

= Skanderbeg 's Italian expedition =

Skanderbeg 's Italian expedition (1460 ? 1462) was undertaken to aid his ally Ferdinand I of Naples , whose rulership was threatened by the Angevin Dynasty . George Kastrioti Skanderbeg was the ruler of Albania (Latin : dominus Albaniae) who had been leading a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire since 1443 and allied himself with several Western European monarchs in order to consolidate his domains . In 1458 , Alfonso V of Aragon , ruler of Sicily and Naples and Skanderbeg 's most important ally , died , leaving his illegitimate son , Ferdinand , on the Neapolitan throne ; René d 'Anjou , the French Duke of Anjou , laid claim to the throne . The conflict between René 's and Ferdinand 's supporters soon erupted into a civil war . Pope Calixtus III , of Spanish background himself , could do little to secure Ferdinand , so he turned to Skanderbeg for aid .

In 1457 , Skanderbeg had achieved his most famous victory over the Ottoman Empire at Albulena (Ujëbardha) , which was received with great enthusiasm throughout Italy . In order to repay Alfonso for the financial and military assistance given to him years before , Skanderbeg took up the pope 's pleas to help out Alfonso 's son by sending a military expedition to Italy . Before leaving , Skanderbeg tried to negotiate a ceasefire with Sultan Mehmed II , the conqueror of Constantinople , to ensure his domain 's safety . Mehmed had not declared a truce and he was still sending his armies against Bosnia and the Morea . It was not until 1459 , after Mehmed 's conquest of Serbia , that Mehmed not only declared a truce , but also a three @-@ year ceasefire with Skanderbeg . This gave Skanderbeg his opportunity to send his men to Italy .

Due to fears of an approaching Ottoman army , Skanderbeg first sent his nephew , Constantine , with 500 cavalry to Barletta . They were incorporated into Ferdinand 's forces to combat his Angevin rivals . They held back their enemy for a year , but did not gain much ground until Skanderbeg arrived in September 1461 . Before reaching Italy , Skanderbeg visited Ragusa (Dubrovnik) to convince its rectors to help fund his campaign . Meanwhile , his men landed in Italy and Angevin forces lifted their siege on Barletta . Upon arriving , Skanderbeg continued to pursue his ally 's enemies with great success . Ferdinand 's adversaries thus began to retreat from his territories and Skanderbeg went back to Albania ; a troop of his men stayed until Ferdinand managed to finally defeat the pretenders to his throne at the Battle of Orsara , although it is not known if Skanderbeg 's men participated .

= = Background = =

In 1456 , Skanderbeg 's ally , Janos Hunyadi , died , and his son , Mathias Corvinus , was crowned King of Hungary . Hunyadi had been an advocate for an offensive war against the Ottoman Empire , whereas the Hungarian nobility and his son promoted a defensive war . The next year , however , George Kastrioti Skanderbeg defeated a sizable Ottoman force at the Battle of Albulena (Ujëbardha) . Rome had been desperately waiting for such a victory after the Siege of Belgrade , as Pope Calixtus III had wanted to assure himself of the feasibility of a crusade before declaring one . Calixtus thus named Skanderbeg the Captain @-@ General of the Curia ; to secure the pope 's interests , Skanderbeg sent twelve Turkish prisoners of war that had been captured at Albulena to Rome . Despite seeing his forces defeated the year before , Sultan Mehmed II prepared another force to be sent into Albania . The country had been obstructing his ambitions for empire in the West and he grew restless to defeat Skanderbeg . Skanderbeg sent delegations to several Western European states to convince them to stop fighting each other and unite for Calixtus ' crusade .

= = = Italian situation = = =

On 27 September 1458 , Alfonso V of Aragon , Skanderbeg 's most important and helpful ally after the stipulation of the Treaty of Gaeta , died . In 1448 , as gesture of friendship with Alfonso , Skanderbeg sent a detachment of Albanian troops commanded by General Demetrios Reres to Crotone to quell a rebellion against Alfonso . The next year , many of these men were allowed to settle four villages in Sicily which Alfonso controlled . Upon hearing of his ally 's death , Skanderbeg

sent emissaries to the new King of Naples , Ferdinand I , to give condolence for his father 's death , but also to congratulate him on his accession to the throne of Naples . The succession was not without turbulence , however : René d 'Anjou laid claim to the throne since his family had controlled Naples before Aragon had taken control of it , and also because Ferdinand was Alfonso 's illegitimate son . The Southern Italian nobility , many of Angevin background , supported René d 'Anjou over the Aragonese Ferdinand . Among them was Giovanni Antonio del Balzo Orsini , the Prince of Taranto , and Jacopo Piccinino , a famed condottieri who had been invited by the Angevins . Francisco Sforza , the Duke of Milan , who was wary of a French presence in Italy , sided with Ferdinand and sent his nephew , Alessandro Sforza , to command his army in southern Italy . Pope Calixtus , a Spaniard who wished to see his compatriot in control of Naples , was in no position to help the weak Ferdinand , so he turned to Skanderbeg for help . However , by that time , Piccinino and his men had conquered all of southern Italy except Naples , Capua , Aversa , Gaeta , Troia , and Barletta , where Ferdinand was besieged .

Skanderbeg had received much aid from Ferdinand 's father , Alfonso , and was still a vassal of the Crown of Aragon , so he felt the need to repay the Crown . He accepted the pope 's pleas to go to Italy and aid Ferdinand . Skanderbeg 's stated reasoning was twofold : he wanted to remain loyal to his ally and he wanted to prevent an Angevin takeover of Naples since they had maintained friendly relations with the Turks . Skanderbeg also feared that if the Angevins took Naples , they would turn to Albania where they had previously maintained a kingdom . On the other hand , before undertaking any action against the Angevins , he took measures to soften relations with Venice . Seeing that Southern Italy was locked in conflict , Venice no longer feared an Aragonese @-@ Albanian alliance and the Senate decided to take a friendlier approach in Albanian @-@ Venetian relations . Meanwhile , Pope Calixtus III had died and was succeeded by Pope Pius II . Sensing that war would soon begin , Pius tried to convince Giovanni Orsini , Ferdinand 's main rival , to settle his differences with the King . The French King , Louis XI , took up the Angevin stance and , in the hopes of convincing Pius to allow the French takeover of Naples , proposed the repeal of the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges which undermined the pope 's power and he even declared that he would be willing to lend 70 @,@ 000 men for the planned papal crusade . Pius , however , was wary of insincerity and disregarded these proposals . A further effort to deter Skanderbeg 's landing was made by Sigismondo Malatesta , the Lord of Rimini and Italy 's most feared petty tyrant , who had tried to invite Mehmed to Italy with a detailed map of the Adriatic if Ferdinand sent for the Albanian . The manuscript , however , never reached the sultan and fell into Pius ' hands .

= = = Albanian situation = = =

Constant news of Ottoman campaigns against Bosnia and Morea but not against Albania seemed to suggest to Skanderbeg that Mehmed II had been considering an armistice with Skanderbeg . The latter took advantage of this lull in the fighting by preparing for his voyage to Italy and by securing his northern frontiers from a possible attack by Skanderbeg 's elusive ally in northern Albania , Lekë Dukagjini , who had been trying to expand his realm by reaching an agreement with the Turks . In order to curb his ambitions , Skanderbeg seized Shat Fortress and presented it as a gift to Venice . Skanderbeg then established an alliance with Venice against Dukagjini , while Dukagjini was strengthening his Turkish alliance . The new pope issued a bull against Dukagjini , giving him fifteen days to break his alliance with the Ottomans and to reconcile with Skanderbeg , or be subject to interdiction ; Dukagjini conceded and chose the former option . He then reestablished his alliance with Skanderbeg and Venice and accepted all of its losses .

Pius II continued to support Skanderbeg , but did not provide him as much financial aid as Calixtus had since he believed that Skanderbeg 's military skill and his soldiers ' aptitude for battle were enough to hold back the Turkish armies . However , the pope still considered Skanderbeg 's assistance essential for his plans for an anti @-@ Ottoman crusade . In 1459 , after Mehmed II completed his conquest of Serbia , Ottoman envoys appealed for a three @-@ year armistice between Skanderbeg 's Albania and the Ottoman Empire . The sultan 's purpose was to distance Skanderbeg from the pope 's crusade as he believed the crusade 's only hope for success was

Skanderbeg . In order to give Albania a break from fifteen years of continuous Ottoman invasion , Skanderbeg considered accepting the proposal but he had to get the pope 's approval . Pius did not allow such an agreement and began to doubt Skanderbeg 's loyalty . As the Ottomans were operating in the Western Balkans , Pius feared that the Ottoman soldiers would break the truce and pour into Albania . In order to regain the pope 's trust , Skanderbeg did not agree to the peace . Skanderbeg , nevertheless , was disappointed by Rome 's response and he responded by not participating in the Council of Mantua which was held to plan the future crusade . The Council ended in failure , signifying that Skanderbeg would receive no help from the West . He thus sent ambassadors to the pope saying that he would only be willing to land in Italy if a ceasefire with the Turks were arranged , something which Rome soon allowed .

Before sending his men to Italy , Ragusa (Dubrovnik) was to receive Skanderbeg 's envoy on 9 June 1460 . He requested the city 's support for the transport of his warriors to southern Italy over the Adriatic . Venice was not consulted since they pursued their own interests in Italy , whereas Ragusa held close economic relations with the Crown of Aragon . Meanwhile , Skanderbeg sent Martin Muzaka to Rome where he presented Pius with Skanderbeg 's plans , and Pius in turn notified Ferdinand . Pius then ordered Venice to guard the Albanian coastline . Skanderbeg then decided to send a troop of his men while he remained in Albania . In mid @-@ June 1461 , Skanderbeg agreed to a ceasefire with Mehmed who used this time to finally conquer Trebizond (Trabzon) in the northeastern part of modern Turkey . The truce was agreed to last for three years .

= = First landings = =

On 17 September 1460 , Skanderbeg sent 500 cavalry to Barletta in Apulia under the command of his nephew , Constantine , who at the time was 22 or 23 years old . The battles for the Crown of Naples up to that point had been minor with not much more than one @-@ thousand troops per belligerent . Ferdinand 's Neapolitan army as a whole stood at 7 @,@ 000 men . The addition of 500 Albanian cavalry , even though they were not cuirassed like their Italian counterparts , increased his force 's effectiveness . By this time , Ferdinand had lost most of his territory , and was left with some fortresses in Apulia and the area surrounding Naples . The Angevins were swiftly approaching Naples and Ferdinand prepared a counteroffensive . He first secured what he had by putting Roberto del Balzo Orsini in command , but Orsini 's incompetence held up the Neapolitan army . By this time , Skanderbeg 's men had already arrived , and Ferdinand commenced his offensive . Albanian light @-@ cavalry warfare was first noted here for its swiftness and effectiveness where they were reported to travel 30 ? 40 miles (48 ? 64 km) per day as opposed to the Italian cavalry which could only travel 10 ? 12 miles (16 ? 19 km) . The Albanians were encouraged by Ferdinand to fight in their traditional manner and to raid the territory ; Ferdinand informed Francisco Sforza that the Albanians had been devastating Apulia and taking whatever loot they could . These events worried the Angevins and prompted Giovanni Orsini to try to stop Skanderbeg from pouring his men into Italy . René d 'Anjou had been particularly surprised by Skanderbeg 's action since he believed that he had never offended the Albanian .

= = Orsini ? Skanderbeg correspondence = = =

Giovanni Orsini was the Prince of Taranto and Ferdinand 's fiercest rival . He had been , however , Alfonso 's faithful ally and had developed an admiration for Skanderbeg and his campaigns in Albania . After Skanderbeg had sided with his rival , Orsini allied with the Angevins and refused to recognize Ferdinand as King of Naples . He then sent a letter to convince Skanderbeg to pull his men out of Italy arguing that Ferdinand 's fortunes were hopeless , that Skanderbeg 's fame would die out after his supposed debacle , and that an alliance with René would be much more rewarding than an alliance with Ferdinand . Skanderbeg 's letter in response , dated to 10 October 1460 , stated that he was not a condottieri looking for fortune , but a mature man looking to help his ally . Furthermore , he sent another letter to Ferdinand assuring him his loyalty . Another letter was sent to Pius assuring him that the Albanians were fit for battle in Italy , something the Italian rulers did not

believe . The letters elucidate Skanderbeg 's political motives behind his Italian expedition , presenting himself as a noble ally , and also illustrate the influence of the Renaissance in Skanderbeg 's court . They also served a psychological purpose to intimidate Ferdinand 's rivals : Skanderbeg compared himself to Pyrrhus of Epirus of antiquity who marched into Italy to defend the Greek city @-@ states from Roman expansion .

= = = Neapolitan counteroffensive = = =

By October 1460 , Ferdinand was able to recapture his western territories from Capua to Beneventum . In his eastern frontier , however , his enemies remained at large . The most dangerous among them was Piccinino . Piccinino had undertaken the task of blocking papal and Neapolitan troops en route to Apulia . Since Roberto Orsini , the man left in charge of the east and Giovanni Orsini 's brother who had remained loyal to Ferdinand , was deemed incompetent , Ferdinand invited Constantine to Naples , offering him a leading role in an operation against Piccinino . Along with Constantine 's cavalry , Francesco del Balzo , the Duke of Andria who had remained loyal to Ferdinand , managed to defeat Ercole d 'Este in Gargano . They then had control over the custom @-@ duties gathered there which brought 30 @,@ 000 ducats annually from which most of Piccinino 's pay came . The fighting continued for three months after which Constantine and Ferdinand were able to regain some lost territory . Piccinino prepared his own counteroffensive , along with Giovanni Orsini 's men , laying siege to the main castles . A fierce battle soon erupted over Venosa on 28 May 1461 where the Albanian cavalry took part . Ferdinand abandoned the city and fled back to Apulia . Near Troia , he met Skanderbeg 's ambassador , Gjokë Stres Balsha , who informed him that Skanderbeg was ready to land in Italy as soon as the proper galleys were provided .

= = Skanderbeg 's expedition = =

= = = Preparations and Ragusan voyage = = =

Before leaving for Italy , Skanderbeg needed to accumulate the appropriate finances . Pius ordered the Diocese of Dalmatia to give a third of what it had raised for the forthcoming crusade to Skanderbeg . The pope also ordered 1 @,@ 000 florins to be given to Skanderbeg from the Vatican 's funds . The Ragusan banks held this amount , but due to the threat of an Ottoman invasion , they refused to continue funding the crusade ; Stefan Vuk?i? of Zeta warned that the Ottomans would soon move into Dalmatia and Albania . They were thus reluctant to fund Skanderbeg 's expedition to Italy . Due to issues of finance and the lack of large ships (he had , however , received several smaller ships to transport his troops) , Skanderbeg 's arrival was delayed while Ferdinand was under siege in Barletta . Before the siege began , however , Ferdinand sent four galleys to the Albanian shores where Skanderbeg and his men were waiting . Skanderbeg had meanwhile sent an unnamed captain to his eastern frontiers to guard against an Ottoman attack and left his wife , Donika , in charge of his affairs .

A Venetian ambassador on his way from Constantinople reported that Skanderbeg had assembled 1 @,@ 000 cavalry and 2 @,@ 000 infantry along with several papal and Neapolitan ships at Capo @-@ di @-@ Lachi (Albanian : Kepi i Lagjit) near modern @-@ day Kavajë . He was still awaiting a supply of grain and two Neapolitan ships , however , so he continued to wait . On 21 ? 22 August 1461 , the four galleys sent by Ferdinand arrived . He boarded soon thereafter but he did not send his entire force directly to Apulia . He sent Gjokë Balsha (who had returned from Italy) with 500 cavalry and 1 @,@ 000 infantry to the besieged Ferdinand , whereas Skanderbeg himself went to Ragusa to convince its rectors there to give him his needed funds . Balsha 's men landed in Barletta on 24 August 1461 . The Angevin forces , among whom was Giovanni Orsini , feared that Skanderbeg himself was the leader of this force , so they lifted the siege of Barletta immediately . Balsha then informed Ferdinand that Skanderbeg would arrive after his voyage to Ragusa .

Ferdinand felt that Skanderbeg 's personal involvement was essential and began to worry when he did not come in two days , as Balsha had promised .

Skanderbeg reached Ragusa on 24 August 1461 along with the Pal Engjëlli , the Archbishop of Durrës . His men stayed on the ships anchored in the harbor while he went into the city . Due to papal pressure , the Ragusans had reconsidered Skanderbeg 's requests . His fame was visible when he walked through the city @-@ gates and the population poured into the streets to see him . He had been greeted with a ceremony and a tour of the city inspecting its walls and weaponry . He then received the financial sum he had come for . His men were also supplied with food for their coming campaign . His popularity allowed him to be well @-@ kept by the Ragusans where the largest Albanian community outside of Albania was present . On 29 August 1461 , Skanderbeg set off for Apulia , but a storm forced him to anchor off a Dalmatian island . On 3 September 1461 , Skanderbeg finally reached Barletta .

= = = Skanderbeg in Italy = = =

Even though they lifted the siege of Barletta upon seeing Skanderbeg 's approaching men the week before , Angevin forces remained active . Once Skanderbeg arrived , Ferdinand put him in command of the fortress of Barletta whereas the King himself went to Ariano Irpino . Once left in command of the fortress , Skanderbeg moved against Ferdinand 's rivals . Among them were Giovanni Orsini , Jean d 'Anjou (the Duke of Calabria) , Piccinino , and Francesco del Balzo . They had stationed themselves in Andria , where the Albanian assaults continued . The Albanian cavalry 's light armament , swift horses and loose ranks allowed them to quickly overcome the more heavily armed Italian cavalry , which fought in tight formations . In one of their operations , an Albanian warrior captured Alois Minutolo , the lord of the Castle of Monte Sant 'Angelo who was imprisoned in the Fortress of Barletta . Three years later , Ferdinand would present Skanderbeg with the castle as a token of his gratitude .

Ferdinand 's opponents , under Piccinino 's main command , tried to open battle with Skanderbeg , but due to the combined strength of Albanian and Neapolitan forces , they withdrew from the Andrian fields to Acquaviva delle Fonti . News of Piccinino 's retreat reached Venice who sent a message to Francisco Sforza . Skanderbeg then marched to Taranto , where Giovanni Orsini was prince . Orsini tried again to dissuade Skanderbeg from marching against him , but Ferdinand was wary of Orsini 's faithfulness , so Skanderbeg continued raiding Orsini 's territory . He split his army into three parts , one under Moisi Arianit Golemi , the other under Vladan Gjurica , and the last under his command . He led attacks against Ferdinand 's enemies in three directions without halt , thoroughly exhausting them . During the month of October , Skanderbeg continued to pillage Orsini 's territory from his bases at Barletta and Andria since the Angevins were not present ; Ferdinand meanwhile mopped up in Calabria , where he recaptured Cosenza and Castrovillari . At this point , Orsini asked Skanderbeg for a truce which the Albanian rejected . On 27 October , Skanderbeg reported that he had captured the town of Gisualdo . Piccinino then asked Skanderbeg to discontinue his campaign which Skanderbeg exuberantly accepted , believing that peace was near .

Piccinino , however , did not seek to maintain the agreement as one of his deserters reported . Upon learning this , Skanderbeg decided to open battle with Piccinino 's men . After feeding his men and preparing his horses , Skanderbeg set off by moonlight for the Angevin camp . He found the place empty , however , since one of Piccinino 's men had already informed Piccinino on the Albanians ' intentions . Skanderbeg then returned to Barletta where he was reinforced by Ferdinand and his men . He then split his army into two , one under Alessandro Sforza 's command , the other under his , and he approached Troia . Jean d 'Anjou and Piccinino were stationed in Lucera , however , eight miles from Troia . Knowing that battle would come between Troia and Lucera , Skanderbeg set out by night to capture Seggiano , a mountain lying between the two cities , where he stationed some of his men to protect it . Thence , his men could find refuge in case of defeat . Piccinino had the same objective in mind and set out to capture the mountain , but instead met Skanderbeg 's men . He thus kept his men in order for the coming battle . The next day , the two

armies met . The battle lasted until dusk , but Jean 's men suffered a serious defeat and he was forced to flee . Piccinino then retreated from his campaigns . He went northwards where he joined Sigismondo Malatesta and 200 of his men to launch assaults on the papal state .

Skanderbeg 's next task was to recapture Trani , the second most important point in Apulia , aside from Barletta . He succeeded in capturing the commander of the garrison , Fuscina de Foja , who had rebelled against Ferdinand . Fuscina was outside the walls of Trani with sixteen men when Skanderbeg saw him and surrounded him and then tried to convince him to abandon Orsini , whereby Fuscina refused for pecuniary reasons . On the morning of 28 December 1461 , with Fuscina 's pleas , Gracciani , the vice @-@ commander of the garrison , surrendered Trani . Both Fuscina and Gracciani , however , refused to hand over the garrison 's munitions . Skanderbeg threatened to imprison them if they did not surrender what they were asked to , forcing the two to hand over Trani 's stores . After weeks of marauding , Skanderbeg and his Aragonese colleagues joined Alessandro Sforza 's men . They then yielded all of the fortresses that they had recaptured to Ferdinand .

= = Aftermath = =

Seeing that their fortunes were dwindling , Ferdinand 's rivals tried to settle for peace with Francisco Sforza . Ferdinand sent Skanderbeg as an intermediary where Giovanni Orsini and Piccinino offered peace if paid 150 @,@ 000 and 110 @,@ 000 ducats respectively , something that Ferdinand refused . This was one of Skanderbeg 's last personal actions in Italy . He stayed in Apulia for another month until January 1462 when he returned to Albania , leaving his soldiers in Italy . His reason for leaving Italy is not clear , but it is believed that at that time Mehmed was preparing his campaign against Hungary , something which could be turned against Albania . On his return route , he again visited Ragusa , where he was likewise welcomed as a hero . He wanted to set off for Albania immediately , but bad weather forced him to stay . He was offered supplies by the Ragusan Rectors , suggesting that he wished to continue to Albania via land , but instead , after ten days in Ragusa , he sailed by ship to Albania . Before leaving , he purchased grain from Sicily for his soldiers in Apulia .

The war over the Crown of Naples continued for several more months after Skanderbeg left . It is not known if Albanian warriors fought in the ensuing battles . In August 1462 , Ferdinand achieved a decisive victory at Orsara . Skanderbeg 's expedition made him famous throughout Italy . In his book , *De Bello Neapolitano* (English : *The Neapolitan War*) , Iovianus Pontanus sees the Albanian landing as essential to Ferdinand 's victory : their quick maneuvering and swift assaults virtually immobilized the Italian warriors . Skanderbeg 's expedition succeeded in lifting the Siege of Barletta , capturing Trani through a ruse , forcing the Angevins to turn from an offensive to a defensive strategy , and devastating the land to the point where its inhabitants and Giovanni Orsini were forced to submit to Ferdinand , even allowing Ferdinand to safely attend the wedding of Antonio Piccolomini , Pius II 's nephew . Moreover , the campaign was instrumental in securing the Neapolitan kingdom for Ferdinand .

For his services , Ferdinand awarded Monte Sant 'Angelo to Skanderbeg where many of his men soon settled . They settled fifteen villages in the rolling landscapes to the east of Taranto . His return to Albania was greeted as a triumph by his followers . Despite the jubilation , however , Skanderbeg began to prepare for war . On 7 July 1462 , the Turkish army resumed its campaigns in Albania . The first major engagement was at Mokra on 7 July 1462 . In the following Macedonian campaign in August of the same year , Skanderbeg defeated three Ottoman armies in one month . On 27 April 1463 , Skanderbeg and Mehmed signed a new peace treaty , but later , on 9 September 1463 , Skanderbeg signed an alliance with Venice which had been preparing for war against the Ottomans . On 12 October 1463 , Pius grew confident enough to declare his crusade against the Ottoman Turks which Skanderbeg joined .