

## CHAPTER 7

# The Balkans from Dušan's Death (1355) to the Eve of Kosovo (1389)

### **Initial Territorial Losses for the Serbian Empire after Dušan's Death**

During the last decade of Dušan's reign the magnates had remained at peace within Serbia, loyal to Dušan's authority. His death was a signal for the stirring of separatist activity. But though disintegration of his empire followed, it was to be a piece-meal affair taking place over a period of twenty years. Furthermore, when we contrast Dušan's empire and the separatism after his death, we should not exaggerate centralism under Dušan. Despite his power and the glorious court titles he granted, he stood over a loosely bound state. In much of his realm great local noblemen continued to dominate local affairs, merely rendering obligations to him. Thus in many or even most areas he had not replaced local rule by central appointees. Even during Dušan's reign cases of separatism had occurred—like Hrelja's secession in about 1340—and great independence from Dušan's authority was shown throughout his reign by Despot John Oliver. And Dušan's law code, for example, in its laws on brigandage that gave responsibility for order to local authorities, also showed the state's inability to control large portions of its far-flung territory. Thus separatism in and after 1356 simply reflects the utilization for greater independence of a social/administrative structure already existing before and during Dušan's reign.

Dušan's son and heir Uroš (1356–71), though by this time twenty years old, was weak, possibly feeble-minded, and unable to take forceful action against this separatist tendency. Immediately after Dušan's death two Greek magnates—Alexis and John Asen—revolted and liberated Anaktoropolis, Chrysopolis, and the rest of the Aegean coastal territory between the Struma and Mesta rivers. Also possessing the near-by island of Thasos, they soon recognized the suzerainty of the Byzantine emperor, John V. These lands were direct holdings of the Asens, who were descendants of the former ruling dynasty of Bulgaria. By 1365 they were also administering Kavalla for the emperor; this town, however, did not become part of their appanage. Scholars

argue over the status of Kavalla prior to the mid-1360s. Most of them believe Dušan had acquired it in 1345 and retained it to his death, at which point Alexis and John took it; very likely they then quarreled with the emperor over it until a compromise was reached which allowed them to govern it while the emperor retained direct title for it. Other scholars have claimed that Dušan never took Kavalla, but that it remained imperial throughout this period under various governors, among whom were numbered Alexis and John from about 1365. The Asens' activity affected only the territory along the coast; the interior lands between the Struma and Mesta rivers remained Serbian.

In 1356 the Byzantine rebel Matthew Cantacuzenus, needing to build up his own power base and hoping that the Greek population residing in the interior territory conquered by Dušan between the Mesta and Struma rivers would prefer his rule to Uroš', tried to re-establish his former appanage along the Serbian-Byzantine border. With five thousand Turks he attacked this region. But he failed to take Serres and soon was defeated in battle in late 1356 or early 1357 by a Serb army under Vojvoda Vojin, the holder of Drama, a major fortress in the vicinity. The Serbs captured Matthew with the intention of releasing him when he had raised the large ransom they demanded. However, John V, who had rapidly moved in to occupy Matthew's lands, offered Vojin an even larger sum to turn Matthew over to the empire. And Vojin found it very profitable to oblige. John V, after briefly imprisoning Matthew and making him renounce his imperial title, then released him to go to the Morea, where he joined his brother Manuel who was ruling there.

Meanwhile in the province of Braničevo two leading families of Serbian magnates quarreled. The weaker of the two, about to be bested and having little hope of support from the weak Serbian ruler who was faced with far more serious dangers, turned to the Hungarians for support. The Hungarians jumped at the chance to regain their influence in the province of Braničevo and sent aid, probably in 1359, to the petitioner. Their intervention was successful and they soon installed the Rastislalić family in power in Braničevo province (with Kučevo attached to it). Though it cannot be proved, it was almost certainly the Rastislalići who had sought Hungarian intervention. (Matteo Villani, the source on the quarrel between the two nobles that led to Hungarian intervention, does not name them.) By 1361 the Rastislalići were ruling this province, seceded from Serbia, under Hungarian suzerainty. The Hungarians tried to move beyond this region and make further gains at the expense of Serbia, still early in 1359. They were initially successful in penetrating Serbia but failed to engage the Serbian army, which intentionally avoided battle. Realizing they could not hold these further gains, they withdrew, probably in July 1359.

### **Thessaly and Epirus**

Meanwhile, almost immediately after Dušan's death Preljub, his governor for Thessaly, died. His widow Irene, who was a daughter of Dušan, hoped to

preserve the province for herself and their minor son Tomo Preljubović. But taking advantage of the instability caused by Preljub's death and of the anarchy caused by the influx of Albanian tribesmen, Nicephorus II, the former ruler of Epirus, arrived in the spring of 1356 in Thessaly; he hoped to acquire support from the local Greeks to gain Thessaly and then use that province as a base to regain his inheritance of Epirus. At that time he had been the governor of Ainos, appointed to that post by his father-in-law, John Cantacuzenus, when Cantacuzenus had become emperor. Nicephorus acquired considerable support from the Greeks of Thessaly and soon drove Irene out and gained Thessaly. She returned to Serbia, where she was granted Preljub's hereditary lands on the Crna Reka (Black River). She soon married a Serb nobleman, Hlapen (or Radoslav Hlapen), who had been Dušan's governor for, and was still holding, Voden and Veria. Thus he held the territory that lay just north of Thessaly.

Meanwhile, as we saw in the last chapter, Dušan had installed as his governor of Epirus his half-brother Symeon—who was the son of Stefan Dečanski and his second wife, Maria Palaeologina. To improve his local position Symeon had married Thomais, the daughter of Anna of Epirus and the sister of Nicephorus II, the titular despot of Epirus who had now taken over Thessaly and had his sights set on Epirus. Symeon's neighbor to the north was John Comnenus Asen, the brother of Dušan's wife and of John Alexander of Bulgaria. He, as mentioned, had married Anna of Epirus, the mother of Nicephorus and Thomais, and ruled a portion, if not all, of Dušan's Albanian lands from Valona, where he had established a Byzantine-style court.

Nicephorus, having gained Thessaly, moved against Epirus. He acquired considerable local support. Symeon was expelled from the capital city of Arta, which submitted to Nicephorus, who soon made himself the ruler of Epirus and Aetolia. It probably would be more accurate to say he was the ruler of the towns of these two regions, for much of the countryside was in the hands of Albanian tribesmen.

Symeon, driven north to the region of Kastoria and having lost most of his lands, was faced with the choice of settling down to be a petty prince like Hlapen or of assembling an army to win himself a worthy realm. Choosing the latter option and realizing that Nicephorus had a firm hold on Epirus, Symeon now set his sights on Serbia. As Dušan's brother he had a good claim to the Serbian throne, and he probably felt he had a good chance to win it. If, as seems likely, Uroš was feeble-minded, Symeon's chances probably seemed excellent. So, in 1356, in a ceremony in his town of Kastoria, he had himself proclaimed Tsar of the Greeks, Serbs, and Albanians. He soon acquired the support of John Comnenus Asen of Valona. He then began assembling an army. Aware of Symeon's plans, the Serbian nobles held a council in April 1357 at Skopje and decided to observe Dušan's will and support Uroš. Presumably they preferred to have a weak tsar, which allowed them far greater independence in their own provinces. In the war that followed, as Naumov

points out, the nobles joined for their own ends, more as allies than as dependent vassals. Having mobilized a force of Greeks, Serbs, and Albanians that numbered four to five thousand men, according to the Jannina chronicle, Symeon advanced on Zeta. The forces of the Serbian nobility met Symeon's near Skadar, probably in the summer of 1358, and forced him to retreat. Symeon returned to Kastoria and never tried to acquire Serbia again. For the next year he was in no position to consider doing so, as it was all he could do to maintain a small principality centered in Kastoria. Soon new opportunities presented themselves to him and he became thoroughly involved in increasing his holdings and authority in northern Greece. Though many scholars have stated that Symeon's primary ambition had been Serbia, we really are totally ignorant of his ambitions and preferences. He moved against Serbia only after he had lost most of his Greek lands. Had Nicephorus not driven him from Epirus, Symeon might well have been satisfied with being a ruler in Greece and never have made the attempt on Serbia.

However, despite his successes, Nicephorus' position was by no means secure; for to acquire the support of the local Greeks who had been his muscle to this point, he had had to support their interests. They had previously been dispossessed of much of their land by the Albanian tribesmen who, of course, threatened to take what the Greeks still held. Thus Nicephorus was driven to launch a campaign against the Albanians to prevent their further expansion and to drive them from the lands they had occupied. He hoped to restore the lands recovered to his Greek followers. In this he had some success, but his policy stirred the animosity of the Albanians against him. At the same time he faced the threat of an attack from his neighbor to the north, Hlapen, who aimed to restore his wife to Thessaly and expand his own authority over that rich province. Nicephorus also had to be concerned about Symeon, who, though down at the moment, could, with Albanian support, become a menace again. Nicephorus could at least be thankful that Hlapen detested Symeon, which prevented an alliance between those two.

Faced with these dangers, Nicephorus needed to negotiate with one of his enemies and, possibly to prevent Symeon's Albanian allies from supporting the Albanians already in Epirus, decided to negotiate with Symeon who, married to Thomais, was, of course, his brother-in-law. Their discussions seem to have gone smoothly and a second marriage alliance to bind Nicephorus and Symeon together was discussed. But before it could be fully negotiated, Nicephorus was back fighting the Albanians in a war that was to prove fatal to him.

This particular phase of the warfare with the Albanians seems to have emerged from other marriage negotiations. To seek allies and possibly to find a restraining influence on Hlapen, who throughout these events had retained his loyalty to Uroš, certain of Nicephorus' advisors recommended that he establish closer relations with Serbia. To do this they suggested that he drop his present wife, Maria Cantacuzena, and marry the sister of Dušan's widow. Maria was placed under guard in Arta while the negotiations with Serbia were

carried out; an agreement was reached with the Serbs and it was decided that Maria should be handed over to the Serbs in exchange for the new wife. Maria seems to have been popular with much of the court at Arta, so it was not difficult for her to send a message to her brother Manuel, the ruler of the Morea, to ask him to rescue her. Friends at court effected her escape from the palace and got her to the shore, where a ship from Manuel landed, took her aboard, and carried her to safety at Manuel's court in the Morea.

Maria had also been popular with various Albanian tribesmen who had already submitted to Nicephorus. These tribesmen now threatened revolt if Nicephorus did not give up his plans for the Serbian marriage and recall Maria. Faced with revolt (and possibly also coming to his senses, for Maria seems to have been a wholly admirable woman who still seems to have been devoted to him), Nicephorus summoned her back. But at the same time he decided to crush the Albanians who had dared threaten rebellion to pressure him to alter his policy. He marched into the region where they had settled; they mobilized a large force to meet him. The battle occurred in the late spring of 1359 near Acheloos in Aetolia. Nicephorus was killed and the Albanians won the battle. Thessaly and Epirus were left without a ruler. Soon thereafter Maria left the Morea for Constantinople, where she became a nun.

Symeon moved rapidly to fill the power vacuum in Thessaly. Before Hlapen even knew that Nicephorus was dead, Symeon had marched into Thessaly, where he was greeted in summer 1359 by the local Greeks as emperor in the capital city of Trikkala. And it seems most of Thessaly followed suit. Symeon then left his wife to govern Thessaly and set out to recover his former holding of Epirus. The towns of Epirus were threatened by the Albanian tribesmen, so Nicephorus' cities of Arta and Jannina, as well as various lesser towns, quickly submitted to Symeon. Thus he rapidly restored his rule over at least the towns of Epirus. But then, while Symeon was absent in Epirus, Hlapen attacked and took Damasis in northern Thessaly. Symeon hurried back to Thessaly to face Hlapen, but instead of fighting the two decided to negotiate a settlement. Having agreed upon a marriage between their two families, they were able to reach a territorial settlement that satisfied Hlapen and he called off his campaign. By the settlement Tomo Preljubović, Hlapen's step-son, married Symeon's daughter Maria Angelina. Since Maria was then only about ten years old, it has been argued persuasively that the pair were at the time only betrothed, and that the marriage occurred a couple of years later. In any case, by the mid-1360s the two were married.

Symeon allowed Hlapen to keep Damasis and also granted to Hlapen the lands Symeon had held to the west of Hlapen's principality, including the important city of Kastoria. This territory was almost certainly to be held under Symeon's suzerainty. Tomo Preljubović then, with or without his bride, went to Hlapen's court at Voden; possibly Voden, which belonged to Hlapen, had been marked out by the treaty as an eventual appanage for Tomo. Thus Hlapen came into possession of the lands between Symeon and Uroš' Serbia, giving each of those rulers a buffer against attack from the other. Hlapen, who

held his initial lands of Voden and Veria from Dušan, had remained loyal to Uroš up to this time; his agreement with Symeon did not lead to any change in this relationship. Thus Hlapen might be considered an ideal buffer in the event that friction should occur between Symeon and his nephew. However, and possibly Hlapen deserves some credit here, no friction did develop and the two Serb tsars seem to have ignored one another entirely from the time Symeon retreated from Zeta in 1358 until their deaths. But Symeon's secession and activities did mean the loss of this Greek territory for Serbia. After his treaty with Hlapen, Symeon settled down in the richer province of Thessaly which by then he clearly preferred to Epirus.

In the wake of Nicephorus' death and Symeon's departure from Epirus, the governors Symeon left behind found themselves unable to control Epirus. This enabled the Albanians to migrate into Epirus in ever greater numbers; soon they had settled throughout Epirus and taken over most of the towns as well, including Arta. Since Epirus was nominally Symeon's (at least the townsmen there, including those of Arta and Jannina, had hastened to submit to him after Nicephorus' death), he tried to maintain at least indirect control by recognizing in Epirus and Aetolia as deputies for himself certain powerful locals whom he considered friendly. The most active figures in Aetolia and Epirus were John (Ghin) Bova (or Buji) Spata and Peter Liosha (Losha). These two Albanian chieftains seem to have acquired most of these two regions in the course of the mid- to late 1350s. They soon succeeded in obtaining Symeon's blessing, or at least his acquiescence, for their activities, and each obtained the title of despot from him. Soon Symeon agreed to the division of Aetolia (including southern Epirus with Arta) between the two of them. Peter Liosha's half included Arta. Spata's main fort was Angelokastron. Thus one could accurately say Epirus was under Albanian rule.

However, owing to their tribal structure and the absence of any central Albanian authority over the tribes, the Albanians did not replace Greek or Serbian rule with any sort of Albanian state. The Albanians remained divided into tribes, each under its own chief. They regularly feuded with one another and newly arriving Albanian tribes pushed already settled ones from the lands they had occupied; thus the specific territory under a given tribe and the extent of territory controlled by a tribe were frequently changing. Furthermore, in these years the Albanians did not limit their control to the countryside but took over towns as well.

Thus we can conclude that the Albanians became the true rulers of Epirus, but owing to their tribal divisions and mutual quarrels that made them unable to create an effective state authority there, the term *anarchy* would best describe Epirus in this period. The Albanians have remained in this region in large numbers to the present. Their large-scale settlement, much of which occurred at this time, has been attributed by certain scholars to Symeon's departure from Epirus. However, this is an unwarranted conclusion. They were widely settled in Epirus by the time Symeon returned in 1359 after Nicephorus' death. He clearly was not strong enough to expel all these tribes-

men or to have stopped from entering Epirus those tribes who moved in during the 1360s. Furthermore, whatever success he might have had (and the little evidence we have on Symeon's military abilities does not suggest he would have had much) would probably not have lasted beyond his death, when the flood of Albanians would have been free to flow again.

By late 1366 or 1367 it seems only one city in the region, Jannina, was holding out against the Albanians. Its townsmen sent a delegation to Symeon requesting a governor, and he sent them his son-in-law Tomo Preljubović, who until then had been living at the court of his step-father Hlapen in Voden. Under the suzerainty of Symeon, Preljubović, from Jannina, nominally held a considerable portion of Epirus; but in fact his authority probably did not extend much beyond the immediate environs of Jannina. In that limited region he did, however, retain various small fortresses. The Albanian tribesmen, whose activities kept matters in a state of flux in Epirus, prevented Preljubović from asserting his authority in most of the lands that were nominally his. They also frequently attacked Jannina, thus creating great insecurity for his capital. By these means the Albanians prevented the development of anything resembling central authority in Epirus.

The main source for Preljubović's reign is what is known as the *Chronicle of Jannina*, whose anonymous author hated Preljubović. Writing during the reign of his successor who quite possibly had been involved in Preljubović's murder, the chronicler may well have presented Preljubović as a tyrant in order to justify the murder. Thus we should take the chronicle's account with a grain of salt. It claims that Preljubović's rule in Jannina was unpopular. The cornerstone of his policy was to support the interests of his army, which had accompanied him from Voden to Jannina and was composed chiefly of Serbs. To satisfy these troops he confiscated lands from Greek magnates and from the Church. The chronicler also accuses him of increasing taxes, creating new taxes, and establishing monopolies on the sale of certain products to benefit himself and his followers. The chronicler describes various actions Tomo took against local nobles. However, he also reports various local rebellions and attempted coups against Tomo. Thus it is hard to determine whether Tomo's policy provoked those rebellions or whether ambitious locals consistently opposing him caused him to take action against them. Tomo Preljubović also quarreled with the Church leadership in Jannina, which led to the Metropolitan of Jannina's going into exile in 1367, first to Thessaly and later to Constantinople. Jannina remained without its bishop until 1381, when a new one, appointed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, appeared in town. Tomo chased him out almost immediately but agreed to his return the next year, since the Byzantines agreed to grant Tomo the title of despot and the bishop was needed to perform the ceremony.

Tomo also fought regularly against the Albanians in the area, particularly against the Malakasi, Liosha, Zenevisi, and Musachi tribes. Immediately on Tomo's succession, Peter Liosha launched an attack against Jannina which kept the city under siege for a good part of the next three years. Peace was

finally made in 1369/70 when Tomo's infant daughter was betrothed to Peter's son, John. A five-year peace followed with Liosha. However, Tomo had various fracasces with other tribesmen during those years. Then in 1373/74 Peter Liosha died of the plague. John Spata immediately took advantage of his death to conquer Arta and unite the two parts of Aetolia/southern Epirus. Soon Spata attacked Jannina, but Tomo managed to conclude peace with him, giving Spata his sister as a wife. But this agreement did not bring peace to Jannina, for almost immediately thereafter the Malakasi began attacking Jannina; Tomo won a decisive victory over them in 1377, which dispersed them for a while. The following year Tomo was allied with Spata against a Frankish attack upon Acarnania led by the Hospitaller Knights of Saint John then ruling Achaëa. The allies won a major victory over the Franks, probably late in 1378, in which they took prisoner Grand Master John Fernandez de Heredia and a rich Florentine adventurer, Esau del Buondelmonti. The latter was brought back as a captive to Jannina and was to play a major role in the region's history several years later. Whatever territory the knights had occupied in Acarnania—including Naupaktos, taken from the Angevins by Spata in 1376 or 1377—was regained by Spata.

In February 1379 the Malakasi, supported by local Bulgarians and Vlachs, again attacked Jannina, only to be defeated once again by Tomo. That May his recent ally John Spata marched against Jannina, but Tomo defeated him too. Next a coup was planned by some local nobles. Tomo was tipped off and nipped it in the bud by arresting the leading conspirators, one of whom was blinded while the other was poisoned in jail. His problems with the local Albanians continued, so in 1380 he turned to the Ottomans for assistance against them. The Ottomans were willing, and with their help Tomo recovered a series of small forts in the vicinity of Jannina. Then he took the offensive into central Epirus. What gains, if any, Tomo made as a result of this offensive are not known. It also seems that his Turkish allies were at times operating on their own, picking off various fortresses which they retained for themselves. A Turkish leader named Timurtash even tried, but without success, to take Arta from Spata in 1384.

Meanwhile Symeon, calling himself Symeon Uroš Palaeologus, settled in Thessaly. At Trikkala he established his main court, which imitated the Byzantine court. Greeks were the most numerous element present and the Angelus family, relatives of his wife, played a dominant role. All of Symeon's surviving charters are in Greek. However, there was no discrimination against other groups, and Serbs and Albanians held prominent positions too. The Greek magnates of Thessaly continued to hold great estates, managing them and local affairs with great independence. In 1366 or 1367 Symeon founded the remarkable Meteora monasteries, perched on the high rock pinnacles that rise up from the great Meteora plain. Their development continued beyond Symeon's lifetime, and the monasteries reached the height of their prosperity in the 1370s and 1380s right after his death. Symeon is last heard of



in Trikkala in 1369. Soon thereafter he was dead. His successor was his elder son John Uroš. He also had a second son, Stefan. If we can believe seventeenth-century sources like Orbini, Stefan acquired his own holding in southern Thessaly, including the town of Pharsalos. Whether Symeon ordered this division of his realm or whether Stefan seized this territory is not known.

Most of Thessaly, however, went to John Uroš, a peaceful, religious type. He turned its administration over to Alexius Angelus, who seems to have been a relative of his mother and who held large estates in Thessaly. Alexius bore the title caesar; it is not known whether he received it from Symeon or from John Uroš. After Tsar Uroš' death in Serbia in 1371, John Uroš became the last living male Nemanjić (insofar as we know neither the fate of Stefan nor whether he had issue). However, John Uroš had few secular interests and became a monk (probably in 1372 or 1373, in any case before 1381) under the name of Joasaf. After John Uroš' departure to a monastery, Caesar Alexius Angelus remained in power and became the ruler of Thessaly. We have references to him as Lord of Thessaly through the 1370s and 1380s. As a powerful local magnate, he had acquired a dominant position during John Uroš' reign. Finding himself in power when John Uroš abdicated, if he did not indeed force that abdication, he simply secured his hold further with the support of local magnates. He was married to Maria, a daughter of Hlapen. He eventually entered into close relations with Manuel Palaeologus, who was governor of Thessaloniki (1382–April 1387) for his father, John V, and accepted Manuel's—and therefore also Byzantine—suzerainty. We find several cases in which Manuel confirmed charters issued by Alexius. However, we also have a series of Alexius' judicial decisions that were issued in his own right. Thus Thessaly found itself back in the Byzantine sphere by the early 1380s.

The last certain evidence we have of Alexius Angelus' being alive is a charter he issued to the Meteora monasteries in August 1388; we have a reference to his successor, Manuel Angelus, almost certainly Alexius' son, in 1392. Thus Manuel probably succeeded his father as hereditary governor of Thessaly in about 1390. Manuel also bore the title caesar. Since it required an emperor to grant it, presumably the title came from John V and indicates that Manuel recognized Byzantine suzerainty, in return for which his position as governor of Thessaly was recognized by the emperor in Constantinople. Manuel was to be the last Christian ruler of Thessaly since, as we shall see, the Ottomans conquered the province and drove him out in 1394.

Meanwhile in Jannina, on 23 December 1384, Tomo Preljubović was murdered, victim of a court intrigue. The hostile Jannina chronicle says his throat was cut by some members of his own body-guard. The population of Jannina was overjoyed and at once declared allegiance to his widow, Maria Angelina. They urged her to invite her brother, the monk Joasaf (John Uroš), to come to advise her. He obliged and soon after his arrival suggested that she marry Esau del Buondelmonti. Esau, as noted, had formerly been a captive in

Jannina after his capture in 1378 and may well have made a good impression on the widow and her court. Maria thought this a good idea, offered her hand to him, and Esau returned and married her.

Chalcocondyles presents a very different point of view. He reports that Maria had made the prisoner Esau her lover and implies that Esau had not been released. This contradicts the Jannina chronicle, which indirectly says Esau had been released since it states he returned to Jannina to marry her. Chalcocondyles then claims that together they carried out the murder of Tomo, after which she took over the rule of Jannina and married her lover. Tomo's and her son then fled to the Turks to seek help: help against Esau we might assume, but Chalcocondyles says help against Carlos Tocco, the Count of Cephalonia who was expanding into Acarnania. However, the two statements need not be viewed as contradictory, for Esau and Carlo Tocco were related; Carlo's mother was a Buondelmonti. Thus Carlo may well have been supporting his kinsman. In any case, Sultan Murad was not interested in the quarrel. He simply arrested and blinded Tomo's son.

Whatever their disagreements, both the Jannina chronicle and Chalcocondyles have Maria in power after Tomo's murder and soon marrying Esau. It also seems that Maria's brother (John Uroš, the monk Joasaf) did arrive to help her. At the same time Alexius Angelus' wife, accompanied by the widow's other brother Stefan, appeared for a visit. Whether their presence reflected ambitions on the part of Alexius Angelus and/or Stefan to take over in Jannina is not clear. Then in January or possibly February 1385 Esau del Buondelmonti, who may well have been the candidate of the anti-Tomo party, married Maria and thus triumphed—if holding Jannina at this time is something one would judge a triumph. Esau then became governor of Jannina. He was a Florentine, related to the Acciajuoli of the Morea and Attica (through his mother Lapa Acciajuoli) and, as noted, to the Tocco family of Cephalonia.

Before continuing with our account of Esau's rule in Jannina, it is worth pausing to explain that the Tocco family had acquired control of this Ionian principality—Cephalonia, Zakynthos, and possibly Ithaca—in about 1357 when the Angevin Robert of Taranto granted the islands to Leonardo Tocco, one of his leading retainers. Carlo Tocco succeeded to these possessions on Leonardo's death, which occurred between 1375 and 1377. Leonardo, probably in the 1360s but certainly by 1373, had also seized the island of Leucas and Vonitsa in Epirus from John d'Enghien, Walter II of Brienne's heir. Thus Carlo also inherited a foothold on the Epirote mainland.

After Esau's assumption of power, the monk Joasaf soon departed for Meteora and spent the rest of his days as a monk either on Meteora or on Mount Athos until his death in 1422 or 1423. The *Chronicle of Jannina*, which is very favorable to Esau, says he immediately abolished Tomo's new taxes, recalled various exiled local nobles, restored to the local landholders the lands Tomo had confiscated, and arrested—jailing, exiling, or blinding—Tomo's leading councillors. Esau sought recognition from Byzantium, which

sent an envoy to invest Esau as despot in 1385/86. His attempts to reach understandings with the Albanians failed. Early in 1385 John Spata attacked Jannina but soon withdrew when he saw he could not crack the defenses created by Esau. The two soon concluded a peace, whose terms are unknown; but soon again they were at war with one another. Faced with the Albanian threat, Esau, as Tomo had, began negotiating with the Turks for aid. In 1386 he visited Murad's court and paid homage. As a result he received Ottoman military help for his local defense.

But then, right after the Battle of Kosovo (June 1389), in which Murad lost his life, the Ottomans for several months were not able to provide assistance to Esau. This encouraged the Albanians to immediately rise up again against Esau. In the summer of 1389 Spata attacked Jannina, unsuccessfully, though he did plunder the environs. Directly on the heels of Spata's attack, the Malakasi launched a raid against Jannina's territory and soon concluded an alliance with Spata for a new effort against the town itself. Faced with this threat, Esau, still in 1389, made an alliance with the "caesar from Thessaly"—either Alexius Angelus or his successor Manuel—and their joint forces defeated some Albanian nobles (presumably Spata and the Malakasi) late in that year. Bayezid I, having rapidly secured his position as sultan, sent troops that winter which helped Esau repel Spata once again. Then Esau went to Bayezid's court, supposedly spending fourteen months there, where he concluded a new alliance with the Ottomans. He returned to Jannina in December 1390, accompanied by an Ottoman army led by the able general Evrenos beg. Their joint forces soon defeated the Albanian tribes in the neighborhood, forcing them to withdraw back into the mountains, and a short period of peace (1391–94) followed.

Maria then died in December 1394. Just as they differ on the causes of Tomo's death and Esau's succession, our two sources differ in their assessments of her. The Jannina chronicle depicts her as kind and pious. Chalcocondyles sees her as an unfaithful wife of generally dubious morality. The Albanians soon became active against Jannina again, and to try to bring about peace with at least some of them, Esau in 1396 married John Spata's daughter Irene. Though this may have led to peace with Spata, it did not pacify the other tribes in the area, in particular the Zenevisi, against whom Esau went to war in April 1399. Esau was defeated and taken prisoner. The Florentines, who had found Esau's presence in Jannina beneficial for their policy, soon paid a huge ransom to purchase his freedom, enabling him to return to Jannina in July 1400.

Soon thereafter, in October 1400, John Spata died. His brother, Sgouros Bova Spata, obtained Arta. Sgouros had troubles at once when a certain Vango of mixed ethnicity—he called himself a Serbo-Albano-Bulgaro-Vlach—expelled him from Arta. By the end of 1401 Vango had been driven out of Arta. However, Sgouros did not regain the town; instead, his nephew and also the late John's grandson, Maurice (Muriki) Spata, took over Arta;

Sgouros had to settle for Angelokastron as his residence. At this point the Jannina chronicle comes to an end and our main source of information on Jannina and Epirus dries up.

At the time, the Spata family was involved in civil war. Carlo Tocco, holder of Cephalonia, Leucas, and Vonitsa, joined in the fighting as an ally. Successful, he acquired for himself several fortresses. Sgouros Spata of Angelokastron died in 1403 from wounds suffered in this warfare. He left his lands to his son Paul, who seems to have been without much ability. Carlo Tocco then took the offensive for himself; as a result Paul turned to the Turks for help, soon ceding Angelokastron to them. (The Turks did not hold it long; in 1408 Angelokastron belonged to Tocco.) A relatively small contingent of Turks sent to aid Paul suffered a defeat, probably in 1406, outside the walls of Vonitsa; as a result the Turkish commander came to an understanding with Tocco. Paul, seeing little hope, retired to Naupaktos, still a Spata family possession. The next year, in 1407, he sold Naupaktos to Venice. As a result of Paul's withdrawal, Aetolia and Acarnania were divided between Maurice Spata and Carlo Tocco. Maurice Spata still retained Arta, having successfully beaten off an attack upon it by Tocco. Maurice and Carlo remained in a state of war.

Meanwhile in Jannina, probably in 1402, Esau divorced Irene Spata—who by a previous husband was the mother of Maurice Spata—and took a new wife, Eudocia Balšić, the sister of Constantine Balšić, a leading Ottoman vassal in northern Albania. They had a son, George, who was only seven when Esau died on 6 February 1411. Immediately his widow tried to take control of Jannina. However, the town leaders disliked her and agreed to reject her when they learned she was seeking a Serb to be her new husband. On 26 February the citizens of Jannina revolted, exiled her, and summoned Esau's nephew Carlo Tocco to be lord of Jannina. Carlo arrived in Jannina on 1 April 1411.

Maurice Spata, unhappy with Carlo's acquisition of Jannina, soon formed an alliance with John (Gjin) Zenevisi, the leader of the most powerful tribe in the vicinity of Jannina, against Carlo. However, despite winning a major open-field battle against Tocco's forces in 1412, the Albanian allies could not take Jannina. Tocco owed much of his success to his ability to mobilize local Greek support against the Albanians. In 1414 Maurice Spata died, and Arta went to his brother, who had become a Muslim and taken the name Yaqub. Yaqub in his turn died in 1416. Carlo brought his forces south; the people of Arta submitted to him, and he entered the town in October 1416. At the same time Rogoi surrendered to him. Carlo turned the rule of Arta over to his own brother Leonardo, who had long been his faithful colleague, while he himself returned to the north to rule Jannina. Leonardo died in 1418 or 1419, leaving a son, Carlo. Since the elder Carlo had no legitimate sons, this Carlo was already his uncle's recognized heir. It is often said that Carlo Tocco became master of Epirus. He did hold the two major cities—Arta and Jannina—and presumably various other towns as well. However, it must be

stressed that much of Epirus, as always in this period, was under the domination of various Albanian tribes, over which Tocco almost certainly had no authority. But in any case, holding various towns, Tocco was the nominal lord of Epirus, Aetolia, and Acarnania from his victory in 1418 until his death in 1429. He also retained his family's hereditary possessions of Cephalonia, Zakynthos, and Ithaca.

### **Dušan's Albanian Lands**

Meanwhile, John Comnenus Asen established his own independence to Janina's northwest, in southern Albania, bearing the title of despot Dušan had granted him. Though he had good relations with Symeon and even supported his invasion of Serbia, he did not recognize his suzerainty. After Symeon's retreat back to Kastoria in 1358, John Comnenus continued to rule in his principality centered in Valona and Berat. As noted in the previous chapter, it is not known whether his Albanian holdings were limited to the region of these two towns or whether, as some scholars believe, he held a good portion of Albania. To secure his position he maintained close ties with Venice, which, despite its loss of the territory north of Durazzo to Hungary in 1358, continued to be a major commercial and naval force in the region south of Durazzo. Valona at this time became a major commercial port—particularly trading with Venice and Dubrovnik—that sold cattle, pepper, sugar, and other spices wholesale. John Comnenus ruled his principality until he died of the plague in 1363.

His successor was named Alexander; he was probably John's son. Alexander ruled until about 1368, the last year he is mentioned in the sources. At Alexander's court we find mention of Serbs, Greeks, Albanians, and Vlachs. Sources also mention in 1366 a Castriot as kephale (head) of Kanina (the acropolis fortress above Valona) who probably was an ancestor of John Castriot and Skanderbeg, who were to become so prominent in the following century. North of Valona, holding Myzeqeja, the region between the Shkumbi and Devolli rivers, an Albanian named Blasius (or Blaž) II Matarango (1358–67) asserted his independence and set up a short-lived principality; he bore the title of *sevastocrator* which Symeon, who recognized his rule over this territory, granted him. On Lake Ohrid a Serb named Mladen, granted the title *caesar* by Dušan and soon succeeded by his son Branko Mladenović, for all practical purposes ruled this Albanian-Slavic border territory independently, though the family at least nominally recognized Uroš' suzerainty. Then as we move further east, beyond Mladen's lands, we run into the lands of Hlapen, who held Kastoria and Voden. The territories of these petty princes formed a buffer between Epirus and Thessaly on the one hand and the state of Serbia on the other under Uroš and its great nobles who, regardless of how independent they were in fact, still recognized the suzerainty of the Serbian tsar.

## **The Lands that Remained Loyal to Uroš**

While these southern conquests of Dušan seceded, the core of his state held together. This included most of Macedonia, the interior Struma-Mesta lands, and the Chalcidic peninsula. In this core area one might expect the strongest nobleman to have been John Oliver. He outlived Dušan, for coins of his with Uroš' name on them exist. However, no written source mentions him in these years, and it seems he died shortly after Uroš' succession. He left two sons, but somehow they did not acquire major positions in Serbia. It is not known why, but we may suspect they were thwarted by a coalition of strong nobles. Most of Oliver's lands went to John and Constantine, the sons of Sevastocrator Dejan of Kumanovo. Earlier scholars believed they were relatives of Oliver. This is no longer accepted. Oliver also left considerable land to Hilandar on Mount Athos.

The lands that remained Serbian can be divided into three main parts: the western territories, including Zeta, the central Serbian lands of Uroš, and the southern lands (including the eastern part of Macedonia, with Serres its capital). Because the leading nobles of these three regions usually expressed loyalty to Uroš, no legal separatism occurred.

### *The Western Nobles*

The two leading western noble families were those of Vojislav Vojinović and the Balšić brothers. Vojislav, the strongest, was the son of a certain Vojin who had governed Hum for Stefan Dečanski. Vojislav held lands along Zeta's borders between the Drina and the coast, including Užice, Gacko, Popovo Polje, Konavli, and Trebinje.

The Balšići held Zeta. No surviving source refers to this family before 1360. If we can believe Orbini (writing in 1601) the family founder, Balša, had been a petty nobleman, holding only one village under Dušan. Thus he entered Uroš' reign with a small holding. In fact, at that time the family was less influential in Zeta than a second noble named Žarko who also is not mentioned in surviving sources from the period before Dušan's death. Right after Dušan's death, however, Žarko emerged as the leading nobleman of Zeta. He is referred to on the coast in June 1357 as a baron of the Raškan king (Uroš) who ruled Zeta, the region of the Bojana River, and the (southern) coast. The phrasing shows that Žarko recognized Uroš' suzerainty. Žarko disappears thereafter from the sources as rapidly and unexpectedly as he had appeared. He had probably taken advantage of a power vacuum to expand a small holding only to be pushed out in the same manner by a more efficient force, which presumably was the Balšić family. However, Žarko probably survived for a while, holding some of his lands on the Bojana. His son Mrkše Žarković was to emerge subsequently as a figure of middling significance, but chiefly owing to lands belonging to the woman he was to marry.

By 1360, when we first hear of them, the Balšići were already quite

powerful, though we cannot be certain about their specific holdings. For in September of that year, when we hear of them for the first time in a charter issued by Uroš to Dubrovnik, the Balšići were listed on the same level as Vojislav and said to be holding the Zetan lands. The charter granted the merchants of Dubrovnik the right to trade freely in Uroš' lands and in those of these two leading barons. Orbini states that the father (Balša) first acquired Skadar, which was betrayed to him by its defenders, and then he (and probably here we should read "they" to include the sons who succeeded him) expanded to acquire the territory between Lake Skadar and the coast to, but not including, Kotor. Orbini reports that this expansion into Upper Zeta and into the lands of the Dukagjins south of Lake Skadar was carried out fairly violently by the sons. Djuraš Ilijić of Upper Zeta was killed and the Dukagjins were either killed or imprisoned. Other Dukagjins, we know, survived, for the family was not to lose its prominence, though it may have suffered some diminution in territory. Orbini also makes the comment that the Balšići carried out their expansion more by trickery and cleverness than by force of arms. The scholarly consensus attributes their success to concluding advantageous marriages, supporting Uroš against Symeon to earn his gratitude, and land-grabbing. Three brothers (Stracimir, George [Djuradj], and Balša) jointly succeeded their father. Orbini says that in terms of goodness and trustworthiness Stracimir was the best of the three; George was wise and very skilled in the use of arms; while Balša was brave and a fine horseman, but not very intelligent. George is soon documented as bearing the title of župan (count).

But though we know the Balšići were powerful and held much of Zeta by 1360 and can trace, to the degree Orbini was accurate, the order of their acquisitions, we are left in the dark about exact chronology, for Orbini provides no dates, other than to say these gains occurred after Dušan's death. By 1363 they clearly had Skadar and Drivast and probably Bar. They probably took Drivast in the spring of 1362. If Orbini is accurate, and most scholars do accept him here, they probably acquired Skadar, which he states was the first major town they obtained, in or before 1360.

In 1361 these two leading western noble families (Vojislav and the Balšići) split. For when Vojislav, supported by Uroš, attacked Dubrovnik, the Balšići supported the town. Their ability to act independently illustrates the weakness of Uroš' control over his state.

Vojislav's quarrel with Dubrovnik broke out in the fall of 1358, when the Serbs and Hungarians clashed along the Danube. Using Dubrovnik's vassalage to Hungary as an excuse—for Dubrovnik had not earned this enmity by any actual participation in the fighting—and a commercial dispute between Dubrovnik and Kotor as further cause for anger, Vojislav prepared for war. On this occasion war was avoided, and Dubrovnik sent Uroš his Saint Demetrius' Day tribute. But tensions increased the following year, 1359, when Hungary launched a larger effort against Serbia that included support of the Rastislalić in Braničevo. Having eliminated the local opponents of the

Rastislalići, the Hungarians secured Braničevo's independence from Serbia and then used this territory as a base to penetrate further into Serbian territory. The Serbian army retreated to avoid battle with the attackers and the Hungarians had to be satisfied with plundering. The Serb Vojislav then took out his frustrations on Hungary's vassal Dubrovnik by sending his men to plunder into the part of Konavli belonging to Dubrovnik.

It seems that Vojislav, who probably had sent troops to help defend central Serbia from the Hungarians, waited until the Hungarians withdrew from Serbia before he attacked Dubrovnik. For it seems the Hungarians withdrew in July 1359, and Vojislav's troops were plundering Konavli in August. Vojislav also had by then begun to call himself the Prince (knez) of Hum—a title, it seems, awarded to him by Uroš, although Vojislav actually held only a very small part of Hum. He now demanded that Dubrovnik turn over to him Ston, the traditional capital of Hum, which Dubrovnik had purchased from Dušan in 1333. He next seized a Ragusan merchant caravan that was passing through his lands; he said the seizure was carried out on the orders of Tsar Uroš. When Vojislav brought his troops to the very walls of Dubrovnik, the town gave in and bought a temporary respite from the fighting by paying him four thousand perpera. However, matters remained very difficult for Dubrovnik. The following year (1360) it sent envoys to Serbia to attend the wedding of Uroš and Anna (Anka, Anča), the daughter of Alexander Basarab, Vojevoda of Wallachia, and the half-sister of Wallachia's reigning ruler—a marriage probably intended to seal an alliance against Serbia's and Wallachia's common enemy Hungary. These envoys complained of a series of new toll and customs stations erected throughout Serbia by various Serbian nobles in the years after Dušan's death. Uroš, at least on paper, declared these new stations abolished and took Dubrovnik's caravans under his protection.

War between Vojislav and Dubrovnik broke out again in 1361. Vojislav had the support of Uroš, who ordered the seizure of all Ragusan merchants in his realm. Kotor, which until recently had enjoyed good relations with Dubrovnik, declared its support for Vojislav. Kotor probably did so because it saw Vojislav as a protector against the ambitious Balšići, who had expanded to the Gulf of Kotor and clearly had their eyes on the town of Kotor. Moreover, Kotor, under Serbian suzerainty since the time of Nemanja, traditionally supported the Serbian ruler, who on this occasion supported Vojislav. Orbini provides further details. Pointing out that the two towns had regularly been allies until 1361, Orbini reports that when Vojislav attacked it, Dubrovnik asked Kotor not to sell him salt. In the interests of its economy, Kotor refused. Dubrovnik then burned Kotor's salt works. Furious, Kotor then came out strongly for Vojislav and began to sell him arms. Vojislav mobilized his troops to attack both Dubrovnik and Ston. Dubrovnik, secure in its own defenses, worried about Ston. To pressure Vojislav's men into wanting peace, Dubrovnik stopped exporting salt into the interior. This caused hardship not only for Vojislav's subjects but also for the shepherds of Zeta and Albania



who depended upon this salt. The town moreover attacked Kotor and created a naval blockade of the Gulf of Kotor. It also offered a reward to anyone who would burn Vojislav's granaries in Gacko and Sjenica. Some of Vojislav's men meanwhile plundered the environs of Dubrovnik while others attacked, but failed to take, Ston and Pelješac.

At this moment George and Stracimir Balšić, holders of western Zeta (possibly already including Bar and Skadar), sent word to Dubrovnik of their support, as did Budva. Interestingly enough Budva seems to have supported Vojislav in 1359. However, by 1362 this town under its head Površko had accepted Balšić overlordship. If his submission had occurred, as it may well have, by 1361, then it would have been natural for Budva to fall into line with Balšić policy. The Balšići's decision to involve themselves on behalf of Dubrovnik was probably owing to the fact that Dubrovnik was at war with Kotor; ambitious to obtain Kotor, they presumably decided to support Dubrovnik in the hope of achieving that goal.

The Balšići's entry into the war on Dubrovnik's side, in opposition to their overlord Tsar Uroš, shows that Uroš was unable to control his vassals. And, since the war seems to have been pushed by Vojislav, one might conclude that Uroš had in fact been dragged into a war that was being carried out chiefly to serve the interests of his vassal. It is quite likely that Uroš and his court were unhappy with the situation; thus it is not surprising that in the summer of 1361 Uroš sent envoys to Dubrovnik to seek peace. Though his efforts failed, as did those of Tvrtko of Bosnia, Uroš at least was able to get salt exports resumed for much of the interior. However, Dubrovnik's ban remained in effect for Kotor and for Vojislav's own lands. Finally in 1362 an armistice was signed through the mediation of Venice, which was angry at the naval blockade that impeded its commerce and infringed upon what it felt were its rights to trade freely on the Adriatic. A peace treaty that restored matters to their conditions under Dušan was signed in August 1362. At the very end of the year peace was also concluded between Dubrovnik and Kotor; each side released the other's merchants who had been arrested and restored all confiscated merchandise. Thus the war concluded indecisively.

Dubrovnik was spared further trouble when Vojislav died in September 1363, probably a victim of the plague that was then ravaging Dalmatia. By then his ambitions seem to have been increasing, for he was calling himself Stefan (the Serbian royal name) Vojislav, Grand Prince of the Serbs, Greeks, and the coastal lands. The subjects listed for himself and the manner in which they were listed were clearly in imitation of the title of the Serbian ruler. One may well wonder what his specific goals were. In any case in the early 1360s Vojislav was the most powerful figure in Serbia. His death was to permit the rise of others. Vojislav's lands went to his widow, Gojislava, who was soon attacked by Vojislav's nephew Nicholas (Nikola) Altomanović. For the next three years, as a result of a grant made to her by Uroš (renewing a grant Uroš had made to Vojislav in 1358), Dubrovnik paid the two thousand perpera Saint Demetrius' Day tribute to Gojislava.

During and after these coastal events the Balšići were active in their own interests. In the period 1360–63, if they had not already done so, they acquired Skadar and probably Bar. In the fall of 1362 they besieged but failed to take the port of Ulcinj, which, though managing its own affairs, had officially become the property of Dušan's widow Helen after his death. The Balšići finally succeeded in taking Ulcinj in 1368. During this period they also acquired the port of Budva. Most scholars date its acquisition to the period 1360–63. Those who oppose this conclusion point to the fact that Orbini reports Budva as independent under a nobleman named Površko in 1363. However, he may well have been a Balšić vassal, for Orbini states that Površko had bought Budva or, as some say, been granted it by the Balšići for some service. In 1364, Orbini says, Kotor attacked Budva, and in the fighting Površko was killed. Kotor was probably taking advantage of a war (to be discussed later) then going on between Budva's probable suzerain, George Balšić, and the Albanian Thopias. Despite Površko's death Budva held out against Kotor and soon thereafter the Balšići had come to Budva's aid. Thus Budva was saved from Kotor and the Balšići were soon thereafter in control of Budva, where they installed a new vojvoda, Nicholas Zakarija (Zaccaria), to administer the town.

Kotor now found itself isolated and in difficulties. The most powerful figure in the area, George Balšić, was at war against it. And Kotor could not seek help from the Serbian ruler, for George was closely associated with Vukašin, who was coming to be the most powerful and influential figure at court. In fact George had married Vukašin's daughter Olivera. Kotor's former protector Vojislav had died, and since his heir, his widow Gojislava, was trying to defend her lands against her nephew Nicholas Altomanović, she was in no position to help the town. Only after Nicholas' victory over his aunt in 1368 did the town again find in Nicholas a protector close by. And by then the town's dangers had decreased since Uroš and his court had cooled toward the Balšići.

To further their coastal ambitions, in 1368 or early 1369 the three Balšić brothers accepted Catholicism. However, this did not lead to any effort by them to encourage the Orthodox Christians in their lands to convert.

### *Vukašin*

The death of Vojislav, who, though active in his own interests, had, as far as we can tell, remained loyal to Uroš, weakened Uroš' position and encouraged more separatist activity. Needing a new protector, Uroš decided, or was persuaded, to turn to Vukašin Mrnjavčević. Orbini says Vukašin's family originated in Hum; he himself was born in Livno, the son of a certain Mrnjava. Originally poor, Mrnjava and his sons—Vukašin and Uglješa—rose rapidly under Stefan Dušan. Possibly the family had supported his invasion of Bosnia/Hum in 1350. That they were from Hum is confirmed by the fact that a certain Mrnjan (or Mergnanus) was a treasurer (kaznac) in Trebinje in the

1280s serving Milutin's mother, Helen. The family could well have moved to Livno after the Bosnian conquest of Hum and then, having supported Dušan in his preparations for his invasion of Bosnia (1350) and fearing punishment, have emigrated to Serbia prior to that war. Noteworthy, the first reference we have to Vukašin in Serbia comes from March 1350 when we find Vukašin as Dušan's appointed *Župan* of Prilep. For the rest of Dušan's reign Vukašin is mentioned in documents as a high courtier and as the ruler's deputy in Prilep; he also came to possess considerable territory around Prilep in his own right. His brother Uglješa may well have also been in Dušan's service already before the Bosnian campaign; at least a baron of Dušan's named Uglješa is documented in Ragusan records from 1346.

Having in 1364 made Vukašin a despot, Tsar Uroš in August or September 1365 crowned him king, repeating in theory the situation that had existed when Dušan was tsar and Uroš king. However, there was one major distinction between the present and former situations. For formerly, at least in theory, Uroš had held the Serbian lands, and Dušan the "Roman." Now Vukašin and Uroš were co-rulers and there was no territorial division between them; both jointly ruled the same Serbian land. Moreover, the king, Vukašin, was to become the dominant figure. Scholars have often depicted Vukašin as a usurper. However, though Vukašin may have pressured Uroš into crowning him, at first Uroš' rights were respected; through 1366 they appeared together on coins and on wall-paintings, on both of which Uroš was portrayed in the senior position on the right. Moreover, because Uroš was weak, possibly even feeble-minded, he did need support. The epics depict Vukašin as Uroš' kum (God-father). Though no contemporary source confirms this, it offers a plausible explanation for Uroš' action. One in trouble would naturally have turned to one's kum for support. Thus quite possibly Vukašin's coronation was a mutually convenient act, executed voluntarily by Uroš. However, in time Vukašin came to act increasingly on his own. In 1367 Vukašin was corresponding with Dubrovnik in his own name alone and in 1370 he issued a charter to Dubrovnik without reference to Uroš. However, he never ousted Uroš.

Vukašin may have had plans to establish his own dynasty. He crowned his son Marko "young king." This was the title borne by Dušan during the reign of Dečanski which indicated his position as heir to the throne. But since Uroš was childless, a desire on the part of Vukašin to secure Marko's succession need not have threatened Uroš' position. Only Orbini, a late author (1601), on the basis of a non-extant and unknown source, suggests outright friction between them; he states that in 1368/69 Uroš joined a coalition against Vukašin which resulted in his briefly being imprisoned by Vukašin. Vukašin also did take advantage of his position to expand his personal holdings further into Macedonia and Kosovo, acquiring by 1366 Skopje and by 1370 the important cities of Prizren, Ohrid (taken somehow from Branko Mladenović or from his son Vuk Branković), and most probably Priština and the rich mining town of Novo Brdo. Vukašin's rise followed the death of

Vojislav, whose departure from the scene meant there was no possible check on Vukašin except possibly the Balšići; however, their territorial expansion and ambitions did not overlap with those of Vukašin, and Vukašin had rapidly made them into allies by giving his daughter to George as a wife. Vuk Branković and Lazar were not yet on this level of power. Their rises followed the Battle of Marica (1371), in which Vukašin was killed.

### *Uglješa and Serres*

Upon Dušan's death his widow Helen inherited the southernmost lands that Serbia retained, including the Greek lands between the lower Vardar and the Mesta as well as the Chalcidic peninsula. She also held Ulcinj on the Adriatic coast. Though she became a nun, Helen continued to play an active political role. Cantacuzenus claims that when Uroš had to fight his uncle Symeon for his inheritance, his mother was unfaithful both to her son and to Symeon, taking for herself many towns and using her armies to hold power for herself, neither fighting against either nor helping either, while in Serbia the strong nobles drove out the weaker ones from their towns and forts and took them over for themselves. Cantacuzenus' description is applicable to various nobles like the Rastislalići and the Balšići. But, as far as we can tell, it does not fit Uroš' mother. No other medieval source even hints that she quarreled with Uroš. In fact he frequently resided at her court in Serres, where he was recognized, at least on paper, as Serres' overlord. Moreover, his name appears first in her charters, even though he probably had no actual authority in Serres or the rest of Helen's realm.

Vukašin's brother John Uglješa is found serving at Helen's court in Serres. He was, for example, her envoy to Emperor John V in 1358 when the emperor visited Kavalla. Uglješa was married to the daughter of Vojvoda (later Caesar) Vojin of Drama. Since Uglješa is later found holding Drama, we may assume he inherited it and the rest of Vojin's lands after Vojin died in ca. 1360. In 1365, when Vukašin was crowned king, Uglješa was crowned despot. By 1366 Uglješa was the *de facto* ruler of Serres. Helen's role declined, and she eventually died in November 1376. Uroš' name soon disappeared from official documents in Serres. And in 1369 we find Uglješa calling himself "autocrat." However, no secession occurred, for Uglješa and his brother Vukašin co-operated closely with each other. This was facilitated by the fact that Uglješa's lands extended north to border on the Serbian lands of Vukašin and Uroš. Thus the core of Dušan's state—the central Serbian and Macedonian lands—remained united. And since scholars have emphasized the break-up of the Serbian empire after 1356, it is worth noting here that the years following Dušan's death did not only see territorial losses for the Serbs. For Uglješa (or Helen) actually expanded the territory of the Serres "state" beyond the borders that had existed in Dušan's day. For we find Uglješa's holdings stretching beyond the former Mesta River frontier to include the towns of Xantheia, Polystylon, and Peritheorion.

From the documents preserved on Mount Athos we know a great deal about Uglješa's state in Serres.<sup>1</sup> Its population was a mixed one dominated by Greeks, Slavs (including Serbs and Bulgarians), and Vlachs. In the villages, beside the dominant element of the peasantry, lived artisans (blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters, etc.). Most of the peasants seem to have been bound to great estates, whether of secular landlords or of the Church. There was also a fairly large number of landless laborers who were hired to work the land of others, often in exchange for a share of the produce. In Serres, as in Serbia, mines were a major source of income.

After the death of Dušan the administration of Serres remained efficient, following the policies established by Dušan. Greek remained the official language of Church and state. However, Uglješa issued charters in either Greek or Slavic, depending on the grantee; he had two chancelleries, one for each language, to issue his documents. Court decisions and administrative acts were issued in Greek. The titles for offices also tended to be Greek.

Like many other towns, the town of Serres (and its environs) was under a *kephale* (headman). By this time the term *kephale* was equivalent to the Serbian term *župan*, which was coming to mean a figure appointed to govern a town, like Vukašin in Prilep in 1350, rather than indicating, as formerly, a hereditary lord of a county. The *kephale* was responsible for the administration of the town and its environs. In Serres the position was usually held by a Serb. When Dušan took Serres he had left the Greek holder of that position in office; however, from 1360 until the Byzantines recovered Serres all Serres' *kephales* were Serbs. And, as noted in the last chapter, throughout the Greek lands ruled by Dušan Serbs tended to hold the highest administrative positions while the Greeks tended to dominate the lesser ones. This policy was continued in the Serres state under Uglješa. However, we find many Greeks at Uglješa's court. Uglješa was very free in issuing them inflated honorary (as opposed to functional) titles. Thus Greeks were included among the highest nobility at Serres and they made up the major portion of the local aristocracy. On the whole they were loyal to him, serving in his army or administration, holding their *pronoias* from him, participating at his court, and in general playing an active role in the state. Some of these Greeks were of high Byzantine families, tied by blood or marriage to the first families of Constantinople. They remained at Serres after its conquest by Dušan, keeping and even enlarging their large estates. The policies of recognizing the titles and landholding of the Greeks, while making even further grants of both, and retaining Greeks in many administrative positions were ways to keep peace and order. It made the Greeks less prone to revolt against Serbian rule and it also meant that Serbian manpower was not spread too thin. Ostrogorsky's study of Serres shows that Greeks held the majority of honorary court titles while the bulk of important functional ones went to the Serbs. However, if one takes the nobility of Serres as a whole, more Greeks were to be found in its ranks than Serbs.

However, despite the presence of these Greeks in various official posi-

tions at court and in possession of large estates, the Serbian nobility expected to be rewarded for their part in the conquest of this region, and they were. They walked off with the highest positions in both Church and state. In fact, Serbs dominated high Church positions to an even greater extent than they did state ones. As noted, at the time of his conquest Dušan removed a certain number of Greek bishops, including the Metropolitan of Serres, and replaced them with Serbs. And throughout the period of Serbian rule, Serbs occupied the position of Metropolitan of Serres. It was similar in many other towns in that region, though there were cases where Greeks were retained in or even appointed to bishoprics. A glaring exception (though in Thessaly rather than Serres) was Anthony, the Metropolitan of Larissa, who remained in office from 1340 to 1363 through a whole series of changes: Andronicus III, the civil war between regency and Cantacuzenus, the rule of John Angelus, Dušan's conquest bringing Preljub's governorship, Nicephorus of Epirus' rule, and finally the rule of Symeon. In addition to changing the men holding sees, the Serbs had removed Serres and various other bishoprics in the area from the jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitan hierarchy and placed them under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Patriarch of Peć. On Mount Athos, though Greeks continued to hold many high positions, frequently a Serb held the top position of protos.

As noted, Dušan allowed the monasteries on Athos to retain their ties with Byzantium and even allowed them to mention the emperor in their prayers. This policy continued under Uglješa. In fact, the Serres state and Byzantium recognized each other; they exchanged embassies and the empire recognized the titles used in the Serres state, not hesitating to call Uglješa despot. On a non-official level Greeks and Serbs of Serres had ties with the empire, particularly with Thessaloniki, which many Serres subjects visited for pleasure or business. Commerce between Serres and Thessaloniki was very active.

## **Bulgaria**

John Alexander of Bulgaria outlived Dušan. In the 1350s he abandoned his first wife, with whom he did not get along, according to Orbini, because she was not bright enough. He then married Theodora, a converted Jewess, whose intelligence impressed him. Under her influence he disinherited the son of his first marriage, John Stracimir, and declared his and Theodora's son John Šišman as his heir. As compensation for Stracimir, shortly before 1360 John Alexander granted him Vidin, thereby dividing the realm again and making Vidin a separate principality once more. In 1365 the Hungarians invaded the province of Vidin. John Stracimir shut himself up behind the walls of Vidin, awaiting help from his father. In four days, before any help could arrive, the Hungarians on 2 June 1365 took Vidin; over the following three months the Hungarians took the rest of the principality. They established a Hungarian banate of Vidin under a Hungarian-appointed ban. John Stracimir was taken

prisoner with his family and spent a period of honorary captivity in a Croatian castle. The Hungarians also called in the Franciscans to try to convert the population to Catholicism. Having the Hungarians on their eastern border must have cramped the style of the Rastislalići of Braničevo, who, up to then, though Hungarian vassals, had more or less been able to behave as independent lords.

In 1370 John Stracimir recovered Vidin. It seems he was allowed to return by the Hungarians. Later Hungarian sources describe a Wallachian raid against the Vidin banate, in which the province was plundered and the lower town of Vidin taken and burned. The Wallachians then besieged Vidin's citadel, which forced King Louis to bestir himself to intervene and drive them out. Louis then allowed Stracimir to return as his vassal. We may assume he reasoned that Stracimir would have more local support and thus could defend the province more effectively than a Hungarian-appointed ban. To assure Stracimir's loyalty, Louis kept Stracimir's two daughters at the Hungarian court. One soon died but the other was married, through Hungarian negotiations, to Tvrtko of Bosnia in 1374. Stracimir's recognition of Hungarian suzerainty also enabled him to assert his independence from his father and subsequently to resist his brother, toward whom he felt great bitterness throughout his life. Exercizing the freedom this Hungarian support gave him, John Stracimir now assumed the title of tsar and removed his Church from the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Trnovo and subjected it to the Patriarch of Constantinople. He also began coining his own money.

John Alexander's Trnovo state suffered other losses as well. In north-eastern Bulgaria, based in the fortified town of Karbona (modern Balčik), a boyar named Balik had already—probably back in the middle 1340s—defected. For Balik is mentioned as sending one thousand troops under his brothers Dobrotica and Theodore to aid Anna of Savoy in the regency's war against Cantacuzenus. Balik was succeeded by his brother Dobrotica, for whom part of his holdings, the Dobrudja, received its name. (The name Dobrudja, by which the region is known today, is a Turkish form derived from his name that came into use in the Ottoman period.) He also held the Black Sea coast below the Dobrudja, including Varna, which was becoming a major port. To further assert his independence from Trnovo, Dobrotica, too, separated the Church in his lands from Trnovo, recognizing the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. He soon acquired even more of the Black Sea coast, coming to hold most of Bulgaria's northern coastline. He carried on considerable trade on the Black Sea, much of it on Venetian and Genoese vessels.

To make Trnovo's commercial situation worse, John Alexander lost his major southern Black Sea ports as well. In 1364 a war, whose causes are unknown, had broken out between Byzantium and Bulgaria. Though it did not last long, it lasted long enough for the Byzantines to take Anchialos. Then in 1366 Emperor John V visited Hungary; when he attempted to return home overland via Bulgaria, John Alexander, possibly still angry over the events of

1364, detained him. Amadeus of Savoy, the emperor's Latin cousin, came to the rescue by launching his fleet against the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Without difficulty he took Mesembria and Sozopolis. His actions led to negotiations that brought about not only the release of the emperor but also the cession of the two ports to Byzantium. Bulgaria was never to regain these ports from the empire.

Thus the tsar in Trnovo suffered considerable losses in trade and income. The income loss and territorial fragmentation were disastrous because the Turkish offensive against the Balkans was under way.

Upon John Alexander's death on 17 February 1371 his eldest son by Theodora, John Šišman, received the bulk of his father's dominions with Trnovo. Stracimir immediately attempted to conquer all Bulgaria. He succeeded in seizing Sofija but was able to retain it for only a year or two. Thereafter, Vidin and Trnovo, under the rival half-brothers, remained hostile to one another, preventing the Bulgarians from achieving any sort of united front against the Ottoman danger.

### **Bosnia: The Early Years of Tvrtko's Reign**

In Bosnia Stjepan Kotromanić died in 1353 and, as noted, was succeeded by his teen-age nephew, Tvrtko I (1353–91). Kotromanić had created for Bosnia a strong army, yet he had erected little state administrative apparatus, generally leaving his vassals in outlying regions to administer their own lands. Based on their own lands in the provinces they dominated, these nobles rendered their obligations and services to the state. Thus though Kotromanić's authority was strong, his state was not. His authority was personal, not institutional. Tvrtko was only fifteen years old when he began his rule, and few of these nobles felt obliged to serve him; not bound to the state by any force, the nobles were free to act as they chose. Thus the strong "state" of Kotromanić split into separate units and would have to be reassembled. The only way the new ban could reassert central authority, if the nobles defied him, was to send out punitive forces; but the bulk of the forces that had served Kotromanić for this purpose had come from these same nobles, many (or most) of whom now chose to sit on the sidelines. Tvrtko's chances for success, if he were to try a military solution, would have to rest on his personal army from his personal holding and on the retinues of any other nobles who chose to participate. Thus holding only his family lands and presumably compelling obedience chiefly from the lesser lords of his own central banate, he had the task of acquiring the loyalty of the other regions that were seceding from his state.

This situation gave the Hungarian king a great chance to meddle and to try to reassert his lost control over some or all of the banate. The king actively began to woo the northern nobles. The Hrvatinić family, the most powerful of these, who were the lords of the Donji Kraji, split, some for Tvrtko and some for Hungary. The weak and inexperienced Tvrtko was thus faced with what



might have seemed a no-win situation. He could not stand up to the Hungarians until he had re-created his state. And the Hungarians were doing everything they could to encourage the independent-minded Bosnian nobles to abandon the ban. Thus Tvrtko had to rebuild the state slowly and cautiously so as to retain or regain the support of the major nobles. To do this it was often necessary to outbid the Hungarian king.

The Hungarian king, Louis, had married Kotromanić's daughter Elizabeth in June 1353, just before Kotromanić's death. Louis now demanded that Tvrtko surrender to him, as her dowry, most of western Hum: namely, Završje and the lands between the Cetina and Neretva rivers, down to, and including, the rich customs town of Drijeva. Since Tvrtko was not at first able to acquire sufficient support from his nobles, Louis was able to compel him to come to Hungary in 1357 and surrender this territory. Thus Louis finally regained all the Croatian lands his father had lost; for first in 1345 Louis had acquired submission for the Cetina župa lands from the Nelipčić family and now in 1357 he acquired the lands to the south that Kotromanić had annexed. Tvrtko, stripped of this substantial territory, was then, as a Hungarian vassal, confirmed as ruler over Bosnia and Usora. "Hum" and "the Donji Kraji" were dropped from the title Louis confirmed him with, since the Hungarians had walked off with parts of these regions and did not want Tvrtko's title to support any Bosnian claims to them. In this period the pope stepped up calls for action against heretics in Bosnia. This increased Tvrtko's danger even though he himself was—and was to remain throughout his life—a Catholic. For if he tried to cross the Hungarian king, the king could take up the pope's call and invade Bosnia on a religious pretext.

We have no sources on Bosnian internal affairs from 1357, when Tvrtko submitted to Louis, until 1363, when a war (whose causes are unknown) broke out with Hungary. The Hungarians struck the north of Bosnia in two waves. The first wave struck the Donji Kraji, whose lords were divided among themselves, some for Tvrtko and some for the Hungarian king. This attack would be the crucial test. Loyalties already promised were not firm commitments. Vlatko Vukoslavić, loyal until then to Tvrtko, surrendered the important fortress of Ključ to Louis. However, Tvrtko came out on top as Vlkac Hrvatinić successfully defended Sokograd in the Župa of Pliva, and the Hungarian army was forced to turn back. Vlkac was given the whole Plivska župa as a reward a couple of years later; presumably that had been his price. The second Hungarian attack came a month later; this one was directed at Usora. Once again the Bosnian defense was successful; this time the Hungarians were halted at the fortress of Srebrnik in Usora, which held out against a massive attack. Thus somehow between 1358 and 1363 Tvrtko had become powerful enough to resist a major Hungarian attack. The sources are silent on how he managed to do this.

Shortly thereafter in February 1366 various major Bosnian nobles revolted against Tvrtko, forcing him to flee to the Hungarian court. The Hungarian king welcomed his enemy of two-and-a-half years before. The rebel

nobles placed Tvrtko's younger brother Vuk on the Bosnian throne. Whether he initiated the action or was merely a figure-head for others is not known, but once on the throne he took up his new role with enthusiasm. However, Tvrtko, having again recognized Hungarian suzerainty, received aid from Hungary—we may presume "aid" meant troops—and was back in Bosnia in March. By the end of that month he had regained some, but not all, of his state. He was supported by the lords of the Donji Kraji. A variety of nobles participated in this affair, shifting sides throughout as suited their own interests. The most important defector in this affair was Sanko Miltenović, the leading nobleman of Hum, who held most of Hum between Nevesinje and Konjic and the coast. In the second half of 1367 he came to terms with Tvrtko, and a peace was concluded; by it, Sanko retained his holdings but again recognized Tvrtko's overlordship over them.

By the end of 1367 Tvrtko had regained his banate and Vuk was in exile. From exile Vuk began to seek outside help, particularly from the pope, who had been calling for a crusade against Bosnia. However, nothing was to come of Vuk's or the pope's plans because the King of Hungary stood by Tvrtko. By 1374 Vuk was reconciled with Tvrtko; possibly the occasion for the reconciliation was the marriage between Tvrtko and Dorothy, the daughter of John Stracimir of Vidin. She had been living as an honored hostage at the Hungarian court and it seems that Louis arranged the marriage. In the years that followed Vuk remained in Bosnia as a junior ban; the only traces of his presence from these years are the charters he endorsed.

Despite Tvrtko's Catholicism, the Bosnian Church continued to survive under Tvrtko. And we shall find it flourishing in the years immediately following his reign, when it is mentioned in many sources. One hostile source tries to link Tvrtko himself to it, but all the other sources indicate that Tvrtko remained a Catholic all his life. However, like his predecessors, he tolerated all the local faiths. He also maintained cordial relations with the Orthodox Church. It seems the Bosnian Church played no secular role under him; at least no charters witnessed by it have survived from his reign. One such charter purporting to have been issued by Tvrtko exists; from time to time it is cited by scholars, but I am certain it is a forgery.<sup>2</sup>

By the early 1370s, re-established in power and with his northern lands loyal and secure again (with the lords of the Donji Kraji back in line), Tvrtko began to meddle in the feuds of the Serbian nobles to his southeast. In particular, he actively supported Lazar against Nicholas Altomanović and as a result made considerable territorial gains for Bosnia. We shall turn to this event later.

### **The Albanian Lands in the 1360s**

In the 1360s considerable fighting occurred in the Albanian-Zetan border region. This caused difficulties for Dubrovnik, whose main trade route to Prizren (one of the three main markets the town traded at in Serbia) went

along the lower Bojana and Drin rivers through Albania. Owing to brigands and the frequent fighting between nobles and tribesmen in the vicinity, the route lacked security.

Three main families—the Balšići, the Matarangos, and the Thopias—were struggling for the region between Lake Skadar and Durazzo. Blaž Matarango, as noted earlier, had extensive lands within the square between the coast (including the port of Karavasta), the Shkumbi River to the north, the Seman (Semeni) River to the south, and the Devolli River to the east. These borders are extremely approximate; tribal movements were constant. Surely part of this territory included the pasture lands of various other tribes, some of which might have been Matarango clients, and very likely the Matarangos spilled out beyond this region at times. To the Matarangos' south lay Berat, which belonged to Alexander, John Comnenus Asen's heir. And to their north lay the lands of our third family, the Thopias.

The Thopias became prominent in the second quarter of the fourteenth century when the pope granted Tanush Thopia the title of count and recognized him as the holder of the lands between the Mati and Shkumbi rivers. Thus the border between the Matarangos and Thopias lay roughly along the Shkumbi River. In 1338 Tanush married an illegitimate daughter of Robert, King of Naples, and also was recognized as a count by the Angevins. This marriage allowed his son Karlo to brag in his epitaph that he was descended from the Kings of France. The Thopias—particularly under Karlo, who succeeded when Tanush died in 1359—became more prominent in the late 1350s and early 1360s at the same time as the Balšići did. The Thopias rapidly expanded their territory, subduing various lesser nobles and tribes, whose members were incorporated into their forces and then used to subdue others. They acquired the important fortress of Kroja in 1363 and at roughly the same time came to dominate the region around Durazzo. Durazzo itself, however, still remained Angevin.

War broke out between the Thopias and the Balšići in 1363 and lasted into 1364. Since the Balšići had been expanding at the expense of the Dukagjins, who were based along the Drin, we may suspect that the Balšići had penetrated into the region beyond the Drin toward the Mati, while the Thopias, in their turn, were pressing beyond the Mati toward the Drin, and that they had clashed as a result. The issue may well have been more complicated, since in these lands lived various other tribes who were being forced into clientship and who presumably were regularly trying to break away from such relationships. Furthermore the recent collective history of Montenegro suggests that the Matarangos also had somehow come into possession of some lands to the north between the Bojana and Durazzo. This description is too vague and the lands included in this region overlap with those of too many other tribes and noblemen to make much sense. That same work then claims that the Matarangos seem to have accepted the suzerainty of the Serbian tsar for these northern lands, but it adds that in fact they were independent.

In the 1363–64 Balšić-Thopia war the Matarangos were allied to the

Balšići. One would expect the Balšići to be opposed to the Matarangos if, in fact, the Matarangos were trying to establish themselves in this northern region. Thus, if the Matarangos did indeed have both northern lands and an alliance with the Balšići, one might conclude they were clients or vassals of the Balšići for these lands. However, it makes more sense to see Matarango involvement in the war as resulting from a Matarango-Thopia quarrel to the south. This view is confirmed by the fact that the citizens of Durazzo supported the Thopias. Possibly Blaž Matarango had attempted to take that town and Karlo Thopia had gone to the defense of the Angevin city with which he was allied. In the spring of 1364 in the course of a skirmish Karlo Thopia took George Balšić prisoner and held him captive until 1366 when Dubrovnik mediated peace and procured his release. In 1367 Blaž Matarango died, and Karlo Thopia was able to occupy the bulk of his lands; one presumes this refers to the southern lands beyond the Shkumbi; a small portion of his lands seems to have been left to his son John.

After Blaž's death the Matarangos ceased to play a major role in the affairs of Albania. By the early 1370s the Matarango family has disappeared from the sources.

Some historians have claimed that the Balšići acquired most of the Matarango lands. This view is based on Orbini, who reports that the Matarangos' southern lands were seized by the Balšići after the Balšići had violated a safe-conduct given to Blaž and his son John and jailed them—the father dying in jail and the son being released only after seventeen years. However, the places Orbini claims the Balšići obtained in this way (Berat and Kanina) were not so acquired. Balša Balšić obtained these cities for his family as a dowry when he married John Comnenus Asen's daughter in 1372. And though the Matarangos had been active in the lands between Berat and Kanina, these cities seem never to have been theirs but had remained in the possession of John Comnenus Asen and his heirs. Orbini was obviously confused about these events; in fact he calls Balša's wife Kanina, which is the name of the fort. Thus he may well have attributed the acquisition of lands actually acquired by dowry to the seizure of the Matarangos. If there is any truth to Orbini's report that the Balšići seized the Matarangos, and if any land fell to them as a result, then we may assume the lands involved were the Matarangos' secondary, and presumably fairly small, holdings in the vicinity of the Bojana instead.

In 1368 the Balšići and Karlo Thopia seem to have been fighting again; at least in January of that year Dubrovnik reported that the three Balšić brothers were camped on the Mati River preparing for a campaign against Karlo Thopia, whose lands lay to the south of that river. If any fighting occurred, it was evidently on a small scale, since two months later Karlo's hands were sufficiently free for him to involve himself in the affairs of Durazzo. For in March 1368 Durazzo, which had long remained a lonely bastion of the Angevins, fell to Karlo Thopia. Possibly the capture had the consent of the citizens of Durazzo, who seem to have been recent allies of Karlo in his war

against the Balšići and the Matarangos. Karlo entered into close relations with Venice, which granted him Venetian citizenship and called him "Prince of Albania." Soon, in either 1372 or, as most scholars believe, 1376, Karlo lost Durazzo to Louis of Evreux, whom we shall meet shortly; but Karlo was able to recover the city again in about 1383.

### Civil War among the Serbs

Meanwhile inside Serbia a struggle erupted over the former lands of Vojislav Vojinović. His widow Gojislava and nephew Nicholas Altomanović were the main participants, but four others—Lazar Hrebljanović (whose rise began in this period), the Balšići, Vukašin, and Tvrtko of Bosnia—also got into the act.

The first figure to consider in this affair is Nicholas Altomanović. It is very difficult to present an accurate picture of his rights, motives, and ambitions. Since he eventually was to be the loser in the struggle, it is not surprising that he was portrayed as a villain; his reputation has not improved with time and he still tends to be depicted as ambitious, greedy, and unscrupulous. Nicholas was the son of Vojislav's brother Altoman. It is often stated that Altoman died in 1363, the same year that Vojislav did. However, the last reference we have to his being alive is from 1359. Scholars are now coming to believe his death occurred nearer to that date. His son Nicholas was in his middle teens at the time, and it seems that some or even most of Altoman's lands went to Altoman's brother Vojislav. Whether this was by a testament, whether Vojislav simply seized them for himself, or whether he was given control of them to preserve them from predation by others to turn over to Nicholas later is not known. And not knowing the conditions under which he acquired the land, we are ignorant of what his obligations toward his nephew were and whether he was making any effort to fulfill those obligations. In any case, Vojislav died and his widow inherited all his lands, including those that had once been Altoman's.

By the fall of 1367 Nicholas, entitled *župan*, was clearly in possession of his father's former main residence, the mining town of Rudnik. That year he attacked his aunt Gojislava and took much of her territory along the coast bordering on Dubrovnik, presumably including her part of Konavli. In 1368 Gojislava was still holding Trebinje. Soon thereafter she disappears from the sources,<sup>3</sup> and Nicholas is found holding Trebinje as well. Nicholas is usually depicted as an aggressor against his unfortunate aunt. This may well be an accurate description, but it does seem that prior to this warfare she was holding territory on the upper Drina and along the border of Zeta that had belonged to Altoman. Thus possibly Nicholas was fighting to regain his father's lands that Vojislav had taken and Gojislava had not wanted to return. Before long—if not from the start—Nicholas wanted her lands as well in order to re-create under his authority the major holding that Vojislav had ruled at the time of his death. And it appeared that he might well be able to do this. By the end of 1367 he not only had the coastal territory noted above but also

the territory Vojislav had held along the borders of Zeta. However, Nicholas' activities in turn threw him into conflicts and diplomatic relations with a host of other Serbian nobles.

The first of these whom we must consider was Lazar Hrebljanović. His father, Pribac, had been a logothete (chancellor) for Dušan, and Lazar had held various court positions as well. Having married Milica, a lady descended from Nemanja's son Vukan of Zeta, Lazar had left the Serbian court after 1363 and retired to his lands on the Ibar, South Morava, and West Morava rivers. His main residence was at Kruševac. Some scholars have dated his departure from court to 1365 and associated it with Vukašin's coronation as king, an act they suggest Lazar opposed. However, we simply do not know whether he voluntarily departed or was forced to leave by Vukašin. Lazar had as a neighbor Nicholas Altomanović, the holder of Rudnik and Užice, who was probably not an easy neighbor to have.

However, if we can believe Orbini (writing in 1601), Lazar's dislike of Vukašin was stronger, and at first he allied with Nicholas against Vukašin. Their alliance probably dates from about 1369, in which year, if we can believe Orbini, Lazar and Nicholas, jealous of Vukašin, won Uroš over to their side against Vukašin. Confirming the possibility of a break between Uroš and Vukašin is the fact that at this time Vukašin was issuing state charters and carrying on negotiations with foreign powers entirely in his own name, without reference to Uroš. Furthermore there is a tradition in Dubrovnik, written down in 1403, that after Vojislav's widow died and Uroš resumed receiving the Saint Demetrius' Day tribute, Vukašin had sought it for himself; but Dubrovnik insisted on sending it to Uroš until his death, stating (in 1403), "when Uroš was in trouble, he lost all except the Dubrovnik tribute." Uroš' defection would have threatened Vukašin, for after all Uroš was the official source for Vukašin's royal power. Orbini then proceeds to report that the Raškan nobles Lazar, Altomanović, and Uroš clashed with Vukašin in battle at Kosovo in 1369. However, Lazar withdrew from the fighting at the start, leaving his allies to oppose Vukašin. Altomanović suffered a defeat while Uroš was captured and briefly imprisoned by Vukašin. Confirming this story—or at least Uroš' removal from office—is the fact that in 1370 Vukašin issued a charter to Dubrovnik with no mention of Uroš. That a new charter to the town was necessary—since there had been no quarrel between Dubrovnik and Serbia at the time—may indicate a change of administration, as it was customary for the town to procure a new charter of its commercial privileges each time there was a change on the Serbian throne.

Soon thereafter, in 1370, Lazar is found holding Altomanović's Rudnik. Presumably he obtained it after Nicholas' defeat at Kosovo. Lazar may have simply seized it from a weakened Nicholas, or, as has been suggested, he may have collected it from the victorious Vukašin as his price for remaining neutral in the battle. Interesting as Orbini's report is, we cannot pass judgment on its reliability, because we simply do not know what his source(s) for it is.

Nicholas' quarrels were not limited to those just described; he also

started a row with Dubrovnik, something, when we consider the town's success in preserving records, that was not likely to help his reputation among posterity. With Gojislava's departure from her lands, as noted, Uroš resumed receiving the Saint Demetrius' Day tribute. In October 1367 Nicholas, since he held part of Vojislav's coastal lands, most probably including Konavli, demanded that Dubrovnik pay him this tribute. The town refused, claiming that it was Uroš' to dispose of and pointing out that it had been paid to Vojislav and then to his widow only because Uroš had so decreed it. Therefore the tribute was owed to the ruler of Serbia. Altomanović countered with the claim that the tribute was actually payment for the agricultural use Dubrovnik made of what was Serbian land along its borders. Thus the payment should be made to the actual holder of Trebinje and Konavli. And he argued that the custom of delivering the money to the Serbian ruler had arisen only because in former times the Serbian ruler had been the actual holder of these particular lands; however, since now the holder was a second figure, himself, the tribute was his by right. Dubrovnik ignored Nicholas' demands and sent the tribute to Uroš. However, it could expect trouble from Nicholas in the future. Its main cause for optimism was the fact that Nicholas had so many irons in the fire he might not have time or men to spare to attack the town.

The potential threat to the town increased when a second powerful neighbor, Sanko Miltenović-Draživojević, concluded an alliance with Nicholas, though once again the town could be thankful that other opponents had a higher priority for the new allies. Sanko was the leading noble of Hum, whose lands of Popovo Polje, Dabar (not to be confused with Dabar on the Lim), and Trusina bordered on Trebinje. In 1368 he revolted for a second time against his lord, Tvrtko of Bosnia. Needing allies to defend himself against Tvrtko, he concluded a pact with Nicholas. However, if the threat from Tvrtko should be dissipated, the town could expect trouble; for Nicholas surely had not offered his aid to Sanko for nothing, and a combination of Nicholas and Sanko would pit against the town the two most powerful military forces in the neighborhood. Dubrovnik could count only on the good relations it had frequently enjoyed with Sanko in the past, and it now exerted its full diplomatic talents to break his alliance with Nicholas and to mediate Sanko's differences with Tvrtko. The last task was difficult, for this was not Sanko's first defection from Bosnia. Furthermore, Sanko's defection had lost for Bosnia a great part of Hum. Not surprisingly Tvrtko was angry and was ready to join the Serbian opponents of Nicholas.

However, by 1370, because of Dubrovnik's efforts and/or the losses Nicholas took at Kosovo at the hands of Vukašin, Sanko had deserted Nicholas' cause and soon, if we can believe Orbini, was actually at war with Nicholas, taking some of Konavli from him. Thus, like Lazar, Sanko seems to have turned against his erstwhile ally when he was down in order to grab territory from him. We last hear of Sanko alive in mid-1370. He was clearly dead by 1372. According to Orbini, Sanko was killed in battle near Trebinje by some Trebinje hillsmen who seem to have been supporters of Nicholas. In

any case in 1371 Nicholas again held Konavli. However, despite the fact that before his death Sanko broke with Nicholas and again submitted to Tvrtko, Tvrtko remained allied against Nicholas.

Nicholas, meanwhile, forced to fight over Konavli and thus concentrate his attention on the region around Dubrovnik, became more and more hostile toward the town. In 1370 when Dubrovnik once again refused him the tribute he demanded, he ravaged the outskirts of the town. Dubrovnik had to re-route its caravans destined for Serbia through the Bašići's lands.

Meanwhile in 1368, hoping to acquire suzerainty over the town, the Bašići had gone to war against Kotor, which, as a result of the warfare of the 1360s, had been suffering economic decline. The town realized that submission to the Bašići would do nothing to help it economically. And seeing that Bar's tribute of one hundred perpera under Serbia had gone up to two thousand ducats under the Bašići and expecting the same fate for itself, Kotor resisted. The town first sought an alliance with Nicholas, but after his loss at Kosovo he could provide little aid. So Kotor sought help from Uroš and from Venice. Neither of them provided any serious help. Venice, in fact, seemed only concerned that no warships other than its own be on the Adriatic. It wrote Uroš in 1368, objecting to Serbia's having armed ships in the Adriatic—citing Bar, Budva, and Ulcinj as having them—in violation of a Venetian-Serbian treaty, and threatened to treat such ships as pirate vessels. Uroš replied that the ships about which Venice complained were George Bašić's ships, which, if the ships were from the towns mentioned, would have been true. Clearly unhappy with George's actions (which presumably were directed against Kotor, a town under Uroš' suzerainty), Uroš called George a rebel. And he concluded that, since George was a rebel, the Serbian court bore no responsibility for any of his actions that might violate the treaty. Since Vukašin, at least previously, had been a strong supporter of George, did Uroš' letter reflect a change in Vukašin's position? Or did Uroš' reply reflect his own personal view, as distinct from Vukašin's, and indicate an attempt to oppose Vukašin, possibly as part of a policy to extricate himself from his tutelage? Or did Uroš' remarks have no significance as far as Serbian court policy was concerned but merely offered a plausible excuse for Serbia not to involve itself in a quarrel between Venice and George?

In 1369 George laid siege to Kotor. Not receiving any help from its suzerain Uroš, Kotor now turned to Hungary and recognized Hungarian suzerainty. This submission was probably ratified in 1370. The Hungarians sent a nobleman from Zadar to be Kotor's prince. If we stop to consider how small the Hungarian presence was in southern Dalmatia and thus how unlikely it was that Hungary might provide effective help to Kotor, we must conclude that Kotor's turning and submitting to Hungary made little sense. Not only did it bring the town no benefits, but it simply increased Kotor's difficulties. First, it meant that Kotor lost for a time its trade privileges in Serbia, thus causing it further economic decline. Second, it provided, in the name of Serbian rights, an excuse for Nicholas Altomanović, who until then had been sympathetic to



Kotor, to attack Kotor, which he did in 1370. By spring 1370, probably through Venetian mediation, George Balšić had made peace with Kotor. In fact by 1371 he was lined up on Vukašin's and Kotor's side against Altomanović, for in June 1371 George announced to Dubrovnik that Vukašin and his son Marko, with their armies, were in Skadar with George, together preparing to attack Altomanović. Since their efforts, he claimed, were in Dubrovnik's interests, he hoped Dubrovnik would assist their campaign by providing ships to transport men and supplies. Dubrovnik agreed to provide this assistance.

The campaign never took place, because Vukašin and Marko were then called east to participate in Uglješa's campaign against the Turks, which culminated in the disaster at Marica. The departure of Vukašin did not free Altomanović of enemies. Nicholas now found himself faced with a very real threat from Tvrtko and Lazar. Desperate for a strong ally, Altomanović opened negotiations with George Balšić. Most scholars feel that at the end of these discussions George concluded an agreement by which he acquired Dračevica, Konavli, and Trebinje from Nicholas. It is not certain whether George received this territory for promising support—support which in fact he was not to provide—or whether he received it simply as a bribe to remain neutral, which is what in fact he did. Other scholars, including Mihaljčić, follow Orbini's account and argue that George concluded no such agreement but simply seized these coastal territories after Altomanović was defeated and captured by Lazar in 1373.

But if we pause and look at the Serbia that was about to stand up to the Turks at Marica in 1371, we find it a far cry from the state Dušan had left at his death. Thessaly, Epirus, and Albania had seceded from Serbia entirely. Nicholas Altomanović had for all practical purposes made himself independent in Rudnik and in the lands that had belonged to his uncle Vojislav. The sons of the now deceased Branko Mladenović, headed by Vuk Branković, in Macedonia, the Balšići in Zeta, and Lazar Hrebljanović in northern Serbia, though nominally under Uroš' suzerainty, were all autonomous lords of their lands and involved themselves little with state affairs or with the policy and concerns of those at court. This is well illustrated by the fact that all these vassal lords were conspicuous by their absence at Marica. When the crunch came and the Serbian court decided it was imperative to stand up to the Turks, only Vukašin and Uglješa, who of course made that decision, took part in the campaign. And the court of Tsar Uroš, which Vukašin represented, no longer had the power to compel these others to come.

### **The Turkish Threat and Uglješa's Response to It**

A far more serious problem for Serbia—and the whole Balkans—than these internal squabbles, however, was the appearance in Europe of the Ottoman Turks followed by their penetration into Thrace. In 1354, as noted, they acquired Gallipoli on the European side of the Dardanelles. From there they,

or Turkish bands loyal to them, expanded into Thrace, taking Demotika from the Byzantines in 1360 or 1361, Philippopolis from the Bulgarians in 1363, and finally the major city of Adrianople in 1369. By 1370 Turks had occupied most of Thrace to the Rhodopes and to the Balkan Mountains. As they reached the Rhodopes they collided with Uglješa, who had extended his realm beyond the Mesta into this territory. Thus Uglješa found his lands bordering on those of the Ottomans (or various Turkish march lords associated with the Ottomans in a variety of differing client/vassal relationships). There were no fixed frontiers, and the Turks moved about as they pleased, penetrating to raid or graze their flocks in territory nominally Uglješa's. And in much of the land beyond his border the Turks were not in actual occupation; they had simply swept through it, plundering and receiving promises of tribute from the inhabitants they had not taken off as captives. But throughout the 1360s the number of Turks entering Thrace and plundering beyond it into the Rhodopes and into Bulgaria increased; thus the Turkish threat to the Balkans, and in particular to Bulgaria and to the Serres state of Uglješa whose borders they had now reached, had become extremely serious.

Uglješa well realized the seriousness of the danger and set about trying to create a grand coalition against the Turks. For he realized that it was necessary to go on the offensive and drive them out of Europe rather than wait and try to defend fixed fortresses. To obtain Byzantine support he tried to improve relations with the Byzantine Church, which had excommunicated the Serbs in 1350. However, though embassies were exchanged between the Byzantines and Serbs, the schism between the Serbian Church (headed by its patriarch in Peć) and the Patriarch of Constantinople was not healed. In 1363 Patriarch Kallistos, accused in Serbian sources of being the patriarch who had excommunicated the Serbs, visited Serbia. Discussions seem to have been congenial; but Kallistos took sick and died in Serbia, and negotiations were not resumed. However, though the Serbian Church as a whole remained in schism, Uglješa did succeed in ending the Church schism between the Greek Church and the Church in his own lands. He apologized for past Serbian actions, and the Patriarch of Constantinople proclaimed an end to their schism in 1368. Uglješa agreed to restore the Metropolitan of Drama and its suffragans to the jurisdiction of Constantinople. And the patriarch agreed not to remove from their positions those Serbs then holding Church offices in the transferred diocese. However, Uglješa refused to restore the Metropolitanate of Serres to Constantinople, and thus it remained Serbian, in theory under the Patriarch of Peć, but surely in reality under the personal authority of Uglješa.

Uglješa's general good will toward the empire and his ecclesiastical submission, however, were not sufficient inducements to bring the Byzantines into an active alliance against the Turks. The Bulgarians were not to participate either. The Hungarians accused the Bulgarians of treachery on the occasion of the 1371 conflict. This is probably unwarranted. John Alexander had died in February and his successor John Šišman, at war with his brother who was trying to oust him, had not yet had a chance to consolidate his authority in

Bulgaria. Thus he was not in a position to undertake a foreign adventure, particularly one which, if it failed, could well cause the Turks to direct a major assault on Bulgaria. In fact some scholars believe that immediately after John Alexander's death the Turks had exerted considerable pressure, possibly threatening an actual attack on Bulgaria, upon the new ruler, who was therefore doing everything he could to appease them. Thus, under the circumstances it probably is not surprising that Bulgaria did not join Uglješa's coalition.

So, when he was ready for action in 1371, Uglješa had enrolled in his coalition only his brother Vukašin. The leading Serbian nobles were independent enough to avoid having to participate and either failed to realize the extent of the Turkish danger or feared to leave their own regions lest hostile neighbors seize their lands. Some may have wondered what Altomanović might grab in their absence, and the Balšići may well have feared that Karlo Thopia would attack Zeta should they take their armies away. Furthermore, from jealousy or other reasons, many nobles seem to have disliked Vukašin. Thus some may not have wanted to participate in a coalition with him, and some may even have looked forward to possible gains for themselves should the crusade fail and Vukašin either not return or return with only a small remnant of his forces.

### **The Battle of Marica and its Aftermath**

The offensive against the Turks was originally scheduled for early 1371, but for some reason it was delayed. Possibly Uglješa had been expecting Bulgarian participation and then, having his plans overturned by the death of John Alexander, postponed the attack to await Bulgarian developments in the hope that John Šišman would establish himself in power and provide some forces. Since the campaign was delayed, Vukašin and his son Marko in the summer of 1371 marched west to Zeta to join the Balšići in a planned coalition against Nicholas Altomanović. They were all together in Skadar preparing for action, when Uglješa summoned Vukašin and Marko. The two hurried east with their forces, joining up with Uglješa and his army, and then together they easily penetrated into what was supposedly Turkish territory; their easy advance shows that the Rhodope–western Thrace region was not yet efficiently administered or incorporated into any sort of Ottoman state. Their armies, which were large but probably nowhere near the sixty thousand claimed by the monk Isaiah, reached Černomen on the Marica River. There on 26 September 1371 they met the Turkish forces. The Serbian armies were annihilated, and both Uglješa and Vukašin were killed. A later source, Chalcocondyles, blames the Serbian defeat on the Serbs' not having their horses and weapons in readiness and allowing themselves to be surprised.

The Battle on the Marica was the Ottomans' greatest success to that time and was far more significant in opening up the Balkans to the Turks and in weakening Serbian resistance than the more famous Battle of Kosovo (1389).

Owing to its vast losses at Marica and the increasing separatism that followed it, Serbia became ripe for the picking. Uglješa's territory was thereafter lost to Serbia, and in Serbia proper the various regions—the south, the west, and the north—became increasingly independent. Thus Serbia ended up being reduced to half of what it had been before the battle. Uroš had not gone to the battle, but he died childless in December 1371, ending the Nemanjić dynasty on the male side. The only Nemanjić left alive was Symeon's religious son John Uroš in Thessaly, who was about to become a monk and who left no sons. No subsequent ruler of Serbia bore the title tsar. (Lazar, though called "tsar" in the epics, was actually entitled prince.) Vukašin's son Marko, who survived the battle, had already been crowned "young king" and after Vukašin's death was crowned king. However, he was neither from the recognized—Nemanjić—dynasty nor more powerful than the other leading nobles. Thus he could not assert his authority over Uroš' state. In fact, after Marica the Brankovići (the sons of Branko Mladenović) and the Balšići (until then friendly to the Mrnjavčević family) seized part of Marko's family's holdings. Marko, who had suffered heavy manpower losses at Marica, was in no position to resist these neighbors who, in sitting out the battle, had kept their forces intact.

Marko's troubles began right after the battle. George Balšić expelled his wife Olivera (Marko's sister) and immediately, still in 1371, took Prizren from Marko. At about the same time Lazar grabbed Priština. The Balšići gained Peć, probably in 1372, and thus Marko found himself stripped of most of his Kosovo holdings. Then in the course of the 1370s he found himself being pushed out of both eastern and western Macedonia. By 1377 Vuk Branković had Skopje and an Albanian named Andrew Gropa had Ohrid. It is possible, however, that Gropa was a vassal of Marko. However, Andrew Musachi, who was based in east-central Albania and took Kastoria from Marko, was clearly no vassal of his. As a result of the significant territorial losses Marko suffered, his ability to raise new armies (to replace the forces lost at Marica) was severely reduced. Thus he found himself in no position to assert his kingship over Serbia; in fact, weaker than the Balšići, Lazar, and probably by the end of the decade the Brankovići, it was all he could do to maintain his reduced principality around Prilep in central Macedonia. However, despite his unfortunate career, Marko has gone down in history, as a result of his role in the epics, as Serbia's epic hero par excellence. The Serbian epics call him Kraljević—the king's son. The title is incorrect, for he actually was crowned king, a fact reflected accurately in the Bulgarian and Macedonian epics, which call him Krali (King) Marko.

Since no figure of national unity existed, separatism increased, thus further reducing Serbian unity and potential resistance to the Turks. The Battle of Marica contributed to the ease with which the remainder of Serbia fell apart; for the central government (such as it was) lost the bulk of its forces at Marica, while the nobles who had not gone retained their forces unimpaired. Thus not

only were they stronger than King Marko and able to grab his personal holdings, but they were also stronger than he was in his capacity as king and able to resist any attempts he might make to reassert a central Serbian authority. Free to ignore any orders or tax demands he might issue, they made it impossible for him or anyone else to think of restoring the Serbian state even to the strength and size it had maintained under Uroš and Vukašin. Thus the great nobles (Lazar, the Balšići, Altomanović, Vuk Branković) established their own separate states, each having its own individual interests. These nobles recognized no subordination to any central authority, as is reflected, for example, in Balšić charters: in 1379 Balša II Balšić wrote, "I, Lord Balša by the Grace of God," and in 1386 George II Balšić was calling himself "autocratic Lord George." Hostile to one another and involved in enriching themselves at the expense of their neighbors, the nobles were blind to the ever increasing seriousness of the Ottoman danger and unwilling to co-operate against it. And as they skirmished and fought among themselves, further manpower, sorely needed to resist the Turks, was lost.

After the Marica battle the territory held by Uglješa, who had no heirs, was grabbed by others; a good portion of it lost all connection with Serbia or Serbs. The Ottomans themselves acquired very little of it, probably taking little more than his lands east of the Mesta. Manuel Palaeologus, the son of Emperor John V and the Byzantine governor of Thessaloniki, recovered Serres (by November 1371) and the Chalcidic peninsula with Mount Athos for the empire. Most, or even all, of Manuel's acquisitions were added by John V to Manuel's governorship. Soon thereafter, in late 1371 or 1372, the Greeks beat off an Ottoman attack against Mount Athos. The region further up from the coast between the Vardar and Struma rivers (including Velbužd, Štip, and Strumica) more or less seceded from Serbian rule under two noblemen, Despot John and Constantine Dragaš, whose main seat was Kumanovo. They were the sons of a certain Dejan, who had married Dušan's sister Theodora and had received from his brother-in-law the title *sevastocrator*. As supporters of the Mrnjavčevići, the family had built up a strong holding during Vukašin's rule. It included a large part of John Oliver's former lands. Dejan had not held Strumica and Štip, so it seems that his sons acquired these cities and much of the surrounding area by moving in and filling the vacuum left by Uglješa's death immediately after the Battle of Marica. These two cities became their main residences in the late 1370s. The brothers seem to have managed their holdings jointly. John is last heard of in 1378; he probably died at about that time. His entire share went to his brother Constantine. Constantine continued to increase his holdings and by 1380 had acquired Vranje.

Vukašin's "state" also broke up. As his "state" we must include (1) his personal lands, which were left to Marko (their fate, resulting in Marko's being left with only a small holding in central Macedonia, was traced above) and (2) the royal/imperial lands of Uroš, which presumably had been managed by King Vukašin. Uroš died without an heir; the fate of these royal lands

must have had an impact on the future of a Serbian kingdom, for they could have provided a core of support (income and men) for a would-be holder of the state against the separatists. Unfortunately, we do not know which lands Uroš still directly held in 1371 and which had fallen under Vukašin's control. Vukašin almost certainly had relieved Uroš of various lands in the region of Kosovo-Metohija. Marko, as noted, was not able to retain these; the Balšići grabbed some at once, but in the long run the Brankovići were to get the lion's share. The history of the royal/imperial lands in central Serbia is more of a puzzle. But regardless of what lands Vukašin may or may not have taken from Uroš in that region, Marko did not end up with them. And though Nicholas Altomanović may have briefly picked off some of them after the Battle of Marica, Prince Lazar, as we shall see, was to end up with the major part of these. Thus Marko, the would-be king, ended up with little or none of the royal/imperial lands and no territory in the center of his would-be kingdom. This deficiency made his task almost impossible. Pushed to the fringes of the kingdom and supported only by his reduced personal holding, Marko, less powerful than some of the great nobles, was in no position to turn his title into a reality. And so King Marko, unrecognized by the rest of the nobility, became a petty prince in Macedonia who watched his principality shrink through the 1370s as his neighbors wrested away a large portion of his cities. In fact, it seems that he even had to share the little territory he retained with his brother Andrew (Andrejaš). That Andrew received his own holding is suggested by the fact that he issued his own coins. And as the royal authority disappeared, the royal lands were grabbed by others, and much of Serbia's territory seceded under local lords who made themselves independent of any central authority. Serbia ceased to be a state.

Besides the separatism and the weakening of Serbian resistance following the battle, Marica led to the acceptance of Ottoman suzerainty by Marko and the Dejanovići (probably both in 1371), the Byzantine Empire (by 1373), and Bulgaria (probably in 1376). This submission meant that all these vassals owed tribute to the Ottomans and also were obliged to supply troops for Ottoman campaigns, commanded by a member of the ruling family, often the heir to the throne in the case of states and the family head in the case of the noblemen vassals.

### **Activities of the Independent Serbian Nobles**

After the Battle of Marica the Balšići of Zeta marched east, where they clashed successfully with Marko, taking Prizren from him immediately after the battle and Peć, probably in 1372. Altomanović, whose ambitions also included the Kosovo region, was not pleased by the Balšići's success. He attacked, but failed to take, Prizren in 1372; soon, probably in the spring of 1373 (but in any case before the major warfare of 1373), Nicholas made peace with George Balšić.

Prizren, the object of all this interest, was one of Serbia's major trade centers where there were resident many Serbian merchants as well as traders from the coast. Dubrovnik's consul for all of Serbia resided there. In the years after 1371 Prizren began to decline to some extent, for now it was part of a smaller principality and separated from the major mines, which no longer lay under the same ruler as the town. After 1371 merchant colonies at individual mines, like Novo Brdo, grew in size and importance, and much of the trade between the mining centers and the coast was carried on directly rather than being filtered through Prizren. Under the autonomous rulers of the different small units, the production of the mines increased; whether this was owing to a greater interest in the mines on the part of the more local rulers or to technological improvements is not known. However, Dubrovnik's profits from this increased production were reduced as individual noblemen set up many new customs and toll stations in their own lands. In former days the Kings/Tsars of Serbia had issued orders prohibiting the establishment of most new toll stations. Now, there was no one to issue such orders. Thus Dubrovnik found the existence of many small principalities, each with its own customs regime, harder on its profits than the single state regime that had existed under Dušan.

The tendency to create small principalities was not limited to the nobility. The patriarchs in Peć treated that region and their far-flung estates as their own domain, by 1390 even coining their own money. Indeed, in the period after Marica many of the leading Serbian nobles began minting money. Vuk Branković even allowed his vassals to coin money, whereas Lazar did not allow the nobility living in the lands he directly held to do so. When they belonged to Vuk certain towns, like Prizren and Skopje, also issued coins.

The Balšići, having expanded into the Kosovo region, soon clashed with the Brankovići, a family that had begun its rapid rise after Marica. Under Dušan, this family's founder Mladen had been the tsar's deputy in Ohrid. His son Branko Mladenović had ruled a principality centered in western Macedonia, probably still including Ohrid; from there he had acquired further lands toward and into the Kosovo, including the region of Drenica. Under Vukašin, Branko's heir Vuk Branković lost Ohrid and found his possessions reduced to a small holding around Drenica. What else, if anything, Vuk then held is not known. However, after Marica, taking advantage of Marko's weakness, Vuk began rapidly to expand his authority over much of Kosovo and Macedonia. By 1376/77 Vuk had acquired Skopje and Priština (which right after Marica seems to have been grabbed briefly by Lazar). After the death of George Balšić in January 1379, Vuk acquired Prizren.

The Balšići, in addition to pressing east into the Kosovo, remained active on the coast, where they acquired all the territory between (but not including) Kotor and the Mati River. In 1372 they acquired Valona, Kanina, Berat, and Himara as the dowry of John Comnenus Asen's daughter when she married Balša Balšić. This soon led to further fighting in Albania with the Thopia

family, whose lands lay between the Balšići's Zeta and their newly acquired Albanian possessions. Old rivals of the Balšići, the Thopia were not happy to see them acquire more territory in Albania.

The Thopias were then in a major struggle over Durazzo, which, according to a recent calculation, underwent a total of thirty-two changes of lordship between 992 and 1392. Karlo Thopia had taken Durazzo, quite possibly with the consent of its citizens, from the Angevins in 1368. Shortly thereafter Louis of Evreux, brother of King Charles XII of Navarre, had married an Angevin, Joanna, the granddaughter of John of Gravina. John had received title to Albania from Catherine of Valois when he turned Achaea over to her. Joanna had inherited these so-called rights to Albania through John. Interested in realizing these rights, Louis hired four companies of knights from Navarre, who are usually referred to as the Navarrese Company, and took Durazzo, probably in 1376. Shortly thereafter Louis died, probably still in 1376.<sup>4</sup> The company remained in Durazzo, bored. Louis' widow soon thereafter (probably in late 1377) remarried; since the knights had been in Louis' personal service, they regarded their contract as terminated and left Albania for adventures elsewhere. We shall soon meet some of these Navarrese in the Morea. The Angevins retained Durazzo for a time, for in 1379 Joanna's new husband, Robert of Artois, is found issuing to Dubrovnik a charter pertaining to Durazzo. Karlo Thopia, who held the territory both north and south of the city, soon, probably in 1383, regained possession of Durazzo.

### **The End of Nicholas Altomanović**

As noted earlier, Lazar of Kruševac and Tvrtko of Bosnia formed an alliance against Nicholas Altomanović. The alliance seems to have been in effect in 1371; in any case it clearly existed in 1372. Faced with this threat, Nicholas Altomanović opened negotiations with George Balšić. It is not certain whether George promised Nicholas aid or simply neutrality, but in either case the promise seems to have been expensive and Nicholas probably had to turn over to Balšić his territory near the coast, including Dračevica, Konavli, and Trebinje.

Venice seems to have mediated this agreement. It expressed its willingness to see George get Durazzo and Kotor (the last town, of course, was under the suzerainty of its enemy, Hungary) and Nicholas, the nominal Prince of Hum, acquire Hum's coastal lands, the Pelješac peninsula with Ston, from Dubrovnik. Venice also seems to have hoped that the two noblemen would attack Dubrovnik. This information, which may not be accurate, comes from Dubrovnik. It is worth noting that these plans are not mentioned in any document preserved in the Venetian archive. Worried, Dubrovnik complained to its suzerain Hungary, which seems to have issued a warning to the two would-be allies. Orbini, who accepts the Ragusan version of the affair, says the Hungarian king threatened to attack the two noblemen. This warning seems to have ended the alliance, and no attack on Dubrovnik occurred. And



in November 1373 George Balšić personally visited Dubrovnik, assuring the town (by oath, in fact) of his friendship. As a result Dubrovnik agreed to pay him the Saint Demetrius' Day tribute, which the year before, after Uroš' death, the town had finally agreed to pay, and in fact had paid in 1372, to Altomanović. There was no reason for the town not to have yielded on this issue; after all, Uroš was now dead, and there was no longer a Serbian tsar; and though Marko was a king by name, in fact he was just a petty prince in Macedonia. Thus the town might as well pay the tribute to the actual holder of the Serbian territory on its borders where it exercised its privileges. That Dubrovnik paid it to George in November 1373 shows that by then he was in possession of Dračevica, Konavli, and Trebinje. In the agreement Dubrovnik stated it would pay George this tribute as long as he held these lands and as long as Serbia had no tsar. George was to receive this tribute until 1378.

By November 1373, when George paid his visit to Dubrovnik, Nicholas Altomanović had been defeated. According to Orbini, Nicholas, upon regaining Rudnik after Marica, tried to have Lazar murdered but failed. If Nicholas really did try this, his motive may have been anger at Lazar's desertion at Kosovo (1369) and his seizure of Rudnik from the defeated Nicholas after the battle. Worried about Nicholas, Lazar established closer ties with Hungary, which was already hostile to Nicholas, and accepted Hungarian suzerainty. Then in 1373 Lazar and Tvrtko attacked Nicholas' lands from two sides, ravaging them. One may doubt the motives for Lazar's attack given by Orbini, for it seems to have been planned before Nicholas' alleged plot to murder Lazar. According to Orbini the Hungarians also contributed to the effort a cavalry of a thousand men under Nicholas Garai (Gorjanski), the Ban of Srem. Caught between these two powerful opponents, Altomanović, according to Orbini, retreated toward the coast. Finding little support in that direction, he doubled back and shut himself up in his fortress of Užice. Lazar's troops besieged him and eventually, still in 1373, forced him to surrender. According to Orbini, Lazar then handed him over to some nobles under the command of Stefan Mušić. They were supposed to be responsible for guarding him. However, hating Altomanović, they blinded him. He entered a monastery and soon disappears from history. According to Orbini, Mušić, who we know was a leading servitor of Lazar, had the secret permission of Lazar to carry out the blinding.

Orbini seems to have been relying mainly on a source written with the intention of clearing Lazar of any wrong-doing; this source depicted Lazar's attack on Nicholas as a response to Nicholas' attempt to murder him and then placed the responsibility for the blinding of Nicholas on subordinates. Orbini deserves credit for seeing through the tradition of hero-worship of Lazar and accepting a second report that admitted Lazar did order Nicholas' blinding.

Nicholas' lands were divided among the victors in the fall of 1373. Tvrtko obtained his western lands, the upper Drina, and the Lim region, with Prijepolje and the monastery of Mileševo which housed the relics of Saint Sava. He also seems to have acquired the districts of Onogošt (Nikšić) and

Gacko. Lazar took Altomanović's eastern lands, including Užice and the rich mining town of Rudnik. Vuk Branković picked up Sjenica and Zvečan, although it is not known whether he received them for participating in the alliance (about which we know nothing) or gained them by land-grabbing after Nicholas' defeat. And the Balšići, as noted, acquired some of Altomanović's territory near the coast. George Balšić had remained on the sidelines during the war. His only possible action would have followed Nicholas' defeat when, according to Orbini, he occupied Nicholas' coastal lands. Other scholars, however, as noted, believe George had received these from Nicholas by agreement prior to the warfare. Tvrtko was to obtain this coastal land in 1377 after some local nobles revolted against the Balšići and submitted to Tvrtko. And from about 1379, when Dubrovnik recognized that his possession was secure, the town paid Tvrtko the Saint Demetrius' Day tribute. In 1377 Tvrtko, descended from Nemanja through his grandmother (Dragutin's daughter), was crowned King of Serbia and Bosnia at Mileševo by its metropolitan; his kingship rights were derived from Serbia's. Despite his title, he never obtained a role in Serbia or ever tried to obtain such a role; and no Serbian nobleman outside of Tvrtko's realm regarded him as an overlord.

As a result of Marica and the defeat of Altomanović, three families made rapid advances in the early 1370s, both in asserting their independence and in expanding their territories: the Brankovići, the Balšići, and Lazar. We shall turn to the Brankovići later, but it makes sense here to pause and regard the other two.

The Balšići had come to hold a massive territory, larger than the early medieval Kingdom of Duklja; their lands stretched from Peć and Prizren in the Kosovo to the coast, where they extended from the Gulf of Kotor (without Kotor itself)—and briefly between 1373 and 1377 beyond this gulf north to the borders of Dubrovnik's territory—south to the Mati River. Holding most of what is now Montenegro and part of Albania, the family acquired through Balša's marriage the region of Berat and Valona in Albania's south. Though Balša clearly had these towns, it is not certain that he had much of their hinterland in which, we know, various tribes were active. Though the possibility cannot be ruled out that some tribes submitted to him, no documentation of such submissions exists.

In 1373 Stracimir, the eldest Balšić brother, died; however, George, the second brother, had long been the major figure in the family. George now shared power with the third and youngest brother, Balša II, and Stracimir's son George II. Though they held their territory as a family collective, it seems each also held within the larger territory an individual holding; for in a 1373 charter issued to Dubrovnik George promised he would not establish new customs stations "in my lands or [in] those of my brother Balša or in those of my nephew George." This suggests that each of these individuals had an individual appanage. Balša's lands probably were those he received as a dowry in 1372, south of Durazzo.

## Lazar's Principality

Lazar, who now emerges as a major figure, took Altomanović's eastern lands, including Užice and the rich mining town of Rudnik. Since Lazar also held Novo Brdo, which he seems to have seized right after the Battle of Marica, Lazar held the richest mines in Serbia. They gave him the wealth that made it possible for him to become the major lord in Serbia. He also built up a power base from the local lesser nobility by being very generous with land grants to them. His becoming a Hungarian vassal during the war against Altomanović also made possible his expansion to the north. He actively campaigned in this area and clearly was not opposed by the Hungarians. Having consolidated his control along the Morava, he soon reached the Danube. There he held Mačva, which had probably been granted to him by King Louis when he became a Hungarian vassal. His possession of Mačva—or at least part of it—is seen in a grant made by Lazar in 1381 to his Ravanica monastery, which mentions a number of villages in Mačva. In 1379 he defeated the Rastislalići and acquired their holdings, including Braničevo and Kučevo. Orbini, making a general statement about Lazar's northward expansion, says that in acquiring this land Lazar jailed some of the local nobles, expelled others, and forced still others to submit to him. By 1382, when King Louis died, Lazar had become strong enough to shed his vassalage. That year he tried, but failed, to take Golubac and Beograd, two major fortresses on the Danube, from the Hungarians.

Lazar also benefited because his territory, of all the Serbian lands, lay furthest from Turkish centers. This spared his lands from the ravages of the Turks until the mid-1380s and also attracted to his region immigrants from Turkish-threatened areas. Thus he gained manpower both to work the land and to serve as soldiers. These migrations, the Turkish threat, and the Turkish suzerainty imposed on various Serbs to the south, combined with the fact that Lazar had become Serbia's strongest prince, had the effect of placing the center of Serbia considerably to the north of where it had been before.

Lazar built a large number of churches including the famous Monastery Ravanica, granted the Church much land, and helped, by building churches and encouraging missionary work, to spread Christianity in the northern regions, where, except for certain towns on the Danube, little evidence of earlier Christian penetration exists.

In 1375 Lazar negotiated peace with the Constantinopolitan patriarch by renouncing the right of the Serbs to hold the imperial title (of tsar or emperor); in return he received Byzantine recognition for the Serbian patriarch's title and also confirmation of the Serbian Church's autocephalous status. As we saw earlier, being autocephalous meant that the Serbian Church both managed its own affairs and also chose without reference to Constantinople its own patriarch and hierarchy. Lazar also promised that should the Serbs occupy Greek lands in the future, the Serbs would not expel bishops appointed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. The call for this settlement was initiated by a

delegation to Lazar of Serbian monks from Athos who were upset by the frequent quarrels between Greeks and Serbs on Athos. Lazar delayed acting on this request until after the death of Patriarch Sava (1354–75), which occurred early in 1375. This delay suggests that Sava had been opposed to discussions with Constantinople; possibly he feared losing his title, or perhaps, since he had held the office from the time of Dušan, he was a hard-liner who opposed any compromise with the Byzantines, be it in Church or state questions. Upon Sava's death Lazar sent a Serb monk named Isaiah and a Greek cleric as delegates to Constantinople, where they worked out the compromise described above.

A council was then held at Prizren (or possibly Peć), attended also by a delegation from the Patriarch of Constantinople, that announced the settlement and installed Serbia's new patriarch, Jefrem, with the blessing of the Byzantine Church. George Balšić, who then held Prizren (and Peć too), played an active role at the council even though he had by now become a Catholic. That the council was held in Prizren (or in nearby Peć) and not in Lazar's lands seems odd. The explanation may be simple; since Peć was the seat of the patriarch, it may have been considered proper to hold the council near, if not at, the Church's capital. However, one senses an undercurrent of opposition to Lazar at this moment. Possibly Sava had been a hard-liner who had had considerable support among the clergy; if so, perhaps his followers saw Lazar as soft and too willing to compromise. In this case, a strong Church faction may well have opposed having the council in Lazar's principality, where Lazar might have been able to exert more influence, and thus have insisted that the council be held in a city in Kosovo, where the Church had its centers and where many of the great Serbian monasteries were located. There may also have been differences over who the new patriarch was to be. If there was opposition to Lazar's choice, as seems likely from evidence we shall examine in a moment, then it also made sense to hold the council in a more neutral location.

Jefrem, who was elected, was a Bulgarian of retiring, mystical disposition. He did not long remain in office. When George Balšić died in 1379, Jefrem left office. The *Life of Jefrem* states this was at his own request, for he wanted solitude to meditate. However, many scholars believe that he was George's candidate, whom Lazar disliked for some reason and ousted upon the death of his patron. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that after Lazar died (and upon the death of Jefrem's successor, Spiridon) Jefrem returned as patriarch. His *Life* says the Serbian bishops at that time could not agree on a new patriarch, so they decided to invite him back.

Jefrem's *Life*, unlike those of many Serbian Church figures, takes a strong pan-Orthodox rather than pro-Serb position. In so doing, it condemns Dušan's coronation, seeing that act as a usurpation and also an evil because it broke the unity of the Orthodox Church. This position was to be taken frequently in works written by Serbian monks in the fifteenth century, some of whose authors saw the immediate decline of the state after Dušan's death and

the Turkish successes that followed as divine punishment for Dušan's pride and usurpation. The *Life of Jefrem* also glorifies, far more strongly than most Serbian works, the monastic life that exerted such a strong attraction—far stronger than holding an episcopal position—upon the Jefrem it depicts.

Regardless of undercurrents of suspicion possibly felt by some clerics toward Lazar, Lazar emerged with the good will of the Church and even its strong appreciation. After all, he had brought about an end to the schism with Constantinople and gained recognition of the position of the Serbian Church from the Byzantines. He also, as noted, did many other services for the Church in the way of land grants, church building, and support of missionaries. Thus the Church soon came to support Lazar strongly and in ca. 1378 gave him a Church coronation as prince. He was crowned with the title "Lord of the Serbs and the Danube, Stefan [the Serbian royal name] Prince Lazar, autocrat of all the Serbs." Though he did not call himself king or tsar, his title bore all the other elements to suggest that he saw himself as a successor to, and continuer of, the Nemanjić state.

Lazar's strength was increased also through the marriage alliances he contracted for his four daughters: (1) Mara in 1365/66 married Vuk Branković. (2) Helen (Jelena) married George II Stracimirović Balšić in 1386/87. The son of Stracimir Balšić, he succeeded Balša II as ruler of Zeta in 1385, ruling it to 1403. (3) Theodora in 1387/88 married Nicholas Garai, a powerful Hungarian count who was active in Balkan affairs. (4) His fourth daughter married Alexander, the son of John Šišman, Tsar of Bulgaria. By 1386, after Helen's marriage to George II, the two major Serbian lords beyond his borders, both of whom now were his sons-in-law (Vuk Branković and George II Balšić), had come to recognize Lazar's suzerainty. For example, one of Vuk's charters from 1387 refers to Lazar as his lord (gospodin); moreover, Vuk had previously added Lazar's name to his coins, which was a sign of submission. Suggesting George's submission is the fact that in 1387 or 1388, right after George's marriage to Helen, Lazar added "and the Coast" to his title.

### **The Balšići in the 1370s and 1380s**

Lazar's position was also helped by the decline of the Balšići at the end of the 1370s. George I died in 1379. (Until recently scholars had dated his death to 1378.) His death freed Tvrtko of worry about counter-attacks from George and secured Bosnia's possession of what had been the Balšić territories bordering on Dubrovnik, annexed by Tvrtko in 1377. In fact at George's death Tvrtko had taken the remainder of Balšić coastal land between the Gulf of Kotor and the lands Tvrtko had taken in 1377. Vuk Branković quickly sent his forces into Kosovo and seized Prizren and the rest of the Balšić holdings in that region. Thus, as so often happened, the death of a strong leader led to immediate territorial losses for his heirs.

After divorcing Vukašin's daughter in 1371, George I had married Theo-

dora, Dejan's daughter, who was the former wife of Žarko of Zeta. Scholars speculate that at that time she brought him further territory in Zeta, i.e., whatever Žarko had been able to retain. George and Theodora had a son, Constantine. He was a minor when George died, so George's brother Balša II had no trouble in succeeding George. Whether George I had expected Constantine to take over Zeta later or to at least obtain an appanage is unknown. In any case Balša ignored any rights Constantine may have had, and their relations became increasingly strained. Balša's relations may also have been tense with the other major surviving Balšić, his nephew George II, who had been sharing power with his two uncles before George I's death. Our only suggestion that their relationship deteriorated comes from Orbini, who, on the basis of unknown sources, claims the two immediately quarreled and that Balša captured his nephew. Angry at his disobedience and afraid his nephew might oust him, Balša locked George II up in his Durazzo fortress, where he remained until Balša died (1385). Then George II was released from jail, returned to Zeta, and was accepted as its lord.

Clearly there are problems with this account. First, Ragusan sources show George II dealing with Dubrovnik off and on between 1379 and 1385; thus clearly George was not imprisoned throughout this period. However, a brief imprisonment at some time within this period cannot be ruled out. Second, Balša obtained Durazzo only in 1385. Of course, George might have originally been held in a different fortress and been transferred to Durazzo in 1385. Or, he might initially have been jailed in Durazzo, but in 1385 rather than in 1379. However, we really do not know anything about the relations between uncle and nephew, for no contemporary source provides us with any information. Thus we have no basis to judge whether or not there is a kernel of truth in this particular report given by Orbini.

In 1372, as noted, Balša had married the daughter of John Comnenus Asen and had received as a dowry the Berat-Valona region of Albania. His interests were increasingly directed toward that region, particularly as he became more interested in the affairs of Durazzo. This meant that he was able to devote less attention to matters in Zeta itself. He made no attempt to recover the lands lost to the Brankovići. However, he did retain an interest in the Adriatic region, and we have charters issued by him to his towns of Bar and Alessio (Lješ). His Adriatic interests overlapped with Tvrtko of Bosnia's. He clearly was unhappy with Tvrtko's seizure of Dračevica, Konavli, and Trebinje; and in the 1380s (probably 1383) the two rulers clashed in indecisive skirmishes in Konavli and Trebinje. Further straining the two rulers' relations was the fact that both Balša and Tvrtko sought overlordship over Kotor. Their ambitions also overlapped along the border of Zeta in what had been Altomanović's land.

In 1385 Balša Balšić conquered Durazzo, presumably from Karlo Thopia. In a charter to Dubrovnik issued in April 1385 he called himself Duke of Durazzo. He was not to enjoy his prize long. That summer a Turkish raiding party for the first time penetrated to the Adriatic and Ionian coast.

Balša, if we can believe Orbini, rounded up one thousand men in Durazzo and, ignoring the advice of his more level-headed courtiers, raced out to take on the Turkish raiders. Not surprisingly, his small forces had little success, and Balša was killed near Berat in battle against the Turks on 18 September 1385. We can see why Orbini called Balša brave but stupid. Orbini reports that Marko's brother Ivaniš, then living with Balša, also died in this battle. Whether or not the circumstances of Balša's death were exactly as Orbini reports, we do know that Balša was killed in battle against the Turks at this time. He was succeeded by his nephew George II Balšić (1385–1403). By the end of the year Durazzo was back in the hands of Karlo Thopia, who probably had already accepted Ottoman suzerainty. However, Karlo Thopia died in 1387 or 1388. He was buried in a church he built near modern Elbasan. His epitaph was given in three languages—Greek, Latin, and Serbian. Under George Thopia, his son and heir, the family's power declined. This enabled various client tribes to assert themselves in central Albania.

The Albanian lands Balša had received through his marriage with John Comnenus Asen's daughter almost at once slipped away from Balšić control. Balša's widow and their daughter Rugina (or Rudina) remained in possession of the Valona-Berat-Himara holdings. Shortly therefore, in 1391, Rugina married Mrkše Žarković, the son of the Žarko who was found holding Zeta right after Dušan's death. Balša's widow seems to have been the Valona duchy's main ruler until her death in 1396. By this time the family of Musachi had gained control of Berat. Mrkše succeeded to the duchy, calling himself the Lord of Valona; he held the city until his own death in 1415. Rugina succeeded him and briefly held Valona until the Ottomans conquered it in 1417. At various critical times during their rule, these heirs of Balša offered Valona to Venice, which always refused the responsibility.

The Albanian regions to the south of the consolidated Balšić holding of Zeta also fell away. The Albanian family of Dukagjin, which had been forced to submit to the Balšići, seceded. Already in 1387 the brothers Lek and Paul Dukagjin were issuing trade privileges to Dubrovnik in their lands, which included the important town of Alessio and the territory along the left bank of the Drin, probably extending south to the Mati. This Lek Dukagjin, or possibly a second individual bearing the same name from the following century, is credited with compiling Albania's oral law code, which came to be known as the *Law of Lek*. Also in this region, centered at Danj (Dagno), further inland on the left bank of the Drin, and also asserting its independence from the Balšići, was the Jonima family. The Dukagjins and the Jonimas were involved in a struggle for the territory along both sides of the Drin. And soon the Castriots were to be challenging Dukagjin dominance between the Mati and the Drin.

It is a thankless task to determine who held what in this general region. For nothing remained stable; a family's holdings could and did change from year to year. Borders within this large area between the Mati and the Bojana rivers, where these leading families and their clients resided, in particular,

underwent frequent fluctuations, as first one and then another family rose to dominance. At the same time the Balšići were not happy to see the territory in which these northern tribes lived slip from their grip. Thus they carried on a struggle with the Dukagjins for the region between the Drin and the Bojana rivers. Needless to say, the Balšić-Dukagjin border was particularly unstable.

Even the Balšići's Slavic lands were not secure. Nicholas Zakarija, who had commanded the castle of Budva for the Balšići for nearly twenty years, revolted, probably in 1386, and made himself the ruler of Budva. This secession did not last. George II was again in possession of Budva by 1389. At this time also the Crnojević family began to assert its independence in the mountains behind the Gulf of Kotor as well as in certain other scattered lands in Zeta. This family, whose origins are obscure, seems to have begun its rise holding only the village of Oblik on the Bojana and two or three villages on Lake Skadar.

Having lost all this territory and struggling to retain his hold over his remaining Slavic lands in Zeta while trying to somehow bring the Crnojevići back to obedience, George II Balšić faced an uphill fight. Holding securely only the land between Skadar and the coast, he established his major residence in Ulcinj and maintained other courts and garrisons at Drivast and Skadar. Despite his shrinking fortunes, he maintained an elaborate court and kept up the court titles and ceremonial that had existed at Dušan's court. He also began to coin money. In 1386 he married Lazar's daughter Helen. And it seems that he accepted Lazar's suzerainty. Possibly he hoped by this means to obtain Lazar's support to reassert his rule over the Crnojevići and various other Slavic nobles and tribesmen who were seeking an independent path. Moreover, he had to face the Turkish threat, a far more serious danger than local separatism. Under Turkish pressure George also accepted Ottoman suzerainty, either immediately on his succession in 1385 or during the extensive Ottoman raids that overran parts of Zeta the following year. In any case, documents clearly show him as an Ottoman vassal in 1388.

### **Tvrtko of Bosnia from the 1370s to 1391**

As noted earlier, as a result of his and Lazar's victory over Altomanović, Tvrtko received a large chunk of the loser's land. He obtained his gains in three installments. First, in late 1373 or early 1374, right after his victory, he acquired a strip of Hum along the border of Zeta, through Gacko and Onogošt to the upper Drina and Lim rivers, that included the region of Prijepolje with the important Serbian monastery of Mileševo. This brought the Bosnian-Serbian border near to the present border between the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro. In 1377 he received the second installment. As a result of a local rebellion against George Balšić, who had initially received this part of Altomanović's holdings, Tvrtko gained the coastal territory near Dubrovnik of Dračevica, Konavli, and Trebinje. When added to the parts of Hum gained by Bosnia in 1326, this gave Bosnia nearly all the territory that had composed



Serbian Hum in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, except for Ston and the Pelješac peninsula held by Dubrovnik. According to Orbini, Tvrtko's annexation of these coastal lands (which George considered to be his own) led George, at the moment allied with the Thopias, to plunder Bosnia as far into the interior as Nevesinje. The raiders then withdrew; the action was not repeated because George then died in January 1379. Tvrtko immediately took advantage of George's death to acquire the third installment, annexing from the Balšići the coastal territory lying between the lands he gained in 1377 and the Gulf of Kotor. Thus Tvrtko gained control of the coast between Kotor and Dubrovnik but not including either city itself.

Tvrtko's conquests, particularly those along the Drina and Lim, brought many more Orthodox clerics, monks, believers, and churches into the Bosnian state. However, as noted earlier, throughout the Middle Ages Bosnia retained a localized character. Thus we see little sign that the other religions of Bosnia—Catholicism and the Bosnian Church—played any role in this newly conquered area or that the Orthodox migrated to or influenced the non-Orthodox areas of Bosnia.

This acquisition of Serbian territory, including the important Serbian monastery of Mileševo, combined with the fact that Tvrtko was a Nemanjić (through his grandmother, Dragutin's daughter), gave Tvrtko the idea to have himself crowned King of Serbia. After all, the royal Nemanjić line had died out with Uroš in 1371 and one could not expect Tvrtko to place much stock in the claims of Marko, who, despite his coronation, was just a petty princeling in Macedonia without a drop of Nemanjić blood. So, in 1377 the Metropolitan of Mileševo crowned Tvrtko King of Serbia and Bosnia. We find no evidence that any of the Serbian princelings and noblemen objected to the coronation; in fact, Tvrtko's relations with Lazar remained cordial after 1377. But, though none objected, it is also certain that no Serbian nobleman outside the borders of Tvrtko's realm recognized Tvrtko as an overlord. From this time on until the fall of Bosnia in 1463, all Bosnian rulers called themselves kings rather than bans. And though the kingship had meaning for only Bosnia and Hum, because that kingship was derived from the Nemanjići, they all called themselves Kings of Serbia and Bosnia.

Having established himself so firmly on the coast down to the Gulf of Kotor, Tvrtko's hopes of acquiring that major port increased. And a situation arose that might have provided an opportunity for him to realize that ambition. In 1378 a war had broken out between Genoa and Venice. The Hungarians soon joined the Genoese side and tried to mobilize their Dalmatian towns against Venice. A large Genoese fleet appeared on the eastern side of the Adriatic; Trogir became its regular base. Needing a base to oppose the Genoese, the Venetians attacked and took Kotor on 13 August 1378. Considerable fear of Venice swept Dubrovnik, the Dalmatian town that had been most loyal to Venice's enemy Hungary over the past twenty years. Furthermore, Dubrovnik provided asylum to various anti-Venetians who had fled from Kotor.

Tvrtko tried to maintain correct relations with both towns, though Dubrovnik tried to pressure him to cease trading with Kotor as long as the Venetians were in occupation. The citizens of Kotor, meanwhile, fearing an attack from Genoa to expel the Venetians, tried to improve relations with Bosnia. In fact a faction in Kotor believed that the best solution for the town's difficulties would be to expel the Venetians and then at once submit to Tvrtko, an idea the Bosnian ruler encouraged. In June 1379 the Venetians suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Genoese near Pula in Istria; Kotor's fear of a Genoese attack increased. At this moment a rebellion erupted in Kotor, evicting the Venetian officials from the town and announcing the town's recognition of Hungarian suzerainty once again. Thus Tvrtko's hopes fell through. A certain number of Venetian soldiers managed to flee to the fortress of Kotor, where they were able to hold out while the rest of the town accepted the revolution. But though the town had re-accepted Hungarian suzerainty, the giving up of which had initially caused the break between it and Dubrovnik, the quarrel between the two towns continued. In fact it became more heated when a group of local citizens in May 1380 expelled Kotor's governing council, which had been dominated by the richer nobility. This act upset many of the coastal towns in which the rich patriciate dominated, especially Dubrovnik; relations remained strained between the two towns until the nobles of Kotor succeeded in regaining power in October or November 1381.

Unfortunately, almost nothing is known about the revolutionary regime in Kotor. Orbin's description is flawed. He mixes the war I have just described with earlier events that involved George I Balšić and Altomanović, both of whom by this time were in fact deceased. Orbin's report is as follows: The population of Kotor, led by a man called Medoj, expelled their magistrates for bringing Dubrovnik's and Balšić's raids upon the town. The expelled aristocratic magistrates fled to Dubrovnik and offered peace between the two towns in exchange for aid. After debate the Dubrovnik council, infected with fear that Kotor's example might influence the general populace of Dubrovnik against its patriciate, agreed to help them. Then Dubrovnik's leaders negotiated with the rebel leaders in Kotor; these negotiations resulted in peace and the return of the expelled magistrates both to their town and to their former positions of power. And so ends Orbin's account.

By the time Kotor's aristocrats had restored themselves to power, Venice and Genoa had concluded peace and the Venetian troops had evacuated Kotor's citadel. All Dalmatia was once again under Hungarian suzerainty. And Tvrtko had failed to capitalize on the war to gain Kotor for himself.

Having failed to acquire an existing port, Tvrtko decided the next best thing was to develop his own port on the Adriatic and in this way to make himself more independent of the existing commercial centers, especially of Dubrovnik. He began building a new town early in 1382 called Novi (literally, "New"; modern Herceg-*Novi*). Dubrovnik protested strongly, particularly insisting on its right to have a monopoly in selling salt to the Balkan

interior. Kotor and the Italians welcomed the new town, hoping by trading there to increase their share of the Bosnian market, particularly in the sale of salt. Soon Dubrovnik established a blockade of Novi and, besides pressuring others not to trade there, seized foreign ships sailing to Novi. Tvrtko tried unsuccessfully to purchase ships from Venice to defend his harbor. Dubrovnik and Bosnia came close to war, but finally in December 1382 Tvrtko gave in to Dubrovnik and agreed in a treaty to recognize the monopolies Dubrovnik claimed. Novi then stagnated. Tvrtko's capitulation owed itself to his desire to have his hands free to involve himself in the civil war that was then breaking out in Hungary. However, despite the affair over Novi and lesser issues that popped up from time to time, Tvrtko's relations with Dubrovnik tended to be cordial. The town's merchants were very active in Bosnia; besides trading, they served Tvrtko actively as financial officials, chancellors, and diplomats. Dubrovnik established colonies at various newly opened mines and increased the size of its colonies at the older mines. During Tvrtko's reign mines at Olovo (opened under Stjepan Kotromanić), Srebrenica, and probably Fojnica developed rapidly. By the end of the century a Franciscan mission was established at each of these towns.

### **Hungarian Civil War**

On 16 September 1382 King Louis of Hungary died. His death ended the male line of the Hungarian Angevins. Three women remained behind: Louis' widow (Stjepan Kotromanić's daughter) Elizabeth, and their two daughters, Maria and Hedwiga (or Jadviga). Maria was engaged to Sigismund of Luxemburg, the son of Charles IV, King of Bohemia and Emperor of Germany. On 17 September 1382 Maria, aged twelve, was crowned "King" of Hungary. Louis had hoped that after his death the union between Hungary and Poland would hold. The Poles, however, announced that if Maria wished to be ruler of Poland she would have to reside there. Maria refused, so the Poles chose her sister as their ruler and she departed for Poland. Meanwhile in Hungary Maria's mother, Elizabeth, assumed the role of regent; her leading advisor was Nicholas Garai. An assortment of Hungarian nobles found the rule of a woman objectionable.

The first to go into active opposition was John of Paližna (Paližina), the Prior of Vrana. He seems to have been chiefly opposed to the centralizing policy enforced during the reign of Maria's father and to have hoped, by opposing Maria, to reassert local independence. He sought support from Bosnia, for Tvrtko was then operating in the Dalmatian area, immediately taking advantage of Louis' death to recover the territories he lost to Louis in 1357. Bosnian help did not materialize in time. A Hungarian army, supporting Maria, appeared before the walls of Vrana. The town was surrendered to it, while John fled to Bosnia.

After a brief period of peace a new movement against Maria emerged in 1385. This was led by the Horvat brothers, who were the leaders of a great family from the Vukovska župa (the county just west of Srem between the

Sava and Danube rivers). John Horvat was Ban of Mačva<sup>5</sup> while his brother Paul was Bishop of Zagreb. Their rebellion was far more serious than John of Paližna's, for not only were the Horvats more powerful figures with much greater support, but they also offered a new candidate for the throne, Charles of Naples, the closest male relative to the deceased King Louis. He was descended from another Maria, the daughter of Stephen V of Hungary, who had married Charles II of Naples. Soon John of Paližna had joined the Horvat rebellion on behalf of Charles; this united the supporters of the earlier rebellion to Charles' cause.

In the course of these Hungarian troubles after Louis' death Tvrtko quietly dropped his vassalage to Hungary, which since about 1370 had been only nominal in any case. He also, as noted, at this time regained the territory lost to Louis in 1357: Drijeva and western Hum between the Cetina and Neretva rivers with Završje. Tvrtko also had a major success in southern Dalmatia, finally replacing Hungary as overlord of Kotor. In late 1382, taking advantage of the quarrel between Tvrtko and Dubrovnik over Novi, Balša Balšić had attacked Kotor. Failing to take it, he placed the town under siege from the land. Dubrovnik, despite being on good terms with Balša, continued to send Kotor shipments of grain to help it endure the siege. Skirmishes soon followed in 1383 between Balša and Tvrtko in Konavli and Trebinje; presumably Balša was trying to regain these lands, which Tvrtko had taken from George I in 1377. Soon in 1384 (quite likely in July) Kotor, still under pressure from Balša, finally submitted to Tvrtko. The official date given for the event is August 1385, when Hungary, Kotor's previous overlord, recognized Tvrtko's suzerainty over the town. Most scholars believe that the hard-pressed Hungarian ruler Maria, who accepted this change, was recognizing a *fait accompli* and was further hoping, by recognizing Tvrtko's acquisition, to win Tvrtko's support or at least neutrality.

In 1385, on the advice of her counselors, Maria tried to break her engagement to Sigismund, so that she could marry the brother of the King of France. Angry at this slight, Sigismund attacked Hungary. The country was then in a state of semi-anarchy, with whole regions recognizing the Horvats' candidate Charles of Naples. When Maria found herself in these further difficulties arising from Sigismund's attack, the Horvats decided that Charles should now come to Hungary and claim his throne. In September 1385 he landed at Senj and then marched to Zagreb, the seat of Paul Horvat. Faced with this increasing danger from her main rival Charles, Maria submitted to Sigismund and married him. The two then entered into negotiations with the Naples faction inside Hungary; a peace was concluded, which evidently neither side intended to honor, that left Maria as the ruler and recognized Charles as "Governor of Hungary." What this title meant in terms of authority is not clear, but, considering what was to follow, it is also not important. Since Sigismund had returned to his affairs in Bohemia, Maria took over again as ruler with Nicholas Garai, restored as Count Palatine, the leading figure at court. Meanwhile, Charles was persuaded to come to Hungary itself. Plots

were hatched on all sides and he, no more sincere about the agreement than Maria, planned to expel Maria and have himself crowned king.

Charles came to Buda. His followers engineered a coup that forced a renunciation of the throne from Maria, and Charles was then crowned king. However, he then stupidly accepted an invitation to visit Maria at one of her palaces; upon his arrival there on 7 February 1386 he was murdered by one of her henchmen. Charles' supporters immediately rose up in arms, and thus the civil war resumed. They were now campaigning on behalf of Charles' son Ladislas.

In late 1386 Maria and her mother, Elizabeth, paid a visit to Djakovo in Slavonia. After they departed, they were attacked on the road by the Horvats and their retainers. Nicholas Garai, who had accompanied them, was killed, and the two ladies were taken prisoner. They were taken off to a castle in Novigrad near Zadar. John of Paližna, who had been named Ban of Croatia by the murdered Charles, became their jailer. When rumors reached Novigrad that Sigismund was on his way to rescue his beloved bride, the guards strangled Elizabeth before her daughter's eyes. In the meantime armed supporters of both candidates moved around Croatia, engaging in considerable local fighting. Sigismund meanwhile, hearing of his wife's capture, hurried to Hungary from Bohemia. The nobles in Alba Regalis accepted him and crowned him King of Hungary on 31 March 1387. Sigismund, supported by Nicholas Garai's son (also named Nicholas), then set about procuring Maria's release. This clearly had to be done by force; a large army volunteered by John of the Krk princely family (the future Frankapans) besieged Novigrad and procured her release in the spring of 1387. With Sigismund present and Maria freed, the tide turned against the Naples party and the Horvats were forced to flee to Bosnia.

Meanwhile in the Donji Kraji the branch of the Hrvatinić family that had supported Tvrtko against Hungary in 1363 and had thereafter risen to dominance in the region as a result (namely, Vlkac and his son Hrvoje), still loyal to Tvrtko, joined, in about 1387, the Horvats against Sigismund. Presumably this alliance was concluded with Tvrtko's consent. It also occurred in the nick of time for the Naples faction, for just when it had lost in Hungary and was on the point of losing in Croatia, the Bosnians took up its cause. Soon Bosnian and Croatian troops were campaigning together on behalf of Naples in Croatia in the region around Zagreb. And by the end of the year, 1387, the Bosnians and their Croatian allies were in control of most of Croatia and Slavonia. The Horvats, who had sought refuge with Tvrtko, were now able to make their return to Croatia. Tvrtko himself also came out openly for Naples in the course of 1387. He sent his own armies into Hungarian Dalmatia, in particular into the strip of coastland between Zadar and Dubrovnik. Actively helped by John of Paližna and Hrvoje, Tvrtko established his suzerainty over all the towns between these two cities, though not including Zadar and Dubrovnik themselves; thus Split, Omiš, Trogir, Šibenik, and even several Adriatic islands submitted to Tvrtko. He issued charters confirming their existing

privileges, including their rights to remain self-governing under their own town councils and existing law codes. Tvrtko evidently intended to retain these towns for Bosnia. John of Paližna had been named Ban of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in 1385 by the ill-fated Charles of Naples. Tvrtko recognized John's title and appointed him to be his deputy for various Dalmatian towns that submitted to him.

Some of the towns seem to have been unhappy with the change, preferring as their suzerain the more distant Hungary to near-by Bosnia. Tvrtko never tried to force his rule upon either Zadar or Dubrovnik. Thus between 1387 and 1389 Tvrtko made himself overlord over a large part of Slavonia, Dalmatia, and Croatia south of Velebit—including Knin, Ostrovica, and Klis. On behalf of Naples his troops even passed through Slavonia into Srem. Though these actions were carried out in the name of Naples, it is evident that Tvrtko and his own vassal, Hrvoje, with whom he was closely associated in this venture, were acting for themselves and it was they who held the actual authority in much of this vast area. In 1390 Tvrtko began to call himself King of Croatia and Dalmatia. Though they owed their revived fortunes and their return to Croatia to Tvrtko and his Bosnians, one still may wonder how the Horvats felt about Tvrtko's successes and claims. Surely Tvrtko's ambitions clashed with their own.

It seems that Prince Lazar of Serbia briefly joined the Naples cause and may even have sent some troops to participate in the fighting around Beograd and in Srem. But as the Turkish threat increased and Sigismund's support in Hungary itself grew, Lazar made peace with Sigismund; this peace was sealed, probably at some point in 1387, when Lazar's daughter Theodora married Sigismund's loyal supporter Nicholas Garai.

Tvrtko died in February 1391. John of Paližna died a month later. The Hungarian civil war continued unabated. In Bosnia a struggle for power followed among various members of Tvrtko's family. Hrvoje Vukčić, however, was clearly the strongest local figure. He was to become more-or-less a king-maker for Bosnia, while he retained tight control over his own Donji Kraji. He also moved rapidly to replace Tvrtko as overlord over Dalmatia and parts of Croatia. Ladislav of Naples, hoping to retain both this territory and Hrvoje's support, gave his blessing to Hrvoje's ambitions and recognized him as his deputy for this region.

### **Attica, Boeotia, and the Peloponnesus**

The Catalans continued to rule Attica and Boeotia. They had, however, lost most of their holdings in southern Thessaly to the Serbs in 1348. Of that region only Neopatras and its district remained in their possession. They remained under the suzerainty of the King of Sicily. He, though appointing a vicar general to manage the duchy and various other officials, was not able to impose his authority against the wishes of the local Catalans. Besides the vicar general, an outsider appointed to oversee the whole territory who re-

sided in Thebes, the king appointed two vicars (*verguers*)—one in Athens and one in Livadia—and a captain in Neopatras. These appointees generally served for terms of three years; their appointments could be renewed.

All the territory of the duchy was divided among these four major leaders. The vicar general, though responsible for supervising the whole duchy, also had particular responsibility for the fourth of the duchy that fell under Thebes. The vicar, or captain in the case of Neopatras, was responsible for the local military forces as well as for civil and criminal justice. Beneath these four leaders were a series of castellans who commanded lesser castles throughout the duchy. Some of these castles were held as fiefs assigned by the Catalan Company (and confirmed by the king); the castle fiefs were usually hereditary. Other castles, particularly the more important ones, received royally appointed commanders; frequently however, these appointees were drawn from the company. Each vicar was responsible for supervising the castellans in his own territory. Each vicar and castellan had a military force under his command to keep order, put down brigands, and defend his fortress. The king also appointed a marshall who, as the chief military figure of the duchy, co-ordinated military campaigns and major defense efforts. The marshall was always a local Catalan; for fifty years the position was hereditary in the de Novelles family. The vicar general stood over the marshall. However, in theory their spheres of responsibility seem to have overlapped; and even if their responsibilities were more clearly defined than is apparent to us now, in practice they certainly would have overlapped.

The local Catalans themselves were a military caste. They formed a corporation that had its own council responsible for company matters; they elected various civil and military officials who co-existed with the royally appointed administrators. As holders of lesser fortresses, various Catalans participated in the royal administration and as a company they made (on both local and duchy-wide levels) policy decisions which they presented to the king in petitions. Thus the Catalan Company was a separate policy-making group that, having its own council and enjoying the loyalty of most of the local military forces (its members), was in a position to behave as it chose. If the king ignored the Catalans' wishes, they could revolt, as they did in 1362 when Roger de Lluria, a Catalan marshall, carried out a military coup and took power in Thebes. The vicar general, Peter de Pou, was killed and de Lluria was recognized by his followers (who seem to have included most of the local Catalans) as the new vicar general. De Lluria then assigned the command of various fortresses in the duchy to his men. Soon he had Neopatras; it is not certain, however, that he acquired control of Athens. The king did not want to accept him and appointed a new vicar general, who tried, but failed, to oust de Lluria in 1363. Having failed to remove him, the king had little choice but to accept him, which he did in 1366 when he named de Lluria vicar general. De Lluria remained in power until he died, at some point after November 1368, probably in 1369.

After his death matters seem to have become particularly chaotic. A

whole series of charters of royal appointment to the duchy from the 1370s have survived, but it often is not known whether the appointees ever actually assumed their offices. There also seem to have been various splits within the ranks of the local Catalans; and between 1374 and 1378 (a more exact date cannot be determined) warfare broke out between the Catalans of Thebes and Livadia on the one hand and those of Athens on the other. Peace was concluded between the two sides before the end of 1378.

In 1377 Frederick III of Sicily died, ending the male line of the Sicilian house; his heir was his daughter Maria, whose succession was illegal, because succession by a female had been outlawed by a previous king, Frederick II. A serious quarrel followed in Sicily. Scholars have often stated that it carried over to the Duchy of Athens/Thebes and split the local Catalans. Setton takes this view. Loernetz, however, while recognizing that various divisions did exist among the local Catalans, has noted that these splits existed before Frederick III's death; he also points out that no direct evidence exists to demonstrate that the Sicilian succession was an issue that troubled the local Catalans or that any of them rejected Frederick's daughter.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of 1377 Peter IV of Aragon had triumphed over Maria; he assigned the rule of Sicily to his son Martin. However, he continued to take an interest in the affairs of both Sicily and the Catalan duchy. By 1379 he had added "Duke of Athens" to his title and had come to the conclusion that the House of Aragon should take a more active role in the duchy or at least in selecting the Catalans who managed the duchy's affairs. However, his desire to manage the affairs of the duchy backfired on occasion; for he frequently summoned his vicar generals back to Spain to report and receive orders. In their numerous absences, which sometimes coincided with unanticipated crises, the local Catalans were free to act as they chose.

During their years of rule, then, the Catalans were a small military minority that ran the duchy. Their government seems to have been inefficient. There was considerable lawlessness within the state—some of which Catalans surely participated in—and commerce suffered. To keep their control, the Catalans separated themselves from the Greek population. They banned intermarriage between Greeks and Catalans. (This law seems to have been violated with some frequency.) They also only to a limited extent armed the local Greeks for defense needs. Though this may have avoided revolt, it also meant that in the event of a foreign invasion their forces were smaller than they might otherwise have been. They chiefly supplemented their own forces with Albanian and Turkish mercenaries. The Albanians at this time were migrating beyond Thessaly and Epirus into Attica and Boeotia, and we know of one Albanian chief, Demetrius, who was considered a baron of the duchy. Holding a large fief, he commanded fifteen hundred horsemen. Peter of Aragon, presumably seeking them as soldiers for the duchy, offered a two-year tax exemption to any new Albanians who would come to settle in the duchy. The Albanian response to his offer is not known.

The local Greeks held middle-level administrative positions that required



literacy; they dealt with civil affairs as notaries, scribes, record-keepers, and tax collectors. The role of local Greeks, though limited, was still greater under the Catalans, who had little interest in administrative tasks and therefore willingly left them to Greeks, than it had been under the Burgundians. The Catalans also profited from the slave trade, selling Greeks, among others, as slaves. The center for this trade was Thebes.

Meanwhile, after the death of Philip II of Taranto in 1373, most of the barons of Achaea recognized Joanna, the Angevin Queen of Naples, as their suzerain. In late 1376 or early 1377 Joanna, tied down with Italian affairs, leased her principality of Achaea (the Frankish Morea) for four thousand ducats a year on a five-year lease to the Hospitaller Knights of Saint John. The relatives of the late Philip disapproved of her action and advanced their own candidate to rule Achaea, Philip's nephew Jacques des Baux.

Meanwhile the Hospitaller Knights of Achaea decided to invade Epirus. Though the reasons for this venture are unknown, it is probable that they were seeking to regain the Epirote forts granted to the Angevins in 1294 that had subsequently been occupied by the Albanians. Led by their Grand Master (from 1377) John Fernandez de Heredia, the knights in 1378 moved against John (Ghin) Bova Spata, the Albanian who, as noted, controlled Arta and much of southern Epirus and Acarnania. He probably had brought this attack on himself by his conquest in 1376 or 1377 of Naupaktos, the last Angevin town in Epirus. The knights directed their first attack on Naupaktos, which they captured, and then in April 1378 they are found in occupation of Vonitsa in Acarnania. It seems Vonitsa had been made available to them by its holder, Carlo Tocco. With the knights was a company of Navarrese—another Spanish military company. The Navarrese, who had been campaigning for Louis of Evreux around Durazzo previously, had found themselves at loose ends after his death in 1376. Presumably the Hospitalers had hired them for the Epirote campaign. The campaign began to go badly after Spata took John Fernandez prisoner. (The Florentines ransomed him and he was back in Achaea, in Clarenza, in May 1379.) His capture seems to have ended the campaign against Spata, who in 1380 is again found as master of Naupaktos. Carlo Tocco retained possession of Vonitsa. The Navarrese were then hired by the Hospitalers for eight months' service in Achaea itself.

Once there the Navarrese company soon split. One group remained in the Morea as a force of disorder while a second group, under John de Urtubia, soon became allies, if not retainers, of Nerio Acciajuoli, the Florentine banker who held Corinth. Urtubia's Navarrese, probably in the service of Nerio, soon marched against the Catalans. Nerio certainly acquiesced in, if he did not outright encourage, their activities, allowing them passage through his lands, which, after his conquest—aided by the local citizens—of Megara in 1374 from the Catalans, bordered on and controlled access to the Catalan duchy.

The Catalans, who seem not to have expected this attack, did not put up an effective or co-ordinated defense against the Navarrese. Between January and May 1379 the Navarrese took Thebes, and in 1380, or possibly early

1381, they took Livadia. Thebes shortly thereafter is found in the hands of Nerio, so it seems Urtubia yielded it to him. Whether this shows that Urtubia had been in Nerio's service or whether Nerio simply bought the town from him is not known.<sup>7</sup> Livadia was soon recovered for the Catalan duchy.

Many of the Navarrese then proceeded to return to the Morea, where, joining up with those previously hired by the Hospitaller Knights, they set about plundering the northeastern part of the Peloponnesus. Then in 1381, after Joanna was overthrown in Naples, the Navarrese decided to support Jacques des Baux, who was now styling himself Despot of Romania and Prince of Taranto and Achaea. Thus the Navarrese came to oppose the Knights of Saint John who had originally employed at least some of them. The Navarrese were successful in conquering much of Messenia, taking the towns of Androusa and Kalamata, in the name of Jacques. But then Jacques died in July or August 1383, and the Navarrese recognized no further overlord; on their own, they now held this territory for themselves. The Knights of Saint John, who had never succeeded in asserting their control over much of Achaea, at the expiration of their five-year lease in 1383, departed. This made things even easier for the Navarrese, who, operating on their own without a suzerain, soon decided to proclaim their own leader Peter de San Superano as Prince of Achaea.

The Navarrese then set their sights on the rich town of Corinth, held by Nerio Acciajuoli, the Florentine banker. Needing allies to oppose them, Nerio approached and soon, in 1384 or 1385, concluded an alliance against the Navarrese with the Byzantine Despot of the Morea.

By this time the Palaeologus family had regained control of this appanage. Wanting to make the Morea into an appanage for his own son Theodore, the emperor, John V, sent his father-in-law John Cantacuzenus as an envoy to Mistra to persuade his son Matthew Cantacuzenus to turn the Morea over to Theodore. Matthew earlier had had to swear an oath of loyalty to the imperial house; though in his youth he had not taken such promises seriously, now, older and mellowed, Matthew seems to have done so. Agreeing to accept Theodore as Despot of the Morea, Matthew remained in office awaiting Theodore's actual arrival to turn the insignia of government over to him. But though Matthew agreed to surrender his authority, his son Demetrius, who had hoped to succeed to the Morea, did not. Already given an appanage in the Morea by Matthew, Demetrius decided to use it as a base to resist. Procuring the support of some local Greek magnates, and hiring some "Latins" (probably Navarrese mercenaries) and some Turkish bands, he began to extend his rule over more of the Morea. When Theodore Palaeologus arrived in December 1382, Matthew at once turned Mistra over to him and retired. (Matthew died soon thereafter, in June 1383, and thus was not to influence Peloponnesian affairs further.) However, by the time Theodore had assumed office Demetrius held most of the Byzantine Peloponnesus, including many fortified centers.

Demetrius had no desire to submit, and thus the Byzantine province

remained divided, with probably the larger part of the population supporting Demetrius. However, late in 1383 or early 1384 Demetrius suddenly died; his leading supporter Paul Mamonas of Monemvasia submitted grudgingly to Theodore, and the revolt fizzled out. But one should emphasize that Theodore's position was saved only by Demetrius' sudden death. And Theodore could expect difficulties ahead, for though they had submitted to him, many magnates were not happy to have Theodore as their governor.

The economic problems of the Morea had increased significantly in the second half of the fourteenth century, when Turks from the Anatolian emirates had begun large-scale raiding of the coastal towns and stepped up their attacks upon shipping. Particularly effective as a predator was Umur of Aydin, the son of Cantacuzenus' supporter of the same name. Under the name of Morbassan, this Umur had the reputation of being the bloodiest pirate in the East. Raiding the shores of Greece, he called himself "Sovereign master of Achaea and Scourge of the Christians." In addition to plundering and destroying, the Turks also carried off large numbers of people to sell as slaves. Their activities, combined with the numerous wars fought on the peninsula, contributed substantially to the depopulation and economic decline of the whole Peloponnesus.

Theodore, in 1382 about thirty years old, was to rule the Peloponnesus as an autonomous state under the suzerainty of the emperor. Though emperors occasionally interfered in Peloponnesian matters during the next sixty years, on the whole Theodore and his successors ruled independently rarely consulting Constantinople. However, after 1382, when the Morea came to be administered by members of the same family as that which held the imperial throne, the Morean despots came to have closer relations with the capital and worked more frequently on behalf of the same general policy interests. But the Morea did have financial and judicial autonomy; the despots appointed their own officials, collected their own taxes, and issued grants of land and of privileges including financial and judicial immunities. However, the authority of the despots was limited. They did not issue their own coins but used imperial money. Moreover, no traces of local law are found in the Morea. Byzantine Church canons, Byzantine law codes, and the novels of the Byzantine emperors were the law of the Morea. The despots, though they headed local courts, had no legislative authority. And though the despots issued commercial privileges and sent envoys to foreign states to discuss local problems, the emperor in Constantinople had to conclude, or at least confirm, any major treaty.

Once established in power, Theodore was also concerned about the Navarrese, who were a force of disorder for the whole peninsula. Thus he was receptive to Nerio's proposed alliance, and in 1385, to seal it, he married Nerio's eldest daughter, Bartholomaea. Nerio had no legitimate son and it was understood that Bartholomaea was to eventually inherit Corinth. Thus Theodore saw his marriage as a means to regain for the empire that important town.

Strengthened by this alliance, Nerio then decided to move decisively against the Duchy of Athens. Possibly he feared the Navarrese had designs upon the duchy, and thus, by anticipating them, he could prevent them from establishing a strong base on his northern border. He dispatched his troops into the duchy in 1385, and they quickly overran Attica and Boeotia, taking almost all of it. Athens alone held out, and it was placed under siege. The ease with which the Catalan state fell is astounding and is difficult to explain. It has been estimated, however, that at this time there were only five to six thousand Catalans in the duchy, of whom about three thousand were based in Athens. These now undertook its defense and did so effectively, holding out until 1388 when Nerio finally took it. He then moved against the Catalans' special captaincy of Neopatras and conquered it by 1390. (Neopatras was a short-term gain since the Ottomans were to take it in 1394.) Thus the whole Duchy of Athens and Thebes became the private holding of this Florentine banker.

He quickly dismantled the feudal structure and turned the administration over to salaried agents he hired; in general he hired Italians. However, he gave a considerable role to the local Greeks, for he needed their support against any of the military companies—Catalan or Navarrese—that might try to evict him. And we find many Greeks working side by side with his Italian bureaucrats. Greek became the official language of his chancellery and he allowed a Greek archbishop to return to Athens. However, the Greek bishop had to live in the lower town. The upper town, with the Acropolis and its great cathedral church (the Parthenon), was reserved for the Catholic archbishop with whom Nerio had close relations.

After Nerio's conquest a few groups of Catalans remained in the duchy, holding a few scattered castles. As outcasts, they basically lived as brigands holed up in individual strongholds.

## NOTES

1. The discussion that follows is greatly indebted to G. Ostrogorski, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti* (Beograd, 1965).

2. This point is argued in Fine, *The Bosnian Church*, pp. 106–07.

3. Gojislava's fate is unknown. Scholars reject the two variant but similar stories recorded by Orbin that Nicholas had her and her two sons thrown into prison, where they died, or that he ordered them all to be poisoned. Ćirković points out that neither fate could have occurred, at least not to Gojislava, because we know Dubrovnik aided her escape to Albania. After that we lose all traces of her.

4. Ducellier (*La façade maritime*, p. 479) dates the reconquest to 1372. An expedition was planned for that year, but it seems it was never actually launched (See E. Léonard, *Les Angevins de Naples* [Paris, 1954], p. 438). Thus a later date is probably warranted. The evidence presented by K. Setton (*Catalan Domination of Athens, 1311–1388* [Cambridge, Mass., 1948], pp. 125–26) for the 1376 date for both the capture of Durazzo and Louis' death rests on the following: Louis continued to actively recruit troops through 1375; through most of 1375 until the summer of 1376

documents mention troops as embarking for the campaign; and though no source mentions the capture, a document from the end of the year 1376 refers to Louis as Duke of Durazzo, suggesting his enterprise was successful. This same document also refers to Duke Louis as being dead. Thus his death occurred the same year, possibly even in connection with the campaign.

5. The title Ban of Mačva presents problems. In 1381 we know that Prince Lazar held some or possibly all of Mačva, for in that year he awarded the income from various villages in Mačva to support his monastery of Ravanica. That same year, 1381, John Horvat is referred to in documents as Ban of Mačva. We know that John at the time held the Vukovska župa. Radonić proposes that by this time the more prestigious title "Ban of Mačva" was given to the holder of the Vukovska župa, a territory that earlier had often been granted by the Hungarian king to the holder (ban) of Mačva. Though this theory cannot be proved, it was not unusual to grant noblemen titles to lands claimed, but not held, by a given state. Thus Horvat's title found in sources from 1381 and 1382 should not be taken to indicate that Lazar did not actually possess much of Mačva.

6. Setton, *Catalan Domination of Athens*, and R.-J. Loenertz, "Athènes et Néopatras," in Loenertz, *Byzantina et Franco-Graeca* (Rome, 1978), p. 227.

7. George Dennis ("The Capture of Thebes by the Navarrese [6 March 1378] and Other Chronological Notes in Two Paris Manuscripts," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 26 [1960]: 42–50) has discovered a fragment of a Byzantine chronicle that dates Urtubia's capture of Thebes to 6 March 1378. If this date is correct, as Dennis believes, then it seems Urtubia's company, possibly in Nerio's service, first attacked Thebes. Then subsequently, after taking it, the company entered into service with the Hospitalers for the Epirote campaign. And then after that campaign's end, when the Navarrese Company of Mahiot de Coquerel entered into Hospitaler service in Achaea, Urtubia's band returned to Thebes and Boeotia.