

BYZANZ  
UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.  
Studia  
Byzantino-Occidentalia



BYZANZ UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.  
STUDIA BYZANTINO-OCCIDENTALIA

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Herausgegeben von

Zoltán Farkas  
László Horváth  
Tamás Mészáros

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# **Byzanz und das Abendland VII. Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia**

Herausgegeben von

Erika Juhász

Eötvös-József-Collegium  
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László Horváth, Direktor des Eötvös-József-Collegiums

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Boris Stojkovski

## Remarks on the Serbian Foreign Policy in the Age of Despot Stefan Lazarević\*

After the death of the most powerful medieval Serbian ruler, King and Emperor Stefan Dušan (1331–1355) Serbia underwent harsh inner feudal conflicts. During the rule of Dušan's son Emperor Stefan Uroš V (1355–1371) the feudal disintegration commenced and continued after his death. In the period up to 1371 the most prominent noblemen were brothers King Vukašin and despot Jovan Uglješa Mrnjavčević, both with lands in Macedonia. In the said year of 1371, on September 26 at the battle of the Maritsa River both brothers lost their lives against the Ottoman Turkish army. Almost the whole territory of Macedonia fell under Turkish rule as a consequence of this battle. After this, among Serbian rulers, Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and his Moravian Serbia (as it is known in historiography) arose as one of the strongest Serbian lands in a very complicated and turbulent epoch.<sup>1</sup>

However, after the battle of Kosovo on Saint Vitus Day, 15 June 1389 the situation in the Balkans was once again radically changed. Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović lost his life during this conflict, together with the Ottoman ruler Murad I, being the only Turkish sovereign who died in battle. Nevertheless, Serbia was not strong enough to resist Ottoman conquest and therefore acknowledged vassal relations with Turkey and the new ruler, sultan Bayezid

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<sup>1</sup> There is a vast number of bibliographical units in Serbian, but for this occasion only the key literature in English and other world languages will be cited. On the rule of Stefan Dušan see in English SOULIS, G., *The Serbs and Byzantium during the Reign of Tsar Stefan Dušan (1331–1355) and his Successors*. Washington, D.C. 1984. For the whole period from Dušan's ascension to the throne until 1389 cf. by now standard, though not always the most reliable one FINE, J. F., *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*. Ann Arbor 1994, 286–337, 345–366, 373–389, 406–411.

I. Princess Milica, wife of Prince Lazar became the regent in the name of her young son Stefan Lazarević, who was still a minor.<sup>2</sup>

From that time onwards Serbia, and later Prince Stefan Lazarević, became Turkish vassals and this Serbian ruler turned into the one of the key military commanders of sultan Bayezid I. Besides this, he had a very active foreign policy towards Hungary, and after the battle of Ankara/Angora in 1402, he became one of the most prominent Hungarian barons, vassals and allies at the same time, of King and Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg. In the same year Stefan was given the title of despot by Byzantine emperor John VII and from 1402 the Serbia was a despotate. In the present study not all aspects of very versatile and many-sided foreign policy led by Prince and Despot Stefan Lazarević will be considered. The main stress will be on his Hungarian and Western relations, especially his participation in the wars with the Hussites.

When observing prince Stefan's career as one of the best commanders of sultan Bayezid I Yildirim one needs to have in mind three key battles: Rovine 1395, Nicopolis 1396 and battle of Angora in 1402. Even though two of these battles were actually a defeat of the Ottoman army, prince Stefan Lazarević distinguished himself with outstanding bravery and played a significant part in all of these conflicts, personally leading Serbian troops on the sultan's side.

The Battle of Rovine was a result of an Ottoman campaign against Wallachian voivode Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Brave). He was helped by King Sigismund of Luxembourg, whilst the Ottoman side was led by the sultan himself. During the battle, a key tactical role was played by the Wallachian archers who severely depleted the Ottoman ranks during their initial attack. Bayezid's vassals, the Serbian noblemen, Prince Stefan Lazarević and King Marko Mrnjavčević, fought bravely. According to Stefan Lazarević's biographer Constantine the Philosopher, Stefan showed great courage, while King Marko died during the battle. Alongside Marko, another very prominent Serbian leader named Constantine Dejanović also lost his life. From this important Serbian feudal family descended Byzantine Empress Helen Dragaš, wife of the Emperor Michael II Palaiologos. Although Wallachians led by Sigismund's ally voivode

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<sup>2</sup> Among many publications and articles that consider the battle of Kosovo in 1389 and its significance cf. MIHALJČIĆ, R., *The Battle of Kosovo in History and in Popular Tradition*. Beograd 1989; ĐURETIĆ, V. (Hrsg.), *Die Schlacht aus dem Amselfeld und ihre Folgen, Internationales Symposium Himmelstür 1989*. Belgrad 1991; VUCINICH, W. S. – EMMERT, T. A. (eds.), *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle*. Minneapolis 1991; FINE (n. 1), 406–411. In further footnotes Serbian sources and literature will be extensively used, but all Cyrillic titles will be transliterated, as well as in the cases of Bulgarian bibliographical units.

Mircea the Brave pushed the enemy back, the Ottomans were able to defend their resulting position relying on the personal guard of the Sultan composed of Janissaries. Wallachians were unable to defeat the Ottoman army completely, but the Turks did not manage to conquer Wallachia. From the Serbian point of view, it is also very interesting to observe that in the army of King Sigismund and Mircea, the brothers of Marko Mrnjavčević also fought. Dmitar survived and later became a prominent nobleman of Hungarian King, and his brother Andrijaš (Andrew) died on the so-called *Christian* side, i.e. that of King Sigismund and voivode Mircea. This battle is a good model of the later position of Serbs, divided into different empires throughout late medieval and modern period.<sup>3</sup>

On the battle of Nicopolis, or the *crusade of Nicopolis* much has been written in the contemporary historiography. For this topic, it is very important to stress that the Serbs were led by prince Stefan Lazarević who, according to many sources, entered the battle and managed to change the fortunes in favour of his lord, the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I. This does not mean that his role was of decisive importance, even though some of the sources (Johann Schiltberger in the first place) do stress that Serbs played a key part in changing the luck and the balance during the battle. The Serbian ruler did play an important part among the vassals and military commanders of the Turkish sultan and was of great help to the sultan. The Serbian chivalry overthrew the royal banner of King Sigismund at the moment when Sigismund's army succeeded to break the Ottoman infantry. After this move by Stefan's soldiers, a great massacre took place.<sup>4</sup> These are well-

<sup>3</sup> Constantine the Philosopher wrote that all these Serbian noblemen were not in the Ottoman army by their own will, but by necessity. *Konstantin Filozof, Život despota Stefana Lazarevića*. JOVANOVIĆ, G. (ed), Beograd 2009, 40–41; there is also a German edition of Constantine's work BRAUN, M. (ed.), *Lebensbeschreibung des Despoten Stefan Lazarević von Konstantin dem Philosophen*. Mouton 1956. This edition can be consulted by the non-Serbian speaking audience, but a part of the commentaries is a bit outdated. In this paper Serbian critical edition was consequently used and translations into English are by the author.

For the literature on the Battle of Rovine cf. MUREŞAN, D. I, Avant Nicopolis: la campagne de 1395 pour le contrôle du Bas-Danube. *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire* 83 (2003) 115–132; KRANZIERITZ, K., Havasalföld szerepe az 1396-os kereszties hadjárat előkészítésében és végrehajtásában. *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 129 (2016) 3–26. both with extensive literature. See also a brief but valuable overview PÁLÓSFALVI, T., *From Nicopolis to Mohács. A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare, 1389–1526*. Leiden-Boston 2018, 55.

<sup>4</sup> On the battle of Nicopolis see: ATIYA, A. S., *The Crusade of Nicopolis*. London 1934, esp. 82, 87, 93; PAVIOT, J. – CHAUNÉY-BOUILLOT, M., *Nicopolis, 1396–1996: actes du colloque international; réuni à Dijon, au Conseil Régional de Bourgogne, le 18 octobre 1996*. (Annales de Bourgogne 68) Dijon 1996. esp. work of KATZINGER, M., Sigismund le Roi et la croisade. In: *ibid.* 11–22;

known historical facts, but the later medieval historiography, mostly Italian in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and particularly in 16<sup>th</sup> century started to claim that despot Stefan fought on the side of King Sigismund of Luxembourg. This can be found in the work of an Italian historian Paolo Giovio, and even in a Hebrew source, by rabbi Joseph HaCohen, who was mostly dependent on Giovio's work. Other Italian writers also provide the same information, which can be a simple omission, but also it can be a tradition stemming from a later Stefan's position as vassal and an ally of Hungarian King and German emperor.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, during the fatal and decisive battle of Angora/Ankara in 1402 prince Stefan was the commander of the right wing of the sultan's army. Besides Serbian troops, in which Stefan's brother Vuk fought, along with Grgur and Đurađ Branković, under the command of Serbian ruler, there were also the Anatolian chivalry and Turkish leaders Timurtaš pasha, Hacı II bey and Firouz bey. Despot Stefan stood strong in this battle, and when Turkish general Emerhalis wrote in 1934 the book about this battle, he stated that even in that time there was a place called Sirp Gazi near the place where the clash itself had occurred. It is said that Tamerlan himself admired Stefan's personal bravery and even allowed that Serbs be released. Among the prisoners were Grgur Branković, Stefan's nephew and most probably his sister Olivera, who was sent to Bayezid sometime after the battle of Kosovo as part of the most probable peace treaty.<sup>6</sup> Even Byzantine sources, Laonikos Chalkokondyles in

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HÓVÁRI, J., A nikápolyi csata. Fordulópont a balkáni oszmán hódítások történetében. *Memoria rerum Sigismundi regis. Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 111/3 (1998) 29–63 with valuable contributions of Hungarian and other historians (in Hungarian); there is also a valuable Bulgarian volume GJUZELEV, V. (ed.), *Nikopolskata bitka v sâdbata na Bâlgariya, Balkanite i Evropa*. Sofia 1999, with different studies on the battle on 9–107, and Bulgarian translation of the sources 109–184; NICOLLE, D. – HOOK, C., *Nicopolis 1396: The Last Crusade*. Oxford 1999, esp. 63–64, 66–67; ŠUICA, M., Bitka kod Nikopolja u delu Konstantina Filozofa. *Istorijski časopis* 58 (2009) 109–124; PÁLÓSFALVI (n. 3) 55–65.

<sup>5</sup> STOJKOVSKI, B., Pomen despota Stefana Lazarevića u jednom srednjovekovnom hebrejskom izvoru. In: JOVANOVIĆ, G. (ed), *Srednji vek u srpskoj nuci, istoriji, književnosti i umetnosti IX, Naučni skup Despotovac-Manasija, 20-21. avgust 2017*. Despotovac 2018, 45–57.

<sup>6</sup> EMERHALIS, *Za vreme Sedmogodišnjeg rata Tamerlanov pohod na Anadoliju i bitka kod Ankare*. Beograd 1937, 28–39, 87–96, 103–152; on Emerhalis and his work cf. ĐINĐIĆ, M., Značaj dela generala Emerhalisa (Ömer Halis) za srpsku istoriografiju i onomastiku. In: JOVANOVIĆ, G. (ed.), *Srednji vek u srpskoj nauci, istoriji, književnosti i umetnosti VII Naučni skup, Despotovac-Manasija, 22-23. avgust 2015, XXIII Dani srpskoga duhovnog preobraženja*. Despotovac 2016, 479–489; for Stephen's role in the battle see PURKOVIĆ, M., *Knez i despot Stefan Lazarević*. Beograd 1978, 57–61; JOVANOVIĆ, G., Angorska bitka i despot Stefan Lazarević. In: JOVANOVIĆ, G. (ed.), *Srednji vek u srpskoj nauci, istoriji, književnosti i umetnosti V, XXI Dani srpskoga duhovnog preobraženja*. Despotovac 2016, 7–19.

the first place, state that Serbs fought with particular bravery, and that their heroism is worthy of every praise.<sup>7</sup> Ottoman chronicler Dervish Ahmed, better known as Aşıkpaşazade in his work *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman* also gives credit to Stefan Lazarević and his troops that *stood bravely* in this battle, as he said.<sup>8</sup> The exact number of Serbian troops in the battle is a matter of discussion since Ducas writes of the 5000 horsemen armed with spears,<sup>9</sup> but Constantine the Philosopher, biographer of Stefan Lazarević only mentions that he commanded Serbian troops in the battle, without giving their precise number.<sup>10</sup>

The battle itself was decided by the treason of the Muslims from Anadolia, who changed sides and crossed over to Tamerlan. The consequences for Serbia after this battle were numerous. Stefan Lazarević managed to release the Ottoman pressure, but he was involved in the civil war in Turkey, permeated with the conflict with his brother Vuk. The latter went to Suleiman, and only in 1404, after the mediation of their mother princess Milica the treaty between the brothers was accomplished. Also, Suleiman made contracts with many surrounding countries, and one of the parts of the treaty related to Stefan Lazarević. He was still obligated to pay annual tribute to sultan and to send auxiliary troops but was not obliged to command and to participate in the battles personally. That allowed Stefan to look towards the north and to establish as close ties as possible with Hungarian ruler King Sigismund of Luxembourg.<sup>11</sup>

During his journey while returning to Serbia, Stefan Lazarević stopped at Constantinople, where Emperor John VII was regent in the name of Manuel II who was seeking help against the Ottoman peril in the West at the time. Emperor John VII gave the title of despot to Prince Stefan Lazarević, and the Serbian ruler was most probably married to John VII sister-in-law Helen, sister of his wife and daughter of Francesco Gatiluzio, lord of the Island of

<sup>7</sup> KALDELLIS, A. (ed.), *Laonikos Chalkokondyles. The Histories*. Cambridge, MA – London 2014, 3,55–62.

<sup>8</sup> ELEZOVIĆ, G., *Turski izvori za istoriju Jugoslovena. Dva turska hroničara iz 15. veka. Brastvo* 26 (1932) 60.

<sup>9</sup> MAGOULIAS, H. (ed.), *Doukas, Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*. Detroit 1975, XVI,1–12.

<sup>10</sup> Konstantin Filosof (n. 3) 42–49 for the detailed account on the battle.

<sup>11</sup> KOVAČEVIĆ, LJ., *Despot Stefan Lazarević za vreme turskih međusobica. Otadžbina* 4 (1880) 70–77, 289–310, 438–446, 569–574, 647–665; PURKOVIĆ (n. 6) 61–73; KASTRITSIS, D. J., *The Sons of Bayezid. Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413*. Leiden – Boston 2007, 66–73, 50–63, 123–129, 135–153, 166–188.

Lesbos (Mytilene), and from that time onwards Serbia was a despotate.<sup>12</sup> When explaining Stephen Lazarević's foreign policy, one must not overlook the fact that by going to Constantinople and by getting this high-ranking title from the Emperor Stefan Lazarević acknowledged the well-established hierarchy of medieval states. Furthermore, he wanted, in the moment when he was relieved from the Ottoman pressure, to try to underline the independence of his state. In 1405 already there are documents issued by the Despot where he uses the Byzantine title of αὐτοκράτωρ or *Samodržac* in medieval Serbian-Slavonic translation. With this, the idea of an independent state was spread by the Despot, even though he never stopped leading *Realpolitik* of the time, turning, as it has been already stated, towards his northern neighbour – Hungary.<sup>13</sup>

Relations with Hungary probably started in 1403–1404, and the negotiations were led by Pippo Spano (Filippo Scolari), who was one of the closest associates of Sigismund. From a donation charter of King Sigismund dated 1407 it is possible to learn that Scolari was a mediator in these contacts, and it even seems that the initiative came from Hungary.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to mention

<sup>12</sup> MEŠANOVIĆ, S., *Jovan VII Paleolog*. Beograd 1996, 100–101; ĐURIĆ, I., *Sumrak Vizantije. Vreme Jovana VIII Paleologa 1392–1448*. Beograd 2007, 110–112; It remains unclear whether the marriage was really accomplished or merely arranged. Konstantin Filozof (n. 3) 49–50 also writes about the marriage. On the other side, there is a Venetian document from September 1402 where Girardo Sagredo reported how emperor John VII himself arranged this marriage, but later it was said, that there will be nothing from it. See MILINČEVIĆ, V., *Grada iz Venecijanskog arhiva o Angorskoj bici 1402. Istorijski glasnik 1–2* (1982) 120–126, this was actually a speech of great Slavist Pavel Jozef Šafarik which Milinčević edited for publishing. The second part of the speech is his report on the basis of Venetian sources on the battle of Angora.

<sup>13</sup> *Istorija srpskog naroda II*. Beograd 2000, 66. (KALIĆ J.); hereinafter *ISN II* with the name of the author of the relevant part in the brackets.

<sup>14</sup> *vbi etiam terminos et confinia antedicti Regni nostri ab ea parte, vnde nobis et regnicolis nostris per crebras inuisiones ipsorum Turcorum et aliarum cismaticarum nacionum multimoda imminebant incommoda, signanterque a parte Regni Rascie taliter rectificare et pacificare studuit, quod abiude dictum Regnum nostrum et eius regnicole optata pacis tranquillitate fruuntur, et Illustrem Principem dominum Dezpotum ipsius Regni Rascie Ducem cum suis regnicolis, qui alias nostris, et eciam predecessorum nostrorum Regum temporibus ad nos et Sacrum Dyadema obliquimi defixere intuitum, quorum ne inrefrenatam duriciam raro legimus Regem Hungarie potuisse perdomare, suis salubribus monitis et ingeniosi consilij prudentia, interdum etiam lenitati seueritatem intermiscens, taliter et adeo studuit demoliri, ut idem Dux Despotus cum dictis suis regnicolis se nostre dicioni submitis seruiturum, et ex eo nunc inter Regnum nostrum et Regnum Rascie cunctis adeuntibus et redeuntibus tuta et securo patet via, nec inter ipsa Regna aliquid discrepante seu dissensionis poterit considerari*. From the text it is obvious that according to King Sigismund of Luxembourg it came to the restoration of the previous relations between Hungary and Serbia, since the latter (again) was subjugated to the Crown of Hungary, WENZEL, G., *Okmánytár Ozorai Pipo történetéhez. I. Történelmi Tár 3/7* (1884) 19–24, esp. 22 for the cited text.

that Scolari entered Serbian epic tradition under the name *Filip Madžarin*, which means in Serbian *Philip the Hungarian*.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, German-Hungarian historian and chronicler Eberhard Windecke provides an interesting portrait of the Serbian ruler, and explains how the ties between him and king Sigismund of Luxembourg were established.

Als Sigmund im Jahre 1408, dem letzten Jahre des Krieges, von Bosnien abgezogen war, wandte er sich gegen Serbien und Raizen und verhandelte mit Tischbot und traf Abmachungen mit ihm. Diese hielt derselbe wie ein Biedermann, denn er war Fürst und Herzog von Serbien und Raizen und ein stattlicher, schöner Mann, wahrhaft, gerecht und auch friedliebend, wogegen der Korvy und der Sendel wortbrüchig und lügenhaft waren.<sup>16</sup>

As Eberhard Windecke states, in the last year of the Bosnian war (which coincides with 1408) King Sigismund went to *Rascia and Serbia* and started negotiations with the Despot and made an alliance with him, because the despot was, on one side, a powerful lord of Rascia and Serbia, and, on the other, he was justice-loving and excellent man, unlike liars Hrvoja (Vukčić) and Sandalj (Hranić), two Bosnian noblemen. For Windecke, despot Stefan was not only justice-loving, but also a man who cherished law and peace. He also described the despot as a beautiful man. Both of these pieces of information have a larger Balkan and Hungarian background. King Sigismund was in war with his arch nemesis Ladislaus of Naples, and the barons who had supported him led an uprising against Sigismund. Bosnian noblemen also meddled in these internal affairs, and both Sandalj Hranić and Hrvoje Vukčić were in 1403–1404 against Sigismund, supporting the uprising of barons in the period prior to 1403.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> DÁVID, A., Ozorai Pipo, a délszláv vitézi énekhagyomány negatív magyar hőse. *Hungarológiai közlemények* 3 (1971) 17–49; ENGEL, P., Ozorai Pipo. In: VADAS, F. (ed.), *Ozorai Pipo emlékezete*. Szekszárd 1987, 53–78; NÉMETH PAPO, G. – PAPO, A., Ozorai Pipo: a győzelmes törökverő és a reneszánsz előfutára. Budapest 2017, 19–146 for his most complete modern biography.

<sup>16</sup> For German text see *Eberhard Windecke Denkwürdigkeiten zu König Sigismund und seiner Zeit*. CD-Ausgabe mit Kommentaren. In this German version one can observe a very interesting illumination that depicts a meeting between King Sigismund and Despot Stephen. Hungarian version SKORKA, R. (transl.), *Eberhard Windecke emlékirata Zsigmond királyról és koráról*. Budapest 2008, 20.

<sup>17</sup> On the Bosnian position and the relations of Hrvoje Vukčić and Sandalj Hranić with Hungary see RADONTIĆ, J., Der grossvojvode von Bosnien Sandalj Hranić-Kosača. *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 19 (1896) 380–465; ČIRKOVIĆ, S., *Istorija srednjovekovne bosanske države*. Beograd

Even though the chronology of Eberhard Windecke is somewhat inaccurate, for the year 1408 there is another very important piece of information concerning the topic of this paper. In this year the *Ordo Dragonis*, i.e. the chivalric Order of the Dragon was founded by King Sigismund of Luxembourg. The Order was to secure the throne for the King and for his successor, no matter of which gender, but the knights were also obliged to come to the aid of each other. This actually happened only a couple of months after the establishment of the Order, when Pippo Scolari came to help despot Stefan against his brother Vuk and the Turkish troops of sultan Suleiman. Besides Ozorai, John of Maroth, ban of Mačva, also came to help with an army and finally king himself. This all happened in early 1409, and this large conflict ended with the truce between the brothers, with Vuk ruling in his part of Serbia as a vassal of Suleiman. The help provided to Stephen from Hungary was a part of the rules of *Ordo Dragonis* and even more, of the wider foreign policy of King Sigismund. In a part of the creation charter where the founding members of the Order of Dragon are listed, despot Stefan is mentioned as the first knight of the order: *Nos vero Stephanus dominus despoth Rasscie*. Only after him Sigismund's father-in-law Herman of Celje is recorded, and after him other prominent knights.<sup>18</sup>

Despot Stefan took active part in Sigismund's inner and foreign policy. The first example that will be given here, is a famous event from 1412, the congress in Buda, followed by jousts and other chivalric games. In the list of the most notable guests, Stefan Lazarević is listed after Emperor and King Sigismund, then King of Poland, King of Bosnia, following who Lazarević is written down as *der dissipot herr in Sîrfey*.<sup>19</sup> Constantine the Philosopher mentions this joust

1964, 197–214; KURTOVIĆ, E., *Veliki vojvoda bosanski Sandalj Hranici Kosača*. Sarajevo 2009, 111–117, 161–202; KASTRITSIS (n. 11) 59–62.

On the movement of noblemen against Sigismund and the uprising: ENGEL, P., *Királyi hatalom és arisztokrácia viszonya a Sigmond-korban (1387–1437)*. Budapest 1977, 40–43; MÁLYUSZ, E., *Szigmond király uralma Magyarországon (1387–1437)*. Budapest 1984, 47–55.

<sup>18</sup> Magyar nemzeti levéltár országos levéltára, Diplomatikai fényképgyűjtemény, DL 9470. see also for the Order of the Dragon BARANYAI, B., Szigmond király ú. n. Sárkány-rendje. *Századok* 55/4–6, 7–8 (1925–1926) 561–592, 681–720, esp. 562–590; ANTONOVIĆ, M., Despot Stefan Lazarević i Zmajev red. *Istorijski glasnik* 1–2 (1990–1992) 15–22. The information on the participation of Pippo of Ozora (Spano) in the war against the Turks are mostly drawn from the several documents that postpone certain litigations, see WENZEL (n. 14) 226; MÁLYUSZ E., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár II. (1400–1410): Második rész (1407–1410)*. Budapest 1958, 203–205.

<sup>19</sup> For the original document DI 39277; list is also published by MÁLYUSZ, E., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár III. (1411–1412)*. Budapest 1993, 527. for the two most recent studies see FILIPOVIĆ, E. O., Viteške svečanosti u Budimu 1412. godine i učešće bosanskih predstavnika. In: LOVRENOVIĆ D. (ed.)



and he explicitly writes how one Serbian knight had defeated the most powerful one and took *the wreath of victory*. There is further a very interesting observation of Constantine the Philosopher that Serbian despot Stefan Lazarević even promoted knights. He says that he had the right “to assign and award kings and famous knights with knightly honors”, and those knights were so proud of it, that they considered themselves to be higher than other knights (ordained by the king), saying “I was given this honor by the Despot”.<sup>20</sup> Of course, this part is a bit of an exaggeration, since it is not likely that the despot promoted kings to knighthood, nor was that possible. It is, however, probable that he could have promoted some of his distinguished warriors to knighthood and that they have indeed participated in jousts or other knight games at this congress in 1412 in Buda. Members of *Ordo Dragonis* had a right called *comitiva*, which is an institution found in medieval Germany, which, in this particular case, refers to the right to bring new members into the order, i.e. to enter others into the knighthood.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most obvious traces of Stefan’s policy in Hungary is his feudal position with respect to the many possessions he got from Sigismund. Already when the relations were established Serbian ruler was given in 1403–1404 Belgrade, Golubac and many fortresses, towns and villages throughout Hungary. Belgrade became for the first time a See of Serbian state during the rule of Despot Stefan, until his death in 1427 when the city was returned to Hungary. Despot Stefan Lazarević rebuilt the Belgrade fortress and founded many important buildings, including the renovation and erection of an Orthodox temple in the city itself. In 1411 he was given new possessions by King Sigismund, becoming one of the top-ranking barons of Hungarian realm and one of the closest allies of King Sigismund of Luxembourg. In this period a part of Bosnian county Usora fell under the Hungarian rule, and, following this, the Hungarian ruler gave the Despot the important mining centre of Srebrenica. He and his later successor despot Đurađ Branković even owned a palace in Buda (in present-day Országház utca, once the Italian street in the fortress) and the city of Debrecen, but also two very important mining centres

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*Spomenica akademika Marka Šunjića (1927–1998)*. Sarajevo 2010, 285–306; NAGY, B., Ceremony and Diplomacy: The Royal Summit in Buda in 1412. In: BACSA, B. A. (ed.), *The Jagiellonians in Europe: Dynastic Diplomacy and Foreign Relations*. Debrecen 2016, 9–20. both with extensive references to sources and literature.

<sup>20</sup> Konstantin Filozof (n. 3) 86–87.

<sup>21</sup> BARANYAI (n. 18) 701–702. for this privilege cf. also SCHULER, P. J., *LdMa 3. Codex Wintonienis bis Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen*. Stuttgart – Weimar 1999, 79–80 s. v. Comitiva.

Nagybánya (Baia Mare) and Felsőbánya with villages and a mint of money. In the southern parts of Hungary (which cover mostly the part of present-day Vojvodina, Northern Serbia) Stefan Lazarević's possessions were particularly numerous. In the Torontal county, which covers most of the present-day Banat, he received the fortress of Becse, along with Bečkerek, Aracs and Bašaid. In the Bodrog county, Arnat, Aranyan and Apatin were donated to the Serbian ruler by his senior. Besides these, he possibly even received a large portion of possessions in other regions of the southern parts of Hungary, where many Serbs started to settle, especially with Ottoman conquests becoming stronger and more pressing. These possessions in Bačka, Srem (Syrmia) and Krassó counties were maybe given only to Stefan's heir Đurađ Branković, but this still remains unclear. In 1422 he received Tokaj and some other possessions in the counties of Abaúj and Zemplén.<sup>22</sup>

As any other Hungarian feudal nobleman at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Despot Stefan Lazarević also participated vividly in the feudal life of Sigismund's Hungary. As one example of this here, a few interesting points considering his possession of Szatmár (Szathmar) and Némethi (Nemethy) will be provided. It is important also to stress that some of these Hungarian charters are not that known in historiography. One of these charters was issued in the Serbian city of Kruševac (once a see of Stefan's father Lazar) on 18 February 1417 where the despot writes to the bishop of Transylvania saying to him that the King gave him the city of Szathmar and that bishop cannot punish despot's official man named Stephen Remetei who came to the city of Szathmar to collect the tithe of the city customs. The bishop, who unrightfully claimed this tithe to be paid to him, was warned that upon King Sigismund's return, the satisfaction would be given to him.<sup>23</sup>

On the day of Saint Simon and Judas (28 October) in Belgrade in 1417, the see of despot Stefan, this ruler issued two letters sending them to the city of Asszonypatlak, Szathmar and Nemethy with similar content. The already mentioned Stephen Remetei, son of Peter is sent to Nagybánya to confiscate the benefits of Abraham, son of Nicholas. Despot also writes to the citizens of

<sup>22</sup> KRSTIĆ, A., Ugri i srpsko-ugarski odnosi u biografiji despota Stefana Lazarevića Konstantina Filozofa. In: JOVANOVIĆ, G. (ed.), *Srednji vek u srpskoj nauci, istoriji, književnosti i umetnosti* VIII. Despotovac 2017, 75, 78–79 with extensive overview of the sources on the despot's possessions. For the far most detailed analysis of Belgrade under the rule of Stephen Lazarević see KALIĆ-MIJUŠKOVIĆ, J., *Beograd u srednjem veku*. Beograd 1967, 82–103.

<sup>23</sup> DL 53925; A regesta has been published MÁLYUSZ, E., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár VI. (1417–18)*. Budapest 1999, 89.

Szathmar and Nemethy to guarantee security and provide help for his *magister tavernicorum* Stephen Remetei under the threat of being accused of infidelity. The next letter is to the aforementioned cities of Szathmar and Nemethy, where despot asks them to help the jurisdiction of Remetei and to choose their own jurors. He also states that this man is his representative. Remetei was also supposed to collect the unlawfully held 150 golden forints, that were taken from royal *collecta* and that belong to despot. This letter was also issued in Belgrade on the same day.<sup>24</sup>

The men of Despot Stefan were also mentioned in documents which provide a vivid depiction of the feudal life in Hungary. The first document is dated 6 June 1417 in Konstanz, whilst the second one is issued on 31 August in Buda. The first charter is sent to a certain *Ladislav vicecomiti vestro comitatus de Bodrug*. In it, the King explains that the people of Despot Stefan Lazarević made damages to the possession of Asszonyfalva, which was the possession of the widow of late Ladislav Töttös and her sons. He also wrote that they should be given satisfaction for the damage. In the second document, King sends a charter to Kalocsa to conduct an investigation against the *familiaris et officialis illustris principis domini dezpoti regni Rascie ducis*, who, according to this document:

*non diu post mortem prefati Ladislav, dei timore postposito, magnam particulam terre arabilis ipsorum Halaztelek vocatam, (inter) metas possessionis eorum Valpher vocate existentem, ac silvam Verester vocatam omni sine lege occupasset, et occupatas ad possessionem Apathy vocatam applicasset, potencia mediante, in ipsorum preiudicium et damnum multum ingens.*

The reason for taking this investigation is that the men of the Despot unlawfully occupied the land in Halásztelek and a forest named Verester on the possession of the said widow and her sons, the name of who was Valter.<sup>25</sup>

These are only some examples, and there is, for instance, a quite peculiar letter issued in Buda in 1423, ironically on the day of Saint Vitus and Modest

<sup>24</sup> DL 53965-53968; THALLÓCZY, L. – ÁLDÁSY, A., *A Magyarország és Szerbia közötti összeköttetések oklevéltára 1198-1526*. Budapest 1907, 61–63; MÁLYUSZ, E., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár. VI. (1417–18)* Budapest 1999, 306.

<sup>25</sup> NAGY, I., *A zichi és vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idősb ágának okmánytára. Codex diplomaticus domus senioris comitum Zichy de Zich et Vasonkeo. VI*. Budapest 1894, 451–453, 463–467. The name of the men of Despot were *Clemens dictus Kwthy de Chynioz et Michael Thwruk ac Sebastianus de Labdas officiales*.

(15 June), the same day when the Battle of Kosovo occurred in 1389. By this letter, Despot Stephen orders to all his vice-counts, but also to his officials, *familiares* and others (*universis et singulis nostris vicecomitibus, castellanis, tributariis et quibusvis officialibus ac familiaribus, necnon vices vestras gerentibus*) not to ask the payment of customs of salt distributed by the Paulines of the monastery of Saint Lawrence in Buda. The order concerns the salt that the monks from the said monastery transport and sell in Buda and elsewhere, for their own use, in the time of general captol which is in the monastery held annually, by the right that this monastery received as a gift by the King.<sup>26</sup>

Cited documents are merely a brief illustration of the very active feudal life that despot Stefan Lazarević had as a baron in Hungary. At the same time this was in a way a permeation of both domestic and foreign policy of this great Serbian ruler, which will be considered later in greater detail.

Despot Stefan Lazarević, being the closest ally of Sigismund of Luxembourg also participated in the fights against the Hussites. Various sources confirm this, and there are some very peculiar data on his relations towards Hussitism. His biographer Constantine the Philosopher gave a quite extensive account on Hussitism and the relation of Stefan Lazarević towards this religious and political phenomenon. He writes that Despot Stefan confronted *heresy called Hussites*. His narration is very interesting since he writes that *some say* that Jan Hus and Hussites are close to Orthodoxy, and even though he calls them heretics it seems that he has a lot of understanding for Jan Hus and his teachings, especially on the topic of priests getting married. On the latter issue, Constantine the Philosopher wrote that Hus said that none of the Saint Fathers ever forbade the priests to get married. He illustrated this with a story when one man had brought a widow to a village, and from another side he brought another widow. One gave him son, the other daughter, and since the children did not know of each other it happened that they got married. After this story, Constantine writes, Hus was burned. Regarding Hus, the biographer of the Serbian Despot also wrote that he went to Mount Sinai where he learned Greek living with the monks, where he became familiar with the learning of the Orthodox faith. He even allegedly brought some of the Greek writings and studied them. Further on, Constantine writes that the King kindly asked the despot to send a part of his troops to confront Hus's pupils and that Serbian

<sup>26</sup> DL 11375; THALLÓCZY – ÁLDÁSY (n. 24), 71; C. TÓTH, N., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár X. (1423)*. Budapest 2007, 337; KRSTIĆ, A., Pismo despota Stefana Lazarevića svojim ugarskim službenicima o pravima pavlinskog manastira Svetog Lavrentija kod Budima. Budim, 1424, jun 15. *Stari srpski arhiv* 12 (2013) 133–143.

army helped to stand against the Hussites who *became violent* and who looted and plundered.<sup>27</sup>

Eberhard Windecke also mentions Rascians, and Serbs who fought the Hussites with Hungarians – “der König mit seinen Serben, Raizen und Ungarn abzog”.<sup>28</sup> Lest we forget that in 1420–22 there were great campaigns of King Sigismund against the Czechs, in which Despot Stefan and his warriors took active part. After these campaigns, a part of the Serbian troops plundered the area as testified by the Chronicle of Szepes under the entry dated 1422 on the eve of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. According to this narrative source, “dy Ratzen von konig entrunnen” and they went on towards Poland, they wanted to catch people from Szepes and to kill them, and their leaders answered to the King.<sup>29</sup> The following year, in 1423, despot Stefan was in the entourage of Sigismund when he went to Kežmark to have negotiations with Polish King Wladyslaw and Lithuanian duke Vitold. The aim of this meeting was for King Sigismund to try to stop these two rulers from interfering in the complicated Czech events. The concordance was reached on 29 March 1423 and Despot Stefan – *Stephanus regni Rasciae Despotus*, is listed as the first lay witness of this treaty.<sup>30</sup> The presence of *dispot* on this meeting in Kežmark is noted also by Bavarian chronicler Andreas von Regensburg in his *Diarium Sexennale*.<sup>31</sup> The Ragusans were also aware of this high meeting, since they sent a letter as King from the Hungarian ruler to influence his attitude towards Ragusan traders in despot’s lands.<sup>32</sup>

Once again, Despot Stefan in 1424 came to a council summoned by King Sigismund of Luxembourg in order to once more discuss the problem with the Hussites. On this meeting many most prominent people of the time were present. According to Eberhard Windecke, Byzantine Emperor (John VIII) was

<sup>27</sup> Konstantin Filosoφ (n. 3) 88–90.

<sup>28</sup> Eberhard Windecke Denkwürdigkeiten (n. 16) 109; Eberhard Windecke emlékirata (n. 16) 97–98.

<sup>29</sup> PUKÁNSZKY, B. (ed), *Chronicon, quod conservatur in Monte S. Georgii (Szepesszombat, Georgenberg, Spiška-Sobotka)*. In: SZENTPÉTERY, E. (ed.), *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum II*. Budapestini 1938, 285; ROKAI, P., *Ratnici despota Stefana Lazarevića u Slovačkoj prema svedočanstvu Spiške hronike*. *Acta historica Posoniensia* 19 (2012) 11–14.

<sup>30</sup> FEJÉR, G., *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*. Tomi X. Vol. 6. Budae 1844, 533–537, *series dignitatum* at 536. C. TÓTH (n. 26) 161–162.

<sup>31</sup> LEIDINGER, G., *Andreas von Regensburg: Sämtliche Werke*. München 1903, 308; on the work itself cf. LXIII–LXX; DICKER, S., *Landesbewusstsein und Zeitgeschehen: Studien zur bayerischen Chronistik des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Köln – Weimar 2009, 34–36.

<sup>32</sup> *ISN II*, 209 (KALIĆ J).

there, who came to Sigismund in order to seek the help against the emerging Ottoman peril. Then, also a papal legate cardinal Placentinus, four princes from Bavaria, many prominent ecclesiastical figures, but also, *der Despot*, whom Windecke lists after the Byzantine Emperor.<sup>33</sup>

German writer did not miss to mention the exchange of gifts between Serbian ruler and the *Roman King* as Windecke calls Sigismund in 1424. In this year Despot came to Buda to visit king Sigismund and on the arrival Serbian ruler brought gifts, one hour after the visit of the Turkish emissary.

Darauf saß der König wohl noch eine Stunde, da kam der Despot, Herzog von Serbien, und schenkte dem römischen Könige wohl zwanzig golddurchwirkte seidene Tücher, zehn vergoldete Becken, zehn Kolben, zehn Paar beschlagene türkische Taschen, zwei versilberte türkische Säbel und zehn Teppiche.

One can, therefore, read that the King received 20 silk headscarves interwoven with gold, ten gilded chalices, ten Turkish rifles, ten pairs of Turkish padded purses, two Turkish swords with belts and with silver on the latter ones, as well as ten rugs. In the very same year, 1424, on the Feast of the Ascension both John VIII Palaiologos and Stefan Lazarević said their goodbyes to King Sigismund. Before they went back to their countries, they both received generous gifts from their host. Stefan Lazarević got *vier Becher, fünfhundert Gulden, drei Stück Sammt, sechs Stück mechelnsches Tuch und vier Pferde*, i.e. four gilded chalices, 500 Hungarian golden forints, four rolls of velvet, cloth from Mechelen and four horses.<sup>34</sup>

When one carefully observes Despot Stefan's policy, it can be clearly seen that inner and foreign policies often permeated, especially in the case of Hungary. Undoubtedly, from the Serbian point of view, this ruler's relations in Hungary do seem like part of his foreign policy. On the other hand, being a feudal baron, vassal and ally of King Sigismund of Luxembourg, for Despot Stefan Lazarević his

<sup>33</sup> Eberhard Windecke *Denkwürdigkeiten* (n. 16) 189; Eberhard Windecke *emlékirata* (n. 16) 140.

<sup>34</sup> Eberhard Windecke *Denkwürdigkeiten* (n. 16) 191, 194; Eberhard Windecke *emlékirata* (n. 16) 141-145.

Sylvester Syropoulos also mentions the visit of Emperor John VIII and their negotiations, particularly on the question of the union between churches. See LAURENT, V., *Les Mémoires du grand ecclésiarque de l'Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence (1438-1439)*. Paris 1971, 150-153, 584-585; Đurić (n. 12) 226-227.

relations with his familiars, or different aspects of feudal life were definitely a matter of internal affairs. Two letters sent by Stefan Lazarević to his representatives and officials in the county of Szatmár, the already mentioned Stephen Remetei, from the Himffy family, as well as to Benedict Himffy, even though short, provide some interesting data on the said permeation. These two letters were almost completely unknown in the historiography until recently, when they were for the first time published and thoroughly analysed by Aleksandar Krstić. He dates these letters (since they are not dated originally) to the wide period roughly between 1413 and 1420. In these documents Serbian despot informs his men to be prepared to come to him (to Serbia) once they were summoned and receive his new letters.<sup>35</sup> Other *familiars* of Stephen Lazarević, members of the Pósaft family of Szer, Peter and George, were even engaged in the battle around Novo Brdo, a key mining, and therefore, economic and commercial centre of Serbia.<sup>36</sup> It was the 1413 military campaign of Ottoman prince Musa against Serbia.<sup>37</sup>

After the battle of Lašva in 1415, in which the troops of Hungarian aristocrats confronted Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, who was helped by the Ottoman army, Hungarian prominent noblemen fell into Turkish captivity. Those were John of Maróth, ban Martin Ders of Szerdahely, John Harapki, and Peter Szepes. Martin Ders and John Harapki died in Turkish prison, whilst Despot mediated in the liberation of the other two imprisoned Hungarian noblemen himself. From a document issued in Pécs, on 4 September 1416 it can be seen that Peter Cheh, the equerry, was sent to Despot Stephen in order to discuss the release of the four noblemen who were captured *per paganos et Turcos infideles* and that Despot promised to mediate and he said that if 65 000 golden forints were not paid to the Turks, the four noblemen would remain in prison. Because of that, this assembly ordered to collect extraordinary taxes and after the money is collected and given, Despot himself, or his man and one in the service of Ottoman sultan will bring them back to Hungary in Futog/Futak.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> KRSTIĆ, A., Dva neobjavljena latinska pisma despota Stefana Lazarevića. *Inicijal. Časopis za srednjovekovne studije* 3 (2015) 197–209.

<sup>36</sup> SZASZKÓ, E., *A Szeri Pósaftiak. Egy dél-alföldi előkelő család története a 14–15. században*. PhD dissertation, Budapest 2014, 80.

<sup>37</sup> *ISN II*, 88–89 (KALIĆ J).

<sup>38</sup> Konstantin Filozof (n. 3) 88 names them *Petar i Ivaniš Mirovijski*; the original document of the assembly in Pécs DL 43338; it was partially published in MÁLYUSZ, E., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár V. (1415–1416)*. Budapest 1997, 599–600; the document and the activity of Despot Stephen are well-known in scholarly circles, see ČIRKOVIĆ, S., O jednom posredovanju despota Stefana između Ugarske i Turske. *Istraživanja* 16 (2005) 229–240; SZASZKÓ (n. 36) 80–81; KRSTIĆ (n. 22) 85–86.

Despot Stefan's foreign policy was, even though a bit romanticized, well described by his biographer, Constantine the Philosopher. Being the author who is very partial to the main character of his work, Constantine somewhat exaggerates, but it must not be overlooked that he is quite an accurate and reliable historical source, and since he had belonged to the circle that was very close to the Serbian ruler, Constantine the Philosopher was very well-informed. Finally, instead of a conclusion, and having in mind that this topic is certainly not exhausted, a brief summary of Despot Stefan Lazarević's foreign relations as portrayed by his biographer will be given:

In the world the Eastern rulers were hostile towards the Western ones, plundering their lands and leading wars with one another, and this Despot Stefan sends his army to Eastern rulers against the Western ones, and personally goes to Western ones to seek for advice. Both of these things he did publicly for many years. And really, nobody before did anything like that, only him, the one and only, great and uncommon in his wisdom and strength. And after him, it remained as an established law. For the Westerners this was not easy to put up with, but they knew that he was like a shield and an unwavering force.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>

Konstantin Filosofof (n. 3) 87.



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