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 **The Serbian Patriarchate of Pȇ in the Ottoman Empire:  
The First Phase (1557–94)**

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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*Vladislav B. Sotirovȋ*

# Introduction

The goal of this article is to investigate the role of the revived (“second”) Patriarchate of Pȇ in Serbian and Balkan history, particularly with respect to (a) the Serbian Church’s influence in the creation of a Serbian national identity during the first decades of the Ottoman occupation of Serbian lands; (b) Serbian-Turkish relations in the second half of the 16th century; and (c) the reasons for Serbian disloyalty towards the Ottoman government at the turn of the 17th century.

This article addresses the causes of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, once among the most powerful European states in the New Age of European history. The decline of the Ottoman Empire was a prelude to the “Eastern Question” in the Balkans, i.e., the question of the survival of the Ottoman Empire in Europe.<sup>1</sup> This was one of the crucial questions in the history of Europe from the time of the Reformation to the beginning of the First World War. The methodology employed in this paper consists of analysis of available documents and comparison of different historical sources and literature on the subject.

The Patriarchate of Pȇ is a subject of major significance as it was the only Serbian national institution within the Ottoman Empire and was crucial in influencing the Serbian people to remain loyal to the Orthodox faith rather than convert to Islam. The patriarchate was responsible as well for preserving Serbia’s medieval heritage and the idea of an independent national state. Under the influence of the patriarchate, Orthodox Christianity became the **[End Page 143]** cornerstone of Serbian national identity, a role that has continued to the present day.<sup>2</sup>

The Patriarchate of Pȇ was founded in 1346, during the reign of the most significant Serbian ruler—Emperor Stefan Dušan, “the Mighty” (1331–55) (**Fig. 1** following p. 167).<sup>3</sup> The foundation of the national Serbian Patriarchate of Pȇ was the consequence of a new political situation on the Balkan Peninsula, the emergence of Serbia as the most powerful country in the region positioned to replace the Byzantine Empire. In the same year as the founding of the patriarchate, Dušan the

Mighty was crowned the emperor of Serbs and Greeks (i.e., the Byzantines) by the patriarch of Peř. The period that followed was one of full independence of the Serbian medieval church from the Greek one, named the Ecumenical Church in Constantinople.

The history of the Patriarchate of Peř can be divided into two periods, with a long interruption between them lasting approximately one century: from 1346 to 1459 and from 1557 to 1766. In the first period the Patriarchate of Peř was the state church of the independent medieval Serbia.<sup>4</sup> When the Ottoman Turks conquered Serbia in 1459 the patriarchate, as the Serbian national church, was soon abolished (most likely in 1463), and it did not exist for a century, until its revival in 1557. However, the revived patriarchate found itself in a new political situation. Now, from 1557 to 1766, the new Patriarchate of Peř was under the total control of the authorities of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, the territory under the jurisdiction of the “second” patriarchate was greater than that of the “first” patriarchate (Fig. 2).

The “second” Patriarchate of Peř had jurisdiction over all Serbs in the Ottoman Empire. It is important to stress that only two (Orthodox) patriarchates, the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Serbian Patriarchate **[End Page 144]** of Peř, were permitted to exist in the Turkish state after the Ottoman conquest of the largest part of the Balkans. After the fall of the independent Serbian state, the Patriarchate of Peř was the only institution that could unite all Serbs in the Ottoman Empire. The patriarchate actually became a representative institution of the Serbs before the Ottoman government. Essentially, in the eyes of the Serbs, the “second” Patriarchate of Peř was a substitute for the lost national Serbian state.

The main functions of the “second” patriarchate during the two centuries of its existence were to prevent the Serbs from converting to the Islamic faith, to...

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the “Eastern Question,” see Vasilij Popović, *Istočno pitanje* (Belgrade: Gece Kon, 1928).



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