

= Siege of Krujë (1450) =

The first Siege of Krujë occurred in 1450 when an Ottoman army of approximately 100 @, @ 000 men laid siege to the Albanian town of Krujë . The League of Lezhë , led by Skanderbeg , experienced low morale after losing Svetigrad and Berat between 1448 and 1450 . Nevertheless , Skanderbeg 's exhortations and the support of the clergy , who claimed to have had visions of angels and victory , motivated the Albanians to defend the capital of the League , Krujë , at all costs . After leaving a protective garrison of 4 @, @ 000 men under his trusted lieutenant Vrana Konti (also known as Kont Urani) , Skanderbeg harassed the Ottoman camps around Krujë and attacked the supply caravans of Sultan Murad II 's army . By September the Ottoman camp was in disarray as morale sank and disease ran rampant . The Ottoman army acknowledged that the castle of Krujë would not fall by strength of arms , lifted the siege , and made its way to Edirne . Soon thereafter , in the winter of 1450 ? 51 , Murad died in Edirne and was succeeded by his son , Mehmed II .

= = Campaigns of 1448 and early 1450 = =

After several failed invasions of Albania by Ottoman captains , Murad II laid siege to the fortress of Svetigrad (which is thought to be today 's Demir Hisar) on May 14 , 1448 , with a force of 80 @, @ 000 men . Svetigrad was an important strategic point , since it controlled the routes from Macedonia into Albania . The small garrison , composed of Albanians , Bulgarians , and other Europeans , held the fortress while Scanderbeg attacked the Ottoman camp from outside . After the Ottomans poisoned the wells , a group of defenders decided to open the gates and let the Turks in , thus giving control of the fortress to the Ottomans . The Sultan retired from Albania and Skanderbeg laid siege to Svetigrad on September 23 , 1448 . After several failed assaults , Skanderbeg lifted the siege and retreated . In early 1450 , Berat was captured by the pasha of Gjirokastër through a night attack , causing Gjergj Arianit to desert Skanderbeg 's cause .

= = Prelude = =

= = = Albanian morale before the siege = = =

The morale of the Albanians sank after the losses in the previous years . When the Turks began marching towards Krujë on April 5 , 1450 , the people claimed to have seen cherubims and angels flying over Albania . Skanderbeg himself claimed that he had received a vision of St. George handing him a flaming sword to " destroy the enemies of true religion (Christianity) . " This speech , along with many other visions of the clergy , raised Albanians ' morale , motivating them to fight .

= = = Albanian dispositions and preparations = = =

Before the siege began , Skanderbeg exited Krujë with 8 @, @ 000 men ? among whom were many Slavs , Italians , Frenchmen and Germans . 2 @, @ 000 of these were infantry and 6 @, @ 000 were cavalry . Skanderbeg found Mount Tumenishta (now known as Mount Skënderbeu) to be a suitable position from which to attack the Ottomans . Krujë was left with a garrison of 4 @, @ 000 men under the command of Vrana Konti . Vrana had under his command several Germans , Italians , and Frenchmen , to whom he emphasized the importance of the siege and also ordered them to their positions . Krujë had enough supplies for a sixteen @-@ month siege . The women and children of Krujë were sent for protection to Venetian possessed cities , whereas the others were ordered to burn their crops and move into the mountains and fortresses .

= = = Ottoman dispositions and preparations = = =

Murad reached Krujë on May 14 with approximately 100 @, @ 000 of his best soldiers (60 @, @

000 of which was cavalry) . Murad proposed to Vrana that he should hand over the fortress , but Vrana refused . After receiving the refusal , Murad set his army to cast ten cannons , one of which could fire rocks weighing 400 pounds and another 200 pounds . Despite the firepower , the Turkish firing positions were at a disadvantage , since Krujë " was almost part of the mountain which it had been built . " The cannons could fire two or three times a day and were not accurate . Two large and four smaller guns were placed on the Tirana side , and the remainder were aimed at the main gateway .

= = Siege = =

= = = First phase = = =

Murad fired on Krujë for four days until a breach was finally made . The Sultan believed that he had the advantage and ordered his troops through the walls . The garrison managed to push the assault back , thus gaining 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 . When Skanderbeg returned to his men , his " shield was so battered that its shape was scarce to be discerned . " The raid cost Skanderbeg ten dead and even more wounded . 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 .

= = = Second phase = = =

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 .

While Skanderbeg had been away , a large Ottoman assault was made on Krujë from the Tirana side , but inadvertent friendly fire from the Turks forced them to call off the assault . The Ottomans then attempted to mine the fortress , but could not succeed , since the fortress had been built on rock . Since the food supplies were beginning to run out , the Turks received provisions from Venice , as did the Albanians . The Turkish attacks had made no headway and the Ottoman army had lost many dead or wounded , whereas Skanderbeg 's force had lost 1 @,@ 000 men thus far . Moisi Golemi and Tanush Thopia raised a couple thousand more and the force was split between the three , making attacks on the Turkish camp easier . Skanderbeg began to move towards the camp as the Turks had assembled 8 @,@ 000 men which began to move towards him . 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 (July 25) they were surrounded and completely destroyed . The next day , Skanderbeg was seen above the rocks of Krujë , in conference with Vrana Konti , surprising Murad .

= = = Final phase = = =

After Vrana had returned to the castle , a pasha was chosen to have a conference with Vrana bringing him many rich presents . The pasha tried to convince the count that Murad would be a more suitable master than Skanderbeg was , and that the siege was almost over , but Vrana refused to surrender . As a result , a fresh Ottoman assault began . Meanwhile , Murad sent an envoy trying to convince Skanderbeg to capitulate by offering 10 @,@ 000 crowns annually . Skanderbeg also refused replying : " Nay if Murad did divide with me and make me co @-@ partner with all his empire , I would never suffer the name of Albania to be stained and blemished with this blot of disgrace and infamy . " 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 .

= = Aftermath = =

The siege cost 20 @,@ 000 Ottoman casualties and over 1 @,@ 000 Albanian casualties . Marin Barleti claims that Murad died of disease under the fortress of Krujë , but Murad in fact died in Edirne in 1451 . Murad began to retire from Albania out of fear of losing even more men from the Albanian winter , however the retreat itself caused the loss of thousands of Ottoman troops due to attacks from local Albanian militias . Skanderbeg was at the end of his resources . He travelled to Ragusa , urging for assistance , and the Ragusans informed Pope Nicholas V. Through financial assistance , Skanderbeg managed to hold Krujë and regain much of his territory . Skanderbeg 's success brought praise from all over Europe and ambassadors were sent to him from Rome , Naples , Hungary , and Burgundy . Skanderbeg then became a vassal of Alfonso V , on March 26 , 1451 , by the Treaty of Gaeta , gaining much needed men and supplies from the crown of Aragon .

According to legend , one night during the siege Skanderbeg sent out a herd of goats with a candle on each of the goats ' horns . The encamped Turks believed it to be an Albanian attack and made a movement against the herd . When the Turks advanced far enough , Skanderbeg launched an attack against the force , destroying it . After the siege was lifted , Skanderbeg commemorated his victory by designing a helmet with the head of a goat on it , as a reference to his " ingenious tactics " used that night .

= = Popular culture and legacy = =

Naim Frashëri , a prominent Albanian poet , wrote of how the siege of Krujë had saved Europe from Ottoman invasion . Today , Albanians take pride in the actions performed during the siege . The Skanderbeg Museum , in Krujë , has many commemorations to the siege and the film Skënderbeu (1953) stages the siege . It is the setting of the novel The Siege by Albanian writer Ismail Kadare .