoring the empire to roughly the position it had enjoyed in 1402 prior to the Battle of Ankara, laid the foundations for a new period of expansion under his successors.

Stefan Lazarević and Hungary

From their treaty in 1402 or 1403 Stefan Lazarević had maintained cordial relations with Sigismund, who clearly regarded Stefan as one of his most reliable supporters. In 1408 when Sigismund created his Dragon Order to defend the Hungarian realm from internal and foreign enemies, Stefan was one of the first foreign members to be enrolled. After Stefan accepted Hungarian suzerainty for his whole kingdom in 1411, Sigismund began to grant Stefan lands within Hungary. In fact, Stefan soon became one of the largest landowners in Hungary.

Sigismund’s treatment of Stefan differed from his treatment of other nobles in greater Hungary—i.e., nobles in lands officially under Hungary but not in Hungary proper—like his Bosnian supporters or the Garais. These, though granted territory, received their grants in peripheral regions that Hungary was claiming and trying to retain. However, they did not receive lands in Hungary itself. Stefan, in contrast, after his visit to Buda in July 1411, was granted not only Srebrnica in Bosnia but also other mining sites within Hungary, Szatmar, Németi, Nagybánya, and Felsőbánya, the last also having a mint. He not only obtained the Szatmar mine but the whole county of Szatmar as well as Debrezen, the seat of the Hajduk county. In 1414 he was to obtain most of the Torontal county in the western Banat, whither Stefan Lazarević sent a deputy to govern, seated at Arács. Though Stefan held this Hungarian territory from Sigismund, it was Stefan who named the officials and collected the customs, tolls, and judicial levies. In 1417 his representatives were found in the county of Ung and also in Temes and Krassó counties. A letter by Sigismund from 1421 shows Stefan as his financial representative in Szatmar. He also owned a palace in Buda. For these territories Stefan established his own Latin chancery.

One may suspect that these grants were resented by the Hungarian nobility, but possibly Sigismund felt them necessary to keep Stefan as an ally against the Turks. Or perhaps he felt Stefan was more to be trusted than the Hungarians, and thus Stefan could secure the loyalty of these areas to Sigismund’s rule. We may also suspect that various Serbs would have disliked the close ties formed between Stefan and Catholic Hungary. Though the great land grants had not been awarded to him that early, Stefan had already back in 1408 become a member of the Dragon Order; thus Radonić wonders if Stefan’s Hungarian ties may not have caused some Serbs to support Vuk against him in 1409–10.

Stefan also regularly attended the annual diet of Hungarian nobles. At the diet of 1423 Stefan was listed first among the nobles present. At these
diets Stefan often participated in knightly tournaments, excelling in them. On one occasion he bested all the Hungarians only to be defeated by another Serb.

Constantine the Philosopher’s biography stresses Stefan’s knightly prowess and ability as a military leader over all his other qualities. He fought, as has been seen, in a considerable number of major battles; his armies did well and, even in defeat, never suffered devastating losses. Like his contemporaries Stefan also held tournaments at his own court, and knightly poetry and tales were popular there. But Constantine the Philosopher notes that, despite this lively knightly side to his character and despite his active patronage of art and literature, Stefan’s court was modest and puritanical. The despot would tolerate no rowdy behavior, raucous laughter, stamping, and shouting. He also disliked popular music, considering it to be somewhat immoral; he banned it from his court, allowing only martial music when needed for battle order. He also, his biographer informs us, did not pursue women.

In this context it may be worth while to turn to Constantine’s description of the character of Stefan’s subjects, the Serbs. We should keep in mind that to some degree this may be an idealized picture, but at least it should stress the values Serbs admired:

The Serbs are quick to obey but slow to speak; in bodily cleanliness they surpass other peoples; they are charitable and sociable; when one is poor, the others all help him; they do not live basely or against nature; they pray to God more than twice a day; they greet their lords with doffing their caps; the son stands before his father as obedient as a servant; this one sees not only among the rich but also among the most rude and poor.

Albania and Zeta after Ankara

After the Battle of Ankara various Ottoman vassals in Zeta and Albania gave up their vassalage to the Ottomans and submitted to Venice. Among these was Koja Zakarija who had been closely associated with, if not subordinate to, Constantine Balšić. He held several small fortresses in the vicinity of Kroja. Having fought for the Ottomans at Ankara and returned to discover that the Venetians had eliminated Constantine, Koja submitted to Venice. Demetrius Jonima and various members of the Dukagjin family also substituted Venetian for Ottoman suzerainty after the Battle of Ankara. In 1403 Tanush Major’s brother George Dukagjin, in submitting to Venice, received two villages on the right side of the Drin, north of Alessio, as a pronoia for which he owed forty horsemen and one hundred footmen in local Venetian military campaigns. It should also be noted that though Tanush Major had submitted to the Turks in 1398, bringing many members of the family with him, some other Dukagjins had remained in Venetian service thereafter. And, in fact, throughout the many changing alliances and submissions made by the family chiefs, various Dukagjins were regularly found as Venetian citizens resident in
Skadar. The Ottoman defeat and Constantine Balšić’s death allowed the Venetians to regain Kroja, which they allowed Nikola Thopia to govern as their vassal. Nikola soon asserted himself and by 1410 was holding for Venice most of the territory between Kroja and the lower Shkumbi River. With control over this territory, whose inhabitants probably preferred him to Venice, Nikola was probably, as Ducellier puts it, more an ally of than a deputy for Venice.  

As the Venetians became active on the Albanian coast, followed by the establishment in the early 1390s of Venetian regimes in various coastal cities, Albanians began settling in Venice itself. From the middle of the fourteenth century Albanians had been taken in fairly large numbers and sold as slaves in Italy. Subsequently, after the Venetians established themselves on the coast, others began emigrating voluntarily. Ottoman pressure at the turn of the century caused increasing numbers of Albanians to emigrate to Italy, and, since Venice was actively involved in Albania, naturally many turned up in Venice. There they tended to take up the lower occupational positions generally occupied by immigrants breaking into a new society: domestic servants, couriers, night watchmen, custodians. Others became artisans, in particular barbers and bakers. In the fifteenth century Albanians were regularly hired as military retainers (bravos) in Italy. A few through military service, where they had the chance to demonstrate their ability, reached higher ranks. For example, we find an Albanian as castellan of Bassano. The Albanians soon established their own quarter in Venice, where newly arrived Albanians tended to settle. They had their own church and priest, John of Drivast. Large-scale emigration of Albanian peasants to Italy—in this case chiefly to southern Italy—came only at the end of the fifteenth century. Though this migration occurred after the Ottoman conquest, economic motives—the seeking of a more prosperous life—seem to have had more influence than political ones.

George II Balšić died in April 1403. He was succeeded by his son Baša III, who was then about seventeen years old. His mother, Stefan Lazarević’s sister Helen (Jelena), played an active role in Zeta’s affairs under Baša. Strongly pro-Serb, she wanted closer relations with Serbia and had strongly disapproved of her late husband’s pro-Venetian policy, including his sale of Skadar and the other towns to Venice. She disliked Venice’s interference with the Orthodox Church in its Zetan territory; she complained that Venice hindered contacts between the Orthodox Metropolitan of Zeta and the Serbian Patriarch of Peć and that it deprived the Orthodox churches around Skadar of their rightful income. She also objected to Venice’s monopolistic trade policy, which lost Zeta considerable income. Helen had brought Baša up to hold her views. And he gave up the Catholicism of his predecessors and returned to the Serbian Church.

In early 1405 a revolt against Venice broke out in the region of Skadar. Though Venice was able to retain Skadar itself, the rebels expelled many Venetian officials from the outlying area. Baša sent troops into the rebellious area and soon, though only briefly, took Drivast; the Venetians were back in
possession of that town in August. He also seems for a time to have held the lower town of Skadar, though not its citadel. It is not certain whether he had encouraged the revolt from the start or whether he simply moved in to take advantage of an existing situation. However, the angry Venetians responded actively along the Zetan coast and soon captured Balša’s three main ports: Bar, Ulcinj, and Budva. Since his potential Serbian allies had become embroiled in the Ottoman civil war and thus could not come to his aid, and since he was threatened not only by Venice but also by Sandalj Hranić, who wanted to regain control over the Gulf of Kotor, Balša sent envoys in 1405 to Suleyman, the holder of Ottoman Europe, and accepted Ottoman vassalage again, agreeing to pay tribute. From time to time, when there was a lull in the Ottoman war, Suleyman was to send Balša troops, which then were to plunder Venetian Zeta.

Both Balša and the Venetians worked hard to win the support of the local nobles, who shifted sides for their own advantage during the whole war, which was to last eight years. The Djuraševići remained faithful to Balša throughout; however, if Venice had given them their long-sought goal of Budva, they probably would have joined the Venetian side. Koja Zakarija and Demetrious Jonima supported Venice. The Dukagjins, on the whole, remained neutral. Though Venice held the advantage along the coast, inland, where many of the nobles supported him, Balša had considerable strength. Balša had little tolerance for the loose loyalty of many of these nobles, however, and took strong measures against those who had deserted him whenever he was able to capture them; many of these suffered mutilations, by which they lost their noses and/or limbs.

Early in 1407 Balša married the daughter of Nikola Thopia, a Venetian vassal. From that moment on, often with Nikola as a mediator, active negotiations between Balša’s representatives and Venice accompanied the fighting. When it was believed that Venice might return Bar to Balša, many local citizens objected; they had welcomed the Venetians back in 1405 and greatly feared Balša’s revenge. As negotiations dragged on fruitlessly and the Ottoman civil war prevented both Turks and Serbs from giving Balša sufficient help to restore his authority along the coast, Helen herself went to Venice to negotiate. She remained there from July to October 1409 and then returned with a draft treaty. However, its clauses had not been observed during the truce then in effect, so Balša launched new attacks on Venetian territory early in 1410. And so matters continued until December 1410, when Balša’s mother married Sandalj Hranić, transforming Balša’s serious enemy into a strong ally. After the marriage Balša’s negotiators ceased seeking compromises and began making demands. Finally in 1412 Sandalj himself became the mediator and demanded that the borders be restored to where they had been at the time of George II’s death in 1403. The Venetians did not want to return the three ports, so Balša besieged Bar and began seizing Venetian merchants and merchandise along the coast. As a result, the Venetians finally
on 26 November 1412 agreed to Sandalj’s terms: each would hold the territory it had held before the war began—thus Balša would regain his three ports—and Venice would again pay tribute to Balša for Skadar and for the other towns surrendered to it by George II. And Balša had to promise amnesty to the inhabitants of his regained towns who had supported the Venetians during the war. Sandalj, the guarantor of the treaty, was responsible for seeing to its execution. Balša ratified the treaty on 30 January 1413, and so the long war was over.

Having regained the three ports, Balša made Bar his main residence. It is worth noting that under the Balšići, and subsequently under the Serbian despot, the traditional political autonomy of Bar, Ulcinj, and the other ports continued. Even though the Balšići had a palace in Bar that frequently served as their main residence, and though later the despot’s voivoda (or deputy for Zeta) was to have his residence in Bar, both were careful to respect the town’s rights. Neither thought to interfere with the autonomous organization of the town commune or to interfere in how the town collected and used its income. The Balšići and Serb vojvodas simply collected the income due them from the town.

From his residence in Bar Balša now successfully devoted his attention to asserting his control over the interior regions of Zeta. He sent his vojvodas to defend the self-governing coastal towns and to supervise the hereditary chieftains who controlled the rural areas. He seems to have completed the subjugation of the Crnojevići, though their relatives the Djuraševići rose in rank and power and came to dominate the Paštrovići and the other tribes in the mountains above Kotor and Budva. The Djuraševići held the most honored position at court and their names appeared first among witness-guarantors of charters. Balša’s new step-father, Sandalj, remained a firm ally, and under Sandalj’s pressure Kotor resumed its annual tribute payments; these were now split between Sandalj and Balša. However, Sandalj, as we have seen, was soon involved in a series of major wars in Bosnia that prevented him from providing anything more than diplomatic support for Balša.

Balša strove to develop close relations with his neighbors, except for Venice, for which he retained his hatred. He divorced his wife, the daughter of Nikola Thopia. Nikola had ceased to be a worthwhile ally because Theodore Musachi had captured him in a skirmish, probably in late 1411, and retained him as a prisoner. In late 1412 or early 1413, Balša married the daughter of Koja Zakarija, who had already given another daughter to one of the Djuraševići. Balša gave Koja Budva to administer. Released from jail in July 1413, Nikola Thopia returned to Kroja, which he again administered for the Venetians; but very soon thereafter, certainly by early 1415, he died.

Whereas Mehemed I respected his treaties with Byzantium and Serbia and did not resume attacks on them, he considered the Albanian-Zetan region fair game. Seeking to restore the Ottomans to their former strong position in the area, he launched a large attack thither in 1415. His forces took Kroja and
several lesser forts in the area. Under this threat, Balša reaffirmed his vassalage to the sultan, and the other nobles in the area, including the Dukagjins, set about establishing good relations with the local Turkish commanders.

By this time, as the Balšić and Thopia families declined (the latter especially after the death of Nikola), two other families rose in importance. The Arianiti (Araniti), dominating the interior behind Valona, became the major family in the south. And the Castriots, led by John Castriot, had already begun their rise that was to make them by about 1420 the major family in northern Albania. In the 1390s the Castriots, holding territory between the upper Mati and upper Drin, had begun pressing to the north where they came into conflict with the Dukagjins. By 1415 John Castriot held Tirane and the territory north of that town to the Mati, if not beyond it, and controlled, or had suzerainty over tribes controlling, lands almost as far east as Prizren. How much of the lower Mati he then held is not known. It is likely that he gained its mouth and access to the sea only between 1417 and 1420.

It is possible that John Castriot also accepted Ottoman suzerainty in 1415, though Ducellier dates his submission to 1417. For in 1417 the Ottomans were again active in Albania. Mrkše Žarković had died in 1415, leaving the administration of Valona to his widow, Rugina. She was not to hold it long. The Ottomans took Valona in 1417, including its citadel of Kanina. The same campaign also gave the Ottomans Berat and Përj. Rugina sought asylum with Balša, who soon—by 1419—gave her Budva to rule.

Meanwhile, probably between 1417 and 1420, John Castriot, capitalizing on his good relations with his Ottoman suzerain, expanded down the Mati to the coast and took control of the territory between the mouth of the Mati and the Erzen River. Besides apparent Turkish approval to do this, he was able to take advantage of a power vacuum in this area. The Thopia family, once dominant there, had declined greatly after the death of the energetic Nikola Thopia in about 1415. Moreover, the Jonima family, which also had been active in the region of the Mati mouth but was already greatly weakened by the end of the fourteenth century, disappears from the sources, and possibly from a role in the area, after 1409. Thus John Castriot was able to move coastward. Possibly he acquired some of the Jonima lands shortly after 1409; however, John’s major gains along the coast seem to have come after the death of Nikola Thopia and after his own submission to the Turks.

Now that John Castriot’s lands reached the sea, new economic possibilities emerged; for the first time he was in a position to market the timber he had in abundance. In 1420 he issued a charter to Dubrovnik, allowing that town’s merchants to trade in his lands, which stretched from Sufada, on the coast between the Mati and Erzen rivers, inland as far as Prizren. Some scholars believe that he also occupied the Cape of Rodoni at this time. Ducellier, however, rejects this view. He argues that the territory north of Durazzo up to and including that Cape traditionally belonged to Durazzo; taken by Venice along with Durazzo in 1392, the Cape was retained by Venice, according to Ducellier, until the later Castriot leader Skanderbeg took it in about
1450. John Castriot, who did his best to maintain good relations with Venice, had accepted Venetian suzerainty and citizenship in 1413 and was doing his best to retain these cordial ties after he had had to become a Turkish vassal between 1415 and 1417; he was not likely to have endangered these relations by trying to seize the Cape from Venice.

By 1421, if not a year or so earlier, the Ottomans had acquired direct control over central Albania. They set about assigning much of this territory as military fiefs (timars) to their supporters. A 1431 census shows that about 80 percent of these timars were awarded to Turkish colonists from Anatolia and about 20 percent to native Albanians. Throughout the 1420s Turkish authorities in this newly conquered region had to face considerable resistance from the local Albanians. To the north of this annexed territory the Castriots, Thopias, and Dukagjins were able to retain most of their lands by accepting Ottoman suzerainty. The Musachi family, much of whose land lay in the conquered territory, suffered considerable eclipse.

Balkša’s differences with Venice continued. Neither side believed the other was observing all the clauses of the 1412/13 peace treaty; each felt the other owed reparations for destruction carried out during the war, and Venice seems to have continued to interfere with the rights and privileges of the Orthodox Church in the Skadar region. Then a new issue emerged. The Hoti, a large Albanian tribe living north of Skadar, quarreled with the neighboring Mataguzi tribe over pasture lands. Balša, called on to judge the dispute, found for the Mataguzi. The Hoti, ignoring his judgment, then seized the disputed lands. The Mataguzi, with the permission of Balša, attacked the Hoti, killing four Hoti tribesmen in the fracas. When Balša ignored Hoti complaints about the Mataguzi attack, the Hoti leaders went to the Venetian governor in Skadar and offered to serve him. In the agreement the Hoti promised the Venetians that in return for a stipend they would provide three hundred warriors, eighty of whom would be mounted, for Venetian campaigns in the area. This in effect lost Balša control over the territory in the Skadar border region controlled by the Hoti that until then had nominally been his. Balša complained to Venice, which by treaty was bound to return any deserters to him. The Venetians ignored Balša’s complaints and a few skirmishes followed. After launching a large raid into Venetian territory in December 1417, Balša began planning a major campaign to restore his authority over the Hoti by force, while they prepared to resist. Trade issues exacerbated the quarrel with Venice, and Balša began laying plans to seize all Venetian merchants in his lands. Tensions and small-scale fighting continued through 1418.

Finally in March 1419 Balša launched a major attack that overran the Skadar district and laid siege to Drivast; that town fell in May and its citadel was starved into surrendering in August. Involved at that time in serious warfare against Hungary and the towns that had remained loyal to Hungary in northern Dalmatia, Venice had few troops available for a campaign in Zeta. The Venetians offered a large award to anyone who would assassinate Balša. They also tried, it seems without success, through bribes to persuade the
Dukagjins and Castriots to go to war against Baša. Baša meanwhile moved along the Bojana, taking Sveti Srdj while a couple of his ships took up positions on the Bojana and closed off all movement along the river. Baša’s success was short-lasting. He was already seriously ill. A surgeon from Dubrovnik visited him from April to the end of June 1420. Also in the spring of 1420 Kotor, which for years, to escape the demands of its greedy neighbors, had been attempting to submit to Venice (always to be rebuffed), renewed the offer. This time Venice agreed. Sandalj, at war in Bosnia, could do no more than protest. Moreover, the Venetians, by then having been successful in their northern Dalmatian campaign (securing their control over Split and Trogir), now had ships available for the south. These sailed into the Bojana and soon opened that river for traffic again. Warfare along the river heated up. The Venetians also sent a naval squadron into the harbor of Budva. Rugina surrendered the town to them at once, making no attempt to resist. She then departed (with the town’s treasury) for Dubrovnik. Kotor, with Venetian blessing, then actively began to assert its control over various villages on the Gulf of Kotor. Baša, occupied with the fighting on the Bojana, was not able to respond to the threat to his lands on the Gulf of Kotor until the winter of 1420–21. At that point he and the Djuraševići arrived there in force. Their appearance caused the villagers of Grbalj to rise up against Kotor. The rebels burned property in villages remaining loyal to Kotor.

But Baša was in no position to lead a major campaign. He was much sicker and, realizing that death was approaching, was concerned with his succession. His one son had died as an infant. His eldest daughter—who was to marry Sandalj’s nephew Stefan Vukčić in 1424—was then only about thirteen. So, while his officials were carrying on unsuccessful negotiations with Venice, Baša, extremely ill, took a rigorous trip to visit his uncle Stefan Lazarević, in Serbia. Realizing that only Stefan would be strong enough to defend Zeta against Venice, which now seems to have been confident that it was about to obtain control over the whole Zetan coast, Baša offered his state to Stefan. Then on 28 April 1421, shortly after his arrival at the Serbian court, Baša died.

The Venetians immediately stepped up their efforts and in May 1421 they took Drivast, Ulcinj, and, it seems, Bar. The Zetan commanders seem to have yielded these cities quickly, offering little or no resistance. The most powerful local figures, the Djuraševići, took advantage of Baša’s death without an heir on the ground to take over various interior lands and villages belonging to the Balšići and to press into Upper Zeta. And soon thereafter they also moved into the Gulf of Kotor and took over Grbalj and the Svetomiholjska Metohija, both of which Kotor claimed for itself. Baša’s widow, a daughter of Koja Zakarija, unable to resist these seizures, returned to her family in Danj.

Since the Venetians did not recognize Stefan Lazarević’s inheritance and were holding onto the Zetan coast and much of Baša’s former territory on the Bojana, including Drivast, Stefan had to take action. In August 1421 he led
his armies into Zeta. Unlike Byzantium, which, on Mehmed I’s death in 1421, had tried to support a pretender to the Ottoman throne against Murad II, Stefan had immediately recognized Murad and thus for a while continued to enjoy peaceful relations with the Turks. Stefan immediately took Sveti Srdj and Drivast; he then moved to the coast and took Bar in November. Leaving deputies to administer and defend his Zetan possessions, Stefan, after also concluding a truce with Venice, returned to Serbia. As a result of this campaign Venice found itself holding in Zeta only the towns of Skadar, Ulcinj, and Budva—plus Kotor, which though it had submitted was autonomous—with most of the countryside around these towns supporting the Serbs. And there seems to have been considerable unrest inside the town of Skadar. Stefan sent an envoy to Venice to demand the surrender of these coastal towns to him. When Venice in early 1422 refused, war resumed.

Stefan’s troops returned to Zeta, probably in June 1422, and besieged Skadar. And by blockading the Bojana, his troops prevented Venice from shipping troops or supplies to Skadar. Venice retained its possessions through that year, though it seemed only a matter of time until they would be lost. But then, assisted by some local Albanians, the Venetians defeated the Serbs in battle at Skadar in December 1422; this victory broke the Serbian siege. Next, in January 1423, through bribes and deals the Venetians won over the Pampriot tribe on the Bojana River. Thus Venice’s position in this part of Zeta greatly improved. Soon thereafter Venice through more bribes won over a series of tribal leaders in or near Zeta who until then had been loyal to the despot: namely, the local Paštrovići, John Castriot (who by now had extended his dominance to the outskirts of Alessio), the Dukagjinis, and Koja Zakarija. Though none of these figures actually mobilized to help Venice militarily, their men were removed from the ranks of Stefan’s forces and thus became a potential danger to the despot.

The Paštrovići held an assembly (zbor) in April 1423 that accepted the terms offered by Venice and ratified a treaty. The tribe agreed to defend, without pay, the Kotor region and lands as far south as Bar and its hinterland. If called upon to fight in the Skadar region, the Paštrovići were obliged to serve free for only eight days, after which they were to be paid for this service. Accepting Venetian suzerainty, they also agreed to pay one perpera per hearth to Venice. In exchange Venice promised it would continue to respect the tribe’s existing customary institutions. For example, each year the tribe held an assembly by which it chose from its midst an elder, entitled a vojvoda, who kept order, exercised tribal and local judicial functions, and led the tribe in battle. These institutions—the tribal assembly and elected vojvoda—were to be allowed to continue, and Venice promised to confirm the vojvoda the tribe elected. The tribe’s present lands were guaranteed and this guarantee was extended to include lands formerly held by the tribe but now lost, should the tribe regain them. Thus Venice recognized the tribe’s rights to all the land it had held at the time of Balša’s death. Venice also recognized the tribe’s right to retain pronoias held from the last two Balšići in the vicinity of
Budva. Finally, Venice granted tribesmen the right of asylum in Venetian territory.

Excepted from the treaty were the lands of those Paštrovići who remained loyal to the despot. Thus the treaty did not recognize the tribal land as a permanent unit but endorsed its division. The annual tribal assembly (zbor) was to be held in Venetian territory and therefore the voivoda it elected had binding authority only over the Paštrovići in Venetian territory (i.e., in the lands of the Paštrovići who had submitted to Venice and who thereby had converted their personal lands into Venetian territory). The leader of the pro-Venetian faction, Radić Grubačević, was elected voivoda in 1423; he was re-elected each year into the early 1430s. By the late 1420s he headed what had clearly become the most powerful clan within the tribe. He received as voivoda a monthly salary from Venice (or from Kotor, which, of course, had by then accepted Venetian suzerainty).

Though recognized as traditional, the tribally elected voivoda was actually a recent innovation. Dušan and the Balšići, the previous overlords of the area, had sent a kefalia or voivoda into the region to oversee the tribesmen. This outside overseer had presided over a court/council of elders/judges drawn from the local chiefs. When central authority declined subsequently, the tribesmen became in fact independent and started electing their own voivoda to be the regional tribal and military leader. The Venetians were never to try to impose a governor over them but allowed this recent innovation to continue.

There were twelve recognized Paštrovići clans who attended the zbor. Presumably there were more than twelve families, but the other families, not recognized as noble council clans, had to affiliate themselves as clients to one of the twelve main clans. Each clan had a headman—a chief—who usually represented his clan at the zbor, which was attended by one member of each clan. In addition to the voivoda, the zbor elected four judges who also served for a year until the next zbor. By the end of the fifteenth century the tribe had come to have two voivodas, each elected, still for a year, by the assembly. Presumably this second voivoda emerged as a compromise to prevent the walk-out of a dissident faction within the tribe. Major quarrels and quarrels between clans tended to be settled by the assembly rather than by the voivoda.

The Paštrovići had no urban centers in their land, though they had at least two forts. They were peasants and shepherds, holding small plots of not very fertile land. They were also fine warriors. And since they had little wealth and were able to provide fine soldiers to Venice, which was always short of manpower in the Zetan-Albanian region where few Italians wanted to serve, the Venetians were willing to leave the tribesmen to their own customs. However, it seems the Venetians did all they could to support Grubačević and the pro-Venetian faction within the Paštrovići to help it retain its dominance over the tribe.\textsuperscript{11}

Having strengthened their position, the Venetians then in the spring of 1423 took Sveti Srdj. With the tide turning somewhat in Venice’s favor, the
despot, who had spent large sums of money on the war without achieving much success, became willing to negotiate. Venice also wanted to end the war. Not only had it spent a lot on the war, but, by preventing trade, the warfare had cost it much commercial income. Moreover, the Ottoman civil war between Murad II and the pretender Mustafa was over, which meant that Murad could now provide aid against Venice to his loyal vassal Stefan, who had supported Murad against Mustafa. Stefan, meanwhile, delegated his ally George Branković to manage the Zetan war, including negotiations, for him. George appeared in Zeta for this purpose with eight thousand horsemen. To strengthen his position George assigned a large portion of his troops to the Bojana, where they were in a position to cut off supplies and Venetian access to Skadar.

In August 1423 George and the Venetians concluded a treaty—the Peace of Sveti Srdj, where the final negotiations occurred—which put an end to the fighting. Noticeable among George’s witnesses were two Turkish officials. The treaty allowed Venice to keep Skadar, Ulcinj, and Kotor. Stefan Lazarević was allowed to keep Drivast and Bar. Venice also promised to turn over to Serbia the Grbalj region, which the Venetians seem to have retaken, and Budva. Thus Serbia would again reach the Adriatic. The Venetians also agreed to pay to Stefan the thousand ducat annual payment for Skadar which they had regularly made to the Balšići. The two sides agreed on a prisoner exchange and to henceforth return to the other fleeing criminals. The Bojana River remained Venetian. The Serbs were to have no rights on the river and could not build forts along it. Both sides, moreover, promised to raze their existing forts on the river. It was also agreed that after the territorial settlement, vassals of one state who found they had land in the other’s territory should be able to keep and make use of such land.

Various other issues were left up in the air, such as establishing the borders between Serbia and Venice in various places—in particular, how much territory beyond the walls was to go with the above-mentioned towns and how much territory held by tribesmen was therefore to be recognized as belonging to the state holding suzerainty over them. Venice was especially concerned about the lands near Skadar taken by a certain Andrew (Andrej) of Hum. Since he was loyal to the despot, his—and through him Serbia’s—possession of these lands seemed a threat to Venice’s hold on Skadar. On the other hand, how much of the Paštrović’s land was to go to Venice? (This was a touchy matter since their defection had given Venice considerable territory above the Gulf of Kotor that Stefan had no desire to lose.) Furthermore, Stefan insisted that Kotor, despite its defection, still owed the Balšić tribute, which should now be paid to him. Sandalj, too, since April 1422, had been objecting to Kotor’s defection and demanding its return to his overlordship. When the town and Venice ignored his complaints, Sandalj banned his Vlachs from trading in Kotor, which considerably damaged the town’s economic position. However, under pressure from Bosnia’s King Tvrtko II, who was trying to improve his relations with Venice, Sandalj gave in and concluded in
November 1423 a treaty with Venice in which he renounced his claim to Kotor. However, Stefan Lazarević had no intention of yielding on this issue.

Though no further fighting broke out, the Venetians and Serbs continued to quarrel over these various unresolved issues. In addition certain items they had agreed upon were not carried out. For example, Venice did not turn Budva and Grbalj over to Serbia. Finally a major conference was held, resulting in a new treaty that was signed on 22 July 1426. Serbia was again represented by George Branković. Orbini claims that Stefan had actually granted Serbia’s part of Zeta to George in 1425. We have no confirmation of this statement in any contemporary document. However, it is a fact that George was extremely active in the region; he had been Serbia’s representative in Zeta and in the negotiations about it since 1423. By this new treaty Grbalj was given to Kotor. Kotor remained Venetian and was no longer obliged to pay the “Balšić tribute” to any Slavic ruler. Budva was now to be yielded to the despot. Most of the tribal lands under dispute near Skadar were to go to Venice to secure the town’s defense. Most of the Paštrović land was to become Venetian—though the land of those Paštrovići who had remained loyal to the despot after the 1423 zbor was to remain Serbian. And most of the disputed territory around Bar was to go to the despot.

A further clarification was negotiated in November 1426 by which the two sides defined the territorial borders around the towns of Skadar, Drivast, Ulcinj, Kotor, Budva, and the Paštrović lands. By it Venice was recognized as holding all of Lake Skadar and all of the islands on the lake. The Venetians also promised to recognize the Serbian Metropolitan of Zeta’s authority over Orthodox bishops and over believers in their Zetan cities and to respect the rights of the Orthodox. The Serbs promised to respect the rights of Catholics in their Zetan cities and to recognize the Archbishop of Bar’s authority over them. The Serbs also agreed to turn over to Venice income taken by them since the 1423 treaty from the lands assigned by that treaty to Venice but retained beyond 1423 by the Serbs, and Venice was to begin at once to pay the Skadar tribute. As a result Serbia held the whole coast from, but not including, Kotor to the Bojana, except for Ulcinj and the Paštrović lands.

The Orthodox Metropolitan of Zeta, whose residence lay in a monastery at Prevlaka on the Gulf of Kotor, clearly had had considerable difficulty in maintaining himself in this territory under the authority of Venice’s Kotor. Evidence exists that Catholic propaganda and proselytism were encouraged among the local Orthodox, and various Orthodox priests were expelled from their communities; as a result certain Orthodox churches and some Orthodox Church lands were taken over by the Catholics. These acts were allegedly carried out not as attacks upon Orthodoxy but as measures against political opponents of the Venetian-supported government of Kotor. The atmosphere clearly was not conducive for the metropolitan to maintain his residence there; thus, it is not surprising that shortly after Budva was restored to the Serbs in 1426, the metropolitan took up residence there.

This 1426 treaty was observed; so for a short time merchants from
Venice, Dubrovnik, Kotor, and the other coastal towns were able to move freely around and to trade in this area and also to pass through it into Serbia. As a result the economy of the whole region briefly improved. However, needless to say, many of the new treaty’s provisions were not observed. The Venetian governor in Skadar refused to pay the Skadar tribute. The sale of salt soon became a major cause of dispute. The population of Grbalj objected to being placed under Kotor and staged a revolt. And certain Paštrović clans which had agreed to submit to Venice in 1423 now were no longer willing to do so. In fact, a pro-Serb faction emerged among the so-called Venetian Paštrovići and actively opposed the general tribal policy agreed upon at the tribal assemblies (zbors) of 1430 and 1431. Radič Crnac, the leader of the pro-Serb faction, was in fact seized and sent to a jail in Kotor during the meeting of the 1431 assembly. Pressure from his supporters led to his release after twenty-five days, but he was not allowed to leave the town of Kotor for some time. Eventually peace was mediated between the two factions within the Paštrovići, and Grubačević remained as vojvoda, pushing a pro-Venetian policy. These issues dividing the Serbs and Venetians, though at times causing fracases, did not lead to war. Further negotiations between Venice and Serbia followed, resulting in another agreement in 1435 between George Branković, by then the ruler of Serbia, and Venice. In this agreement the Serbs gave in to Venice on most issues, but the Venetians did recognize that Serbia’s town of Budva was to have extensive rights to trade in salt.

Despite Venice’s gains, most of Zeta, in particular the interior regions—excluding the territory around Skadar and along the Bojana—was now legally Serbian. Moreover, most of the nobles and tribesmen in Zeta—led by the Djuraševići—were willing to submit to the ruler of Serbia. Yet owing to Zeta’s distance from Serbia and owing to the fact that the Branković lands lay between Stefan’s realm and Zeta, Serbia’s control over Zeta was very loose and the local nobles managed their own affairs. This led to increased power and independence for the Djuraševići, under the family head George (Djuradj), who, as noted, nominally expressed his loyalty to Stefan. George’s policies paved the way for the family’s even greater success under his son Stefan, who, as we shall see, revived the name Crnojević.

Stefan Lazarević’s control over Zeta was not threatened by any of Zeta’s neighbors. Stefan now had good relations with George Branković, who was soon, in 1427, to succeed him. He also had good relations with Sandalj, his brother-in-law, who held the lands to the north of Zeta. None of the Albanian lords to the south were prepared to challenge Serbia’s overlordship over Zeta. And though Serbia and Venice had many differences over Zetaan issues, Venice did not threaten Serbia’s position in the interior of Zeta. Thus the only serious threat to Serbia’s position in Zeta was to come from the Turks.

The Turks, meanwhile, in 1423, directed a major offensive into Albania. If he had not already done so earlier, John Castriot now accepted Ottoman suzerainty; so did the Arianiti in the south. Both sent their sons to Adrianople as hostages. One of these young men was to rise to great prominence in later
life. This was John Castriot’s son George, born in about 1404, who, soon after his arrival in Adrianople in 1423, became a Muslim, taking the name Iskendar and becoming known later as Skanderbeg. He quickly won the favor of the sultan and served him loyally in campaigns both in Europe and Asia. He did well and rose rapidly to become a high-ranking Ottoman military commander.

**Stefan Lazarević’s Last Years in Serbia**

Faced with so many actual and potential foreign threats, Stefan took measures to beef up the defense of his state. He divided the territory of Serbia into a series of military districts, each called an authority (vlast) under a governor, bearing the title vojvoda, who was a military commander. The local inhabitants were mobilized as a militia, with the obligation to appear armed on call. A series of new fortresses were erected, and new taxes were instituted to support these defense efforts.

This military districting reform was put into effect throughout Stefan Lazarević’s realm except, as Dinić has shown, for the territory that made up the Branković holding in Kosovo. The Ottomans, already in possession of two fortresses in that territory and maintaining an active presence there—to keep the route open between their center in Skopje and Bosnia—almost certainly would not have permitted the establishment in Kosovo of a more effective Serbian military system. Zeta was placed under a single vojvoda, resident in Bar, who, in effect, was the despot’s governor for that region.

As a result of these reforms the vojvodas became the dominant figures in the major towns and soon had usurped many of the functions of the kefalías who until then had governed the towns. The kefalías, many of whom had previously exercised both civil and military authority, were now increasingly limited to civil functions and, as the military took precedence, had to act in accordance with the wishes of the vojvoda. Not surprisingly, the importance of the kefalías declined and in some places the office died out altogether.

Moreover, in need of cash, the state awarded fewer immunity grants to the estates of monasteries and the nobility, and some of the immunities previously awarded were reduced. It was now regularly expected that all villages and estates, including those of monasteries, would supply manpower to serve in the army.

After 1413 Stefan skillfully managed to avoid conflict with his powerful Turkish and Hungarian neighbors by submitting to the suzerainty of both. And until 1425 neither overlord seems to have made serious objections to his submission to the other. However, in 1425 the Ottomans seem to have become suspicious of Stefan’s increasingly close ties with Sigismund. As a result they launched an attack upon Serbia that pillaged the territory between Niš and Krusevac. The Hungarians sent troops to Stefan’s support; as a result he was able to negotiate with the Turks to procure their withdrawal.

Taking advantage of this Ottoman raid into Serbia, the Bosnians attacked
Srebrnica in 1425. However, when the Turks quickly withdrew, Stefan was able to take his army and drive the Bosnians away from Srebrnica, which until his arrival had been defended not only by a Serb garrison but also by the Ragusan colonists there. Having driven off the Bosnians, the Serbs then raided into Bosnian territory.

According to Stefan’s biographer Constantine the Philosopher, Stefan, who by 1426 was about fifty years old, had long suffered from an illness in the leg. When it grew worse he became worried about the succession, for he had no children. Constantine then describes his decision to make George Branković his successor, the recognition of this decision by a council at Srebrnica, his successful repulse of a Turkish attack through diplomacy and of a Bosnian attack on Srebrnica through military action, and then his death. In addition to Constantine’s brief account we have two slightly different texts from the sixteenth century of an agreement made between Stefan and Sigismund at Tati (Totis) in Hungary. No contemporary source or any later narrative source mentions an agreement between the two rulers near the end of Stefan’s reign. However, the contents of the agreement—as written in the sixteenth-century copies—are reasonable; and since Sigismund was Stefan’s overlord and since Stefan had cordial relations with Sigismund, it made sense for Stefan to obtain confirmation from Sigismund for his succession plans. Thus most scholars believe that the Tati meeting and agreement occurred, though it is possible that the surviving document is not a verbatim text.

Moreover, the sequence of events occurring in Stefan’s last years (1426–27) is not certain. Did the events occur in the sequence in which Constantine gave them, as they are listed above? If so, and if the Tati meeting did take place, then where in that sequence does it belong? Did Stefan go to Hungary with his plans and, having obtained Sigismund’s approval, then present them to the Serbian council in Srebrnica, which we know met in July 1426, as Radonić believes? Or did the Tati meeting follow the Serbian council and reflect Sigismund’s confirmation of what the Serbs had already agreed to?

In the absence of further information from the sources, it is impossible to resolve the problem. Thus, relying on probability, I shall follow Radonić and hypothesize that the Tati meeting preceded the Srebrnica council. Since Stefan had cordial relations with Sigismund and there was no reason for Sigismund to oppose Stefan’s plans, in the interest of realizing these plans, it made sense diplomatically to clear them first with his overlord, a touchy individual, rather than face him with a fait accompli which might have caused Sigismund to oppose Branković upon Stefan’s death.

Thus we can postulate the following sequence of events: Since Stefan had no son or obvious heir, a struggle for succession could have occurred in Serbia. Fearing Turkish meddling in such an event, he wanted to ensure a quick, smooth succession. Having decided on his nephew George Branković, he wanted to prevent the development of any opposition to his choice. (And such opposition might reasonably be expected; after all, before their peace in 1411, there had been twenty years of enmity between Stefan’s and George’s
families, and many of Stefan’s nobles might still have felt hostility toward Branković.) Besides the choice of his successor and paving the way for his succession, Stefan had to face territorial issues, which could not be decided without Sigismund’s agreement. His lands were in two parts: his Maćva lands, with Beograd, received from Sigismund for his own lifetime and his patrimonial lands of Serbia. From the time of reception the former, and from about 1411 the latter, had been held under Hungarian suzerainty. Stefan also had large landholdings inside of Hungary that he obviously could not dispose of without Sigismund’s agreement. So—following the text of the Tati agreement and Radonić’s reconstruction of events—Stefan left George to administer Serbia and went to Tati in May 1426 where he met Sigismund. After discussions they drew up an agreement that (1) recognized the vassal status of Raška (Serbia) to Hungary, (2) recognized George Branković as heir to Raška and admitted him to the ranks of the high Hungarian nobility, the barons, (3) agreed that the lands of Maćva, with the fortresses of Beograd and Golubac, were to revert to Sigismund for his disposition, and (4) promised that George would take on the obligations of a Hungarian vassal (e.g., attendance at the annual diet, military aid to his lord, etc.) that had been borne by Stefan. No reference was made in the sixteenth-century text to Stefan’s properties in Hungary. Possibly they had been mentioned in the original, but later Hungarian copiers omitted reference to them so as not to give support to any Branković family claims to particular lands in Hungary at that time.

Stefan then returned to Serbia, and, strangely enough, chose an insecure border town, Srebrnica, to hold a great Serbian council of the nobility and clergy. Possibly this site was chosen to emphasize the Serbian character of this disputed town. At this council Stefan obtained Serbian recognition of George Branković’s succession. No mention is made of Maćva and Beograd in Constantine’s brief account of this meeting. Thus we have no evidence that the Serbs accepted the surrender of this northern territory to Hungary. Whether Stefan, chiefly concerned with winning approval for George, decided to ignore this issue or whether he tried but failed to obtain Serbian agreement to its surrender is not known.

Next comes the issue of the two military events mentioned by Constantine the Philosopher: the Turkish attack on Serbia and the Bosnian attack on Srebrnica. If we follow Constantine’s chronology, these two events followed the July 1426 Srebrnica council meeting. However, some scholars, like Radonić, want to place one or both of these military actions earlier, prior to the Srebrnica meeting. The Turks were active in the area during this whole period, raiding Bosnia during the summer of 1426 and departing from that country by early August. They could well have hit Serbia on their return east, though we have no source stating that they actually did so then. The Turks had every reason to be angry at Stefan Lazarević at the time for his agreement with Sigismund—assuming, of course, that the Tati meeting preceded the Srebrnica council. Thus it seems likely that Constantine is right in dating the
threatened Turkish attack after the Srebrnica council meeting. According to Constantine, Stefan defused this threat by diplomacy.

Meanwhile in the spring of 1427 the miners of Srebrnica revolted against Stefan’s town governor, killing him in the process. The other inhabitants of the town immediately joined in the rebellion. Whether this reflected their general dislike of Serbian rule or whether they were unhappy at particular Serbian policies of the moment is not known. Stefan immediately sent forces thither that brutally suppressed the rebellion.

Constantine the Philosopher’s text, meanwhile, lists after Stefan’s above-mentioned success against the Turks a military defense of Srebrnica against the Bosnians. If his list is intended to be in chronological order, then this “attack” occurred between the fall of 1426 and July 1427 when Stefan died. Is mention of this “attack” a misleading reference to the local rebellion? Or did the Bosnians send troops, whose appearance was omitted in other sources, to support the rebels? Or is this a misplaced reference to the Bosnian attack on Srebrnica made previously in 1425? Since we lack the sources to provide answers to these questions, we must admit that we do not know whether there was a single Bosnian attack on Srebrnica in these years, occurring in 1425 before Tati and the Srebrnica council, or whether there were actually two Bosnian attempts directed at Srebrnica, with the second one occurring in late 1426 or early 1427, most probably in the spring of 1427 at the time of the local uprising. In any case the Bosnians failed to take Srebrnica. Then in July 1427 Stefan Lazarević died.

Constantine the Philosopher describes the wild grief and great mourning of the Serbian population at the death of Stefan.

Besides his political role, Stefan had been very active culturally. He built several monasteries including the spectacular fortified monastery of Resava (Manasija). The monastery, begun in 1407, according to Constantine, was built specifically as a center for the Hesychasts, showing the ruler held them in great honor. He endowed Resava generously with books and icons. Kašanin points out that Resava has frequently been called the cultural center of Serbia during this period by scholars, who use the term Resava School for literary and artistic works of this period. Kašanin sees this as a misnomer; other than housing the usual activity of translating and copying religious manuscripts, Resava was not a major literary center. And since its literary efforts were narrow and traditional, it certainly was not a representative center for this period, which was important for having a greater variety of literary genres than any earlier period in Serbian history. The center of Serbian culture at this time, where original creativity could be found, was the new capital, Beograd.14

During Stefan’s reign Serbia enjoyed a literary revival, spurred on by various Bulgarian and Greek emigrés who had fled their homelands after Ottoman occupation. This revival produced both translations from the Greek and original works. The leading literary figure, Constantine the Philosopher,
who wrote, as we have seen, tracts on language and orthography as well as his famous biography of Stefan Lazarević, was of Bulgarian origin. Stefan Lazarević was both a participant in and a patron of literature. In fact he himself carried out translations from the Greek as well as original compositions. Two of his works, a panegyric poem to his father Knez Lazar and a complex poem on love full of literary devices and acrostics, survive. Under him we find, in comparison to other reigns, the largest number of active writers and the most translations carried out. We also find variety. In addition to the usual works on theology, we find original chronicles, annals, and travelogues, as well as translations of popular romances, knightly tales, and poems. And like other rich and cultured rulers of his time, Stefan commissioned a major anthology.\footnote{15}

That Marko and Vuk Branković were rivals of Lazar’s dynasty and that the literary figures who produced the surviving chronicles were affiliated with Stefan’s court probably explains why the chronicle tradition slights Marko’s and the Brankovići’s careers. The literati’s and the Church’s support of Lazar’s dynasty in building Lazar’s cult also created the popular tradition making Kosovo more significant than Marica, the battle that in fact was more significant and in which Marko’s father and uncle died. The chronicles at this time also created genealogical myths to support the legitimacy of Stefan Lazarević’s dynasty. Earlier genealogical works, written during the reigns of various Nemanjići, had simply begun their genealogies with Nemanja, the founding figure. Now chronicles argued that Constantine the Great’s rival Licinius was a Serb who married Constantine’s sister, and from a truncated tree they made Nemanja a descendant of that union, thereby linking him to the Roman Empire. Having transformed Nemanja into a figure of universal history, they then made Lazar’s wife and Stefan Lazarević’s mother, Milica, a descendant of Nemanja through his son Vukan, and thereby connected Stefan Lazarević to the Nemanjić dynasty. Associated with the cult of Lazar as well, Stefan had the best of both possible worlds and a strong ideological foundation to advance against any would-be usurpers like the Brankovići.

**George Branković’s Succession**

After Stefan’s death, George Branković succeeded to the Serbian throne. He did not at once succeed to the despot’s title. For the first two years of his reign, he simply called himself lord (gospodin). Then in May 1429 a Byzantine envoy, bringing him the proper insignia, installed him as despot.

George’s succession was greeted by several major complications. First, the Turks were to attack him. Second, he, or his advisors, was unhappy about restoring Serbia’s recent capital, Beograd, to Sigismund; this caused Sigismund to come with his army to Beograd. Sigismund arrived there a little over a month after Stefan’s death, suggesting that he did not trust George to carry out the Tati agreement. To avoid a confrontation and bad relations, Sigismund made it seem that his concern was to prevent the Turks from acquiring this
key fortress. For, taking advantage of Stefan’s death, they had already invaded Serbia. Sigismund’s acquisition of his fortress clearly was not easy. Constantine the Philosopher says the commander of the fortress refused to let anyone into the town until George himself arrived. And Sigismund’s dated documents from this period, from 17 September to 30 October 1427, are dated “near Beograd” (i.e., at his camp). Only on 31 October is a document dated in Beograd. At the same time that Sigismund was impatiently waiting outside of Beograd, the Turks were actively plundering the Serbian countryside and besieging Novo Brdo, Krusevac, and several other fortified towns.

George arrived at Beograd at some point in October. Even so, it seems the town was still not surrendered to Sigismund. Instead a council meeting was held to discuss what answer to give Sigismund. According to a monk named Radoslav from a monastery near Golubac, the council was attended by clerics. Radonjić believes, therefore, that the Orthodox clergy was particularly opposed to turning the city over to the Catholic Hungarians. However, with the Turks in the land, it seemed sensible not to antagonize one’s strongest possible ally. So more practical heads prevailed, and with the consent of the council George ordered the surrender of Beograd to Sigismund.

The Hungarian historian Turosci says that in exchange for Beograd George received from Sigismund various towns and settlements in Hungary, some of which had previously been held by Stefan and some of which were newly granted to him by Sigismund. Sigismund then extracted an oath of loyalty from George and recognized him as the ruler of Serbia. Thus it seems that George was willing to surrender Beograd only as part of a deal, and Sigismund, knowing the Turks were in the vicinity and wanting to regain Beograd, a fortress vitally important for the defense of Hungary’s southern border, was willing to make all sorts of concessions to get it as quickly as possible. Golubac was also to be returned to Hungary. However, its commander refused to turn it over and soon thereafter surrendered it to the Turks.

Since George is thereafter documented holding parts of Mačva and appointing officials there, its disposition is a matter of scholarly controversy. Did Sigismund take back both Beograd and Mačva and then re-grant Mačva to George? Or by this time was Mačva divided, with part reverting to Sigismund and part being retained by George? For we have no way to be certain that the term “Mačva” in the fifteenth century referred to the exact same extensive territory that it had referred to in the thirteenth. Dinić argued that despite the Tati agreement all Mačva remained under the Brankovići. He also thought it likely that this retention of Mačva had Sigismund’s agreement. And subsequently Spremić has provided sufficient documentary evidence of Serbian activity in Mačva, including its northernmost parts, to demonstrate conclusively that Serbia held Mačva until the Turks conquered it in 1439.\(^{16}\)

The Ottomans continued their offensive against Serbia in 1428, acquiring in that year Niš, Krusevac, and Golubac. Despite their other successes, the Turks could not take the rich mining town of Novo Brdo, which resisted a siege of nearly a year. Sigismund led his forces to try to recover Golubac. He
was defeated, however, and forced to retreat. As a result of the 1428 campaign George had to accept Ottoman suzerainty, owing both an annual tribute of fifty thousand ducats and military service, with the stipulation that he had to lead his troops in person.

**Zeta and Albania, 1427–30**

While the Ottomans were raiding Serbia in 1427 and 1428, it seems the Džuraševići of Zeta took advantage of Serbia’s difficulties to more-or-less declare their independence. At about this time they revived the old name of Crnoci, from the broader family of which they seem to have been a part. This name had fallen into disfavor at the beginning of the century when Radić Crnojević had clashed with the Balšići.

In 1429, though at peace with Serbia, the Ottomans supported an attack upon Zeta. Supplied with some Turkish troops, the attack was led by a Stefan Balšić, probably a son of Constantine Balšić, who was seeking to acquire his family’s former lands. He quickly obtained military support from Koja Zaka-rija of Danj, who was angry at Serbia for pressuring Ragusan merchants to use a new trade route that by-passed Danj, where Koja had his customs station. Tanush Minor Dukagin also joined Balšić’s offensive, and the invaders took the town of Drivast, though the Serbian garrison was able to retain the citadel. Venice, realizing that its Zetan possessions were threatened also, wanted to make an alliance with Branković against Balšić.

The following year, 1430, after Thessaloniki fell, the sultan decided to take advantage of the newly re-opened route to Greece to concentrate on Epirus, whose ruler Carlo Tocco had just died. But Murad also had sufficient troops to spare for an attack upon Epirus’ neighbor Albania. Ottoman troops under Ishak beg, governor of Skopje, marched through Albania to besiege Durazzo. Durazzo, held by the Venetians, withstood the attack, but the countryside surrounding it was plundered. George Branković, having made peace with the Turks, had no interest in risking his position by making any sort of alliance with the Venetians, against whom the Turks were now directing their offensive. The Turks at the same time occupied the bulk of John Castriot’s lands, installing garrisons in at least two of his former fortresses while razing the rest. The Ottomans were angry at him, for, despite submitting to Ottoman suzerainty, he had retained close relations with Venice. Giving up Stefan Balšić’s cause, the Turks also turned against his allies. They took Danj, expelling Koja Zaka-rija. Nothing more is heard of him. They also occupied much or even most of the Dukagjin’s lands; the Dukagjin chiefs, Tanush Major and Nicholas, fled to Skadar. Enjoying at the moment good relations with Branković, the Turks allowed the Serbian garrison to regain control of Drivast for Serbia. As a result of the improvement in Branković’s fortunes and of the fact the Turks were supporting him, the Džuraševići-Crnocijević submitted again to Branković. We can be sure this submission was only
nominal. Not only did they exhibit no interest in Branković’s affairs, but there was no way he could exercise actual authority in the mountains of Zeta.

Serbia in the 1430s

George Branković erected the great fortress of Smederevo at the junction of the Morava and Danube rivers, which became Serbia’s last capital. This fortress was built rapidly, as might be expected with the Ottoman threat ever present. It was erected by forced levies at the expense of considerable suffering. The initial fortress was completed in 1430, with further walls erected later in the decade. His wife Irina (Jerina in Serbian) Cantacuzena, whom he had married in 1414, may well have had a major role in this undertaking. This would explain why she became known as the Cursed (Prokleta) Jerina in the Serbian epics. A lively market developed in Smederevo. A Ragusan colony quickly appeared, and a mint was also established there.

Many Greeks, associates of George’s Greek wife, including her brothers Thomas and George Cantacuzenus, who also lived at court, came thither in the 1430s and had considerable impact on Serbian court life and culture. Thus despite the death of Stefan Lazarević and the loss of Beograd to Hungary, Serbian culture did not suffer an eclipse. Smederevo and Novo Brdo—the latter had also been active culturally under Stefan—were centers of culture. And literati continued to turn out translations and new literary efforts of various genres: Church literature, chronicles, and anthologies containing a varied assortment of texts or fragments from texts. George Branković was an active patron and possessed a large library that in addition to Slavic works had Latin and Greek books as well; George knew both these languages and seems also to have had an understanding of Hungarian and Turkish. Unlike his predecessor, he liked music and supported an outstanding Church choir at Smederevo. He, however, was not a church builder, though he donated money to existing churches and also interested himself in their repair and renovation. His major building efforts, a sign of the times, were fortifications.

When Constantinople fell in 1453, many more Greeks came to Serbia. In fact George was to ransom from Turkish slavery large numbers of Greeks, both noblemen and Church figures, whom he welcomed to Smederevo. His court and its officials reflected the increasingly international character of Serbia, as it acquired emigrés from the neighboring lands falling under the Turks. At Novo Brdo his military commander was an Albanian, and his official representative in charge of customs was a Byzantine of the Cantacuzenus family. That representative’s son, Demetrius Cantacuzenus, remained in Novo Brdo after its fall to the Turks and in the 1460s and 1470s was a prominent cultural figure. Demetrius was to build churches, expand an already large library—containing works of and on Church fathers, religious topics, Greek classics, history, geography, natural science, and medicine—and be a significant Serbian-language writer on religious and moralistic sub-
jects. In Smederevo, George’s finance minister was from Dubrovnik and his chancellor was a native of Kotor who also had a large library in Smederevo that among its collection contained many works by Italian humanists. George also had Hungarians and even some Turks in his service.

George, as noted in our discussion on Bosnia, became involved in Bosnian affairs in the early 1430s, as a result of which his armies took a large chunk of Bosnian territory in Usora, including Zvornik and Teočak, along the Drina. These acquisitions served as a buffer between Srebrnica and the Bosnian kingdom and thus provided additional security for Srebrnica’s defense.

The Ottomans, meanwhile, beefed up the fortifications of Kruševac on the new Serbian border. That fortress became the center from which Ottoman raids were dispatched against Serbia. Under continual Ottoman pressure George finally, in 1433, had to agree to the marriage of his daughter Mara to Sultan Murad II. The marriage took place in Adrianople in September 1435. As her dowry the sultan received the districts of Toplica and Dubočica. These regions were most probably surrendered to Murad in 1433 at the time Mara’s engagement was concluded. Despite this marriage Ottoman raids continued, and by the late 1430s the Turks were occupying large chunks of territory. In 1437 Braničevo fell. And in 1438 the Ottomans took Ravanica, Borač, and Serbia’s Ostrovica.

During the 1430s George Branković tried to steer a middle course between the Turks and Hungarians. At the same time that he married Mara to Murad II, he married his other daughter, Catherine (also known as Cantacuzina), to Ulrich of Celje, one of Hungary’s leading noblemen. By 1439 Serbia, owing to the Ottoman annexations of 1437 and 1438, was greatly reduced in size. As a result, Sigismund’s successor Albert began putting pressure on George to yield Smederevo to Hungary, arguing that Hungary could defend it better against the Turks than George could. George may well have felt unable to defend it and have agreed to yield it. For, according to one account, he exchanged it for more property in Hungary, including Világosvár (Világos) and one hundred and ten villages. Smederevo fell to the Ottomans anyway, after a three-month siege, in August 1439.

Orbini gives a second, but similar, account of Smederevo’s fall. George went to Hungary to seek aid, leaving his son Gregory (Grgur) to defend it. No Hungarian help was forthcoming. The Turks attacked, and, despite the fortress’s strong walls, Gregory was forced to surrender the town because it lacked supplies to feed the garrison. Presumably relying on an oral tradition hostile to George’s wife Jerina, Orbini blames the lack of supplies on her; for wanting cash, she had sold the town’s grain reserves. Murad received Gregory kindly and granted him the former Branković lands in southern Serbia as a fief. Orbini states that Gregory was to share the rule of these lands with his brother Stefan, who had been living for some time at the Ottoman court as a hostage. Whether or not this was the way that Gregory acquired this appanage, we do know he was holding it the following year. In the course of 1439 the Ottomans also took Srebrnica and Mačva. At the end of the Ottoman
campaign of 1439 the Serbs retained only Novo Brdo, which again that year had withstood an Ottoman attack, and their territory in Zeta. The Turks were back in 1440. For six months they laid siege to Hungarian-held Beograd, but failed to take it.

**Zeta in the Late 1430s and Early 1440s**

Faced with the end of Serbia and holding only Novo Brdo, George Branković was still at least the suzerain of Zeta. In addition, the Turks had allowed his son Gregory, as their vassal, to govern the former Branković lands in southern Serbia. During the winter of 1440–41 George traveled through his son’s province to Zeta, whose territory the Turks had as yet made no attempt to annex, to try to organize some sort of resistance to save Serbia.

At this time the Djuraševići, once again known as the Crnojevići, were still the major family in Zeta. The older generation of this family seems to have died out, for the brothers George and Lješ are not heard of after 1435. George Djurašević had left four sons; the eldest and family leader was Stefan, who had played an active military and political role under his father for several decades. Stefan was married to Mara, the daughter of John Castriot and sister of Skanderbeg. By this time, with Serbia collapsing, the Crnojevići had for all practical purposes become the independent rulers of a good part of Zeta. However, they had not yet broken with George Branković. They received him cordially, even though they did not fall in with his plans. At the same time, foreseeing the end of Serbia, Stefan Vukčić Kosača of Bosnia laid plans to move against Zeta and annex as much of it as possible to his growing realm. Stefan Vukčić was already by this time negotiating with various nobles in Zeta. He was to be the greatest impediment to the creation of an independent state in Zeta under the Crnojevići.

Meanwhile in April 1441, accusing him—probably justly—of plotting against the sultan, the Ottomans removed Gregory Branković from his governorship. In May 1441, on the orders of the sultan, they blinded him and his brother Stefan for treason. Nothing was to come of their father’s efforts to raise resistance either. In June 1441 the last Serbian city, Novo Brdo, fell to the Turks. George Branković, on the coast at the time, still trying to organize some sort of resistance, soon moved to Hungary, where he took up residence on his lands there. Serbia, annexed by the Ottomans, disappeared as a state. Orbini provides a story which cannot be confirmed in the contemporary documents: He states that George was visiting Bar, when the Ottomans opened negotiations with the citizens of Bar to hand him over. Forced to flee, he went to Budva, where he found things no better. The Crnojevići, operating in the area, turned against him and planned to capture him. To avoid this George made a hasty escape on a Ragusan ship.

The fall of Serbia resulted in the interior of Zeta becoming independent under its various noblemen and tribesmen. For without a power base in Serbia to provide troops, George Branković had no means to assert his suzerainty
over or to try to establish himself as the ruler of even a small part of Zeta. The Crnojević set about trying to win over or subdue the other nobles of the land without losing the loyalty of those who had already submitted to them. They also had to prepare their territory against attack from Stefan Vukčić, from an extension of Venetian authority in the coastal regions, and also sooner or later from the Turks.

By this time Zeta was coming more and more to be called Crna Gora (Black Mountain or Montenegro), the name by which the region has been known from that time to the present. Though this name is associated with the state—if such a loose federation of tribesmen can be called a state—created by the Crnojević, the name is older and was originally associated with the Paštrović. In the late fourteenth century, the mountain system, including Lovćen, behind the Gulf of Kotor was coming to be called the Black Mountain. Much of this region in the early fifteenth century was dominated by the large Paštrović tribe, and soon the term came to refer to the territory that the tribe controlled. Early in the fifteenth century George Djurašević became active in this area as well, at times controlling much of it. Presumably his association with this region caused the name to become attached to the territory he controlled; then as his family extended its sway over a large part of Zeta, the name Crna Gora came more and more to replace the previous name, Zeta.

In 1441, after negotiations with various nobles of Zeta, Stefan Vukčić of Bosnia marched with his army into Upper Zeta, reaching the Morača River. Stefan Crnojević, who presumably had been unable to raise sufficient support to resist the Bosnians, seems to have decided to make the best of the situation. He came forward to treat with Stefan Vukčić. Crnojević, caught between Stefan Vukčić and Venice, may also have submitted to the former as the lesser of two evils. Stefan Vukčić was then occupying a region including five katuns; for Crnojević's submission this region was restored to the Crnojević brothers, with two katuns going to Stefan and one each to each of the other three brothers. Stefan Crnojević's son John was then handed over to Stefan Vukčić as a hostage. He spent the next decade at the Kosača court. Fear for the welfare of his son seems to have played a major role in Stefan Crnojević's policy thereafter.

Stefan Vukčić continued his march through Zeta, following a policy of extracting submissions from the Zetan nobles and tribesmen and then leaving them in possession of their lands. Among the many he won over in this way were the Albanian Mataguzi and the Bjelopavlić tribe. He soon temporarily won over most of the Paštrović clans. Their long-time vojvoda, Rudić Gručaević, disapproved of this and with his brothers remained faithful to Venice, where he went into exile, enjoying a large Venetian pension. His popularity seems to have declined. In the previous year, 1440, he had had to flee to Kotor when his clan had become involved in a blood feud. His return had been made possible by a tribal assembly that ended the feud through a mutual
exchange of kumstvos (God-fatherships). The Knez of Kotor also had a role in pacifying the feuding tribesmen, for the final peace had been signed in his palace.

Stefan Vukčić rapidly extended his territory down to the north shore of Lake Skadar; in much of this newly acquired territory he simply extracted homage and left the local nobles to rule. Once there Stefan Vukčić became ambitious to acquire the nominal coastal possessions of the Serbian despot: Bar, Budva, and Drivast. Venice had the same aim. Drivast had remained in the hands of the commander placed over the town by George Branković. This commander was still loyal to George. Budva had been turned over, prior to Serbia’s fall, to the Metropolitan of Zeta, who managed the city and supported himself on the income raised from the Svetomiholjska Metohija on the Gulf of Kotor. Bar was still nominally held by George, but it seems to have remained independent under its town council.

In March 1442, after wintering at home, Stefan Vukčić returned to Zeta and, accompanied by Stefan Crnojević, took Bar. He then moved to the district of Budva, which presumably was next on his agenda. Threatened by Stefan Vukčić’s alliance with Stefan Crnojević, which presumably would result in the Gulf of Kotor region’s being granted to Crnojević as a Kosača vassal, the Paštrovići began to resist Stefan Vukčić. They soon joined the Venetian camp. The Venetians, seeing their own ambitions in danger, stepped up their response. In the summer of 1442 they sent their fleet into the threatened area and opened up a major diplomatic offensive. These efforts soon won over the three younger Crnojević brothers, who seem to have believed their elder brother was becoming a puppet of Stefan Vukčić and thereby forfeiting the family’s dominant role in Zeta. As a result of the younger brothers’ defection, the two Stefans confiscated their lands in Upper Zeta. The three younger brothers merely strengthened their ties with Venice. Next, faced with the Venetian fleet, the Metropolitan of Zeta surrendered Budva to Venice in August 1442. The Venetians were to hold Budva until 1797. Kotor at once dispatched its forces to reassert itself along the gulf and seized the Svetomiholjska Metohija, the major source of income for the metropolitan. Venice next attacked and took, still in August 1442, Drivast. Winning over the local Pamaliot tribe, the Venetians established a strong position along the Bojana River. They began planning their attack upon Bar.

Stefan Vukčić, who had returned to Bosnia to defend his lands there against an attack from King Tvrtko II, hurried back to Zeta. He dispatched his troops through Venice’s Skadar territory, which they plundered. And once again he secured submissions from his supporters in the region between Onogošt (Nikšić) and Lake Skadar. Venice did not back down, however; it continued to woo the local nobles, agreeing to their retention of any territory Stefan Vukčić had previously awarded them. In this way it soon won over the Bjelopavlići. Various other tribal chiefs followed suit. In the late spring of 1443 Venice took Bar, which it was to hold until 1571. With this conquest the
Venetians took possession of the whole Zetan coast. And Stefan Vukčić found himself pushed back to his interior possessions in Upper Zeta. He was unable to turn to his Ottoman suzerain for aid, because the Ottomans were occupied with the Christian Crusade of 1443. This crusade, as we shall see, resulted in George Branković’s return to Serbia. The treaty concluded between crusaders and sultan at the campaign’s end in 1444 restored Serbia—defined as twenty-four named fortresses—as a state and recognized George as its ruler. George immediately accepted the sultan’s suzerainty again. The sultan recognized him not only as ruler of Serbia but also of Srebrnica and Zeta.

Stefan Vukčić, who had been operating partially in Branković’s name and also as a vassal of the sultan, had to go along with the sultan’s decision. Stefan Vukčić renounced his Zetan ambitions and surrendered Upper Zeta with Medun to George. Stefan even supported George militarily in his war for Srebrnica against the King of Bosnia. Most of the nobles of Upper Zeta soon submitted to George, though many of them may have done so only nominally; those submitting included Stefan Crnojević. However, faced with Stefan Vukčić’s withdrawal and the opposition of Venice, which was allied to his three brothers, Stefan Crnojević made peace with Venice in March 1444 and soon thereafter with his brothers. However, his peace with his brothers was an uneasy one, and tensions remained among them. But even so, the Crnojevići, headed by Stefan, remained the most powerful local family. The renunciation of his Zetan ambitions made it possible for Stefan Vukčić to conclude peace with Venice as well. After reaching agreement in 1444, Stefan Vukčić and the Venetians signed a treaty in 1445.

The fall of his protector, Serbia, and Venice’s acquisition of Budva in 1442 led to new difficulties for the Orthodox Metropolitan of Zeta. Kotor stepped up its action against the Orthodox, ignoring Venice’s advice to work gradually. Kotor expelled Orthodox priests from the towns and villages along its gulf and by 1452 had turned over almost all, if not all, of the Orthodox churches of this region to Catholic clerics. By 1455 the last Serbian monk had been expelled from the Gulf of Kotor. Lands belonging to Orthodox monasteries and the Orthodox Church met the same fate. Thus the Serbian Church had almost no sources of income along the coast. The Venetians allowed the harassed metropolitan to move from Budva in 1442 to a monastery on Lake Skadar, which was under direct Venetian authority. But his tenure there was to be of short duration. In 1452 he was to be driven from his monastery and replaced by a Greek monk who had accepted the Union of the Churches proclaimed at Florence. The Venetians recognized this Uniate as the Metropolitan of Zeta and ordered that all Orthodox Church financial dues go to him. The protests of Orthodox clergy and believers were ignored. The deposed Orthodox metropolitan withdrew into the mountains of Zeta, moving from one village to another, existing almost without income, and in no position to maintain ties with his clergy or defend his embattled Church, until finally, supported by the Crnojevići, he established himself in 1485 at Cetinje, which was to become the permanent seat of the Metropolitan of Zeta.
Albania in the 1430s

Meanwhile, the Albanians suffered severe losses to the Turks as a result of the Ottoman campaigns of 1430 and 1431. Particularly hard hit were the Dukagjins and Castriots, who lost most of their lands in the vicinity of the Mati River. The full extent of their losses is not known, but it seems probable that the Turks took over most of the fortresses as far north as Danj and the Drin River. Thus both families suffered considerable eclipse. As they had a decade earlier in central Albania, the Turks began registering these new lands and assigning a good portion of them as fiefs (timars). Once again most of the timars were assigned to Ottoman servitors from Anatolia, while about a quarter of the known timars were assigned to submissive members of the Albanian elite, some of whom accepted Islam. As a result of the assignment of these fiefs, many members of the Albanian elite were dispossessed. Consequently, already in 1431 various mountain regions (for example, Tepelene) resisted the cadastral surveys. Thus much of the territory surrounding the fortresses taken in 1430 was in fact not subdued, for the inhabitants had taken up armed resistance against the establishment of these timars.

In 1432 Andrew Thopia revolted against his Ottoman overlords and defeated a small Ottoman detachment in the mountains of central Albania. His success inspired other Albanian chiefs, in particular George Arianite (Araniti) who held lands along the middle course of the Shkumbi River. Hearing—falsely, as it turned out—that Murad II had died, Arianite raised a large rebellion of his own tribesmen in 1433. The revolt rapidly spread throughout Albania from the region of Valona up to Skadar. The rebels defeated three major Ottoman offensives between 1433 and 1436, including a large force led in 1434 by Ishak beg, the Ottoman governor of Skopje. Nicholas Dukagjin took advantage of the rebellion to return to his family’s former lands; in taking them over, he submitted to Venetian suzerainty. He also took Danj, which he soon yielded to Venice. However, the Venetians, learning that Murad was still alive and fearing to provoke the Turks, repudiated Dukagjin and broke off all relations with him. To show their good faith, the Venetians returned Danj to the Turks by 1435. At this time, though summoned home by his relatives back in Albania, Skanderbeg did nothing; he remained in the east, loyal to the sultan, serving actively in Asia Minor. In 1436 the Ottomans sent a massive army into Albania that finally put down the revolt; the campaign was savage, marked by massacres and the erection of pyramids of skulls. The Ottoman troops also devastated parts of northern Epirus. George Arianite, who had probably been the most successful rebel commander, escaped and took to the mountains with a small group of followers; from there he continued his resistance as a guerrilla. He was not to be subdued and was still active when the major revolt of 1443 broke out. He was to participate actively in that rebellion as well.

After his triumph in 1436, the sultan left those Albanian chiefs who had submitted to him in possession of a considerable portion of their lands and
with considerable autonomy; however, he also took more of their sons off east as hostages. The sultan remained angry at the Dukagin and forbade Tanush Major Dukagjin to return to Albania. Tanush briefly served as vojvoda for Venice’s Skadar district, but then he was suspected by the Venetians of treason and arrested. He was soon sent to Italy. His guilt was not proved and so he was released from confinement; but, fearing he might in revenge take actions against Venice’s interests, the Venetians forced him to live thereafter in Italy. He lived in exile, on a Venetian pension, in Padua, never to return to his native region.

Byzantium and the Turks after Mehemmed I’s Death (1421)

The Byzantines maintained good relations with Mehemmed I (1413–21), the candidate they had supported to gain the Ottoman sultanate, through his reign. Having won the throne and then having had to devote his attention to consolidating his position, Mehemmed had not tried to wrest territory away from the empire. Matters changed after his death and the Byzantines were responsible for provoking the troubles that befell them. For, at the death of Mehemmed, the empire supported a pretender against Mehemmed’s legitimate successor, Murad II (1421–51), a ploy that failed. This policy had the effect of stirring Murad’s wrath against the empire and of giving him an excuse to terminate existing agreements with Byzantium and to resume the Ottoman offensive against the empire. However, one should not exaggerate the importance of Byzantium’s misfired policy; for we can be sure that even if the empire had greeted Murad II with timbrels and dancing, sooner or later the Ottomans would have resumed their offensive against its territory.

Murad II besieged Constantinople in 1421 and then unleashed a raid through Greece that ravaged the Peloponnese in 1423. This militant policy threatened Thessaloniki, which the empire felt unable to defend against a major assault; so, it assigned the city to Venice in 1423. The empire soon knuckled under to Ottoman pressure, becoming a tribute-paying vassal of the Ottomans again in 1424. However, this submission did not stop Ottoman raids; for the Ottomans had many excuses, like the surrender of Thessaloniki to Venice, to continue their raids. Pressure was kept up against Thessaloniki until the Ottomans took it by assault in 1430.

In desperate straits, the new emperor John VIII (1425–48), Manuel’s son and successor, reached the conclusion that salvation for the empire could come only from the West. However, to obtain Western support, the empire needed to approach the pope; and the pope would give his blessing to aid only if the Byzantines accepted Church Union. Needless to say, as we have seen in earlier attempts to effect Union, the Byzantine populace strongly opposed it; at least, the Greeks opposed Union on papal terms, and the pope would accept no others. John VIII initiated negotiations with Rome anyway, and in November 1437 he, his patriarch, and a large assemblage of bishops set off for Rome.
Their arrival in Italy created enormous protocol problems. For though it was accepted that the pope had honorary precedence over the patriarch, the two parties held different views on how the pope stood vis-à-vis the emperor. Bickering over ceremonial matters began at the very start, when Patriarch Joseph, though willing to admit papal primacy in precedence, was not willing to kiss the pope’s foot. Pope Eugene IV backed down on this issue and agreed to a more equal embrace, though he insisted this greeting should occur in a private audience and not in public. A host of questions about seating followed. Both sides agreed the pope should sit higher than the patriarch, but disagreed over the placement of the emperor’s seat. On this issue the pope won out; for the Greeks were at a distinct disadvantage in being in Italy as suppliants, with the further disadvantage of being maintained (fed and housed) by the pope.

In early 1438 the council to effect Church Union opened in Ferrara and shortly thereafter moved to Florence—it is known by the name of either city. The Roman side had many advantages: the council was meeting in its territory; in hosting the aid-seeking Greeks, the Roman Church was literally feeding the Greek guests; and the Roman side was united. Each Roman debater advanced the same theology. The Greek party, on the other hand, was divided between those interested in compromise and those bent on arguing the Greek position. Within these two categories all sorts of individual positions on particular points existed. To make discussion more difficult, the council did not address issues directly. Thus it did not ask: is Filioque (the double descent of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son) correct doctrine or not? Instead, the question was debated indirectly through argument as to whether or not it was permitted to add to the creed. For the Greeks claimed, correctly, that Filioque was an addition to the Nicene Creed. The debate went on endlessly, and single speakers could and did ramble on for several days at a stretch.

After interminable discussions the council finally promulgated its edict of Union in July 1439. The Greeks were allowed to keep their own rite, service, and language of service. They were also allowed to retain leavened bread—rather than the Latin unleavened bread—in the communion wafer. But they had to recognize papal primacy—in terms only slightly modified from the original papal position—and accept the Latin position on all disputed theological points, including the major issue of Filioque. Thus the Greek delegation accepted the Latin belief that the Holy Spirit descends from the Father and the Son, rather than from the Father alone as the Greek Church believed. The Latins had throughout insisted on their position and had strongly rejected a compromise advanced by some Greeks that the Holy Spirit descended from the Father through the Son.

John VIII, his patriarch, and his bishops—except for Mark Eugenius, the Bishop of Ephesus—accepted the Union. However, the results of the council were not as dramatic as they might seem. First, other than one major crusading effort, which was to have initial successes in 1443, little Western
help was to follow. Furthermore, since most Byzantines detested the West, the papacy, and all the variant beliefs and practices of the Roman Church, the Byzantine people refused to accept Union. A slogan was heard in Constantinople that it would be far better to see the Turkish turban in the city than the Latin tiara. Thus the council divided the population at a critical moment when the empire needed a unified populace to face the Turkish threat. The Union was also very bad for popular morale, particularly since it contributed to defeatism among the Greeks. For most Byzantines seem to have believed that imperial decline was a result of their sins; to commit the further sin of selling out to the heretical Latins would surely lose God’s favor completely and bring about the fall of the empire. Thus the great majority of the population remained Anti-Union and avoided Unionist churches.

The lone dissenter who had attended the Council of Florence, Mark Eugenius, became an instant hero and led the Anti-Unionist party. At his death George Gennadius Scholarius, one of the most learned men of his time, became the leader of the Anti-Unionists. Interestingly enough, George Scholarius was much taken with Catholic theology and read Thomas Aquinas with great interest and approval. But though he had sympathy for much in Catholicism, he detested the papacy’s pretensions; believing the pope had no right to dictate to the whole Church or to meddle in dioceses other than his own, Scholarius strongly upheld the Greek belief that disputes must be settled by Church councils, not by papal fiat. The Anti-Unionists had most of the population behind them and wrangled with the smaller number of Unionists—most of whom were unhappy with the Union theologically but had accepted it as a necessary evil in order to obtain aid against the greater evil of the Turks. The wrangling continued until the fall of the empire.

The Council of Florence also cost the Greek Church considerable prestige in the broader Orthodox world. The Patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem—the other three ancient and great patriarchs besides Constantinople and Rome—all condemned it, as did the Muscovites who saw Florence as a betrayal of the true faith. However, it should be noted that for the empire’s survival in this world, this loss of prestige among the Orthodox was unimportant. The other three Eastern patriarchs all resided in Turkish territory, and thus were useless in supplying aid for the defense of the empire, and Moscow, though independent, was too distant and too weak to provide help against the Turkish threat.

The Morea and Non-Turkish Greece

In this period the emperor continued the policy of granting appanages to high family members, to his brothers and sons. The Peloponnesus (Morea) was always so assigned, sometimes to one family member and sometimes divided between two or even three relatives. The holder or holders bore the title of despot. Through the 1430s when there was more than one despot, the individuals tended to co-operate. Later on, multiple despots frequently quarreled,
undermining the unity, and therefore the defense, of the peninsula and giving the Ottomans, who at times provided troops for one side or the other, a foothold in the area. Until it was ceded to Venice, Thessaloniki had frequently been assigned to an imperial family member. In 1414 it had been assigned to Manuel’s son Andronicus. Selymbria on the Sea of Marmora was also regularly assigned as an appanage.

In the last chapter we discussed the despotate of the Morea (Peloponnnesus) down to 1407, when Manuel’s brother Theodore died and Manuel installed his minor son Theodore (II) as despot in the Morea under a regency. The Morea at this time enjoyed considerable peace. It was distant from the Ottoman civil war then occurring in the east-central Balkans. Thus the Morea suffered no Ottoman raids from the Battle of Ankara (1402) until 1423. Furthermore, the Morea was now stronger than the Latin principalities in the Peloponnnesus. Thus the despotate was not threatened by the Latins; it was usually the initiator of confrontations with them and usually fought with success. Thus it gradually obtained further territory from the declining Latin state of Achaea. Freedom from outside invasion also allowed the Peloponnnesus to prosper agriculturally and economically: metals were mined, and silk and cotton were produced, along with wine, wheat, wax, and honey. In fact the Morea seems to have been self-sufficient agriculturally.

A certain amount of disruption was caused by further Albanian migration and settlement, but this had benefits as well. Albanians, settled in deserted and mountainous regions, added to the number of farmers and shepherds and thus contributed to increased agricultural production and tax income. The Albanians also provided further, and excellent, soldiers. However, the Albanians were also a source of disorder and brigandage. For though their settlement at times took place on vacant lands, at others it resulted in the ousting of already settled agriculturalists. And since many Albanians were shepherds and continued to be so, a portion of Morean farm land went out of crop production to become pasture land.

In March 1415 Emperor Manuel arrived in the Morea, investing his son Theodore, who was now of age, with full authority. For defense Manuel decided to construct a fortification across the Isthmus of Corinth, the famous Hexamilion. Its construction was extremely rapid—taking only thirty-five days in April and May—but it stirred up local opposition, for it required higher taxes to finance it and levies of peasants to build and later to man it. As a result there was, as we shall see, a certain amount of unrest among the local nobility (resulting in a small rebellion in July 1415, which Manuel put down) and enough dissatisfaction among the peasants for many to abandon their lands and migrate to Venetian territory. The Venetians still held the cities and environs of Modon, Coron, Argos, and Nauplia on the peninsula. Despite Theodore’s and Manuel’s demands, the Venetians refused to send these peasants back. Feeling threatened by the increasing strength of the despotate and by Manuel’s presence, the Prince of Achaea, Centurione Zaccaria, hurried to Mistra to pay homage to Manuel and to accept him as his suzerain.
Shortly after Manuel’s return to Constantinople, he sent a second son, John, the future emperor, to assist Theodore in the Peloponnesus. They took further action in 1416 against the remnants of Achaea, which since 1407 had been under Venetian protection. It is often stated that this protection—exerted diplomatically by Venice—saved the remnants of Achaea from the despotate’s successful 1416 campaign that brought the bulk of the Peloponnesus under the authority of the despotate. After that campaign the Latins—excluding Venice—retained only Patras and the regions of Arcadia and Elis.

In this period of economic prosperity and no major warfare, considerable building took place, particularly in the Morean capital of Mistra. Many beautiful churches were erected and adorned with fine frescoes. A lively Byzantine-style court was maintained, where a variety of leading literary figures, including philosophers and theologians, participated and wrote. Theodore II was an active participant in these activities and was considered one of the best mathematicians of his time. He was also a literary patron and had considerable interest in theology. Influenced by these Orthodox theologians, and possibly also by political realities, many Latins living in the territory recovered by the Byzantines accepted Orthodoxy. Many of these converts seem to have been gamsoules, the children of mixed Latin-Greek marriages.

The leading figure in the intellectual life at court was George Gemistos Plethon, who had come to Mistra after the death of Theodore I to tutor Theodore II. A philosopher and follower of Plato, he revived Plato’s thought and wrote a work on laws. Under the influence of Classical Greek thought rather than the tradition of multi-national empire that had dominated Greek political thinking for the preceding thousand years, Plethon advocated the idea of Hellenism. The term Hellene had for centuries had a bad odor within the Christian empire because it connoted a pagan. But Plethon proudly used the term and urged the Greeks to concentrate on a Greek state based on a more homogeneous population and upon the compact and more defensible territory of mainland Greece, rather than to dream of a far-flung, multi-ethnic Roman Empire. Thus Hellenic particularism should replace Roman universalism. He wanted this state—small, consolidated, not over-extended, and based on Hellenism—to be centered in the Peloponnesus, which he believed was readily defensible. Plethon is often seen as the first exponent of Greek nationalism. Plethon wrote prolifically to advance his ideas. He also proposed various legal reforms, including a new law code, and a reordering of society in the Morea.17 His works, as noted, were highly influenced by Plato. However, as interesting a figure as he was, he had little impact on policy, for the leading political figures were wedded to the preservation of the empire and were not inclined to listen to such proposals. In any case, Mistra was a second center of Greek life, comparable to Constantinople but on a smaller scale. And far from the major warfare involving the Turks, it was a region where Greek life could exist for a while longer with security.

The years of peace came to an abrupt end in 1423 when the Ottomans, as noted, launched a major raid against the Peloponnesus. The raiders broke
through the undemanned Hexamilion in May and caused considerable damage before they withdrew with considerable plunder. On this occasion the Turks annexed no territory. The Greeks defeated one Turkish detachment, but an Albanian army that opposed the Turks at Davia near Tripolis in Arcadia was routed. The Turks left a pyramid of eight hundred Albanian heads on the battlefield. The Turks were to return in 1431 with a second major and devastating raid.

Though most works on Byzantine civilization stress the positive side of Morean life in this period up to ca. 1430—excluding the 1423 attack—and emphasize the flowering of culture with its literary, architectural, and artistic achievements, life in the Peloponnese at this time was not always a bed of roses. Zakythinos argues that, excluding the elite, the general educational level was low. Possibly owing to the presence of large numbers of foreigners, the Greek spoken there was poor. Its culture seems to have been centered in one place, Mistra. There an elite was advancing Greek culture, but it was a narrow, privileged group. The rest of the Peloponnese, Zakythinos claims, had little high culture; morals and life-style were in general rude. The Turkish raids of 1423 and 1431—and then others in the years to follow—caused devastation.

The nobles, as seen, also caused considerable unrest. The major nobles, some of whom had enormous estates, were for all practical purposes independent rulers of their own lands. The mountainous geography helped them to preserve this independence. Yet it should be stressed that when we speak of the nobles (archons) as local rulers, it means only that they managed their own estates, collecting the state taxes from their peasants and rendering them to the despot—and, of course, ignoring all such taxes and obligations when they could. But they collectively had no general provincial (Morean-wide) authority. They did not form any sort of council to participate in local legislation or in decisions touching on taxes. Those decisions were made by the despots, advised by their own courtiers. And the despots’ courtiers tended to consist more of dependents coming from Constantinople than of nobles of local origin. Thus many nobles probably did see the court and despots as foreigners. However, though historians have tended to condemn the nobles and sympathize with the despots, Finlay does note, “it must not be forgotten that what the historian feels compelled to call [their] anarchy, contemporaries dignified with the name of liberty.”

A large number of rebellions by the nobility against the empire (or the despots, the imperial representatives on the ground) did occur. In fact in the 1390s, as noted, certain nobles—in particular Paul Mamonos, expelled from Monemvasia—had sought and received Sultan Bayezid’s intervention, leading to the Serres meeting. The nobles’ independent-mindedness and desire to separate and establish “their own tyrannies” (as one pro-despot source says) continued into the 1420s. Each attempt to raise taxes provoked unrest or even out-and-out rebellion, as we saw in 1415 when Manuel raised taxes to build the Hexamilion. The nobles, after 1402 believing they had little to worry
about from the Ottomans and thus little or no need to establish a defense against the Turks, continued thereafter to resist each tax increase or attempt by the despot to centralize political authority or even to centralize the military defense. This resistance, resulting in actual small-scale fighting at times, continued in the years after 1415. These clashes caused a certain amount of destruction and some loss of manpower, thereby weakening the area vis-à-vis the Turks. Venice, trying to retain its cities in the Morea and wanting to prevent the development of a strong Greek state in the area that might threaten its possessions, encouraged the independence of the magnates.

Life for peasants on estates in the Peloponnese must have been hard, for we hear of widespread flights of peasants to Venetian territory. The Venetians, needing labor, were happy to receive them. Thus they refused to return them, despite the fact they were obliged to do so under an article in the treaty they had concluded with Manuel. Plethon might dream that the Morea could be the core of a Greek state, but even Greek unity was lacking. And to expect such unity is probably anachronistic, for the fifteenth century fell in a pre-nationalist period, when feelings of community followed religious rather than ethnic lines. Moreover, in this so-called Greek heartland, we find many Latins, gazemoulis (who were often Catholics in religion and attached to many Western values), and large numbers of Albanian warrior-tribesmen who were in the process of settling the area. Many of these Albanians did not immediately settle permanently in a particular place but continued to move around the area, providing an unstable element that was not always averse to plundering. Thus the Albanians were a factor contributing to anarchy; however, as noted, they also had a very positive aspect, providing able soldiers for the despot’s army.

Cydones was able to say of the Peloponnese: “Towns and laws disappeared here.” An Italian humanist who spent seven years in Greece states that in the Peloponnese there remained nothing worthy of praise. Stressing barbarian attacks and the laziness of the inhabitants of the region, he states that the Peloponnese was then deprived of its former wealth and worthy men. The author of a satire speaks of the cruelty of the barbarians and then adds that “the local populace, forgetting God and no longer recognizing the law, cannot even speak Greek properly.” And he too stresses the disloyalty of the population to its lord (the despot).

These two pictures, though they clash, are not necessarily contradictory. Prosperity and hardship can co-exist at any given moment in any given place. And when we try to examine a region about which broad generalizations are made, great differences are found between different areas, different classes of the population, and different years. Moreover, large agricultural yields, though signs of prosperity, may encourage heavier taxation, leaving the producers not as wealthy as their yields might suggest and entirely breaking those farmers whose farm production did not fit the general pattern of a year, owing to one misfortune or another. And the high culture of Mistra, though it may
have filtered down to some extent to other towns—we know, for example, that George Cantacuzenus had a fine library at Kalavryta—may well have borne little resemblance to the semi-literacy and poor spoken Greek of much of the region’s populace. Thus the historians should try to steer a middle course and recognize that both pictures contain elements of the truth.

Throughout the 1420s Theodore was able to hold his own against his Latin neighbors. He drove out Anthony Acciajuoli of Athens when Anthony tried in 1423–24 to conquer Corinth, the former seat of his family. Theodore also did well in various skirmishes against Centurione Zaccaria of Achaea, who was supported by Navarrese troops. Theodore and his brothers also expelled Carlo Tocco from the Morea entirely.

In the last chapter we met Carlo Tocco, Count of Cephalonia, Leukas, Zakynthos, and Ithaca, whose wife Francesca had inherited Corinth from her father, Nerio Acciajuoli. Carlo had tried to establish himself there but had eventually been expelled by Theodore I. Ambitious for holdings in the Peloponnese but not wanting to challenge Theodore further, he returned to the peninsula shortly after 1402 and seized Elis from Centurione Zaccaria, the Prince of Achaea. Soon Carlo inherited Jannina from his uncle Esau, in 1411. Becoming interested in Epirus, he concentrated his attention against the Albanians who held most of Epirus. By the end of 1416 he had acquired almost all Epirus, including Arta. He was assisted by the local Greeks, who were sick of the anarchy existing under the Albanians. He was also helped by the lack of unity among the different Albanian tribes. Thus Carlo managed to create a large but scattered principality in Greece.

Theodore was unhappy with the foothold that Tocco had gained in the Peloponnese. Meanwhile Emperor Manuel II died and was succeeded by his son, John VIII (1425–48). John decided to divide the Morea, assigning an appanage there to his and Theodore’s younger brother Constantine. As his appanage Constantine received the southwestern Morea. Thus his lands bordered on Centurione Zaccaria’s Arcadia and Carlo Tocco’s Elis. Theodore does not seem to have objected to Constantine’s arrival, and the two brothers co-operated. Deciding on a more aggressive policy, they determined on an offensive to eliminate Tocco’s rule in Elis. In 1427 the troops of the two despots, supported by others from Emperor John VIII, took Tocco’s main city, the port of Clarenza. The surrender was made to the future well-known historian George Sphrantzes, a native of Monemvasia. The following year, supported by their third brother Thomas, Constantine attacked Elis again and, defeating Carlo’s troops, obtained Carlo’s niece as a bride with all Elis as her dowry. Thus the Tocco family was expelled from the Peloponnese and Constantine was able to expand his appanage. A slightly variant account, but one having the same result, was given by the eye-witness Sphrantzes. He claims that in 1427 the two forces met in battle. Defeated and realizing he had no future there, Tocco agreed to the marriage of his niece to Constantine and the surrender of all his Morean forts, including Clarenza. Sphrantzes thus
claims that Constantine occupied Clarenza after and as a result of the treaty. Though the first version is probably seen more often, the second, written by Sphrantzes, who was present, probably should be accepted.

Carlo I Tocco then died in Jannina in July 1429. Having no legitimate children, he left his lands to his nephew Carlo II Tocco (1429–48). However, Carlo I’s illegitimate sons, who held lands in the region of the Achelous in Aetolia, appealed to the Turks that Carlo II had usurped the lands Carlo I had intended for them. The Ottomans found this a fine excuse to intervene; in October 1430 Ottoman armies appeared before Jannina. The city—represented, it seems, by the local nobility rather than by Tocco or a deputy of his—surrendered on demand and received a charter of privilege from the Ottoman conquerors giving Jannina autonomy, the right to collect and deliver its own taxes, and religious liberty. The Ottomans were to observe this treaty for several centuries thereafter. In 1431 the Ottomans returned to conquer almost all Epirus and Aetolia. Annexing most of it, they allowed Carlo II to hold Arta as an Ottoman vassal. He ruled Arta and its district until he died in 1448. Then, in 1449, the Ottomans expelled his successor Leonardo and directly annexed Arta and the rest of Epirus, excluding Venice’s possessions there. The Venetians continued to hold on to Naupaktos (Lepanto) on the north shore of the Gulf of Corinth, which they had acquired in 1407 from the Albanian chief Paul Spata.

Having eliminated the Tocco holdings, Constantine in 1429 turned against Patras, the major Latin city in the Morea, still administered by its Catholic archbishop who recognized only the suzerainty of the pope. Constantine had relatively little difficulty in taking the city, though its citadel held out until May 1430. Theodore was worried about this conquest, fearing that either or both the Venetians and Ottomans might object and decide to take action against the Peloponnesus. These two powers, and the pope also, made verbal objections. However, none of them took any action over it, and the Greeks retained Patras. At the same time Thomas, the third brother, attacked the remnants of Achaea. The Venetians, to whom the elderly Prince of Achaea, Centurione Zaccaria, appealed, refused him aid, so the prince decided to surrender. He offered his daughter Catherine, his only legitimate child, to Thomas and most of his domains as her dowry. Centurione sought to keep only part of Arcadia and the town of Kyparissia for himself for his lifetime, for which he was willing to accept Byzantine suzerainty. After Thomas agreed, a treaty to this effect was signed in September 1429, and Thomas married Catherine in January 1430. Thus Thomas acquired a territorial holding of his own in the Morea. Centurione then died in 1432, and Thomas took Kyparissia and whatever parts of Arcadia Centurione had retained. This put an end to the Principality of Achaea. All the Peloponnesus, except for the four previously noted Venetian towns, was now Greek again. But life was not to be smooth, for already the Ottomans had begun to raid the peninsula again, having carried out a very destructive raid in 1431. At this time the Ottomans were out for plunder and to soften up the area. They were
not yet conquering towns or annexing any territory. But the earlier fate of Thessaly and that of most of Epirus in 1430–31 should have been a clear message to the Morea that its days were numbered.

The Byzantine Morea thus found itself divided among the three brothers, with each ruling his own specified territory. After Thomas’ new acquisitions in 1432 the boundaries of the Morean territories were readjusted. Thomas, also holding, since 1430, the title of despot, received what had been Constantine’s lands in the southwest (with Androusa) and also Constantine’s northwestern acquisitions (Elis with Clarenza), while keeping his own Arcadian lands. Constantine took the region north of Arcadia with Kalavryta as well as the northeastern part with Corinth. He also retained Patras. Thus he held the northern and northeastern parts of the peninsula. Theodore retained the southeast with the traditional capital of Mistra. Theodore was given no authority over his brothers, but he did keep an honorary precedence.

Meanwhile Anthony Acciaiuoli died in 1435. Having no sons, he left his Attican-Boeotian duchy to Nerio and Anthony, two sons of a cousin. However, Anthony’s widow, Maria Melissena, tried to seize power for herself. A Greek, she had considerable local Greek support. Thus her attempt was a threat to local Latin interests. She also sent envoys to try to obtain recognition for her rule from the sultan. Constantine, the Morean despot whose lands bordered on Attica, decided to take advantage of the struggle to see if he could not grab the duchy. He dispatched his troops, still in 1435, across the Isthmus of Corinth into Attica. It is not entirely certain whether he was acting on his own or whether perhaps Maria had sought his support against domestic Latin opponents. Though he occupied parts of Attica for a brief time, Constantine was unable to take any major towns.

Meanwhile, the Latin aristocracy suspected that if Maria found herself in greater difficulties, she would certainly try to turn the duchy over to her fellow Greek, Constantine; this, the aristocrats believed, would result in the duchy’s being annexed by the despotate and cost them their lands and positions. Sphrantzes, in fact, claims that Maria did try to effect this, offering Constantine Athens in exchange for other lands in the Morea. To forestall this danger, the Latin nobles rose up and overthrew her, establishing young Nerio II as the duke in Athens. Thus Constantine’s attempt failed, and he soon withdrew, leaving the Athenian duchy to the victor in the local succession struggle, Nerio II. Nerio quickly agreed to accept Ottoman suzerainty and ruled over the duchy until 1451—except for the years 1439–41, when he was briefly ousted by his brother Anthony II.

On the whole the three brothers in the Morea co-operated, but tensions developed between Theodore and Constantine in the mid-1430s. In those years it became apparent to Theodore that his brother, Emperor John VIII, who had no sons, had begun to favor Constantine as his heir over Theodore, even though Theodore was the elder. Constantine found himself opposed by both Theodore and Thomas in various small local issues, and Sphrantzes says that small-scale fighting actually occurred before imperial ambassadors
brought about peace. Then in 1437, when John VIII went west to the Council of Ferrara-Florence, he turned the empire and Constantinople over to Constantine to rule as regent. Theodore was assigned temporary rule over Constantine’s lands in the Morea. Theodore was not happy with the favor shown Constantine on this occasion.

The Council of Florence increased family tensions. For Constantine and Thomas supported John’s decision to accept Church Union. Theodore, the scholarly brother who had long been interested in theology and was much more strongly Orthodox in his beliefs, adamantly opposed the Union on theological grounds. The youngest brother, Demetrius, who then held the Selymbria appanage, was Anti-Union too. In 1442 or 1443 John VIII, distrusting Demetrius, became worried over his holding an appanage so close to Constantinople, from which, should he obtain Ottoman support, he might try to seize the capital. So, John decided to re-assign appanages. He ordered Demetrius to the Peloponneseus and offered the Selymbria-Mesembria appanage to Constantine. Demetrius revolted and with a Turkish retinue ravaged the suburbs of Constantinople. Peace was soon concluded, and Constantine assumed control of the Selymbria appanage for a short time. Then deciding on a new plan, John sent him back to the Morea. John now gave the Selymbria appanage to the more level-headed Theodore, who occupied it in March 1444.

In the Morea Constantine received the senior appanage that Theodore had held, which included Laconia and was centered in Mistra. He also acquired the appanage in the northern Morea, including Patras and Corinth, that he had held prior to his transfer to Selymbria. Thomas continued to hold his appanage in the west. Demetrius, presumably in disfavor, received no appanage at the time. Theodore remained in Selymbria until he died in the summer of 1448, a few months before the death of his imperial brother. Constantine during this period maintained cordial relations with his brother Thomas. Constantine also made various concessions to the local nobles, trying to infringe less upon their rule over their own lands and assigning important Morean governorships to certain important local aristocrats. As a result of these concessions, Constantine won their agreement to certain special levies he wanted for defense and, as we shall see in the next chapter, in 1443 for offense.

NOTES

2. Resti, Chronica Ragusina, p. 264.
4. On the Bosnian Church, see Fine, The Bosnian Church.
7. This section is much indebted to M. Šunjić, *Dalmacija u XV stoljeću* (Sarajevo, 1967).
8. A detailed description of the military marches and their defense responsibilities can be found in R. Petar, “Poslednje godine balkanske politike Kralja Žigmunda (1435–1437),” *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta* (Novi Sad) 12, no. 1 (1969): 89–90. Petar also notes that at this time Sigismund borrowed vast sums of money from his vassals and as security gave them lands in Croatia and southern Hungary in areas often struck by Turkish raids. In this way he forced his vassals to assume broader defense responsibilities.
9. Kilia at the mouth of the Danube alone held out. And though it fell to the Turks in 1420, the Moldavians occupied it in about 1424. The port then fell out in the hands of one or the other of the Rumanian principalities or in those of Hungary until the Turks finally conquered it in 1484.
15. Ibid., pp. 349–66.