

# ***A BRIEF* history of Serbia**

## **From the Foundation to the Ottomans**

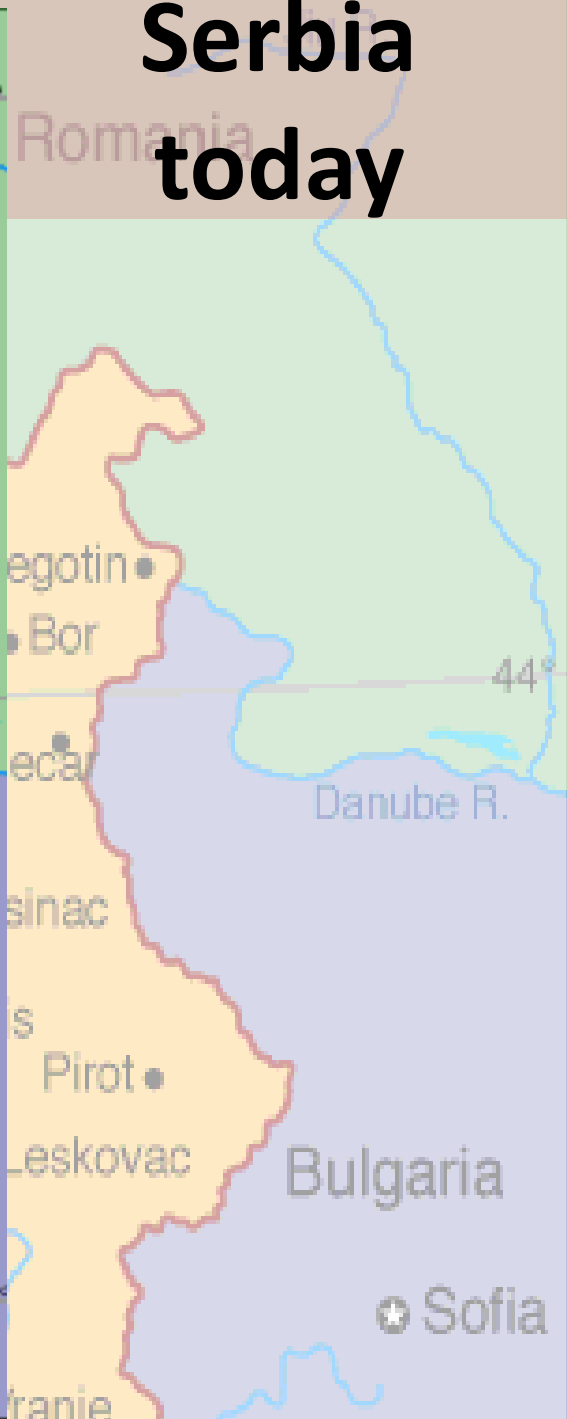




## To Look for:

- Look for the following themes in history (write down examples)
- 1-political intrigue
  - (using greater powers to get something, switching sides)
- 2-example of tolerance
  - (getting along w/ other ethnicities/religions)
- 3-examples of infighting
  - (Serbians fighting Serbians for power)
- 4-examples of a 'Holy' empire
  - (leaders doing things for God, Serbia being a faithful servant to God)

# Serbia today



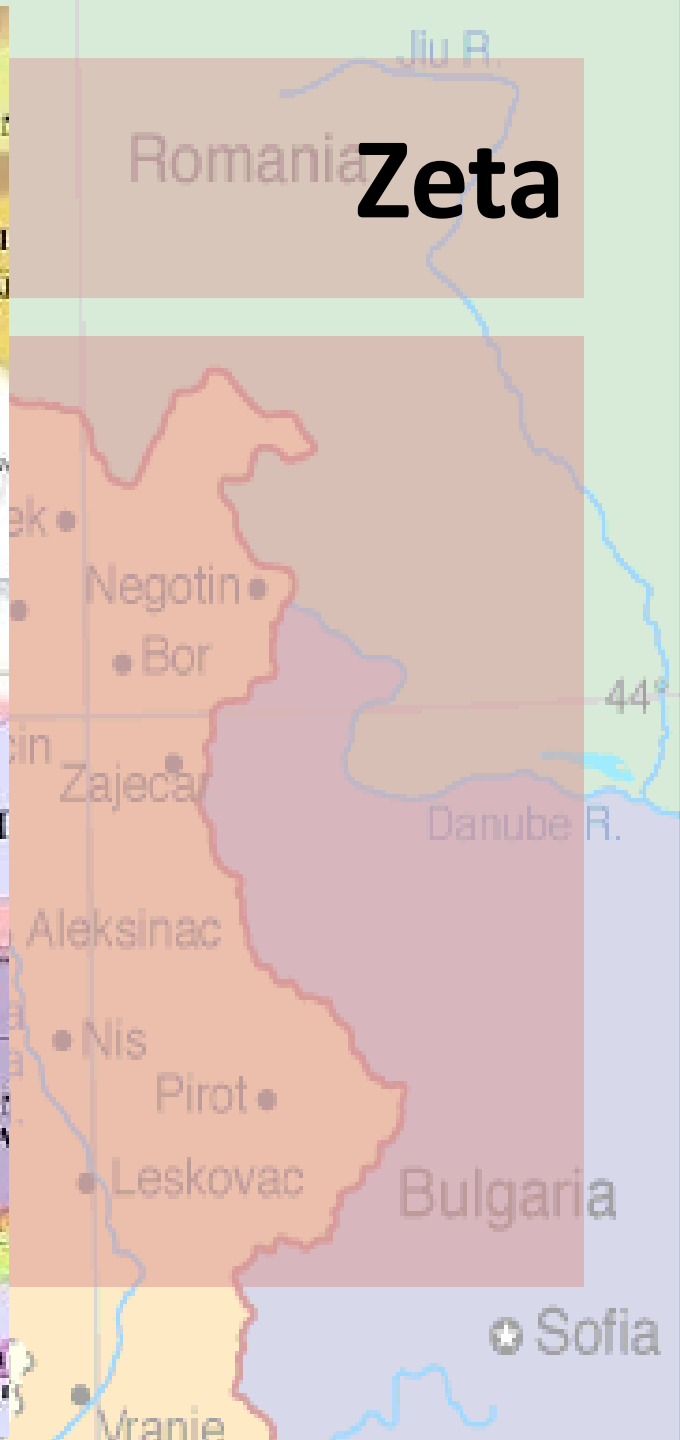
**Kingdom of  
Serbia,  
(1555)  
greatest  
extent**



# A little Background on the Serbs

- **1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Kingdom began around 1036 in the area of modern day Montenegro.**
- **It was started by Stefan Vojislav, who renounced his allegiance to the emperor in Constantinople and moved his support to Rome and began to bring neighboring Serbian tribes under his control**
- **(Playing ruling powers off one another)**





# Zeta

# Serbs become Orthodox

- -the land became known as Zeta and was 1<sup>st</sup> ruled by a Catholic
- -civil wars and power struggles broke and power shifted to Raska where Stefan Nemanja founded a dynasty and that would rule for the next 200 yrs. and created an expanding Serbia
- -The Nemanjas united the Serbs and gave them a Serbian identity centered around the church (Stefan had become a prisoner of Emperor Emanuel in Constantinople and had been introduced to Byzantine culture, when he returned he was determined to bring back to the Serbs





# The Nemanjan Serbian Kingdom in pink



# The Nemanjas

- -As the Bulgarian state grew in the Balkans, they did not capture the Nemanja's capital of Raska
- the Bulgarians were taking the opportunity to expand their empire after Catholic Crusaders had sacked the Byzantine capital...
- Serbia so decided to take advantage of this Byzantine defeat, expanding their rule not only to Herzegovina but to modern day Kosovo and up to central Serbia

# Appeal to the Catholics to be

- -Stefan will go on to established and retired to a monastery (taking the name Sava) but returned due to civil
- -The Byzantine Empire still in disarray due to the crusades, Sava again decided to use this to his advantage appealing to the Pope in Rome who agreed and crowned him King (probably to further weaken the Byzantine empire)





# The 'Holy Root'

- -Sava also canonized as a saint
- This gave the Serbs a holy foundation for their empire.
- Nemanja was the 'holy root' that was considered the protector of Serbia
- All of those that came after him were like 'saplings'
- (this idea can be seen in the paintings of family trees which appear in churches (the one at Pec actually depicts Christ himself blessing the royal family,
- later writings made Nemanja equivalent to Abraham (thus making Serbia the 'New Israel' and God's new 'chosen people' and the job of Nemanja's successors to unite and defend the flock from all evils

# Growing the Tree of Righteousness

- -Serbian kings continued to dutifully build monasteries, and as Constantinople was restored, even married one of the Byzantine emperor's daughters (in their minds making them ancestors of the Byzantine empire)
- -Although the Nemanja's monasteries were all Orthodox, the family did not totally alienate Catholics, even choosing to marry them and even sometimes sided with the Catholics during conflicts when Hungary threatened to bring Serbia under its control

# Dusan the Mighty

- -Dusan (the Mighty and the Lawgiver), the greatest Serbian leader, then took control (but was never sainted because he was suspected of murdering his father for the throne)
- -He soon expanded Serbia into Macedonia and much of Albania and deep into modern Turkey. He was supported in this by a pretender to the Byzantine throne who had already married one of his daughters off to Orhan, the Ottoman sultan.
- Later this man would turn on the Serbs and call in the Turks to fight the Serbs (who he probably felt was getting too powerful) this is when the Turks made their first incursions into Europe. These types of divisions w/n Christian nations only worked to the Ottoman's advantage

A map of the Balkans region, showing the extent of the Serbian Empire. The empire is highlighted in a light orange color, stretching from the Danube River in the north to the Peloponnese in the south. Major cities like Belgrade, Pancevo, and Zagubica are marked. Surrounding countries like Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Montenegro are also labeled. A compass rose is visible in the bottom left corner.

# Dusan crowned

- -Duscan in the meantime had crowned himself emperor of the Serbs and the Greeks (later the Albanians and the Bulgarians as well)
- -but since only a patriarch could crown himself emperor, Duscan then sought to establish his own patriarch but died before could
- By 1355, the Serbian empire stretched from the Danube to the Peloponnese, it had a strong leader, a dynasty and a church, it was the most powerful state in the Balkans

# Serbia under Dusan

- From this (pink) to gray



# The Nemanja Golden Age...and fall

- -The time of the Nemanjas was considered the golden age for the Serbs and is celebrated in Serbian epic poetry
- -after the death of Tito, the Serbs will draw to this 'golden age' to try to create the time of Dusan's empire
- -With the death of Tsar Dusan this empire began to collapse
- -He was succeeded by his son Uros V (the weak) who did not have the authority or military abilities of his father
- -his uncle, Simeon tried to take over and even Uros's own mother, Jelena, did not take his side but instead tried to gather cities and power for herself



# An Empire in Decline

- -Venetians saw this as an opportunity to wrestle modern day Albania from Serbia control, parts of Greece soon fell away and Northern Serbia was attacked by the Hungarians
- -2 brothers (Vukasin and Jovan Ugljesa) had worked to help Uros but then took the power for themselves, Uros granted Vukasin kingship because Uros had no children of his own (aka King Marko)
- -the new main threat was appearing in the Balkans was the Ottomans versus Serbs previous rivals Byzantium and Bulgaria

# Maritsa Battle, 1371

- -In 1371, the 2 brothers and the Serbs had their first major defeat against the Turks at the battle on the Maritsa river (modern day Bulgaria), the Turks won taking Bulgaria, Macedonia and southern parts of Serbia under their power), the consequences of this battle actually far outweigh the consequences of Kosovo
- -after the battle, what remained of Serbian land was divided into vassals (which required a tribute and military service)
- **THIS BATTLE, NOT KOSOVO, WAS BEGINNING OF THE END FOR THE KINGDOM OF SERBIA!!**

# King Marko & the end of the Nemanja Empire

- -King Marko was the first Serbian King, with his men to fight in Sultan Murad I's army
- -nevertheless the King Marko still appears as a central figure in Serbian folklore as the 'hero' subject often rebelling against his Ottoman master (one legend alleges that on the eve of the battle he prays for a Christian victory in battle even if it means that he is the first one killed)
- -In the mean time, Uros died formally ending the Nemanja Empire

# The Weakening of Serbia

- -After the battle of Maritsa, remaining Serbian lands are divided among Feudal Lords
- Lord Brankovic: parts of Raska, Kosovo and Northern Macedonia
- King Lazar rose to prominence in today's central Serbia and parts of Kosovo (and expanded his territory on the border of Bosnia)
- -When the Turks began to advance in the Balkans (which was greatly aided by divisions among Christian leaders), many Serbs fled north towards Hungary and the Adriatic and westward as well (they were also fleeing famine and plague).
- Whole areas were deserted

# The Legend of Kosovo

- King Lazar will later be viewed as the hero at the Battle of Kosovo (even though he lost and was killed)
- Very little is actually known about Lazar, most of his background is speculation and legend...more myth dispelling in a minute
- what we do know:
  - he conquered other feudal lords in Serbia
  - made marriage alliances w/ Brankovic
  - mended relations w/ the Byzantine patriarch in Constantinople was supported by the church to unify and lead Serbia
  - described himself as 'ruler of all Serbs'...although Ban Tvrtko was already crowned the 'King of the Serbs and of Bosnia' because he was actually from the Nemanja bloodline)

# Primary Sources

- **Class will be divided into groups and each group will read a section of the Legend of Kosovo**
- **You will need to:**
- **1. Summarize what happened in your section**
- **2. What is the important message of the section (parallel w/ Christianity or setting an example of what a good Serbian would do)**

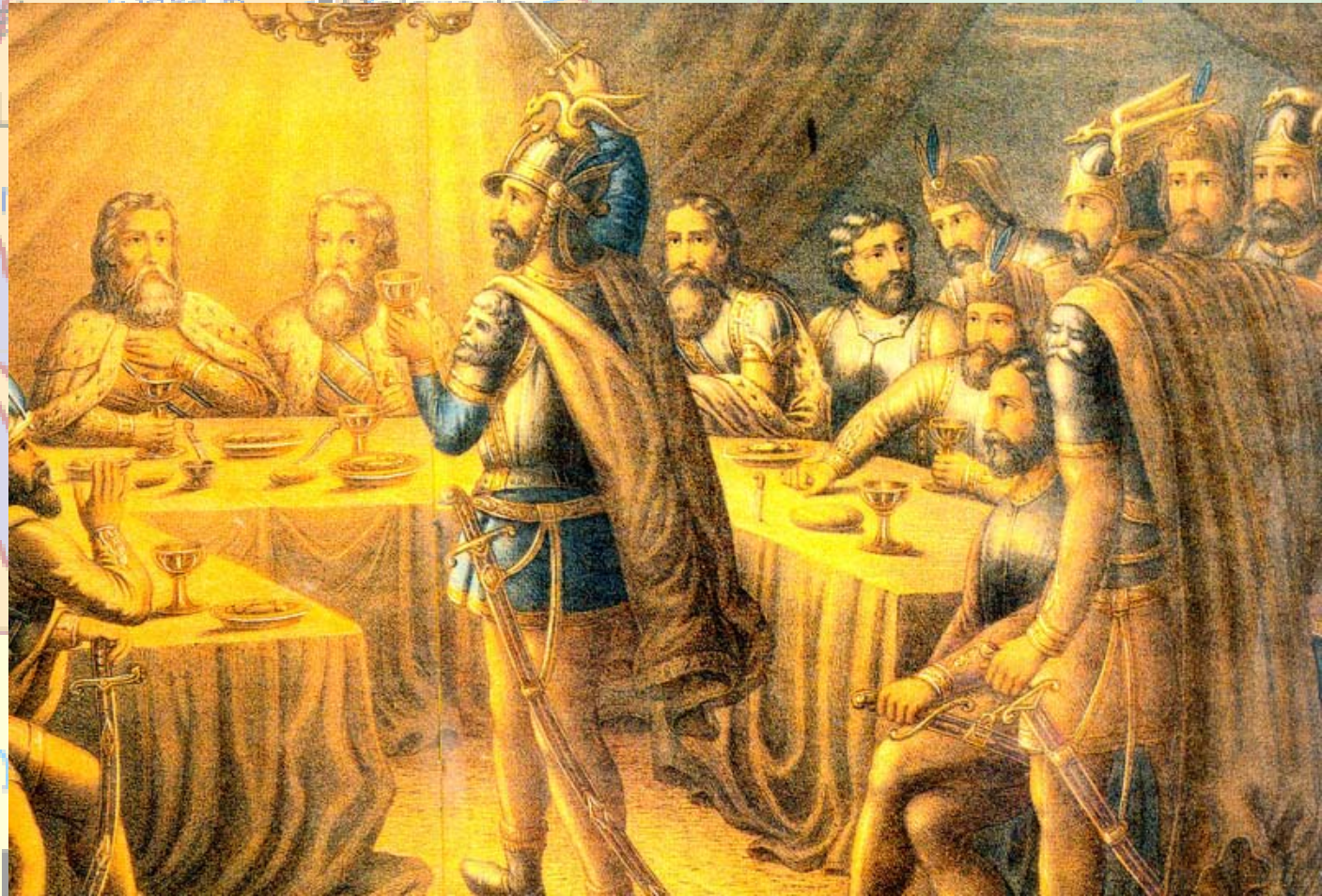
# King Lazar

- Notice he has been sainted



# The Last Supper (communion) before the Battle

- Oberlic swears it is not he who will betray Lazar but Branovic



Podgorica  
(Titograd)

Pec

Kosovo

Pristina

Vranje

Sofia



# The Battle

- Serbs from the battle going up to heaven and being welcomed in



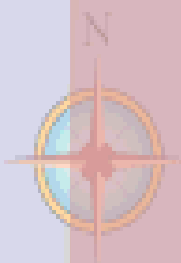
# Milos Oberlic

- Who the Ottoman Sultan in the battle

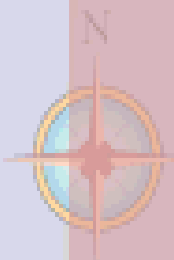


Владислав Тителбах, Милош Обилић, уље, око 1900, Народни музеј у Кикинди  
Vladislav Tietelbah, Miloš Obilić, oil painting, c. 1900, National Museum in Kikinda

# Notice Oberlic's Saintly halo



# The Betrayal of Branovic



# The Maid of Kosovo & the standard bearer

- **Comforting him as he dies**
- **Standard bearer dying is symbolic**



# Basic Key themes to look for

- **Comparison w/ Christianity**
  - Last temptation of Christ (trade an eternal kingdom for an earthly one)
  - Last supper
  - Betrayal of Judas (betrayal is a common theme in Serbian cultural perspective)
  - Sacrifice for God
- **What makes a 'good Serbian'**

# More detail on themes

- -betrayal
- -Sacrifice for God (provided an explanation for Serbian oppression under the Ottomans)
- -Eternal reward (Lazar chooses the kingdom of Heaven in exchange for a Kingdom on earth, temptation parallel to the temptations Christ experienced in the desert before he was crucified)
- Lazar chooses God's Kingdom and sacrifices his life so that one day the state of Serbia would be resurrected...this legend assure the Serbs that they will one day have a kingdom again and that are in the favor of God (as God's 'chosen people' Serbs identify with the Jews)
- -Serbs see themselves as victims and martyrs but that they are destined to survive and ultimately prosper
- -also that death is preferred to live in shame, do not surrender (later in history the role of the Ottomans will be replaced by Albanians, Croats, and Bosniaks or anyone that stands in the way of the re-creation of the Kingdom of Serbia)
- To many Serbs, the struggles w/ these different ethnic groups are equivalent to the Ottomans and of the Battle of Kosovo



# **Fact vs. Fiction: What really happened**

## **...putting the legend into perspective**

- -In 1389 the Serbs did ultimately lose the Battle of Kosovo
- but, remember the Kingdom of Serbia was already on the decline (the Battle of Maritsa, 1371 )
- -the legend of Kosovo & Lazar was preserved in epic folk poetry by monks, these legends would provide a link to Serbians glorious past and hopes and inspiration for a greater future
- -Milica (Lazar's widow) encouraged church scribes to canonize Lazar to help bolster his son's (Stefan Lazarevic) claim to the throne..thus making him part of the Holy Nemanja root (although he was not officially blood)
- -remember, during the middle ages, the church was the main source of news and information (many of these epic stories wouldn't be until the great 19<sup>th</sup> century reformer of Serbian language, Vuk Karadzic would record these poems...around 400 years later!!!)



# A Little More Reality

- -again, very little is known about the battle except that King Lazar and Sultan Murad was killed (supposedly by someone named Milos Obilic, which became another major figure in Serbian legend).
- Brankovic and Vlatko Vukovic (commander of the Bosnian forces send by King Tvrtko) and Bayezid (son of the sultan survived)
- after the battle, Bayezid the Turks retreated to Edrine (their capital at the time, probably to take care of issues of succession)

# The Real End of the Battle

- -Initial reports coming from the battlefield reported a Christian **VICTORY** not a slaughter
- -It won't be for another 200 years after the battle that Vuk Brankovic is regarded as a traitor in legend despite historical record that he remained on good terms with Lazar's widow and would once again fight the Turks (nevertheless, betrayal and treachery is thoroughly engrained into the Serbian worldview)
- -The main reason that the Ottomans ultimately "won" the battle was because the Ottomans had a reserve of backup troops were Serbian forces had been depleted
- When Bayzeid returned and demanded Lazar's widow (Milica) submit to his authority she had little choice (the Hungarians were also threatening her in the north)
- Lazar's 14 year old daughter was sent off to be a member of the Bayzeid's harem

# An anti-climax

- -After Kosovo, Serbia was became a vassal state of the Ottomans and were forced to pay tribute to the Turks
- -When Stefan was old enough, he was required to pay military tribute to Sultan Bayzeid, and would even help him defeat the Christians in the last serious crusade in 1396
- -in 1402, Bayzeid was defeated and taken captive by the Mongol leader Tamerlane, he would die in custody and a bloody civil war among his sons for succession ensued
- -Stephen used this chance to escape from the Sultan (and recued his sister from the Sultan's harem); he went to the emperor in Constantinople and was granted the title of ruler
- -by 1413, the Ottoman civil war had concluded and Stefan once again was forced to pay tribute
- -Serbia was completely taken over by the Turks in 1459

# Distortion of history for political purposes

- The memories, nostalgia and symbolism of the Battle of Kosovo has strongly affected the Balkans
  - Assassination of Franz Ferdinand (came to Kosovo on the anniversary of the Battle, Black Hand saw the Hapsburg's as = to Ottoman invaders)
  - Slobodan Milosevic will revive the Legend of Kosovo in order to try and reassert Serbia's role in Yugoslavia
- (See Slobodan Milosevic's speech in Kosovo)
  - Make note and discuss the similarities/references to the Legend of Kosovo
  - \*Also, Keep in mind that the 'body' of Lazar had just been on tour throughout the region before he gave this speech

# Today...Applying Concepts

- Can you recall any examples of how history is distorted today for political purposes?
- What are the dangers of this?

