

FALLING LIKE AN AUTUMN LEAF”: THE HISTORICAL VISIONS OF THE BATTLE
OF THE MARITSA/MERIÇ RIVER AND THE QUEST FOR A PLACE CALLED SIRP
SINDIĞI

by
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Во сеќавање на мојот татко Владимир Шопов
и на Душанка Бојаниќ Лукач

ABSTRACT

“FALLING LIKE AN AUTUMN LEAF”: THE HISTORICAL VISIONS OF THE BATTLE OF THE MARITSA/MERIÇ RIVER AND THE QUEST FOR A PLACE CALLED SIRPSINDIĞI

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This work is centered around the accounts narrating the Battle of the Maritsa/Meriç River (1371). Also known in the Turkish historiography as the *Sırpsındığı Zaferi* this Ottoman victory over a coalition of South-East European rulers (King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa) in the vicinity of Edirne is referred to in the historiographies in the region as an event that initiated the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. The following study will offer a broad discussion on the sources as well as studies referring to early Ottoman history and the Battle of the Maritsa River. My intention is to bring attention to the great variety of versions that narrate the event. I will discuss how the authors constructed all these visions on the memorable event. By comparing Ottoman, Slavic, Greek and western sources I will discuss how these accounts came into being, the chronology they use, their imagination of the battlefield etc. In my discussion I will include written, oral and visual sources and show how they intermingle in the available accounts on the Battle in 1371. The Battle of Maritsa River has been referred to by South-East European historiographies as a fulcrum of history. That is why a discussion on the nationalisms in South-East Europe and Turkey cannot be avoided in this work. I will also refer to the 20th century Balkan, Turkish and Western historiographies and see how they interpreted events as well as the impact of these interpretations on the consciousness of history in the region of South-Eastern Europe.

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ÖZET

"SONBAHAR YAPRAĞI GİBİ DÜŞMEK": MARITSA/MERİÇ IRMAĞI SAVAŞI'NA DAİR TARİHSEL GÖRÜŞLER VE SIRPSINDIĞI ADLI BİR YER ARAYIŞI

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Anahtar kelimeler: maritsa, savaş, sırpsındığı, tarihçilik

Bu çalışma Meriç Irmağı kıyısındaki savaş hakkında anlatılanlar üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Osmanlı Beyliği'nin birleşik Güneydoğu Avrupa hükümdarlarına (Kral Vukašin ve Despot Uglješa) karşı Edirne yakınlarında kazandığı ve Türk tarih yazınında Sırp sındığı Zaferi olarak bilinen bu savaştan, bölgedeki tarih yazınında Osmanlılar'ın Balkanlar'ı fethini başlatan vaka olarak bahsedilir. Aşağıdaki çalışma, erken Osmanlı tarihi ve Meriç Irmağı kıyısındaki savaş ile ilgili kaynak ve incelemelere yönelik geniş bir tartışma sunacaktır. Amacım, bu olay hakkında anlatılanların önemli ölçüdeki çeşitliliğine dikkat çekmektir. Bunu yaparken, yazarların bu olay ile ilgili tüm görüşleri nasıl kurguladığını da tartışacağım. Osmanlı, Slav, Yunan ve Batı kaynaklarını karşılaştırarak, kullandıkları kronoloji ve savaş alanı tahayülleri vs. üzerinde duracak ve anlatılanların zaman içerisinde nasıl oluştuğunu tartışacağım. Tartışmamda yazılı, sözlü ve görsel kaynakları kullanarak, 1371 yılındaki bu savaş hakkında bilinen rivayetlerin birbirlerine nasıl karışmış olduklarını göstereceğim. Meriç Irmağı kıyısındaki savaş Güneydoğu Avrupa historiografyasında tarihin bir dönüm noktası olarak anlatılmaktadır. İşte bu yüzden, bu çalışmada Güneydoğu Avrupa ve Türkiye'deki milliyetçilik tartışmalarının üzerinde durmamak mümkün değildir. Aynı zamanda, 20. yüzyıl Balkan, Türk ve Batı tarihçiliğinde bu olayların nasıl yorumlandığına ve bu yorumların Güneydoğu Avrupa tarihsel bilinci üzerinde ne gibi etkileri olduğuna da değineceğim.

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INTRODUCTION

How do people describe events and relate them to their experience? How do people imagine their past and relate it to what they project as future? These questions have for long made me think about the nature of historical events. Whenever I would have the Battle of the Maritsa River cross my mind, in the initial stages of my research, I would always picture my father discussing, what soon after turned out to be, his unfinished novel. His final writings modeled according to the assumption of “telling the history as you like it”, disclose the Battle to be a meeting point of long-forgotten brothers and not the conflict place between two different worlds (Turks and “us”) as asserted by national historiographies. From the little I knew back then about the Battle of the Maritsa River (1999) such assertions were obvious attempts to slant evidence concerning the event as there were no available documents purporting a blood-related connection between the soldiers fighting each other on the banks of Maritsa. This way of depicting events in the literature has been defined by Hayden White as postmodernist docudrama or historical metafiction. According to White, the depiction of events in this postmodernist docudrama is an:

abeyance of the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Everything is presented as if it were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary – realistically imaginary or imaginarily real, with the result that the referential of the images of events is etiolated.¹

This “new” understanding of how events can be depicted in literature, film etc, can be best illustrated with a passage from one of the novels by Italo Calvino. In “If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler” one of the main characters says that the novel/book which he would most like to read at the moment:

¹ Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, John Hopkins University Press, 1999, 67/68

should have as its driving force the desire to narrate, to pile stories upon stories, without trying to impose a philosophy of life on you simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like a tree, an entangling, as if of branches and leaves....²

How all of the stated afore can be instructive to the historian in telling his story? What could be the impact of such an understanding of the narratives and events on the way historians write about the past? In this work I will try to delineate the event outside the traditional approaches of writing political histories. Instead of seeing it as a piece in the chain of events progressing towards present, I will show that the various existing historical visions offer us a venue for debating historiographies, politics, nationalism, folklore, art etc. With this approach the Battle of the Maritsa River transforms from an object of observation into a subject which identifies those who narrate and discuss this event. My questions in this work such as when did people began to narrate the Battle of the Maritsa River and why, how the knowledge on this battle transferred from one narrative form into another, how people imagined the battlefield and why the moderns need to write and commemorate the Battle, do not attempt to reveal what really happened in 1371. Moreover in this work I will attempt to discuss as many interpretations of the battle in the past and present. I believe that the task of the historian is not to give a final judgment or a definition but to present the contours of each version of what people imagined as taking place at the banks of Maritsa.

The written work in your hands makes an overview of the versions that have through time been used by people to tell about their historical visions on the Battle of the Maritsa River. The scope of sources is not narrowed to contemporary ones to the Battle. Save for those, I have included latter accounts on the battle and even an interpretation of the event from the beginning of this century. The scope also covers different literary genres created at various points of time: Hagiographies of Christian saints and rulers, Ottoman dynastic histories, travel accounts, modern historical scholarship, history text-books, local histories, epic poems, etc. I have also included works of art and architecture dated back to times immediately following the battle such as fresco painting, mosque etc. Furthermore, in order to understand present-day historical consciousness on the Battle I interviewed people from regions in Turkey and

² Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter Night a Traveler*, trans. from Italian by Wiliam Weaver, New York:Vintage,1998, 92

Bulgaria (assumably the designated points where the battlefield is supposed to have taken place). The goal was to show the multiple realities of the event having each of them to add a contour on the overall painting - the Battle of the Maritsa River. Frequently in the text I will refer to authors writing the accounts on the Battle and the sources they used in order to understand the path of the story that changed its meaning when it was accommodated in a different narrative form or genre. Throughout the text the reader will frequently encounter translations from original sources. The intention was to present to the reader an opportunity for an immediate experience of accounts narrating the battle. Unfortunately, for some of the account on the Battle I only provided a partial translation. I hope that in near future I will have the rest of the remaining available sources translated and add them as an appendix to the work.

A Battle with Many Names

The various historiographies in the region use different appellations for the Battle. Bulgarian and Macedonian historiographies do not accept the Ottoman appellation for the Battle which is Serf Sıdıǵı (the destruction of the *Serfs*). These historiographies claim that king and Despot Uglješa ruled the territory populated by Bulgarians-in the case of the Bulgarian historiography and Macedonians as some Macedonian historians say. This why in their works historiographies from the above mentioned countries have not mentioned on the existence of a place called “the destruction of the Serbs” in the Ottoman sources. Bulgarian historiography refers to the event as the Battle at Černomen and Macedonian historiography usually refers to it as the Battle of the Maritsa River.³ “The Battle of the Maritsa River” is more or less

³ The earliest Slavic sources say that the Battle took place in Macedonia but the authors refer to Byzantine Macedonia – the region around the City of Edirne. Slavic sources from the 15th century onward locate the battlefield more accurately, i.e. on the banks of river Maritsa. Only a few of the sources from the end of the 15th century like the Anonymous histories and Chalkokondyles’s “Demonstration of Histories” mention that the Battle took place in the vicinity of Çirmen/Černomen. Later works took the information from these sources most probably of Ottoman origin. We will see later in the chapters that the chronology of the event was preserved in the Slavic and Greek sources but details on what happened at the battlefield was more familiar to the Ottoman cultural milieu. In the 17th century Slavic sources will borrow this information

accepted in the Western historiography, too. Serbian historians generally use this name and unlike their Bulgarian and Macedonian colleagues often mention that there is a site adjacent to Edirne called “the destruction of the Serbs”. This fits very well in the national historical narratives in which Serbian historians since the 19th century tell of the continuity of the Serbian people and culture from medieval period. The Turkish historiography uses the name *Sırp Sındığı Muharebesi/Zaferi* (the battle/victory called the “destruction of the Serbs”). The Ottoman sources from the 19th century instead of the Sırf/Serf Sındığı (as it is mentioned in the first Ottoman sources telling about the battle, last decades of 15th century) used the term Sırb which they were familiar with as the new state was created with the center in the former Ottoman city of Belgrade. In modern Turkish language the name acquired the final change by throwing the letter *b* instead of *p*. The Turkish historiography does not only use a different appellation for the battle but also a different date. Unlike the aforementioned South-Eastern European historiographies in which 1371 is taken as the date of the Battle, general Turkish historiography accepts the year 1363/4. Ottoman histories written by Uzunçarşılı and Danişmend (both works regarded to be reference for the Ottoman chronology),⁴ leaving out studies on the Battle produced by South-Eastern European historians, misinterpret the chronology.⁵ By exclusively using Ottoman sources they write that *Sırp Sındığı muharebesi* from 1363 and *Çirmen muharebesi* from 1371 are two different events. All of the Greek, Slavic and Ottoman sources word only one big battle in this period as it will be later in the text shown. As for the reason why Ottoman sources date the Battle in 1363, the third chapter will serve as a reference.

The Battle holds a prominent place in the national historical narratives from the region. It is addressed in historical text-books for elementary and high school students as the most important battle from the second half of the 14th century. Historiographies

from Western translations of the Ottoman sources and create the legend on the Battle of Maritsa (the story about the drowning etc.).

⁴ Ord Prof. İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt I, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1947, 66-70, 90/1; İsmail Hami Danişmen, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, Cilt I, Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1971, 42/3, 53

⁵ The general Turkish histories provide not only a wrong date for the Battle but also follows a wrong line for the narration of the event. Without consulting the available studies on the battle which consulted Slavic, Greek and Western sources, Turkish historians write of a crusaders’ army approaching the city of Edirne.

regard the Maritsa Battle, side by side with the Kosovo Battle from 1389 as crucial for the Ottoman advance in the Balkans. The paucity of sources contemporary to the Battle of the River Maritsa was not considered an ample reason to exclude this event from the 19th and 20th century process of reshaping historical consciousness of the people in South-Eastern Europe. I recollect well that my knowledge of the past while studying in elementary and high schools in Macedonia was examined with questions such as the date when the Battle of the Maritsa River took place or its importance for the “destiny” of the Macedonian nation. The 1371 Battle is defined by South-Eastern European modern scholarship as a fulcrum of history; the turning point of “our” fortunes and has been rendered as such in historical text books and popular histories from the region. The Battle was and is still an issue under consideration for national historical narratives and any discussion based on the Battle involves issues such as politics, nationalism etc. Unfortunately, during the past decades there were no works that could challenge the one-sided nationalistic discourse. My attempt to offer extant multiple versions of historical consciousness on the 1371 Battle is at the same time an effort to demystify the national myths both in the Balkans and Turkey.⁶

Most of the available historical sources give solely a brief account on the Battle. Therefore, there is almost no mentioning of the tactics employed,⁷ weapons used,⁸ number of soldiers confronted,⁹ etc. Researchers do not know of a contemporary

⁶ This work is not aimed at measuring the presence of the Battle in present day Turkish and South East European popular cultures. Yet, I remember that whenever I was asked by someone about my work during my studies in Turkey not everyone new of the Battle upon mentioning my research interest. Most of the people reminisced of school lessons mentioning the Battle but failed to retrieve further details. The same situation is persistent throughout the Balkans, too. Despite that, I am convinced that a cross-cultural study on the perception of the same events may turn out an exceptionally interesting topic. For example, in Turkey the Battle did not only find place in the history text-books but also in calendars such as the *Saatli Maarif Takvimi*, which used to be popular among senior generations. It is interesting that this year’s edition of the same calendar places the battle on 25 January 1366 and says that the army approaching Edirne was of crusaders. See. *Yilin Ansiklopedisi: Büyük Saatli Maarif Takvimi*, Istanbul Maarif Kitaphanesi ve Matbası, 2007

⁷ Most of the early Ottoman and Greek sources tell about a sudden Ottoman attack.

⁸ More on this topic in the chapter “The historical narratives and the epic poem”

⁹ For this period Byzantine sources tell that even an army with couple of thousands of soldiers was regarded as big. This is why I believe that the forces on both sides could not exceed the number of several thousand of soldiers.

document depicting the Battle. The very few contemporary sources of the Battle refer to the Battle in brief and rule out further need of explication. One could recall the famous statement of Georges Duby that in his judgment the most interesting evidence can be traced in what a period has not said about itself. By comparing this with a fish which is unaware of the fact that swims in water things which are omnipresent in a period are, accordingly, unknown to the period itself.¹⁰

In the first chapter of this work “The Event” I will make a brief overview on the 20th century understanding of events in western historical writing. I will write on the recent new approaches in writing on the history of events mainly purported by anthropologists. Unfortunately, the time and the space did not allow me to make a detailed research on the works on events in the field of Ottoman studies. I can just generalize that the “event” was not the most exciting topic for researchers and when on occasions such research did appear it was not a result of a re-thinking on the approach of the traditional positivist historiography.

Even though throughout my writing I will constantly refer to the late 19th and 20th century studies on the Battle of the Maritsa River, the second chapter “Historiographies on the Battle of the River Maritsa” will in full consider the studies in that time frame. In the same chapter I will also discuss the political history in South-Eastern Europe in the period preceding the Battle in a similar manner as the positivist historians did. Also I will introduce the sources that were used by modern historians as well as some of the accounts on the Battle written in Ottoman, Greek and Slavic and other languages written in the 15th and 16th century. At the end of the chapter I will explain why the Battle which in the “Christian” sources is known as “the Battle of the Maritsa River” is the same event which in the Ottoman sources is referred as the Battle at Sırf Sındığı.

In the third chapter I will focus on how the modern scholarship that worked on the Battle of the Maritsa River understood the identity of the participants of the Battle. Here I will examine some aspects of late 19th century Serbian and Bulgarian nationalisms as well as historiographies. Further in the chapter I will discuss an early 15th century Slavic source (The Life of Stefan Lazarević) and compare it with Ottoman accounts referring to the commander of the Ottoman sources. This very important

¹⁰ G. Duby and G. Lardreau, *Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft Dialoge*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), 97-98

Slavic source reports that the Battle was won by the Ottoman commander Avranız (Evrenoz) which contradicts the Ottoman histories. My intention here was not to persuade the reader that the Ottoman commander was Evrenoz but to show that any discussion on the early Ottoman history is not possible without taking into consideration the Slavic sources.

Even though modern Serbian historiography had established the chronology of events preceding the Battle as well as the date when the Battle took place I have decided to include review on the scholarship dealing with this “problem”. In the forth chapter I will refer also to the “inconsistence” between the Slavic and Greek sources on one side and the Ottoman on the other concerning the chronology of the events at the second half of the 14th century. As an example of this “inconsistence” I will examine the chronologies depicting the Battle of the Maritsa River. Previous scholars dedicating studies to this event have not regarded the inconsistency of the “Christian” and Ottoman chronologies. Their positivist approach as well as the lack of knowledge of Ottoman and Turkish meant that Ottoman sources may be virtually discarded as “relying” accounts on the event. However, in this chapter I will propose possible theory why the Ottoman sources give a different date for this event. How the Ottoman accounts have been crafted is also a very important question that may answer questions on the changing Ottoman historical vision at the end of the 15th century. At the end of this chapter I will make a reference to the monuments that are mentioned in the Ottoman sources as being built immediately after the Battle. I will examine whether they can assist the researcher in establishing the chronology of events from the early Ottoman history and also propose other ways of writing about them.

The chapter “The Memory of a Place” discusses various accounts that describe the battlefield which in the Ottoman sources from the end of the 15th century is called Sırf/Serf Sındığı (The routing of the Sırf/Serfs). In the beginning I will discuss whether the present-day sub-district Sırpsındığı (The routing of the Serbs) is the location which the Ottoman sources describe as the battlefield. Beside the Ottoman, Slavic and Western accounts, in this chapter I will refer to the present-day “oral histories” of the people leaving in the sub-district Sırpsındığı in Turkey and the citizens of Svilengrad in Bulgaria – the site which historical accounts point as the battlefield. A detailed comparison of sources and interviews with the people in Sarayakpınar- the center of the sub-district Sırpsındığı will show that the place has nothing in common with what Ottoman sources describe as the battlefield. The naming of this region north of Edirne

as *Sirpsindiği* in the 1920s and the construction of a monument commemorating the Battle in 1990s was a result of the importance that this event had acquired in the national historical narratives. I will make detailed analyses of some of the earliest Ottoman accounts on the Battle mentioning a “forest” as the site of the battle-field. My intention will be to establish whether such forest existed at the time of the Battle by comparing the former account with Western and Slavic sources as well as by a detailed research of the toponyms of the region. In this chapter I will show that it is not enough for a historian to compare the written accounts but also to make field-research in the region pertaining to the research topic. What follows in the remaining part of the chapter is a discussion on the sites where according to Western travel accounts and Slavic sources we find the graves of the leaders of the Christian army king Vukašin and Despot Uglješa.

The last chapter discusses the relationship between the historical narratives depicting the Battle and the epic poetry in Slavic recorded in the 19th century. Here I have translated a rare example of an epic poem that mentions the death of king Vukašin. What follows in the rest of the chapter is a discussion on a source written in Greek contemporary to the Battle, Ottoman sources from the beginning of the 16th century and a Slavic source from the end of the 15th century. In all of them we will see that we can find resemblance to the epic poem. In this chapter I will refer to a fresco painting (painted several years after the Battle) that I believe is connected with the depiction of the Battle and the death of king Vukašin (V’lkašin, Volkašin) in the epic poem and some of the historical narratives. The purpose of including a visual representation when discussing historical narratives and epic poems is to propose new ways of researching the past where the historian uses various genres in their interpretations. At the end of the chapter I will refer to another epic poem that may be regarded as a version of the first one. Unlike the poem which I have translated, the second one (or the other version) was published in the first half of the 19th century and influenced the historical vision of the people in South-Eastern Europe. The story of the drowning of the Serbs which is found in this second version of the epic poem depicting the death of king Vukašin must have been a motive introduced in the folklore of the Slavic people in the Northern-Balkans in the 17th or 18th century. What I attempt is to follow the story on the Serbs’ drowning back to its original source which is most probably Ottoman accounts from the end of the 15th century.

One of the chapters that I have planned to write is on the poetics of the depiction of the Battle. However, insufficient timing and additional skills prevented me from following my plans in full. Having read modern studies on the Battle I could not fail noticing how their authors succeeded in creating an illusionary difference between the accounts narrating the very same event and managed that only by presenting conflicting facts. Authors have failed to refer to the literary elements with the help of which “facts” have been accommodated in the historical narratives. By analyzing the metaphors, synecdoche, etc we see one of the ways how the event was told.¹¹ When historians consider as much as possible approaches of analyzing how the event has been told it is than that we may understand what might have happened.

At the end of this introduction I would take up to explain some of the terms that will be used throughout my writing and which I account to lack the quality of being self explanatory. In the sources that I will quote the reader often encounters names such as Serfs/Serbian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek etc. However, I would like to bring to the reader’s attention that their present-day meaning differs from the one which the past bears. In most of the cases they represent dynastical, religious, regional, linguistic or other group affiliations of people and have nothing to do with present-day understanding of ethnicity and nationality. Unfortunately, nationalist as well as western historiographies usually fail to make this distinction and in the works referring to the history of the region the reader is left to assume of the existence of ethnical or national awareness among the people in Late Medieval Balkans. I do not want to be interpreted as one who denies peoples from this region their history. On the contrary, my opposition to the claims that from the time immemorial “we have not changed” does not represent the richness of world views among the people from this region living in the past. Throughout the text I will refer to the term such as Slavic language for the sources written before the 19th century. These texts have been regarded by the various nationalisms in the Balkans as being written in Serbian or Bulgarian languages. We have to remember that as codified languages Serbian and Bulgarian appear in the 19th century and the other South Slavic languages such as Macedonian in the 20th century. Before the 19th century we can not speak of any uniformity of the texts written in the

¹¹ The first line of the thesis’s title is taken from the description of the Battle written by Abdurrahman Hibri Efendi in 17th century see. *Enisü’l Müsamirin Edirne Tarihi* 1360-1650, Abdurrahman Hibri, çeviren Dr Ratıp Kazanıl, Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği, Edirne Şubesi Yayınları No: 24 Edirne Araştırma Dizisi: 14I, 153 – “Sonbahar yaprağı gibi Meriç nehrine dökülüb”

region of South-Eastern Europe and the most suitable way of designating these sources is by using the term Slavic language referring to Late Common Slavic. In the end I want to note that all the translations and images are mine if unless otherwise stated.

Chapter I

THE EVENT

Events, writes the famous French historian Georges Duby in his book on the battle on Bovines, “are like the foam of history, bubbles large or small that burst at the surface and whose rupture triggers waves that travel varying distances.”¹² In this fecund introduction of the work on one of the memorable events from the French Medieval history the author heralds the topic of his research and a definition of what his understanding of an event is. According to one of the greatest French historians of the 20th century and a member of the third generation of the Annales School it is the culture of 13th century France that can be examined when one reads the contemporary depictions of the Battle. For the author, the usage of historical sources depicting an event cannot tell us more about a confused milieu difficult to understand even for the most prominent participants. However, it reveals more about society and culture in Medieval France.¹³ In many ways Duby’s research dedicated to a single event

¹² Georges Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines: War, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi, Polity Press, 1990, 1-2

¹³ It is not coincidence that I have chosen to quote a historian known to belong to the third generation of the Annales School of historical thought. Duby’s view on the role of events in the “human experience” is similar with that of one of the founding fathers of the Annales School, Fernand Braudel, who was concerned with placing individuals and events in their context. Defining history of events as most superficial, Braudel says that events are just “surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides carry on their strong backs” see. Peter Brucke, *The French historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1990, 34/5. The third generation has been influenced by intellectual trends outside France and historians tried to combine the annales tradition and trends such as the history of popular culture, the new economic history, symbolic anthropology etc. We can see the influence of the new trends in Duby’s mentioning as part of the introduction to the book on the Battle at Bovines that a fascinating study of the consciousness of history could be done if someone measures the representation of this battle on various levels of present-day French culture. But the author repudiates the

represents a change in the general focus of historical thought in France and the West after the Second World War. The North-American historian Lawrence Stone in the article “The revival of the Narrative” (1979) defines Duby’s narration of a single event as something that “a few years ago would have been unthinkable.”¹⁴ There, Lawrence Stone refers to the eclipse of the narratives in the post Second World War era during which time historians were preoccupied with “the big why questions” and the “scientific history”.¹⁵

It seems that the field of Ottoman studies is “immune” to developments in the historical thought taking place in the Western historiographies. Recent works that discuss the 20th century Ottoman historiography do not even mention the state of eclipse of the narrative in works of researchers.¹⁶ The same can be said for the history of

former when saying that he is not familiar with methods and instruments to measure those representations which tell about the consciousness of history and says that he will examine traces from the Battle referred by historians as documents. For Duby it is only that these traces are tangible, delineable and measurable and by using such contemporary documents referring to the Battle he tries to illuminate the thirteenth-century French feudal society. The Annales school of historical thought influenced South-Eastern European and Turkish historiographies. I know of several prominent Ottoman historians from the Balkans who personally visited Fernand Braudel in France after the WWII and were warmly welcomed as well as advised on their works in progress. As for the Turkish historiography, the most famous is the example of Fuad Köprülü who was influenced by the works of the annales school even before WWII. Köprülü’s students, such as Ömer Lutfi Barkan, dominated the field of Ottoman studies after the WWII. Ömer Lutfi Barkan published in the Journal of the Annales school. See Ömer Lutfi Barkan. ‘La “Méditerranée” de Fernand Braudel vue d’Istanbul’, *Annales, E.S.C.*, 9 (1954), 189-200. The popularity of the Annales School in western historiography coincided with the rise of the Ottoman field of Studies from the second half of the 20th century. This certainly played a role in the questions that historians dealt with concerning Ottoman past and which were centered around Braudel’s “long terms” observed in economy, demography, taxations, etc. These topics have dominated the Ottoman field of study in Turkey, the Balkans as well as Western Europe and United States. Consequently, narratives (focusing and organizing the material in a chronological order or a single coherent story) and even to a lesser extent research on events have not served as most popular research topics among Ottoman historians.

¹⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a new Old History, Past and Present*, No.85 (Nov., 1979), 17

¹⁵ For a critic on Lawrence’s article see. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Revival of Narrative: Some Comments*, Past and Present, No.86(Feb., 1980), 3-8

¹⁶ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Approach to the Sources*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; The workshop- conference “Twentieth

events. Even specialists in the field of Ottoman studies discuss the historiographies in the Balkans and the Arab countries is a simple repetition of the old rhetoric employed by nationalist historiographies to approach the Ottoman past from their own ideological stances, respectively – thus blaming the Ottoman society for the setbacks in the 20th century modernization projects.¹⁷ A more comprehensive self-critic is necessary for the past and present scholarship in the field of Ottoman studies and not just a repetition of the old critique addressed to the nationalist historiographies. What kind of history do Ottoman historians write; how does it refer to present world trends and the past?

In the Introduction I stated that my intention in this work on the memorable event called the Battle of the Maritsa River is to present the great number of versions narrating the same event.¹⁸ I did not try to re-create “what actually happened” or put in different words, to extract the facts from various versions excerpted from the historical narratives and combine them into a single personal version. For my work, I was driven by the wave of criticism set forward in a number of recent works which strongly point at the distinction between facts and meanings. According to this, facts do not present a basis for arbitrating between the various versions of a same event. In the essay “The Modernist Event” Hayden White says that “facts are a function of the meaning assigned to events, not some primitive data that determine what meaning an event can have.”¹⁹ In other words, facts are determined by the meaning of the event which is a result of various ideological and political reasons. In this sense, every event in the historical

– Century Historians and historiographies of the Middle East Istanbul May 2002” - papers published in Mediterranean Historical Review, Jun 2004

¹⁷ Such generalization does not correspond with what the majority of works done by specialists say about the Ottoman past in the Balkans. In most of the cases historians outside the field or involved in writing popular histories and text-books should be blamed for the nationalistic views on the Ottoman past. For example, all the works on the Battle of the Maritsa River in the Balkan historiographies have been written by researchers in the field of Medieval or Byzantine studies.

¹⁸ The event is not what happened. The event is that which can be narrated. Feldman Allen, 1991. *Formations of Violence: The narrative of Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, in Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*, The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

¹⁹ Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in Mimesis Effect*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1999, 70

narratives is depicted by versions that do not constitute a unity from which facts need to be extracted. All of the variants exist independently from each other and in most of the cases for the narrators of the event it is only their version that depicts the reality which they do not usually experience as just another point of view. The various versions of the event came to be constructed by a different set of mental conditions dominant for the author writing the narrative and very often as a part of a series of other events that construct a specific historical consciousness and in a particular time with its own economical and political characteristics, etc. So we may say that various versions of an event do not address the same event. I think that each and every version of a particular event actually refers to a different event because the author writes with a particular historical consciousness and ascribes a brand new meaning. This kind of a reproduction of an event will continue as long as it is considered relevant to the current ideological, political discourse of individuals, groups or societies. And each time an event rises from the “ashes” it is the facts that will be invented in order to construct a new meaning.

This kind of understanding events forces the researcher to take a different stand when narrating an event which to a large extent should differ from what positivist historians did. There is no such way as the correct or wrong approach towards writing history. Instead, historians in their works should try to avoid on distinguishing between false and correct statements. This sort of historical understanding is very well depicted by Frenk Ankersmit in the reply to Professor Zagorin’s critic of postmodern historical writing. Ankersmit says that “we must focus our theoretical reflection on these ‘picture of the past’ and not on individual (subsets of) statements and on what they say about the past.”²⁰

Such historical writing puts the historian in a different relation to the historical problem such as the history of event. This can be illustrated with Golo Mann’s opinion on how historians should discuss events. According to Mann historians should analyze events from the position of a “better informed observer” while “swimming with the stream of events.”²¹ This sort of historical writing can be observed in the works of the

²⁰ F. R. Ankersmit, *Historiography and Postmodernism: [Reconsiderations]: Reply to Professor Zagorin*, *History and Theory*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Oct., 1990), 278

²¹ Peter Burke, *History of Event*, in *New Perspectives on Historical Writings*, ed. By Peter Burke, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, 239

anthropologists Renato Rosaldo and Richard Price.²² The works of the aforementioned represent the “historical turn” in the anthropology especially in North American scholarship. Rosaldo used Ilongot’s narratives as extended metaphor, a tool for pointing at the directions in which we should think about the events. In this way Rosaldo’s deftly analysis of events (using non-Ilongot sources, too) and their impact on the personal histories of individuals shows that Ilongot’s practice of reciting place names in the stories symbolizes their consciousness of history as “movement through space in which people walk along a trail and stop at a sequence of named resting places.” This will result with Rosaldo’s interpretation of Ilongot’s consciousness of history as “mapped onto the landscape”, events being told not chronologically with a help of a calendar but in terms of place-names. In this way the author showed that even so-called “primitive” societies have their own consciousness of history. Ilongot’s narration of events in this work is interpreted as essential cultural forms which contend the historiography in the West where events are understood as a simple manifestation of structures.

Another innovation that may influence historians’ understanding of events comes from Richard Price. When narrating events from Saramaka’s history, Richard Price uses two “voices”: the first one is the recorded stories of the people and at the bottom of the page is the voice of the historian who juxtaposes those stories and the referred events with western sources. The author is not in the role of a “negotiator” between the two. By this approach the author legitimizes both “voices” as a valid version of “the before now” and the events taking place then. Richard Price in his work legitimized the various viewpoints of the events which have a central place in his study of the history and society of Saramaka.²³

The Braudelian notion of the futility of events is attacked by anthropologists with interest in history. After Rosaldo’s and Price’s studies on events and historical consciousness it was Marshall Sahlins who argued the presence of a dialectical

²² Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting 1883-1974: A study of Society and History*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1980; Richard Price, *First Time: The Historical Vision of an African American People*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2002

²³ In 1990 Richard Price published the book *Alabi’s World* where the two voice “experiment” was “doubled”. In this work Richard Price writes with four ‘voices’: the Saramakans, the Dutch colonial authorities, Moravian missionaries and the author himself. Richard Price, *Alabi’s World*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990

relationship between events and structures.²⁴ Referring to Cook's arrival in Hawaii in 1778, the author ascribes an event the ability to reorder culture. Upon arrival Captain Cook is perceived by Hawaiians as their God Lono due to his power and arrival in the year associated with that divinity. Captain Cook did not depart from the identical place of his arrival since the changes in the culture caused by the contact with the British created a "new" Hawaii.²⁵ Sahlin's work is very instructive for future historians who are willing to abandon the inferior position of events as practiced by followers to the historical thought of the Annales School.

At the end of his essay "History of Events", Peter Burke concludes that historians such as Tawney, Namier, Febvre and Braudel rebelled against the traditional forms of historical narratives which dominated the period until the first decades of the 20th century. The rise of the interest to write structural history was succeeded by an eclipse of the narratives. However, Burke discerns a growing interest among many scholars today in telling a story as well as experimenting with various narrative forms. With the increasing popularity of narrative history, events too, become a resurgent theme for the historians. It is up to future studies to exhibit whether historians will follow the examples of the anthropologists mentioned afore or continue along Braudel's paradigm of the three-tiered historical time (in which events are just the surface disturbances).

Narrating event or writing the history of events ought to be one of the focus topics for historians specializing in the field of Ottoman studies. Such an approach may contribute to deconstruction of historical "myths" in nationalist historical narratives. In the 20th century in the writing about the Ottoman past specialists in the field were focus on the social and economic histories. It seems that the nationalist historical narratives were left the "room" to "experiment" with the narratives while the majority of the specialists in the field of Ottoman studies have been focus with other historical "problems".

The national historiographies in the region of South-Eastern Europe constructed a "myth" out of the Battle of the Maritsa River. It is the myth of the defeat of the brave

²⁴ Peter Burke, *History of Event*, in *New Perspectives on Historical Writings*, ed. By Peter Burke, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, 244/245

²⁵ As a result of the contact with the British the *tabu* system in Hawaii was abandoned.

Christian²⁶ leaders - king Vukašin and Despot Uglješa who resisted foreign invaders – the Turks. Such a construction had an implication on the politics in the region of South-Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th and throughout the 20th centuries. The events that even my generation lived through in 1990s in former Yugoslavia serve as a terrible reminder of how manipulation with those historical constructs can affect our present. Public opinion was mobilized with historical visions of a continuity of “the nation” from ancient or medieval times. Events such as the battles of the River Maritsa or Kosovo or the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans or the resistance by Skenderbeg against the Ottomans in Albania (15th century) served as the building blocks around which the historical consciousness of the people in the region was reshaped. According to the historiographies in the region the aforementioned events are the starting points of a chain of events that tell about the hardship of the people of South-Eastern Europe under Ottoman rule. They still serve the political elites in the region as a ground to mobilize public opinion in heated nationalist debates. What is most important, and equally dangerous, these national historical narratives exclude other historical visions on these events. Such “other” historical vision is found in the Ottoman historical narratives in which we read that the Battle in 1371 was not the beginning of a disaster. On the contrary, it was one of the most celebrated achievements of the Ottoman dynasty.

Finally, the “big” question is why should a historian undergo the trouble to write about an event? Keith Jenkins in his “memorandum” on postmodern writing of history²⁷ boldly contends that “nobody has a patent of the past, it can be used or ignored by everyone.”²⁸ For the first historian who dedicated an article on the Battle of the Maritsa River, the previous statement may sound as a symptom of madness. Stoyan Novaković

²⁶ In various occasions further in this work I will examine the historiography in the region and show that historians have not agreed on the “ethnicity” of the protagonists in the Battle. Various nationalisms in the region claim that the army opposing the Ottoman forces in 1371 belongs to their respective pantheon of heroes.

²⁷ Jenkins Keith, *Refiguring history: new thoughts on an old discipline*, London Routledge, 2003

²⁸ The author further exposes his opinion on the elusive character of the historical research by saying that: “Because the so-called past (the before now) does not exist ‘meaningfully’ prior to the effort of historians to impose upon it a structure or form; ‘the before now is utterly shapeless and knows of no significance of its own either in terms of its whole or its parts before it is ‘figured out’ by ‘us’.”

at the end of the 19th century believed that events which lead to the defeat of the Balkan “nations” by the “Turks” in the 14th and 15th centuries need to be studied as an example that will teach “us” how to defeat the old enemy (Turks) in the near future.²⁹ One can trace ideological motivation in Richard Price’s undertaking which led him to write his work on the 18th century events in Saramaka’s history; the author’s support of the Saramakas’s fight for human right among the reasons for the research.³⁰ This sort of “confession” on the ideological preference of the author is not very often recognized by professional historians as they often emphasize their supposed objectivity. When interpreting events, historians should also be concerned with the present day ideological and political consequences of their interpretations. A researcher should never forget how improbable it is to remain distanced from contemporary political, ideological or philosophical debates about certain events. However, the involvement in contemporary debates should not follow the line of Stoyan Novaković’s militaristic rhetoric. We may find Richard Price’s example to be of a more humanistic character.

Following the introduction on the treatment of events in historical researches the “big” question is how should future historians narrate events? Can we say that there is a “correct” or “wrong” way of narrating events? In the conclusion of his essay *History of Events*, Peter Burke says that the binary opposition between events and structures (exposed in Braudel’s historical writing) has been resolved by Marshall Sahlins in his writing about Hawaii.³¹ It seems that for Burke the task of the historian should be to investigate the relationship between events and structures and also to present multiple viewpoints. These multiple viewpoints to which Burke refers in his writing can be best illustrated with Ankersmit consideration on features of a historical writing. Ankersmit believes that if one version of the past prevails in a historian work readers are deprived from a view of the past. Only different perspectives safeguarded in various narrations provide readers the opportunity to observe the entirety of contours perpetuated by each

²⁹ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka: Istorijske studije o prvim borbama i najezdom turskom pre i posle boja na Kosovu*, Prosveta, Beograd 1933 (first edition 1893), 1-7

³⁰ This is very well explained in the preface of the 2002 edition of Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an African American People*, xi-xvi

³¹ Marshall. Sahlins. *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom*, Ann Arbor, 1981

view of the past.³² For this reason in the chapters that follow I will not attempt to approach the past as if looking at *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* but to present as many historical visions of this memorable event as possible.

³² F. R. Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic: A semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983, 240

Chapter II

HISTORIOGRAPHIES ON THE BATTLE OF THE MARITSA RIVER

What we know today about the Battle of the Maritsa River comes from the arduous work of 19th and 20th century historians from South-Eastern Europe. These scholars had an interest on late Medieval and Byzantine periods from the history of the region and when writing on the Battle of the Maritsa River had tested the accuracy of a number of documents referring to the chronology of events preceding the battle, the alliances formed, successes and failures of king Vukašin and his brother Uglješa. Most of the historical works written on the Battle included a detailed political history of the period preceding the Battle in 1371. They followed the carrier paths of king Vukašin and Despot Uglješa from being members of the court of the Serbian Emperor Stephen Dušan soon after his death in 1355 rising to the rank of a King and a co-ruler of the Serbian tsar Uroš - in the case of Vukašin, and his brother Uglješa becoming a Despot and an independent ruler of a political entity in South-Eastern Macedonia.³³ Researches were unable to determine the exact borders of the area they controlled but from the historical sources we understand that the two brothers were the most powerful rulers on the territory which only a decade before had been part of Stephen Dušan's Empire. King Vukašin controlled regions of western and central Macedonia (Skopje, Prilep, Bitola, Ohrid, Prespa, and Tikveš) as well as parts of southern Kosovo. His brother Uglješa controlled South-Eastern Macedonia with the center in Serrez and including the valleys

³³ Ragusan documents show that already in 1361 Vukašin was the most powerful person in the Serbian court see. Konstantin Jireček, *Srpski car Uroš, kralj Vukašin i Dubrovčani*. Zbornik Konstantina Jirečeka I, SAN, knj.326, Beograd, 1959, 34;. In 1365 Vukašin was proclaimed as a king and a co-ruler of the heir of Stephen Dušan, Uroš, and at the same time his brother received the title Despot see. G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, Beograd, 1965, 12; In Ragusan documents (1366) Uroš and Vukašin who had sent a joint delegation to Dubrovnik have the titles *dominus imperator Sclauonie* and *dominus rex Sclauonie*.

of the rivers Strimon (Struma) and Nestos, the Holy Mountain and areas west of Nestos which means that his territory was a borderland to the newly conquered Ottoman territories in Thrace.³⁴³⁵

The scholarship could not establish what really happened in 1371 when the two brothers advanced towards Edirne. We do not know of contemporary documents depicting the Battle which occurred in the vicinity of Černomen/Çirmen or present-day Svilengrad as there are only a few contemporary accounts that only briefly mention the Battle in 1371. The historian George Ostrogorsky who attributed for the most of what we know on the regions controlled by Despot Uglješa writes the following on the Battle in 1371:

we have to accept that even for the fateful Battle which took place on 26 September we do not know anything for sure as it is the case with the Battle at Kosovo, too. Besides the writing of the old Isaiah all the information on the Battle of the Maritsa River and the death of Uglješa and Vukašin come to us from the hands of latter writers.³⁶

Most of the studies on the Battle in 1371 have included a great number of documents referring to the attempts of Despot Uglješa for crafting an alliance with the Byzantines in order to undertake a military campaign against the Ottoman strongholds in Thrace.³⁷ In his article published in 1893 the Serbian historian Stoyan Novaković was among the first ones to define that the entire political activity of Despot Uglješa was being centered solely on the idea of a “great war against the Turks”.³⁸ In the decades to follow this hypothesis was supported by newly published documents and got its final shape in the work of the famous historian on Byzantine period George Ostrogorsky,

³⁴ G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 37

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 142/3

³⁷ It could be that even before the Battle of the Maritsa River some minor battles took place in western Thrace. Documents issued at the end of 1360s report attacks by the Ottomans on the Holy Mountain see. G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 128

³⁸ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka: Istorijske studije o prvim borbama i najezdom turskom pre i posle boja na Kosovu*, 184. The author explicitly affirms in the foreword to the book *Serbs and Turks 14th and 15th century* in which he re-printed the article on the Battle of the Maritsa River published the same year, that he was inspired to write on the situation of the Balkans during the Ottoman conquest of the region because the political situation at the end of the 19th century was similar.

quoted above. In his book “The Region of Serrez after the death of Dušan” Ostrogorsky gives a detailed account on the history of negotiation between Despot Uglješa and the Patriarchy in Constantinople which resulted with the reconciliation between the Patriarchy in Peć and the Patriarchy in Constantinople.³⁹ But if Uglješa hurried in 1368 to announce the reconciliation, the Patriarchy in Constantinople did that in May 1371, most probably as the result of the long absence of the Byzantine emperor John V who since 1366 was on a mission to the West in search for Western aid to stop the Ottoman advance.⁴⁰ In Ostrogorsky’s opinion the negotiations for reconciliation between the churches were just a prelude to a political agreement for a military alliance between Despot Uglješa’s state and Byzantium. In the summer of 1371 the Byzantine statesman Demetrios Kydones reports that Serbian envoys had arrived in Constantinople to offer alliance against the common enemy (Ottomans) and at the same time Ottoman envoys requesting Gallipoli to be surrendered back as their rightful possession.⁴¹ The Polish historian Halecky reports of a document issued by the Pope in the summer of 1371 in which we read that Genovians had sent a letter to the Pope in which they claim of the possibility of new Ottoman offensive soon to be expected.⁴²

On the activity of Vukašin in the months preceding the battle we learn from the late 19th century historical works of the Czech expert on South-East European history Constantine Jireček. One of the documents from the archives in Dubrovnik (Ragusa) shows that in the early summer of 1371 Vukašin with his son Marko was in the vicinity of Skadar/Shkodër preparing to attack the župan⁴³ Nikola Altomanović.⁴⁴ Most probably it was his response to the call of his brother Despot Uglješa that made King

³⁹ In the first half of the 1350s the Patriarch in Constantinople issued anathema against Stephen Dušan and the patriarch in Peć. The reason for the schism was the politic of Stephen Dušan to assign the newly conquered Byzantine territories under the Patriarchy in Peć.

⁴⁰ For the rule of the Byzantine Emperor John V Palaeologus see the excellent monograph written by Radivoj Radić, *Vreme Jovana V Paleologa (1332-1391)*, SANU knj. 19, Beograd 1993

⁴¹ G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 139

⁴² O. Halecki, *Un empereur de Byzance à Rome*, Varsovie 1930, 284-51

⁴³ Head of the administrative unit called Župa, a prominent feudal lord in Late medieval Balkans

⁴⁴ Konstantin Jireček, *Srpski car Uroš, kralj Vukašin i Dubrovčani*, 374

Vukašin to withdraw from the position in Skadar and join his brother's army in the military offensive against the Ottoman possessions in Thrace. It was there that Vukašin and Uglješa had lost their lives as their armies were defeated in the battle that researchers of Medieval and Byzantine periods define as the most important Ottoman victory until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.⁴⁵ The following year Byzantium became a vassal state of the Ottomans⁴⁶ and the Pope in a letter to the Hungarian king writes that he had heard of the news about attacks by "Turks" of some Greek regions, also that they had subjected several *magnatibus Rascia* (Raškan or Serbian notables) and had reached the borders of Serbia, Hungary and Albania posing threat to the Adriatic coast.⁴⁷

The Battle of the River Maritsa for the majority of historians specializing in the Late Medieval Balkans and late Byzantine periods is the culmination of the political actions that lasted decades before the decisive event in 1371. It was the pinnacle of decades - long turmoil created by the civil wars in Byzantium, the disintegration of Stephen Dušan's empire and the feuds among the "Serbian" nobility which after the death of the Serbian Emperor took over control from the central government and established independent political polities. Modern historians, especially the Serbian historiography, had characterized the ambitions of Despot Uglješa to fight the Ottomans as a continuation of the Stephen Dušan's ideas⁴⁸ to stop the Ottoman advance from the east. The outcome or the defeat on the battlefield in 1371 according to South-East European historians was a result of the incapability of the Christian polities in the region to craft a joint alliance against the enemy.

In the course of 19th and 20th centuries historians dedicated only few works on the Battle in 1371. In all of them the positivist historian had been focused on estimating the exact date, place, the numbers of the soldiers, the approach routes of the forces of

⁴⁵ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, Oxford 1968, 541; Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261-1453*, London, 1972, 286

⁴⁶ G. Ostrogorsky. *Byzance, etat tributarie de L'empire turc*, - ЗРВИ, 1957,49

⁴⁷ . Konstantin Jireček, *Srpski car Uroš, kralj Vukašin i Dubrovčani*, 378

⁴⁸ The Pope Urban VI is reported as granting to Stephen Dušan just before his death the title "capitaneus contra Turchos". See. G. C. Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantines during the reign of Tsar Stephen Dušan and his Succesors* (Washington D.C.) 1984, 53

Vukašin and Uglješa in the vicinity of Edirne, the ethnic composition of troops etc. In the course of my writing I will refer to some of the works because the historical vision of the modern historians is equally important as the historical documents and narratives that narrate the Battle in 1371.

The history of the Modern scholarship on the Battle of the Maritsa River goes back to the end of the 19th century. The first articles were those written by the Serbian historian Ilarion Ruvarac and Kovačević which determined the chronology.⁴⁹ For the first one the Battle took place in the summer of 1371 whereas the former historian proposed a more precise date - 26 September 1371.⁵⁰ In the last decade of the 19th century the Serbian historian Stoyan Novaković wrote a comprehensive article on the Battle by making an impressive review on the sources - Slavic, Greek and Ottoman.⁵¹ The same article was reprinted the same year in his popular book “Serbs and Turks in the 14th and 15th century” which discussed the political history of South-Eastern Europe during the Ottoman conquest.⁵² In the first years of the 20th century two articles had been published in Serbia. Jovan Mišković in 1900 used a report of a Serbian officer who inquired about the place called *Sirpsindigi* in the region of Černomen.⁵³ This short article is of great importance because when we compare the report of the Serbian officer with the writing of the Ottoman intellectual Ahmed Badi Efendi we learn that among the population in the region around the Ottoman town Cisir-i Mustafa Paşa in 19th

⁴⁹ Ruvarac. I, *Hronološka pitanja o vremenu bitke na Marici*, God, N.Č.III, 1879, 214-226

⁵⁰ Lj. Kovačević, *Nekoliko hronoloških ispravaka u srpskoj istoriji*, God.N.Č.III, 1879, 404-41; This date has been accepted by the majority of historians in South Eastern Europe.

⁵¹ Stojan Novaković, *Boj na Marici 1371 godine*, Ratnik XXVIII, 1893, 1-38; The author was a diplomat in Istanbul between 1886 -1892 and that is the place where he was able to look at the Ottoman sources. He does not give description on the Ottoman manuscripts that he used. For the life and work of Stoyan Novaković see the papers from the conference held in the Serbian Academy of Science and Art published in *Stojan Novaković, Ličnost i delo, naučni skup povodom 150-godišnjica rođenja (1842-1992)*, SANU, knj.25, Beograd 1995

⁵² Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka: Istorijske studije o prvim borbama i najezdom turskom pre i posle boja na Kosovu*, Izdanje Čupičeve zadužbine XXXIII, Beograd 1893

⁵³ Jovan Mišković, *Jedan Priloščić Maričkom boju*, Glas LXII/1900, 109-113

century there existed oral tradition concerning the battle in 1371.⁵⁴ In 1904 Jovan Tomić published the article in which various versions related to the death of Vukašin are discussed.⁵⁵ The author examined travel accounts reporting on some local legends about the death of Vukašin in the vicinity of Harmanli (Bulgaria) and also discussing in short on a Serbian epic poem which mentions the death of Vukašin.

In the first half of the 20th century several articles were published in Turkey. These works, however, only re-tell what Ottoman histories from 15th and 16th century tell about the event. The authors of those articles use the date which was found in Ottoman sources (1364) and neither used Slavic or Greek sources nor modern studies on the Battle. The most important is Nami Malkoc's article where for the first time in Turkish historiography we read that the battlefield called Sırpsındığı is in the vicinity of Svilengrad, Bulgaria and not in the Turkish subdistrict north of Edirne which during the 1920s had been named Sırpsındığı.⁵⁶

After the Second World War another wave of works on the Battle of the Maritsa River took place. The Yugoslavian war-historian Petar Tomac in 1956 wrote an article in which he tried to describe the war tactics and the strategy but his hypothesis was based on sources written centuries after the Battle.⁵⁷ A similar approach but with reference to other new sources⁵⁸ had been applied in the article by Gavro Škrivanić in 1963. Two years after Škrivanić's article George Ostrogorsky conducted in-depth analyses on the political actions of Uglješa at the eve of the Battle of the Maritsa River in the book "The region of Serrez after the death of Stephen Dušan". Even though this work does not refer explicitly on the Battle in 1371, significant part of the book was

⁵⁴ Ahmed Badi Efendi, Rıyaz-ı Belde-i Edirne, MS. Bayezid Genel Ktp 10393, fol. 106

⁵⁵ J. Tomić, *Motivi u predanju o smrti kralja Vukašina*, Sbornika po slavianovjedeniu, I, Sankt Peterburg 1904, 1-14

⁵⁶ Malkoç, N. *Sırpsındığı*. Askeri Mecmua, İstanbul (7), 105-122; Detailed discussion on the battlefield in the chapter "The Memory of a Place".

⁵⁷ P. Tomac, *Bitka na Marici*, Vojnoistorijski glasnik 1, 1956, 61-74; The author used later sources such as Mavro Orbini's "The Kingdom of the Slavs" (written in 1601). I will refer to this important work latter in the text.

⁵⁸ These are three documents issued by Despot Uglješa which refer to the regions in western Thrace that were under the control of this ruler - Gavro Škrivanić, *Bitka na Marici 26 septembra 1371*, VIG, 1963, 71-94

dedicated to events preceding the Battle and Uglješa's political action in creating a coalition against the Ottomans. The last work dedicated to the Battle of the Maritsa River was the article published by the Bulgarian historian Hristo Matanov in 1981.⁵⁹ The title of this work is the "Participation of the Bulgarians in the battle at Černomen". This work does not introduce new sources but its only focus is the 'ethnicity' of the troops that have been commanded by King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa and it is a reiteration of the Bulgarian official historiography according to which the Christians in Macedonia are Bulgarians from the early medieval period onwards.⁶⁰

The Battle of the Maritsa River since the end of the 18th century has been included in the general histories on the History of the South-Eastern Europe such as the work of Raić, Jireček.⁶¹ Under the name Sırpsındığı it is also found in general Ottoman histories such as the works of Hammer, Uzunçarşılı and Danişmend. In the histories written by Raić and Hammer we read of a poor description of the Battle of the Maritsa River and references only to a few of the sources. But this was a result of the date of their publications, Jovan Raić's history in 1794⁶² and Hammer's in 1834,⁶³ when only a few of the sources narrating the event were published. However, we can not pardon the works of the last two, Uzunçarşılı and Danişmend, who wrote their multi-volume

⁵⁹ Hristo Matanov, *Kŭm vŭprosa za uchastieto na bŭlgarite v Chernomenskata bitka 1371 g./.-V: Bŭlgaria i Balkanite 681-1981*. S. 1982, 142-154

⁶⁰ Following the article of Matanov in 1995 several works referring to the Battle in 1371 have been presented at a conference in Prilep, Macedonia. The main topic of the conference was King Marko and all presentations were included in a publication the following year. There we read of several articles related to the Battle of the Maritsa River but these are just a repetition of what has been said before in the works of the above mentioned historians. Several articles in this edition refer to the artistic representations of king Marko after the Battle in 1371. These are valuable works that relate to the impact of the battle in 1371 on the iconography in the fresco painting in Macedonia see. *Kralot Marko vo istorijata i vo tradicijata*, prilozi od naučniot sobir održan po povod 600-godišnjinata od smrtta na Kralot Marko, Prilep 23-25 Juni 1995, Prilep, Institut za staroslovenska kultura, 1997

⁶¹ Jireček, Konstantin, *Geschichte der Bulgaren*, Prague (1876), 328-329

⁶² Ioan Raić, *Istoria raznih slavenskih narodov naipače Bolgarov, Horvatov i Serbov*, v Vien, 1794, 687-693

⁶³ Joseph Freiherr von Hammer- Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, grossenteils aus bisher unbenützten Handschriften und Archiven durch Joseph von Hammer. verb. Ausg., Pesth: C.A.Hartleben, 1834-36, VI c.

Ottoman histories of the Ottoman Empire in 1949 and 1971 when a number of studies and sources on the Battle had already been published. It seems that these two Turkish scholars were not familiar with the scholarship in South Eastern Europe. Even the date and the enemy against which the Ottoman fought is mistakenly depicted in the works mentioned afore. In 1990, a work was published by Colin Imber dealing with the chronology of the Ottoman state from 1300-1481. Surprisingly enough, even this prominent Ottoman historian did not include major studies on the Battle of the River Maritsa in his work.⁶⁴

Sources

Historians writing on Late Medieval Balkans, Byzantine and early Ottoman periods jointly agree in one thing and that is the paucity of “reliable sources” and in particular, narrative sources telling about events from the second half of the 14th and the

⁶⁴ The Battle of the Maritsa River was discussed in the commentaries of several editions of Slavic and Greek sources. The English translation of the “Memoirs of a Janissary” includes a discussion on the Battle of the Maritsa River in which obviously the author had not consulted the available studies on the Battle and referred to the battle at Sırfsındığı and the one on the river Maritsa as two different events – most probably relying on the works of Uzunçarşılı or Danişmend see. Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, Translated by Benjamin Stolz, Historical commentary and notes by Svat Soucek, Ann Arbor, 1975; The translation of the Anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle into modern Bulgarian offers extensive commentary on the Battle in 1371 including most of the available studies, see. Ivan Tiutiundzhiev, *Bŭlgarskata Anonimna hronika ot XV*, Veliko Trnovo, 1992, 125-130

The translation of Chalkokondyles’s *Demonstration of Histories in English* (1996) includes a commentary on the Battle in which a number of sources referring to the Battle in 1371 have been quoted, see. Laonikos Chalkokondyles: a translation and commentary of the “*Demonstrations of histories*”, Books I-III / Nicolaos Nicoloudis; editor, Evangelos K. Chrysos. Athens: Historical Publications St. D. Basilopoulos, 1996, 168/9. But we do not have the extensive commentary on the Battle as in the Anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle which sets the example of how to prepare an edition of a historical source. Very important set-back for the studies on the early Ottoman history is that editions of the Ottoman histories have not been published with a commentary or notes.

first half of the 15th century.⁶⁵ Still, the memory of the event that took place in 1371 has been preserved and since the 15th century several versions of the Battle were available in historical narratives written in various languages. But what escaped the attention of the researchers writing on the Battle of the Maritsa River was a thorough discussion on the sources that they had used. If the preservation of memory on the Battle in 1371 is connected with developments in the historical writing in Ottoman, Slavic, Greek and western languages somewhat at the end of the 15th century, then researchers writing on the Battle have assigned this topic with little attention. A research on this “explosion” of narrative sources at the end of the 15th century could help us understand why the knowledge on the event in 1371 appeared at the “horizon” in this particular point of time. What was the reason for the burst of works that have included the Battle in their narratives at the end of the 15th century and how this relates to our understanding of the historical vision of the authors writing in Ottoman–Turkish, Slavic and Greek languages?

As I mentioned before, almost all of the studies on the Battle in 1371 neglect to discuss historical narratives despite the fact that they are the only preserved sources on the Battle in 1371 and thus the underlying documents for any research on this event. In the studies on the Battle researchers only extract the information on the date, number of soldiers, etc. and compare with other narrative sources. Just a few are the examples where authors refer to the relatedness between the major accounts narrating the battle and earlier written or oral historical visions. Since studies on the Battle were written by Medievalists or Byzantinists who were not trained in Ottoman history, the Histories of the Dynasty of Osman were regarded without attention, and were then criticized both for the assumingly mistaken chronology and inadequate depiction of the Battle.

Studies on the Battle of the Maritsa River have not regarded the reasons for absence of narratives depicting the event in the early Ottoman histories. The nature of the early Ottoman historiography where we find the histories of the dynasty of Osman just as a brief attachment (compared to the main text) to a more Universal Islamic history, did not serve as the most appropriate format to tell on the various details from

⁶⁵ Dennis, G, *The reign of Manuel II, Palaeologus in Thessalonica, 1382 -1387* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 159), Romae 1960, 1; Ferjančić Božidar, *Vizantijski u Srpski Ser u XIV Stoleću*, SANU, knj. 21, Beograd 1994

the conquest of Rumeli (South Eastern Europe).⁶⁶ Such is Ahmedi's poem *Iskendername*,⁶⁷ regarded to be the oldest written account on the Ottoman history in which only at the end a small portion (this part written during the reign of Süleyman Çelebi 1412/3) is dedicated to the Ottomans, whereas the rest is a compilation of events connected with deeds by Alexander the Great which are interwoven with discussions on world history, philosophy, medicine, etc. The only personalities mentioned in this work are the members of the family of Osman and the text is a "panegyric" of their accomplishments with only brief descriptions and lacking chronology.

Only the thirteenth chapter in another early Ottoman historical narrative, Şükrullah's work the "Magnificent Histories" (written in 1460s), tells of the History of the House of Osman.⁶⁸ Similar to Ahmedi's work Ottoman history here, too, was narrated within a larger context of the Islamic history which meant that the accomplishment of the House of Osman had to be represented as being in the line of legitimate Islamic dynasties. It is quite possible that the intended reader of these works had to be persuaded on the political legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty vis-à-vis the Anatolian principalities without venturing into details of the achievements of the various Ottoman commanders not being members of the House of Osman.

In Enveri's work *Dusturname* the narrative on the Ottoman history follows after a more general Islamic history and a *dastan* on the exploits of Umur Beg of the Aydın principality who became famous with his *gaza* achievements in the Aegean against the

⁶⁶ Most of the Ottoman Histories that I will use in this work divide their narration according to chapters dedicated to a particular Sultan. The account of the defeat of the Serf is in the majority of works placed during the rule of Murad I (1362-1389). One other genre in which account of the Battle of the Maritsa River is encountered is the histories of the Ottoman city of Edirne. Such are 17th century Abdurahman Hibri Efendi's and 19th century Ahmed Badi Efendi's histories - Ahmed Badi Efendi, *Rıyaz-ı Belde-i Edirne*, MS. Bayezid Genel Ktp. 10393. In these works the event is narrated in the chapters that tell about unusual events taking place in the city or its surrounding. In the oldest history of the city of Edirne written by Beşir Çelebi (written in the first half of the 15th or 16th century) there is no mentioning of the Battle at the place called Serf Sındığı, see. Beşir Çelebi, *Tarih-i Edirne hikayet-i Beşir Çelebi*, (1451), çev. İsmail Hikmet Ertaylan.-- İstanbul : İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Türk Dil ve Edebiyatı Dalı, 1946

⁶⁷ Ahmedi, *İskender-name*, İnceleme-Tıpkıbasım, ed. İ. Ünver, Ankara 1983

⁶⁸ Atsız, Çifçipğlu Nihal, *Şükrullah. Behcetüttevarih*, in *Osmanlı Tarihleri I*, İstanbul, 1947-49, 39-76

Christians.⁶⁹ Just as the previous two works, this too, shows that the historical consciousness, prior to the final defeat by Ottomans over the Anatolian principalities (end of 15th century), was focused on legitimizing the Dynasty. It is with certainty that this vision of the Ottoman past disregarded the achievements of various war-leaders or *uc-begs* (border commanders) who had important role in the Ottoman conquest in South-Eastern Europe. The Ottoman rulers had to present themselves as the undisputed leaders in the conquest against the Christians in the West. In the attempt to show the political legitimacy of the dynasty, there was no space left for the exploits of the *uc-begs* in Rumeli. This is why the early Ottoman historical narratives have not depicted the Battle of the Maritsa River.⁷⁰

The “big turn” in the Ottoman historical writing took place at the end of the 15th century, which signed the appearance of the first “detailed” Ottoman Histories. Such proliferation of a number of historical narratives was explained by the historians as the result of the consciousness of the Ottoman rulers that they have established a great empire.⁷¹ It has been proposed by researchers that Ottoman histories such as the ones written by Aşık Paşa-zade (Apz)⁷², Neşri,⁷³ Kemal’s *Selatin-name*,⁷⁴ etc are historical narratives legitimating Bayezid II as the successor of Mehmed II in a time when his brother Cem contested his accession. These Ottoman histories were concluded with Bayezid’s great victory in Moldavia while emphasizing the military success of the new Sultan. What is important here to note is that these Histories on the House of Osman distinguish from the previous Ottoman historical narratives in telling for the first time

⁶⁹ Enveri, *Düstürname-i Enveri*, ed. M.H. Yinanç , İstanbul 1928

⁷⁰ These are not the only historical narratives in this early period of Ottoman historiography. From the first half of the 15th century we have several Ottoman Royal Calendars which I will discuss in the following chapter.

⁷¹ Inalcik, Halil *The Rise of the Ottoman Historiography*. in *Historians of the Middle East*. Historical Writings on the Peoples of Asia, ed. Lewis/Holt. London, 1962, 152

⁷² Aşık Paşa –zade, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, Ç. N. Atsız, Osmanlı Tarihleri I, İstanbul 1949

⁷³ Mehmed Neşri, *Kitab-i Cihan-nüma*, I cilt, yayımlayanlar Faik Reşit Unat, Mehmed A. Köymen, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1995

⁷⁴ *XV Yüzyıl Tarihçilerinden Kemal: Selatin-name (1299-1490)* Hazırlayan Necdet Öztürk,TTK 2001

details on the conquest of Rumeli. The conquest is described as a joint accomplishment of the Ottoman sultans and the uc begs (border commanders) such as Ilbeg, Evrenos, Ishak Paşa as well as the Beglerbegs such as Lala Şahin, Timurtaş etc. The first mentioning of these Ottoman commanders, even though it is a brief one, is in the collections of stories on the legendary Sarı Saltuk ordered to be written (1473) by the Ottoman prince Cem.⁷⁵ Ebu-l-i hayr-i Rumi collected the stories in the work known as Saltukname and as an appendix to his work, similar to the early Ottoman histories (Ahmedi, Şukrullah, Enveri), wrote a short narration on the history of the House of Osman but it differs from the above mention historical narratives in its depiction of some conquests in Rumeli performed by Ilbeg and Evrenoz.⁷⁶ This appearance in Saltukname of some of the most famous commanders who were not members of the House of Osman may have been Cem's attempt to gain support from the Ottoman provincial elite in Rumeli.⁷⁷ A similar attempt but this time by Bayezid II may have resulted with the presence of a number of commanders in the Ottoman historical narratives written during his rule.

The detailed and comprehensive histories written during the reign of Bayezid II must have been directed at the public and especially to the families whose forefathers conquered the region. Bayezid II had to answer the challenges posed by his brother Cem who contested the throne and was known to be popular among the gazi circles and the unsatisfied provincial elite affected by the centralization policies of Mehmed II. One of the ways for Bayezid II to confront his brother was to change the perspective of historical writings and in a Turkish vernacular to emphasis the “old tradition” of Ottoman rulers who sought support from famous gazis and uc-begs. The new historical writing may have sent a message that the “old tradition” ought to be continued during his reign. This collaboration between the nobility and the Ottoman Sultan can be seen in the policies of Bayezid II who appointed the famous Bosnian gazi Davud Paşa as the grand vizier to lead the army in the victorious campaign in Moldavia.

⁷⁵ Ebü'l Hayr Rumi, *Saltuk-name*, hazırlayan Şükrü Haluk Akalın, c.III Ankara: KTB, 1987

⁷⁶ Ibid.,III, 351 -356

⁷⁷ Kafadar, Cemal, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 147

In the Ottoman Histories written at the time of Bayezid II and contrary to available early Ottoman historical narratives, texts did not include long introductions on the Islamic dynasties or famous Anatolian gazis. What characterized the historical writing during the reign of Bayezid II is the attempt of various authors to include in their Ottoman histories the stories that show the collaboration between the Ottoman rulers and the famous uc begs and gazis. Such was the story on the battle at Sırsındığı written down by Aşık Paşa zade at the end of the 15th century and included in almost all the historical narratives at the time and more then a century after the event took place:

BAB [chapter] [47]

Tells who conquered Biga and how it happened.

...

BAB [chapter] [48]

Tells about the arrival of the Sırfs in Edirne

The Serbian infidels joined their forces. They advanced to the vicinity of Edirne. Şahin Lala and the prepared gazis intercepted them. In the darkness of the night with the sound of the drums and taking refuge in the mighty God they marched toward the infidels. As soon as the infidels heard the sound of the drums the infidels violently jostled against each other. The horses broke loose and were scared. In the darkness of the night the infidels suddenly began to kill each other. This happened on the banks of Meriç [Maritsa]; the rest of them [the infidels] drowned in the water and died. From those infidels only a few survived. And some of them were followed by the gazis and killed along the road. Today, gazis call that place Sırf Sındığı [the routing of the Sırfs]. When the Han [Murad I] heard that the infidels were utterly defeated he returned to Bursa with glory and circumcised his sons. [He] had an Imaret constructed in Yinişehir and there was a dervish called Postınpuş, so he built a dervish-lodge for him. And in Bilecük he built a Friday-mosque and for himself within the wall of Bursa, at the gate of the Palace, he constructed a mosque and in Kapluca he built an imaret and above it a Medrese.

BAB [chapter] [49]

Tells how Murad Han Gazi became a father- in- law to the Germiyanoglu ⁷⁸

In the studies on the Battle of the Maritsa River Balkan and Turkish historiographies do not refer to a number of Ottoman accounts on this event. One of them is the History of the House of Osman written by Ibn Kemal (Kemal Paşa zade) in the first two decades of 16th century. The 16th and 17th century Ottoman histories relied in their descriptions on Apz, Neşri, Oruç or the Anonymous Histories or Chronicles,

⁷⁸ Aşık Paşa –zade, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, Ç. N. Atsız, 29

whereas Ibn Kemal for a number of events from the early Ottoman history utilized oral sources and his work presents an independent version even for the battle at Sırsındığı. His account will be referred to in the following chapters.

Another important Ottoman source that the modern studies on the Battle have not taken into consideration is the writing of the 19th century Ottoman intellectual Ahmed Badi Efendi.⁷⁹ His depiction on the battlefield as narrated by the local community in the 19th century is almost identical with reports by a Serbian military officer who examined the region of Černomen/Çirmen at the turn of the 19th century. Thus we learn of the Ottoman *lieu de memoire* which existed not only in the Ottoman historical narratives from the end of the 15th century onwards but in the folklore of the 19th century Turkish speaking community leaving in the vicinity of Cisir-i Mustafa Paşa/Svilengrad.

In the studies on the Battle researchers have been indifferent towards the historical vision of the Ottoman writers which is the result of their specialty in the field of Byzantine or Balkan Medieval studies. Even in the Turkish historiography where researchers commanded the languages in which Ottoman histories were written, the very few works on the Battle just re-tell what accounts say on this memorable event. The major accomplishment of modern scholarship on the Battle of the Maritsa River in South-East European historiographies was the discussion on Slavic, Greek and western accounts that narrated the event. Positivist historians understand the Battle as the culmination of a continuous series of decisions by Christian polities in the region who attempted to forge a coalition against the Ottomans. This is why modern studies examined documents referring to the negotiations between Despot Uglješa and the Patriarchy in Constantinople when narrating the battle. The rich archives in Ragusa were also utilized by researchers to reconstruct the political relations between King Vukašin and the Serbian political entities in the north in the years preceding the battle. From the very few narrative sources contemporary to the Battle researchers used a short note by the monk Isaiah (probably residing on the Holy Mountain) who tells us that the death of the brothers Vukašin and Uglješa and the destruction of their army by the Turks was followed by the worst time for the Christians in the “west”. George

⁷⁹ Gökbilgin in his entry on Edirne in *Islam Ansiklopedisi* gives the same information on the battlefield as Ahmed Badi Efendi who was probably his source.

Ostrogorsky in his article *The Holy Mountain after the Battle of the Maritsa River* brings to the attention of researchers two other accounts by contemporaries to the Battle of the Maritsa River who resided on the Holy Mountains.⁸⁰ These are the *Hagiography of St. Niphon* and *Hagiography of St. Romylos*. The authors not only briefly mention the battle in 1371 but as contemporaries to the events at the end of the 14th century they render valuable information on the Ottoman advances in the region. Researchers also used documents preserved in the Monasteries on the Holy Mountain which had been issued by the chancery of Despot Uglješa. The rhetoric in these documents was pointed out by researchers as showing the determination of Despot Uglješa for a future military action against the Ottomans in Thrace.

If historians complained about the lack of narrative sources from the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century, the situation in the second half of the 15th century drastically changed. At the end of the 15th century and the beginning of 16th century apart from an “explosion” of historical narratives in Ottoman language, we also encounter a number of texts written in Greek, Slavic, and western languages. Some of them refer to the Battle of the Maritsa River. Such are the histories of Chalkokondyles, Konstantin Mihailović, and Spandounes. In all three we find different versions of the same event and all of them combine Christian perception of the Battle and Ottoman oral and written accounts.

Chalkokondyles’s *Demonstration of Histories* is one of the first historical narratives written in Greek language at the end of the 15th century that combines Ottoman, on one hand and Greek and Slavic sources on the other. For a description of the Battle, Chalkokondyles must have combined various Ottoman historical narratives preceding the late 15th century Ottoman sources that mention the place Sırfsındığı for the first time. In these early Ottoman sources, such as Şukrullah or Mehmed Nişancı,⁸¹ we do not read of the Battle at Sırfsındığı but only a description of a sudden attack lead by Süleyman Paşa in which the army of the *Laz*⁸² advancing towards Thrace was destroyed in the field of Mığalkarya/Malkara.⁸³

⁸⁰ G. Ostrogorsky, *Sveta Gora posle Maričke Bitke*, Otisak iz Zbornika Filozofskog fakulteta, knjiga X-1, Beograd 1970, 277-282

⁸¹ Nişancı Mehmed Paşa, karamanlı, *Osmanlı Sultanları Tarihi*, çev. H. Konyalı in *Atsız, Osmanlı Tarihler I*, Istanbul 1949.

This news [the crossing over of Süleyman Paşa in Rumeli] was heard by Laz. The cursed infidels were triggered. Army was gathered and when it reached the field of Miğalkarya a camp was set up. Süleyman Paşa immediately made drums from two cooking pots. God overruled. The night was dark and it was rainy. Süleyman Paşa attached those two drums on the saddle. He put twenty brave men in the fortress of Od Gönlek. He took the remaining twenty along. Dividing them in groups of five he sent them to attack the infidels from four directions.⁸⁴

The rest of the story in Sükrullah's narrative tells how Süleyman Paşa and his soldiers with the Muslim battle-cry *Allahu ekber* and with the sound of the drums attacked the confused infidels. What followed was a total chaos in the enemy's camp; the enemy killing each other without recognizing the fellow combatants. Finally, they were utterly destroyed leaving behind a great fortune. This story shows resemblance with the Ottoman accounts on the Maritsa Battle written at the end of the 15th century. Such are the Anonymous Ottoman Histories written in the time of Bayezid II.⁸⁵ For now we should focus on the resemblance of the early Ottoman sources, like Sükrullah's, with Chalkokondyles's account written in the second half of the 15th century and covered the period between 1298 and 1463. Without providing a date for the events, Chalkokondyles refers to the Battle of the Maritsa River as preceding the Ottoman conquest of Edirne:

He [Süleyman] marched at night and fell upon the enemy camp at daybreak. He observed that the enemy had not left enough watchmen by the banks of the River Tairaros [Maritsa], the waters of which are very good to drink and good for the health. It was summertime and they were not paying much attention to their arms and horses, thinking that they did not have to worry about facing the enemy. They were idly passing their time in the area of Černomen when Süleyman suddenly fell upon the Triballi [Byzantine name for Serbs] with his eight hundred men and destroyed their whole army. He slaughtered them mercilessly and drove the bulk of them into the River, as they were too confused

⁸² Comes from the name Lazar Prebeljanović, the leader of the coalition forces at the Kosovo Battle (1389)

⁸³ Located in Thrace

⁸⁴ Çifçipğlu Nihal Atsız, *Şükrullah. Behcetüttevarih*, 54

⁸⁵ see. page 85-86

to escape. In this way he massacred them. Uglješa was killed in the battle and so was his brother, the Kral [Vukašin].”⁸⁶

Several information from this description show that Chalkokondyles used Ottoman sources. The victory being attributed to Süleyman and the depiction of his march during the night is similar to Sükrullah’s account of the Battle in the field of Miğalkarya. Confirmation that the Battle took place at the banks of Maritsa and in the area of Černomen is found in Apz and the Anonymous Ottoman histories that also include a description of the great confusion in the camp of the enemy. It seems that the description on the “face of the Battle” in Chalkokondyles’s *Demonstration of Histories* was meticulously composed from several Ottoman sources and that only the information on the Christian forces being lead by Uglješa and the King (Vukašin) is something which can be found in the earliest Greek and Slavic sources referring to the Battle.

Similar to the above mentioned accounts is the description of the Battle in 1371 in the work of Theodore Spandounes. In his work *The origin of the Ottoman Emperors* written in Italian in the first decades of the 16th century, the author acknowledges that he relied on the “annali di Turchi”. In this work dedicated to King Louis XII (1498-1515) we read of yet another description about what happened on the banks of the River Maritsa in 1371:

One George “Glava”, then lord of Didymoteichon (“Dimotico”), went to pledge loyalty to Paleologo at Constantinople; and [while he was away] some rebels, corrupted by bribes, handed the castle over to Orhan, who marched in and pillaged the country. The news prompted John Uglješa (“Unglesi”), lord of Serrez, to assemble a huge [army of] Christians to blockade Orhan in Didymoteichon. He had very few troops; but he broke out by night and made his way towards Bulgaria. The Bulgars failed to realize what was afoot since there were so few Turks; and in any case the Bulgars were sodden in drunken sleep. Their army was totally defeated and scattered; and this was the first victory which God, for our sins, granted to the infidel on the soil of Greece.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Laonikos Chalkokondyles: a translation and commentary of the "*Demonstrations of histories*", Books I-III / Nicolaos Nicoloudis, 122/3

⁸⁷ Theodore Spandounes, *On the origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, translated and edited by Donald M. Nicol, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 20

This description of the events in 1371 is similar to Chalkokondyles's *Demonstration of Histories*. It is a combination of information that the author had taken from the Ottoman and Christian sources. The above narrative is centered around the personalities and achievements of the Ottoman Sultan and instead of Süleyman, as in Chalkokondyles, Spandounes wrote that it was Orhan who had defeated the drunken Bulgarians. In several of the late 15th century Ottoman histories like Oruç's for example, we read that the defeated enemy at the place called Sirfsındığı was at sleep and drunken and as well as that the attack was during the night. Chalkokondyles's narrative tells also of the time of the advance of the Ottoman troops.

Spandoune's usage of Christian sources on the event in 1371 could tell us more on the historical vision of the Christian nobility from the various polities in the region after their defeat by the Ottomans at the end of the 14th and 15th centuries. The author spent his youth at the court of Mara, the daughter of Despot Djurdj Branković, who was the step-mother of Mehmed II. In her residence in Ježevo (the vicinity of Serrez) she welcomed pilgrims traveling to the Holy Mountain as well as Christian nobles from Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia. Among them was her sister's nephew Theodore Spandounes who spent his youth and received his education in the court of Mara. This is why the precise definition of John Uglješa as the ruler of Serrez does not evade the historical writing of Spandounes. But most important is the author's definition of the Battle of the Maritsa River as fulcrum of the history and the fortunes of the Christians in the region. For Spandounes this was the first great victory of the Ottomans and this must have been part of the education that he had received in the court of the Serbian princess Mara. Spandounes remark reminds us of the information on the Battle of the Maritsa River in the Biography of Stefan Lazarević (written in 1431) where the author refers to the battle in 1371 as the beginning of the shedding of Christian blood.⁸⁸

Another historical narrative that I will take as an example of an account on the battle in 1371 that incorporates Ottoman and Christian sources, is the writing of Konstantin Mihailović. His work known as *The memoirs of a Janissary* is one of the few historical narratives written in Slavic in the 15th century. The original manuscript was written in the Slavic language spoken in the region of South Eastern Europe of which only a Polish and a Czech version survived. Most of the researchers agree that the birth place of Konstantin was Serbia or Bosnia. The author himself does not

⁸⁸ See chapter *Serbs, Bulgarians and the Ottoman commander*, page 72

precisely locate the place of his birth but he tells how he served as a soldier in the forces of the Serbian Despot Djuradj Branković who assisted the Ottomans in the siege of Constantinople in 1453. Unfortunately, the very few South-East European historians writing on the Battle of the Maritsa River had not included Konstantin Mihailović's account on the Battle which may be regarded as one of the rare depictions of the Battle from someone familiar with the region. Serbian historian Škrivanić in his article in 1956 refers to Konstantin Mihailović's account of the Battle by saying that "the events and the personalities are mixed or confused and that is why his writing is almost impossible to be used as a historical source."⁸⁹ The passage on the Battle is a part of the Chapter "The punishment of the Serbs" in which the author as an introduction to the Battle narrates the sins committed by members of the Nemanjić's dynasty. Accordingly, the battle was the defeat of the last member of the dynasty - Emperor Uroš, who atoned for his forefather's sin somewhere in the vicinity of Edirne:

The Emperor[Murad], seeing and knowing this kind of disorder in the army, having retired from the city[Edirne], marched with all his might upon him; having defeated the guard, he marched directly upon the army and caught Emperor Uroš in his tent. And here he was killed, and many others were killed alongside him and the whole army was routed and defeated; and even to this day that place is called - Srbske a neb Raczke pobiti- [the Serbian or Raškan defeat] (the author using the older known text – the Czech manuscript⁹⁰)

Konstantin Mihailović in his account on the Battle had the personalities and events mistaken as Škrivanić correctly purports in his article. Uroš never lead an army against the Ottomans in Thrace and the only military campaign against the Turks after the death of the Serbian ruler Stephen Dušan was that of the brothers King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa in 1371. However, Konstantin Mihailović writes in his work that the Battle which was known among the Ottomans as *Serfsındığı*, was the event that took place in the year when Emperor Uroš died. According to Ragusan documents historians established that the defeat of the army on the banks of Maritsa lead by the two brothers was followed by the death of Uroš, the same year.⁹¹ So, it may be a deliberate

⁸⁹ Gavro Škrivanić, *Bitka na Marici 26 septembra 1371*, VIG, 1963, 75

⁹⁰ Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, Translated by Benjamin Stolz, Historical commentary and notes by Svat Soucek, Ann Arbor, 1975,

⁹¹ Ruvarac. I, *Hronološka pitanja o vremenu bitke na Marici*, God, N.Č.III, 1879, 406-7

construction of the author to depict the last member of the Dynasty of Nemanja as the defeated ruler leading the Serbs on the military campaign against the Ottomans in Thrace. In this way the author was able to give a perfect ending to a chapter in which he described the fall of the Dynasty of Nemanja and the beginning of the conquest of the Ottomans in the region.

At the end of the author's account of the events in 1371 the reader sees a familiar expression "and even to this day that place is called Serbian or Raškan defeat (Srbske a neb Raczke pobiti)". This expression is seen in the Ottoman histories from the end of the 15th century when they narrate on the Battle at the place called Sırfsındığı which in English can be translated as "the defeat of the Serbs".⁹² Clearly, Konstantin when writing his memoirs used the Ottoman historical narratives from the end of the 15th century or he might have heard about the place called Sırfsındığı while being a soldier in the Ottoman army. On the Konstantin Mihailović's version of the events in 1371 much more will be said in the chapter "The historical narratives and the epic poems". Important at this point was to show that even the sources written by Christians at the turn of the 15th century had their provenance in various Ottoman accounts.

For someone trying to understand the Slavic historical narratives concerning the Battle of the Maritsa River from the 17th century onwards and the folklore among Slavic speaking people in the region, one needs to refer to the writings of Johannes Leunclavius and Mavro Orbini. These authors may have been the transmitters of the information on the battle found in the Ottoman sources from the 15th century into the Slavic historical narratives on the Battle of the Maritsa River written in the 17th and 18th century. Johannes Leunclavius' *Annales sultanorum othmanidarum* (1588) was a translation of Sadettin's *Tac üt tevarih* and the *Historiae musulmanae Turcorum de monumentis ipsorum exscriptae libri xviii* (1591) was based on two texts which have used late 15th century Ottoman sources.⁹³ The works of Johannes Leunclavius was used in the Mavro Orbini's work *The Kingdom of the Slavs* written in Italian language at the request of the wealthy Ragusan trader Andrea Bobali who resided in Pesaro, Italy. This

⁹² Sırf Sındığı comes from the Turkish words *Sırf* – refers to the latin appellation of Serbs as *Servi* and *sinmak* – routed, defeated.

⁹³ The first one was the Codex Verantianus which was a compilation in Italian from two recensions of the Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles. The second text was the Codex Hanivaldanus which was a version of Neşri's history translated in Latin. see. V.L.Menage, *Neshri's History of the Ottomans: The sources and development of the text*, Oxford University Press, 1964, 31-40

is one of the most important works ever written on the history of the Slavic speaking Christians in the region of South-Eastern Europe. Historical narratives in Slavic from 17th century onward used the work of Mavro Orbini⁹⁴ and the same can be said for western authors referring to the history of the region.⁹⁵ The account of Mavro Orbini on the Battle of the Maritsa River is a compilation of information from Leunclavius's work and Chalkokondyles's *Demonstration of Histories*.

In the studies on the Battle in 1371 South-East European researchers give a long list of 15th, 16th and 17th century sources that refer to the event. In most of the cases the researchers were interested in what the sources had to say about the event but in terms of number of troops, dates, etc. as their interest was to extract facts without discussing the formation of the accounts on the battle in the narrative sources. But the authors of the very few articles on the Battle in 1371 and those researchers making entries in the general Ottoman histories had not regarded this as a topic of their work. The lack of communication between the two fields of historical studies – Late Medieval or Byzantine and Ottoman, on both sides resulted with a scholarship which deserves to be the subject of our critique not only in the case of the Battle of the River Maritsa but on other topics as well.

⁹⁴ It is believed that even the 17th century Patriarch of Peć Paysiye included in his work information from Mavro Orbini's 'Kingdom of the Slavs'. see. Radojčić. N, *Srpska istorija Mavra Orbinija*, 71. There are no doubts that Djordje Branković at the turn of the 17th century used the work of Orbini in his work "Chronicles". This work and the translation of Mavro Orbini in Russian in 1722 influenced Slavic historical narratives in the region of South-Eastern Europe. Mavro Orbini through these works had influenced even 19th century Serbian and Bulgarian historiographies.

⁹⁵ Mavro Orbini's work was used by Charles du Fresne, *Seigneur du Cange in Historia Byzantina Duplici Commentario Illustrata*, 1680. It is also possible that Orbini's work had been used in Richard Knolles' *The General Historie of the Turkes*. see. Mavro Orbini, *Kraljestvo Slovena*, preveo sa italijanskog Zdravko Šundrica, predgovor i komentari Franjo Barišić, Radovan Samardžić i Sima Ćirković, Beograd 1968, LXXXV/LXXXVI

The Battle at Sırsındığı or the Battle of the Maritsa River

The historical vision of the authors writing the Histories of the House of Osman at the end of the 15th century shows resemblance with the Histories and Chronicles written in Slavic and Greek languages. Even though the Battle at Sırsındığı, as it is known in the Ottoman sources does not bear the same name in the Slavic and Greek sources, the chronology of the events tell us that both historical visions refer to the same Battle. If we carefully read the Ottoman narratives from the end of the 15th century we see that the achievements of the Ottoman forces in Rumeli are depicted as conquests of the cities, some of them peaceful takeovers and some accompanied with sieges or battles outside the city walls. In the second half of the 14th century only Sırsındığı, in 766/1364, and Kosovo, in 791/1389, were described in Ottoman narratives as battles in the open-field and victories won against large enemy forces. Similarly to the Ottoman sources, historical narratives in Slavic and Greek languages recognize two major events in the second half of the 14th century, the Battle of the Maritsa River in 1370/1 and the Battle at Kosovo in 1389.

Apart from the similar chronological ordering of the events in both historiographies, the depiction of the enemy in the narratives can assist the researcher in establishing whether the battle at Sırsındığı and the Battle of the River Maritsa are just a different appellation for the same event. Idris Bitlisi is the author of the first Ottoman historical narrative from the first decade of the 16th century who mentions the leader of the Christian forces approaching Edirne. In his work *Heşt Bihîşt* we read that the army of the *destbot* camped not far from Edirne.⁹⁶ There can be no doubt that the name *destbot* refers to Uglješa's Byzantine title *Despot* as we do not know of such Persian word or a name.⁹⁷ In the Ottoman histories from the end of the 15th century the ruler called Despot is not mentioned when authors narrate the battle at Sırsındığı. This means that Idris Bitlisi had used either an Ottoman source which has not been found yet

⁹⁶ Idris Bidlisi, *Heşt Bihîşt*, MS. Topkapı, Revan, fol. 174a

⁹⁷ Stoyan Novaković in his study on the battle 1371 reports that in Idris Bitlisi's work we read of Despot. However he does not tell anything else about the manuscript he had used.

or it could have been information he had taken from a source written in Greek or in a Slavic language.⁹⁸

The majority of sources Ottoman, Slavic and Greek agree that the Battle took place on the River Maritsa. Some of them, like the Biography of Stefan Lazarević, explicitly say of the “shedding of blood” on the River Maritsa. In the Ottoman sources like Apz’s history we read that the Battle at Sırpsındığı took place on the “banks of River Meriç” and the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* refer to the vicinity of Çirmen as the site which is only one kilometer away from the River. Laonikos Chalkokondyles’s work *Demonstration of Histories* written in Greek language at the end of the 15th century also refers to the River Tairaros (the River Maritsa) and Černomen as the places where the army forces of Uglješa were destroyed by an unexpected attack of eight hundred men led by Süleyman.⁹⁹

For the “Ottoman” warriors defeating the enemy in 1371 the battlefield became a *lieu de memoire* which appeared in Ottoman sources a century after the battle. The late 15th century *Histories of the House of Osman* only identifies the enemy and the place of the defeat. The enemy was Sırfs/Serfs who were approaching Edirne and at the place of their defeat was hence called “the destruction of the Sırf/Serf”. Ibn Kemal was familiar with the region and utilized oral accounts on the description of the conquests in Rumeli in his History of the House of Osman. At the beginning of the 16th century he writes that the place bares the designated name *Serf/Sarf Sındığı* not because of the identity of the enemy. Moreover, the name of the battle field comes from the fact that the enemy was defeated on a rough terrain.¹⁰⁰ The various interpretations of this event in the Ottoman histories agree that the battle in the year 767 was one of the most important events in the early Ottoman history and that it must have been the Battle which modern historians from South-Eastern Europe had been referring to as the fulcrum of history.

⁹⁸ Most probably he used a Greek source. Most of the Greek sources use only the name Uglješa when narrating the Battle. On the other hand the Slavic sources always mention the names of Vukašin and Uglješa.

⁹⁹ Chalkokondyles, 123. The author combined most probably some Greek account which mentioned Despot Uglješa with an Ottoman source ascribing the victory to Suleyman. He knew of the battle of Maritsa River as the only great battle preceding the battle at Kosovo (the work was still in progress in late 1490s).

¹⁰⁰ See chapter “The Memory of a Place”, page 89



(Figure 1) This map shows the political entities in the Balkans and Western Anatolia in 1371.

Chapter III

26 SEPTEMBER 1371, THE ECLIPSE AND THE CHRONOLOGY IN THE EARLY OTTOMAN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

26 September 1371

Much has been written on the chronology of events taking place at the end of the 14th century in South-Eastern Europe. Determining the chronology of events on the eve of the Ottoman conquest of the region has been referred as a very important question for the historiographies in the region. Several are the reasons for such an intensive research of the dates, places and persons. First, historians have been preoccupied with establishing “what really happened”-a concern which was imported from the 19th century European understanding of what historical writing should look like. Second, events from the 14th century, especially the ones taking place in the second half of the century, had a very important place in the “national consciousness” of the newly created “imagined communities”. In general, the historiography in South-Eastern Europe regarded this period as the time when people in the Balkans lost their “independence” and were embraced under the foreign rule of the “Turks”. These are some of the reasons why the Battle of the Maritsa River had been in the attention of historical research which regarded this event as one of the breaking points for bringing “dramatic” change in the region. To determine the exact date when the battle took place had been an imperative in order to define the beginning of the “hardships and sufferings” in national historical narratives.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ It will be unfair to ascribe such rhetoric to the majority of scholars in the Balkans. In most of the cases their research was “embellished” by writers of history text-books, and popular works dealing with themes from the national history. The various national historiographies in the Balkans are not united in determining the dates that mark the beginning of the Turkish yoke. The Battle of River Maritsa is one of the most important

The first works on the chronology of the Battle of the Maritsa River were published in the second half of the 19th century when Serbian historiography made its first steps in modern historical scholarship. In 1879 two leading Serbian historians published articles on the question of when the Battle of the Maritsa River took place.¹⁰² Both authors in their main argument used the writing of the monk Isaiah, a brief note to his translation of the Greek text written by Dionysius the Areopagite. In this short note the Monk Isaiah explains to readers his motives for the decision to complete such an endeavor of translating Dionysius's writing from Greek into Church Slavonic; touches upon the time in which he had completed the work; and in the end writes down the date 6879 indict. 9 (Sept.1370-Sept1371). Isaiah's writings on the period when he finished the translation are a gloomy depiction of the defeat of the brothers Uglješa and Vukašin followed by the evil that had befallen upon the people afterwards:

And the book of the holy Dionysius I have began in good times when the holy temples and the Holy Mountain blossomed similar to a bowl placed next to a spring from which water is constantly poured in. And I have finished my work in the worse time ever, when God angered the Christians in the West and Despot Uglješa gathered all Serb and Greek soldiers, and his brother King Vukašin, and many other dignitaries, around sixty thousand chosen soldiers¹⁰³ and they went in Macedonia¹⁰⁴ to drive out the Turks without having in mind that no one escape the anger of God. They failed and were killed, their bones were left behind without being buried, and a great number of people fell as

breaking point for the Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian national historical narratives. The Greek national historical narratives attribute the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople as the "turning point" for the destiny of the Greek people. The Albanian version goes further into the second half of the 15th century with the death of Skenderbeg.

¹⁰² Ruvarac. I, *Hronološka pitanja o vremenu bitke na Marici*, God, N.Č.III, 1879, 214-226; Lj. Kovačević, *Nekoliko hronoloških ispravaka u srpskoj istoriji*, God.N.Č.III, 1879, 404-41

¹⁰³ The number of the soldiers in this account has been exaggerated. In the second half of the 14th century an army of several thousands of soldiers was regarded as a very strong force. Most probably both of the armies did not number more than ten thousand soldiers.

¹⁰⁴ Here the author refers to the region of western Thrace. The tradition of calling this region with the name Macedonia comes from one of the Byzantine themes bearing the name Macedonia and established between 789-802. As we see from the account above even in late medieval period such nomenclature had survived. See George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 194

victims of sharp swords, some of them taken in slavery, and some escaped and came back. And so much trouble and calamity fell upon all cities and regions in the West that ears had not heard of before nor eyes had seen. Because of the death of the brave Despot Uglješa, the Turks had the courage and as the birds in the air flew over the land....The year was 6879 indict 9”¹⁰⁵

This contemporary account on the Battle was differently interpreted in the attempt by the historians to determine the date of Uglješa and his brother Vukašin’s defeat. For Ruvarac it was the evidence that 1 September 1371 is *terminus ante quem* as the monk Isaiah gives the date 6879 indict 9 (Sept.1370-Sept1371) when concluding the translation. He also adds that May 1371 should be regarded as *terminus post quem* because this was the date on which a document signed by the Patriarch Philotheos mentions the name of Uglješa as the Despot of Serbia.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to what Ruvarac says about the time when the Battle took place, the second Serbian historian working on the same problem (Lj.Kovačević) believed that Isaiah’s text had been written some time after the Battle because its author’s reference on the consequences of the defeat had to be observed for a longer period in order to be written down.

Monk Isaiah’s account is one of the few contemporary writings on the Battle in 1371 and from his account we learn only of the year in which the Battle took place without any other details concerning exact date. Even the Koporinjski Chronicle¹⁰⁷ which is regarded to be the closest version of the oldest Serbian chronicle composed soon after the death of Uroš (1371) gives the year 6879/1370 and only adds that the day

¹⁰⁵ This is a partial translation of Isaiah’s note. *Antologija Stare Srpske Književnosti (XI-XVIII veka)*, Izbor, prevod i objašnjenja Đorđa Sp.Radojičića, Beograd 1960, 100

¹⁰⁶ This document is the act of renewal of the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople over the land ruled by Uglješa see. Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*,183; according to Ostrogorsky this was the renewal of the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople but we do not know of the exact territory. G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 137. The attempts for establishing the canonical unity between the Serbian church and the Patriarchy in Constantinople was part of the Uglješa’s plan to create large coalitions that will fight the Ottomans. On this subject state of the art historical writing in G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 137

¹⁰⁷ The manuscript dates from 1453 see. Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, Zbornik za Istoriju, Jezik i Knizevnost Srpskog Naroda, Beograd (1927), xxxiv

was Friday.¹⁰⁸ However, Slavic chronicles written in the 15th and 16th century exhibit much more details concerning the date of the Battle. One such example is the 16th century Senički Chronicle¹⁰⁹ in which we read details never mentioned before and concerning the date when the event took place:

The lawlessness that was created by the brothers Volkashin and Uglesha had fallen upon their destiny, both of them being killed in Macedonia on the River Maritsa, on the day of Jovan Bogoslov [John the Baptist] September 26, 1371, in the same year when Uroš died¹¹⁰

As time passed by, the story of the battle evolved into a more “comprehensive” explanation of what happened in 1371. Also, assumptions on the date gained on accurateness.¹¹¹ But whether it was the summer of 1371, as Ruvarac claimed,¹¹² or 26 September 1371, the year 1371 is attested in what may have been the last document issued by Despot Uglješa. In April 1371 Despot Uglješa bestowed to the Monastery of Vatopeda the lake Poros in Western Thrace:

My predecessors, the anointed and glorious tsars and holy fathers had the power to rule and subject the enemy who used to rise against them by no other than the military help and bravery of my pure Mother of God.¹¹³ This is why my kingdom, elevated with their hopes and rising the weapons against the infidel

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 133; in the Anonymous Greek Chronicles only the year 1371 stand as a date of the Battle of the Maritsa River. For example see Peter Schreiner, *Die Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, T. II. Wien, 1979 Chronik 72a,114

¹⁰⁹ The text of this Chronicle ends with the year 1529 see. Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, Zbornik za Istoriju, xxxiii- cviii

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 199

¹¹¹ Some of the earliest sources that could indicate the date of the battle as 26 Sep. 1371 are the Ragusan chronicle where the author writes 26 November as the date for the battle, see. Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 160; The *Anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle* from the 15th century depicts the battle as taking place in 6879, on the 26 day of September see. Ivan Tiutiundzhiev, *Bŭlgarskata Anonimna hronika ot XV*, Veliko Trnovo, 1992, 88

¹¹² That the battle was during summer time the 15th century Greek historian reports in his History, see. Laonikos Chalkokondyles: a translation and commentary of the "*Demonstrations of Histories*", 1996, 120-124

¹¹³ The Holy Mountain, a peninsula in now-day Northern Greece was/is believed to be protected by the Mother of Jesus which explains the invocation

Muslims, knows that it has to come on the Holy Mountain, to bestow to this Mother of God the appropriate prayers and submission, in order to receive from her treasure the mercy, and with her help and her name and our God. Because it is up to their will that Kings have a kingdom and Rulers rule.¹¹⁴

The Sun Eclipse

The chronicle of the priest Moksa written in 1620 was not used by the aforementioned Serbian historians who wrote on the Battle of the Maritsa River and established chronology of the events. Other sources like the Slavic chronicles, the Byzantine Short Chronicles or the writing of the contemporary authors to the Battle such as monk Isaiah, were regarded closer to the event and “reliable” when it came to dating the Battle back in time. The fact that the chronicle written by the priest Moksa was composed in Romanian and that editions were not published until the second half of the 19th century made this valuable work on Balkan history inaccessible to 19th century historians in South-Eastern Europe. After having been introduced, its value as an original source was downplayed. Majority of researcher referred to it as a late version of the *Bulgarian Anonymous Chronicle* (written in the 15th century).¹¹⁵ Among the events narrated by priest Moksa (writes from the “beginning” of the world and ends in the year 1489) we read about the battle in the Valley of the River Maritsa:

Then Murad had raised the Turks against Uglješa and Vukašin. They gathered a great army and engaged in battle with the Turks, and lot of blood was shed by the two armies. In the end the Turks were victories. Uglješa and Vukašin died in the valley of Maritsa, in the year 6879 [1370]. The Turks captured many and took them in Gallipoli. Then the sun became dark in the middle of the day and stars could be seen.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ A. Solovjev i V. Mošin, *Grčke povelje srpskih vladara*, Beograd 1936, 287

¹¹⁵ Researchers today recognize the importance of the sources and are on the opinion that besides the Bulgarian chronicles the priest Moksa used a variety of sources some of which are now not available for the researchers.

¹¹⁶ Ivan Tiutiundzhiev, *Bŭlgarskata hronika ot XV v. i hronikata na vlaškiot monah Mihail Moksa 1620*, IPR, 1987, 71

Truly, the Chronicle of Moksa resembles the Bulgarian Anonymous Chronicle.¹¹⁷ However, the information on the sun eclipse is not seen in any of the known sources on the Battle of the Maritsa River. Such depiction of a sun eclipse draw the attention of the Bulgarian historian Ivan Tutundjiev who had calculated, according to the method given by the Russian historian Kamenceva,¹¹⁸ that on Saturday 27 September, one day after the date which is accepted by the majority of historians as the time of the battle, a sun eclipse could be observed in the sky.¹¹⁹ Tutundjiev believes this information actually represents one of the best counterargument to those researchers thinking that the Chronicle of Moksa is just a latter variant of the *Bulgarian Anonymous Chronicle* and that his finding puts an end to the discussion of the date when the Battle took place.¹²⁰

The calculation done by Fred Espenak shows that there was a partial sun eclipse appearing on the sky over South –Eastern Europe in 1371.¹²¹ However, Espenak and Tutundjiev came up with different dates. According to the Julian calendar,¹²² Espenak’s calculation tells that the only sun eclipse visible over South-Eastern Europe in 1371 occurred October 9th. From the image (Figure 2) it seems that the shadow of the moon was visible in the regions of South-Eastern Europe as the greatest eclipse took place

¹¹⁷ Ivan Tiutiundzhiev, *Bŭlgarskata Anonimna hronika ot XV*, 88 - “Amorat [Murad] was preparing again to attack the Bulgarians or to go against Uglesha. When Uglesha and King Volkashin found out about this, a great number of Serbian armies and from Dalmacia and Traves arrived at the city of Ser [Serrez]. Uglesha and his brother Volkashin arrived and it was a great battle against the Turks who had Amorat as their leader. A terrible bloodshed ensued on the river Maritsa. The Turks were shouting powerfully. Because of that the Serbs fled and Uglesha and Volkashin were killed on the river Maritsa. And their death was in 6879 [1370], on the 26th day of September. The Turks managed to capture many prisoners and they took them to Galipole [Gallipoli]”

¹¹⁸ E. I. Kamenceva, *Ruskaia hronologiia*, M. 1960

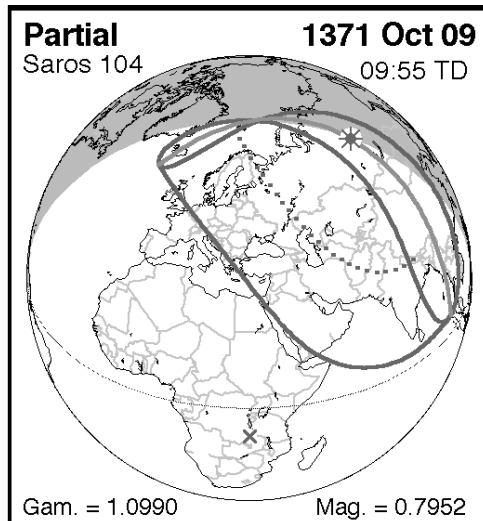
¹¹⁹ Ivan Tiutiundzhiev, *Bŭlgarskata Anonimna hronika ot XV*, 129

¹²⁰ Tutundjiev discusses in length the Battle of the Maritsa River in the commentaries in the edition of the Bulgarian Anonymous Chronicle

¹²¹ NASA Technical Publication, Five Millennium Canon of Solar Eclipses: -1999 to +3000,(NASA/TP-2006-214141):

¹²² Astronomers use the Julian calendar for calculating dates before 1582. The date according to Gregorian calendar is 17 October.

over Siberia. The sort of sun eclipse taking place in 1371 was partial, which means that only Moon's penumbral shadow traverses Earth. Moreover, only part of this penumbral shadow was visible in South-Eastern Europe because the region was not on the “path of totality” which is marked on the image with a sign of a star.

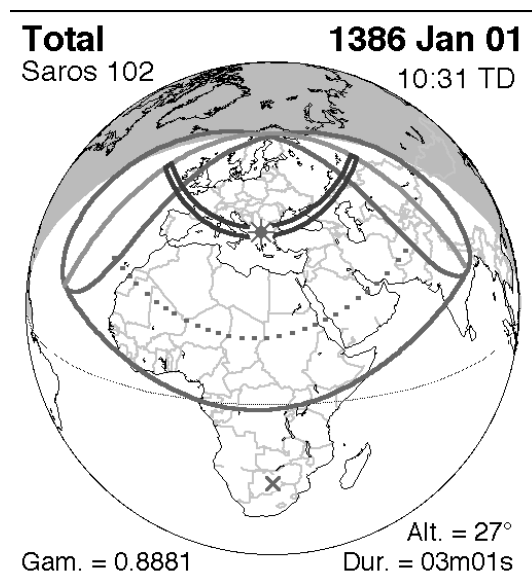


(Figure 2) Projection of the sun eclipse by Fred Espenak

According to the projection above we can say that the Chronicle of Moksa gives true information concerning the appearance of an eclipse but the description does not correspond to the characteristics of eclipses from the partial type as well from regions which were not on the “path of totality”. What Moksa describes as “the stars could be seen” occurs in a case of a total sun eclipse which can not be said to have taken place on the sky over the region in 1371. Partial eclipses may have been remarkable events, too, but still the projection of the sun eclipse in 1371 does not tell us that a spectacular event on the sky over South-Eastern Europe took place. The report of Moksa of a total sun eclipse following the Battle of the Maritsa River in 1371 can be interpreted with two explanations: it may be that the priest Moksa had copied this information from an earlier source that exaggerated the proportions of the eclipse in 1371 or the author Moksa mistakenly copied a description of a total sun eclipse taking place in a different year and also being used to depict an important battle between the “Turks” and the “Christians”.

Because we do not know of an earlier source depicting a sun eclipse in 1371 we can just examine the second explanation of why Moksa connects the Battle in 1371 with a sun eclipse. We know that sun eclipses have been mentioned in Slavic and Greek

chronicles and Ottoman calendars. One of the sun eclipses which was recorded in the Slavic and Greek Chronicles in the year 1386/7 was mentioned in the year when a military expedition of Murad I fought the Serbian forces at Pločnik.¹²³ According to the calculations of Espenak, the sun eclipse in 1386 appeared to be a total eclipse on the sky over South-Eastern Europe and similar to what Moksa described as “the stars appeared”. Most important is that this sun eclipse is approximately in the same period with Moksa’s depiction and also commemorating an important Battle between the Serbian forces and the Ottomans.¹²⁴



(Figure 3) Projection of the sun eclipse by Fred Espenak

From the projection above we see that in 1386 the moon shadow traversed exactly over the center of the Balkans which made it visible throughout most of present day Albania, Southern Serbia, Northern Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria. According to the calculations done for the entire second half of the 14th century this is the only total

¹²³ Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, 214/5, Osmanlı tarihi ilk devrine Ait Bulgar ve Sırp Kronikleri, Çeviren Akdes Nimet Kurat, Tarih Araştırma Dergisi, Ankara 3 (4-5), 1965

¹²⁴ NASA Technical Publication, *Five Millennium Canon of Solar Eclipses: -1999 to +3000* (NASA/TP-2006-214141)

eclipse when the Moon's dark umbral shadow passed through the region of South-Eastern Europe.¹²⁵

The total sun eclipse from 1386 is not encountered only in the writings of Slavic and Greek sources. In one of the Ottoman calendars published in 1961 we read of a sun eclipse, too.¹²⁶ To identify whether the sun eclipse in 1386 is the one recorded in the Calendar we should first trace the way of dating events in these valuable sources. The authors of the Ottoman calendars give the date of events by telling the number of years that passed from the occurrence of the event until the time of the writing of the calendar. As for the time when they wrote the Calendar, which is crucial to identify the other dates, we use the last event recorded. In the Calendar where the sun eclipse is mentioned, the conquest of Selanik (Thessalonica) in 833 (1430) is referred as the last year by the author.¹²⁷ Atsız proposes that we should calculate the dates from the year 835/1432 (according to Atsız the year of writing of the Calendar) and not 833 because it gives wrong results for events such as the battle of Ankara whose chronology is firmly established by many other sources. But if we use the year 833/1430 as the date from which we calculate the dates in the Calendar we come with a result that shows the sun eclipse as occurring in 1386:¹²⁸

The sun was completely covered, stars appeared, Las [the Serbs] attacked and the late Murad Beg became a martyr and the late Bayezid Beg

¹²⁵ The Short Greek Chronicals, too mention this sun eclipse - "In the same year [6894=1370/1] the sun darkened and darkness prevailed for three days on January 7th" - Peter Schreiner, *Die Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, T. II. Wien, 1979 Chronik 72a, 114

¹²⁶ Atsız, N, *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Takvimler*, Istanbul,1961,58-71; V. L. Ménage, *The 'Annals of Murad II'*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 39, No. 3.(1976), 570-584

¹²⁷ In the introduction of the calendar Atsız proposes that instead of the year 833 recorded in the calendar as the last event (the conquest of Selanik) we need to consider 835/1432 as the year when the calendar was composed and according to this date we should make the calculations. Then he gives dates which are widely known such as the battle at Angora that if we calculate according to the year 833/1430 the result will be two years earlier than the established date in the historiography.

¹²⁸ This calendar used an older Ottoman source, most probably another calendar. It is the only Ottoman source that I am aware of mentions the sun eclipse in 1386.

came on the throne. The region of Saruhan was conquered. Forty five years [from the date when the calendar was written]¹²⁹

From the examples above we see that the sun eclipse in 1386 found its way into Ottoman, Slavic and Greek narratives. Indeed, the sun eclipse must have been an unusual event that could be observed in the Balkans including the Ottoman capital where the above mentioned Ottoman calendar might have been written in 1431/2. The sun eclipse of 1386 which in the Chronicle of Moksa is placed in the year 1371 as the event following the defeat of Vukašin and Uglješa is probably the description of what happened in 1386. That this may be the case is shown in the absence of a description of a sun eclipse further in the text in the Chronicle of Moksa which fits the calculations done by Espenak that at the end of 14th century there was only one total eclipse appearing on the sky in the region at stake.

It can not be determined for sure whether it was Moksa's conscious decision to place the total sun eclipse in the year 1371 in order to emphasize the importance of the Battle in the valley of Maritsa or it was only a mistake due to his use of some older sources. However, if there was any event significant enough to satisfy the inclination of the author for determining its importance by relating it to a total sun eclipse, that event would have surely been the battle at Kosovo in 1389. The description of the Kosovo Battle in the chronicle is far more dramatically. It is also referred as the most important event. Although the exact date of the battle of River Maritsa is hard to be determined I believe that the Battle took place in the summer of 1371. From the available sources we cannot establish whether it was 26 September or another date. However, knowing the year will be useful in determining how chronology of events was constructed in early Ottoman historical narratives from late 15th century.

¹²⁹ N. Atsız, *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Takvimler*, Istanbul, 1961, 69

The Chronology in the Ottoman Historical Narratives

The earliest Ottoman sources concerned with the chronology of the early Ottoman rulers and events were the so called “Royal calendars”. The earliest of these calendars written in Persian language was dedicated to Mehmed Çelebi and written in 1421. The published calendars, so far,¹³⁰ do not mention a battle against *Laz* or *Sırf*¹³¹ and in general very few events have been recorded in this early Ottoman period. Most of these sources give the year of Süleyman Paşa’s death and with some exceptions¹³² almost all of them “make a leap” to the 1380s with events such as the Ottoman conquest of Kütahya or the Battle at Kosovo.¹³³ This “black hole” in the early Ottoman calendars¹³⁴ can be explained with the information we get from the latter Ottoman histories according to which the famous conquests in Thrace were not achievements of the family of Osman but the local commanders. Could it be that the authors of the Ottoman calendars did not include these events because they included only dates in which the Ottoman ruler made a particular achievement? It is hard to answer this question with few of the Calendars available and also a scarcity of narrative sources for this early period.

The early Calendars offer scarcity of information on the period of the conquests in Thrace. As a result we trace mistakes in the chronology which refers to that part of Ottoman past depicted in the first comprehensive dynastic histories at the end of the 15th

¹³⁰ Turan, O. *Istanbul’un Fethinden Önce Yazılmış Tarihi Takvimler*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, XI, 7, Ankara, 1984, Atsız, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed’e Sunulmuş Tarihi Bir Takvim*, İstanbul Enstitüsü Dergisi, 1957.

¹³¹ Except for the Battle on Kosovo.

¹³² Atsız, N, *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Takvimler*, İstanbul, 1961, 101 - only in the calendar from 843 the conquest of Edirne is recorded but in the year 773 (1372) unlike most of the latter Ottoman histories which place the event much earlier.

¹³³ Halil İnalcık, *The Rise of the Ottoman Historiography*. - Historians of the Middle East. Historical Writings on the Peoples of Asia, ed. Lewis/Holt. London, 1962, 158 the author says that the calendars give little information until the last years of Murad I and that this means the calendars must have used a chronicle for the first Ottoman sultans since it was unlikely that any calendars were written in the early period

¹³⁴ Most of them have been written in the time of Murad II.

century. Menage and Inalcik established long ago that calendars had been used by authors of late 15th century Ottoman histories.¹³⁵ It is quite possible that these early Ottoman calendars, or a version of them not yet found or lost, had served as a framework for the authors of late 15th century histories to organize oral traditions, data from *gazavat-names* and even personal recollections in a chronological order.

Let us look at the chronology used by the grand vizier Mehmed Paşa who wrote his Ottoman history in Arabic during the rule of Mehmed II. In his work the “black hole” appears in the first two decades of conquests in Thrace as well, which may serve as an additional argument why Menage considers Mehmed’s history to be a recasting of a simple calendar.¹³⁶ But contrary to other available calendars, in this Ottoman history we read about the conquest of Biga taking place in 766 (1363). Between this conquest and those of Drama, Zihne, Serrez and Karaferye (in Northern Greece) in the year 787 (1385) the text informs only about the takeovers of Kütahya, some Germiyan towns and Hamid region in 783 (1381).¹³⁷ We learn about the Ottoman conquest in 783 (1381) from the published Calendars. However, the conquests of Biga and the places in present day Northern Greece mentioned afore must have been part of an unknown calendar or a source used by Mehmed Paşa.

The calendar that may have been used in Mehmed Paşa’s history or, even if we do not accept this presumption, the chronological arrangement found in his work was the main source for the chronological ordering of the conquests in Thrace in the first major Ottoman dynastical histories. The oral tradition used by Aşıkpaşazade, Oruç and the author(s) of the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* was not centered on specific dates but the focus was on well-known commanders which took part in the conquest (Ilbeg, Evrenoz, Delü Balaban) or tales about important events. This oral tradition may have resembled the narrative found in the Hagiography of Seyyid Ali Sultan whose conquests in Thrace have a legendary character and were not described according to a

¹³⁵ Inalcik, H, *The Rise of the Ottoman Historiography*, 158/9 ; Menage, V, *Annales of Murad II*, 579

¹³⁶ Menage, V.L. *The Beginning of Ottoman Historiography*. - Historians of the Middle East. Historical Writings on the Peoples of Asia, ed. Lewis/Holt. London, 1962, 174

¹³⁷ Nişancı Mehmed Paşa, karamanlı, *Osmanlı Sultanları Tarihi*, çev. H. Konyalı in Atsız, Osmanlı Tarihler I, Istanbul 1949, 346

chronological order.¹³⁸ However the format of the histories that were taken by the authors in the late 15th century necessitated a departure from the “old style” and required that the chronological order is introduced even for conquests that were not previously associated with a particular date.

Apz’s account on the events from the conquest of Biga (766/1364) to the conquest of Kütahya (783/1381) is the best example of how the authors of the first major Ottoman dynastic histories had to interpolate events into the available chronology coming from early Ottoman calendars. If in the previously mentioned Ottoman history written by the Grand Vizier Mehmed the conquests of Biga and Kütahya were briefly mentioned in successive ordering, Apz History covers the same time sequence (between 766 and 783) with five *bâbs* (chapters). Each of the chapters describe the conquest of Biga, the routing of the Sırfs, the negotiations with the Germiyanoglu, the wedding of Bayezid with the Germiyan princess and the envoys sent by the Germiyans to bring the bride, respectively.¹³⁹

When Apz was incorporating the story on the routing of the Sırfs and the wedding of Bayezid I he was not able to give an “exact” chronology of these events. As a solution he must have resorted to connecting the stories to events for which chronology already existed and such were the conquests of Biga and Kütahya. At the beginning of the *bâb* on the conquest of Biga, Apz mentions that the town was conquered when Murad I was on the way to cross to the other side and help the Ottoman forces under threat from the Sırfs army approaching Edirne.¹⁴⁰ The forces of the Sırfs mentioned in the beginning of the *bâb* do not appear until the *bâb*. There the beginning of the *bâb* repeats the same information-that the Sırfs approach Edirne. However, what follows in the rest of the *bâb* is their arrival in the vicinity of Edirne, at the place where

¹³⁸ *Seyyid Ali Sultan Vilayetnamesi*. Hazırlayan Doç. Dr. Bedri Noyan Akyıldız Yayınları, Ankara, 1999

¹³⁹ Menage writes that the story of the conquest of Biga and the description of the Bayezid marriage with the Germian princess may be ascribed to Yahşi Fakı (the son of the Orhan’s imam) and his Menakib, V. L. Menage, *The ‘Menaqib’ of Yakhshi Faqih*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol.26, No.1 (1963), 53; It could be that even the bab or chapter on the Sırfs coming in the vicinity of Edirne and the ensuing battle may be ascribed to Yahsi Fakih

¹⁴⁰ What follows is the take over of Biga in 766/1364 and a short story of the treacherous unbelievers who had re-established the control of the town some time afterwards

Şahin Lala suddenly attacked and annihilating the Sırf forces during the night (most of the enemy drowned in the River Meriç/Maritsa). That place was latter named *Sırfı sındığı* (the routing of the Sırf). Apz does not give a date after the narrating of the battle at Sırfı sındığı but tells how Murad Han returned to Bursa, circumcised his sons and ordered a construction of a dervish-lodge in Yenişehir, Friday Mosque in Bilecük, a mosque in Bursa and a mosque-complex in Kapluca (suburb of Bursa).

The author's attempt to give dates for all the events in his narrative had to be combined with a story by someone who had known that the conquest of Biga precedes the annihilation of the Sırf. This approach may be interpreted as a necessity that arose from the scarcity of sources from where the author could copy the exact dates of the particular event. Instead, the stories coming from the oral traditions or personal recollection and genres such as *menakıbs* and *gazavat-names* had to be combined with the available chronology in order to "fulfill" the requirements for a chronological order in a new format of historical narration. This method had to be applied in the following three *bâb* in Apz where stories coming from the personal recollections of Yahşi Fakı (the wedding preparation and the celebration) had to be attached to the available date which was the conquest of Kütahya (783).

The authors of the other major Ottoman dynastical histories at the end of the 15th century made a different arrangement of the chronology of the Battle in which the Sırf had been destroyed.¹⁴¹ Both the Ottoman History written by Oruç¹⁴² and the *Anonymous*

¹⁴¹ The corpus of Ottoman Anonymous Histories or Chronicles available today numbers more than thirty manuscripts. All of them begin with the migration of Suleyman (the legendary ancestor of Osman) but two groups can be identified according to the time they finish the narration of events from Ottoman history. One group had received its final form in the time of Bayezid and another during the rule of Suleyman. The core of the text must have been an earlier text composed in the first year of the rule of Murad II as the events until those years have lengthy description. A discussion on the value of these so called Anonymous Histories or Chronicles, see. Öztürk, N. *Anonim Tevarih-i Al-i Osmanların Kaynak Degerleri Hakkında*. – XII Türk Tarih Kongresi. Ankara, 1999, 756-762

¹⁴² Menage thinks that the Oxford text is the abridgment of the Anonymous Histories from the group finishing the narration of Bayezid see. Menage, V.L, *The Beginning of Ottoman Historiography*, 172; Halil Inalcik on the contrary thinks that that the Anonymous chronicles have not used Oruç giving examples of mistakenly written names of places in Oruç text that have the correct form in the Anonymous Histories, Inalcik, H, *The Rise of the Ottoman Historiography*, 154

*Ottoman Histories*¹⁴³ account separately for the conquest of Biga 766 (1364) and the defeat of the Sirfs. The two texts briefly mention the conquest of Biga before writing on the arrival of the Sirfs in the vicinity of Edirne and after the description of the Battle they give the following year in the calendar, 767 (1365). In Oruç's history the victory is attributed to Lala Şahin, similarly to the account in Apz. However Oruç includes additional details, never mentioned by Apz, such as the division of the gazi's forces in three groups and their attack against the drunken enemy.¹⁴⁴ Contrary to Apz, there is no mentioning of a place called Sirfsındığı, the Battle does not take place on the banks of river Meriç nor we read about a drowning enemy. At the end of the depiction of the battle in Oruç's history we read of the year 767(1365) accompanied with a brief note on the circumcisions of Murad's sons; the construction of the mosques in Bursa;¹⁴⁵ and the wedding of Bayezid with the Germian princes.¹⁴⁶

Similar arrangement of the chronology¹⁴⁷ is available in the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories*, although the description of the battle differs significantly. Following an exact depiction as in Oruç's text, the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* give another version of the same event.¹⁴⁸ The second version is introduced with a line that says

¹⁴³ *Anonim Osmanli kroniği*, Hazırlayan Prof.Dr. Necdet Öztürk, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları vakfi, İstanbul, 2000, 29-30

¹⁴⁴ Babinger, F. *Die frühosmanischen Jahrbücher des Urudsch. Nach den Handschriften. zu Oxford und Cambridge*, Hannover, 1925, 23; *Oruç Beğ Tarihi*, Edited by Nihal Atsız.İstanbul, 43/4; *Oruç Beğ Tarihi* (Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tipkibasım), Hazırlayan. Necdet Öztürk, Çamlıca Basım Yayın, İstanbul, 2007, 26

¹⁴⁵ Unlike Apz we do not read of a construction of tekke in Yineşehir.

¹⁴⁶ What follows is the conquest of Kütahya, Hamid ili and others for which the author does not give a date.

¹⁴⁷ Only exception is the rendering of the date for the conquest of Kütahya etc, year 783/784

¹⁴⁸ The Ottoman Anonymous Histories also give a much more specific description of the battlefield. They say that the battle took place near Edirne, opposite or next to Çirmen at the place "today" called Sirfsındığı. Unlike the Apz and Oruç Histories there is not mentioning of the River Maritsa. In my opinion, the source of this account was very informed on the geography of this place which is something I will discuss in the chapter "The Memory of a Place"

“some narrators tell the story” of Hacı İlbeği who had defeated the Sırf army with four of his companions:

Apparently, Hacı İlbeği with four people went on hunting.¹⁴⁹ While being on the road one night they suddenly heard a clamor of a crowd. They took cover at a very inaccessible place and from there they saw that the clamor comes from the endless army of infidels. Then Hacı İlbeği said: “Companions, let us be many”. The companions said: “The plan is yours. If you say that we should be many we shall do that”.¹⁵⁰

The story continues with the destruction of the army and ends with the death of the hero who was killed by the envious “begs” (in the first place referring to the beylerbeg Lala Şahin).¹⁵¹ In this episode there is no causality with the previous events

¹⁴⁹ That hunting was practiced by Ottomans during the conquest of Thrace can be seen best in the Hagiography of Romylos written around 1391. In this valuable source for the second half of the 14th century we read how on one occasion Romylos was advised by the governor of Scopelos (eastern Thrace, today known as Üsküb and situated east of Kırklareli) to abandon his dwelling in the mountains because “the Hagarenes [refers to the descendents of the biblical Hagar and describes his descendent, the Arabs] wish to come here to hunt wild beasts, so you must do one of two things: either come and live within the tower, or retire from the area”. The “Life of Saint Romylos” is an eye-witness account of the period that saw the earliest Ottoman achievements in the Balkans (1350s and 1360s) as well as events immediately following the Battle of the Maritsa River. For the Battle this work refer in the following passage – “After a little while, the most Christian Uglesha [he is known as a great supporter of the monasteries on the Holy Mountain] was killed, and all the monks on the Holy Mountain, especially the solitaries and those dwelling in deserted places, were filled with tumult and fear, and therefore many of the anchorites fled from the Mountain” see. Mark Bartusis, Khalifa Ben Nasser, and Angeliki E. Laiou, *Days and deeds of a Hesychast Saint: A Translation of the Greek Life of Saint Romylos*, Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines, 9:1 (1982), 22; the Slavic version of the Life of Romylos was published by P.A. Syrku, *Monaha Grigoriia Zhitie prepodobnoga Romila*, Petrograd 1900 (Pamiatniki dreveneï pismennosti i iskustva, CXXXVI); according to researchers the Slavic version is only a translation from the Greek original see. P. Devos, *La version slave de la vie de S. Romylos*, Byzantion 31 (1961), 149-187

¹⁵⁰ *Anonim Osmanli kroniği*, Hazırlayan Prof.Dr. Necdet Öztürk, 29-30; *Anonim Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, F. Giese, Hazırlayan Nihat Azamat, Istanbul Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1992. 25/6

¹⁵¹ This mentioning of the term *beg* is similar to the title of the Ottoman rulers in some of the Ottoman calendars mentioned previously in this chapter. Murad I is referred to as a Beg in the contemporary documents such as the treaty between the Genoese and the Ottomans see. Kate Fleet, *The Treaty of 1387 between Murad I and the Genoese*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, *University of London*, Vol. 56, No. 1.(1993), 13-33. For the usage of beg when referring to Ottoman rulers in the Slavic

as the hero encounters the enemy by accident, unlike the narrative of Apz who tried to establish a logical continuation and connection between the stories which he attempted to fit into the available dates of the early conquests such as the one for Biga. The story of İlbeği, as found in the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* must have been a part of the “oral histories” in the region of Thrace. The author of the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* wanted not only to offer additional version of the event but also to “confront” the “official” hero with another commander. The surprising familiarity with the terrain around Černomen/Çirmen and the place depicted as the battlefield (see. chapter The Memory of a Place), shows that this story comes from the local community in the region.

In the 16th century Ottoman historians were not faced with the daunting task of determining a date for the battle. The majority just copied the earlier sources without modifying the basic information found in earlier text.¹⁵² They had a ready-to-use chronology on which the early historians had to labor so that this important event would fit in the first detailed Ottoman dynastical histories from the end of 15th century. Early Ottoman historians had older sources available which provided them with partial chronology where they had to insert the event that took place in 1371. They were aware that the Sırsındığı battle took place after the conquest of Biga and before the conquest of Kütahya - two events that are frequently noted in Ottoman calendars. In between the poor chronology available to the authors of the first major Ottoman histories very rich material was inserted narrating the exploits by Ottoman Sultans or famous individuals, some of it coming from *menakıbs*, *gazavatnames* as well as oral traditions and personal recollections. The story of Sırsındığı serves as good example of how a long forgotten

sources see the example in *Antologija Stare Srpske Književnosti* (XI-XVIII veka), Izbor, prevod i objašnjenja Đorđa Sp. Radojičića, Beograd (1960), 115

¹⁵² *XV Yüzyıl Tarihcilerinden Kemal: Selatin-name (1299-1490)* Hazırlayan Necdet Öztürk, TTK 2001 – this is a history in verses dedicated to Bayezid II which does not resemble other Ottoman sources in the chronological ordering of the (Sırsındığı) Battle. The author gives the year 788 (1386) and attributes the victory to Bayezid I; late 16th century Hoca Sadettin Efendi, *Tacü't-tevarih*, hazırlayan İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1999 - dates the battle to 766/1364. In this work we read of a very interesting combination of the accounts on the battle from Apz, Oruç and the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories*. A similar story and a date are found in 17th century Solak-zade (Mehmed Hemdemi Çelebi, *Solak-zade Tatihi*, Hazırlayan Dr. Vahid Çabuk, Cilt 1, Kaynak Eserler Dizisi:34, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1989) and in the History of Namık Kemal written in late 19th century (Namık Kemal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Hürriyet Yayınları, İstanbul, 1971).

date has to be invented so that Ottoman historians can interpret the early history of the Ottoman dynasty.

Victory Memorials

In almost all of the early Ottoman histories following the battle at Sırfsındığı we read that Murad I constructed several mosques, a mosque complex (imaret)¹⁵³ and a dervish lodge in Bursa, Yenişehir and Bilecük. In fact the Apz's history place the building of these monuments within the *bâb* or the chapter narrating the defeat of the Sırfs. After hearing the news that Lala Şahin destroyed the enemy, according to Apz, Murad I returned to Bursa, where he circumcised his sons and:

[He] constructed Imaret in Yinişehir and there was a dervish called Postınpuş, so he built a dervish-lodge for him. And in Bilecük he built a Friday-mosque and for himself within the wall of Bursa at the gate of the Palace he constructed a mosque and in Kapluca he built imaret and above it a Medrese

It seems that only three of the objects mentioned above have survived until present day. I have not found any record of the Imaret in Yenişehir nor the Friday mosque in Bilecik. The other buildings are preserved but have not been interpreted by art-historians in connection to the victory at Sırfsındığı. They only used the year when the Battle took place to establish the date when their construction had launched. Art-historians have not understood the importance of the battle in 1371 and have not connected it with the extensive building program by Murad I. The only sources they used were Ottoman histories disclose the consequences of the Battle for the future developments in the region of South-Eastern Europe only when compared to Slavic, Greek and Western sources. Unfortunately, by reading only Ottoman histories from the end of 15th century art historians just copied the year 1364 as the date when the building

¹⁵³ In the early Ottoman period the word imaret has a different meaning than what in latter periods will be known as soup kitchen. It used to refer to the mosque with its dependencies such as school, soup-kitchen, and hospital. In later periods such mosque complexes will be known as külliye

of the monuments had began, instead using the year 1371 which historians in South-Eastern Europe have since the end of the 19th established as the date when the Battle of the Maritsa River took place.¹⁵⁴

From the research that was done by the South-European historians on the chronology of the Battle we can now correct the older generation of art historians who believed that the objects have been built between 1365/6 and 1385. The political developments after the Battle in 1371 that must have had impact over the economics may have been the reason for the increased patronage of Murad I. Soon after the battle in 1371¹⁵⁵ among Murad's vassals we see the Byzantine Emperor John V who obliged to join the Ottoman troops took part in the military expeditions in Asia Minor in 1373 and was also forced to pay tribute to the Ottoman ruler.¹⁵⁶ We can only speculate on the financial impact from these military and political successes but it seems reasonable to assume that it is reflected in the ability of Murad I to finance the above mentioned building projects. It is not only the construction but also the availability of assigning land and financial resources in the deed of trust. Interesting enough Murad I was the patron of a number of buildings in the newly conquered lands but in the narratives we

¹⁵⁴ 1364/5 which in the early Ottoman history has been regarded as the date when the Battle of the Maritsa River took place is referred in the majority of works by art historians as the time when the construction of the monuments begun: Albert Gabriel, *Bursa'da Murad I Camii ve Osmanlı Mimarisinin Menşei Meselesi*. Istanbul, 1942, Cumhuriyet Matbaası. Vakıflar Dergisi II'c; Albert Gabriel, *Une Capitale Turque Brousse*, Paris, E. De Boccard, 1943; Tayyib Gökbilgin, *Murad I. tesisleri ve Bursa imareti vakfiyesi*, *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, X, 1953; Aptullah Kuran, *İlk devir Osmanlı Mimarisinde Cami*, Mimarlık Fakültesi, Ankara 1964; Ayverdi, E.H. *Osmanlı Mimarisinin İlk Devri: Ertuğrul, Osman, Orhan Gaziler, Hüdavendigâr ve Yıldırım Bayezid, 630-805 (1230-1402)*, Istanbul, 1966; Şaman Doğan, N., *Bursa Murad Hüdavendigâr Camii ve Niğde Ak Medrese'nin Düşündürdükleri*, Prof. Dr. Zafer Bayburtluoğlu'na Armağanı Sanat Yazıları, (Ed. M. Denктаş-Y. Özbek), Kayseri 2001: 211-220. Even in the recent works on the Ottoman architecture in western languages this date still exists. Such is the popular work of Godfrey Goodwing, *A History of Ottoman Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1971, or Howard Crane, *The Ottoman Sultans' Mosques: Icons of Imperial Legitimacy*, in *Urban Structures and Social Order: The Ottoman City and Its Parts*, Irene Bierman and Donald Preziosi, eds. (New Rochelle, 1991), 153–212.

¹⁵⁵ Ostrogorsky in his work showed that Byzantine Emperor John V became the vassal of the Ottomans as early in 1372 because the rebellion of Ottoman prince Savci Çelebi and Adronic IV took place in early May of 1373. see G. Ostrogorsky. *Byzance, etat tributarie de L'empire turc*, - ЗРВИ, 1957,50

¹⁵⁶ In 1373 for the first time John V took part in an Ottoman military expedition

encounter the buildings mentioned afore. Could it be that they served as memorials to the victory in 1371?

Since Oleg Grabar's interpretation of the Dome of the Rock as a victory monument art historians have been discussing whether Islamic buildings carried messages with political connotation.¹⁵⁷ In order to regard monuments as vessels of political and religious messages researchers have attempted to interpret sites, forms and decorations of buildings. But when applying the same method on the early Ottoman monuments in our case we face several problems. First, most of the monuments from this period have not been preserved in their original form. Even the very few monuments that have their original architectural features preserved are missing the original decorations and inscriptions which were destroyed and replaced with new ones.

From all the monuments according to Ottoman histories erected after the battle at Sırfınsındığı the one that drew the attention of the art historians was the Hudavendigâr mosque in Bursa.¹⁵⁸ The mosque is the central building around which the other parts of the complex were built and the entire mosque complex was known from Ottoman histories as the *İmaret* in Kapluca.¹⁵⁹ The mosque served at the same time as Medrese—the ground floor, and zaviye—the first floor. The building has been preserved in its original form and regarded by art historians as one of the rare examples through which they could observe the early Ottoman architecture. In addition, the interesting Byzantine features on the façade have been a topic of discussion on the beginnings of the Ottoman architecture. This work was of a particular interest for the debate on the "nature" of the Ottoman beylik in the 14th century.¹⁶⁰

Even though preserved, this monument lacks some original features from the time of its construction which can tell us whether this building was a victory memorial.

¹⁵⁷ Oleg Grabar, *The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem*, *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 33-62

¹⁵⁸ This imposing monument is located in one of the suburbs in Bursa on the famous hill Çekirge which dominates the area.

¹⁵⁹ The mosque complex was composed from a mosque, zaviye and medrese which have been in the same building today known as Hudavendigâr Camii. Around the central building a bath, soup kitchen and after the death of Murad I a turbe was built.

¹⁶⁰ Such is the case with Albert Gabriel who defended the recently published work on the foundation of the Ottoman state by Mehmed Fuat Köprülü (1890-1966) see. Gabriel, A. *Bursa'da Murad I Camii ve Osmanlı Mimarisinin Menşei Meselesi*. İstanbul, 1942

The foundation inscription dates from 1322 (1905) and the one above the *mihrab* was made after the repairs in 1904.¹⁶¹ In the deed of trust which was a copy made in 802 (1400) from the original document written in 1385, we do not see any reference which shows that this mosque complex was a victory memorial. From the *vakfiye* we know only of the date when the construction of the mosque was presumable completed and as for the beginning of the construction we can just presume any of the years between 1371 and 1385. The depiction of this monument in the Ottoman histories from the end of the 15th century which connects its construction with the battle at Sırfsındığı can not be confirmed by available documents and inscription. Even later Ottoman narratives such as Evliya Çelebi's travel account on Bursa do not refer to the Hudavendigâr mosque as a victory memorial. There is also no reference to the famous battlefield by this famous Ottoman traveler, although he passed through the region of Cısr-i Mustafa Paşa. As for his account on Bursa, the short description he provides of the mosque complex only notes that the Hudavendigâr Mosque does not resemble a mosque at all.¹⁶²

The dervish lodge of Postınpuş is another monument referred to as the building constructed after the victory at Sırfsındığı. Hoca Sadettin Efendi's *Tacü't tevarih* reiterates Apz when saying that the lodge was constructed by Murad I.¹⁶³ Evliya Çelebi writes on the convent as the burial place of Sultan Orhan's son and that this place belonged to the order of dervishes of *Al-i Aba*.¹⁶⁴ This information is confirmed by the Ottoman documents from the 16th century where we read that the lodge was constructed during the reign of Orhan. In one order issued by the Central government (1571) the construction of the lodge is ascribed to Sultan Orhan but the document itself refers to a deed of trust issued by *Hudavendigâr* (Murad I).¹⁶⁵ The document issued by the central

¹⁶¹ Ayverdi, E.H. *Osmanlı Mimarisinin İlk Devri: Ertuğrul, Osman, Orhan Gaziler, Hüdavendigâr ve Yıldırım Bayezid, 630-805 (1230-1402)*. 257-259

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 232

¹⁶³ I refer to the İmaret and the Medrese as one because the medrese is actually the second floor of the mosque.

¹⁶⁴ Ayverdi, Ayverdi, E.H. *Osmanlı Mimarisinin İlk Devri*, 209

¹⁶⁵ This document was first published by Hikmet Turhan Dağlı oğlu, *XVI 'Asırda Bursa, Bursa vilayeti matba'ası* 1940, 69-70. Transcription in the Latin alphabet is also given

government is actually a warning to the *mütevelli* (the guardian) of this zaviye to spend the financial incomes according to the terms (şart-ı vakıf) set forward in the deed issued by Murad I. The reports that one of Orhan's sons was buried in the object may have created the story of the *zaviye* being constructed by Sultan Orhan. But only if we have the original *vakıfname*, and I am not aware of its existence, we may say that the *zaviye* of Postınpuş was constructed during the reign of Murad I. This might be the only way to resolve conflicting information in the historical narratives and Ottoman documents.

Ottoman archival documents do not inform on the exact time when Murad I constructed the building for which the late 15th century Ottoman dynastic Histories claim to have been built after the Battle at Sırfıncı. King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa were the most powerful rulers in the region of South-Eastern Europe and their defeat may have been understood by the contemporary Ottomans as a great success. This is why we may consider the increased patronage of Murad I reported by the Ottoman historical narratives as an act of commemorating the Battle in 1371.

by Ayverdi with some corrections see. Ayverdi, E.H. *Osmanlı Mimarisinin İlk Devri*, 209-210

Chapter IV

SERBS, BULGARIANS AND THE OTTOMAN COMMANDER

The modern historiographies in South-Eastern Europe, from their beginnings in the 19th century, have not been preoccupied with questions concerning the political developments in the Ottoman polity. Also Turkish historians were not interested in the political developments in South-Eastern Europe before the Ottoman conquest and did not pay attention to the question who was the enemy that the Ottomans fought against in the battle of Sırfsındığı.¹⁶⁶ Both historiographies (on one side the South-Eastern European and the Turkish) were indifferent to the work of the other and with a different set of methods to interpret the Ottoman advance in the region. In the Turkish historiography the advance of the Ottomans in South-Eastern Europe was seen from the perspective of the taxation records concerning the peasant population. The Ottoman taxation records showed that peasants in the region were relieved from the harsh feudal

¹⁶⁶ In majority of general histories written in Turkish the battle is attributed with a wrong chronology and description of the enemy forces. Many of the authors have used the work of Hammer von Purtschall who on the other hand utilized the 16th century Ottoman history of Hoca Sadettin Efendi where the enemy forces approaching Edirne - Bosnian, Hungarian and Moldavian troops are being destroyed at the place called Sırfsındığı. Hammer von Purtschall adds to Sadettin's depiction of the Sırfsındığı battle the name of the Hungarian king and claimed that the battle in 1364 was the first battle between the Hungarians and the Ottomans; Turkish historians such as Uzunçarşılı and Danişmend make a distinction of the Sırfsındığı battle with the one at Çirmen and write that these were two different battles. The text books for Turkish high schools use Hammer von Purtschall's account but in addition they write that in the Sırfsındığı battle Ottomans for the first time fought a Crusade army see. Kemal Kara, *Lise Tarihi 2*, Önde yayıncılık, İstanbul 2002, 21; Tahir Ergoğan Şahin, *Tarih 2*, Koza Eğitim ve Yayıncılık, Ankara 1992, 12; similar to Danişmend one of the first published history text-books for High school education in Turkey make a distinction between Sırfsındığı and the Battle at Çirmen but also claiming that these were two different battles, see. *Tarih 3: Yeni ve Yakın Zamanda*, T.T.T. Cemiyeti Tarafından Yazılmıştır, Devlet Matbaası, İstanbul 1933, 18, 19.

obligation that existed before the Ottoman conquest.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand modern South-Eastern European historiography focused on the political history when narrating the Ottoman conquest. The basic premise of the nationalistic ideologies was that the Ottoman conquest disrupted the continuity in the political and cultural life of the Balkan people.¹⁶⁸ The best illustration of this scholarship is the opening lines in the book called *Serbs and Turks 14th and 15th century: Historical studies on the first conflicts and the Turkish invasion before and after the Battle at Kosovo* which was published in 1893 as a work of the leading Serbian historian at the end of the 19th century Stoyan Novaković:

In 14th and 15th century the Serbian people and their society experienced a terrible catastrophe with the invasion and the conquest of the Turks . . . This last battle [between Serbs and Turks] resulted with the lost of everything that the Serbian people had developed in term of statehood from the XI century, from the time of Stefan Voislav until the end of the 14th century.¹⁶⁹

For the early South-East European historiographies the Ottoman conquest was not only the ideological “battle-ground” in which the political and cultural continuity of the “indigenous” Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians had to be shown as disrupted. Historical writing from the 19th century onwards turned its attention to questions such as the ethnicity of the people before the Ottoman conquest of the region. Such discourse was intensified especially after the Berlin Congress (1878) when Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria began competing as to who would conquer the remaining European provinces of the Ottoman state. Such political agenda reflected in the historical research of that time. It was important to discover “what belonged to us before the Turks arrived” and those findings to be presented to the European public.¹⁷⁰ When Stoyan Novaković

¹⁶⁷ The literature on this question is voluminous. For a brief discussion on this issue see. Inalcik, H. and Quataert, D. eds. *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 15/16

¹⁶⁸ Bistra Cvetkova complains in her book on the Ottoman conquest of South Eastern Europe that the resistance of the people in the region had not been carefully researched and that this was one of the reasons why a theory dominates in the historiography saying that the conquest was a relieve for the population which suffered from the chaotic political situation in late Medieval Balkans see. Bistra Cvetkova, *Pametna bitka na narodite (Evropeiskiiat iugoistok i osmanskoto zavoevanie- kraia na 14. i pŕvata polovina na 15. vek)*, Knigoizdatelstvo “Georgi Bakalov” – Varna, 1979, 59

¹⁶⁹ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 1

referred to the Battle of the Maritsa River he believed that the Turks fought against the coalition of the southern Serbian states and that the northern ones (defeated on Kosovo 1389) were indifferent to the “Turkish” danger.¹⁷¹ The southern Serbian states geographically had been located in Macedonia or the region which for the Serbian government was one of the places awaiting the “unification”. Without making any distinction between the term Serb as encountered in the Medieval sources and its modern meaning 19th century Serbian historians at the time referred to the polities in Macedonia as being Serbian which fitted the national narrative claiming continuity from the first mentioning of the name Serb or Serbian until present.¹⁷² This is how the rulers and the troops on the battlefield in 1371 have been characterized as Serbian and the outcome of the Battle understood as the catastrophe for the southern Serbian people and the overture for the second upcoming decisive Battle at Kosovo (1389).¹⁷³

The same misconception of names (Bulgarian, Serbian, and Greek) that in the medieval context referred to a regional, religious or dynastic affiliation of the nobility and the common people was introduced in 19th century Bulgarian historical writing. The name Bulgaria or Bulgarians which is encountered in various sources since the formation of the Bulgarian kingdom in VII century was understood by the modern Bulgarian historians as the evidence for the enduring consciousness of the people on their Bulgarian origin. Similar to the appellations Serb or Serbian the name Bulgarian was used when referring to people and territory in Ottoman Macedonia¹⁷⁴ which became a matter of dispute among the Serbian and Bulgarian historiographies as the

¹⁷⁰ For the Greek historiography see the case of the 19th century Greek historian K. Paparrigopoulos in Cyril Mango, *Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism*, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 28, 1965, 29-43.

¹⁷¹ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 194

¹⁷² In the medieval sources the name Serb is frequently mentioned but its mentioning is not enough to claim the existence of the Serbian nation or ethnicity. I am not aware of studies focusing on this question.

¹⁷³ Latest Serbian historiography also refers to Uglješa’s and Vukašin’s polities as Serbian see. Rade Mihaljčić, *Kraj Srpskog Carstva*, Beograd, 1975, 137

¹⁷⁴ During Ottoman period territorial appellations such as Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia etc. have not been used in defining administrative units. These names were introduced by the European travelers and foreign representatives who used ancient and medieval geographical definitions for the region. The Ottoman referred to these regions as Rumeli/Rumili (the land of the Rum or Rome).

Serbian and Bulgarian national project hand in hand with the Greek one, after the Berlin Congress, prepared for the liberation of this region.¹⁷⁵

The raising nationalisms of the end of 19th century did not spare even the fresco paintings or inscriptions believed to have depicted the “Serbian” dynasty. One such example is the destruction of fresco paintings in the 14th century church of Sveti Dimitrij in the Markov Monastery south of Skopje which was built by king Vukašin and his son Marko. In 1873 when the region was still part of the Ottoman state the Serbian researcher Srečković published a book in which he claimed that during his visit to the Markov Monastery he had seen the fresco paintings of the *ktitors* (patrons) of the church - kings Vukašin and Marko. Also he reports that the fresco composition on the ground level in the church depicted figures from the Nemanjić dynasty. This claim as well as other reports of the existence of fresco paintings depicting the “Serbian dynasty” provoked the Bulgarian bishop from Skopje to destroy the fresco paintings in the ground level of the church.¹⁷⁶ Roughly in the same period was the destruction of the inscription above the west entrance of the church St. Nikola¹⁷⁷ where researchers believe that the names of the Serbian King Uroš and Vukašin had been mentioned.¹⁷⁸ Fortunately, the reports of Srečković that he saw the portraits of King Vukašin and Uglješa were false as researchers in the 1960s discover their portraits on the south entrance of the church where at the beginning of the 19th century a newly constructed baptistery covered the portraits from the views of the visitors. These two portraits are important for our discussion on one of the popular versions on the Battle of the Maritsa River which will be a part of the last chapter.

As the borders were drawn after the First World War, the discussion on the ethnic origins of the population that stayed outside the projected national territories

¹⁷⁵ A very detailed discussion on the Macedonian question at the end of the 19th century in Adanır Fikret, *Makedonya sorunu: oluşumu ve 1908'e kadar gelişimi*, trans. İhsan Catay, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, Istanbul 2001

¹⁷⁶ S. Radojčić, *Freske Markovog Manastira u život sv. Vasilija Novog*, Zbornik radova S.A.N XLIX – Vizantološki institut, knj. 4, 215

¹⁷⁷ 14th century church in north-west Macedonia in the vicinity of the town Kriva Palanka which in the Ottoman time was called Eğri Dere.

¹⁷⁸ Balabanov, K. *Novootkrieni portreti na kralot Marko i kralot Volkašin vo Markoviot manastir* – Kulturno nasledstvo. 3/Skopje, 1967, 48

accelerated. One of the most important works that appeared between the two great wars on the subject of ethnicity of the Slavic speaking Christians in Macedonia was the article of the Bulgarian historian Sakuzov with the title “The newly discovered documents from the end of the 14th century about Bulgarians from Macedonia sold as slaves”.¹⁷⁹ The author during his research in the archives in Venice had discovered notarial documents from Crete concerning the years 1381, 1382 and 1383 where a number of slaves from Salonichi (Thessalonica), Serrez, Melnik, Scopia (Skopje) and other places from Macedonia have been recorded in various transactions. In many of the cases after the name of the slave follows the expression *de genere bulgarorum* which was enough for the author to conclude that “Bulgarians inhabited the Macedonian lands” and that “there is no mentioning of Serbian elements [ethnic] in the Macedonian regions of the former kingdom of Stephen Dušan”.

This tendency of placing the question of identity as the most important topic for the Bulgarian historiography can be seen in the writings of several Bulgarian historians who in the following decades would make brief notes on the Battle in 1371. They wrote that the army of the Serbian feudal lords must have been composed by ethnic Bulgarians which was supported by the findings of Sakuzov.¹⁸⁰ In 1981 Hristo Matanov in his article “The question of the Bulgarian role in the Battle at Chernomen” wrote a detailed review on the available sources and argued that “ethnic Bulgarians” from the lands ruled by Vukašin and Uglješa took part in the Battle.¹⁸¹ It seems that this article is the only one in the Bulgarian historiography dedicated to the Battle of the Maritsa River. Although the Battle itself, according to the sources, took place on the territory of today’s Republic of Bulgaria (see chapter “The Memory of a Place”), Bulgarian

¹⁷⁹ D-r Iv. Sakuzov, *Novootkrite Dokumenti ot kraia na XIV vek za Bŭlgari ot Makedoniia prodavani kato robi*, Makedonski Pregled, 2-3, 1-62

¹⁸⁰ Dušchev Ivan, *Ot Chernomen do Kosovo Pole*. – Izvestiia na Trakiïskiiia nauchen institut, II, S., 1970, 555

¹⁸¹ In the introduction of his work the author says that the older Bulgarian historians ignored the question of the participation of the “Bulgarian ethnic element” in the Battle at Chernomen because the military expedition was organized by the Serbian feudal lords and due to the laconic contemporary sources saying that only Serbs and Greeks took part in the Battle (here he refers to the note of the monk Isaiah on which more will be said in the Chapter Chronology). - Hristo Matanov, *Kŭm vŭprosa za uchastieto na bŭlgarite v Chernomenskata bitka 1371 g./.-V: Bŭlgariia i Balkanite 681-1981*. S. 1982, 142-154

historians were not willing to write about the battle which in the western historiography was accepted as the defeat of the Serbs.

The few documents and inscriptions preserved today and issued in Slavic and Greek language by Vukašin and Uglješa, say that these rulers defined themselves as Christians without any other appellations to their names. Inscription on the grave of the military commanders like Evrenoz who lead the Ottoman conquest of South-Eastern Europe in the second half of the 14th century similar to the afore mentioned rulers shows that he defined himself as Muslim as there is no additional designation in the writing at the entrance of his resting place.¹⁸² But from the 19th century onwards, the political elites and the historians re-discovered new identities for these long forgotten “heroes”. And such re-discovering continues even today as it is the case with the recently published book *The Military History of Macedonia* where we read that the army approaching Edirne in 1371 was composed of Macedonians and that the defeat marked the beginning of the Ottoman rule over Macedonia. In a style similar to the oldest national ideologies in South-Eastern Europe (Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek),¹⁸³ the century-old Macedonian nationalism and thus the youngest of all in the region tries to follow the very same discourse in which national historiographies claim the existence of ethnicity and even nationhood in the Medieval Ages.¹⁸⁴

The Ottoman Commander

If the majority of Sources written in Slavic and Greek agree that King Vukašin and his brother Uglješa had lead the army defeated in 1371, Ottoman sources have various versions on the victorious leader in the battle on the place called Sırfsındığı. We have two versions¹⁸⁵ in the oldest available Ottoman sources narrating the Battle (the

¹⁸² See the inscription of Evrenoz Beg in Vasilis Demetriades, *The Tomb of Ghazi Evrenos Bey at Yenitza and Its Inscription*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 39, No.2, 1976, 328-332

¹⁸³ Soyan Novaković's work is re-published in Belgrade, 2001

¹⁸⁴ Vanče Stojčev, *Military History of Macedonia*, Skopje, 2004, 113-117;

¹⁸⁵ The Ottoman histories from the 16th century and onward combine these two versions.

last two decades of 15th century) in which the victory is attributed to two different Ottoman commanders.¹⁸⁶ Apz,¹⁸⁷ Oruç¹⁸⁸ and Neşri¹⁸⁹ tell us that the victory was achieved by Lala Şahin who just before the battle is mentioned to be appointed by Murad I as beglerbeg of Rumili. On the other hand, the *Ottoman Anonymous Histories* after reporting the “official” version, which is very similar to the abovementioned sources (especially Oruç), tell a version according to which the victorious Ottoman commander is Ilbeg. In a story resembling a legendary tale, Gazi Ilbeg routed the enemy with the help of only four companions.¹⁹⁰ This version was part of the oral tradition in the region of Cisir-i Mustafa Paşa (Svilengrad) which was preserved until the end of 19th century in the story recorded by the Serbian military officer and quoted in the article written by Jovan Mišković in 1900.¹⁹¹ The existence of two versions attributing the Ottoman victory to different Ottoman commanders according to historians was

¹⁸⁶ Halil Inalcik showed that Aşıkpaşazade, Oruç and the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* (Chronicles), all of them written at the end of the 15th century (a group of Anonymous Histories narrates until the time of Süleyman, beginning of 16th century), used a same source until 1422 but also adding new information from different sources, see. Halil Inalcik, *The Rise of the Ottoman Historiography*, 154. This can be confirmed with their narration of the Battle at Sırfsındığı.

¹⁸⁷ His history on the Ottoman dynasty is regarded as the most valuable source for early Ottoman history. The author used older sources such as the menakıb of Yahşi Faki. Aşıkpaşazade presents also his personal observation of events that he witnessed.

¹⁸⁸ Ottoman historian writing during the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512) see. Menage, V.L. *The Beginning of Ottoman Historiography*, 172/3; Menage, V.L. *On the Recension of Uruj's History of Ottomans*. - BSOAS, XXX, 1967

¹⁸⁹ Researchers have established that Neşri's Cihanuma actually used a compilation of composed from the History of Aşık Paşa zade and other source see. Menage, V. L. Menage, *Neshri's History of the Ottomans: The sources and development of the text*, Oxford University Press, 1964,32/3. When considering the account of the Battle on Sırfsındığı the only difference between Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri is that in the last words such as *gazis* and *gaza* are not found in the text. That Neşri ‘misunderstood’ the ethos of the *gaza* is a topic broadly discussed in Paul Wittek, *The taking of the Aydos Castle: A Ghazi Legend and its transformation*, in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, edited by G. Makdisi, 662-72, Cambridge, Mass, 1965

¹⁹⁰ See chapter “26 September 1371, the Eclipse and the Chronology in the Early Ottoman Historical Narratives” for a translation of the passage.

¹⁹¹ See chapter “The Memory of a Place”

triggered by the tension between the gazis credited for the Ottoman advance in Thrace (who opposed Ottoman centralizing policies) and the central authority. After the Battle the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* report that Ilbeg was killed by Lala Şahin who was just recently appointed by Murad I as the beglerbeg of Rumeli. This was not the official version of the event and that we see in the official Ottoman histories from the first decade of the 16th century when two famous scholars, Idris Bitlis and Ibn Kemal, had been appointed by Bayezid II to write the History of the House of Osman. It was Idris Bitlisi, the newly arrived *munşi* from the East, who included in his Ottoman history *Heşt Bihîşt* the version of the victorious and later poisoned Ilbeg. On the other hand, Ibn Kemal was well aware of what the official version had been, as his family and himself held high positions in the Ottoman military and scholarly hierarchy. This is why Ibn Kemal in *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman* did not include the version on the battle at Serfındığı as it is found in the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories*. It is possible that Idris Bitlisi fell into disfavor soon after he had completed the Ottoman history because of inconsistencies in his work with what Ottomans regarded as the acceptable version of their past at the time. Unfortunately, there are no comparative works on the Ottoman histories written by Idris Bitlis and Ibn Kemal to confirm my hypothesis but behind the enmity that arose between the Grand vezir Hadim Ali Paşa and Idris Bitlisi, as some sources report,¹⁹² there could be a disagreement of the high court circles about how the author presented the Ottoman history in Persian language. The story about an Ottoman commander being mercilessly poisoned by the representative of the central government (Lala Şahin) could have not served the purpose of sending a message to the eastern Islamic dynasties that the Ottoman sultans have the leadership in the Islamic world.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Abdülkadir Özcan, *Idris-i Bitlisi*, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, c. 21, 486; Doç. Dr. Mehmed Bayrakdar, *Bitlisi Idris*, *Kültür Bakanlığı yayınları* 12, *Türk Büyükleri Dizisi* 134, Ankara 1991, 7-8

¹⁹³ *Heşt Bihîşt* was written in Persian language. It is possible that Bayezid II ordered the writing of the history of the dynasty in Persian so that it could serve as a way of promoting the dynasty to the East as Persian language enjoyed the reputation of a language of the literate. On the other hand Kemalpaşazade's History of the Ottomans was ordered to be written at the same time but in Turkish language. The richness of stories on provincial nobility and the language which could appeal to the local reader much better than Persian may suggest that this historical narrative was intended for the Ottoman reader. Unfortunately there are no comparative studies on these two important historical narratives and the above said can not be confirmed with the present state of scholarship.

My interest here is not to discuss whether the victory that sealed the Ottoman achievements in Thrace¹⁹⁴ had been Lala Şahin's or Ilbeg's but to raise awareness that the story of Sırfsındığı in the Ottoman historical narratives was a subject of ideological debates at the end of the 15th and beginning of 16th century. A “third version” on the identity of the Ottoman¹⁹⁵ troops commander in 1371 may serve as another example that the most important victory of the Ottomans, after their landing in Thrace, was considered a controversial event (at least until the beginning of the 16th century). The source crediting the victory in 1371 to the famous Gazi Evrenos Beg (Avranéz in the original text) is not a known Ottoman source but *The Biography of Stefan Lazarević* (1374-1427) written in Slavic language by Constantine Filozof (born, second half of 14th cent.).¹⁹⁶ When the author of this work (written in 1431) described the war between Stefan Lazarević and his younger brother Vuk Lazarević (1408-1410) he mentions that Süleyman Çelebi assisted the former by:

sending him [Vuk Lazarević] the one who ever since the beginning shed Christian blood . . . the one who was responsible for the bloodshed in the great battle on the river called Maritsa (Avranéz).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ If carefully observed, the early Ottoman narratives after the victory at Sırfsındığı tell about succeeding Ottoman conquests to the north, towards the Black Sea (Polanya/Apolonia) and in Macedonia Serüz/Serrez, Kavala, Dırama/Drama, and Zihne. This was the logical outcome of the victory at Sırfsındığı because the most powerful rulers in Macedonia who threatened the Ottoman acquisitions in Thrace were destroyed together with the strongest army at the time in the region of South Eastern Europe.

¹⁹⁵ It is hard to determine how those taking part in the conquest identified them selves. In the *Vita Seyyid Ali Sultan* – a narration on the conquest in Thrace, we do not find praise for the Ottomans as conquerors of the region. Thus one can question the “Ottoman” character of the conquest. On the other hand the immediate outcome of the Battle of the Maritsa River (the Byzantine Emperor John V becoming a vassal of the Ottomans) shows that the conquest of Thrace was connected to and coordinated by the House of Osman.

¹⁹⁶ The only exception that I have encountered is the Ottoman History by Namık Kemal written at the end of the 19th century. The author writes that most of the historians attribute the victory to Ilbeg but some say that he died two years before the battle and the commander leading the troops was Evrenos. However, he does not mention the sources that ascribe the victory at Sırfsındığı to Evrenos, see. Namık Kemal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116.

¹⁹⁷ J. V. Jagić. *Konstantin Filozof i njegov Život Stefana Lazarevića despota srpskoga.* – Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva, knjiga XLII, u Beogradu, 1875, 290

This information was neglected by the majority of historians working on early Ottoman period even though it was pointed out by the Serbian historian Ruvarac in 1879.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, the author of the Biography of Stefan Lazarević was contemporary to the last decades of the 14th century when Gazi Evrenoz beg played the most important role of establishing the Ottoman rule in South-Eastern Europe. Constantine the Philosopher had a very important place in the court of the Despot Stefan Lazarević where he could have listened to the accusation referring to Evrenos as the one who shed blood in the Battle of the Maritsa River as there must have been refugees from the regions that used to be under Despot Uglješa's control. One such example is Jefimiya, the wife of the defeated Despot Uglješa, who enjoyed protection in the court of Stefan Lazarević. In fact, the author of the Biography of Stefan mentions Jefimiya in his writing as someone possessing great wisdom and knowledge which means that she could have known who defeated her husband on the banks of the River Maritsa.¹⁹⁹

Researchers on late medieval literature agree that in the literary work of Constantine we see one of the most educated men at that time. His knowledge of languages (most probably Turkish, too) and the numerous travels on which he embarked during lifetime made him aware of the history and the politics of the region. When we compare him with the authors of the first major Ottoman dynastical histories from the end of the 15th century it is clear that as an outsider, Constantine had no ideological preferences when narrating certain events from the early Ottoman history, such as the Battle on Marisa. Indeed, the Biography of Stefan Lazarević comes from the hands of a writer who was neither interested nor obliged to balance between the official versions of the conquest of Rumeli and popular folk tales on independent gazi warriors.

Constantine's motives to include the name of Avranetz (Evrenoz) in his narrative may have originated from the need to show that the enemy force which Despot Stefan Lazarević confronted when the Ottoman commander arrived to aid his brother Vuk

¹⁹⁸ Ruvarac. I, *Hronološka pitanja o vremenu bitke na Marici*, God, N.Č.III, 1879, 214-226

¹⁹⁹ Jefimiya had taken part in the very important diplomatic mission in 1398 in which she traveled to Serrez and as the envoy of Stefan Lazarević negotiated with Bayezid I. Jefimiya is known also for her poetry. One of the most beautiful poems in late Medieval Slavic literature is *The Morning for the young Uglješa* which was dedicated to the death of her son (died few years before the Battle of the Maritsa River).

Lazarević in 1408, was the same as the victorious army at the Maritsa Battle. The story of how Despot Stefan Lazarević opposed his brother and the Ottoman commander Evrenoz who arrived to his aid, fitted very well in the image of a ruler who defended his land successfully even though faced with the very same Ottoman commander who destroyed the great Christian army some forty years ago on the banks of Maritsa. Another reason why Constantine refers to the Battle of the Maritsa River may be his birth-place as well as the area where he lived before arriving to the court of the Serbian Despot. Researchers agree that Constantine was not born in Serbia and most probably arrived to the court of the Serbian Despot from regions already under the Ottoman rule - Bulgaria or Macedonia.²⁰⁰ Since the Ottoman conquests of these regions began after the 1371 it is understandable why the author places the beginning of the Ottoman conquest after the Battle of the Maritsa River when he writes that “since the beginning he was shedding Christian blood”.²⁰¹ This battle must have been a part of the general knowledge that educated people at that time possessed and especially those in the monastic communities on the Holy Mountain from where we also have contemporary accounts referring to the Battle.²⁰² The consequences of the event in 1371 were strong enough and having repercussion on the economic and political position of the church and this is why the memory of the event was not so easy to be erased with time. Christian clerics and political elite at the end of 14th and beginning of 15th century do refer to the Battle as the turning point of their fortunes which shows that what we read in the *Biography of Stefan Lazarević* on the Ottoman commander defeating the Christian forces may have been a part of the knowledge of the educated people at the time.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ He spent his youth in Trnovo (Bulgaria)

²⁰¹ For the Christians living in the North Balkans this was the Battle of Kosovo.

²⁰² In the following chapters we will see description of the Battle coming from the hands of two Monks that lived on the Holy Mountain.

²⁰³ The Byzantine rulers, too, thought of the Battle on the River Maritsa as the turning point of their fortunes. Document issued by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II in 1408 shows the changes and uncertainty after the Battle: “Long time ago, immediately following the death of the Serbian Despot, the late Uglješa, because of the assault by the Turks which became hard and continuous, in order for the common well-being to be preserved it was decided that half of the properties of monasteries on the Holy Mountain and Thessalonica and putted in simple all of them assigned as *pronoia* [Byzantine system of land grants] so that to save the destruction of all of them.” -

We said previously that the major Ottoman dynastic Histories from the end of 15th century in two different versions attribute the victory at Sırsındığı to Lala Şahin and Ilbeg. But after reading that Constantine ascribes the Ottoman victory as the deed of Gazi Evrenoz then parts of the Ottoman historical narratives following the Battle at Sırsındığı can be interpreted in a very different way. One example is Apz's description of the wedding between the Ottoman prince Bayezid and the Germiyan princess which follows immediately after the Battle at Sırsındığı. Apz reports that in the preparations of the wedding even Ishak Fakı, the father of Yahşi Fakı – one of Apz's sources, participated as the Ottoman envoy.²⁰⁴ This led to the hypothesis of some researchers that the story of the wedding was incorporated in Apz's narrative from the *manakıb* of Yakşı Fakı which Apz mentions as his major source.²⁰⁵ With the possibility that Apz's narration on the wedding comes through reports of someone contemporary to that event, let us go back to the story and examine how it refers to Constantine's information that Evrenoz was the victorious commander in 1371.

In the account we read that after the successful negotiations the wedding between the Ottoman prince and Germiyan princess was arranged and invited were the rulers of the Anatolian principalities, the Mamluk sultan, the *sancakbegs* of the Ottoman provinces and Evrenoz Gazi who is the “star” on the wedding. Arriving with hundred slaves and hundred young maidens who carried in their hands ten trays with gold and other ten trays filled with silver and the rest of them holding precious pots and kettles, Evrenoz bewildered the guests with the impressive presents presented to Murad I. What follows in Apz's narrative is a brief “moral” lesson by the author in which he describes how a ruler has to behave when having such fortune. He describes how Murad I had shared the treasures brought by Evrenoz with the common people and the other guests all of this giving a description of what Aşık Paşa zade believed to be the “ideal” ruler.

In Apz's narrative the Battle at Sırsındığı was the deed of the *beglerbeg* of Rumeli, Lala Şahin. But the depiction of Evrenoz as the most important guest on the

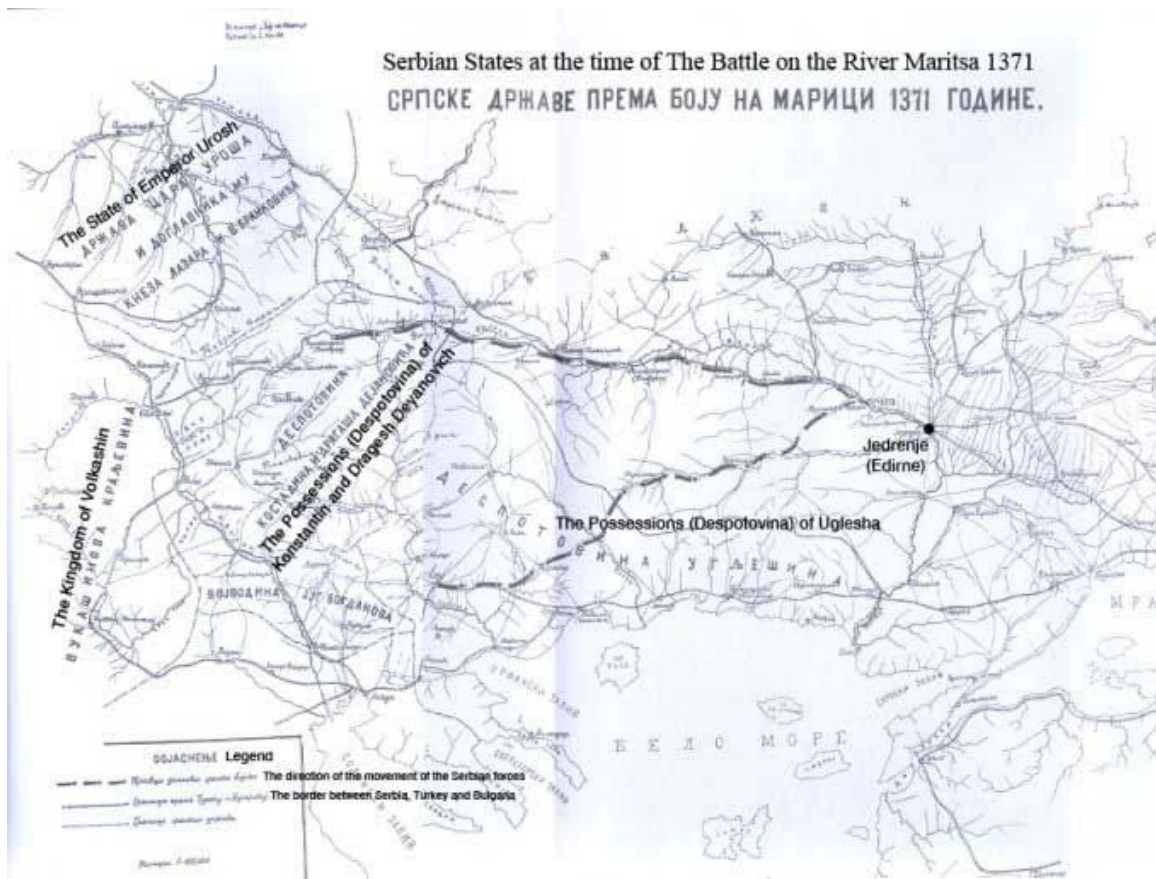
G.Ostrogorsky, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 146 and V. Mošin, *Akti iz svetogorskih arhiva*, Spomenik 91, (1939), 165; for *pronoia* see. G.Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 482/3

²⁰⁴ The participation of this person in the events lends much credence to the account.

²⁰⁵ V. L. Menage, *The 'Menaqib' of Yakhshi Faqih*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol.26, No.1 (1963)

wedding and the one that brought the great amount of treasures as presents for the Ottoman ruler does not fit into the line of narration in Apz's narrative. The reader would expect Lala Şahin to arrive with all that treasure and slaves as a result of the great victory at Sırfsındığı. We do not know whether Yahşi Fakı was Apz's source for the Battle at Sırfsındığı but it is possible that he used an account of the Battle that was close to the "official" version. If Yahşi Fakı was the son of Orhan's imam then we may presume that Apz had utilized the menakıb of Yahşi Fakı even for narrating the Battle of Sırfsındığı.

We can never know who had been the victorious Ottoman commander on the banks of Maritsa in 1371. It may be more important to compare the non-Ottoman sources such as the Biography of Stefan Lazarević and the first Ottoman historical narratives that mention the Battle at Sırfsındığı in order to understand the crafting of the historical narratives in the 15th century. What constituted the historical vision of the authors depicting the Battle in 1371 can be examined by reading the most trivial details in the texts, marginal data such as the information who among the Ottoman commanders led the Ottoman army into victory. In modern historiography too much attention has been given to the genealogy of the House of Osman which is found in the opening passages of the Ottoman histories. The Ottoman historical visions can not be seen only by looking at the Ottoman historical narratives and certainly not in the first lines of the historical texts which referred to the Ottoman genealogy. It is hidden in the unwritten or the unsaid which exists in non-Ottoman texts, Ottoman architecture, miniatures, etc. According to the *Biography of Stefan Lazarević*, the information that Hacı Evrenoz led the Ottoman army in the Battle in 1371 is only one example in which through the reading of non-Ottoman sources we can also learn of some "realities" that were suppressed by the Ottoman view of the past.



(Figure 4) Stoyan Novaković's Map in the book 'Serbs and Turks 14th and 15th: Historical studies on the first conflicts and the Turkish invasion before and after the Battle at Kosovo' - first edition in 1893

Chapter V

THE MEMORY OF A PLACE – SIRP SINDIĞI AND SERF SINDIĞI

The “New” and the “Old” Battlefield

In 1990 the governor of Edirne in a correspondence with the Ministry for Culture describes the features of the future monument that will commemorate the *Sırp sındığı Savaşı*:

In our governorship, within the borders of the village Sarayakpınar which is a center of the old sub district Sırpsındığı, in order to preserve the memory of the victory won by the Turkish army under the leadership of the commander Hacı İlbeğ in 1363, it was thought as appropriate to have a monument built. A research on this topic locates the battlefield in the vicinity of the present day village known as Sarayakpınar.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Oral Onur, *Sırpsındığı zaferi: Rumeli'nin İlk Şehitleri Anıt Kitabı*, Edirne, 1995; This book is the only monograph on the Battle. The author is an amateur historian from Edirne who most probably participated in the initiative for building a monument in the village Sarayakpınar. The book is in most part a transcription of Ottoman accounts narrating the Battle. It is interesting to mention that in the opening pages of the book the author described how the whole idea of building a monument on the Battle came into being. In his book Mr. Oral Onur says that the idea of building a monument for the Battle was born during his conversations with the director of cultural affairs in Edirne. They had been talking about the importance of the Battle at Sırp Sındığı for the Ottoman Turks advance in the region and their settlement in the Balkans and Europe. With a proposal for a monument to be built on the battlefield they had approached the governor of Edirne who gave the approval and the construction of the monument in the village Sarayakpınar began in September 1990. It is interesting that further in the works when the author transcribes several Ottoman accounts depicting the Battle the transcription of the description of the battlefield by the late 19th century Ottoman historian Ahmed Badi Efendi is incorrect. I believe that Oral Onur on purposely gave a wrong transcription from Ottoman script into Latin alphabet so that the reader can not read the exact location which is in now-day Bulgaria, not far from the Turkish border. On the accounts that tell about the exact battle-field I will touch upon further in this chapter.

Such a monument (Figure 5) exists at present and every year on 21 October representatives from Edirne principality, the Army and the local Turkish villagers commemorate the victory with speeches, folk dance program and in the end a wreath-laying ceremony is performed at the monument which is in the center of the village (Figure 6).²⁰⁷ But the purpose of my visit to the village on the date set by the Municipality of Edirne as one of the *Kurtuluş Günleri* (Days of Independence) celebrated in the region was not to observe the ceremony but to make interviews with the villagers for the purpose of establishing the reasons behind the belief that this village is the place where the battle took place.

Most of the historical sources describing the battle are imprecise when locating the battlefield. The assumptions vary and speak of a location either on the banks of the River Maritsa or in the vicinity of Çirmen/Černomen – the first village when one crosses the Bulgarian-Greek border, nowadays and in the Greek maps bearing the name Ormenion (Figure 7).²⁰⁸ On the other hand, the village Sarayakpınar home of the monument to the battle mentioned afore is at least 20 km to the north from the River Maritsa and not far away from one of its largest tributaries, River Tunca. My doubts on the plausibility of this location as the actual battlefield that the accounts describe grew even stronger when 19th century Ottoman year books (Salname) for the region of Edirne revealed no enlisting for the present-day name of the sub-district called *Sırpsındığı*.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ These are mine observation for the commemoration taking place in 2006 in which I participated.

²⁰⁸ The contemporary, 14th century accounts on the Battle does not tell about the exact location of the battle-field. 15th century Slavic sources tell that it had taken place on River Maritsa. From the early Ottoman sources Apz and Oruç describe the battle-field as being on the banks of river Meriç/Maritsa and the *Ottoman Anonymous Histories* designate the surrounding of Çirmen/Černomen. Černomen is also the location where according to late 15th century Greek source Chalkokondyles the Battle took place.

²⁰⁹ The village Sarayakpınar is the center of *Sırpsındığı*, a district that for the first time appears with that name in one of the last official publication of the Turkish Ministry of Home Affairs published in Ottoman Turkish alphabet (1928) see. *Köylerimizin adları: Son Teşkilat-ı Mülkiye’de*, İstanbul: Dahiliye Vekaleti, 1928; In the publications of the Ministry of Home Affairs dating from 1968 and 1981 Sarayakpınar is the center of the sub-district Sırpsındığı, *Köylerimiz: 1 mart 1968 gününe kadar*, Ankara: İçişleri Bakanlığı, 1968 and *Köylerimiz*: 1981, Ankara: İçişleri Bakanlığı, 1982; The “re-birth” of *Sırpsındığı* can be used for writing one additional page describing Turkish nationalism, something that is not my particular interest here. My intention with this

Upon conducting several interviews²¹⁰ I realized the absence of local stories related to the battle and that the name of the sub-district *Sırpsındığı* was imposed by the government or the municipality in the early 1920s. I traveled westwards and crossed the Turkish-Bulgarian border at *Kapı Kule* (border pass some 15 km west from Edirne) before heading to the Bulgarian town Svilengrad, which is just 16 km from the border.

According to 19th century Ottoman and Serbian sources the place *Sırpsındığı* is to be found in the vicinity of the town Svilengrad known also as *Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa* during Ottoman rule. We read a confirmation for such a claim in the History of Edirne (*Rıyaz-ı Belde-i Edirne*) written by the late 19th century Ottoman bureaucrat and intellectual Ahmed Badi Efendi:

The place called *Sırb Sındığı* is located on the banks of the River Maritsa, down the railroad station in the town *Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa*, which is five hours' distance from Edirne. Known by the people today as (*Sırbsiniri*) this famous place is referred to in the district as *Kuçük Kaz Ovası*. It is ten minutes away from the border to Eastern Rumeli.²¹¹ (Figure 8)

short passage on the present-day *Sırpsındığı* is just to remind the reader that the “oral histories” on the place of the battle in 1371 have not ceased to exist and their re-appearance teach us that “place name” may have the role of “rigid designator” which lodged in little stories can serve as connectors in a variety of heterogeneous families of discourse - Jean François Lyotard, *Missive on University History*, in *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, London: Turnaround (1992)

²¹⁰ I have conducted four interviews with villagers from Sarayakpınar on 21 October (I am not using their original names): Hasim Erdem (male, born in 1925), Adem Nesin (male, born in 1938), Cafer Karaosman (male, born in 1940s?) and Latif Şener (male, born in 1944). Mr. Hasim Erdem advised me to read the monument because that's where I can get the most information on the Battle. On my question when did he learned about *Sırpsındığı savaşı* Mr. Adem Nesin explained that he heard about it since his childhood as it is a very important battle for the Turks. Mr. Cafer Karaosman gave valuable information on the monument. He recalled how the mayor of Edirne came in the beginning of 1990s and told the villager that a monument will be constructed. He also connects the wars in Yugoslavia with the construction of the monument saying that it was a “teпки” (reaction) of what the Serbs did to Bosnians. As for the place where the battle took place he said that it was from the village all the way to *Kapı kule*. The conversation with the villagers revealed that the majority of the villagers are refugees from the Balkans arriving at various times during 20th century. On my question whether there are stories or songs referring to the Battle Mr. Latif Şener answered negatively and adds that the first time he heard of the battle was at school.

²¹¹ Ahmed Badi Efendi, *Rıyaz-ı Belde-i Edirne*, MS. Bayezid Genel Ktp 10393, fol. 106 - author's translation from Ottoman Turkish; One could wonder whether the author's description of the battle ground is part of the stories circulating in Edirne at the end of the 19th century or the author had recorded from the people living in and around the

Similar testimony is found in the writings by the Serbian General Jovan Mišković who used a military report written by a high rank military officer (most probably working for the intelligence service of the Serbian Army) in the 1890s:

The place where the Serbian army was destroyed is called “Srb Sidi” (Srb was scared) and “Srb- Sindigi” (Serbian defeat). The local people call their plots on that place “Srb–hududi” (Serbian border). This is a place when one travels from *Hermanlije* [today Harmanli in Bulgaria] towards *Yedrene* [Edirne in Turkey] between *Kas-Ovasi* and *Čirmen*. North-east is Maritsa and north-west are the Despot-Mountains. This battle for the Serbs was even worse than the one at Kosovo because on Kosovo they died as brave and on Maritsa as crazy.²¹² [parentheses are given by Mišković; the text within is a translation from Turkish most probably made by the Serbian Officer] (Figure 9)

The places depicted in the passages above resemble to one another. The train-station mentioned in Ahmed Badi Efendi’s narrative still exists and it is the final stop in Bulgaria when traveling by train to Greece. The map made by Jovan Mišković shows that the area Srb-Sindigi is the field near the train-station which resembles Ahmed Badi Efendi’s description. Both accounts obviously point out that the plots described as Srb-hududi and the field called Kas-Ovasi (in Turkish can be translated as duck-field) are unavoidably the region between the railroad and the River Maritsa, as on the other side

town Cisir-i Mustafa Pasa during one of his many trips in the region. On the other hand Badi’s history of Edirne relies heavily on the 17th century work of Abdurrahman Hibri in which there is a mentioning of a place called *Sirpsindığı*, something that might have initiated the curiosity of this late Ottoman historian to inquire on the exact location of the battle ground. According to the Turkish historian Peremeci, Ahmed Badi wrote *Rıyaz-ı Belde-i Edirne* in 1890s while he was working in the office of land and tax register of the Edirne district Osman Nuri Peremeci, *Edirne Tarihi*, Istanbul, 1940, 169. This is approximately the same period when the Serbian officer whose account was used by General Jovan Mišković investigated the region.

²¹² Jovan Mišković, *Jedan Priloščić Maričkom boju*, Glas LXII/1900, 109-113; Serbian general Jovan Mišković with a decree by the king Aleksandar Obrenović was appointed as the president of the Serbian Academy of Science (1900). His interest in military history is seen in the article quoted above where on the question of where exactly the Battle in 1371 took place uses few additional sources which have not been mentioned in previous work on the Battle. However the author’s major contribution in the article is the actual transcription of a military report written by a Serbian officer who examined the stories among the people in the region around Cisir-i Mustafa Paşa.

of the railroad the area is undulating and referred among the people as *Devet Čuki* (translated from Bulgarian as the Nine Hills).²¹³

At present, the citizens of Svilengrad have no knowledge of the place-names mentioned in the writings by Ahmed Badi Efendi and Jovan Mišković.²¹⁴ Only Mr. Boris Tomov (male, born in 1930s) knew of the place called *Srb-sandık* which in Bulgarian can be translated as the “Serbian coffin” but could not inform me in-depth about its location apart for the information that it is in the vicinity of Černomen and that his father used to know of it. Mr. Risto Panov (male, born in 1929) during our conversation mentioned that the battle between the Turks and Serbs took place one kilometer away from Černomen, at a place called *kazıklık*-now a swamp on Greek territory and located somewhere between the village and the river.

It is only from the writing of a Svilengrad citizen who was born in 1884 that we know about a description of the battle-field similar to the writings in Serbian and Ottoman Turkish at the end of 19th century. In the book *History of Svilengrad* written in the 1960s but a result of a life-long research of the author Anastas Rayboynikov, the following description of the battle-field drew my attention:

The place of the Battle is next to the train-station, next to the Karčov sazlık and the River Maritsa, where until 1912 there was a Turkish border post “Sıbsı kule”²¹⁵

The above mentioned author gives a much more precise description of the place called *Sırpsandıği* in his article published in 1932:

The place “*Srübü-sandügzh*” is to the north-east from today’s train station [the location is identical to the train station in Ottoman times]; it is marked on a map with the letter P, to the east from the train station next to the river. Here the Turks before the Balkan Liberation War had set up a post called “*Sıbsı Kulesi*”, a name which was not understood by the local Turks and Bulgarians. The historians say that the battle, or to be more precise, the defeat

²¹³ Mr. Risto Panov told about the name of the area. It is interesting to mention his claim that his family resides in the region from the beginning of the 18th century

²¹⁴ All the interviews with the citizens of Svilengrad were conducted on 22 and 23 October, 2006. (I am not using the original names of the interviewed in my work)

²¹⁵ Anastas Razbojnikov, *Minaloto na Svilengrad: Istoriia na grada do 1913 godina*, Sofija, 1990, 37

was next to Černomen, because back then it was the most important settlement/fortress.²¹⁶

During my field work in the region of Svilengrad, Mr. Risto Panov was kind enough to take me on a tour to show me the places mentioned in Razboynikov's account. He pointed at a 2-3 meter high elevation which is on the right side of the road that goes to Harmanli (3 km away from Svilengrad) as the place called *Sabası*. According to him this is the place where in the Ottoman times a *kule* (tower) used to exist which served as a border post and he also added that ceramic pieces from the building can be found even today.²¹⁷ Another place-name was identified from Razboynikov's writing and that is the *Karčov Sazlık* which is on the right side of the rail-road in the direction towards Harmanli. It is a swamp which is located approximately 100 meters after passing the place where *Sıbsı kulesi* used to stand and on the right side on the road from Svilengrad to Harmanli via Ljubimec. But for Mr. Risto Panov the above mentioned places were not related to the battlefield since, as he purported, all battles due to the strategic position took place in the region from the hills located to the west and north-west of the train-station all the way to Černomen.²¹⁸

As a conclusion, both my trips to Sarayakpınar and Svilengrad exhibit that the memory of the place is not completely erased. In the case of Sarayakpınar it was re-born because the event has been accepted as a part of the national historical narrative in

²¹⁶ Anastas Razboynikov, *Svilengradŭ*, Trakiiski sbornikŭ, kniga 3, Sofiia 1932, 120. Razboynikov's writing is not contemporary to the afore-mentioned Ahmed Badi and Jovan Mišković but the author was a citizen of Cısr-i Mustafa Pasa (born in 1883) and his life-long interest in songs, legends and history of the region make him a "trust-worthy" source on the oral tradition on the Battle.

²¹⁷ which indicates that the unusual elevation in the field might have been formed by the remains from the now destroyed tower

²¹⁸ Actually our conversation was on one of those hills north-west from the train-station from which we could see the area around the train-station very well. The rail-road is between the hills and the field which opens towards the River Maritsa. Another place-name was identified from Razboynikov's writing and that is the *Karčov Sazlık* which is on the right side of the rail-road when one goes towards Harmanli. It is a swamp from the *kule* or *Sıbsı kulesi* and goes along the rail-road for some 500 meters. In his last work on the history of this region Razboynikov says that the battle took place next to the train-station, the *Karčov Sazlık* and the river Maritsa see. Anastas Razboynikov, *Minaloto na Svilengrad: Istoriia na grada do 1913 godina*, 37; From the train station and the *Karčov Sazlık* there are approximately 1/1,5 kilometers.

Turkey which resulted with the construction of the monument in the 1990s and the annual commemorations. This process of re-inventing the battlefield within the borders of Turkey began after assigning the name *Sırpsindiği* for the sub-district to the north of Edirne, most probably in the beginning of the 1920s when the intellectual elite in the region realized that this memorable place is left outside the borders of Turkey.

On the other hand, the case in Svilengrad shows the opposite trend. The 19th century stories on the location of the battle were forgotten and lost, thus we learn only of some poor remnants. The reason for such occurrence may be traced in the fact that today in the region of Svilengrad there is no presence of the Turkish speaking community which departed together with the Ottoman forces during the Balkan wars (1912/3).²¹⁹ Along with very few belongings (as such is the case with all refugees) these people have also taken with them the stories and songs which are now lost or exist somewhere in Turkey at places where these refugees have been settled.²²⁰ In addition, apart from the ethnographic material fallen into oblivion and concerning the Battle, the tendency of the Bulgarian Historiography has been to exclude this event as an important part of the national historical narrative which might have been an additional factor leading to the loss of local knowledge for the place where the battle had occurred. The destitute of works addressing this battle in Bulgarian historiography may be seen as a tendency for “forgetting” a toponym derived from the name Serb. One of the most important questions in Bulgarian and Serbian historiographies has been the “ethnic background” of the people from where the Christian forces had departed (Macedonia) in order to fight the Ottomans in the vicinity of Edirne in 1371.

²¹⁹ The 19th century accounts are most probably based on the narration of Turkish speaking people.

²²⁰ One of those stories which refer to the Battle is preserved in the work by Jovan Mišković mentioned afore. The military officer making the inquiry on the place where the Battle took place in 1371 recorded the following story: “Lala Paşa was in Edirne and among Turks there were not enough soldiers so they wanted to retrieve down the River Maritsa. But among the Turkish dignitaries Hacı-İlbey was determined to sacrifice himself and asked for permission from the Paşa to go and observe the Serbian army. He received 3000 horsemen from the Paşa and along the mountains arrived to Çirmen. Here he left the horses in the mountains and went to observe the Serbian army, and when he saw that they are drunk and feckless, he divided his horsemen in three groups: one from the field, the other from Çirmen and the third from the village of Mezek. He ordered for attack from all sides when it becomes dark. Without waiting for an order by the Paşa, Hacı-İlbey chased the routed Serbian Army all the way to the Balkans (probably referring the mountain).” - Jovan Mišković, *Jedan Priloščić Maričkom boju*, 111/112

The Forest

My interest on whether the people today living in the region of Svilengrad recall the place which is described in the 19th Ottoman and Serbian sources as “the routing of the Serbs” made me think of the way how early Ottoman historiography describes this *lieu de memoire* - *Sırsındığı*. If the 19th century sources describe the place *Sırsındığı* as the field between the train-station and the River Maritsa, what are the differences then compared to the first depictions of the battlefield as found in early Ottoman dynastic histories? The late 15th century sources Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri do not exactly specify the place of *Sırsındığı*. In both accounts the authors provide a similar description of the event according to which the *Sırs* had arrived in the vicinity of *Edrene* and were defeated in a sudden night attack by the Ottoman forces:

It was on the banks of *Meriç*. The rest of them [the *Sırs* Army] drowned in the water. From those infidels only a small number was saved. Some of them were followed from behind and killed on the road by the *gazis*. Today the *gazis* call this place *Sırsındığı*.²²¹

Apart from the depiction of the battlefield somewhere on the banks of the River Maritsa as well as the mentioning of a road which implies that the place was at a particular route/road there are no additional information which may be compared with the 19th century accounts and their depiction of a location. A much more detailed depiction of the geography was used in the narratives known as the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories*, written during the time of Bayezid II (1481-1512):

The army of the *Sırs* came close to *Edrene*, next [opposite] to *Çirmen*, today [the place] called *Sırsındığı*. The army of the *Sırs* camped there . . . Some narrators tell the story that it was *Hacı İlbeği* who destroyed the *Sırs* army . . . [what follows is the story of how *Hacı İlbeği* with four of his companions which he placed on four hills overlooking the enemy defeated the entire army]. . . Suddenly they [*Sırs*] shouted “the Turk came” and colliding among them-selves dispersed in that Forest where they perished with the sword.²²²

²²¹ Aşık Paşa zade, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, Ç. N. Atsız, 29

From the account rendered above we read a very similar description of the place *Sırpsındığı* to the one from 19th century Ottoman and Serbian accounts. Even though the depiction of the battlefield in the early Ottoman historical narratives does not give mentioning of a town called *Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa*, one has to bear in mind the Arabic inscription on the Bridge which renders the date of its construction with the numeric value of the letters comprising the two Arabic words “eternally good deed”. Thus we discover the value 935 (1511-1512).²²³ So, in any sort of writing during the reign of Bayezid II, the Bridge and the town bearing the same name could not have been designators for the place called *Sırpsındığı*. Instead, the narrative used the name *Çirmen* which was probably the seat of a *sancak* bearing the same name and holding a strategic position in the valley of the River Maritsa.²²⁴ Actually, the distance between the Greek village *Ormenion* (*Çirmen* or *Černomen* in Ottoman times) and *Svilengrad* (*Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa* in Ottoman times) amounts closely to 6 km and according to the 19th century sources, both places are just about equally apart from the place *Sırpsındığı*. The usage of the name *Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa* as a designator of the battle-field even in accounts from 17th century²²⁵ can be explained with the decreasing importance of *Çirmen* as a new regional center, *Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa*, developed on both sides of the Bridge which became a key-stop on the main communication line between the Ottoman provinces in South-Eastern Europe and Istanbul.

The shards of memory on the historical event that took place in 1371 have been preserved in the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* being written more than a century after

²²² *Anonim Osmanlı kroniği*, Hazırlayan Prof.Dr. Necdet Öztürk, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, İstanbul, 2000, 29-30

²²³ Strashimir Dimitrov, Boris Netkov. *Nadpisūt na mosta pri Svilengrad*. *Arheologia*, I, 1963, 48

²²⁴ M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, *XV-XVI asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası*, İstanbul 1952, 13

²²⁵ In the History of Edirne (*Enisü'l Müsamirin*) written in Ottoman the author Abdurrahman Hibri when describing the unusual events in the history of the town writes the following: “one day journey from Edirne and close to the town *Cisr-i Mustafa Pasha* on the bank of river *Meriç* [Maritsa] still there is the famous place called *Sırpsındığı*” - *Enisü'l Müsamirin Edirne Tarihi 1360-1650*, Abdurrahman Hibri, çeviren Dr. Ratıp Kazanıl, Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği, Edirne Şubesi Yayınları No: 24 Edirne Araştırma Dizisi: 14I, 153, author’s translation from Turkish language

the Battle. They describe the place where the routing of the Sirfs took place as a “forest” in which the enemy soldiers dispersed. The 19th century sources depicting the battlefield do not tell us of a forest or *orman* (in Turkish), as it stands in the original, anywhere in the vicinity of *Sırpsindiği*, *Sırpsınırı* or *Kaz-ovasi*. In their depictions *Sırpsindiği* is only a location where the local people own plots. Does it mean that the sources written in 15th and 19th century refer to a different place or could it be that they describe the same location in a landscape that changed its “face”.

During my first reading of the 15th century *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* the mentioning of the forest was just one of the usual depictions so often encountered when we read about the landscape in the region of South-Eastern Europe. But after the second reading which followed after my discovery of the account written by Ibn Kemal (on which I will refer in the following pages) I realized that the narrative refers to a particular forest by using the expression “that” forest.²²⁶ The notes from my field-trip in Svilengrad latter showed that when I was inquiring about the toponyms in the area some of the interviewed people mentioned the existence of a place called *orman* (forest). Mr. Kole Popov (male, born. 1920s) recalled that in the vicinity of Černomen there was a place “kara orman” meaning “black forest” in Turkish and most probably referring to a thick forest. Likewise, Mr. Risto Panov said that the region behind the train-station is called *orman*. Moreover, the Bulgarian historian Anastas Razboynikov in the article published in 1932 when discussing the toponyms in the vicinity of Svilengrad-the town where he spent his childhood, reports that the area around the train-station “i sega se naricha orman” (and today is called Orman).²²⁷ Furthermore, the author in the article reminds the reader that even travel accounts from the 16th century refer to the area near to the route that leads from Cisir-i Mustafa Paşa to Harmanli (north-west direction) and describe it as a vast forest (Figure 10). One of those accounts was written by Benedict Curipeschitz who had traveled through the region of South-Eastern Europe on his way to Istanbul as a member of the delegation sent by the Emperor Ferdinand to negotiate peace with the Ottoman sultan Süleyman I.²²⁸

²²⁶ ol orman

²²⁷ Anastas Razboynikov, *Svilengradŭ*, Trakiiski sbornikŭ, kniga 3, Sofiia 1932, 125

²²⁸ *Nemski i Avstriskiski pŭtepi si za Balkanite*, uvod, podbor i komentar Mihail Ūonov, Izdatelstvo Nauka i Izkustvo, Sofia 1979, 135; the notes of *Benedict Curipeschitz* have been published in 1532 on 32 pages written in German.

On 8 September we traveled from *Virui* through the elevation and the field reaching the small village of *Harmanli*. After a long oak forest we arrived to a very beautiful and newly constructed bridge which was the deed of the very influential dignitary Mustafa Bey.²²⁹

The area around the train station of Svilengrad which is known by the senior citizens of Svilengrad as *orman* (forest) is very close to the road which is described in Benedict Curipeschitz's account. Moreover, the locations that were part of the depiction of the battlefield in the 19th century sources and the writing of Razboynikov are all along the new paved road connecting Svilengrad with Harmanli via the small town of Ljubimets which follows approximately the same route of the itinerary in the Ottoman times (Figure 11).

Ibn Kemal is the Ottoman contemporary of the afore-mentioned European traveler, whose interest in history precede the appointment by Bayezid II to write a History of the Ottoman Dynasty.²³⁰ What we know from this historical narrative is that Ibn Kemal recorded stories such as the ones concerning the conquest of *Rumeli* even decades before taking up the task to write his History.²³¹ This is why Ibn Kemal's historical narrative adds to the Ottoman historical writing unique descriptions of battles and conquests that have not been seen previously in the Histories of the House of Osman. Compared to the Ottoman sources presented earlier in this chapter, Ibn Kemal's depiction of the battlefield is a lively account that may have assumingly been the work of someone familiar with the region.²³² The battlefield is depicted as being "undulated

²²⁹ Ibid, 147/8

²³⁰ We do not of the exact date when Ibn Kemal began to write the History but researchers believe that it was the first decade of the 16th century.

²³¹ That Ibn Kemal collected stories on the conquests can be seen in his narration of the last Ottoman attack of the fortress of Belgrade in 1456 where the author uses the testimony of the Anatolian Beylerbey Ozgur-ođlu Isa Beđ see. *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman VII Defter*, Hazırlayan Şerafettin Turan, TTK-Ankara, XXXVI fn.82; According to *Sicill-i Osmani*, III, 610 the above mentioned Ottoman dignitary died in 1479-80 which tell us of Ibn Kemal's interest in some important historical events years before he was ordered to write the Histories of the House of Osman.

²³² Ibn Kemal extensively traveled in the region of South-Eastern Europe as he was appointed as teacher in various *medreses* in Üsküb (Skopje) and Edirne

on one side and on the other a river”. In addition, the forest which we heard about in various accounts is also one of the features of the terrain described in Ibn Kemal’s narrative, and similarly to the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories*, it is the place where the enemy was utterly defeated:

Against those unbelievers and evil-doers who escaped earlier, the (scattered) forces of the gazis went after them. In the midst of the forest they [the Christian army] stroke into a jungle of thorny bushes and a few of those pigs escaped.²³³

What we read above is a depiction of what took place in the forest similar to the accounts from the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories*. But like no other Ottoman account, the name of this Ottoman place of remembrance in Ibn Kemal’s work acquires different meaning. Whereas in the majority of Ottoman sources the battle-field is called *Sırfı Sındığı* (the routing of the *Sırf*) Ibn Kemal acquires a different name for this Ottoman *lieu de memoire* and says that:

The place got its fame and the name *Sarf Sındığı* from the fact that the Battle was won with easiness at an inaccessible terrain.²³⁴

In Slavic historical sources we read for the first time about the forests of Černomen as worded in the work of Constantine the Philosopher, written sixty years after the Battle of the Maritsa River.²³⁵ In the *Life of Stefan Lazarević* one of Despot Stefan’s detachments returning from the Angora Battle (1402) was destroyed in the “forests of Černomen” by the forces of the Ottoman dignitary called Saraja.²³⁶ Although

²³³ Kemalpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, MS. Millet Kütüphanesi, Ali Emiri Efendi, Tarih, Nr 30, fol.82a – author’s translation from Ottoman Turkish.

²³⁴ Ibid, 82a

²³⁵ J. V. Jagić. *Konstantin Filozof i njegov Život Stefana Lazarevića despota srpskoga*. – Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva, knjiga XLII, u Beogradu, 1875, 275, author’s translation from Church Slavonic – (written 1431)

²³⁶ According to Tayyib Gökbilgin Saruja/Saruca during the reign of Murad I became the first *sancakbey* of Čirmen – M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, *XV-XVI asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası*, Istanbul 1952, 15

the description does not refer to the Battle in 1371 it seems that the region around Ćirmen was known for its Woods.

Today, the Forest or *Orman* exists only as a name of the area around Ćernomen and the train-station but known just by the senior members of the local community of Svilengrad. There are no signs from this great oak forest which was cut probably during the 18th and 19th centuries (image 12). The catastrophic climatic changes that humanity is faced with today are not the result only of recent developments yet centuries long destruction such as the deforestation of our environment. One of the last accounts of the existence of the “Forest” is found in the *Biography of Tsar Uroš* written 1642 by the Archbishop of Peć Paysiye (1613-1647). Preceding the depiction of the Battle in 1371 when the Christian forces had been destroyed by the Agarens (Ottomans) the author writes how the armies of Vukašin and Uglješa joined at the place:

called the Woods of Ćirmen, more then one day travel from Adriyanopol [Edirne], the place use to be called Mostar and afterwards it was named Mustafa Pashina Ćupriya [The Bridge Mustafa Pasha]²³⁷

Ćirmen/Ćernomen

Surprisingly, the *The Life of tsar Uroš* is the first work written in Slavic that describes the battle as taking place in the vicinity of Ćirmen/Ćernomen. Stoyan Novaković²³⁸ believed that the descriptions of Paysiye on the battle in 1371 as well as

²³⁷ *Stare srpske biografija XV i XVII veka. Camblak, Konstantin, Pajsije*. Preveo Dr. Lazar Mirković. Sa predgovorom Pavla Popovića. Beograd, Srpska knjževna zadruga, 1936, 142

²³⁸ Stoyan Novaković was the first historian to dedicate a study/article on the Battle of the Maritsa River as well as trying to locate the exact place of the battlefield. He published it in 1893 and the same year included the article in his book “Serbs and Turks 14th and 15th cent.” The author describes step by step how he arrived at the idea of a research concerning exact battlefield. While working in the Serbian embassy in Istanbul as a diplomat (1885-92) Stoyan Novaković had the opportunity to acquaint himself with the Ottoman sources. He writes that “all the Turkish sources, Nešri, Idris Bitlisi, Sead-edin and Leunclavius... mention that it is known where the battle took place and that the location is referred as Srb-sindigi - Routing of the Serb (Srpska pogibija).” From some of the Greek and Slavic sources Novaković already knew that the Battle took place somewhere in the vicinity of Ćernomen. In addition he writes on his discovery of a recently published work on the early Ottoman history in French which also confirms the

the mentioning of Černomen had been part of the folklore.²³⁹ In other historical sources written in Slavic language from the 17th century, we read of Černomen as the place of the battlefield. Compared to 15th century Slavic sources, where we read of the battlefield as located somewhere on the banks of Maritsa, 17th century Slavic sources give a more specific reference of the battlefield.²⁴⁰ What was the reason for such a burst of new details to be included in the Slavic sources from the 17th century and why was the vicinity of Černomen identified as the battlefield when earlier Slavic sources mention the Ottoman victory taking place on the River Maritsa, without naming a specific town or a fortress? What could be the possible source for this new perception?

A contemporary of the Patriarch Paysiye who was the founder of the first Catholic eparchies in Bulgaria Petar Bogdan Bakčev (1601–1674) wrote several historical books on Bulgaria where he used Mavro Orbini's *The Kingdom of the Slavs*

existence of place designated as Sırp Sındığı (Oksza Th. d', *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman depuis sa fondation jusqu'à la prise de Constantinople*, par Th. d'Oksza [Texte imprimé], Constantinople: Impr. centrale, 1871) after which he decides to set out on a search for the exact location of the whereabouts of the battle ground. Novaković describes his unsuccessful attempts to find the location of the Battle on various maps. Without losing hope he decided to interview people who had been to the region around Cısr-i Mustafa Paşa. Being a member of the Serbian diplomatic mission in Istanbul must have been helpful in his search: “we have asked the people that travel in that region,” Novaković says: “and one gentleman who often used to travel by carriage from Plovdiv to Drenopolje [Edirne], before the rail road [being constructed, constructed in 1884], told us that it is true that there is a place which today is called Srb Sındigi and every carriage driver shows it to the traveler who wishes to see it [italic by the editor of the 1933 edition].” Novaković continues his explanation and writes what this gentleman said: “that this place is on the elevated field east from Mustafa- Paşa [Cısr-i Mustafa Paşa], on the left bank of Maritsa, after crossing the bridge on Maritsa and Mustafa Paşa, on the left from the road, north of Črmen [Çirmen in Turkish and Ormenion in Greek], between the first stream that goes into Maritsa and the following one. The place is on the last elevations of the northern hills, and the road goes between them and the river.” [Figure 9] - Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 1933, 177; This description the battlefield differs from the ones that were described by Ahmed Badi Efendi, Jovan Mišković and Anastas Razboynikov and it is on the other side of the river Maritsa.

²³⁹ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 160

²⁴⁰ Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopis*, IX, 36 (Karlovac genealogy was written in 17th century); The old chronicles have been written in the 14th century (Koporinski, Pečki, Studenički, Cetinski, Vrhobreznički) Koporinski chronicle was the earliest redaction and written after the death of Vukašin and Uroš-Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari Srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, XXXVI;

(1601). It is in Mavro Orbini's work that we read of the battle taking place in the vicinity of Černomen and, as I have already mentioned in the chapter on the historiography, his work greatly influenced the Slavic historiography in the region of South-Eastern Europe in 18th and 19th century. The 19th century Serbian historian Ruvarac claimed that we can not discard the possibility that Paysiye used Orbini's depiction of the Battle of the Maritsa River when narrating the defeat of Vukašin and Uglješa.²⁴¹ Mavro Orbini tells that the battlefield was:

. . . in the vicinity of the town Černomen in Thrace where the Rasans (Serbs) had been fighting the Turks.²⁴²

I have already mentioned in the previous chapters that when Mavro Orbini narrates the Battle of the Maritsa River he mentions Chalkokondyles and Leunclavius as his sources. But what are their sources and how did the story on the battlefield found its way into the Slavic sources? At the turn of the 15th century Chalkokondyles wrote the work *Demonstration of Histories* in which he narrated events from the early Ottoman past.²⁴³ Among them is a battle taking place in the vicinity of Černomen between the forces of Süleyman and the rulers of the Triballi, the King (Vukašin) and Uglješa. Researchers agree that Chalkokondyles must have used Ottoman sources for describing events concerning the Ottoman history.²⁴⁴ In fact, the description of the battle of Süleyman against the King and Uglješa resembles the *Ottoman Anonymous Histories* written at the time of Bayezid II which are the only sources in the early Ottoman historiography placing the battle in the region of Černomen. Chalkokondyles's depiction of a sudden night attack also resembles to some of the earliest Ottoman histories.²⁴⁵ The author, Chalkokondyles, could not dwell on other Slavic or Greek

²⁴¹ Radojčić, N. *Srpska istorija Mavra Orbinija*, 71

²⁴² Mavro Orbini, *Kraljestvo Slovena*, 1968, 53; Mavro Orbini also uses Ramberti's travel account on which more will be said in the following pages.

²⁴³ In the opening lines of the work the author says that he "refers to what led to the decline of the power of the Hellenes and the rise of the Turks to great power, the mightiest that has ever since been accomplished" -Laonikos Chalkokondyles: A Translation and Commentary of the "*Demonstrations of Histories*" Books I-III, King College, Trc. Nicoloudis, N., 1992, 89

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-75

sources because the information that the battle took place in the vicinity of Edirne is not available in 14th and 15th century Chronicles and Histories written in Slavic or Greek languages.

Johannes Leunclavius is the other source referred to in Orbini's history when the narrative tells about the deeds of king Vukašin and his brother Uglješa.²⁴⁶ In his work we read of Battle taking place in the vicinity of Černomen.²⁴⁷ But here the source which Leunclavius used in order to depict the battle as taking place at Černomen is traceable. We know that Leunclavius used two recensions of the *Ottoman Anonymous Histories* when writing the *Historiae Musulmanae Turcorum*.²⁴⁸ The result of this search for the origin of the information according to which Slavic sources beginning with the Biography of Uroš depict the battle as taking place in the vicinity of Černomen brought us back to the Ottoman sources. It is from the *Anonymous Ottoman Histories* or an older Ottoman source used by the author(s) of the aforementioned that the Slavic sources through the western intermediates acquired the information of the battlefield in 1371 as being in the vicinity of Černomen.

The Graves of Vukašin and Uglješa

Travel accounts from the 16th and 17th century report of a place that was regarded in the region of Harmanli (70km west of Svilengrad) as the grave of king Vukašin – in some examples, or the “brave” Uglješa in others. Such is the partially preserved dairy of the Patriarch of Peć, Arseniye Crnoević III, who as a pilgrim traveled to Jerusalem in 1682 and on the trip from Kosovo to Istanbul he recorded his visit to the grave of one of the rulers fighting on the banks of Maritsa in 1371:

We departed from Uzundževo (Uzunovası) and to our left side we had the main road as we went by a different path through the bushes. And we arrived at the grave of the brave Uglesha, the brother of king Vlkasin (Vukašin). And from there we went down the hill and arrived at the river. And here we saw a

²⁴⁵ See chapter “Historiographies on the Battle of the Maritsa River”

²⁴⁶ His works on the history of the Ottoman Turks have widely been circulating in the West and became one of the most important sources for western scholars on the history of the Ottomans.

²⁴⁷ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 176

²⁴⁸ V. L. Menage, *Neshri's History of the Ottomans: He sources and development of the text*, Oxford University Press, 1964, 31

stone bridge, great and magnificent, and a little town with wonderful big inn with a great dome in the middle. And here we took the necessities, bread and wine and grapes. And that place is called Harmajlija (Harmanli).²⁴⁹

In the biography of tsar Uroš written by the Patriarch of Peć – Paysiye, we read about the existence of the aforementioned site in the first half of the 17th century. Since the work is not presented as travel account (it narrated the live of the last member of the Nemanjić dynasty), Paysiye must have used certain written records which have not yet been discovered:

[Uglješa] was buried by his servant and that the grave is known even today and that it shows strange things and people leave their belongings to mark it. And his body was taken by some monks in a monastery close to Serrez which was founded by him and there it cured people, and the grave was in Harmanli ant even now is marked with a stone.²⁵⁰

Paysiye traveled to the Holy Land and it is possible that he encountered such a place at the time of his trip which is also reported by the later patriarch of Peć – Arsenje Crnoević. What we read in Paysiye's work was not included in the latter account by Crnoević and that addresses wordings that people had observed miracles appearing at that place and in return, people had left marks or belongings. A more interesting comparison can be made with the western travel accounts written one century earlier which reports about a grave belonging to Vukašin and Uglješa.

Benedetto Ramberti was the first western traveler recording a story on the death of *Re Vcassin Mresich*²⁵¹ (Vukašin) during the trip in 1534 to Istanbul. This Venetian Secretary to the Senate and a famous literary man of his time²⁵² when traveling back to Venice from the court of the Sultan, among the places he accounts for on his way from Istanbul was a spring where king *Vcassin Mresich* was killed by his servant while

²⁴⁹ Aleksandar Mladenović: *Dnevnik Patrijarha Arsenija III Crnojevića o putovanju u Jerusalim* (tekst i filološke napomene)

²⁵⁰ *Stare srpske biografija XV i XVII veka. Camblak, Konstantin, Pajsije*, 1936, 144

²⁵¹ Matković proposes that instead of *Mresich* we should read *Mrnjavić* see. Matković P. *Putovanja po balkanskom poluotoku XVI veka* – Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti XLII Zagreb. LVI, 1881, 225

²⁵² Lester J. Libby, Jr., *Venetian Views of the Ottoman Empire from the Peace of 1503 to the War of Cyprus Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Central Renaissance Conference (Winter, 1978), 106/7

drinking water.²⁵³ Apart from the name of king Vukašin recognized by Slavic sources as one of the rulers who had been defeated on the banks of the River Maritsa in 1371, the remaining story by Ramberti provides solely names and events taking place in the second half of the 15th century.²⁵⁴ Therefore, it seems that the only thing our traveler heard from the local community near Harmanli is that the site had been regarded as the place where Vukašin had been killed and the rest of the story presents solely Ramberti's version of events taking place in the late 15th century which he connects with the death of Vukašin.

A similar description of a royal grave in the vicinity of the "King's River"-Karmanli²⁵⁵ exists in the travel account of Pierre Lescalopier, but not much has been provided in addition as the resemblance is obvious with previous western travel accounts, especially the one written by Ramberti.²⁵⁶ New information on these local stories which refers to the rulers killed on the battle-field in 1371, can be found in the writings by Paolo Contirinis. He had traveled in the region at stake on his way to Istanbul in 1580. According to this traveler, three miles further from River Harmanli, a Christian village was named *Unechi* by the Turks and pronounced by Slavs as *Ugles*.²⁵⁷ As for the origin of this name *Contirinis* writes that it descends from the name of a king who was killed by his servant while resting at the spring near the village.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Hana Hynkova, *Europäische Reiseberichte aus dem 15. und 16. Jahrhundert als Quellen für die historische Geographie Bulgariens*, Bulgarische Akademie Der Wissenschaften – Institut für Balkanistik, Sofia 1973, 76; J. Tomić, *Motivi u predanju o smrti kralja Vukašina*, Sbornika po slavianovjedeniiu, I, Sankt Peterburg 1904, 9

²⁵⁴ Ramberti tells that this event took place at the time of the Serbian Despot Giorgio (probably referring to Gjordje Branković who was appointed by the Hungarian king Corvinus as Despot of the Serbs) and the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490).

²⁵⁵ The author probably referring to the river Harmali or River Maritsa in the vicinity of the village Harmanli see. Bistra Cvetkova, *Frenski Putepjesi za Balkanite XV-XVIII v. Sústavila i redaktirala Bistra A. Cvetkova*, Izdatelstvo Nauka i Izkustvo, 1975, fn.34, 160

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 150

²⁵⁷ Hana Hynkova, *Europäische Reiseberichte aus dem 15. und 16. Jahrhundert als Quellen für die historische Geographie Bulgariens*, 76

So far the name of this village has not been encountered in the Ottoman archival sources.²⁵⁹ We also can not cross-check the authenticity of the travel accounts with other sources. Whether they have really witnessed a place referred by the local community as the gravesites of the rulers killed in 1371 is something that awaits the appearance of other sources or maybe an attempt to compare the information in the travel accounts with ethnographical material from 19th and 20th century. I have checked a great number of western travel accounts and it is only in a few of them, such as the reports on the graves of Vukašin and Uglješa, that we see remnants of the memory on the Battle in 1371. As for the existence of Sırf Sındığı, none of the western travelers reports of such a place even though we track Ottoman sources and accounts from 19th century that trace the knowledge by the people in the region of such a place. Maybe the reason for the absence of sufficient information on Ottoman places of memory stems from the fact that many of the western travelers had their interest focused solely on the “glorious” ancient history of the places that they passed through.

In 1904 the Serbian historian Jovan Tomić in his article “The Legends on the death of King Vukašin” noticed the connection between the western travel accounts and the writing of Mavro Orbini.²⁶⁰ It seems that Mavro Orbini not only combined information from Chalkokondyles and Leunclavius but also used the travel account of Benedetto Ramberti in order to craft the account on the Battle of the Maritsa River. We may say that more than two centuries after the Battle, Orbini’s *The Kingdom of the Slavs* is a culmination of the historical writing referring to the Battle of the Maritsa River.²⁶¹ Orbini narrated the defeat of the River Maritsa and the death of Vukašin as the tragic moment in the history of the Slavs and not like Paysiye who used the Battle and the death of Vukašin as a story of morality in which the defeated were punished for

²⁵⁸ J. Tomić, *Motivi u predanju o smrti kralja Vukašina*, 13; This is the only information and the author does not mention any battle

²⁵⁹ Hana Hynkova, 124

²⁶⁰ J. Tomić, *Motivi u predanju o smrti kralja Vukašina*, 9-11

²⁶¹ The author wrote the most detailed account on the Battle of the Maritsa River. One of the reasons is that the author connects the death of King Vukašin with the Turkish expansion: “When king Vukašin died the power of Rashka declined and the one of the Turks ascended. They became arrogant with this victory and began to intrude without any obstacle in all parts of Raškan to plunder.” - Mavro Orbini, *Kraljestvo Slovena*, 53-54

their sins. The old tradition in the Slavic sources where Vukašin is blamed for the death of tsar Uroš²⁶² can be well observed in Pajsiye's depiction of the Battle on the Maritsa River:

If God did not allow it, how is it then, that four thousand and five hundred soldiers [Ottoman] can fight against seventy thousand [Vukašin's army]. This happened because of the unjust murder [referring to the death of Uroš], and in the war and sudden dissension it was an unbelievable miracle to see that a great number of armed soldiers were at once routed with God's approval, and many have drowned in the river, as we mentioned before, similar to what happened to the Pharaoh, prosecuted by God's anger. . . And Vukašin [Vukašin] became a pitiful scene in the swamp and food for the fish and birds, and even his grave is not known: the memory of him died with the murmur.²⁶³

²⁶² According to documents found in the archives of Dubrovnik historians now understand that this might have been a latter invention as Uroš is still alive in the late autumn of 1371.

²⁶³ *Stare srpske biografija XV i XVII veka. Camblak, Konstantin, Pajsije*, 143-144



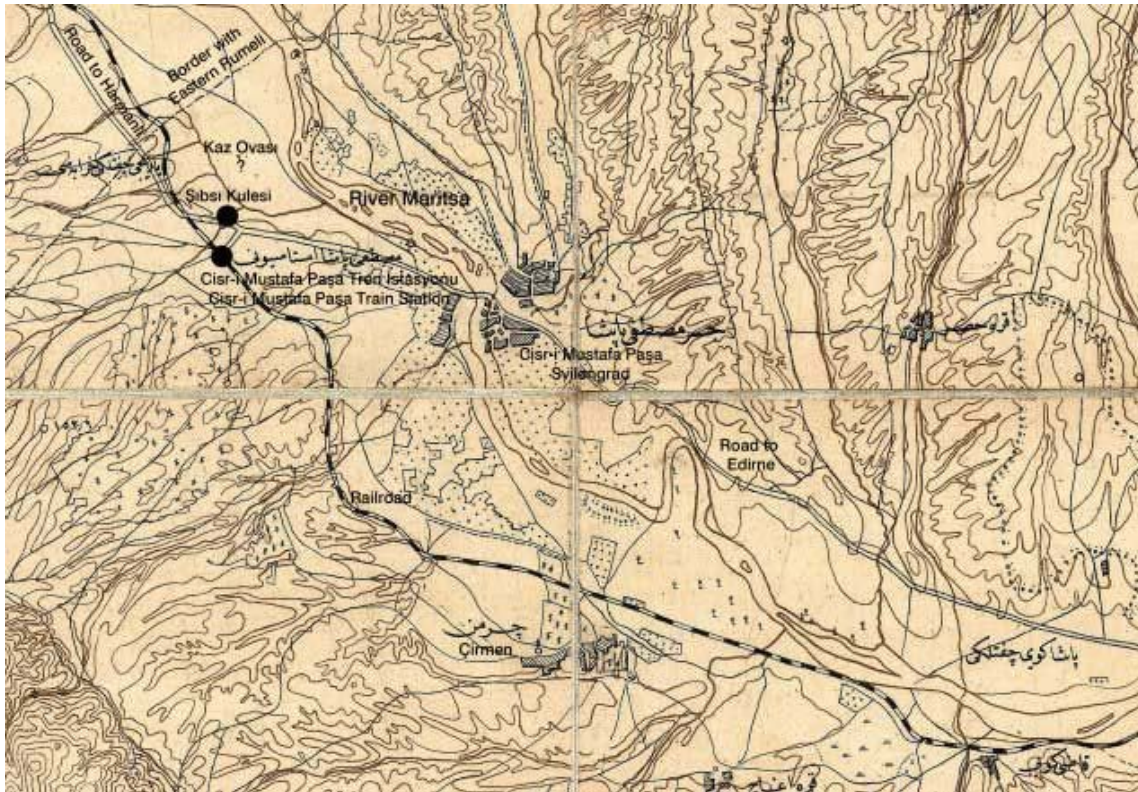
(Figure 5) The monument of the Sırpsındığı Battle in Sarayakpınar – Turkey



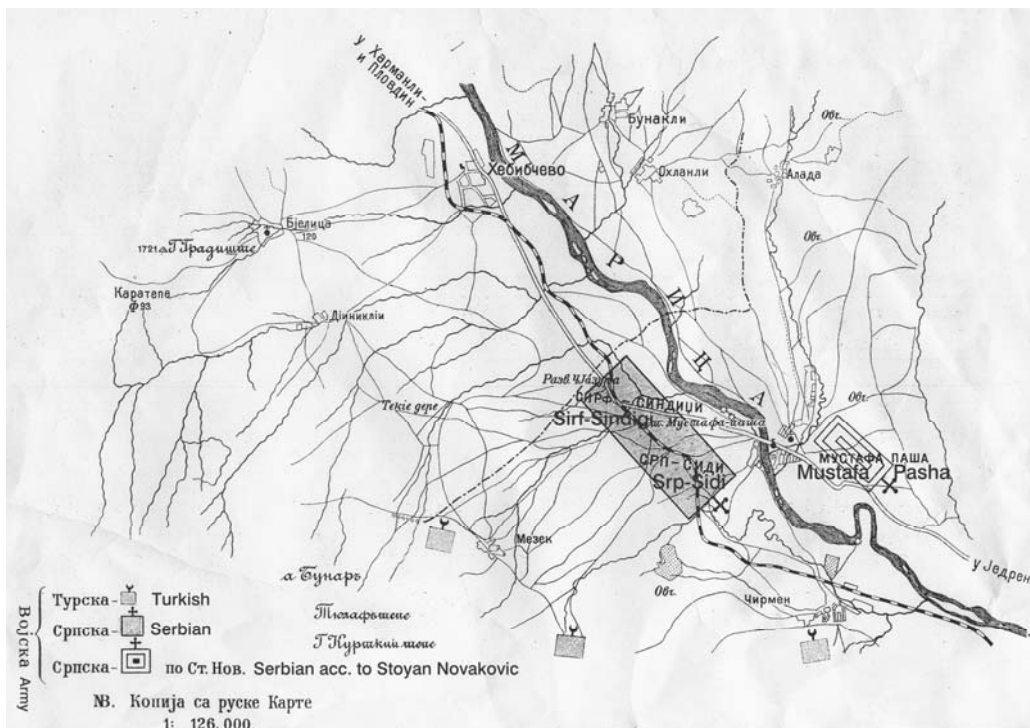
(Figure 6) The ceremony commemorating the Battle (21 October 2006) in the village Sarayakpınar, Turkey



(Figure 7) A map of the region



(Figure 8) This is a fragment of an Ottoman map which depicts Cisri-i Mustafa Pasha (it is not dated but the rail road and the border line indicate on the period between 1884 – 1913 [author’s translation from Ottoman])



(Figure 9) The map published as an appendix in the article by Jovan Mišković in 1900



(Figure 10) A view of the train station (1km away from the point where this picture was taken) as seen from the vicinity of Karčov Sazlık. This must have been the region where the Forest used to be.



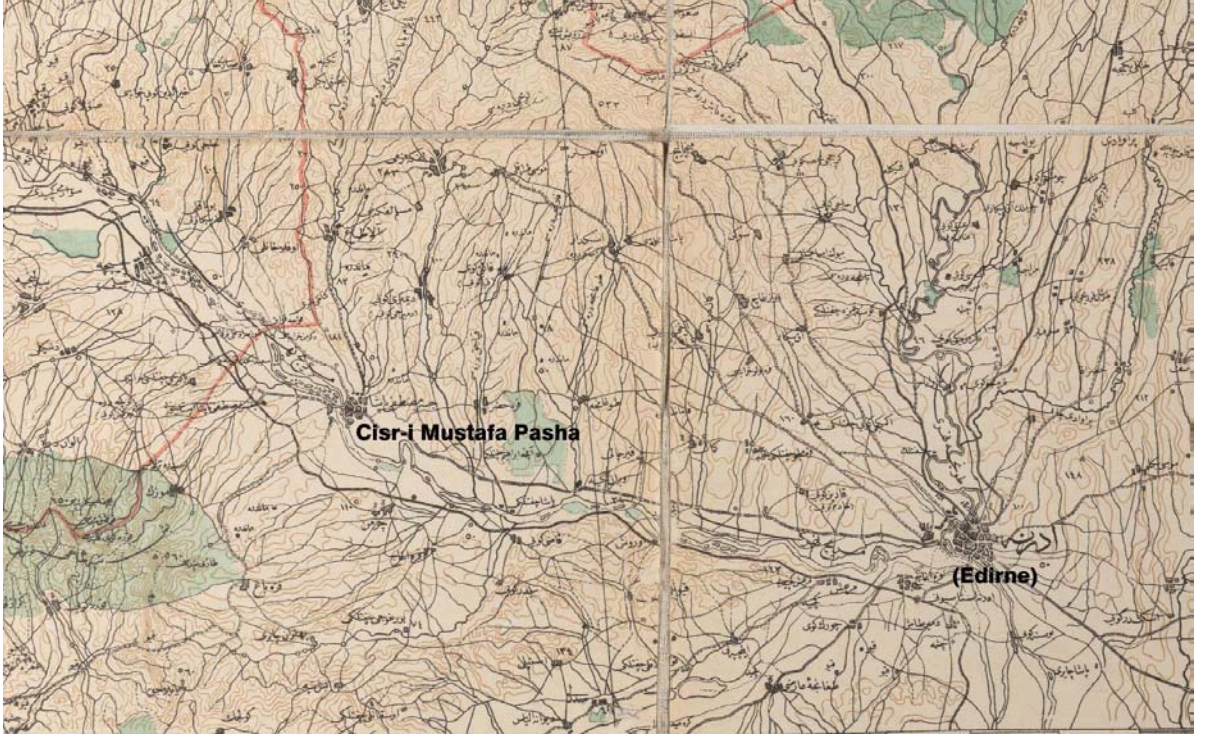
(Figure 11) The old Ottoman road that leads to Harmanli. A view from the area of Karčov Sazlık.



(Figure 12) The first tree line is the Karčov Sazlik. The River Maritsa is 1km behind the first tree line. The rail-road Plovdiv-Svilengrad is located between the point from where this photograph was taken and the first trees.



(Figure 13) This map shows the distance between the “Old” and the “New” Serfsındığı/Sirpsındığı



(Figure 14) Erkânıharbiye-yi Umumiye. Rumeli-i şahane haritası, [Dersaadet] : Erkân-ı Harbiyye-i Umumiyye da'iresi beşinci fen şubesi matbaası, 1317 [1901/1902].



(Figure 15) The River Maritsa and the Bridge Mustafa Paşa (Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa)

Chapter VI

THE EPIC POEMS AND THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Various accounts on the Battle which took place in 1371 sparked up a gamut of puzzling questions for me. One of them was an inquiry on the construction of the story which explained to past and present generations “what had happened” on the Maritsa in 1371. The majority of the modern historians have been preoccupied with the political consequences of the Battle. They regard the Ottoman defeat over the most distinguished rulers in South-East Europe as an opening of a shaft of political power in the region which alleviated Ottoman conquests at the end of the 14th century. Historians have excluded the existence of various collective memories on the battle in 1371. Also, they omit mentioning how the memory was perpetuated through the ages. As a result, we are nowadays confronted with 19th century national historic narratives on the Battle which narrow the various interpretations of the event and construct a generalized vision for a battle that marked the beginning of the Ottoman rule in the region in each national narrative, respectively.

In this chapter I will attempt to observe fragments on the collective memory of the event that took place in 1371, which we find in the historical sources. I will examine several hagiographies and histories that tell about the event and also look at two versions of the epic poem “King Marko Recognizes his Father’s Scimitar”²⁶⁴ where we read of the death of King Vukašin. My intention in this chapter is to show the

²⁶⁴ These two versions have been recorded by the famous language reformer of the Serbian language and collector of folklore Vuk Stefanović Karadžić during his lifetime (1787-1864). It is possible that there are other versions of the same poem which I will attempt to locate in the future. All the folk songs have their own variants recorded from different informers or even coming from different regions. Many of those versions are very beautiful. Vuk Karadžić used to say about the versions “again the same, but different”. The time was too short to establish where exactly these two versions have been recorded.

resemblance of some motifs in the two versions of the epic poem recorded in the beginning of the 19th century with the information that we have from the historical narratives. By doing so, I hope to examine the relation between the historical sources (also including a fresco painting) and the peoples' memory - as embedded in the epic poems.

One of the versions²⁶⁵ of the epic poem mentioned afore (see below for a translation from Serbian into English) shows that the historical consciousness as found in the folklore and which refers to the death of Vukašin has a very similar provenance to the 14th and 15th century literary and pictorial sources depicting the battle and the aftermath in both Christian and Muslim accounts. Such resemblance may indicate that the historical narratives and the poem have a common source (the oral tradition) but also could be the result of the "poetic talents" of a person acquainted with the narrative accounts.

The second version²⁶⁶ of the epic poem "King Marko Recognizes his Father's Scimitar", to which I will focus my attention at the end of this chapter, in certain parts resembles to the Ottoman sources from the 15th century which had most probably infiltrated through the western intermediates (Johannes Leunclavius in the first place) in the 17th and 18th century historical writing in Slavic and from there into the folklore of the Slavic speaking Christians in the North Balkans. Unable to determine the origins of the first version of the epic poem we are however certain that the second one is clearly an eclectic product of the "borrowings" between the Ottoman, Western and Slavic sources.

The epic poems which will be in the focus of this chapter narrate a familiar theme already seen in the travel accounts from the 16th century (see chapter Place). In Ramberti's travel account (written in 1534) we read about the death of King Vukašin which was recorded when the traveler had reached Harmanli. Researchers believe that Mavro Orbini used Ramberti's account in order to transform the story in the following form:

²⁶⁵ It comes from a collection of epic poems collected by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić and published for the first time in 1974 – *Srpske Narodne Pjesme iz neobjavljenih rukopisa Vuka Stef. Karadžića*, knj II, (pjesme junačke najstarije), SANU, Beograd, 1974

²⁶⁶ published in 1845, Karadžić, *Pjesme*, knj. II (drž. Izdanje), br. 55, 67

When king Vukašin crossed the River, he felt a grave thirst and began to drink from a spring. As he leaned over to drink, his servant Nikola Hrsoyevic saw the necklace hanging and killed him for it.²⁶⁷

Ramberti's and Orbini's account on the death of Vukašin are similar to what the two epic poems have to say on the same event. But instead of being killed by his servant, as both accounts tell, the epic poems depict that king Vukašin was killed by a Turk. In fact the epic poem "Prince Marko Recognizes his Father's Scimitar" can be defined as a continuation of the stories found in Ramberti and Orbini's narratives. There we read about the death of Vukašin and the epic poem continues to sing that the king's body had been stripped from its belongings, the valuable scimitar in the first place. Next in the epic poem follows the arrival of King Marko in the military camp of the Sultan in order to participate as a vassal in a military campaign.²⁶⁸ There he recognizes his father scimitar in the hands of a Turk,²⁶⁹ revenges his father's death and appropriates the valuable scimitar back.

This is the core narrative line in the epic poems and its possible connection with the travel accounts. The details and the differences between the two versions and their relation to the historical narratives will be discussed latter in the chapter and observed in the following translation.

²⁶⁷ Mavro Orbini, *Kraljestvo Slovena*, 52-53

²⁶⁸ The historical figure of King Marko is attested in the documents and church inscriptions from the period following the Battle of the Maritsa River. After the death of his father he took over the throne and according to the Life of Stefan Lazarević (written 1431) as well as other sources he became a vassal of the Ottoman sultan and died in the Battle of Rovine in 1394 fighting in the army of Bayezid against the Vlachian ruler Mirče.

²⁶⁹ Besides being the ruler ascending the throne after the death of his father Vukašin king Marko is known as the most popular Balkan hero in the Serbian, Bulgarian and Macedonian folklores. Even though he is not always depicting as fighting the Turks king Marko's popular representations are as the hero fighting the Turks. There are hundreds of studies on this popular Balkan hero which are impossible to quote here. For reference on works considering the folklore see. Tatyana Popovic, *Prince Marko: The Hero of South Slavic Epics*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988

Prince Marko²⁷⁰ Recognizes his Father's Scimitar²⁷¹

The herald shouts early on Sunday,
He shouts for the scimitar
who will be the scimitar's owner.
Evil made King Marko venture outside:
"Oh thou Turk, herald Mehmed,
What is the price of your shining scimitar?"
And Mehmed the Herald says:
"The price of the scimitar is 300 dukats'
with the hilt and the cover all together,
each worth of 300 ducats,
everything for 900!"
King Marko in replies:
"Let us go to the shop
Into the shop of the craftsman Nenad,
to learn of the scimitar's length,
he should tell us of the scimitar's price!"
They went down the shop,
Where the craftsman set a price for the scimitar:
The price was Nine hundred,
Nine hundred golden ducats:
Utters King Marko:
"O thou Turk, Mehmed the Herald,

²⁷⁰ This legendary hero in the folklore of the South-Eastern European people is known from the documents and inscriptions in the second half of the 14th century as the son of King Vukašin. In the 1370/1, just before the Battle of the Maritsa River he was crowned as the young King which we see from the inscription of the Church St Nedela in Prizren see. M. Ivanović, *Natpis mladog kralja Marka sa Crkve Sv. Nedelje u Prizrenu*, Zograf 2 (1967), 20-21

²⁷¹ We do not know of the exact time when this poem came into being nor the place where it was created. It was recorded during the life-time of Vuk Karadžić and in 1974 was among the poems published for the first time. The majority of poems collected by Vuk Karadžić come from the regions of Bosnia and Serbia. If we know that in the stories from Macedonia Marko is not being mentioned as a Turkish vassal then it may be that this poem too has also been recorded somewhere in the Northern Balkans. Another problem that arises when researching the folklore material collected by Vuk Karadžić is that he often made changes to the material. Whether these were minor stylistic changes or major change to the material is hard to be proved. Vuk Karadžić had a background in history as it is known that he had read Raić's history where a description on the Battle of the Maritsa River is included and based on the Slavic sources and Mavro Orbini, see. Miodrag Popović, *Vuk Stef. Karadžić (1787-1864)*, Nolit, Beograd, 1972

Let's go to a safe place
 Under the spacious gardens of Edirne,
 Under the high under the arched Bridge,
 On the Maritsa River, by the cold water,
 There I will pay for the scimitar,
 As I am a hero in debt to the Turks
 Turks will notice my fortune,
 and I will not pay thee for the scimitar!"
 Bad luck met the Turk
 as they venture to the save place
 Under the spacious gardens of Edirne
 on Maritsa and its splendid cold water
 Poor Turk lay down a precious covering,
 Marko spread out the groshs and the ducats,
 Oh how greedy for fortune is the Turk,
 set down the Turk to count the fortune
 Marko grabbed the scimitar,
 Examines carefully Marko,
 and on the scimitar he sees;
 he sees three Christian words:
 One word is Vukashin – the King,
 Exactly as Marko's old parent;
 The second letter of the summer saint George,
 Exactly as Marko's beautiful christen name;
 The third word is the holy Dimitriya.
 Utters king Marko:
 "O thou Turk, Memed the Herald
 What I will ask thee truly should be answered!
 whence came the scimitar in thou hand
 Was it won in a battle
 or bought it with your fortune?
 Utters Memed the Herald:
 "O Kaurine²⁷² King Marko
 When you ask let me tell you the truth –
 I have not won the scimitar in a battle
 Neither I have bought it with my fortune
 But you may know and remember
 When it was the battle at Kosovo²⁷³
 When we took over your kingdom (empire)
 Weak orphan I had been
 There I walk on the battlefield
 scavenging for heroes' belongings
 My destiny destined me
 with wonderful green tents,
 Green tent from green silk,

²⁷² means infidel or Christian.

²⁷³ All the historical sources agree that Vukašin died in 1371 which is almost two decades before the Battle at Kosovo.

On the top of it a golden apple
 And 12 of your Crosses,
 Under it a wounded kaurin lies,
 on his head a gilded crown
 On his chests a precious mantel,
 Bellow the mantle a gilded belt
 His belt embroidered with a raven's feather,
 For water he asked me,
 gave him no water as I willed,
 I drew the scimitar, cut his head off,
 and in Maritsa's waters I threw
 and sold the green tent
 and sold the golden crown
 Now I sell this shinning scimitar!"
 When king Marko heard this,
 Utters king Marko:
 "Oh thou Turk, Memed the Herald,
 Ah Turk, mournful be thee mother
 My parent he was
 My parent King Vukashin!
 You offered him no water what for,
 Even with wine I would treat you
 And if the damned you had buried him,
 I would have buried you even better,
 Above you I would have made a bridge,
 would have hired Turkish dervishes
 so that they pray for you! "
 Utters Memed the Herald:
 " Kaurine King Marko
 Have you seen somewhere or heard
 A Turk to bury a Kaurin,
 I will by no mean bury him indeed!"
 And when King Marko heard,
 Drew the scimitar and cut his head,
 And in Maritsa River he threw:
 "O River, take away my enemy
 Let him find my father,
 with God's will closer or apart!"
 He picked up the *groshs* and *ducats*
 Went down to the shop
 Turkish falconers ask him:
 "Kaurin King Marko,
 Did you bargain well for the scimitar,
 Would there be some hunting?
 Irefully Marko answered:
 "Stay where you are Turk falconers
 It is easy for you. . . ."²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Seems that the epic poem has a continuation but Vuk Karadjic had either not written it down or the ending part was lost. (author's translation from Serbian)

The Historical Narratives

In the following pages my focus will be laid on historical sources not accounted for in the modern historical writing on the Battle of the Maritsa River. These sources show resemblance with the epic poem above. The *Life of Saint Niphon* and Hadidi's *History of the House of Osman* refer to captured weapons on the battle-field in 1371 which may have been metaphorically depicted in the story of Vukašin scimitar falling in the hand of the Turk in the epic poem. After discussing the sources referring to the spoils from the Battle in 1371, I will turn my attention to the work of Konstantin Mihailović's *Memoirs of a Janissary*. He describes the death of king Uroš in a Battle which according to his narration resembles the Ottoman depiction of Sırsındığı or the Battle of the Maritsa River. In this historical narrative, before the defeat of the Serbs occurs at the place called "the annihilation of the Serbs", a dream in which the ruler's sword falls in the hands of the Turks foretells the death of the ruler who similarly to what we see in the epic poem, dies in his tent. Furthermore, I will turn my attention from the narrative sources showing similarities with the epic poem to a pictorial representation of King Marko and King Vukašin in which the later appears to hold in his hand a scimitar without hilt. This interpretation has been debated among researchers working on Late Medieval fresco painting in the Balkans²⁷⁵. At the end of the chapter I will discuss briefly on an additional version of the epic poem "King Marko Recognizes his Father's Scimitar".

The Weapons of the Serbs

One of the written sources telling about weapons captured in the Battle of the River Maritsa is the hagiography *Life of Saint Niphon* - the only contemporary source

²⁷⁵This will be discussed later in this chapter.

where we encounter the term “Serbian weapons” as being seized by the Ismailites (Ottomans) and used in one of their attacks on the Holy Mountain immediately succeeding the battle in 1371.²⁷⁶ It is the work of the George Ostrogorsky in the article “The Holy Mountain after the Battle of the Maritsa River” which introduces this source as a valuable testimony on “what happened on the banks of Maritsa in 1371”. The fact that the writer of the hagiography was a contemporary of Saint Niphon makes this account even more valuable. Also, the author had most probably resided on the Holy Mountain which implies that the information we get from this work comes from a possible eyewitness.²⁷⁷

Because Despot Uglesha was killed by the Ismailites [refers to the followers of the biblical Ishmael and Koranic Ismail] those Ismailites became audacious and gathering many ships dared to attack the Holy Mountain and all the Christians with the weapons of the Serbs, bringing siege devices for the fortresses on the Holy Mountain²⁷⁸

The story continues with the monks from the Monastery of Great Lavra pleading for the protection of Saint Niphon who in return pray to God to be saved. The saint foretells that the enemy will not cause harm to the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain and this is exactly what happened. Three magnificent Venetian ships suddenly arrived and, according to the hagiography, together with the Great Primikjur²⁷⁹ defeated the enemy while at the same time took control over all Ottoman ships which carried the armament. The story of this Ottoman attack ends with saying how the saviors of the Holy Mountain (Venetians and the great Primakjur) sent off one of the seized ships²⁸⁰ and part of the booty to the Monastery of Lavra.

²⁷⁶ The entire text is given in, F. Halkin, *La Vie de S. Niphon, ermite au Mont Athos (XIVe s.)*, *Annalecta Bollandiana* 58 (1940) 5-27

²⁷⁷ Ostrogorsky believes that the writer was a contemporary to the main character in the work Saint Niphon who died at an age of 94 in the year 1411

²⁷⁸ G.Ostrogorsky, *Sveta Gora posle Maričke Bitke*, *Otisak iz Zbornika Filozofskog fakulteta*, knjiga X-1, Beograd 1970, 279

²⁷⁹ Ostrogorsky writes that the Byzantine dignitary mentioned in the Hagiography is Jovan, the founder of the monastery Pantokratos on the Holy Mountain.

²⁸⁰ Here the author refers to the ships loaded with weapons and carried by the Ottoman forces in their attack on the Holy Mountain.

Important phrase in the Hagiography of St Niphon is “the weapons of the Serbs” which drew the attention of Ostrogorsky.²⁸¹ But only a few articles on the Maritsa Battle appeared in the following decades and no one took notice of this interesting detail. First, it tells us how the inhabitants on the Holy Mountain perceived the defeat of the Christian forces in 1371. Only if the Serbian forces on the banks of the River Maritsa had been completely routed then the writer of the Hagiography could have written about their weapons in the hands of the Ottomans. This source can also help us interpret the Ottoman conquest of South-Eastern Europe especially viewed from the aspect of a military organization, weapons, and tactics that the Ottomans used in the last decades of the 14th century.²⁸² Furthermore, the information on the captured weapons which have been very quickly utilized by the Ottomans after the Battle in 1371 in their military undertakings extends our understanding of the transfer of technology and weapons in the years of the Ottoman conquest in South-Eastern Europe. We can not refute that the military technology used in Late Medieval Balkans was known to the Ottomans especially when the existence of such source as St Niphon hagiography stands at our disposal.

However, we can not be precise in the attempt to designate the type of weapons captured on the banks of Maritsa in 1371. It could have been scimitars since the feudal armies in South-Eastern Europe used such a weapon which arrived with the Turcoman

²⁸¹ who adds a footnote in which it is explained that the armament had been seized from defeated Serbs, which can serve as a reference to the Battle of the Maritsa River in 1371.

²⁸² Very little has been said on the weapons and tactics used by the Ottomans in the conquest. Interesting is the information from a 16th century Hunername saying that in the time of Murad I there used to be a game in which archers had to kill a wolf dressed in armoire, see. Öz, Tahsin, *Türk Okçuluğu ve Atatürk*, TTK. Atatürk Konferansları II'den ayrışım, Ankara 1970, 141; Interesting is also the observation that the Ottoman conquest initiated the use of the fire-arms in the Balkans. Documents from Dubrovnik report that in 1385 canons were sent in the fortress of Desna in Bosnia as a precaution to the Ottoman inroads in Albania. Around this period, even Ottoman narrative sources mention the use of canons. see. Petrovic, David. *Firearms in the Balkans on the Eve and after the Ottoman's Conquest of the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Centuries*, in *War Technology and Society in the Middle East*. Londra, 1975, 169-196. That the fire-arms in the Balkans were introduced in the years between the Battle of the Maritsa River (1371) and Kosovo (1389) can be seen even in the Macedonian folklore. According to a story recorded in 19th century when a kid inflicts a wound on King Marko's hand with a gun, the famous hero utters: “It is no worth living in a world where a child can kill the leading hero”. see. Kiril Penušliski, *Marko Krale: Legenda ili Stvarnost*, Misl, Skopje 1983, 147

mercenaries as early as the first half of the 14th century. This occurrence is testified in the fresco paintings from that period.²⁸³ So the story of Vukašin's scimitar in the epic poem as being captured by a "Turk" may not have been a latter interpolation. The usage of scimitars was widely known in the Late Medieval Balkans. A number of questions arise from the mentioning of the Serbian weapons in St Niphon hagiography concerning the intention of the two brothers Vukašin and Uglješa as they advanced in Thrace in the summer of 1371. For anyone visiting the Holy Mountain and especially the Monastery of Lavra which even today resembles a strong medieval fortress situated on a hardly accessible terrain it is obvious that swords or knight's armor captured by the Ottomans at Sırfındığı could not have been considered a threat to the well being of the monks behind the walls. On the other hand if we presume that the campaign of Vukašin and Uglješa was focused on the conquest of Edirne or other fortresses in Thrace serving Ottomans as strongholds, then it could be possible that Ottomans on the banks of Maritsa in 1371 captured a significant amount of siege devices utilized soon in the Ottoman attack on the Holy Mountain in 1372 or 1373.

More information on the weapons of the enemy is found in the late 15th and 16th century Ottoman narratives depicting the Kosovo Battle of 1389. When asked at the eve of the Battle, by Sultan Murad, on the tactics that should be applied on the Battlefield, the famous Ottoman commander Evrenos is supposed to have answered that the infidels resembled a "hill of iron".²⁸⁴ But these are latter sources and they refer to a battle which takes place almost two decades after the Battle of the River Maritsa. What are the Ottoman sources reporting on the booty captured on the banks of Maritsa in 1371 and do we read in the sources of the "Serbian weapon" as the above mentioned hagiography tells?²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Dušan Pribaković, *Oružje na zidnom slikarstvu Srbije i Makedonije/Les armes a la peinture muraille de la Serbie et de la Macedoine*. – Vojni muzej, Vesnik br. 1. Beograd 1954

²⁸⁴ Salih Trako, *Bitka na Kosovu 1389. godine u istoriji Idrisa Bitlisija – The battle of Kosovo 1389 in the history of Idris Bitlisi*, Prilozi za Orijentalnu Filologiju – Revue de philology orientale, XIV-XV/1964-65, Sarajevo 1969, 339

²⁸⁵ Monasteries in Medieval times had their own military organization responsible for the security of the monastery and the well-being of the monks. For a discussion on this military service in Medieval Balkans see. Borislav M. Radojković, *O sokalnicima*, Beograd 1937,95-98

The answer of the question above may never be found. However, one of the Ottoman sources written by a 16th century writer whose nickname Hadidi is the single trace of his identity, reports in his work that weapons have been captured in the Battle at Sırsındığı.²⁸⁶ He is known among the early 16th century Ottoman poets to have written a History of the House of Osman in verse.²⁸⁷ Similar to the earlier histories²⁸⁸ written during the rule of Bayezid II and including the exploits of the *gazis* in Rumeli, Hadidi too, mentions the Battle in which the Sırs (Serbs) have been routed not far from Edirne on the banks of the River Maritsa.²⁸⁹ What makes this work valuable are the references on some events from the early years of the Ottoman conquest in Thrace which are not found in earlier sources such as the first performed *hutbe* after Süleyman Paşa's passage on the European side of the Dardanelles.²⁹⁰ One could propose that all of these stories on the early Ottoman achievements may have been part of the oral tradition still existing in Hadidi's birth-place Ferecik and the surrounding region of Thrace at the time of his writing. In addition, the author mentions in his work that his forefathers participated in the conquest of Ferecik, so the stories about famous *gaza* achievements may have been inseparable part of his upbringing and education. Just like the aforementioned example describing Süleyman Paşa's achievements in Thrace, the episode of the booty captured after the battle in which the "Serfs were routed" may have been one of those local stories that Hadidi decided to include in his work:

²⁸⁶ The meaning of the nickname Hadidi is interpreted as "made of iron". However, several Ottoman biographers give various versions, see. Franz Babinger, *Osmanlı Tarih Yazarları ve Eserleri*, çev. Coşkun Üçok, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Ankara 1982, 67

²⁸⁷ The narration spans from the time of Osman and ends with the first couple of years of the rule of Suleyman the Magnificent. The work numbers 6646 verses.

²⁸⁸ In fact, the only source that Hadidi mentions is Aşık Paşa-zade's *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman* from where he must have taken the part of the story in which the Serbian soldiers drown in the river.

²⁸⁹ This account is the first Ottoman source that precisely locates the place Sırsındığı as being one *menzil* away from Edirne on the banks of river Maritsa. This description corresponds with the place Cısr-i Mustafa Paşa or Svilengrad.

²⁹⁰ One of these is the author's claim that Ferecik (present day Ferres in western Thrace, Greece) was the place where the first *hutbe* was read for the first time after Suleyman Paşa had crossed to the other side of the Dardanelles. see. Hadidi. *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman (1299-1523)*, Edited by Necdet Oztürk, Istanbul, 1991, 79

Just before dawn Lala Şahin ordered
goods to be assigned as booty and collected by gazis
For a Shah fitting treasure from jewel
Armor and cuirass and sword and shield²⁹¹

The description continues with verses describing the captured slaves which were sent to the Sultan together with other spoils. We may account that this is the accustomed way for Ottoman historians to describe the magnitude of a booty following any of the Ottoman victories. Surprisingly, it is only when writing on the battle where the Serfs were defeated that Hadidi mentions the armament as part of the great booty.²⁹² Could it be just a random mentioning or is this information on captured weapons something that Hadidi consciously included in his writing on this particular event? From the corpus of Ottoman sources informing us about the battle we do not read of weapons being captured and the only similarity we find is in the *Life of St Niphon*. There we read of the Ismailites who attack the Holy Mountain with “Serbian weapons” captured after the death of Uglješa. Even though the depiction of the booty as being composed from weapons is not seen in other Ottoman historical narrative, Hadidi’s writing should not be regarded as unique account extolling the captured spoils in the Battle “when the Serbs were routed”.

Ibn Kemal’s History of the House of Osman which was written in the first decade of the 16th century refers to the spoils scattered on the place called Sarf Sındığı in the following passages:

The spring blossoms of the spoils were opened, the endless treasure in the size of a mountain was scattered on the side of the road so that according to the stories one year afterwards one could have gained something by roaming the place.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Hadidi, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman* (1299-1523), 90

²⁹² In this sense Hadidi’s history is the only known Ottoman source mentioning weapons as part of the spoils.

²⁹³ Kemalpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, MS Millet Kütüphanesi, Ali Emiri Efendi, Tarih, Nr 30, fol.82 - ezhar-ı behar ganimet açılıb genci bi-nihayet günc-i kuhsar ve kenar rehguza şöyle saçılır ki rivayet ederler yılından sonra ileri ol yeri gezdikçe kazanc buldu.

The poetic description of this great booty from one of the most famous battles fits very well into Ibn Kemal's enthusiasm to write on the achievements of the gazis from Rumeli. Even though we do not read of weapons as being part of the spoils, still, in the stories on the great victories which Ibn Kemal recorded even before writing the History of the House of Osman,²⁹⁴ the battle itself was a synonym of *gazis* being rewarded with great booty for their courage. The greatness of the booty is seen in the fact that the leaders of the Christian army died on the battlefield.²⁹⁵ Most probably, the same destiny befell upon a great number of their soldiers. Actually, weapons being captured at the place called "the routing of the Serbs" should be an information "worth" to be remembered. We can just guess on the value of the weaponry captured by the Ottomans in the ages of a constant scarcity of metals²⁹⁶ which often made victorious armies look like "vultures" on the battlefield, roaming among the bodies of the fallen enemy and stripping them from their belongings.²⁹⁷ But historical narratives do not always describe such blatant scenes of victorious heroes scavenging the battlefield as what the Ottoman forces might have been doing in 1371. The writing of Konstantin Mihailović shows that the scavenging on the battlefield can acquire an alternative form in the historical narratives. In his work, a historical narrative written by a 15th century born Christian from South Eastern Europe (probably Serbia or Bosnia), the story of the king's sword captured by a Turk serves as a metaphor for the punishment of God against those who have committed sins in the past.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ D-r Dušana Bojanić- Lukač, *Kako Turcite go prezele Skopje (1391)*, Zbornik na Muzejot na grad Skopje, Skopje, 1965/b, 14

²⁹⁵ This is something that almost all sources in Greek and Slavic agree with.

²⁹⁶ Several papal letters issued by Gregory XI in 1363 and 1373 threatened Christian traders with excommunication if trade iron and weapons to the Turks, see. Fleet, Kate, *European and Islamic trade in the early Ottoman state: the merchants of Genoa and Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, 112/3

²⁹⁷ One such example is the Hazar army which after destroying the Persian army in Armenia plundered the corps of the dead soldiers taking the weapons along. see. Nicola Di Cosmo, *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)* ca 629/630, Movses Dasxuranci/Dowsett, 106

²⁹⁸ Konstantin Mihailović tells about a dynastic fight in the first half of the 14th century among members of the dynasty of Nemanja before giving a short account on the Battle of the Maritsa River. For the author, the murder of the members of the dynasty was sanctioned by God with a defeat in a battle close to Edirne. But instead of Vukašin and

The King's Dream

In our quest for historical narratives on the Maritsa Battle which show resemblance with “oral histories”, we find that the work of Konstantin Mihailović - *Memoirs of a Janissary*, has great importance. Beginning from the 19th century, researchers notice a similarity between the Serbian epic poetry and the *Memoirs of a Janissary*. Such are the famous Polish poet and linguist Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)²⁹⁹ and the Slavic languages and literature expert Aleksander Brückner (1856-1939).³⁰⁰ But when reading Konstantin's late 15th century narrative, the first impression is that the author had not included the event which according to majority of historical sources took place on the banks of the River Maritsa.³⁰¹ Indeed, in a chapter from his work named “Concerning God's punishment for our sins, which happened in the Serbian or Raškan kingdom” we do read of a battle in which the Serbs or Raškans have been routed. But the Emperor embarking on the mission to rescue Adrianople³⁰² from the Turkish Emperor Murad is Uroš and not the two brothers King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa, as all the sources in Slavic and Greek languages report. On the other hand, this confusion with the names, and such is the case in other examples in the narrative, could

Uglješa, Konstantin Mihailović writes that the Serbian army was led by Uroš known as the last from the line of rulers of the Nemanja dynasty.

²⁹⁹ Konstantin Mihailović iz Ostrovica, *Janičarove Uspomene ili Turska Hronika*, prevod i predgovor Đorđa Živanović, Spomenik CVII, SANU, Beograd 1959, xii–xx; this edition is a Serbo-Croatian translation of one of the Polish recensions of the text.

³⁰⁰ According to the author the work of Konstantin has many folklore elements. Aleksander Brückner, *Wremennik serbskoturecki*, 311-18 in Konstantine Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, Translated by Benjamin Stolz, Historical commentary and notes by Svat Soucek, Ann Arbor, 1975, xxiii

³⁰¹ Very few of the historians writing on the battle mentioned this source. In Škrivanić's article “The Battle of the Maritsa River 26 September 1371” the author refers to the events and people mentioned in Konstantin's depiction of the Battle as being confused and that they can be hardly regarded as a source depicting the event, see. Gavro Škrivanić, *Bitka na Marici 26 septembra 1371*, VIG, 1963, 75

³⁰² Several Slavic Chronicles written latter in the 16th and 17th century place the Battle of the Maritsa River in which Vukašin and Uglješa were killed in the same year as the Ottoman conquest of Edirne see. Ljubomir Stoyanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, 209.

be a result of the author's usage of oral sources in writing the account. Konstantin may have heard these stories in his birth place, some of them probably during his military service under the banner of the Serbian ruler³⁰³ or part of them while serving in the army of the Ottoman Sultan.³⁰⁴ In fact, the chapter in his work that describes the battle "where the Serb or Raškans have been routed" includes descriptions that are a unique compilation of stories from both cultural milieus.³⁰⁵

The depiction of some of the events in the above mentioned chapter resembles even the main theme in the epic poem "King Marko Recognizes his Father's Scimitar".³⁰⁶ For example, in Konstantin's text, preceding the campaign of tsar Uroš, which is the culmination of the chapter, the Emperor during the preparations of the army³⁰⁷ had a dream in which his sword was captured by a Turk.

he saw in his dream that an angel came to him and took the sword from his hands and gave it to the Turks. And he, having seen such a miracle, remained on that field and himself went to the mountains to an anchorite, telling him of this vision; and he confessed to him, saying, "I fear the sin of my father." The

³⁰³ Despot Djuradj Branković (1377-1456)

³⁰⁴ The author may refer to Vukašin who was promoted to the rank of a king and a co-ruler to Uroš. The narrative mentions that the "two rulers" betrayed Uroš which is also found in the chronicles and narratives written in Slavic. The "Bulgarian lands" probably refer to the territory of the Ohrid archbishopry. Recent research established that the land ruled by Vukašin had been under the religious authority of Ohrid. The mentioning of the place called "The Serbian or Raškan defeat" confirms at best that the writer might have heard stories while in the army of the Sultan. This is a place which is not mentioned in the Slavic or Greek sources but frequently mentioned in the Ottoman sources in its Turkish translation *Serfsındığı*, meaning "the routing of the Serbs".

³⁰⁵ *Sırsındığı* or the Routing of the Serbs see Chapter "The Memory of a Place"

³⁰⁶ That the writing of Konstantin from Ostrovica resembles the Serbian epic poetry is something that the famous Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) notices. see. Konstantin Mihailović iz Ostrovica, *Janičarove Uspomene ili Turska Hronika*, xii-xx; Another scholar of Slavic languages and literature Aleksander Brückner (1856-1939) is of the opinion, too, that the work of Konstantin Mihailović is abundant with folklore elements and that the writing is the most interesting work of all Balkan historical literature. Aleksander Brückner, *Wremennik serbskotrecki*, 311-18 in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, xxiii

³⁰⁷ This is described as taking place in Žegligovo-area north-east from Skopje. Interesting is to mention that in this region is the church St George reconstructed by Milan in 1320s in order to celebrate the victory against the Turks in Asia Minor.

anchorite said, “The sins of your father will be visited upon the fourth generation,” not wanting to trouble him.³⁰⁸

In the case of the narrative written by Konstantin Mihailović, the dream and the prophecy of the anchorite are episodes that do not exist in the epic poem where the entire line of narration is concentrated on the recognition of Vukašin’s scimitar by his son Marko and the revenge for the misdeed of the Turk. However, just like the epic poem where the scimitar is the central motive around which either the peoples’ memory knitted the story of Marko’s revenge or someone aware of this literary monument, the writing of Konstantin Mihailović also depicts the sword as an object heralding the upcoming defeat. What is similar in both the epic poem and Konstantin’s narrative is not only the weapon as the main symbol for the defeat and the revenge. It is also the destiny befalling the ruler. Setting aside the confusion of the personal names in Konstantin’s narrative, it may be that we have two similar versions of “what happened” when the ruler of the Serbs attempted to fight the Turks and that the story of revenge in the epic poem may have been some sort of a continuation of story by Konstantin.³⁰⁹

The Emperor [Murad], seeing and knowing this kind of disorder in the army, having retired from the city [Edirne], marched with all his might upon him; having defeated the guard, he marched directly upon the army and caught Emperor Uroš in his tent. And here he was killed³¹⁰

The passage above is the culmination of the chapter “God’s punishment of the Serbs” and it is in this part of the text that we recognize the most striking similarities with the events described in the epic poem. Future research that will show the extent of popularity of Konstantin work, *The memoirs of a Janissary*, in the region of South – East Europe and before the epic poem had been recorded (first half of 19th century) could tell us whether this narrative served as a source for the creation of the poem or if

³⁰⁸ Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, 45

³⁰⁹ The entire corpus of Slavic chronicles as well as biographies of kings blamed Vukašin for killing Uroš and explain the defeat on the banks of Maritsa as God’s punishment.

³¹⁰ Konstantin Mihailović, 45

the writing of Konstantin had its source from the folklore of the people in the 15th century.³¹¹

The Fresco Paintings

Several churches and fresco paintings dating from the first two decades following the defeat at the River Maritsa show that the successors of King Vukašin continued financing large building projects, in spite of the difficult political situation, such as the lost of control of some of the possession in Kosovo and Macedonia (by Christian neighboring rulers) as well as the rising danger of upcoming Ottoman attacks.³¹² The impact of the 1371 Battle on the artistic representation in these works was a question that received attention especially after the uncovering of the portrait of King Marko on the façade above the south entrance of St Demetrius church (1963) in Markov Monastery painted in 1376/7.³¹³ Depicted in Byzantine ceremonial robes a full standing figure of king Marko is on the left side of the large tympanum above the south

³¹¹ The Stolz edition which is an English translation of one of the Czech versions needs to be criticized in the part of the commentaries. Numerous are the mistakes when in the commentaries the Battle of the Maritsa River is referred.

³¹² Many of the churches and fresco paintings are preserved even today with the majority being on the territory of Republic of Macedonia such as Markov Monastery and St Andrea Monastery south and south-west from Skopje, part of the fresco paintings in the St Archangel Monastery in the vicinity of Prilep have been done, see. Cvetan Grozdanov, *Marička bitka, vazalitetot na Kral Marko (Marko Krale) i živopisot na Markoviot Manastir*, Univerzitet Kiril i Metodij – Skopje (Megunaroden seminar za makedonski jazik), Skopje, 1992, 117

³¹³ The restoration work in the 1960s resulted with tearing down the baptistery which was attached to the southern wall and believed to be built in the 19th century so that space was opened to remove the plaster which covered the fresco composition containing the portraits of King Marko and his father King Vukašin. Full standing figures of king Marko and king Vukašin are depicted on the left and right side above the entrance into the church. In the central lunette above the door a figure of St.Demetrios is painted and the saint is wearing a military dress and holding a spear, sword and shield. Above the three figures of Marko, Vukašin and St.Demetrios on a blue background we see the figures of the Mother Virgin and a child, on the left King David, King Solomon, St Stephen, St. Catherin and another woman saint.

entrance. On the right side above the entrance is King Vukašin's portrait which is significantly damaged and in between them, Demetrius in full armor (Figure 16, see below). Both rulers hold in their hands scrolls but only the one in king Marko's hand is fully legible:

In Christ and God believing king Marko, built and inscribed this divine temple.³¹⁴



³¹⁴ The inscription inside the church tells of the history of the construction of this church. Most probably the portraits on the southern façade were the final touch before the architects and painters finished the construction of the church, see. C. Grozdanov, *Studii za ohrdskiot živopis*. Skopje, 1990, 123-124. The text of the inscription is as follows: “With the will of the Father and the Embodiment in his Son and the existence of the Holy Spirit. This Holy and Godly Temple dedicated to the great martyr of Christ, the victorious and peacekeeping Dimitar, was constructed and written, with the diligence and care of the Christ-loving king Vukašin, with the Christ-loving queen Elena and the first-born son, the Christ loving king Marko, and Andreas, and Ivaniš, and Dimitar in the year 6889 (1376/7). The construction of the Monastery had begun in the year 6853 (1345), in the days of the Christ loving Tsar Stephen, and the Christ-loving king Vukašin, and it was completed in the days of the Christ loving king Marko”; a translation in Bulgarian is given in - Nikolaï Ovcharov, *Nadpisite ot XIV v. v Markov Manastir do Skopie i politichkiat vŭzhod na kralete Vŭlkashin i Marko*, *Palaebulgarica/Starobŭlgaristika*, XIX (1995), 35.

One of the things that make the portrait of King Marko a unique example in Byzantine iconography³¹⁵ is the object in the right hand which does not conform within the canons of portraying a ruler. The first report of the Macedonian art-historians Balabanov who participated in the removing the plaster above the south entrance of the church in 1964 and uncovering the portraits of Vukašin and Marko described the object in King Marko's hand as "a big bended scimitar" having no handle. The appearance of the scimitar was a change of the usual Byzantine regalia used in the depiction of rulers which according to Balabanov can be explained with the circumstances in the aftermath of the battle in the River Maritsa in 1371. Instead of the usual depiction of a ruler holding a cross in the right hand, the patron of this church holds a big bended scimitar which according to Balabanov appealed to the hopes of the people facing "the invasion of the Turks".³¹⁶

After the first reports of the newly discovered fresco painting a number of Yugoslavian art historians wrote on the recently registered portraits. Djurić in 1968 developed a different hypothesis on what may be the object that king Marko is holding in the right hand. In his article "Three events in the Serbian state in the 14th century and their impact on paintings" Djurić instead of a big bended scimitar describes the object as a very large curved horn quite narrow in the bottom and gaining on width to the top covered with rings at four different places and colored in ocher.³¹⁷ Djurić was the first art-historian to discuss in great details on Marko's portrait and describe the object as a horn. He writes that this unusual change of Byzantine artistic canons was also seen in other examples from the 13th century. A portrait of the emperor Manuel I Grand Komnenos in the church Agia Sophia in Trebizond was the only other example in which the ruler contrary to the Byzantine artistic canons was depicted as holding a horn in the

³¹⁵ The depiction of rulers in Late Medieval Balkans from the beginning of the 14th century is characterized to be in conformity to the Byzantine artistic canons. The portraits of rulers in the region have been depicted with Byzantine regalia. This is the case with all of the representations of King Vukašin and King Marko.

³¹⁶ Balabanov, K. *Novootkrieni portreti na kralot Marko i kralot Volkašin vo Markoviot manastir* – Kulturno nasledstvo. 3/Skopje, 1967, 52; Nikolaš Ovcharov, *Nadpisite ot XIV v. v Markov Manastir do Skopje i politichkiiat vūzhod na kralete Vūlkashin i Marko*, 34

³¹⁷ V. J. Djurić, *Tri dogadjaju srpskoj državi XIV veka i njihov odjek u slikarstvu*, Zbornik za Likovne Umetnosti 4, (Novi Sad 1968), 88

right hand. The Serbian art-historian Djurić believed that the Emperor Manuel I Grand Komnenos 1238-63 was faced with a similar political situation as King Marko at the end of the 14th century.³¹⁸ The Mongolian invasion in Anatolia in the middle of the 13th century had been a threat to the Emperor of Trebizond which resembled the situation in Marko's kingdom after the defeat on the River Maritsa. According to Djurić, both Manuel I Grand Komnenos and King Marko used the iconography which emphasized their role of the new David in the face of a foreign invasion. Djurić writes that somewhat in late 1371 after Marko had been crowned he must have realized the difficulty of his position and had found consolation and support in the Psalms on David 88(90).20 in the Old Testament: "I have found David my servant; I have anointed him with my holy oil."³¹⁹ So the horn in the depiction of king Marko was explained as symbolizing a righteous ruler ascending the throne with the divine will and being anointed with the oil from the horn of a ram.

Two problems arise from Djurić's explanations of the portrait of King Marko. First, the inscription inside the church tells us that the church was completed in 1376/7 and that the portraits of the patrons must have been painted just before the completion of the church and most probably in 1375/6. The Serbian art historian Djordjević noted that the depiction of the horn was the response of king Marko to the rejection by the nobility of the former Empire of Stephen Dušan to recognize him as the legal successor of the Nemanjić dynasty. Exactly in 1375, according to Djordjević, Knez Lazar proclaimed himself as "the ruler of all Serbs" which denied Marko's claim of being the successor of Nemanjić's dynasty. The depiction of the horn in the right hand symbolized the message that King Marko had sent and which refers to him as the righteous ruler ascending the throne. The depiction of the horn for Djordjević was not a statement referring to the Ottoman threat but to the nobility that challenged the legitimacy of King Marko.³²⁰

Another doubt in the interpretation of King Marko's portrait in Djurić's work comes from his statement that representation of a horn in Byzantine iconography is

³¹⁸ Ibid, 97

³¹⁹ Ibid, 94

³²⁰ Đorđević Ivan, *Predstava Kralja Marka na južnoj fasadi crkve svetog Dimitrija u Markovom Manastiru*, in *Kralot Marko vo istorijata i vo tradicijata*, prilozi od naučniot sobir održan po povod 600-godišnjinata od smrtta na Kralot Marko, Prilep 23-25 Juni 1995, Prilep, Institut za staroslovenska kultura, 1997, 305-307

already seen in one other example of a portrait of a ruler in the Byzantine world. The fresco painting that Djurić mentions as example is the portrait of Manuel in the church Agia Sophia which was drawn in the end of the 19th century by the Russian artist Grigorii Gagarin who visited the church and published the copy of the image in 1897. Today the portrait no longer exists and the only way to control the accuracy of Gagarin's chromolithography is to compare it with earlier textual description of the portrait. George Finlay in 1851 published the book *History of Greece and of the Empire of Trebizond* in which he describes that portrait of Manuel Comnenos but without mentioning the horn.³²¹ Despite Finley's information that the details of Manuel's face were lost, Gagarin depicted the face of Manuel Comnenos with all its features. This raises doubts that Gagarin's depiction of the horn might be a product of the imagination of the Russian artist who had not seen the horn when visited the church. In the most recent work referring to the portrait of Manuel Comnenos, *Art and identity in thirteenth-century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and the empire of Trebizond*, (2004) the author does not question whether Gagarin's depiction of the horn corresponds with Finley's information. Instead, the author quotes works that refer to the portrait of King Marko in order to say that there is another example of depicting a horn in the Byzantine fresco painting.³²² It seems that art-historians used the examples from Trebizond and Macedonia to support their hypothesis that the appearance of a horn was not unusual appearance in the iconography but without examining in the case of the portrait from Trebizond how the portrait reached to us and whether it might have been a product of the imagination of the 19th century visitors. We should remember that in the case of the church St. Demetrios in Markov Monastery, 19th century visitors made false reports on fresco painting that they have not seen during their visit.³²³

What is the object in the hand of king Marko and how does it relate with the historical narratives on the Battle of the Maritsa River? Majority of art historians have so far interpreted the object as a horn which fitted in the identification of the ruler as the Biblical king David who was anointed with the oil from a horn. The researchers have

³²¹ David Talbot Rice ed., *The Church of Haghia Sophia at Trebizond*, ed. David Talbot Rice, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1968, 1/2

³²² Eastmond Anthony, *Art and identity in thirteenth-century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and the empire of Trebizond*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 145

³²³ See chapter Serbs, Bulgarians and the Ottoman commander

not offered an explanation on how the object in king Marko's hand could have been interpreted by the visitors of the monastery during Ottoman periods. Did the ordinary peasant saw in king Marko's portrait the horn of the Biblical David as today's trained art-historians? In the writing of Konstantin we learned of a 15th century story referring to the Battle of the Maritsa River in which the defeated ruler has a dream in which his sword was captured by the Turks. In the epic poem recorded by Vuk Karadžić in the beginning of the 19th century we also read how king Marko recognized his father's scimitar and took it from the Turk after revenging his father's death. These examples show that among the Christians in South-Eastern Europe there were stories in which the main motif was the scimitar of the ruler who died in the Battle of the Maritsa River. But besides the aforementioned historical narrative and epic poem a large corpus of stories and songs in the Serbian, Bulgarian and Macedonian folklore refer to the heroic deeds of King Marko. There King Marko is imagined by the people as fighting the enemy with his beloved horse and the sharp scimitar. One can not encounter a reference on a horn or any connection of this hero from South-Eastern Europe as being compared with the Biblical king David. This is why the first reports on the discovery of the portraits in which researchers claimed that Marko holds a scimitar in his right hand may be close to what the pilgrims arriving to the monastery saw in the fresco painting and from there the motif of King Marko as fighting the enemy with his famous scimitar transferred into the folklore of the people in the region. As a reminder, the portrait of King Marko in the Markov Monastery in the vicinity of Skopje is one of the two preserved depictions of this hero. That is why this fresco painting may have been one of the sources for the people in the region to create the numerous legends and poems.

We mentioned above that the portrait of King Marko does not fit into the very schematic representations of the rulers in the Late Medieval fresco paintings in the region. The artist depicted the figure in a lively manner and the expression of the face is that of a determined and austere man. This was achieved by adding shades of lighter ocher as well as short white lines. The king is dark-skinned with a hooked nose and piercing gaze. All of these characteristics make this portrait more realistic in comparison to other examples of fresco painting in the second half of the 14th century. It

may be that this portrait attributed for the creation of an aura of heroism around the figure of King Marko.³²⁴

What the majority of art-historians define as horn, for the visitors of the monastery during Ottoman rule might have been a scimitar as well.³²⁵ We can only speculate what visitors saw in the right hand of the church's patron as there is no research on perceptions of this portrait among the people during Ottoman rule. But towards the explanation that the object or the horn in Marko's right hand might have been perceived as scimitar, one ought to be reminded of the numerous epic poems and stories in which this Balkan hero performs the heroic deeds with his scimitar. On the other hand, there is no mentioning of a horn in these epic poems and stories.

The purpose why I have included the portrait of King Marko in my discussion on the Battle of the Maritsa River is to show that it may be connected with the historical narrative of Konstantin Mihailović and the epic poem which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. If we presume that King Marko holds a scimitar, then the entire fresco composition of a father and his son resembles the epic poem in which King Marko takes hold of his father's weapon. Previously in this chapter we saw that the description of the death of Vukašin in the epic poem resembles the depiction of how Uroš had died in the vicinity of Edirne according to the writings of Konstantin Mihailović. Both of them were killed in their royal tents and if Vukašin's scimitar was taken by the Turk after his death, then Uroš in his dream saw the same event. I believe both the epic poem and the historical narrative of Konstantin tell about the same event and that these historical versions used a similar source which could be the folklore of the people in the region. If we accept that the object in King Marko's hand is a scimitar, at least in the perception

³²⁴ The other portrait of King Marko is found on the western facade of the church St Arhangel (vicinity of Prilep, R. Macedonia). This portrait is seriously damaged, the eyes are completely destroyed and the beard damaged as well. Here King Marko wears white *sakos* which symbolizes the mourning after the death of a member from the royal family. This is why researchers write that it was painted in the year following Vukašin's death see. Ćorgi Zdravev, *Oblekrite na kralot Volkašin i na kralot Marko na fresko-živopisot od XIV vek*, in *Kralot Marko vo istorijata i vo tradicijata*, prilozi od naučniot sobir održan po povod 600-godišnjinata od smrtta na Kralot Marko, Prilep 23-25 Juni 1995, Prilep, Institut za staroslovenska kultura, 1997, 319-330.

³²⁵ The monastery was one of the most significant spiritual centers during the Ottoman rule as the signatures carved on the walls of the church show that people from all over the Balkans visited this Monastery.

of the people in the region, than we can say that we have found the source of both the historical narrative and the epic poem. The entire fresco painting in the south entrance may have been one of the sources for developing the oral tradition on the events taking place after the Battle of the Maritsa River. In this chapter I have mentioned the Hagiography of St. Niphon – a contemporary account on the battle, which reports that “Serbian weapons” have been captured by the Ottoman after the death of Despot Uglješa. This information tells us that clerics on the Holy Mountain, probably even from the wider region, knew of the great amount of weapons that had fallen in the hands of the enemy, including the bodies of King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa together with their personal belongings. It may be that the pictorial representation of the weapon/scimitar in the hand of the young king had symbolized the “return” of the lost weapon which legitimized King Marko as the legitimate successor. This can be one of the many hypothesis on which researchers can discuss when looking at the impact of the artistic representation of king Marko on the creation of the vast folklore material relating to his character.

The Drowning of the Christian Army

In the introduction of this chapter I mentioned that I am aware of two versions of the epic poem “King Marko Recognizes his Father’s Scimitar”. In the second version (published in Serbia in the first half of the 19th century), and by far more popular than the previous one, translated at the beginning of this chapter, a Turkish girl stands on the shores of the River Maritsa and while washing the clothes sees a wounded soldier drowning. She saves him from the rapid waters and tells her brother Mustafa Aga who promises to spare the soldier’s life. Having seen the precious scimitar on the soldier’s thigh he breaks the promise and beheads the wounded soldier. Cursed by his own sister, Mustafa Aga departs to join the Sultan’s army. Among those to join is also the Sultan’s vassal, Prince Marko. When Mustafa Aga explains how he got hold of the scimitar, the enraged Prince Marko revenges his father’s death by decapitating Mustafa with his father’s scimitar.

One the most important differences between the two versions of the poem “King Marko Recognizes the Scimitar of his Father”, is the depiction of the drowning of King

Vukašin in the opening verses. This story is similar with what we know from the early Ottoman sources and it is the very one used in the Slavic sources from the 17th century onwards. Apz and Neşri's Histories of the House of Osman are actually the first known Ottoman sources to describe that the *Sırf* soldiers drowned in the River Maritsa and it is from these authors that the story of drowning will be taken by other later Ottoman writers and included in their Ottoman histories. But one could wonder about the relation between the Ottoman sources and the story of the drowning in the Slavic folklore where we read the following in the epic poem mentioned above:

The water became rapid and bloody
and carries away horses and hats,
in front of and under [the water] wounded heroes³²⁶

Previously, in the chapter "The Memory of a Place" I have mentioned that the description of the Battle as taking place in the vicinity of Černomen is found in the latter Slavic sources which must have been borrowed from the Anonymous Histories of the House of Osman coming through the western translation of Ottoman sources in the first place the work of Leunclavius. It is from the work of Leunclavius³²⁷ that the story of the Serbian forces drowning in the River Maritsa entered the work of Mavro Orbini and from there in the 18th, 19th and 20th century historiographies of South Eastern Europe. Most probably, the same story was used by someone familiar with these latter chronicles and was then included into the folklore of the Serbian people. The drowning of the infidels, the *Sırfs*, was not an example for heroism of the *gazis* as the Ottoman sources write³²⁸ but in the 17th century examples of historical writing acquired different

³²⁶ Karadžić, Pjesme, knj. II (drž. Izdanje). 55, 67

³²⁷ In his works Johannes Leunclavius used the works of Neşri and Hoca Sadettin Efendi where we read of a depiction of a drowning of the enemy.

³²⁸ The codex Hanivaldunus which was incorporated in Leunclavius's *Historiae musulmanae Turcorum de monumentis ipsorum exscriptae libri xviii*, Frankfurt, 1591 was a reproduction of Neşri's Ottoman History Wittek. P, *Zum Quellenproblem der ältesten osmanischen Chroniken (mit Auszügen aus Neşri)*, *Mitteilungen zur Osmanischen Geschichte*, i, 1921-2, 77-150; The story of the drowning in Leunclavius is actually the translation of Hoca Sadettin Efendi's work 'The crown of Histories' (1536-1599). Leunclavius's work *Annales sultanorum othmanidarum* published in Francfort in 1588 was the translation of the *Crown of Histories* see. Linda Mcjannet,

meaning. In the genealogy from Karlovac³²⁹ the story of drowning teaches about God's punishment:

He [tsar Uroš] was killed by king Vukašin and Uglješa the Despot and Goyko but them, too God did not leave alive, the same goblet with which they treated their Master they had drunk in just a little while, bitterly from the hand of the Turks. In Maritsa close to Černomen their entire army was drowned³³⁰

Since the 19th century Slavic sources used the defeat and the drowning in the River Maritsa as an example of God's punishment for those killing their ruler.³³¹ The murder of the last member of the Nemanjić dynasty Uroš was sanctioned by God with the old Ottoman story of the unbeliever routed on the River Maritsa.³³²

In the process of literary transformations, Mavro Orbini's history *The Kingdom of the Slavs* (1601) may have been the main disseminator of the story of the drowning of the Serbian forces in the River Maritsa.³³³ It is in Orbini's account that we read for the first time in a work on the Slavic People how the army of Vukašin and Uglješa, after being defeated on the battlefield, was forced into retreat:

Followed by the Turks they [King Vukašin and Uglješa] were forced to retreat towards the River Hebra, now called Maritsa, where they jumped into the

History written by the enemy: Eastern Sources about the Ottomans on the Continent and in England, English Literary Renaissance, Volume 36 Issue 3 , 396-429;

³²⁹ written most probably in the 17th century.

³³⁰ Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, 36

³³¹ Researchers have compared various accounts and established that Vukašin could have not killed Uroš who died in the winter following the Battle of the Maritsa River.

³³² Detailed overview on the bibliography discussing the question of the murder of Uroš by the Mrnjavčević brothers in Rade Mihaljčić, *Kraj Srpskog Carstva*, Beograd, 1975, 87-88, 263-264 and *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti*, 70-13

³³³ In fact Ruvarac proposed that Paysiye when writing *The Life of Tsar Uroš* used Orbini's *The Kingdom of the Slavs*. see. Radojčić. N, *Srpska istorija Mavra Orbinija*, 71; in 1722 the Russian diplomat Sava Vladislavić translated Orbini's work into Russian and this translation as well as the Chronicles of Branković which also used Orbini's work all of them together became the source from which Serbian historiography from the 18th century onwards got a hold of the information found in the *Kingdom of the Slavs*.

water with their horses in order to escape the enemy. Many of the distinguished dignitaries did the same thing but most of them drowned in the above mentioned river. Among the ones drowning were Uglješa and his brother Goyko, who had the command over the army.³³⁴

The Serbian historian Stoyan Novaković in his highly prized article on the Battle of the Maritsa River at the end of the 19th century noticed that the narratives of Paysiye and Leunclavius resemble each other. He believed that these two narratives represent two different sources for observing the event and their resemblance proved the validity of the story found in the writing of Paysiye. But the only source for the story of the drowning originates from the early Ottoman histories. We can discuss that Orbini's account and its sources, and Paysiye on the other side do represent two different versions of the story but only when we realize that the same story had transformed into a completely different way of moralizing.

The story of the drowning of Vukašin's and Despot Uglješa's army was used by the anonymous poet who composed the epic poem which was mentioned above. It seems that the 17th century Slavic sources, such as the Biography of Uroš, had the role of a disseminator of Orbini's historical version on the Battle in 1371 into the folklore of the Christians leaving in northern Balkans. When one of the first Serbian historians writing on the Battle referred to the proverb "turbid Maritsa" as a proof of the endurance of the people's memory on the event which took place on the banks of the River Maritsa in 1371 he had not critically compared all the available sources.³³⁵ For a historian that took part in the creation of a national historical mythology it was not acceptable to conclude that the information of the drowning of the "Serbian" forces in the River Maritsa was a "borrowing" from the Ottoman historical narratives written in the end of the 15th century.

This unscholarly analysis on the historical narratives telling about the Battle in 1371 was copied even by western scholars writing popular histories on the region. In John Julius Norwich's historical book, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, we read of a "poetical" depiction of the events following the Battle which the author must have found in the Serbian historiography. Describing the Battle in 1371 as a disaster of the whole Christendom, Norwich writes:

³³⁴ Mavro Orbini, *Kraljestvo Slovena*, 53

³³⁵ Stojan Novaković, *Srbi u Turci XIV i XV veka*, 182

Both Vukashin and John Uglesha were killed, and the river ran red with the blood of their slaughtered followers.³³⁶

Even though this is a popular historical work, still, the myths which the Balkan historiographies created around a number of events, such as the battles at the River Maritsa (1371) and Kosovo (1389), entered western perception of the history of the region. Unfortunately, until present I have failed to encounter particular works criticizing both the national historiographies in the region and the western scholarship that very often validate the national historical narratives coming from the South-Eastern European historiographies.

³³⁶ John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, Penguin, 1996, 335

CONCLUSION

My intention in this work was to allow various versions on the Battle of the Maritsa River to find place in the study of history. I have tried to narrate the event without giving preference to any of the versions vis-à-vis the others. Also, I wanted to propose alternative ways of writing on one of the memorable events in the history of the region. One of the most important aspects in this work was to observe the path of the knowledge on the Battle which moved from one historical narrative into another. Why at a particular time the interest for the battle (re)appeared and in what shape(s) this knowledge “reached” to 19th and 20th century historians was also relevant to my writing on the Battle of the Maritsa River. The 19th and 20th century historical writings on the Battle are also considered throughout the text in details.

In the first chapter I discussed briefly on the “place” of the event in the historical writing in the 20th century. I tried to explain the reasons why historians have neglected the study of events which is connected with the rise of the Annales School. The interest in structure, social and economic history made an impact on the study of events since they were considered subordinate to or determined by economic and political developments. In this chapter I discussed some novel approaches of studies of events. In recent scholarship events attract the interest of historians and as shown in some cases, the event can have a great impact on cultures and societies.

The second chapter refers to the 19th and 20th century scholarship on the Battle of the Maritsa River. What were the sources that they used in their works and how were they utilized is an important question that also gives us a glimpse of how national historical narratives narrated the event. Even though historians have complained about the lack of contemporary narrative sources narrating the event there is no doubt that the Battle of the Maritsa River occupies an important place in the historical narratives of our time.

The second chapter also deals with the reasons why Ottoman sources began narrating the Battle a century after it took place. This I connect with the change in the

perception of how the Ottoman dynastic history ought to be written. Until the end of the 15th century Ottoman historians wrote the history of the Ottomans as an appendix to Islamic histories and the histories had the form of a panegyric which did not include many of the Ottoman achievements during the conquest of South-Eastern Europe and Anatolia. Also, these early historical narratives were silent about the great victories of the Ottoman provincial commanders at the end of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century. After the elimination of the various political entities competing with the Ottomans in Anatolia and the great achievements in South Eastern Europe, the dynasty of Osman no longer needed the lengthy introduction of Islamic history which was a way of legitimizing the dynasty. The legitimization of the dynasty at the end of the 15th century was found in the victories over the Christians in the West and the stories and oral tradition of these famous conquests which were now incorporated into the Ottoman dynasty history. The political developments in the Ottoman polity with the departing from the centralizing policy of Mehmed the Conquer and during the rule of Bayezid necessitated the incorporation of the Ottoman provincial elite into the narratives explaining the rise of the Ottoman dynasty. The Battle of the River Maritsa or *Sırfsındığı*, as it was known in the Ottoman narratives, was one of those achievements of the provincial commanders that at the end of the 15th century found its place in the Ottoman historical narratives. In the second chapter I also showed that the Christian sources from the end of the 15th century used Ottoman oral or written historical narratives to tell the Battle of the Maritsa River and I briefly discussed why the Ottoman battle at *Sırf Sındığı* is the same event with the Battle of the Maritsa River.

In the third chapter I discussed how modern historiographies had established the date when the Battle took place. From available Slavic and Greek documents we can say that the Battle took place somewhere in the summer of 1371 but the majority of historians prefer the exact date, 26 September 1371. Also, I have discussed an early 17th century chronicle, where we read that following the battle a sun eclipse occurred in the region. By comparing the former information with calculations of the sun eclipses done by astronomers I discussed whether the author in his account on the Battle described the sun eclipse that occurred in 1371. At the end of the third chapter I refer to the 15th century Ottoman sources and how they use the chronology to tell about the Battle. Here I compared Ottoman calendars from the first half of the 15th century and Ottoman historical narratives from the end of the 15th century. It seems that some events from the early Ottoman history which were not included in the early Ottoman calendars were

connected with dates that are found in these calendars. This is why the Battle of the Maritsa River in the earliest Ottoman histories narrating the event is placed in the year 1363/4 together with the conquest of Biga. Stories like the Battle of the Maritsa River must have existed even before they were penned down for the first time at the end of the 15th century. But the narrative forms in which they existed (oral tradition, personal recollection, *menakıbs* or *gazavat-names*) did not chronologically order the events. The historical narrative forms in which these events were written down at the end of the 15th century required such chronological ordering. Therefore, Ottoman authors added these early narrative forms into the available chronologies. At the end of this chapter I included a discussion on the monuments that according to Ottoman sources were built after the Battle of the Maritsa River. From the available documents we can not determine the exact date when these monuments were built but a discussion on them is a valuable venue for understanding the early Ottoman history as few are the contemporary documents and narratives.

In the forth chapter my focus was on the 19th and 20th centuries Balkan historians' interpretations on the identity of the army approaching Edirne and defeated by the Ottomans. There we see that historiographies in the region writing on the Ottoman conquest do not only focus on nationalist discourse of "invading Turks". Competing nationalisms, in first place Serbian and Bulgarian, argue on the ethnic identity of the Christians who had fought against the "Turks". The beginning of this discourse coincided with preparations by the Balkan states to occupy the remaining Ottoman provinces in the Balkan which were the regions where King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa ruled (present day R. Macedonia and northern Greece). In the case of the Bulgarian historiography we saw that this discourse on the ethnic origin of the army approaching Edirne in 1371 has continued even after Second World War and has been ideologically motivated as the Bulgarian state did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian nation and language. The rest of the chapter is devoted to the question about the identity of the Ottoman commander who had achieved the great victory in 1371. I made an attempt to compare the information from an early 15th century Slavic source, *The Life of Stefan Lazarević*, with the Ottoman histories from the end of the 15th century. This Slavic source reports that it was Avranetz (Evrenoz) leading the Ottoman sources in 1371; an information which contradicts Ottoman sources. Even if we are never able to determine which of the Ottoman commanders were on the battle field, my

intention was to show that any discussion on the early Ottoman history is not possible without taking Slavic sources into consideration.

In the chapter “The Memory of a Place” I discuss whether the present-day Turkish sub-district Sırpsındığı, north of Edirne, is the actual battlefield that the Ottoman sources described from the 15th century to the end of the 19th. By interviewing the people in the region of Edirne and carefully examining the Ottoman sources the place appears to be in the vicinity of present-day Svilengrad in Bulgaria. It is there, too, that I interviewed several senior citizens as well as consulted western travel accounts and located the Forest which is mentioned in the earliest Ottoman accounts depicting the battlefield. Even though the Forest does not exist today, the adjacent region of the Svilengrad train-station is still known by the senior citizens as *orman* (which in Turkish means forest). In this chapter I discussed how the fortress called Černomen/Çirmen for the first time appeared in the Slavic sources as the place where the battle took place. In my opinion, this information was transferred from the Ottoman sources through their translations in western languages into the 17th and 18th century Slavic chronicles and Histories. From there it was accepted in the modern historiographies of South-Eastern Europe.

In the final chapter I discussed the connection between the epic poem in Slavic language describing the death of king Vukašin and the historical narratives from the 15th and 16th centuries which depict the defeat as well as the death of the King. The epic poem tells how King Vukašin was killed by a Turk who stole his scimitar. Later, when King Marko (Vukašin’s son) joined the Ottoman army he recognized the scimitar and by killing the Turk revenges Vukašin’s death and takes back the scimitar. After translating the epic poem I referred to the historical narratives where we read that Greek, Ottoman and Slavic sources mention that Ottomans captured arms in the Battle. *The Hagiography of Niphon* mentions “the weapon of the Serbs” with which the Ottomans attacked the holy mountain after the death of Despot Uglješa. The Ottoman history of Hadidi also writes of seized weapons, whereas the *Memoirs of a Janissary* tell about a story in which the Serbian ruler dreamt how the Turk had captured his weapon just before being killed in the vicinity of Edirne. In my discussion on the historical narratives I included a fresco painting depicting King Vukašin and his son Marko. Painted in the decade following the Battle of the Maritsa River the fresco painting depicts king Vukašin and king Marko who in his right hand holds an object that was interpreted by some as a horn and others as a scimitar. I referred to this debate in details

because I believe that determining the object in king Marko's hand may help us to understand the connection between the visual representations, the historical narratives and the epic poem. At the end of the chapter I discussed the story of the drowning of the Christian army in the River Maritsa which we see in some of the earliest Ottoman accounts on the Battle.

I have shown throughout this work that when the event is taken out from the traditional way of writing political history it can be observed from different perspectives. That is why this work is not on the event but how the event can be narrated. Other perspectives of observing this event are possible but for them I hope I can tell more in the future.

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