

THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST OF THE BALKANS AND ITS HISTORICAL ARENAS: ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REGIONAL AND SUPRAREGIONAL HISTORY

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The article aims at interpreting the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans as a major historical process in a larger spatial context. It discusses the late Medieval Balkans as a space that was interrelated with surrounding political and cultural spaces from the Adriatic to Anatolia and from the Black Sea area to the Aegean basin with a special focus on migration and diaspora groups.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; Late Medieval Balkans; spatial methods.

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans was not a single event, but a process lasting from the mid-fourteenth to the late fifteenth centuries.¹ It is thus one of the

¹ The general bibliography is not easily summarised due to a lack of an overall survey. Here some of the more important works are listed. Unfairly overlooked due to its appearance shortly before the fall of the Iron Curtain and its language: R.A. Mihneva/H. Matanov, *Ot Galipoli do Lepanto. Balkanite, Evropa i osmanskoto našestvie 1354–1571 g.*, Sofia 1988; a Marxist account but with many important observations that has largely been neglected recently, also for linguistic reasons: E. Werner, *Die Geburt einer Großmacht. Die Osmanen (1300–1481). Ein Beitrag zur Genesis des türkischen Feudalismus*, Berlin (Ost) ²1972; too little attention has also been paid to the works of the Leipzig Byzantinist K.-P. Matschke, “Research Problems Concerning the Transitions to Tourkokratia. The Byzantinist Standpoint”, in: F. Adanır/S. Faroqhi (eds.), *The Ottomans and the Balkans. A Discussion of Historiography*, Leiden 2002, p. 79–113; K.-P. Matschke, “Der Übergang vom byzantinischen Jahrtausend zur Turkokratie und die Entwicklung der südosteuropäischen Region”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 1, 1999, p. 11–38; still a foundational work of Ottoman studies: H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300–1600*. London 1973; the most recent collection of conference papers: S. Rudić/S. Aslantaş (eds.), *State and Society in the Balkans before and after Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, Belgrade, 2017; the most recent attempt at a synthesis: M. Kiel, “The Incorporation of the Balkans into the Ottoman Empire, 1353–1453”, in: K. Fleet (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey, 1071–1453*, ed. 1: *Byzantium to Turkey*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 138–191; M. Kiel, *Art and Society of Bulgaria in the Turkish Period*, Assen, Maastricht, 1985; idem, *Ottoman Architecture in Albania*, Istanbul 1990; H. Kaleshi, “Das türkische Vordringen auf dem Balkan und die Islamisierung. Faktoren für die Erhaltung der ethnischen und nationalen Existenz des albanischen Volkes”, in: P. Bartl (ed.), *Südosteuropa unter dem Halbmond. Untersuchungen über Geschichte und Kultur der südosteuropäischen Völker während der Türkenzeit*, Munich, 1975, p. 125–138, an important interpretation due its positive assessment of the Ottoman conquest from the national perspective of the Islamised Albanians; H.W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, Albany/NY. 2003; for early Ottoman history, see: I. Beldiceanu-Steinherr, *Recherches sur les actes des règnes des sultans Osman*,

great phases of upheaval in European, Mediterranean and Eurasian history. In the context of the history of the Balkans, the profound transformations of this epoch are matched only by the collapse and reshaping of the Roman Empire during the transition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. Regardless of how one assesses the transformation, there is no denying that politically, the Balkan region post-1500 was completely revolutionised compared to the early fourteenth century and that significant demographic, ethnic and cultural shifts were already becoming apparent and would later undergo further intensification in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were also radical changes in property relations, land law and large parts of the economy (trade, the diversion of certain flows of goods such as precious metals). Society too experienced huge upheaval in the form of mass flight, the destruction of further sub-regions (but not the wider region itself), the rise of new elites, migration, particularly from Anatolia, and the beginnings of the Islamisation. It is impossible to make simple or sweeping statements simply due to the conquest's duration: over 150 years, the actors changed, both the Ottoman Empire, which under Bayezid II had little to do with the groups of warriors of an Orhan, and the many regional medium-sized, small and petty dominions.

But changes were also afoot in the world itself, in whose context the Ottoman conquest must be considered. For our topic cannot be examined only as regional history – although the regional historical approach is clearly eminent: research hitherto has always suffered from favouring only the one visual axis. The conquest has only been examined from the perspective of the Ottoman Empire or its subjugated opponents, the Byzantine Empire and the many Balkan dominions; or from the perspective of Crusader studies, or Mediterranean studies with its subdivisions of Venetian, Genovese and Catalan history, or research on the Order of St. John.² Furthermore, the conquest of the Balkans is also part of East-Central

Orkhan et Murad I, Munich, 1967; eadem, *Études ottomano-byzantines*, Istanbul, 2015; R.P. Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia*. Bloomington, 1983; K. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds. The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley, 1995; P. Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, London, 1938, important for the 'Gazi theory'; still stimulating theoretically: S. Vryonis Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1971; for my own approaches: O.J. Schmitt, "Südosteuropa im Spätmittelalter. Akkulturation – Integration – Inkorporation?" in: R. Härtel (ed.), *Akkulturation im Mittelalter*, Ostfildern, 2014, p. 81–136; O.J. Schmitt (ed.), *The Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans. Interpretations and Research Debates*, Vienna, 2016.

² A selection of the proliferous literature: K.M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, vols. 1–2, Philadelphia, 1976–1979; N. Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1274–1580*, Cambridge, 1992; idem, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat*, Oxford, 2012; N. Housley (ed.), *The Crusade in the Fifteenth Century. Converging and competing cultures*, London/New York, 2017; idem, *Reconfiguring the Fifteenth-Century Crusade*, London, 2019; B. Weber, *Lutter contre les Turcs. Les formes nouvelles de la croisade pontificale au XV^e siècle*, Rome, 2013; D.M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, Cambridge, 1988; E. Orlando, *Venezia e il mare nel Medioevo*, Bologna, 2014; E. Ivetic, *Storia dell'Adriatico*, Bologna, 2019; G. Ortalli/O.J. Schmitt/E. Orlando (eds.), *Balcani occidentali, Adriatico e Venezia fra XIII e XVIII secolo*, Venice–Vienna, 2008; U. Israel/O.J. Schmitt (eds.), *Venezia e Dalmazia*, Rome, 2013; M. O'Connell, *Men of Empire. Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State*, Baltimore, 2009; M. Balard, *Gênes et la*

European history and must therefore be understood especially from the perspective of the kingdom it affected most, the Lands of the Hungarian Crown.³ But we must also look to Anatolia, the Levant and Iran, firstly, because the Balkans were just one, albeit a very important part of the Ottoman Empire and, secondly, because the Anatolian emirates (especially Karaman, but before it also Aydın, Menteşe, Saruhan and İsfendiyar on the Black Sea), the fifteenth-century White Sheep Turkomans, and around 1500 the growing Safavid Empire were sought-after allies of the Balkan and Southern and Central European states (principally Venice and Hungary), and later the Holy Roman Empire.⁴

This brief survey leads us to the main focus of this essay: the aim is to examine the age of conquest in its spatial dimension: regional history and supraregional history; the Balkans and Anatolia – where relevant to the Balkans – in their broader spatial contexts; but also the question of shifting border regions. The spatial dimension cannot be separated from the actors – and this analysis shall not indulge in simple geodeterminism.

In Ottoman studies, spatial approaches to the age of conquest are characterised by the link between architectural research and the analysis of administrative sources, mainly from a local and small-scale regional perspective.⁵ The present

mer/Genova e il mare, Genoa, 2017; G. Pistarino, *I signori del mare*, Genoa, 1992; more recent works on the Catalans in the eastern Mediterranean: D. Duran i Duelt, “Los ducados de Atenas y Neopatra en el comercio regional e internacional durante la dominación catalana (siglo XIV) I. El comercio regional a través del observatorio de Candía”, *Estudios bizantinos* 6, 2018, p. 111–146; idem, “Los ducados de Atenas y Neopatra en el comercio regional e internacional durante la dominación catalana (siglo XIV) II. El comercio de larga distancia a través del observatorio de Barcelona y Mallorca”, *Estudios bizantinos* 7, 2019, p. 85–118, A. Luttrell, *The Hospitaller State of Rhodes and its Western Provinces, 1306–1522*, Aldershot, 1999; idem, *The Hospitallers of Rhodes in Their Mediterranean World*, Aldershot 1992; Z. Tsirpanles, *Η Πόδος και οι νότιες Σποράδες στα χρόνια των Ιωαννιτών ιπποτών*, Rhodos, 1991; N. Vatin, *L'ordre de Saint-Jean-de-Jérusalem, l'Empire ottoman et la Méditerranée orientale entre les deux sièges de Rhodes (1480–1522)*, Leuven – Paris, 1994; idem, *Les Ottomans et l'Occident (XV^e–XVI^e siècles)*, Istanbul, 2001.

³ T. Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács. A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare*, Leiden – Boston, 2018; J.K. Hoensch, *Sigismund von Luxemburg*, Munich, 1996; idem, *Matthias Corvinus*, Graz 1998; Ch. Gastgeber et al. (eds.), *Matthias Corvinus und seine Zeit*, Vienna, 2011; M. Jászay, “Contrastes et diplomatie dans les rapports de Mathias I^{er} Corvin et la République de Venise”, *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 35, 1989, p. 3–39; G. Rászó, “Die Türkenpolitik Matthias’ Corvinus”, *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32, 1986, p. 3–50; A. Dumitran/L. Mádly/Al. Simon (eds.), *Extincta est lucerna orbis. John Hunyadi and His Time. In memoriam Zsigmond Jakó*, Cluj-Napoca, 2009; L. Koszta et al. (eds.), *Stephen the Great and Matthias Corvinus*. Cluj-Napoca, 2007.

⁴ E.A. Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade, Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydın (1300–1415)*, Vienna, 1983; B. von Palombini, *Bündniswerben abendländischer Mächte um Persien 1453–1600*, Wiesbaden, 1968; A.M. Piemontese, “La représentation de Uzun Hasan sur scène à Rome (2 mars 1473)”, *Turcica* 21–23, 1991, p. 191–203; G. Rota, *Under Two Lions. On the Knowledge of Persia in the Republic of Venice (ca. 1450–1797)*, Vienna, 2009; G. Boykov, “Anatolian Emir in Rumelia: İsfendiyaroğlu İsmail Bey’s Architectural patronage and Governorship of Filibe (1460s–1470s)” *Bulgarian Historical Review* 2013/1–2, p. 13–47.

⁵ For instance, the foundational studies by Machiel Kiels, now available as a Bulgarian volume of his complete works: M. Kijl, *Bălgarija pod osmanska vlast. Săbrani săčinenija*, ed. M. Barămoval

study is concerned with something quite different: it seeks to determine in which spatial framework the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans must be placed. This implies a supraregional approach that extends beyond the Balkans in the narrower sense. A second, related question considers how the conquest's spatial dimension can be conceived on the regional level. Space is understood here as an arena of events, as a place where political, military and transformations take place. Although this means focusing less on the socio-economic and cultural upheavals, the study seeks to understand the interrelationship of several large geopolitical fields, and ultimately the dynamics of frontier regions.

Such an approach renders it impossible to go into fine detail. It must also be noted that a holistic model is not proposed; rather, this examination should function alongside explanatory models pursuing institutional continuity and discontinuity, questions of land and tax law, demography or the (in) significance of Islamic religious war.⁶ In close reciprocity with the spatial dimension, greater focus can be placed on political and military aspects than has been the case in the prior socioeconomic analyses or studies in the fields of cultural history or the history of religion.

Regional and supraregional history are closely intertwined in the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans: this is apparent if we consider the two ancient parts of the Byzantine Empire, the west (Dysis) and Asia Minor, or Rumelia and Anadolu, in the Ottoman spatial logic⁷. Until most of the regional states were done away with under Mehmed II, the Ottoman's regional opponents in the Balkans and Asia Minor (especially Karaman, İsfendiyar and the White Sheep Turkomans) first formed ties over the Aegean. Later, such arrangements would extend principally over the Black Sea, Mircea the Elder's Walachia taking on particular importance as it sought to compensate for its exposed position with Pontic alliances from the early fifteenth century onwards.⁸

Entangled regional history must also consider the marriages between the Ottomans and regional ruling dynasties, which became increasingly asymmetrical; what was initially an attempt by Orthodox princes (Byzantium, Bulgaria) to hem in the Ottomans increasingly developed into delivery of Orthodox princesses to the sultan's harem. This mirrored the decline of the Orthodox princes, from John VI Kantakouzenos or the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Alexander to the Serbian despot

G. Bojkov/M. Kiprovska, Sofia, 2017; see also the studies by H.W. Lowry, *The Shaping of the Ottoman Balkans 1350–1500. The Conquest, Settlement & Infrastructural Development of Northern Greece*, Istanbul, 2008; H.W. Lowry/İ.E. Erünsal, *Notes & Documents on the Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice-i Vardar (Giannitsa)*, Istanbul, 2009; H.W. Lowry/İ.E. Erünsal, "The Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice-i Vardar. A Postscript", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 34, 2009, p. 131–208.

⁶ Besides the studies by Matschke, see also fn. 1, on the discussion of the research, in O.J. Schmitt, "Introduction", in: Schmitt, *Ottoman Conquest*, p. 7–44; a comprehensive study of the Islamisation: A. Popović/G. Grivaud (eds.), *Les conversions à l'Islam en Asie Mineure et dans les Balkans aux époques seldjoukide et ottomane. Bibliographie raisonnée (1800–2000)*, Athens, 2011; on the institutional history approach, see: H. İnalçık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest", *Studia Islamica* 2, 1954, p. 103–129.

⁷ B. Geyer/J. Lefort (eds.), *La Bithynie au Moyen Âge*, Paris, 2003.

⁸ T. Gemil, *Româniî și Otomanii în secolele XIV–XVI*, Bucharest, 1991, p. 92 ff.

George Branković.⁹ It is important to note however, that also petty regional ruler lords such as Carlo I Tocco gifted (illegitimate) daughters to the harem (in this case to Sultan Musa) in exchange for auxiliary troops for regional battles with Christian opponents. Incidentally, after Musa's death, Tocco gave the same girl as a wife to an Ottoman officer who was an acolyte of Musa's successor Mehmed and, most importantly, the brother of an influential courtier. Petty regional lords used marriages at all levels of power, and Tocco proved to be particularly agile in his manoeuvres.¹⁰

In this connection, there were also reciprocal interventions in wars of succession; the Ottomans, specifically the regional border commanders/uç beys, were often called upon as auxiliary troops by the Balkan princes. This practice began under John VI and continued for decades. From Walachia to Bosnia, the Ottomans also installed well-disposed princes (in Walachia for instance Vlad in opposition to Mircea the Elder, or Radu Praznaglava, Radu the Handsome). In Bosnia, they also appointed counter-kings (for instance Ikač, Tvrtko II, Radivoj Ostojić)¹¹. It is often overlooked however that Serbian, Walachian and Byzantine rulers intervened in internal challenges to the Ottoman throne. A particularly striking example is the alliance the two princes Andronikos (IV) Palaiologos and Savci struck up against their fathers John V and Murad I in 1373. But Manuel II Palaiologos, Mircea the Elder of Walachia, Vuk and Stefan Lazarević and Georg Branković intervened in the Ottoman Civil War of 1403–1413, and in 1410 the Orthodox rulers of Byzantium and Walachia even supported different Ottoman pretenders. In 1416 and again following Mehmed I's death, Byzantium attempted to nominate candidates to the Ottoman throne and to influence Ottoman domestic policy, as did Walachia in 1416, with drastic consequences. There was no shortage of Ottoman princes seeking protection and assistance from their Orthodox neighbours: one need only think of Bayezid I's son Yusuf, who after his father's defeat at Ankara fled to Constantinople and converted to Christianity, adopting the name Demetrios, or Orhan, who lived in Constantinople around 1450 and for whose keep the last Byzantine emperor demanded an enormous apanage from the young Mehmed II. Orhan fought against Mehmed II on 29 May 1453 and died fleeing when the city fell. Several Ottoman pretenders requested and received occasional help from Byzantine, Serbian and Walachian princes during the Civil War of 1402–1413, and the two Mustafas benefited equally from the support of

⁹ M.St. Popović, Mara Branković, *Eine Frau zwischen dem christlichen und dem islamischen Kulturkreis im 15. Jahrhundert*, Ruhpolding, 2010.

¹⁰ G. Schirò, *Cronaca dei Tocco di Cefalonia*, Rome, 1975, vv. 1916–1922; 3079–3083.

¹¹ O. Cristea, "The Friend of my Friend and the Enemy of my Enemy: Romanian Participation in Ottoman Campaigns", in: G. Kármán/L. Kunčević (eds.), *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Leiden/Boston, 2013, p. 253–274; N. Pienaru, "Les Pays Roumains et le Proche-Orient (1420–1429) I", *Revue roumaine d'histoire* 28/3, 1989, p. 189–207, and II. *Revue roumaine d'histoire* 29/1–2, 1990, p. 69–103, here part I, p. 190–200; E.O. Filipović, *Bosansko kraljevstvo i Osmansko carstvo (1386–1463)*, Sarajevo, 2019, p. 160–165; 309–310; L. von Thallóczy, "Radivoj, Sohn des Königs Ostoja von Bosnien 1429–1463", in: idem, *Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter*, München/Leipzig, 1914, p. 79–109.

Orthodox regional rulers. Mustafa, a son of Bayezid I (whose belonging to the dynasty was contested) was supported by Mircea the Elder I. Upon being defeated, he fled to Saloniki in Byzantium, where he was then held in honourable captivity on the island of Lemnos before contesting the Ottoman throne after Mehmed's death in 1421. In this manoeuvre, he was assisted by Byzantium and at times by the Rumelian border commanders and Sipahi; defeated, however, he was executed after his capture en route to Walachia, a principality of immense importance to Ottoman domestic policy. Almost concurrently, the second Mustafa, Murad II's brother, lost his battle for power in 1422 and fled briefly to Constantinople. As a footnote to this Ottoman–Orthodox entanglement, it is worth noting that in 1421, the dying Sultan Mehmed I placed two of his sons in the protection of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II, fearing fratricide.¹²

Ottoman princes turned to west in hope of military support quite early on. For instance, Davud Çelebi, probably a grandson of Savci, the rebel of 1373, resided at the court of Emperor Sigismund, who soon deployed him in Walachia and in Albania soon thereafter. In 1448, he fought with John Hunyadi at Kosovo polje. Bayezid Osman or Calixtus Ottomanus, as Davud a predecessor to Cem Sultan, one of the great figures of the Renaissance, also attained great renown.¹³ It is therefore important to emphasise that there were pro-Ottoman groups at all regional courts, but also members of the Ottoman dynasty and uç beys who collaborated with or were used by Christian lords.

It is impossible to provide more than this brief outline of entanglement¹⁴ – but the Balkan–Anatolian political world was not without its grey areas; while fronts existed, they changed often and the political actors did not operate within simple categories like Christian/Muslim, not that they were not profoundly aware of these categories.¹⁵ Despite the close ties between actors, one thing is certain:

¹² E. Trapp *et al.*, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, 15 vols. Vienna, 1976–1995, no. 9082 (Jusuf-Demetrios); no. 21133 (Orhan); *Encyclopedia of Islam* (online), C.J. Heywood, Lemma “Mustafa Düzme”, and *ibid.*, Lemma “Mustafa Çelebi”.

¹³ F. Babinger, “Dâwûd Çelebi, ein osmanischer Thronwerber des 15. Jahrhunderts”, *Südost-Forschungen* 16, 1957, p. 297–231; idem “Bajezid Osman (Calixtus Ottomanus), ein Vorläufer und Gegenspieler Dschem-Sultans”, *La Nouvelle Clio* 3, 1951, p. 349–388; N. Vatin, *Sultan Djem. Un prince ottoman dans l'Europe du XV^e siècle d'après deux sources contemporaines*, Ankara, 1997; idem, “L'affaire Djem (1481–1495)”, in: idem, *Les Ottomans et l'Occident (XV^e–XVI^e siècles)*, Istanbul, 2001, p. 93–103, on Cem, most recently L. Horsch, “Prinz Cem an der Kurie (1489–1495). Ein Beitrag zur Wahrnehmung der Türken im Zeitalter der Renaissance”, *Südost-Forschungen* 77, 2018, p. 137–175.

¹⁴ An extensive study is in preparation for *Travaux et mémoires*.

¹⁵ The Ottoman vassal Konstantin Dragaš is said to have shouted to the Orthodox princes of Walachia at Rovine, “I pray to God that he may help the Christians, I want to be the first to die in this battle”; M. Braun, *Lebensbeschreibung des Despoten Stefan Lazarević von Konstantin dem Philosophen*, s'Gravenhage, 1956, p. 12–13; the Despot of Serbia Stefan Lazarević, prior to 1402 a loyal follower of the Ottomans whose armoured cavalry had decided the battle of Nikopolis in 1396 and who had fought to the end for Bayezid, professed to Venice in 1406 that he wanted to be a “good

ultimately, the regional petty states had disappeared, the Ottoman Empire had conquered the Balkans, but until the late fifteenth century, from the institutions to the elites, in many respects one might observe, albeit somewhat exaggeratedly: *Haemus captus victorem cepit*.¹⁶

This Balkan–Anatolian conflict area was bound up with three European political spaces, the fundamental constellations of which shall be outlined in the following. All three corresponded to actual conflict zones that largely determined how the European powers reacted towards Ottoman expansion and also explain why Catholic Europe never opted for a coordinated response. While each of the three spaces are dealt with separately, their analysis will demonstrate that they were closely intertwined.

1) Firstly, we can observe an *Adriatic conflict zone* in which Hungary, Venice and Naples jostled for hegemony, especially in the Southern Adriatic and the East Adriatic coast. These powers' mutual distrust dating back to the High Middle Ages (one need only think of the Norman–Venetian antagonism during the late eleventh century) often prevented collective campaigns against the Ottomans – *pars pro toto* examples would be King Sigismund's wars with Venice (1411–1413 and 1418–1420), the Byzantine attempts to mediate between Hungary and Venice under the emperors Manuel II and John VIII, the latter visiting Venice and Ofen/Buda in 1423/24, but also the Venetian–Hungarian contest for Dalmatia

Christian" once more despite having been an Ottoman vassal; G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, vol. 3, Munich/Palermo 1968, no. 1188.

¹⁶ K.-P. Matschke, *Die Schlacht von Ankara und das Schicksal von Byzanz. Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte zwischen 1402 und 1422*, Weimar, 1981; a comprehensive portrayal of the Balkan–Anatolian entanglement in the Ottoman Civil War is provided by D.J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid. Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413*, Leiden, Boston, 2007; A. Pippidi, "Taking Possession of Wallachia: Facts and Interpretations", in: Schmitt, *Ottoman Conquest*, p. 189–208; L. Pilat/O. Cristea, *The Ottoman Threat and Crusading on the Eastern Border of Christendom during the 15th Century*, Leiden, 2018; M.M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, "Les relations du prince de Valachie Mircea l'Ancien avec les émirs seldjoukides d'Anatolie et leur candidat Musa au trône ottoman", *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6/10–11, 1968, p. 113–125; N. Pienaru, "Români și tatarii. Relațiile Țării Românești cu Hoarda de Aur în vremea lui Mircea cel Bătrân", in: O. Cristea (ed.), *Vocația istoriei. Prinos profesorului Șerban Papacostea*, Bucharest, 2008, p. 297–330; idem, "Les pays roumains et le Proche Orient (1420–1429)", *Revue roumaine d'histoire* 28, 1989, p. 189–207 and 29, 1990, p. 63–103; idem, "Relațiile lui Mircea cel Bătrân cu emiratul pontic Candar-oğulları", *Revista istorică* 7/7–8, 1996, p. 483–510; C. Imber, "The Role of Dynastic Politics in the Ottoman Conquest of the Balkan Peninsula", in: G. Dančev et al. (eds.), *Turskîte zavoevanija i sâdbata na balkanskite narodi, otrazeni v istoričeski i literaturni pametnici ot XIV–XV vek. Meždunarodna naučna konferencija, Veliko Târnovo, 20–22 maj 1987 godina*, Veliko Târnovo, 1992, p. 113–116; E.A. Zachariadou, "Les Tocco: seigneurs, vassaux, otages, rénégats", *Ankara Üniversitesi Güneydoğu Avrupa çalışmaları uygulama ve araştırma merkezi* 1, 2012, p. 11–22; M. Balivet, "Le personnage du « turcophile » dans les sources byzantines antérieures au concile de Florence (1370)–1430)", in idem, *Byzantins et Ottomans: Relations, interaction, succession*, Istanbul, 1999, p. 31–47; A. Krstić, "Which Realm Will You Opt For? – The Serbian Nobility between the Ottomans and the Hungarians in the 15th Century", in: S. Rudić/ S. Aslantaş (eds.), *State and Society in the Balkans before and after Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, Belgrade, 2017, p. 129–163.

under Matthias Corvinus, during the long Ottoman war of 1463–1479. Regional lords also became embroiled in the Hungarian–Venetian conflict, either as victims of antagonism between the two great powers or as beneficiaries – but the Ottomans always profited from the situation: in 1418–1420, Venice fought not only against King Sigismund, but also in Northern Albania against the regional ruler Balsha III and his heir, the Serbian despot Stefan Lazarević. A vassal of Hungary and the Ottomans, Lazarević remained a target for Venice in subsequent years. Consider too the attempt by Bosnian king Tvrtko II to align himself with Venice and, after this policy failed, to turn to Hungary (1424) – and the Ottomans’ punishment of their insubordinate vassal.¹⁷

An equally persistent conflict was that between Venice and Naples in the mid-fifteenth century over control of the Strait of Otranto and Alfons V of Aragon’s Neapolitan plans for the Balkans, namely to establish a chain of vassals from Herzegovina, through the Albania of Skanderbeg and the Araniti down to the Despotate of the Morea, thus challenging the *dominium maris* and with it the Republic’s lifeblood. Indeed, these manoeuvres posed a greater threat to Venice than Alfons’ lofty designs on the imperial Byzantine throne. But another source of conflict was the Italian Pentarchy, the extremely fragile balance of power between Venice, Milan, Florence, the Papal States and Naples established by the Treaty of Lodi (1454) and the Italian League (1455).¹⁸

The Hungarian – Venetian – Neapolitan Adriatic complex thus had a geopolitical impact on Italian domestic policy, which in many respects reacted to the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. The Ottoman threat was both a rhetorical and

¹⁷ W. von Stromer, “Landmacht gegen Seemacht. Kaiser Sigismunds Kontinentalsperre gegen Venedig 1412–1433”, *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 22/2, 1995, p. 145–189; F.-R. Erkens, “...Und will ein grosse Reise do tun’. Überlegungen zur Balkan- und Orientpolitik Sigismunds von Luxemburg”, in: J. Helmroth et al. (ed.), *Studien zum 15. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Erich Meuthen*, Munich, 1994, p. 739–762; G. Beckmann, *Der Kampf Kaiser Sigismunds gegen die werdende Weltmacht der Osmanen 1392–1437*, Gotha, 1902; M. Wakounig, *Dalmatien und Friaul. Die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Sigismund von Luxemburg und der Republik Venedig um die Vorherrschaft im adriatischen Raum*. Wien 1990; O.J. Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien 1392–1479*, Munich, 2001, p. 271–274; E.O. Filipović, *Bosansko kraljevstvo i Osmansko carstvo (1386–1463)*, Sarajevo, 2019, p. 280–281.

¹⁸ N. Rubinstein, “Das politische System Italiens in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts”, in: P. Moraw (ed.), “*Bündnissysteme*” und “*Außenpolitik*” im späteren Mittelalter, Berlin, 1988, p. 105–119; R. Fubini, “Lega italica e ‘politica dell’equilibrio’ all’avvento di Lorenzo de Medici al potere” *Rivista storica italiana* 105, 1993, p. 373–410; F. Babinger, “Sechs unbekannt aragonische Sendschreiben”, in: idem, *Spätmittelalterliche fränkische Briefschaften aus dem großherrschaftlichen Seraj zu Stambul*, Munich, 1963, p. 76–95; C. Marinesco, “Alphonse V, roi d’Aragon et de Naples, et l’Albanie de Skanderbeg” *Mélanges de l’Ecole Roumaine en France*, 1, 1923, p. 1–135; idem, *La politique orientale d’Alfonse V d’Aragon, roi de Naples (1416–1458)*, Barcelona, 1994; A. Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous. King of Aragon, Naples and Sicily, 1396–1458*, Oxford, 1994; M. Jacoviello, “Relazioni politiche tra Venezia e Napoli nella seconda metà del XV secolo”, *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 96, 1981, p. 67–133; M. Jacoviello, *Venezia e Napoli nel Quattrocento*, Napoli, 1992; O.J. Schmitt, “Skanderbegs letzte Jahre – west-östliches Wechselspiel von Diplomatie und Krieg (1464–1468)”, *Südost-Forschungen* 63/64, 2004/2005, p. 56–123.

a real-political instrument for pacifying Italian domestic conflict, leading to Lodi and its renewal (1470). The popes were the driving force behind this domestic coordination, albeit not the decisive players. The post-conciliar papacy's Ottoman policy at times revolved around commitment to crusades (especially under Calixtus III and Pius II), but it also attempted to strengthen its own standing as a territorial state in Italy. Crusades were thus a papal means of conducting a domestic policy seeking to stabilize Italy, the pope acting as the peninsula's mediator, a role many states were happy to recognize. Although they had emerged from the shock of 1453 and the fall of Negroponte in 1470, the leagues were more about Italian domestic compromise than decidedly anti-Ottoman manoeuvring. This entanglement of domestic policy and war with the Turks, further complicated by the leadership conflict between the pope and his close acquaintance Emperor Frederick III and the system of imperial diets proliferating throughout Europe, was particularly evident in the Congress of Mantua called by Pius II in 1459.¹⁹ However, Italian domestic diplomacy was rendered more complex by the Ottoman threat, which became a lever of Italian domestic policy. All of the states cultivated their own relations with the Ottoman Empire, not only those with policies directly related to the Balkans (Venice, Naples, and to a lesser extent the Papal States, although their activity in this area was rather crusading than territorial), but also Florence, Milan or Mantua, which were not involved in conflict in the Balkans, but certainly desired Ottoman pressure on their Italian opponents (e.g. Milan versus Venice, but also Naples versus Venice) and moreover had their own trade interests in the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Genoa was a special case: in the fourteenth century, the Republic had been in tough competition with Venice in the Levant and fought many wars with the Signoria for control of the straits and the Black Sea trade (most decisively during the Chioggia War of 1378–1381). After 1381 however, the mother city found itself increasingly in crisis, having to accept foreign rule under the French and the Milanese Visconti, and thus its influence in Italy as an independent power was limited. Around 1450, the threat to Ligurian maritime trade was no longer

¹⁹ A. Calzona / F.P. Fiore / A. Tenenti / C. Vasoli (eds.), *Il sogno di Pio II e il viaggio da Roma a Mantova*, Città di Castello, 2003; G.B. Picotti, *La dieta di Mantova e la politica de' Veneziani*, Venice, 1912; C. Märkl, *Kardinal Jean Jouffroy (†1473). Leben und Werk*, Sigmaringen, 1996, p. 100–113; J. Helmuth, "Pius II. und die Türken", in: B. Guthmüller / W. Kühlmann (ed.), *Europa und die Türken*, Tübingen, 2000, p. 79–137.

²⁰ F. Babinger, "Lorenzo de' Medici e la corte ottomana", *Archivio storico italiano* 121/3, 1963, p. 305–361; idem, "Relazioni visconteo-sforzesche con la Corte Ottomana durante il sec. XV.", in: *La Lombardia e l'Oriente*, Milan, 1963, p. 8–30; H.-J. Kissling, *Sultan Bâjezid's II. Beziehungen zu Markgraf Francesco II. von Gonzaga*, Munich, 1965. The Milanese emissary to Murad II boasted to the Burgundian agent Bertrandon de la Brocquière, "qu'il avoit esté cause de faire perdre Salonique aux Venissiens pour leur faire dommage et la faire gaignier au Turc; de quoy il fist grant dommage"; Ch. Schefer, *Le voyage d'outremer de Bertrandon de La Brocquière, premier écuyer tranchant et conseiller de Philippe le Bon, duc de Bourgogne*, Paris, 1892, p. 142; in 1430, fires were lit in Milan to celebrate the fall of Venetian Saloniki; E. Basso, "Genova e gli Ottomani nel XV secolo. Gli 'itali Teucrici' e il Gran Sultano", in: *L'Europa dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli: 29 maggio 1453*, Spoleto, 2008, p. 375–410, here p. 380.

Venice, but the Aragonian Mediterranean empire. Largely independently of the mother city, the Genoese regional lords in the Aegean (the Maona on Chios, the Alaun lords of Phokaia, the Gattilusi on Lesbos) pursued regional policies against the Ottomans.²¹

By the end of the age of Ottoman conquest, around 1500, the pentarchal system in Italy had collapsed. In 1480, the peninsula had been hit by a direct Ottoman attack. It was not so much coordinated defensive measures as the death of Mehmed II, the domestic wars of succession between Bayezid II and Cem Sultan, and to a much lesser extent Neapolitan counterattacks that put an end to the extremely threatening Ottoman offensive. In the crisis of 1480/81, the fault lines between the Italian territories became all too clear: Venice maintained strict neutrality, having fought the Turks largely on its own, save for initial papal assistance, from 1463 to 1479, suffering severe financial and territorial losses. Moreover, Naples had undermined the Venetian positions in Albania and Herzegovina by cultivating relations with the Ottoman Empire. Towards the end of the century, the Venetian-Neapolitan conflict escalated with the Venetian conquest of Apulian ports (such as Trani, Brindisi, Otranto, which was then lost during crisis of the League of Cambrai in 1509). While the Ottoman threat gave rise to the Italic Leagues, they remained unstable, precarious and weak. The Pentarchy powers feared domestic competition more than they did the Ottomans, who were not the only power threatening to intervene in Italy either – France proved a much greater danger, and indeed took the war with Turkey as a pretext to launch an assault in 1494, destroying the system that had been in place since Lodi. As a result, the fragile domestic balance of power lay in tatters, and Italy became the arena for Franco-Habsburg competition. From 1499–1503, Venice, again having to fight alone, suffered a decisive naval defeat at the hands of the Ottomans. From this point on, the Republic would hardly be able to hold out against the Empire without a stronger ally. A new epoch had dawned, in which Venice sought to prevent the constant decline of its position in the Levant via unstable alliances with the Spanish Habsburgs – the political heirs of the Neapolitan Aragonese.²²

²¹ E. Basso, “De Boucicault à Francesco Sforza. Persistance et changements dans la politique orientale des seigneurs étrangers de Gênes au XV^e siècle”, in: M. Balard / A. Ducellier (ed.), *Le partage du monde, échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, Paris, 1998, p. 63–77; idem, “La Maona di Chio, Genova e l’Impero Ottomano : relazioni commerciali e intrecci diplomatici fra Tardo Medioevo e prima Età moderna”, in: S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Relazioni economiche tra Europa e mondo islamico secc. XIII–XVIII*, Varese, 2007, p. 315–324; J. Paviot, “Gênes et les Turcs (1444, 1453). Sa défense contre les accusations d’une entente”, in: *La storia dei Genovesi*, vol. 9. Genoa, 1989, p. 129–137; G. Pistarino, “Chio dei Genovesi”, *Studi Medievali* ser. 3a 10/1, 1969, p. 3–68; A. Mazarakis, *Πρακτικά συνεδρίου Οι Γατελούζοι της Λέσβου*, Athens, 1996; G. Olgiati, “Il commercio dell’allume nei domini dei Gattiluso nel XV secolo”, in: Mazarakis, *Οι Γατελούζοι*, p. 373–398; Ch. Wright, *The Gattiluso Lordships and the Aegean World 1355–1462*, Leiden–Boston, 2014.

²² H. Houben (ed.), *La conquista turca di Otranto (1480) tra storia e mito*, 2 vols., Galatina, 2008, therein E. Orlando, “Venezia e la conquista turca di Otranto (1480–1481): incroci, responsabilità, equivoci

2) A second geopolitical complex whose significance for the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans must not be underestimated emerged in *East-Central Europe*: the interplay between the crowns of Hungary, Bohemia and Poland, for which the large Jagiellonian, Luxemburg and Habsburg dynasties and the emerging Hunyady dynasty were vying. Regional actors like George of Podiebrad in Bohemia also had their designs. As in the case of the entanglement between the triangular conflict in the Adriatic and Italian politics, the East Central European conflict zone was related to a further political macro-region, the Holy Roman Empire. In the fourteenth century, Hungary had become the undisputed great power in Southeastern Europe under Louis the Great, but its zenith around 1365 was soon followed by its direct clash with the Ottoman Empire. In 1395, King Sigismund embarked on a policy of making the Ottoman threat a pan-European affair – it failed in 1396 and led Western Europe, with the exception of Burgundy, to be much more reticent about offering military assistance; the defeats at Nikopolis and the huge ransom the French aristocracy had to pay the Ottomans were not forgotten. Sigismund, King of Hungary from 1387, King of Germany from 1411, King of Bohemia from 1419, and Roman Emperor from 1433, was the first to attempt to create an East-Central European power bloc that would offer protection from the Ottomans. In Southeastern Europe, he pursued an extensive preliminary policy in Bosnia, Serbia and Walachia, and also recognised the importance of Anatolian alliances.²³ But it was already clear then that combining the East-Central European crowns created more conflicts than it solved: one need only think of the Hussite wars, which cost the emperor a lot of energy and prevented him from stronger efforts on the southern frontier – there was already talk of conflict with Venice in the Adriatic.

The issue of the Bohemian crown occupied not only the Luxemburgs, but also the Jagiellonians, the Hunyadi and the Habsburgs. The question of the Hungarian succession following the death of Sigismund in 1437 created a severe crisis resulting in decades of conflict between the Habsburgs and the Hunyadi, which had a decisive impact on the Ottoman advance in the Balkans, especially under Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490). It was no coincidence that Hungarian succession crises and dynastic feuds arose at the same time as Ottoman advances,

negli equilibri europei”, p. 177–209; E. Piva, “L’opposizione diplomatica di Venezia alle mire di Sisto IV su Pesaro e ai tentativi di una crociata contro i Turchi 1480–1481”, *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* n.p. 5/1, 1903, p. 49–204; A. Bombaci, “Venezia e l’impresa turca di Otranto” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 66, 1954, p. 159–195; D. Abulafia (ed.), *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494–1495*, London, 1995; O.J. Schmitt, “Geschichte Lepantos unter der Venezianerherrschaft 1407–1499”, *Südost-Forschungen* 56, 1997, p. 43–103, here p. 70–76; G. Cogo, “La guerra di Venezia contro i Turchi (1499–1503)”, *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 18, 1899, p. 5–76, 348–421; 19, 1900, p. 97–138 (source section).

²³ P. Engel, “Zur Frage der bosnisch-ungarischen Beziehungen im 14.–15. Jahrhundert”, *Südost-Forschungen* 56, 1997, p. 27–42; cf. the monumental work by D. Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti (Sveta kruna ugarska i sveta kruna bosanska). 1387–1463*, Zagreb, Sarajevo, 2006 and most recently Filipović, *Bosansko kraljevstvo*.

first in 1382–1387, most disastrously after Sigismund's death in 1437, when Murad II overran Serbia, and around twenty years later, when the entire Serbian Despotate was conquered during the chaos of Matthias Corvinus' first months on the throne (1459). The Habsburg–Hungarian conflict (especially Frederick III's election as Hungarian king by the aristocrats who opposed the Hunyadi and the question of his returning the crown of St. Stephen to the Hunyadi king) impeded the Hungarian response to the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia in 1463. Moreover, it prevented any combined Austro-Hungarian effort against the Ottomans for decades. During his own lifetime, Matthias Corvinus had to face criticism that he neglected the southern frontier in favour of his policy of conquest in the Austrian hereditary lands, in Bohemia and Silesia. The king's defence, that only a strong East-Central European power bloc could resist the Ottomans, has been a matter of controversy for centuries— what is certain is that during the fifteenth century, the internal conflicts in East-Central Europe were just as strong as in the Italian domestic power complex; additional issues were the Hungarian–Polish competition in the foothills of the Carpathians (Moldova) and in the Danube and the Dniester estuaries, which dated back to the mid-fourteenth century and were not settled by the Treaty of Lublau (1412).²⁴

Not only the Luxemburghs, but also the Jagiellons showed that uniting the crowns alone was not the same thing as developing a unified East-Central European bloc that could withstand the Ottomans – as evidenced by the Polish resistance to the young Hungarian-Polish King Ladislaus's crusades (1443/1444) or the later phase of Jagiellonian rulers on the Hungarian throne (1490–1526), when loyalty throughout the dynasty was in short supply.²⁵ On the other hand, it was ultimately the unification of East-Central European crowns (Hungarian, Bohemian and Croatian, the latter of more symbolic than practical importance) under a single dynasty – the Habsburgs – that finally hemmed in the Ottoman advance. Successful defence was predicated, and this was the decisive condition for success, on the consolidation of these crowns with the German lands of the Habsburgs and the financial, military, technological and demographic resources of the Holy Roman Empire. The Habsburg managed to pull off what the Jagiellonians, defeated at Mohács in 1526, failed to achieve, repelling the assaults by Süleyman the Magnificent in 1529 and above all in 1532. Recently, 1532 has quite rightly

²⁴ See the detailed discussion in Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis*; on the Lower Danube, along with the latest study by Pilat/Cristea, *Ottoman Threat*, see also Ş. Papacostea, "The Black Sea in the Political Strategies of Sigismund of Luxemburg", in: Ch. Gastgeber *et al.* (ed.), *Church Union and Crusading in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 279–290; idem, "Gênes, Venise et la croisade de Varna", *Balcania Posnaniensia* 8, 1997, p. 27–37; idem, *Marea Neagră. Puteri maritime – puteri terestre (sec. XIII-XVIII)*, Bucharest, 2006; V. Ciocîltan, "Competiția pentru controlul Dunării inferioare (1412-1420) II.", *Revista de istorie* 11, 1982, p. 1191–1203.

²⁵ See the above bibliography in fn. 3 and K. Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus, Kaiser Friedrich III. und das Reich*, 2nd edition, Munich, 1989; on Varna, see esp. C. Imber, *The Crusade of Varna, 1443–1445*, Aldershot, Burlington, 2006.

been considered the real turning point in the Ottoman conquest: Süleyman the Magnificent overextended himself before the small fortress of Güns/Kőszeg, an imperial army defeated Ottoman troops south of Vienna, while the exits to the Lower Austrian alpine valleys were covered by heavy cavalry and considerable artillery. The sultan avoided a larger field battle and refrained from a second siege of Vienna.²⁶ But this was only because the burden of the defence was shouldered not only by the East-Central European crowns, but also by the Empire's much larger demographic, economic and technological forces, whenever it actually chose to muster them.

This now leads us to a debate that runs parallel to that concerning Italian domestic policy and the interplay between the Ottoman question and the political structures of European macro-regions. Like Italy, the Holy Roman Empire had a symbolic head who was expected to coordinate policy but was not granted *de facto* political leadership – the emperor was to the Empire what the pope was to Italy. The emperor also remained an important figure in Italy in the fifteenth century: key events include the Milanese investiture, the Roman coronation of Frederick the III and his marriage to Eleonore of Portugal, a relation of Alfons V's. It should also be recalled that Hungary pursued its own Italian policy in order to secure its East-Central European position, also via an Aragonese marriage, between Beatrix of Aragon and Matthias Corvinus in 1476.

Just as Italy had its fractured leagues, the Empire had its diets: the Ottoman threat accelerated the rhythm of these congresses, which often resembled European conferences, since they included representatives from Italian states and Burgundy, but also Northern European kingdoms such as Denmark, not to mention the East-Central European states like Hungary or the Teutonic Order in Prussia. Indeed, the diets discussed not only the Ottoman threat, but the many, often entangled, conflicts throughout the empire and on its western (Burgundian) and eastern (Prussian) peripheries.

Hitherto, Ottoman studies and Southeastern European history have largely neglected the diets, probably because they ostensibly produced few immediately tangible results – the 'Turkish diets' of Regensburg, Frankfurt and Wiener Neustadt (1454/1455) were already a great disappointment to contemporaries. Later diets too (1469, 1471) only seemed to drag on, and Emperor Frederick III never became a driving force of the war with the Turks. The emperor principally pursued dynastic goals, competing with the Hunyadi for the Hungarian crown, which went a long way to forcing them to expend many of their energies in the west instead of on the southern frontier; in his inner, i.e. his hereditary lands, Frederick III faced Hungarian-backed opposition and even lost Vienna to Matthias

²⁶ Pál F., *The Unbearable Weight of Empire. The Ottomans in Central Europe – A Failed Attempt at Universal Monarchy (1390–1566)*, Budapest, 2015, p. 81; H. Delfiner, "Nikolaus Jurischitz 1490–1543, Soldier Diplomat", *East European Quarterly* 28/1, 1994, p. 1–47; Ch. Turetschek, *Die Türkenpolitik Ferdinands I. von 1529 bis 1532*, Vienna, 1968; G. Gerhartl, *Die Niederlage der Türken am Steinfeld 1532*, Vienna, 1974.

Corvinus between 1485 and 1490. The death of the Hungarian king, who was without a legitimate son and had failed to obtain foreign recognition of his bastard, triggered the collapse of Corvinus' impressive East-Central European power structure and opened the door for the Jagellions, who also proved unable to bring stability to the region's resistance to the Ottomans after 1490 however.²⁷

But what the diets did achieve only became clear towards the end of the fifteenth century: resistance to the Ottomans and imperial reform, so often debated in dogged negotiations, had become interlaced core issues of imperial policy.²⁸ The imperial reform of 1495 would have been impossible without forty years of rising awareness and the development of political consensus in the empire's complex constitutional structure – and the hard-won compromise laid the foundations for the Empire to become the power bloc that finally clipped the wings of the Ottoman conquest in 1529 and 1532, despite the religious tensions of the early Reformation. Much more so than the Italic Leagues, which were unable to repel the French King Charles VIII's Italian campaign of 1494 and had been extremely fragile even prior to that, the ostensibly cumbersome mechanisms of the Holy Roman Empire had created a defence system able to raise large armies via fixed taxes and ensure forefield resistance on the emerging military frontier.

Finances, frontier fortifications, forefield policies in the Balkans – none of this was new, since the Hungarian crown had long attempted such measures, but had always been hampered by limited resources. The cost of building and manning fortresses had overstretched the Hungarian budget. Hungarian armies were inferior to the Ottomans not technologically, but mostly in number. With the resources of the Holy Roman Empire and the East-Central European crowns of Bohemia and (royal) Hungary dynastically tied to the Habsburgs, sufficient critical mass was

²⁷ For a recent reassessment of Frederick's policy s. C. Märkl, "Habsburger und Osmanen bis zum Ende der Zeit Maximilians I. († 1519)", in: B. Schneidmüller (ed.), *König Rudolf I. und der Aufstieg des Hauses Habsburg im Mittelalter*, Darmstadt, 2019, p. 439–458.

²⁸ H. Weigel / H. Grüneisen, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Friedrich III. Fünfte Abteilung. Erste Hälfte 1453–1454*, Göttingen, 1969; J. Helmraath with G. Annas, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Friedrich III. Fünfte Abteilung, zweiter Teil. Reichsversammlung zu Frankfurt 1454*, Munich, 2013; G. Annas, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Friedrich III. Fünfte Abteilung, dritter Teil. Reichsversammlung zu Wiener Neustadt 1455*, Munich, 2013; H. Wolff / G. Annas, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Friedrich III. Abteilung 8 (1468–1471), Hälfte 2 (1471)*, Göttingen, 1999–2001; G. Annas, *Hoftag – Gemeiner Tag – Reichstag. Studien zur strukturellen Entwicklung deutscher Reichsversammlungen des späten Mittelalters (1349–1471)*, 2 vols., Cologne, 2004; J. Helmraath, "Pius II. und die Türken", in: idem, *Wege des Humanismus. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Tübingen, 2013, p. 279–342; M. Bacsoka / A.-M. Blank / Th. Woelki (eds.), *Europa, das Reich und die Osmanen. Die Türkenreichstage von 1454/55 nach dem Fall Konstantinopels*, Frankfurt/Main 2014; S. Wefers, *Das Primat der Außenpolitik. Das politische System des Reichs im 15. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 2013; J. Dücker, "Von Konfrontation und Kooperation. Matthias Corvinus und die Reichstage der Jahre 1479 bis 1481", in: Ch. Gastgeber et al. (eds.), *Matthias Corvinus und seine Zeit*, Vienna, 2011, 23–32; J. Reissermayer, *Der grosse Christentag zu Regensburg 1471. 2. Teil. Programm zum Jahresberichte über das K. neue Gymnasium zu Regensburg für das Studienjahr 1887/88*, Regensburg, 1888.

achieved.²⁹ Whereas Corvinus himself pursued an imperial policy, had designs on the German crown, was represented at the diets and also vehemently complained whenever his emissaries were not heard, none of his efforts yielded a political breakthrough in the Empire, and his attempts to court the Habsburg's (intermittent) opponents in the west, Burgundy and the Swiss Confederacy were just as unsuccessful. His (East-) Central European empire was built on shaky grounds.

This admittedly cursory comparison of Hunyadi and Habsburg (East-) Central European policy shows the reason why Ottoman expansion was ultimately repelled: the Empire and its tools of power and finance, which the Habsburgs had built up over four decades of painstaking negotiations and, in 1495, political concessions which Emperor Frederick III had not been prepared to make up to his death in 1493.

3) The third concentrated political space is the *Pontic* region comprising the conflicts on the western shore of the Black Sea and their occasional extension to Anatolia via various alliances. Essentially, this area involved the Hungarian–Polish rivalry touched on above, which centred on hegemony over the West Pontic ports of Chilia and Akkerman between the Danube and the Dniester estuaries. In the first third of the fifteenth century, the situation was further complicated by the two youngest Orthodox principalities in the Southeastern European region, Walachia and Moldavia, which had emerged on the territory abandoned by the Golden Horde on its retreat from the Lower Danube and the Eastern Carpathians around the mid-fourteenth century. Walachia and Moldavia were both formed by secession from the Hungarian crown, which did not mean a complete break however, since the Walachian princes held fiefdoms on Hungarian soil in Transylvania (Omlás/Amlaş and Fogaras/Făgăraş). The Serbian despots of the fifteenth century also held fiefdoms on Hungarian territory, and like them the Walachian and Moldavian princes had one foot in the Hungarian political world and another on the unstable ground of their own principalities, where the Ottomans had installed pretenders since the late fourteenth century. Walachia and Moldavia had a vassal-like relationship with Hungary, and Moldavia had the same obligations to Poland too. Often mentioned in the same breath, the two principalities were by no means a single unit, nor even allies: on the contrary, in an exposed region of world politics, they not only had to assert themselves against the Ottomans, the Hungarians and the Poles, but on the regional level often did battle with each other – including at decisive moments. For instance, in 1462, Stephen the Great of Moldavia turned against the Walachian prince Vlad the Impaler when the latter was fighting for his survival against the sultan. Stephen was acting on behalf of Polish interests; the

²⁹ Fodor, *Unbearable weight*, p. 51–52, 77; Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis*, p. 445–462 (Why did Hungary loose?); G. Ágoston, “Firearms and Military Adaptation: The Ottomans and the European Military Revolution 1450–1800”, *Journal of World History* 25/1, 2014, p. 85–124; G. Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the sixteenth century*, Budapest, 2009, p. 23–27.

aim was to conquer the Hungarian-controlled harbour of Chilia. The two principalities thus showed solidarity with none of their neighbours.³⁰

Hence due to its location alone, Walachia was tied much more closely to the Balkans and the Pontic region, where it pursued its own policies from the early fifteenth century onwards. As early as around 1400, the principality had to contend much more than its Moldavian neighbour with competing pro- and anti-Ottoman factions among the boyars, Walachian troops joining the large Ottoman assaults on Moldavia (for instance under Basarab the Elder in 1476 or Vlad the Monk with a reported 20,000 men in 1484, while Radu the Handsome was defeated while fighting for the Ottomans against his Romanian adversaries in early 1475).³¹

The Hungarian – Polish competition had fewer repercussions for Hungary itself than its conflict with Venice or the Habsburgs – but there was barely any sustained collaboration between the two Catholic kingdoms; we have already seen the Polish assessment of the Jagiellonian crusade of 1443/44. Both Hungary and Poland had tangible economic interests on the Black Sea. They sought to control the trade routes connecting the Danube and Dniester estuaries with their trade cities in their own empires – in Transylvania and further west in the case of Hungary, and Lemberg and Cracow in the case of Poland – trade heavily influenced by the Genoese on the sea and, especially in the Polish economic system, the Armenians on the land.

On the regional level, Walachia and Moldavia, in close intertwinement with the two kingdoms, vied for access to these ports – on which the Ottoman Empire had also set its sights, particularly in the last years of Mehmed I's reign and then under Murad II. Both sultans made several attempts to gain a foothold on the West Pontic coast. These assaults did not abate until Bayezid took Chilia and Akkerman in 1484.³² For Hungary, access to the Black Sea proved to be not only of economic,

³⁰ Șt.S. Gorovei / M.M. Szekely, *Princeps omni laude maior. O istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare*, Sf. Mănăstire Putna 2004, p. 42–43; Șt. Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș Dracula*, Bucharest, 2015, p. 108; on the two principalities, see Șt.S. Gorovei, *Întemeierea Moldovei. Probleme controversate*, expanded edition, Iași, 2014; M. Coman, *Putere și teritoriu. Țara Românească medievală (secolele XIV–XVI)*, Iași, 2013.

³¹ See the recently published volume: L. Pilat / O. Cristea, *From Pax Mongolica to Pax Ottomanica*, Leiden, 2020; Pilat / Cristea, *Ottoman threat*; Pippidi, “Taking possession”; on Pontic policy, see the bibliography in fn. 24 and esp. Gemil, *România și Otomanii*; Gorovei / Szekely, *Princeps omni laude maior*, p. 116, 152, 216; on the Walachian boyars, see M. Cazacu, “Marche frontalière ou Etat dans l’Etat ? L’Olténie aux XIV^e-XV^e siècles”, in: idem, *Des Balkans à la Russie médiévale et moderne. Hommes, images réalités*, Brăila, 2018, p. 383–423; Cristea, “The Friend of my Friend”; L. Câmpeanu, « Basarab Laiotă, domn al Țării Românești. Preliminarii la o monografie », *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 32, 2014, p. 145–172.

³² P.P. Panaitescu, “La route commerciale de Pologne à la Mer Noire au moyen âge”, *Revista istorică română* 3, 1933, p. 172–193; E.A. Zachariadou, “Ottoman Diplomacy and the Danube Frontier (1420–1424)”, in: eadem, *Studies in Pre-Ottoman Turkey and the Ottomans*, Aldershot, 2007, part XIV; M. Cazacu, “Les Ottomans sur le Bas-Danube au XV^e siècle”, *Südost-Forschungen* 41, 1982, p. 27–34; N. Beldiceanu, “La campagne ottomane de 1484. Ses préparatifs militaires et sa chronologie”, *Revue des études roumaines* 5–6, 1957/58, p. 67–77; idem, “La conquête des cités

but also geopolitical importance, since they could thus trump two opponents – Venice, with whom King Sigismund waged an extensive trade war with the aim to establish a comprehensive embargo on the Adriatic and the Black Sea, and the Ottomans, repeatedly cultivating ties with the sultan’s Anatolian rivals. In 1419, for instance, the Hungarian emissary Gereczi succeeded in persuading Kara Yülük, the ruler of the Turkoman tribal alliance of the White Sheep, and Timur’s son, Shah Rukh, to attack Sultan Mehmed I in order to relieve the Danube border. John Hunyadi also took root on the Black Sea, in the important fortress of Chilia, whence the Hungarians were driven out in 1462 by a Moldavia aligned with Poland, as outlined above.³³ With the exception of this manoeuvre, Poland had little influence on the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans however, and it was Stephen the Great who dashed one of Poland’s most important campaigns against the Ottomans at Codrii Cosminului in 1497, since it represented a threat to his rule.³⁴

In comparison with the Italian and (East-) Central European political nexus, the West Pontic complex is less significant for the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans however; Pontic ports were too far from Poland and Hungary’s real centres of power, and after 1450 campaigns in the southern and eastern Carpathian foothills were too dangerous for an undertaking. Indeed, the Ottoman influence in Walachia was already too strong in the first half of the fifteenth century. However, this did not diminish the strategic importance of Walachia; like the Kingdom of Bosnia and the Serbian Despotate, in the first half of the fifteenth century it was part of an extensive Ottoman–Hungarian buffer zone, and, incidentally, the only such territory to retain its sovereignty, avoiding becoming an Ottoman province even at the height of sultanic power.

If these three political spaces are viewed in comparison, it becomes clear that Hungary was of key importance. Not only was the Crown of St. Stephen the Ottoman’s main, immediate opponent in the Balkans, but in pursuing interests in

marchandes de Kilia et de Cetatea Albă par Bayezid II”, *Südost-Forschungen* 23, 1964, p. 36–90; O. Cristea, *Acest domn de la miazănoapte*, Bucharest, 2004.

³³ W. von Stromer, “Diplomatische Kontakte des Herrschers vom Weißen Hammel, Uthman, genannt Qara Yuluq, mit dem Deutschen König Sigismund im September 1430–März 1431 zu gemeinsamem Vorgehen mit dem Timuriden Schah-Ruch gegen die Türken”, *Südost-Forschungen*, 20, 1961, p. 267–272; L. Tardy, “Ungarns antiosmanische Bündnisse mit Staaten des Nahen Ostens und deren Vorgeschichte”, *Anatolica* 4, 1971/1972, p. 139–156; L. Tardy, *Beyond the Ottoman Empire: 14th–16th century. Hungarian diplomacy in the East*, Szeged, 1978; G. Ágoston, “Karamania, the Anti-Ottoman Christian diplomacy and the non-existing Hungarian-Karamanid diplomatic relations of 1428”, *Acta orientalia Academiae scientiarum hungaricae* 48/3, 1995, p. 267–274; F. Pall, *România și Cruciada târzie*, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, especially p. 186–248 (“Stăpânirea lui Iancu de Hunedoara asupra Chilie și problema ajutorării Bizanțului”; “Relazioni di Giovanni di Hunedoara con Bisanzio negli anni 1452–1453”; “Byzance à la veille de sa chute et Janco de Hunedoara (Hunyadi)”; M. Cazacu, “La Valachie et la bataille de Kosovo (1448)”, *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 9/1, 1971, p. 131–152; M. Cazacu / P.Ș. Năsturel, “Une démonstration navale des Ottomans devant Constantinople et la bataille de Chilia (1448)”, in: Dumitran / Mády / Simon, *Extincta est lucerna orbis*, p. 323–331.

³⁴ Gorovei / Szekely, *Princeps omni laude maior*, p. 319–340.

the Adriatic, East-Central Europe and in the Black Sea region, it also had to assert itself against strong and tenacious rivals. It is also clear that Hungary, instead of consolidating its efforts in warding off the Ottomans, was distracted by other political spheres, partly Bohemia and the Austrian lands of Frederick III. At times this was a conscious decision by the Hungarian rulers; at others, it was due to external pressure, albeit to a lesser extent. But it is also clear that the actions of all the other powers affected by the Ottoman expansion can only be understood if we examine their immediate political environment. This especially holds for Venice, which was not only a maritime power; during the fifteenth century, it established itself as a northern Italian territorial state and as part of the Italian Pentarchy. A combination of factors – manifold involvement in political spheres, the rising dominance of the Ottomans, the clear failure of anti-Ottoman alliances, be they crusading or purely profane, the resulting need to go it alone, and hence the experience of inevitable defeat – explains why the rival Catholic flanks of Venice and Hungary were increasingly disinclined to fight and preferred to seek ceasefires and treaties with the Ottomans.

As far as Anatolia is concerned, it is important to our discussion in connection with events in the Balkans. The Balkan Orthodox princes and states like Venice and Hungary principally looked to non-Ottoman Anatolian princes as enemies of the Ottomans, as outlined above. Anatolia's entanglement with the Ottoman-conquered Balkans is not restricted to anti-Ottoman alliances however. A more important aspect, since it was more successful and long-term in its impact, was the Ottoman demographic policy of targeted settlement of both nomadic and non-nomadic Anatolian Turks in the Balkans, especially eastern Bulgaria, the southern Macedonian region and Thessaly. The South-Eastern Balkans bore a strong Turkish-Islamic influence due to both organised and spontaneous immigration. This is not to say that there had not been a local Turkish population prior to that, but Turkish-speaking migrants had come predominantly from the Pontic region and been Christianised, as evidenced e.g. in the villages in the Struma region, whose fifteenth-century inhabitants had Turkish names but worshipped in Christian churches – and had no connection to the Muslim Turks from Anatolia in a society structured along confessional lines. The extensive migration from Anatolia reinforced the pre-existing entanglement of the Balkans and Asia Minor – but now the main connection was no longer Byzantine Greeks, but Muslim Turks and Yürüks. Despite the influence the Balkan elites gained within the power structures of the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth century, confirming the impression of a *Byzance après Byzance*, one should not overlook the ethnic Turkification of the Aegean arc and the southwestern Black Sea region with their orientation towards Constantinople.³⁵

³⁵ N. Manolova-Nikolova – P. Jéléva, “Les localités au courant de Gorna Strouma pendant les 15-17ème siècles (Histoire brève)”, *Bulgarian Historical Review* 38/1–2, 2010, p. 16–42; Kiel, “Incorporation”, 146–151; A. Kaljonski, *Jurucite*, Sofia, 2007; Werner, *Die Geburt einer Großmacht*,

So far, we have considered two types of spaces, namely spaces of political entanglement and the two flanks of the empires centred on Constantinople/Istanbul, i.e. the Balkans and Anatolia. Our purpose was to illustrate the sheer extent of this entanglement. Let us now consider a further type of space that has received much attention in recent years, although the concept itself is nothing new: the frontier space (uç) as a constantly expanding organism of Ottoman actions at the expense of their opponents.³⁶ The development of a system of marches goes back to the early days of the Ottoman conquest, when in order to take Thrace, Süleyman emulated the Mongolian tradition of establishing three flanks to drive further advances. Another Mongolian tradition he embraced was taking over, as supreme commander, the middle flank following the course of the Marica, while the right flank advanced into the Tundža region and the left along the Via Egnatia. After taking Edirne (1369), Sultan Murad I appointed Lala Şahin as Beylerbey of Rumelia. In the 1360s, other warrior leaders who had arrived in the Balkans from Anatolia operated with and alongside the Ottomans, figures such as Hacı İlybeyi, Ece bey oder Evrenos. Evrenos belonged to the first generation of frontier commanders to settle in Thrace (Ipsala and Komotini); this period saw the emergence of the dynasty of the conqueror of Skopje, Paşa Yiğit, whose descendent Turahan founded his own dynasty in Thessaly, whence he attacked the Morea and southern Albania, while another son, Ishak, marched from Skopje on Albania, Bosnia and Serbia. The eastern Balkans saw the rise of the Mihaloğlu, with their centre in Pleven in Bulgaria – their radius comprised the lower and mid Danube region, i.e.

189–198 ; N. Antov, *The Ottoman “Wild West”. The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Cambridge, 2017; M. Kiel, “Anatolia Transplanted? Patterns of demographic, Religious and Ethnic Changes in the District of Tozluk (N.E. Bulgaria) 1479–1873”, in: idem, *Turco-Bulgaria. Studies on the history, settlement and historical demography of Ottoman Bulgaria*, Istanbul, 2013, p. 13–42; idem, “The Dobrudja, a bridge and meeting point between the Balkans, Anatolia and the Ukraine. The Ottoman-Turkish Sources for the History and the Historical Demography and Settlement History of the Dobrudja and how they can be used”, in: Kiel, *Turco-Bulgaria*, p. 167–186; K. Tomovski *et al.* (eds.), *Etnozogeneza na jurucite i nivnoto naseluvanje na Balkanot. Materijali od Trkaleznata masa, održana vo Skopje 17 i 18 noemvri 1983 godina*. Skopje, 1986, therein: V. Dimitriadis, “The Yürüks in Central and Western Macedonia”, p. 9–15; E. Grozdanova, “Novi svedenija za jurucite v Bălgarskite i njakoi ot sāsednite im zemi prez XV–XVII v.”, p. 17–27; A. Stojanovski, “Nekolku prašanja za Jurucite vo Kjustendilskiot sandžak”, p. 29–37; M. Petkova, “The Process of Sedentarization of Semi-nomadic Groups of the Yörüks in Parts of 16th Century Ottoman Rumeli: Migration Control or Tax Control?”, *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies* 2/3, 2019, 25–43; for a comprehensive discussion of the Turkish dimension, see the recent study by P. Fodor, “The Formation of Ottoman Turkish Identity (Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)”, in: P. Fodor / P. Ács (eds.), *Identity and Culture in Ottoman Hungary*, Berlin, 2017, p. 19–54.

³⁶ Cf. İnalçık, “Methods”; Evgeni Radoushev, “Ottoman Border Periphery (Serhad) in the Nikopol Vilayet, First Half of the 16th Century”, *Études balkaniques* 3–4, 1995, p. 140–160; A. Kayapınar, *Le sancağ ottoman de Vidin du XVe à la fin du XVIe siècle*, Istanbul, 2011; N. Antov, “The Ottoman State and Semi-Nomadic Groups along the Ottoman Danubian Serhad (Frontier Zone) in the Late 15th and the First Half of the 16th Centuries: Challenges and Politics”, *Hungarian Studies* 27/2, 2013, p. 219–235.

the frontier with Hungary and Walachia. Ottoman court historiography strongly played down the significance of the frontier commanders; it is only in recent years that research has examined the construction programmes under these actors and demonstrated that during the reign of Murad II, they built up genuine regional principalities from which they embarked on independent conquests. But they also cultivated foreign relations with Dubrovnik or Venice and the many Christian petty lords close to their respective marches, from Morea to Bosnia and as far as Walachia. Many cities in the Ottoman Balkans were either founded or architecturally transformed by frontier commander dynasties: Larisa, Trikala, Skopje and Ochrid were heavily influenced by the Turahans, Jannitsa, Serres and Komotini by the Evrenos, and, later, Nikopolis, Plevna and Silistra by the Malkoçoğlus. Their building programmes comprised the classical combination of mosques, Islamic schools, baths, soup kitchens and bridges. Not all frontier commanders established dynasties, but nevertheless left their mark, for instance Mehmed bey Minnetoğlu, whose forefathers had been deported from Anatolia to the Plovdiv regions in the Balkans and whose campaigns as leader of the *akıncı* included attacks on Serbia and Hungary in 1458. In 1459, he became the first sancakbey of the newly conquered Serbian Despotate and in 1463 governor of the Ottoman part of Bosnia, another recent conquest. He influenced the architecture of Sarajevo, Smederevo and Niš.³⁷ While comparative research on these regional princes is still in its infancy, it is clear that they represented the driving force behind the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. Their conquests pushed back the frontiers: Thrace, the first *uç* region of the 1360s, had become one of the core Ottoman territories by the 1390s, with Edirne the empire's centre. Southern Macedonia too was soon one of

³⁷ M. Kiel, "Das türkische Thessalien. Etabliertes Geschichtsbild versus osmanische Quellen", in: R. Lauer / P. Schreiner (eds.), *Die Kultur Griechenlands in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, Göttingen 1996, p. 109–196; idem, *Un héritage non désiré. Le patrimoine architectural islamique ottoman dans L'Europe du Sud-Est, p. 1370–1912* (Études balkaniques – Cahiers Pierre Belon 12), Paris, 2005, p. 17–82; M. Kiprovska, "The Mihaloğlu Family. Gazi, Warriors and Patrons of Dervish Hospices", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 32, 2008, p. 193–222; eadem, "Shaping the Ottoman Borderland. The Architectural Patronage of Frontier Lords from the Mihaloğlu Family", in: M. Barāmova / G. Boykov / I. Pärvev (eds.), *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, Wiesbaden, 2015, p. 185–220; G. Boykov, "Reshaping Urban Space in the Ottoman Balkans. A Study on the Architectural Development of Edirne, Plovdiv, and Skopje (14th–15th Centuries)", in: M. Hartmuth (ed.), *Centres and Peripheries in Ottoman Architecture. Rediscovering a Balkan Heritage*, Sarajevo, 2011, p. 32–45; idem, "The Borders of the Cities. Revisiting Early Ottoman Urban Morphology in Southeastern Europe", in: Barāmova / Boykov / Pärvev, *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, p. 243–255; Lowry, *The Shaping of the Ottoman Balkans 1350–1500*; Lowry / Erünsal, *Notes & Documents on the Evrenos Dynasty*; I. Mélikoff, Lemma "Ewrenos", *Encyclopedia of Islam online* Ausgabe; F. Babinger, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Geschlechtes der Malkoc-oghlu's", in: idem, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen zur Geschichte Südosteuropas und der Levante*, vol. 1 Munich, 1962, p. 355–377; M. Kiprovska, *The military organization of the akıncıs in Ottoman Rumelia*, Master's dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2004, available at <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/bitstream/handle/11693/17136/0008017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; G. Boykov, "In search of vanished Ottoman monuments in the Balkans: Minnetoğlu Mehmed Beg's complex in Konuş Hisarı", in: M. Hartmuth / A. Dilsiz (eds.), *Monuments, Patrons, Contexts: Papers on Ottoman Europe presented to Machiel Kiel*, Leiden, 2010, p. 47–67.

the zones of concentrated Ottoman hegemony oriented around the capital. With the conquest of Morea, Thessaly lost its frontier status; the uç region of Skopje shifted towards the centre when Bosnia, Serbia and Skanderbeg's territory were taken between 1459 and 1467, and when the Venetians were forced to withdraw from Shkodra in 1479, the last significant gap in the South Adriatic frontier was plugged. After the conquest of the Balkans south of the Danube and the Save, the frontier regions remained the Danube line (until the Hungarian advance of 1526) and the long frontier zone with the Venetian Adriatic areas, which due to Venice's weakness on land did not require much bolstering until the mid-seventeenth century however. The system of frontier commanders came to an end under Mehmed II – firstly because the sultan would not compete for admiration with great regional figures, and secondly because most of the centres of important border marches (Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly) were now located in the inner reaches of the Empire. This did not apply as strongly to the Danube line, where Vlad the Impaler wrought severe destruction on Ottoman territory in 1462. But with the conquest of the Moldavian Black Sea ports, a new, sustained frontier zone emerged on the edge of the steppe which with collaboration from the Crimean Tatars pushed the Christian states (Hungary, Poland and the two principalities of Moldavia and Walachia back into the interior.³⁸

While the frontier thus constantly advanced, one might ask whether all of the former peripheries became internal spaces. The frontier commanders contributed in no small measure to societal change; they usually transformed their enlarged property into religious foundations that attracted and protected peasants and especially nomadic or semi-settled settlers not registered for tax (haymane). But it was not just in the cities that the commanders drove societal change, but also on their estates, along with the remaining local lords, whose timar benefices were much less secure than the property of the new regional dynasties protected in the religious foundations.³⁹ But not all of the apparently de-peripherised regions came under imperial control; there remained zones which the central administration was able to bring under its command only gradually, if at all. It is no coincidence that these were classical outposts such the highland regions of the western Balkans (Montenegro, northern Albania) or the periphery of the Eurasian step, in Dobruja. Here, internal colonisation by the Ottomans was a much more drawn-out process or, in the western Balkans, never reached the levels witnessed in the eastern part of the peninsula.⁴⁰

³⁸ M. Kiel, "Krieg und Frieden an der Unteren Donau. Siedlungsgeschichtliche und demographische Bemerkungen über die Kaza Zıştova – Svištov 1460–1878 anhand osmanischer administrativer Quellen", in: R. Lauer / H.-G. Majer (eds.), *Osmanen und Islam in Südosteuropa*, Göttingen, 2014, p. 285–301.

³⁹ Kiprovská, "Shaping the Ottoman Borderland", p. 208–209.

⁴⁰ B. Đurđev, *Turska vlast u Crnoj Gori u XVI i XVII veku*, Sarajevo, 1953.

It is only recently that thorough research has been conducted on the interplay between colonising anti-nomic dervishes who did not strictly observe *şeriat* and *Yürüks* in northeastern Bulgaria, who proved equally difficult to integrate. In an initial phase from the late fourteenth century onwards, dervishes and *Yürüks* conquered this sparsely populated area; in the early sixteenth century, the Empire deported *Kızılbaş* from eastern Anatolia, who further strengthened the non-conformist religious character of the region. Imperial rule was established only gradually, being consolidated in the few towns in a region that was ethnically Turkish yet religiously and socially headstrong.

While an Ottoman administration covered large swathes of the Balkans in the second half of the fifteenth century, closer inspection reveals various regional and local forms of rule that existed alongside one another, albeit in a process of dissolution: the important regional principalities of the frontier commanders; the few remaining long-established regional dynasties, some of whom had aligned themselves with the Ottomans; remote mountainous zones (for instance the Vlachs of the western Balkans, even if they were subject to the *timar* system) and on the edge of the steppe; and then the more centralised regions, i.e. those administered as sultanic domains and *timar* zones. In the case of the latter, a key difference was whether the *timariots* came from abroad (to Albania from Anatolia; to Bosnia from Anatolia, the southern Balkans or Hungary, i.e. as Islamised Magyars) or were defeated local rulers. Another important factor was the extent to which the system of rotating beneficiaries was actually implemented, that is, whether there was a genuine break with the local power structures; in some cases, the *Sipahi* were transferred to other regions, while in others they could continue to run their old fiefdoms. A further point to note is that this was anything but a static system. Rather, there was a development towards stronger centralisation that was accompanied by a break with pre-Ottoman power relations.⁴¹

⁴¹ K. Moustakas, “Early Evidence on the Introduction of *Timar* in the Balkans and its Use as a Means of Incorporation. The *pronoia* of Laskaris”, *Südost-Forschungen* 68, 2009, p. 63–95; I. Beldiceanu-Steinherr – Raúl Estangüi Gómez, “Autour du document de 1386 en faveur de Radoslav Sablja (Şabya/Sampias): du beylicat au sultanat, étape méconnue de l’État ottoman”, *Turcica* 45, 2014, p. 159–186; H. Inalcik, “Timariotes chrétiens en Albanie au 15e siècle”, *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 4, 1952, p. 118–138; F. Duka, “Muzakajt – një lidhëz e fuqishme midis kohëve paraosmane dhe osmane”, in: idem, *Shekujt osmane në hapësirën shqiptare*, Tirana, 2009, p. 27–40; N. Beldiceanu, “Timariotes chrétiens en Thessalie (1454/55)”, *Südost-Forschungen* 44, 1985, p. 45–81; N. Filipović, “Vlasi i upostava timarskog sistema u Hercegovini I”, *Godišnjak Akademije nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine 12/Centar za balkanološka istraživanja* 10, 1974, p. 127–221; S. Rudić, “Bosnian Nobility after the fall of the Kingdom of Bosnia in 1463”, in Rudić / Aslantaş, *Establishment*, 103–127; M. Premović, “Settlements and Population of the Present-Day Montenegrin Polimlje in the Second Half of 15th Century”, *Belleten* 83, 2019, p. 555–584; G. Boykov, “Karlzâde ‘Ali Bey: An Ottoman Dignitary’s Pious Endowment and the Emergence of the Town of Karlova in Central Bulgaria”, in: C. Kafadar / G.A. Tekin (eds.), *Defterology. Festschrift in honor of Heath Lowry*, Harvard, 2013, p. 247–267.

The Ottoman frontier region must be seen as complementary to its Christian counterpart: both Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Venice tried to halt Ottoman expansion with their own extensive defence of the frontier. Hungary relied on both vassal states from Bosnia to Walachia and the establishment of frontier banats from Slavonia to Temes. Of central importance was the voivodship of Transylvania, which under John Hunyadi not only repelled Ottoman invasions but also embarked on its own offensive forays into the Ottoman Balkans. Other players of great importance to domestic politics were the banats of Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Macsó/Maçva. After the Hungarian retreat from Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia were merged in 1476 and new banats were created in Jajce, Srebrenik and Šabac. As on the Ottoman side of the frontier, the Hungarian areas also saw the development of an aristocratic elite whose importance and power derived from the war: besides Hunyadi, around the mid-fifteenth century these dynasties included the Újlakis (for instance Miklós, Voivode of Transylvania and King of Bosnia), the Tallócis or the Rozgonyis⁴². The protagonists on both sides were well acquainted and had a similar style of combat, and both sides had a culture of the epic – for instance Hunyadi as Sibirjanin Janko in the Serbian heroic epic or the glorification of the Mihaloğlu by the poet Suzi from Prizren.⁴³ A regional elite defined by fighting on the frontier also emerged in the particularly exposed Venetian Albania, especially in the Shkodra region, where Venice recruited local pronoiars and patricians along with entire village communities and tribes. Marinus Barletius produced a literary monument to this society in his *De scodrensi obsidione*.⁴⁴

This outline is intended to demonstrate that however important the studies on the Ottoman serhad as a fluid frontier region may be, they must be complementary to analysis of the equally fluid – i.e. receding – frontier regions of Hungary and Venice; the military frontier with the Ottomans existed long before the Habsburgs. The backbone of the Hungarian defence of its frontier was formed by a combination of mobile frontier troops led by regional aristocrats, supported by a (double) line of frontier redoubts and castles with a forefield of vassal lords. And as in the early modern period, the militarised societies on both sides of the frontier had much in common in terms of their organisation, style of combat, habitus, concepts of honour and their self-image in epic poetry.⁴⁵

⁴² Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis*, p. 11–13.

⁴³ Kiprovska, “Shaping”, p. 196–197, A. Sirri Levend, *Gazavât-nâmeler ve Mihaloğlu Ali Bey'in Gazavât-nâmesi*, Ankara, 2000, reprint of 1956; cf. the discussion by A. Tietze: “overall, it cannot be rated very highly as a work of poetry, even if there is no shortage of formally elegant verses carried by the zest of folk poetry. Nor will the narrative embellished with fairytale elements offer much that is new to the pragmatic historian”; *Oriens* 10/2, 1957, p. 306).

⁴⁴ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, p. 476–502; 521–528; St. Zahammer, *De obsidione scodrensi / Über die Belagerung von Skutari*, Vienna, 2017.

⁴⁵ M. Köhbach, “Gellérthegy-Gerz Ilyas Tepesi. Ein Berg und sein Heiliger”, *Südost-Forschungen* 37, 1978, p. 130–144 on the excellent example of Gerz Ilyas, who was immortalised as Gjergj Elezi in the Albanian epic. For a reinterpretation of the Hungarian frontier system which was far less systematic than

Finally, let us consider another space: the diaspora. With the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, there emerged for the first time in the region's history what one might call a political diaspora, that is, a political Balkan beyond the Balkans themselves in the form of political refugees who sought to influence their old homeland and gain status in their new environment by pointing to their noble origins and suffering in battle with the Turks.

The advancing frontier region also brought with it constantly shifting zones of devastation. It generally took around eighty years from the first Ottoman attack for a region to be completely conquered. During these eighty years, the affected areas were exposed to relentless plundering by the Ottoman frontier commanders, whose prime aim was abduction. Fear of capture, enslavement and pillaging drove thousands to flee their towns and villages for local sanctuaries: from Serbia over the Danube, where the Hungarian crown awarded Serbian noblemen fiefdoms; from Albania, Herzegovina and Bosnia to the Albanian and Dalmatian coast, where they seldom remained however due to limited resources, and the Venetian parts of Greece; Albanians settled in nearby Corfu, Moreots on the Ionian islands, while Byzantines went to Venetian Crete. Whenever possible, they returned to their homelands once the Ottoman troops had left, both the Herzegovinians who sought protection for their families and cattle in the Ragusan city of Ston, and the Albanian nobles who returned from Corfu. It was certainly not the case, then, that those seeking help immediately turned to Catholic Europe. Recent studies have shown just how close trade relations, but also cultural ties between Crete and late Byzantine Constantinople were. Cretans sought careers in Constantinople, as did men from Monemvasia. Conversely, Byzantium scholars well-disposed to Church union sought shelter in Venetian Crete, where they were protected from harassment by Orthodox zealots. From the Slavic regions of the eastern Balkans, on the other hand, there was gradual migration to the two young principalities of Walachia and Moldavia, which took in at least some of the old courtly and monastic Serbian and Bulgarian elite. In sum, those who fled remained, whenever possible, close to their homelands and those who could return did so.⁴⁶

usually assumed and which followed spatial patterns sometimes overlooked by research s. D. Salihović, *Definition, extent, and administration of the Hungarian frontier toward the Ottoman Empire in the reign of Matthias Corvinus, 1458–1490*, PhD dissertation, Cambridge, 2020.

⁴⁶ Th. Ganchou, “La fraterna societas des crétois Nikolaos et Géorgios Polos (Polo), entre Constantinople et Moncastro: affaires, dévotion et humanisme”, *Thesaurismata* 39/40, 2009/10, p. 111–228; idem, “Sujets grecs crétois de la Sérénissime à Constantinople à la veille de 1453 (Iôannès et Nikolaos Polos): une ascension sociale brutalement interrompue”, in: G. Ortalli / O.J. Schmitt / E. Orlando (eds.), *Il Commonwealth veneziano*, Venice, 2015, p. 339–390 ; C. Delacroix-Besnier, *Les Dominicains et la Chrétienté grecque aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, Rome, 1997; eadem, “Les Grecs unionistes réfugiés en Italie et leur influence culturelle”, in: M. Balard / A. Ducellier (eds.), *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes.*, Paris, 2002, p. 59–73; eadem, “Manuel Calécas et les frères Chrysobergè, grecs et prêcheurs”, in: *Les échanges culturels au Moyen Âge. XXXII^e congrès de la SHMES*, Paris, 2002, p. 151–16; Th. Ganchou, “Démétrios Kydonès, les frères Chrysobergès et la Crète (1397–1401): de nouveaux documents”, in: Ch. Maltezou / P. Schreiner (eds.), *Bisanzio, Venezia e il mondo franco-*

Thus, a space emerged in an arc around the Ottoman Balkans, stretching from Crete to Dubrovnik and Dalmatia and further on to Hungary and Walachia, that was sought out by those who did not wish to submit to or compromise with the Ottomans, but intended to continue fighting them (→ cf. the contribution of Aleksandar Krstić and Adrian Magina in this volume). Hungary and Venice incorporated anyone who was fit for action into their armies, but not only to do battle with the Ottomans. Thus, while Serbs fought in the Hungarian army against Ottoman Bosnians, they were also deployed against the Habsburgs; Orthodox Albanians and Greeks served as *stradioti* (light cavalry) in Venice's campaigns not only against the sultans, but also in the wars of the Italian Renaissance; Albanians and Greeks who fled to Lower Italy, often aristocrats, served in the armies of Spain. The soldiers thus followed the political logic of their new masters (just as the inhabitants of the Balkans who went over to the Ottomans had to march on Anatolia)⁴⁷. Venice, Spain and Hungary accepted highborn refugees into their aristocracy or patriciates; some nobles continued to be prominent figures in the fight against the Ottomans from their new homes: Vuk Grgurević or Dmitar Jakšić fought on the southern Hungarian frontier, and in 1481, a group of young political refugees from the Dukagjin, Kastrioti and Crnojević families set out from Italy to regain their dynasties after the death of Mehmed II. Others appointed themselves political and symbolic representatives of the Balkan diaspora at the European courts, for instance Konstantin Araniti in the Papal States.⁴⁸

Some of the political diaspora did indeed attempt to influence events – but they lacked a clearly recognisable figurehead; many of the most gifted Balkan princes had either been killed or had died of natural causes during the war (in the

greco, Venice, 2002, p. 435–494; G. Saint-Guillain, “La carrière d’un prélat unioniste au milieu du XV^e siècle et l’établissement du culte grec à Venise”, *Thesaurismata* 39/40, 2009/10, p. 91–110; L. Cotovanu, “L’émigration sud-danubienne vers la Valachie et la Moldavie et sa géographie (XV^e–XVII^e siècles): la potentialité heuristique d’un sujet peu connu”, *Cahiers balkaniques* 42, 2014, online edition; F. Solomon, *Politică și confesiune la început de ev mediu moldovenesc*, Iași, 2004; E. Völkl, *Das rumänische Fürstentum Moldau und die Ostslaven im 15. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden, 1973; K. Zach, *Orthodoxe Kirche und rumänisches Volksbewußtsein im 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden, 1977.

⁴⁷ That many Sipahi did not wish to leave the Balkans during the Ottoman campaigns in Anatolia, such as that fought against Uzun Hasan in 1473, provides considerable insight into the question of Ottomanisation; they were local lords who entered into Ottoman service in order to retain their property, not to follow the sultan eastwards. Just how dangerous the war in the east was is demonstrated by the death of Mihailo Angelović, brother of Grand Vizier Mahmud, in battle with Uzun Hasan; Sigismund alias Ishak Bey Kraloğlu (“King’s Son”), son of the Bosnian King Stefan Tomaš, also took part in the campaigns; Rudić, “Bosnian Nobility”, p. 109–110, 117; A. Krstić, “Prilog biografiji velikog vojvode Mihaila Anđelovića”, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 52, 2015, p. 359–379.

⁴⁸ Krstić, “Which realm will you opt for?”, p. 148–150; P. Petta, *Stradioti, soldati albanesi in Italia, sec. XV–XIX*, Lecce, 1996; idem, *Despota d’Epiro, Principi di Macedonia*, Lecce, 1999; F. Babinger, *Das Ende der Arianiten*, Munich, 1960; J. Harris, “Despots, Emperors, and Balkan Identity in Exile”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 44/3, 2013, p. 643–661; idem, *Greek Emigrés in the West, 1400–1520*, Camberley, 1995.

fifteenth century, e.g. Emperor Constantine XI, Skanderbeg, and the Walachian princes Mihai, Dan II and Vlad the Impaler who all fell on the battlefield– the Walachian losses on this level were higher, then, than those of the Serbs). The majority, however, had sided with the Ottomans. Many of the non-clerical refugees were minors and their mothers (for instance the Araniti and Kastioti), wives of fallen rulers (the Queen of Bosnia), or regional princes in their autumn years (Thomas Palaiologos); few were in a position to act.

It was a different situation with the clerics however, particularly the Byzantine Unionists: first the Cretan Dominicans, and later two outstanding Renaissance figures, the Greek cardinals Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev. It was not the princes, but these two men who headed the political diaspora: Isidor was not only a man of letters, but did not shy from danger either, neither in Moscow nor in his final months in Constantinople; he knew his head would be a prized trophy for Mehmed II, and in a daring escapade fled in disguise while the sultan was a presented with the severed head of a Greek monk as proof of the cardinal's death in battle.⁴⁹ Bessarion on the other hand relentlessly advocated crusades in Italy and the Holy Roman Empire; he was the great speechmaker of the Ottoman wars, whose rousing rhetoric long shaped the occidental image of battle with the Turks.⁵⁰ Along with the Greek cardinals, one should not forget those Dalmatian and Albanian scholars who confronted Catholic Europe with their experiences, urging their hosts to defend themselves: one of the most successful books of the European early modern period was the life of Skanderbeg by the Shkodran exile Marinus Barletius, whose integration has a priest in Veneto is now well documented.⁵¹

⁴⁹ A monograph on Isidor has yet to be written; see the detailed studies by P. Schreiner, "Ein byzantinischer Gelehrter zwischen Ost und West. Zur Biographie des Isidor von Kiew und seinem Besuch in Lviv (1436)", *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* ser. 3, 3, 2006, p. 215–228; idem, "Geträumte Topographie. Isidor von Kiew, ein unbekanntes Kloster und die Justinianssäule zu Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts im Vat.Gr. 1891", *Travaux et Mémoires* 14, 2002, p. 553–560; idem, "Ein seltsames Stemma. Isidor von Kiew, die Leichenrede Kaiser Manuels II. auf seinen Bruder Theodoros und eine moderne Ausgabe", in: I. Vassis et al. (ed.), *Lesearten. Festschrift für Athanasios Kambylis zum 70. Geburtstag*, Berlin, 1998, p. 211–225; idem, "Neues zu Leben und Werk des Isidor von Kiew. Kritische Bemerkungen zu zwei Biographien", *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 69, 2019, p. 289–301; O.J. Schmitt, "Kaiserrede und Zeitgeschichte im späten Byzanz. Ein Panegyrikos Isidors von Kiew aus dem Jahre 1429", *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 48, 1998, p. 209–242.

⁵⁰ C. Märkl / Ch. Kaiser / Th. Ricklin (eds.), *"Inter Graecos latinissimus, inter Latinos graecissimus". Bessarion zwischen den Kreuzzügen*, Berlin/Boston, 2013, therein: Th. Ricklin, "Bessarions Türken und andere Türken interessierter Kreise. Von der Schwierigkeit, ein Feindbild gelehrt zu plausibilisieren", p. 277–300; P. Kourniakos, *Die Kreuzzugslegation Kardinal Bessarions in Venedig (1463–1464)*, PhD thesis, University of Cologne, 2009; L. Mohler, "Bessarions Instruktion für die Kreuzzugspredigt in Venedig (1463)", *Römische Quartalschrift* 35, 1927, p. 337–349; J. Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II.", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49, 1995, p. 111–207, here p. 116–120.

⁵¹ L. Nadin, *Shqipëria e rigjetur: zbulim gjurmësh shqiptare në kulturën dhe artin e Venetos në shek. XVI = Albania ritrovata: recuperi di presenze albanesi nella cultura e nell'arte del cinquecento veneto*, Tirana, 2012.

During the fifteenth century, there also emerged the figure of the itinerant religious refugee who, in exchange for humanist teaching, or by pointing to his aristocratic origins, or offering conspiratorial plans, earned his keep at the courts of Europe. From the Holy Roman Empire to Burgundy, France and England, diaspora's clerical circles contained, then, Orthodox Unionists, converted Orthodox and Catholics. Such figures would characterise courtly life in the Mediterranean for the next two hundred years.⁵² This heterogeneous diaspora elite were supported by many of their compatriots who had fled to Italy, the Kingdom of Naples, the ports of the Papal States and to Venice, which Bessarion called a "second Byzantium". From the southern Italian Arbëresh to the Burgenland Croats, these minority populations are a reminder of the Balkan exodus triggered by the Ottoman conquest.⁵³

But the conquest triggered other migrations too, within the Ottoman Balkans themselves; not only did refugees leave their homelands in droves for the west and north, but there was also mass resettlement in the region, and not only from Anatolia. There is insufficient research on migrations and reconfigurations of settlement structures in the militarily stabilised Balkans under Ottoman rule; here we can only outline the potential for further studies: there was an Ottoman equivalent to the political pensioners at the European courts, namely those dethroned Orthodox princes who were tolerated by the sultans, such as the Despot of the Morea, Demetrios Palaiologos, or those ladies who flocked to the Eževo court of Sultana Mara Branković in Macedonia. Family members could go their separate ways: Thomas Palaiologos went to Rome, Demetrios to Thrace; the last queen of Bosnia, Queen Jelena, daughter of Lazar Branković and Helena Palaiologina, was remembered as the "evil woman" who together with Mara Branković and Katharina, the widow of Ulrich of Cilli, formed a female Serb triumvirate within in the Ottoman Empire that hatched poisonous intrigues. Mara and Katharina, both daughters of the Despot of Serbia Georg Branković, had been married to the west (Cilli) and east (Murad II) and rejoined in their later years. Mara ensured via her will that her sister enjoyed tribute from Dubrovnik.⁵⁴ These cases pale into insignificance however compared with the migration of Islamised high nobles to the court of the sultan, where they

⁵² P. Bartl, *Der Westbalkan zwischen Spanischer Monarchie und Osmanischen Reich*, Wiesbaden, 1974; N. Malcolm, *Agents of Empire*, London, 2015.

⁵³ B. Imhaus, *Le minoranze orientali a Venezia 1300-1510*, Rome, 1997; A. Ducellier / B. Doumerc / B. Imhaus / J. de Miceli, *Les chemins de l'exil. Bouleversements de l'Est européen et migrations vers l'Ouest à la fin du moyen âge*, Paris, 1992; Lovorka Čoralić, *U gradu Svetoga Marka*, Zagreb, 2001; L. Nadin, *Migrazione e integrazione. Il caso degli albanesi a Venezia (1479-1552)*, Rome, 2008; O. Katsiardi-Hering, "Migrationen von Bevölkerungsgruppen in Südosteuropa vom 15. bis zum Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts", *Südost-Forschungen* 59/60, 2000/2001, p. 125-148.

⁵⁴ Đ. Tošić, "Poslednja bosanska kraljica Mara (Jelena)", *Zbornik za istoriju BiH* 3, 2002, p. 29-60.

entered into active service, the labour migration of the itinerant Sipahi, for which the source material is very sparse, or Vlach settlement in the western Balkans.⁵⁵

This attempt to outline the age of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in its spatial dimension collates perspectives that may be very well researched in their own right, but have yet to be considered collectively. They demonstrate that while the history of the Ottoman conquest is certainly regional history, that is not its only, nor indeed its primary status. Furthermore, they also illustrate the extent to which the history of the Balkans can only be understood and written as European, Mediterranean and European history.

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⁵⁵ H. Reindl, *Männer um Bayezid. Eine prosopographische Studie über die Epoche Bayezids II. (1481–1512)*, Berlin, 1983.

