

Skanderbeg (Gjergj Kastrioti)

Gjergj Kastrioti was born in 1405 possibly in Sine, Principality of Kastrioti (where his name comes from) and died in 1468. He was an Albanian nobleman and military leader who led the League of Lezhe in the Ottoman-Albanian wars. He is considered the national hero of

Albania.

Feats



Ottoman Court

He was sent to the Ottoman court at Adrianople in 1415 and again in 1423. He remained at Murad IIs court as ic oglan for 3 years, where he received military training at Enderun School. He participated in Ottoman military campaigns after graduating from Enderun School and he did these campaigns against Christians, so his father was worried, but he was just doing his job, keeping his true sympathies hidden.

He continued fighting for Murad II and gained the title of sipahi in 1430. From 1437-1438 he was governor of Kruje. Because of his military merit, Murad II gave him the title of vali. From 1438-1443 he is thought to have fought against John Hunyadi. 1443 is when he stops being in the service of the Ottomans.

Little did the Ottomans know that he was using this to basically have full insight into the Ottoman military and all of their strategies so that when the time came to counter them in battle, he would basically know all of their moves and he did this all under their thumb, hiding his real intentions and acting like he was loyal all along.

(Deception, Social Intelligence, Learning Ability, Strategy, Planning, Tactics)

League of Lezhe

He sneakily deserted in a battle in 1443 while Murad II was fighting against the crusaders of John Hunyadi either at the Battle of Kunovica or the Battle of Nis. He led his 300 men to Kruje and he forged a letter to make it appear it was from Sultan Murad II so that the Governor of Kruje would step down and well it worked, as he became lord the very same day.

He managed to solidify his holding by convincing people he was heir of the Balsic family and he would capture some castles and thus set up his own territory in the small area he had in northern Albania.

He converted to Christianity and well basically forced the Muslims in his land to convert or face death. He was now clearly showing his intentions, the intentions he hid all of these years to the Ottomans. Cuz well he knew they could not do anything. He learned everything about them and he was now in Albania.

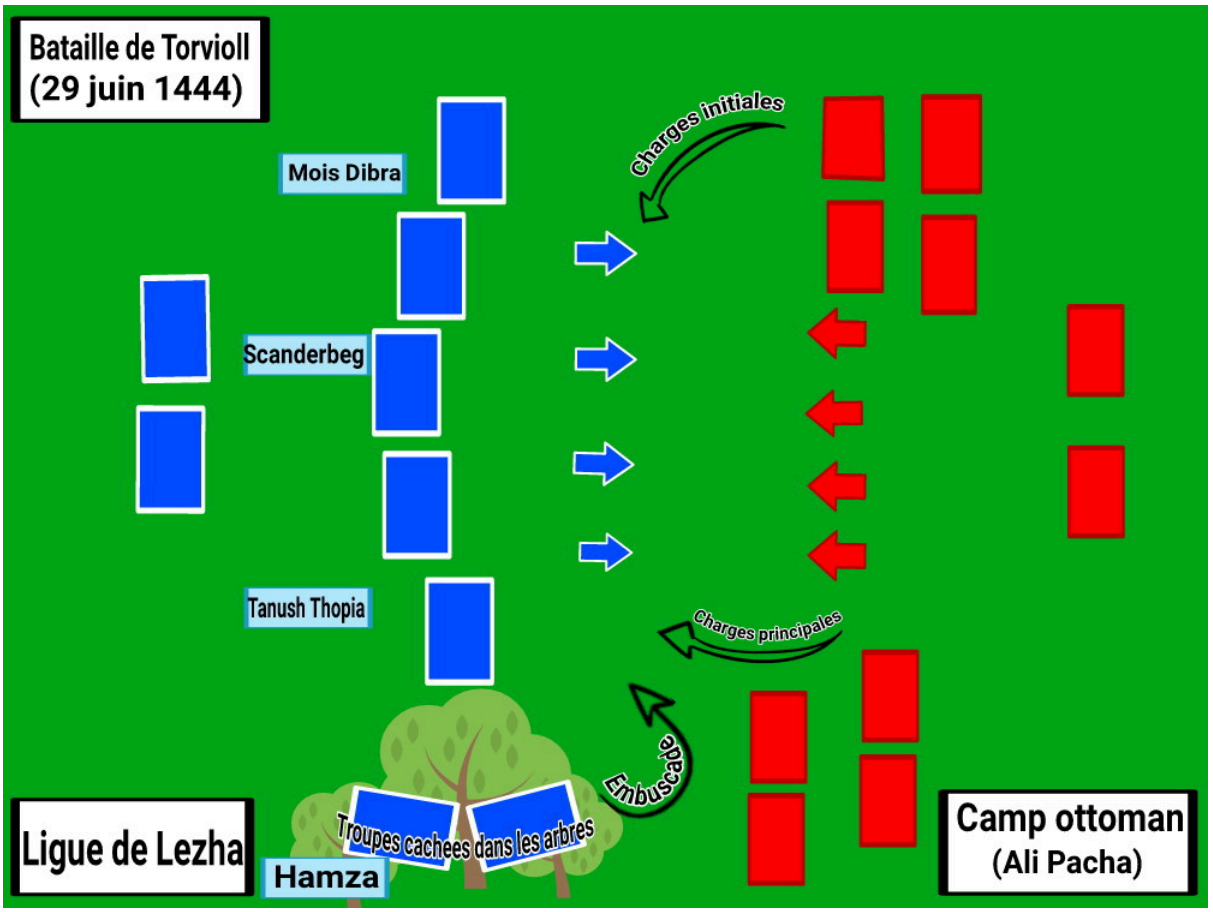
He also managed to have his court consist of people of various ethnicities, and members of the Gazulli family stood out. They had important roles in diplomacy, finance and purchase of arms. Doing this, he made stuff much easier for himself, so he could focus on the more important stuff, aka defeating the Ottomans militarily. He also knew to reach out and convince these very smart guys to be in his court. John Gazulli for example coordinated with Matthias Corvinus an offensive against Mehmed II at his court. Pal Gazulli, a knight, frequently travelled to Italy and Andrea Gazulli was despot of Morea before 1462 when he became a member.

Other helpful people included Stefan Maramonte, John Newport, Radovic, Gundulic merchant family. All of these, like being ambassador to Milan, provided ships for a trip to Ragusa and this other merchant family being an extension of the Gazullis role-wise. They basically made things easier politically for Skanderbeg and choosing these peoples was actually a smart decision and shows how easy he can make connections, especially knowing that the country he ruled was so small and not that significant.

Exploiting the fact that some Albanian revolts were starting to brew against Ottoman rule, Skanderbeg would create the League of Lezhe, convincing the many Albanian noblemen to join him in this alliance while having convened this meeting in the Venetian-town of Lezhe. 10 noble families, 9 from Albania and 1 from Serbia, joined him in this. 10 noble families with different members, different interests etc. all convinced by Skanderbeg to join his side united against the Ottomans. The first time in Albanian history.

(**Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Deception, Manipulation, Adaptability, Leadership, Charisma)**

Battle of Torvioll (1444)



In the summer of 1444, in the plain of Torvioll, Skanderbeg faced Ottoman forces. The Ottomans were led by Ali Pasha and had 25 000 men. Skanderbeg had 7000 infantry and 8000 cavalry so only 15 000 men, he was clearly outnumbered. He hid 3000 cavalry during the night before the battle in the forest under the command of Hamza, similar to tactics

employed by Hannibal in the Second Punic War. This gave the impression, to the Ottomans, that he had less men than he actually had, so as to make it seem like it is easier for the Ottomans to win. Also, it could allow him to potentially encircle the army once they get into his claws and charge. Which was basically the case, as the Ottomans were basically celebrating and feasting as they thought an easy victory would be assured. They thought oh look at this small Albanian army we outnumber 2 to 1 (well not really, but still outnumber, just not as much as thought). EASY!

Both armies would be ready for battle the following morning. He would basically use the time he spent in the Sultan's army to his benefit, showing that he had learned from his many years, all part of his master plan, as his formation would be in a crescent, traditional of Turkish formations, doing this so that he can hope to flank. He stationed himself in the center with various units of light infantry and archery and he put his cavalry and infantry on the flanks.

The narrow terrain of the battle meant the Turks couldn't use their numerical superiority, which was exactly in favour of Skanderbeg. Ok yea yet another Hannibal parallel, I know. But come on, good military tactics are good military tactics. To win the battle you must set up the battle to be favorable for YOU, regardless of how dirty or unoriginal it seems. Skanderbeg knew exactly that and well he was using Ottoman military knowledge that he spent years learning, like he knew that by being on the Ottoman side for so long he could basically gather a lot of intel on their military strategies that he could use later on to great effect.

Ali had his troops in 3 lines. He put himself in the middle with the janissaries and sipahis. He put the akinci light cavalry in the front and in the back he put azabs, so basically infantry. Ali would charge his first two lines into Skanderbegs line. It was a bloody but not decisive melee as the Albanians barely held out against the Turkish onslaught. The bravery shown by the Albanians surprised the overconfident Ali.

So Ali ordered his reserves into the fray in order to finish them off once and for all. However, by doing this, he was sending all of his troops right into the claws of Skanderbeg. Seeing that Ali deployed all of his troops by now into the battle, Skanderbeg ordered his hidden cavalry to come out and from behind to charge towards the Ottoman rear and thus he outflanked and surrounded the Ottoman army led by Ali Pasha.

Through his crescent formation that he set up before, he could much more easily funnel the army into the center of the battlefield and make it more surrounded, making escape harder and maximizing casualties. Ali barely escaped with his life. The Ottoman casualties were high, ⅔ of their army being killed or captured, so 17 000 men.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Knowledge Application, Deception, Psychological Warfare, Adaptability)

Battle of Mokra (1445)



The Ottomans would send yet another army to defeat Skanderbeg, this time led by Firuz Pasha, where they would clash at Mokra in 1445. The Ottomans had 15000 men, Skanderbeg only had 3500 men, so Firuz outnumbered him almost 5 to 1. Murad II before this battle tried to make peace with Skanderbeg, saying how he raised him like a son and also that the Ottomans are mighty and intimidating, he tried to psychologically trick him into making peace, but this failed as Skanderbeg reminded Murad II that he obliterated their army at Torvioll and with the faith of Jesus Christ, he had chosen the greatest side.

The response to Murad IIs message by Skanderbeg is what triggered the sending of Firuz Pasha into battle. Firuz set out to go to Skopje and then quickly to Kruje to surprise the Albanians, which is reminiscent of what Hannibal did in the Second Punic War, move quickly so that the Romans do not link up and is even reminiscent of stuff Napoleon did, so these are good military tactics.

Ironically though, the Ottoman soldiers thought they'd battle Hunyadi. Firuz heard that the Albanian army had disbanded for the time being and moved around the Black Drin valley and through Prizren. However, Skanderbegs scouts picked up these movements and eventually met up with them, setting up for battle.

For the battle, Skanderbeg only brought his 3500 personal men, with the rest of his troops being sent home. They moved into the forest of Mokra in a thin valley which they knew the terrain of. This shows Skanderbeg's battle planning as he intentionally came with fewer men so that he could much better adjust to the conditions he would set for the battle. The Ottomans meanwhile did not, so Skanderbeg basically controlled the battle from the get go.

The woods barely allowed movement of the Ottoman cavalry and this left them vulnerable to assaults by the Albanian infantry. The Ottomans had great numbers, so it was harder for them to actually do much that would allow them to win, plus he had rendered their cavalry's mobility useless. Skanderbeg was playing active, the Ottomans were playing reactive. A key thing that determines who wins military engagements. The Ottomans had 2500 casualties as a result of the battle including Firuz Pasha, while the Albanians had unknown casualties.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Intelligence Gathering, Spatial Awareness, Psychological Warfare, Anticipation, Adaptability)

Battle of Otonete (1446)



A year later, the Ottomans would send another army led by Mustafa Pasha as Murad II was preparing for another campaign against John Hunyadi, who became regent of Hungary at this point. The Ottoman army was 15 000 strong, while the Albanian army was 5 000 strong, so they were outnumbered 3:1.

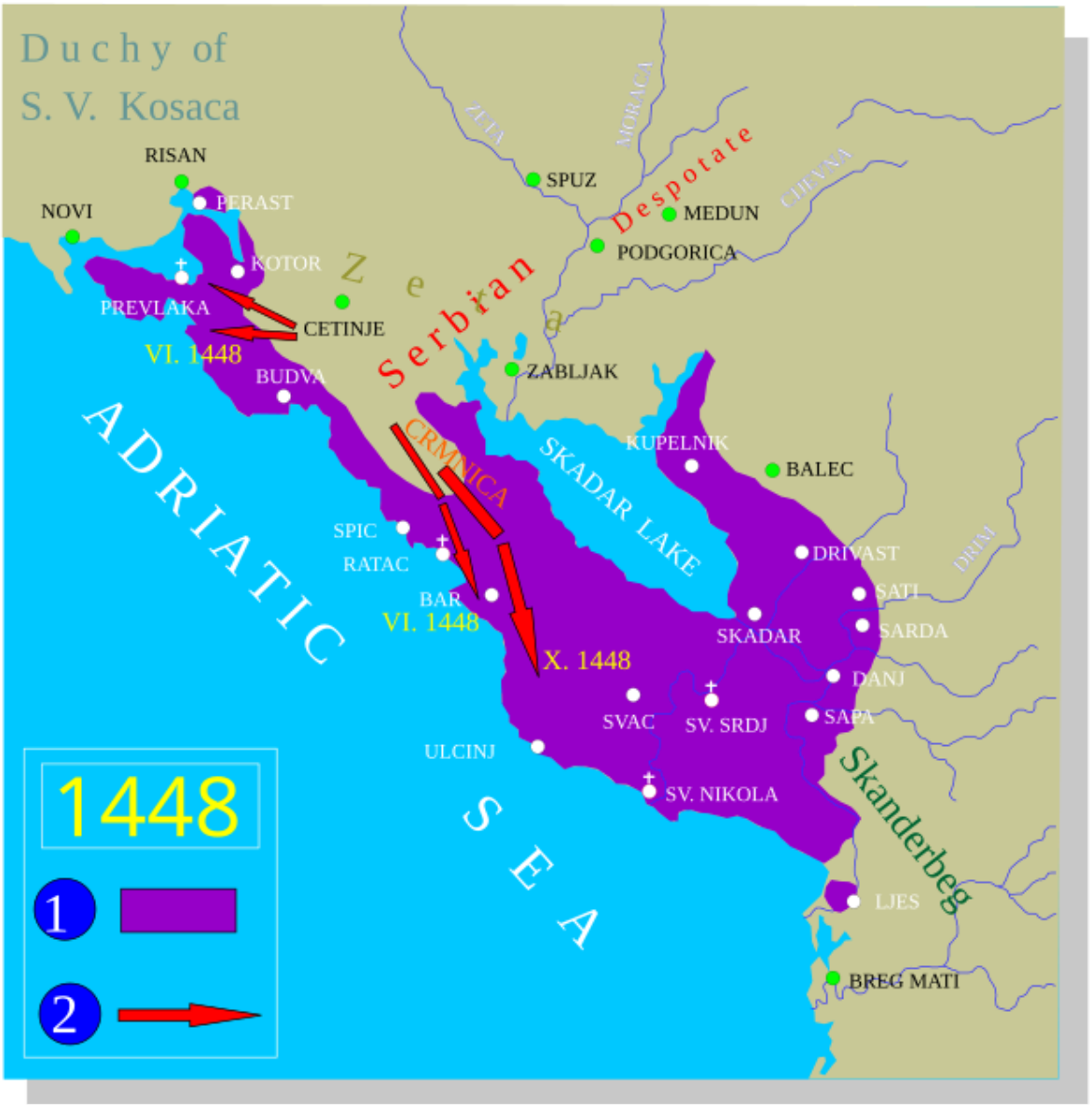
The Turkish plan involved a war of attrition, pillaging the land and inflicting terror on the population, while avoiding pitched battle. If they cannot fight Skanderbeg, at least convince him to give up by destroying his land and terrorizing his people. Mustafa would send one contingent into battle while one was kept at Otonete, the fortress.

Skanderbeg, upon learning the Ottoman army was split, attacked Otonete with 5000 men, disorienting the camp and well it turned into a slaughterhouse. The Ottomans had 5000 casualties as a result of this battle. The Albanian casualties were unknown.

Yet again, Skanderbeg showed his military genius. He exploited immediately upon learning the fact that the Ottomans split to attack their stationary camp by surprise with his men, thus leaving the other half basically useless. He also did not fall for that war of attrition trick of the Ottomans, it did not let that cloud his decisions and he struck correctly. It also shows again how much intel he gathered from the Ottomans when he was with them.

Mehmed II had taken over as sultan in this time and this was not a good thing due to his youth and inexperience as rival factions formed regarding what should the Ottomans focus on militarily. The crusaders, Constantinople, Albania, Wallachia etc. However, the sort of 3-1 consensus wound up wanting to besieging Constantinople but Halil Pasha would lead a janissary rebellion that would only be quelled when Murad II came back due to a letter from Halil Pasha, as he sort of restored order and gave the janissaries a pay rise. This was the first of such rebellions in Ottoman history.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Adaptability, Anticipation)



Albanian-Venetian War (1447-1448)

At first, the Venetians were supportive of Skanderbeg because they considered him a buffer between them and the Ottomans. Lezhe, where the League of Lezhe was established, was Venetian territory. However the rise of Skanderbeg turned out to be against Venetian

interests in the area and a dispute over the fortress of Dagnum led to war

Skanderbeg would leave a protective force of 3000-4000 men under Vrana Konti to guard the frontier in the event of an Ottoman invasion, showing his foresight. Skanderbeg then turned towards Dagnum with a force of 14000 men. He initially offered them the chance to surrender, but then besieged it. To further pressure the Venetians, he also turned towards Durazzo and cut it off from local resources and trade, which forced Venice to redirect two galleys. Once more, he is being active and his enemies have to be reactive.

The Venetians put up a bounty of 100 gold ducats per month that would be given to whoever assassinated Skanderbeg. In May of 1448, the Ottomans, under Murad II (the Ottoman sultan himself, he crushed John Hunyadi twice at Varna and Kosovo, he captured Salonika, consolidated Anatolia and succeeded in many Balkan campaigns, which shows his great military genius, so this was the guy he had to go up against in addition to the Venetians) would siege the fortress of Svetigrad.

(Foresight, Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Adaptability, Psychological Warfare)

Siege of Svetigrad (1448)

This left Skanderbeg to deal with a two-front war as just a weak Albanian state. One against the Venetians, the other against a mighty Ottoman army of 100 000 men. Skanderbeg would resort to scorched earth tactics while also employing hit and run tactics to delay the Ottoman advance, however they still managed to besiege the fortress of Svetigrad.

He would do many guerilla attacks to try and relieve the siege of Svetigrad, continually harassing them. A lot of these attacks were surprise attacks on isolated Ottoman forces. On 22 June he led a night attack on the Ottoman camp which disillusioned the Ottoman soldiers who expected a quiet campaign.

When the besiegers took their afternoon naps, he sent Moses Arianiti and some men dressed as peasants in order to reconnoitre for a future assault. He knew to tell his men not to take booty from the camp as that may alert the Ottomans and make them launch a counterattack. That night, the Albanians launched their attack, but the noise of the armor and the neighing of the horses inhibited a complete surprise. The periphery of the camp was thrown into confusion, but the bulk of the Turkish troops gathered and organized themselves, pushing the Albanians out of the camp but not before suffering heavy casualties.

To prevent further attacks of this sort, Murad detached a contingent of troops under Firuz Pasha to watch the Albanians but it was prone to desertion and thoroughly destroyed with its baggage train being captured. A breach in the walls of Svetigrad was made, but the following infantry assault was repulsed. The Albanians began to hope that the sultan would now be returning to Edirne.

Soon after though the fight had reached a stalemate, he was advised to pillage the countryside, but Skanderbeg had already pillaged those fields. Mehmed II, who was also at the battle, wanted him to go to Kruje, but citing the fact that Kruje had stronger defenses Murad II rejected this proposition. Murad II would attempt to starve the garrison into submission, meanwhile the garrison under Peter Perlati made several successful sorties against the Ottomans in order to ease the encirclement and strengthen his soldiers morale.

(Reconnaissance, Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Adaptability, Psychological Warfare, EQ, SQ)

Battle of the River Drin (1448)

Meanwhile, on the 23rd of July of 1448, Skanderbeg crossed the Drin River with a force of 10 000 men and met a Venetian force of 15 000 men under the command of Daniele Iurichi. The center of Iurichi's line was formed by local mercenaries. Iurichi had himself and his Dalmatian forces on the left while the right was composed of Italian natives. Skanderbeg positioned himself and his bodyguard on the right wing, opposite of Iurichi, his center was commanded by Tanush Thopia and the right by Moses of Dibra.

Skanderbegs forces would open fire on the Venetian line with arrows. Soon after, the Albanians would engage the Venetian left wing with their own right wing, pushing them back, while the center and right engaged the Venetian center and left. He then attacked the gaps within Venetian lines, causing disorder among their ranks. The battle continued for hours until large groups of Venetian troops began to flee. Skanderbeg, seeing his fleeing adversaries, ordered a full-scale offensive, routing the entire Venetian army. The Republic's soldiers were chased right to the gates of Scutari, and Venetian prisoners were thereafter paraded outside the fortress.

The Albanians managed to inflict 2,500 casualties on the Venetian force, capturing 1,000. Skanderbeg's army suffered 400 casualties, most on the right wing.The Venetian presence in Albania was weakened and the garrisons in the cities were stretched thin.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Knowledge, Adaptability)

Siege of Svetigrad (1448)

On the 31st of July, 1448, however, the garrison at Svetigrad surrendered, however they were spared by the Ottomans, even though Mehmed II wanted to massacre them, Murad II rightfully spared them because he knew that it would further incite Albanian rebellion. This was clearly a very hard fought battle for them even though normally it should have been a very easy win. A much smaller army that was led by someone in a two-front war against a much bigger Ottoman army led by the sultan Murad II, yet Skanderbeg helped turned the tide somewhat and the garrison ended up being spared and he almost would have had a successful night attack if not for some noise. The Ottomans had 20 000 casualties, so ⅕ of their men, while their garrison was spared as a result. It was a pyrrhic victory at best for the Ottomans.

Battle of Oranik (1448)

Upon the request of the Venetians, the Ottomans would send yet another army this time led by Mustafa Pasha that was 15 000 strong. Skanderbeg wanted to negotiate Dagnum but failed so he sieged Dagnum and Drisht, but he had to lift those sieges because per the request of Vrana Konti, he turned his attention towards another invading Ottoman force.

He left Hamza Kastrioti, his nephew and Marin Spani to continue those sieges with 5000 men and to garrison Balec, while he took his main army of 6000 men to fight the Ottomans. This shows yet again his clever arrangements that he does to keep things stable on one front, at least somewhat, while he goes on to fight a more important foe.
Mustafa Pasha, thinking Skanderbeg was still occupied at Dagnum (so yea, stealth on the part of Skanderbeg), he marched quickly towards inner Albania. This allowed Skanderbeg to surprise the army of Mustafa Pasha as he deployed near Oranik. The Albanians would then proceed to severely defeat the Ottomans at this battle.

The Ottomans lost 3000 men and a large number of them were taken prisoner, including Mustafa Pasha and 12 high officers.

Skanderbeg pursued the fleeing Ottoman forces in order to avenge the massacres and pillages committed by Mustafa Pasha in Albania. Skanderbeg then once again headed northwards to resume his siege on Dagnum, where his absence had proved detrimental. Skanderbeg's nephew Hamza had acted recklessly by initiating a failed assault on Drisht, and in reaction to this failure, he burnt much of Drisht's surroundings. Additionally, whilst Skanderbeg was fighting the Ottomans in Oranik, the Venetians attacked Balec, which was at this time defended by Marin Spani. Because the fortress was half-rebuilt and would have therefore been impossible to defend against a heavily numerically-superior army, Spani withdrew his troops south of the Drin river, resulting in the Venetians razing the abandoned castle

Skanderbeg learned about the loss of Balec from the captured Ottoman officers and that it was the Venetians who pushed the Ottomans to invade Albania in order to break the siege of Dagnum. The Venetians, upon hearing of the defeat of the Ottomans at Oranik, urgently wished to establish peace. Mustafa Pasha was soon ransomed for 25,000 ducats to the Ottomans.

After months of inconclusive campaigning against the Venetians around Dagnum and Shkodër, Skanderbeg realized that he would need to reach an agreement with Venice if he wished to carry on his resistance against the Ottomans. On the 4th of October, a peace treaty was concluded between the two parties in which Dagnum and Drisht were abandoned to the Republic of Venice in exchange for a strip of territory along the Drin river and an annual payment of 1,400 ducats. Skanderbeg was also given a loan of 1,500 ducats to help John Hunyadi against the Ottoman Turks in Kosovo, as well as an annual tribute of two hundred horses loaded with salt among other commodities.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Deception, SQ, Adaptability, Knowledge Application)

Siege of Kruje (1450)



In 1450, Murad II would arrive in Albania with an army once again numbering 100 000 men and he once again had his son Mehmed II. Skanderbeg would employ a scorched earth strategy, leaving the Ottomans without the capacity to utilize local resources.

Despite the morale having been very low, Skanderbeg carefully managed to heavily raise his army's morale before the battle claiming to have received a vision from St. George with a flaming sword. This speech, alongside many other visions of the clergy, raised the morale of his army significantly.

Skanderbeg would take the bulk of his force outside of the city, roughly 8 000 men, on Mount Tumenishta, while he had a garrison of 4 000 men under Vara Konti inside the city of Kruje. Keep in mind, Skanderbeg only had 12000 men, so he was outnumbered almost 8 to 1, so he was very heavily outnumbered.

Murad II had 100 000 men, which were his best soldiers, 60 000 of which were cavalry. Murad proposed to Vrana to hand over the fortress, but he refused. Murad II then fired his 10 cannons, one of which could fire rocks weighing 400 lbs and another 200 lbs. Despite this massive firepower, the Turks were at a disadvantage since Kruje was almost part of the mountain in which it had been built. They could only fire two/three times a day and were not always accurate.

Murad II fired on Kruje for 4 days until a breach was finally made. Murad II thought he had the advantage and pushed through the walls, however the garrison pushed them back, giving them time to repair the walls.

Murad, fearing a counterattack from Skanderbeg, sent a scouting patrol towards the surrounding mountains to watch for an attack. Skanderbeg still managed to lead, at dusk, a

raid on the Turkish encampment, killing several hundred men, capturing and destroying Turkish supplies, and almost losing his own life.

The assault continued, however, with the guns sounding from time to time. The defenders were not facing great difficulty, however. Sixty of them sallied forth to do whatever damage they could, and those at the walls repelled all attempts to enter. The main weight of the attack had come from the Tirana side, where the Turkish losses had been heavy.

When the second assault began, the Turks tried to break through the gate with their lances. After heavy casualties, the attackers retreated, and Murad held for the next two days a council of all his generals. An immediate precaution was to guard the camp against another surprise attack, which was responded to by placing a force of men under the command of Prince Mehmed, where the first attack had taken place. Moisi Arianit Golemi feigned an attack with about 500 horsemen: the alarm was given, and the Turks prepared for his attack. Meanwhile, Skanderbeg and his forces moved around the camp and broke in where least expected. Before an organized counterattack could be made, Skanderbeg retreated from the camp. The attacks made by Skanderbeg caused the Turks to aim some of their cannons towards the expected guerrilla forces instead of the fortress. A large force of Turkish cavalry was sent out, which Skanderbeg followed up to the mouth of the Ishëm River, until they turned back to Krujë.

When Skanderbeg was away, the Ottomans decided to launch a large assault on Kruje from the Tirana side, but friendly fire forced them to call off the assault. They tried to mine the fortress but could not since it was built on rock. Both sides would later receive provisions from the Venetians as they started to run out of food.

The Turkish attacks had made no headway and they had many casualties, while Skanderbeg only lost 1000 men so far. As Moisi and Tanush raised a couple thousand more men, the force was split between the three, making an attack on the Turkish camp easier. As such, Skanderbeg would move towards the Turkish camp.

Skanderbeg slowly retired while Moisi and Tanush broke into the camp. The Turkish force sent against Skanderbeg was lured towards the foothills, and the next morning, they were surrounded and completely destroyed The next day, Skanderbeg was seen above the rocks of Krujë, in conference with Vrana Konti, surprising Murad.

After Vrana returned to the castle, Murad II sent a pasha to bring him many rich presents, hoping to convince them in this dirty way to just give up the castle after all of this heavy fighting, which shows Murad's cunning. Vrana, despite being told that Murad would be a better master than Skanderbeg and that the siege was almost over, still did not surrender.

He also promised 10 000 crowns annually to Skanderbeg if he would just capitulate, but this did not work, showing his manipulation resistance (and also his patriotism). The assault continued, and the Albanian positions seemed desperate. On October 14, Skanderbeg offered Krujë to the Venetians, threatening to capitulate the fortress to the Turks if they did

not accept it. After Murad lifted the siege on October 26, because of the arriving winter, the Venetians replied to Skanderbeg's offer rejecting it and offered to help Skanderbeg to harmonize his relationship with Ottomans.

The Ottomans would lose 20 000 men while the Albanians only lost 1 000 men. But the retreat resulted in the loss of thousands of more Ottoman turks due to ambushes from local Albanian militias. Skanderbeg would then go to Ragusa, with the Ragusans informing Pope Nicholas V. Through financial assistance, he held Kruje and regained much of his territory. This victory gave him the praise of Rome, Naples, Hungary and Burgundy.

After this, he would become a vassal of Alfonso V in 1451, receiving much needed supplies and men from the Kingdom of Aragon, an important ally, if he was to have a chance to continue fighting the Ottomans.

So yea, Skanderbeg basically outsmarted Murad II, militarily speaking. This is impressive because Murad II defeated Christian coalitions led by John Hunyadi (the guy who saved Belgrade in 1456) on two separate occasions at Varna and Kosovo. He expanded the Ottoman Empire, capturing Thessaloniki and defeating the Venetians and Karamanids. There is no doubt Murad II is a genius commander and that was also demonstrated in this battle, but despite his numbers and technological superiority, Skanderbeg was still able to defeat him at Kruje and ruin his day at Svetigrad, even if not exactly a win, while fighting against the Venetians as well.

Exploiting the fact that Mehmed was busy in the East against the Karamanids, even though he wanted to return to Albania. Skanderbeg rebuilt Kruje in the meantime and made a new fortress in Modrica near the Drin River.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Skanderbeg secretly visited Naples and the Vatican, possibly wanting to create a new Crusade and to discuss the situation after the fall of Constantinople.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Knowledge Application, Deception, EQ,SQ, Manipulation Resistance, Endurance)

1452 Invasion of Albania, Battle of Polog (1453)

In 1452 however, Mehmed II ordered the first campaign against Skanderbeg during his rule. A dual-army under Tahip Pasha the main commander and Hamza Pasha. Their army was 25 000 strong. Skanderbeg gathered 14 000 men.

Keep in mind, Mehmed II started his invasion by exploiting the fact that the Venetians were planning to turn Skanderbeg's allies away from him so as to weaken Alfonso's influence and thus the influence of Aragon in the region.

Skanderbeg knew that if Mehmed struck now, he would be in great difficulty as he lacked resources and support to hold off such an invasion. This is why he decided to ally with the Kingdom of Aragon, first having tried with Venice, but they rejected. Thus, Aragon would

establish diplomatic relations with Albania. The Treaty of Gaeta created the Albanian-Aragonese alliance.

The Ottomans would send their cavalry to raid Albanian territories in the East, a classic strategy whereby they weaken their enemy before committing to their full scale invasion. He ordered a force of 25000-27000 inexperienced men so that he could weaken their forces before he launched his invasion. Tahip and Hamza Pasha would command these forces.

Skanderbeg would gather 14000 men and he would plan to first defeat Hamza and then move around Tahip to encircle him, exploiting Hamza's inexperience, plus Hamza only had 12000 men at most. He immediately struck, not giving him time to prepare and made short work of the forces, resulting in them fleeing and Hamza was captured.

In order to demoralize Tahips army, Skanderbeg sent several men with captives and captured Ottoman standards. He split his forces in two at the plains of Mecad, with the elite forces covering the flanks. Skanderbeg however sent Moses of Dibra around Tahip's flank to weaken his army before launching his main attack. In the heat of battle, Moses spotted Tahip and killed him after a duel. The lack of a commander caused them to flee.

These two battles saw the Ottomans lose 7000 men, while the Albanians only lost 1000 men.

In 1453, Mehmed II would send a force led by Ibrahim Pasha roughly 14 000 strong. In the spring of 1453, Skanderbeg and his army marched through a severe storm, with the goal of surprising the Turks. They would meet near Tetovo. Skanderbeg ordered the march to halt and made plans to retreat to the Mokra valley, hoping to lure his enemy into a narrow field, however Ibrahim did not follow and as such the battle had to take place on the field of Polog, blocking further incursions into Macedonia.

He would make an attack on the enemy camp as per the plans of Moisi and Hamza, initially being skeptical because of the severe storm, but his doubts soon faded. He launched a swift cavalry attack in spite of the storms and broke into the enemy camp, causing chaos and disorder. Skanderbeg dueled Ibrahim and came out victorious, beheading his opponent. His head was placed on a spike just like how the Ottomans placed Wladyslaw III of Poland, causing the Turkish troops to flee.

The Ottomans lost 10 000 men as a result of this battle, while the Albanians only lost 300 men. Yet again, the Albanians were most likely outnumbered and they managed to deliver a pretty hefty victory against their Ottoman foes.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Anticipation, Deception, Manipulation, Adaptability, EQ, SQ)

Battle of Albulena (1457)



After being unable to succeed in the siege of Berat, Moisi betrayed Skanderbeg and joined the Ottomans. But Skanderbeg would defeat him at Oranik in 1456 and he would rejoin his army. But later Skanderbeg's nephew Hamza betrayed him and became a joint commander of Isak Bey for another invasion force into Albania.

The Ottomans would have 80 000 men, led by Hamza and Ishak and would march through the Mat River in 1457. Skanderbeg decided to delay the vanguard, akinci cavalrymen, but when the main force approached, they retreated. Skanderbeg knew Hamza and Ishak were familiar with his tactics, so he adopted a new one.

He split his army into several groups and ordered them to march through separate directions in the mountains and remain unseen by the Ottoman forces until a signal was given. The Ottomans thought that they had won, as the Albanians were still in separate formations even by September. Suddenly though they launched a surprise attack on the Ottoman camp, killing and capturing 30 000 men in the process. Among them was Hamza who was sent as a prisoner to Napoli.

He intentionally appeared to have been gone to give Ottomans the sense that they had won and they should begin withdrawing and this withdrawal basically made them completely unready for what is to come. He came up with a new, unpredictable strategy right on the spot and it worked wonders as I described.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Deception, Psychological Warfare, Anticipation, Fluid Intelligence)

The Italian Expedition (1460-1462)



King Ferdinand I of Naples desperately needed support as his rule over the Kingdom of Naples was contested after the death of Alfonso V, as his rulership was threatened by the Angevin dynasty. The Pope, Calixtus III and a Spaniard himself could do nothing so he requested the aid of Skanderbeg.

To repay what Alfonso had done for him financially, he decided to help out his son in Italy. However, even though he tried to call a ceasefire with Mehmed II, those calls were not accepted as he still continued going after Morea and Bosnia. It took until 1459 for Mehmed II to accept a truce and a three-year ceasefire with Skanderbeg, which gave him the opportunity to send men to Italy.

He initially only sent 500 men, still having some fears that Mehmed II would unexpectedly invade, but they were not doing much. It was not until 1461 when he arrived, but not before

he visited Ragusa to convince them to fund his campaign.

Upon seeing Skanderbeg, Angevin forces lifted the siege of Barletta. He was then put in command of the fortress of Barletta by Ferdinand of Naples. He would then move, while in this position, against the rivals of Ferdinand. They were in Andria, where the Albanian assault continued.

The Albanian cavalry's nature of being light and with swift horses and loose ranks allowed them to overcome the 7000 strong Italian heavy cavalry. A warrior would capture Alois Minutulo and Skanderbeg would be given the castle of Monte Sant Angelo as a token of gratitude from Ferdinand.

Piccino tried to fight Ferdinand and Skanderbeg, but due to the combined strength of the Albanian and Neapolitan forces, he withdrew. After this, Skanderbeg would march to Taranto, after Giovanno Orsini, he tried to plead with them to not come, but Ferdinand knew he could not be trusted so Skanderbeg still raided his territory.

Skanderbeg would split his armies in three directions, one led by Moisi, the other led by Vladan and the other led by himself, allowing him to attack three of Ferdinand's enemies all at once.

In 1462, he would return to Albania, but before reaching Albania he went to Ragusa, where he was greeted as a hero. It is not known exactly why he returned, but it was likely that because the Ottomans were planning on attacking Hungary, they would likely attack him too so he did not want to allow the Ottomans to attack his homeland right when he was not there.

Battle of Mokra (1462)

This turned out to be true, as there were three Ottoman armies approaching Albania. He defeated the first one led by Sinan Pasha at Mokra, but then after hearing news of this defeat, Mehmed II dispatched a new army under Hasan Bey. They once again confronted each other at Mokra, where Hasan was defeated and lost a majority of his forces as well as being wounded himself and he surrendered to Skanderbeg, becoming imprisoned.

The second army, under Hasan Bey, was defeated at Ohrid, capturing the commander. The third army, under Karaza Bey and 30 000 strong was defeated in the region of Skopje, this forced Mehmed II to agree to a 10-year armistice with Skanderbeg, signed in 1463 in Skopje.

Venetian-Ottoman War (1463-1479)

The Venetian-Ottoman War saw the Venetians once again open to allying with Skanderbeg, with the 1448 peace treaty renewed with other conditions added, Skanderbeg had right of asylum in Venice and that a Venetian-Ottoman treaty would include guarantees for Albania's independence.

Pope Pius II tried to organize a new crusade and Skanderbeg in 1463 declared war on the Ottomans when they sent a force of 14 000 men under Seremet Bey to reinforce Ohrid. The Venetians sent 1 000 men of their own to help, under Cimarosto. Skanderbeg would lure the Ottomans out of the gates of Ohrid and feigned a retreat, then assaulting them and thus defeating them. The Ottomans lost 10 000 men and Seremet was captured.

However the death of Pius in 1464 meant Skanderbeg was alone and the Crusader army could not be gathered in time to help him. At the battle of Vaikal, he would defeat Ballaban Badera, a sanjakbey of Ohrid, but the latter captured Moisi and Vladan, plus his nephew Muzaka. Skanderbeg failed to bring them back and they were killed slowly and painfully.

Sure he only had 5 000 men versus 18 000 men in the battle and defeated the Ottomans, inflicting heavy casualties on them, but at what cost?

In that same year in 1465, Ballaban Pasha alongside Jakup Bey would once again invade Albania, resulting in the Second Battle of Vaikal. They planned a double-flank envelopment, however Skanderbegs attack caused their defeat and the Ottoman prisoners were slain as revenge for the previous Vaikal battle.

The other Ottoman army under Jakup Bey was later that day defeated at Kashari field near Tirana by Skanderbeg.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Deception, Misdirection, Adaptability, Diplomacy, Optimization, Psychological Warfare)

Second Siege of Kruje (1466-1467)



Sultan Mehmed II would send an army of 30 000 men personally led by him to continue what his father, Murad II, tried to do 16 years ago. Look, he conquered Constantinople. Surely he could conquer Kruje. To get a context on how impressive Mehmed II is militarily, to get a sense of his foe, Mehmed II literally captured Constantinople and came up with the method of using ships ON LAND to literally take over the city. He was a military genius, just like his father. He defeated Trebizond, subjugated Serbia and Bosnia, he defeated the Qara Qoyunlu, the Moldavians under Stephen the Great, like throughout his career, not up to this point, but even then what he did up to this point was impressive. He even earned the title of Conqueror (Fatih). So yea, he was not just some regular pasha.

Mehmed II decided to isolate Kruje, the main Albanian fortress, by reducing Skanderbeg's manpower and supplies and also his political and moral backing. Afterwards, Kruje would be put under siege. This seems smart. After all, if it is isolated completely, who can relieve its siege? It will inevitably fall.

Anyway, Mehmed would send his army in two directions. One through the Shmkubin river and the other through the Drin river. They would massacre the local populations, raid inhabited areas and burn villages that would resist. Skanderbeg did not leave as previously thought and the arrival of Albanian refugees did not mean Albania fell.

He went in the mountains around Scutari to retrieve men to relieve the siege of Kruje. Mehmed II would have his akinci raid the countryside, as revenge for what Skanderbeg did in Macedonia. The Albanians would gain the mountain tops.

This first phase lasted for two months. Skanderbeg placed 4400 men under Tanush Thopia to defend the castle; this force also included 1000 Venetians under Perducci. Skanderbeg removed his men from the fortress in a manner similar to the first siege.

Mehmed II offered rewards to the garrison if they surrendered, but the garrison responded by bombarding Ottoman positions. Then the Ottomans heavily bombarded the fortress, but to no avail. However, his initial campaign did leave Skanderbeg under significant strain as he also had not received foreign aid, playing exactly into his cards and just shows how smart Mehmed II is militarily as well.

Skanderbeg only received 1000 ducats from the Venetians, but Skanderbeg continued fighting. Convinced that Kruje would not fall by force, Mehmed II left his main army and instead left Ballaban to continue the siege. After the siege, he would build the fortress of Elbasan so that their presence would not wane after this failed siege.

(Strategy, Planning, Tactics, Deception, Manipulation Resistance, Adaptability, Anticipation, Risk Assessment)

SKANDERBEG AURA



- Defeated Murad II and Mehmed II at Kruje, the two most militarily gifted sultans of the 15th century for the reasons I mentioned, even though he was severely outnumbered.

- Stalemated Murad II at Svetigrad, even though he was heavily outnumbered and almost would have succeeded if it was not for some noise in his night attack.

- Was referred to as Athleta Christi aka Champion of Christ by Popes and rulers of European kingdoms.

- United all of the Albanian principalities into the League of Lezhe.

- Was referred to as the Shield of Europe.

- Albania remained unconquered throughout his 25 year long reign over the League of Lezhe, from 1443 to 1468. It only fell AFTER his death. The Ottomans just could not conquer a small piece of land that was Albania because of this one man.

- Became a fundamental myth of Albanian nationalism, the Myth of Skanderbeg.
- When fighting Hamza and Ishak who knew his military strategies well, he was able to create new strategies on the spot which worked just as well as his regular OP strategies.

- Made the attempts of Mehmed II at conquering Albania a failure once more when the Ottomans tried to take Kruje for a 3rd time. The Conqueror of Constantinople btw.

- Heavily pissed off both Murad II and Mehmed II, most likely.

- Killed at least 100 000 Ottomans over the battles he waged against them.

- Made Ottoman pashas who spent many years learning military strategies look like fodder.

- Defeated Ottomans, Venetians and Neapolitan pretenders in many battles.

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