

## = Siege of Svetigrad ( 1448 ) =

The Siege of Svetigrad began on May 14 , 1448 when an Ottoman army , led by Sultan Murad II , besieged the fortress of Svetigrad ( now Kodër ) . After the many failed Ottoman expeditions into Albania against the League of Lezhë , a confederation of Albanian Principalities created in 1444 and headed by Skanderbeg , Murad II decided to march an army into Skanderbeg 's dominions in order to capture the key Albanian fortress of Svetigrad . The fortress lay on an important route between Macedonia and Albania , and thus its occupation would give the Ottomans easy access into Albania . The force prepared by Murad was the largest force with which the Ottomans had ever attacked Skanderbeg . Murad planned to take the fortress , march into the Albanian interior , and capture the main citadel of Krujë , thus crushing the Albanian League .

At the same time , Skanderbeg had been at war with Venice . Realizing the magnitude of his challenge , Skanderbeg attempted to relieve the garrison by engaging in skirmishes with the Ottoman army . His forces succeeded in inflicting heavy casualties on the Turkish forces through guerrilla @-@ style attacks . Efforts were made by Skanderbeg to use intelligence forces , operating as far as Constantinople , to gather information on Murad 's plans of action . Meanwhile , near Scutari , he had been able to defeat a Venetian force and managed to considerably weaken the Venetian presence in Albania . Despite these efforts , on July 31 the garrison of Svetigrad surrendered due to a cut @-@ off in the water @-@ supply to Svetigrad . The garrison was spared and a force of Ottoman Janissaries was stationed inside the fortress instead . Two years later , Murad would march against Krujë , only to suffer a heavy defeat .

## = = Prelude = =

In 1444 the major princes of the Albanian Principalities , which up to that point had been vassals of the Ottoman Empire , united and formed the League of Lezhë , an anti @-@ Ottoman confederacy under Skanderbeg 's lead . As a result , the Ottoman Empire sought to crush the League and re @-@ establish control over Albania . As of 1448 , all Ottoman expeditions into Albania had failed and Murad II chose lead a force in person into Albanian territory and fragment the League . The sultan decided to capture the fortress of Svetigrad . This fortress served the strategic purpose of protecting the Albanian eastern frontier , while also allowing the Albanians to launch their own assaults on Ottoman territory . In late 1447 , war began between Venice and the League , but had not yet escalated into full @-@ scale conflict . Skanderbeg had declared war on Venice as a result of a diplomatic impasse . This left him open to invasion from the East .

Albanian intelligence groups informed Skanderbeg ? the main leader of the revolt ? that a large Ottoman army was preparing to march into Albania , the number of which was reported by some as being as high as 170 @,@ 000 . This army , however , is likely to have contained no more than 80 @,@ 000 soldiers . Nevertheless , Murad marched his army into Monastir . Skanderbeg urgently called for material aid Venice . The answer , however , was negative . Instead , the only aid received came from the Neapolitans and the Ragusans . Nonetheless , Murad soon marched into Ohrid and Black Drin valley , traveling near Svetigrad . In response , Skanderbeg strengthened the garrisons of Krujë , Strelitshi , Svetigrad , and Berat by ordering the populations around these fortress to take up arms .

Shortly before the Ottoman siege began , Skanderbeg positioned himself , and 4 @,@ 000 cavalry , 7 miles ( 11 km ) from the Turkish camp . The force also included 8 @,@ 000 other soldiers . Skanderbeg ordered that no campfires should be lit in order to keep his position secret . Moisi Arianit Golemi and Muzaka of Angelina were ordered , with thirty horsemen , to dress as peasants and enter the fortress . The plot was discovered , however , and the company was attacked , but the attackers were driven off . Upon returning to the main Ottoman camp , one of the commanding pashas saw that this was one of Skanderbeg 's plots and sent 4 @,@ 000 horsemen to find out where Skanderbeg was camping by following Moisi 's band . Moisi led the Ottoman force into a valley , and Skanderbeg , who was ready for such an enterprise , surrounded the valley with his forces . When the Ottoman force was within distance , the Albanians sprung the ambush and the

Ottoman force was annihilated . This happened on May 14 , 1448 , after which Murad ordered the siege to begin .

= = Siege = =

= = = Ottoman arrival = = =

Murad 's force contained approximately 80 @, @ 000 men and two cannons , which could fire 200 pounds ( 91 kg ) balls . His army contained a fresh corps of Janissaries , and 3 @, @ 000 debtors and bankrupts fighting to regain their freedom . The Count of Gurrice persuaded Skanderbeg to incorporate a scorched earth strategy , by destroying all supplies that might be used by the Ottoman army . The Ottoman force paraded around the fortress and offered 300 @, @ 000 aspras ( Turkish currency ) to those who would open the gate and let the Ottoman army in the fortress without a fight . The heralds proposing these offers went into the fortress at night time and the garrison commanders gave them a splendid dinner , so that they would get the impression that the enemy was well prepared for a lengthy siege . After the dinner their offers were rejected and they were sent back to the Sultan . The size of the Ottoman army troubled Skanderbeg because of the effects it could have on the morale of his soldiers and on the local population which supported the princes . Skanderbeg thus moved from village to village , disguised as a common soldier , and invoked the fighting spirit of the population . As a result of this activity , the local chieftains agreed to fight the Ottomans and persuaded Skanderbeg to draw up his plans in concert with theirs .

= = = Albanian guerrilla attacks = = =

To relieve the garrison of Svetigrad , Skanderbeg continually harassed the Ottoman army . Many of these attacks had been surprise ambushes of isolated Ottoman forces . Hoping to evade Ottoman patrols , Skanderbeg moved towards the Ottoman camp . On June 22 , Skanderbeg led a night attack on the Ottoman camp which disillusioned the Ottoman soldiers who had been expecting a quiet campaign . Soon after , when the besiegers were taking their afternoon naps , Skanderbeg sent Moses with some men , again dressed as peasants , inside the Ottoman camp to reconnoiter for a future assault . Skanderbeg spoke to his troops , encouraging them not to take booty from the camp as this might give the Ottoman forces time to react and 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 .

= = = Stalemate = = =

The fighting had reached a stalemate and Murad contemplated his next move . He was advised to pillage the countryside , but the surrounding fields had already been burned by Skanderbeg . The sultan decided to stop chasing bodies of men into the forests to prevent further casualties . Mehmed , Murad 's son , proposed leaving Svetigrad to strike at Krujë . Murad sternly rejected this , reasoning that the supplies to take Svetigrad would have been wasted and that Krujë would be more strongly defended than Svetigrad . The sultan thus decided to remain at Svetigrad in an attempt to starve the garrison into submission . Meanwhile , the garrison under the leadership of Peter Perlati made several successful sorties against the Ottomans , in order to ease the encirclement and strengthen his soldiers ' morale .

= = = Surrender of the fortress = = =

While campaigning against Venetian forces , Skanderbeg managed to inflict a serious defeat on July 23 , 1448 , seriously weakening Venetian power in Albania . The siege of Svetigrad continued , however , and Marin Barleti writes that the Ottomans bribed a soldier to throw a dead dog into the well of the fortress , forcing the garrison to refuse to drink out of it . It is more likely , however , that the Ottomans had cut off the water supply and induced the garrison to surrender . Given the circumstance , Perlati promised a surrender if the garrison were allowed a safe passage through the Ottoman lines . Prince Mehmed suggested that the garrison should be promised safe passage and then massacred , but Murad rejected his son 's proposal , in fear that the rebellion would only be intensified through such an act ; he decided to instead return the garrisoning force to Skanderbeg . On July 31 , 1448 the garrison of Svetigrad surrendered .

= = Aftermath = =

Once the fortress had been captured , Murad placed his own garrison of Janissaries and ordered his men to repair the walls . Perlati and his soldiers came to Skanderbeg , begging for mercy . Skanderbeg pardoned his soldiers for the surrender and even thanked them for holding out for as long as they did . Skanderbeg continued to shadow the Ottoman army as it headed back home in the hopes of dealing some serious damage , but his forces were not strong enough to risk provoking them . In October of the same year , Murad managed to inflict a serious a defeat on John Hunyadi 's forces in Kosovo . Skanderbeg had planned to join Hunyadi 's offensive with 20 @,@ 000 men , but he was not able to get there in time due to ?ura? Brankovi? blocking the roads to Kosovo .

The loss of Svetigrad allowed the Ottomans easy access into Albania from the northeast . They could now launch three coordinated invasions from south , southeast , and northeast into Albania . A few weeks after the siege , Mustafa Pasha led 15 @,@ 000 men into Albania , as requested by Skanderbeg 's Venetian rivals , only to be heavily defeated with Mustafa being captured . Skanderbeg tried to regain Svetigrad the next year , but he did not have the proper artillery to do so . He surrounded the fortress , but he realized that his position was hopeless and lifted the siege . In early 1450 , the Turks would take Berat through a night @-@ time stratagem and later that same year , Murad would besiege Krujë