

# EUROPE AND SERBIAN FEUDALISM - END OF THE 14<sup>th</sup> CENTURY AND EARLY 15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY - RELEVANT ASPECTS

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## Abstract

Serbian feudalism goes through a strong expansion process in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This direction was shaped by Štefan Uros the First, who was already part of a family considered so important in Europe that he could marry Helen of Anjou, which shows the prestige of the power, origin and holiness of the Nemanide dynasty in Europe. On the other hand, Western feudalism was exhausted by the new bourgeoisie, and this area was a good place of enthusiasm for Westerners in search for their roots and warlike mentality. The *Vidovdan* in Sigismund's time animated all the medieval chivalry, and this enthusiasm was manifested by founding *the Order of the Dragon*. Sigismund of Luxembourg was the most important monarch in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. What is paradoxical is the presence of Stephan Lazarevic, son of Lazarus, Serbian tsar, martyr of European fame, as first knight in the *Order of the Dragon*. Lazarevic was a great patron of the Orthodox culture and civilization in Serbia. Lazarevic also owned a large palace with an Orthodox church, right in Buda. The Nemanide dynasty was the most important dynasty in forming an Orthodox monarchical idea in the Balkan area. Therefore, this study aims to highlight briefly the European history concerning the idea of unity of powers in a medieval society, the evolution of this idea in a troubled Europe, and especially in a Hungary insufficient Westerner or Byzantine, seeker of an ethnic and social ideal, which would become so specific to the Serbian people.

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**Keywords:** Serbian feudalism, Sigismund of Luxembourg, Stephan Lazarevic, orthodoxy, holy dynasty

## Introduction

Serbian feudalism went through a considerable expansion process in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This direction was initiated by Stephan Uros The First (king of Serbia between 1243 and 1276), who was already part of a family considered so important in Europe that he could marry Helen of Anjou

(Bojovic, 1995, p.88; Popovic, 2010b, pp.46-47), which shows the prestige of power, origin and holiness of the Nemanide dynasty in Europe. Serbia enjoyed aristocracy and church development, both able to build imposing fortresses (Janicijevic, 2001), and this influence extended to Hungary. The marriage of the great noble Ladislau Khan with the heiress of the Serbian king who was related to Helen of Anjou gave him the opportunity to fight against Charles Robert of Anjou. The latter brought to Hungary a type of mercantile, secularized feudalism, which found its essence, just like American Protestantism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, diluted as well because of the temptation of financial trade and of bourgeois condition, in anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox persecutions. These combinations took Hungary to a lower position, and Angevin defeats against the Serbians and Serbia declared empire imposed to the Angevins recognition of Maramuresh nobility, related to Serbian aristocracy and dynasty (Staretu, 2014). Western feudalism was exhausted by the new bourgeoisie, and this area was a good place of enthusiasm for the West looking for its roots and bellicose mentality. The *Vidovdan* under Sigismund animated the medieval knights environment, and this enthusiasm was manifested by founding *the Order of the Dragon* (1408). Sigismund's religious policy on the removal of the heretical conception concerning papacy and Orthodox synodal, with liturgical and dogmatic reforms, which basically converted the Occident to Orthodoxy, show us the authority of the Orthodox chivalrous model. It was met by Sigismund in Eastern Europe, and used as a strategy to legitimate again European nobility in poverty in front of great urban bourgeoisie, which afforded to ask compensation in Basel, from Sigismund, for damages caused by its noble followers at the Synod (Weiss, 2013). In this context, it is normal to have Stephan Lazarevic in front of *the Order of the Dragon*, for he was Lazarus's son, holy martyr. He was the descendant of all the holy Serbian kings who, from the idea of hesychast and Orthodox-Davidic and Christ roots of saint monarchs inspired as well vague attempts of royal sanctity in Western Europe (Le Goff, 2009). We can think that medieval aristocracy tried to save its situation by return to Byzantium. In the same way, the first crusade revolution in the history of the Occident was triggered by the Byzantium call, which led to crusade. Then, it led to the first sacralisation of the nobility, following the model of the hero warrior in sacred fight for the cross. However, it is based on the intact rediscovery in Byzantium of the idea of military faith defender, illustrated by the cult of military saints, taken over at that time from Byzantium, through contagion, when the knights went across the empire. There is a change of conception and foundation. The Germanic tribal warrior code is replaced by the orthodox idea of Davidic origin related to the Maccabees and martyrs (*saint soldiers*), which was in Byzantium. Not accidentally, *saint soldiers* were painted behind the pews in the church,

belonging to the nobles, and it shows the connection in Byzantium between the ideas of sanctity and nobility, which until then was unknown in the Occident. The term “blue blood” related to nobility, based on the blue-sky holiness has its roots in the crusade experience. Otherwise, without the Byzantine experience, the Occident would not have developed the aristocratic consciousness, where the theological element of holiness and purity of the family through Orthodoxy could be found, but it would have continued at the tribal level, where it was until then, level that would have been suffocated by the increasingly richer bourgeoisie and by Hebrew merchant categories.

### **Europe and feudal Serbia - 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries:**

Sigismund of Luxembourg was the most important monarch in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Great political and military ruler, Sigismund of Luxembourg stands out as an ideologue of Christian Europe (Muresan, 2010, p.94). His rise, at the level of great European policy was possible through accession to the throne of Hungary, by marrying Maria, the daughter of Louis of Anjou, king of Hungary (Michaud, 2000, p.743). Once king of Hungary, Sigismund followed, until 1389, a policy related to direct succession of the Angevins. However, after 1389 there is a change of principle. The first big political event, which induced to Sigismund’s policy originality, was killing Croatian nobility in the administration in 1397. The next coherent action was to deprive great Hungarian nobles in Slovakia area. Great Hungarians castles were alienated or offered to Sigismund’s protected people like Stibor of Stiboricz (Mályusz, 1984, p.29). In essence, Sigismund weakened the nobility to centralize the Hungarian state, which was completely subjected to influences of families like Csaky or Aba (Sugar et al, 1994). These families ruled over territories bigger than the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. There was an expedition to Moldavia ending in the Hindau defeat. As far as Wallachia is concerned, special policy was not necessary. Mircea became Sigismund’s ally, although there were conflicts because of Chilia. All these revealed a first attempt to centralize the Hungarian kingdom, which was divided between aristocratic groups more or less autonomous, an attempt of centralization with considerable effects on the nobility control and on the *Knighthood Investiture*.

Relationship with Poland could be defined only after 1410 (Dvořáková, 2003), when alliances with the Teutons and Russia were clarified. In this period it was obvious that the anti-Ottoman front seemed secondary. The Nicopole crusade and the foundation of the Order of the Dragon in 1408 (Chihaiia, 2010) did not seem to be important elements in his royal policy. It can, however, be noticed that this Order of the Dragon, by considering its members, included the greatest part of the Hungarian nobility,

which made his centralization effort obvious. Actually, it was visible on previous occasions too. Reading the order status, we can see the emphasis on fidelity to the king and faith (Boulton 2000, p.349). Stephan Lazarevic was Lazarus's son. The latter was the Serbian martyr tsar, famous in Europe as first knight. Stephan Lazarevic's presence was paradoxical. Lazarevic was a great patron of Orthodox culture and civilization in Serbia. Lazarevic was as well the owner of a big palace with Orthodox church in Buda (Popovic, 2010 a). What was Stephan Lazarevic's role in medieval Hungary? After Sigismund's relocation, in 1411, in Germany, Hungarian business had to be somehow administrated. Perhaps Lazarevic was commissioned as a kind of regent for Hungary. This is visible from sources related to Stephan Lazarevic's life, like Constantin of Kosteneec, who spoke about the fact that Hungarian nobles were eager to be invested knights by Lazarevic (Bojovic, 1995), so Lazarevic could invest Hungarians knight. Also, in Constantin's work it is mentioned the fact that at his death he was mourned especially by his Hungarian nobles (Kostenecki, 2011, p.32). It is interesting that among Hungarian nobles who had become knights at Lazarevic's court, there were John Hunyadi and Szilagy (Pal, 2003). Szilagy had then functions in Bacskai and Srem areas (Pannon, 2013). Was there any connection between the very important role of the representatives of the families of the two future knights of Lazarevic in the subsequent history of Hungary, where we would return, and Lazarevic's role in Sigismund's Hungary?

The fact is that John Hunyadi would follow a plan of the battles related to the sacred topography of Serbia, as it was through by Stephan Lazarevic, having as central points Belgrade (Teke, 1980); he was beginning his career in the same area, and Kossovopolije (Cartledge, 2011, p.58). Not coincidentally, John Hunyadi has an equestrian statue in Pecs, in southern Hungary, therefore in the area where he operated.

Matthias Corvinus would erect in Buda a statue of Sigismund (Kovács, 1990, p.9). This shows the overwhelming importance of Sigismund in the political imaginary of Matthias Corvinus.

An important dimension of Sigismund's European policy referred to relations with Catholicism. Sigismund's first conflicts with Catholicism occurred in the context of the war with Poland, when he required to Russians subjected to Lithuania to rebel against the Polish, arguing as well with the superiority of the Greek rite (orthodoxy). In addition, Sigismund subsequently would ask to the Emperor John Palaeologus not to take part in the synod of Ferrara-Florence for the union with the pope.

Most noble families from Maramuresh were stopped from poverty through Sigismund's policy, and the Dragffiesti (Filipascu, 2006, p. 79) started their social ascension at those times, when they had the opportunity to build the stavropighia / monastery directly related to the patriarchy, from Peri. Thus,

Sigismund's fame among Russian nobles in Poland, to be holy orthodox emperor, had historical foundation. The purpose of this orthodox line in the Occidental theology would lead to reform.

On the other hand, Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was a world in dissolution. Old chivalric values, formed in the shadows of the great migrations disappeared, to make room for other values that anticipated renaissance. Orthodox Europe in this period was torn apart by Ottoman attacks on the one hand and by the growing prestige of Catholicism on the other. We face a world, which did not believe anymore in its own identity, a world that was seduced by an increasingly secular Occident (Chihaiia, 2010). This orthodox world, oscillating between identity continuity manifested through hesychasm, and the temptation of Catholicism manifested through Varlaamism faced strong Catholic feudalism at its historical peak. We meet the pattern of a new European model (Chihaiia, 2010) based on civilization and trade, thus an enticing model for Byzantium which had become formalist, whose capital, Constantinople was depopulated and whose elite was decomposed (Runciman, 2012, p.231). In this context, orthodoxy evolved as well from the national point of view. Strong states in the Balkans, claiming to be empires, but who gave birth to kinship in Europe, at noble or ducal level, managed to get national and aristocratic identity on religious bases. The most spectacular phenomenon in this period of provincial historical rethinking of orthodoxy was the idea of saint kings canonization. This complex idea, materialized in Serbia, with little legitimacy to surrounding monarchies, Byzantium, Hungary and Venice, always subjected to them genealogically and politically, and tempted even by Bosnia to make bogomile compromises, Bosnia that had state tradition that sometimes seemed more solid, would have overwhelming impact on the European idea and on ideologies related to ruling a state.

These very important and consistent elements would lead to a new understanding of the power pyramid in Europe. Meanwhile, in Europe there were five models related to manifesting power, five ideological structures, based on different pillars, still insufficiently crystallized.

The first of them was the Byzantine imperial monarchy, *Basileus*. This Basileus, which Eginhardt, Charlemagne's chronicler, called the top of medieval power hierarchy, in reality was not a monarch. He was the successor of the Roman republican emperor. He was not elected genealogically and he did not have initially sacred dimension. The *king* was the next. Initially he was a roman provincial clerk, without sacral function, appointed by the Byzantine emperor (see Clovis case, Braudel, 1995). Then there is *the orthodox episcopate*, a strong force at provincial level in Europe, force that would give birth through its members, to some important European dynasties: the Carolingians, the Hapsburgs, the Bourbons. We integrate here

as well monasticism. The fourth, which came quite late, is represented by *the bishop of Rome*. The bishop of Rome initially did not have any political authority. He was part of the Byzantine orthodox episcopate. However, as a result of ideological developments due to great European nobles in the seat of the bishop, they tried to relate to the old roman imperial idea, thus, founding *The Donation of Constantine* (Guran, 2006, pp. 55-69), the most important forgery that led to the power pyramid in Europe in the next period. The fifth was the *aristocrats' community*, knights, nobles (Pop, 2011, p.18).

The idea of Serbian holy monarchy unifies all the five dimensions providing on ideological alternative to Europe, which was divided, and the junction points between these five fundamental dimensions of the society did not have to be seen. By canonization of the monarch (Bojovic, 1995) by electing his brother bishop, usually, and canonizing him as well, and through full unification of the monarchy institution with the monastic and Episcopal one, Serbia used the junction points. It used them in an exemplary manner, which shows a lot of aspects of a strongly ideological society, in order to achieve a viable, orthodox state. These elements would be discovered by Europeans much later, through the relationship between Stephan Lazarevic, Sigismund of Luxembourg and the great European nobility.

We also notice that medieval Europe had more authority ideological models. The development of the Serbian Nemanide tsarate was very important to define geopolitical realities in the north of the Danube. The most important phenomenon for understanding the organic evolution of aristocracy and royalty in the Carpathian-Danube area was the Nemanide dynasty formation, as an orthodox alternative to a catholic monopoly made of Hungarian royalty, which dominated the area. When Zavid's son converted to orthodoxy (Ivkovic, 2013, p.24), the monarchic history of this area changed. He took the name Stephen and began a campaign to release old Byzantine-Illyrian church, which was under Hungarian-Croatian domination since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Nemanja's policy would lead to the relation of this Serbian dynasty with important families in the area, like Morosini, Subic, Kotromanic, Buondelmonte, Angelos, Courtenai, Basarab, Asan, Anjou (Popovic, 2010a ), Dandolo.

We can see acceptance of the new statehood and orthodox monarchy in the Adriatic and Balkan area, with an important role to the Dalmato-Venetian part. The development of this state would record the first great kinship through Stephen Vladislav despot of Srem marriage to the daughter of the Hungarian king, Stephen the Second, and through his Cuman wife, Kuthen's daughter, the latter daughter of a princess in the Vladmir dynasty in Kiev. We can spot a move of this Balkan area to the Adriatic, through kinship with families like Drago de Mare, Morosini or Buondelmonte, families without great noble tradition but descending from regional dukes

appointed by Byzantines in the area in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (which was the best confirmed at Venetian Morosini or Dandolo) . It was Romanic environment where the Serbian dynasty kept its individuality.

The Nemanide dynasty was the most important in getting an orthodox monarchical idea in the Balkan area. That is why this study aims to highlight briefly the European history of his idea of unity of powers in a medieval society, this idea's length in a troubled Europe and in Hungary, insufficiently occidental or Byzantine, looking for ethnic and social ideal, which would become so Serbian. This study aims, in its future issues, to highlight ideological, political, genealogical and economic means that led to the expansion of these elements, everything set in a sequence of events.

Serbia in the 15<sup>th</sup> century began to be directly threatened by the Ottoman Empire. This was the century of its fall. It was a general phenomenon of fall of the Byzantine world under Ottoman rule, and Islamic, in general (Bojovic, 1995, p. 361). The first contender to the throne of Serbia was Simeon Sinisa, Dusan's brother, who tried to chase Stephen Uros Nejak, but he failed. Vukashin Mrnjavcevic would eventually hold control of the Serbian State, as regent of Nejak, and would form a principality, which included most of the Dusan's southern empire. With his brother, Ugljesa, he would represent the most credible alternative in the area. Lazarus's ascension, married to Milita, Vratko Nemanjic's daughter, known in Serbian epic poetry as Jug Bogdan, father of the ten Jugovic, would lead to the Lazarevic's family hegemony. Marrying his daughters to the strongest medieval seniors in the area, Lazarus got to have very important role there. The marriages were: Ana to Radu the First, Mara to Vuk Brankovic, Dragana to Alexander Shishman, Helen to Djuradj Balsic and Theodora to Nicolas Garay, member in the Order of the Dragon later and relative of Lazarevic, master of the order through him.

Tvrtko the First's attempt, having Nemanide blood as well, to proclaim himself king of the Serbians' and Bosnia, would be suppressed by Lazarus. However, after defeating Vukasin and Ugljesa in 1371, the path for the Ottomans' ingress in the Balkans was open. The Ottomans would go to Hum and Nis, where they would be defeated by Vukasin and Lazarus too. Lazarus defeated Murad the First at Plocnik, and the ruler of Tvrtko, Vlatko Vukovic defeated him as well at Bileca, in 1388. It was obvious that revenge from the Turks had to come. Being allied with Tvrtko, who sent Vlatko Vukovic too to command his army, and with Vuk Brankovic, Lazarus would fight in 1389 in the Kossovopolije battle, which would have a very important role in forming the image about crusade in the Balkans. Lazarus's death would lead to new evolutions in the Balkans. Olivera would be sent to her father's killer, to be closed in the harem, and Stephen Lazarevic would be

constantly forced by the Turks to impose vassality and territorial concessions.

Crowned emperor in Skopje on 16 April 1346 (Bojovic, 1995) on Easter, following a tradition that came from Justinian, Alexie Comnenul, and which was followed, apparently by Neagoe Basarab (Muresan, 2010, p.82) and Stephen the Great, Stephen Dusan accomplished the Byzantine inspiration of the Serbian monarchic idea, turning the kingdom into tsarate. Crowned in front of Bulgarian and Serbian patriarchs and of the protos and Athonite Chinotite, Dusan chose an alternative to a Byzantine empire dominated by minor dynasties coming from Asia Minor, from different generals of border, often hesitating about defending the orthodox faith. Died in December 1355, at the age of 48, Dusan was succeeded by his son, Nejak, who could hardly centralize the medieval state, monopolized by medieval seniors, relatives of the Nemanide too. The classic process of centralization and decentralization can be considered from Charlemagne to his descendants. They would resist to the Ottoman approach during a century, until the ultimate fall of the despotate. The best attempt in his respect was that of Lazarus, who fought in the important battle of Kossovopolije, when both sovereigns died, Serbian and Islamic too.

His heir, Stephen Lazarevic became sovereign defeating sultan Bayazid at Ankara (Mantran, 2010). Reuniting a part of Serbian countries, under his authority, he could strengthen the structure of his domination in front of the Ottoman attack. He managed even to integrate, within the despotate, other Serbian countries, too, for example Zetta and the city of Belgrade (Radonitch, 1919, pp. 32-33). The economic and social growth of Serbia in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was considerable (Spremic, 1994, pp. 565-595). The exploitation of gold, silver and lead mines, to mention only the most important products, reached a level that hadn't been reached before (Cirkovic, 1979, pp.1-30). Thus, Serbia became one of the main producers of gold and silver, *fosse de oro et arcento*.

Old crusaders families began to decline, being replaced by new families, which, even getting to strong positions, acted as immoral (see the case of king Edward's immorality). Thus, these families, Subic, Buondelmonte, Garay, Cilli, were influenced by the mystics of the holy dynasty and by the choice of the heavenly kingdom, *the Vidovdan*. Canonization of these kings had as effect special emotion of their Occidental relatives and keeping positivist, orthodox spirit among them. They were ordinary nobles in the Occident and now they had access to holiness and kingship. Through Serbians, they rose above their level in Europe, of non-sacred nobles and even kings and thus they were attracted to the symbol that turned them from ordinary nobles into relatives of saint kings, Nemanides. A



Serbian current was created, which could be seen in medieval Serbian epics, of European circulation.

This current attracted Mathias too, King of Hungary with access to royalty and holiness. That is why he encouraged relatives with access to this Serbian dimension, that is all Serbian despots refugees in Hungary. This attraction, real for medieval, mystic men, of the saint king, of the saint Nemanide family, led as well to Russians attraction to Serbian model and genealogies. Even if some families kept their Catholicism, attraction still existed. Thus, they went beyond their status. That is why, people like Subici or Pipo Spano or Garay, help the Serbians, because they could hear a call of sacred duty for the holy family, the holy nation. The kinship of most of the members of the Order of Dragon with Lazarevic is further proof. This is true for Bulgarian or Wallachia kinship, too. See the genealogy in the narthex from Arges (Chihaiia, 2010), where Basarabs' ancestors were mentioned: Simeon, Sava, Lazarus and Milita, correct genealogically, so all the genealogy was subordinate to kinship with Serbian nation. This mentality must be valid too for kinship in the Catholic area, which shows us that this kinship is actually extension of the saint genealogy idea. This can be seen as well in the case of the last Byzantine emperor, entitled Dragasses – Palaeologus, by mother, descended from the Nemanides. These families were baffled at the idea of the Nemanide holy dynasty as all the Serbian tsars were canonized.

The Order of the Dragon developed as a structure where relatives of Serbian tsars, Serbian canonized tsars, under Lazarevic's rule, the most direct descendant of the tradition of royal sanctity mixed with a tradition of martyrdom started by the tsar Lazarus. They gathered under Sigismund of Luxembourg to counter the Ottoman action in the Balkans to bring Europe to Byzantine orthodoxy again. I think, although nobody can argue that the status of the order in Latin includes the words *ortodoxa fidae*, meaning *orthodox faith* (this term is used for the catholic faith too). The fact that the term "catholica" is missing and only this Greek term is here, term known to Lazarevic, shows that perhaps Lazarevic wrote the status keeping in mind a Byzantine, orthodox idea. The fact that all the members in the Order were his relatives, with pro-orthodox positions in their control areas (including the emperor Sigismund who does not hide his admiration for orthodoxy) shows us that the order was a pro-schismatic club (in catholic terms), which could have been accused by suspicious people of crypto-schismatism. It is an order formed because the attraction of the idea of holy monarchy that becomes shield of the European noble idea. The genesis of ballads on Kossovopoljje, the main battle for the members of the order, is not accidental, as well as Milos Obilic's or others' association with issues related to the order.

## Conclusion

Hungary faced the unique situation in Europe to have Bela the Fourth declared heir of the Byzantine throne and baptized Alexios, which led to the Byzantine aulic atmosphere and foundation of some royal cults after the Byzantine model, similar to Ladislau's one. Participation in crusades of kings like Andrew the second consolidated the Byzantine issues and gave Hungary great European prestige. Kings like Stephan the Second, who separated the Latin communion in Hungary with the pope and tried to convert the country to orthodoxy, gave birth to an atmosphere, which induced many people's hope that eventually Hungary would enter the orthodox camp, which would happen with Serbia during Simeon Nemanja.

In the context of old crusader families fall, being replaced by newer families: Subic, Buondelmonte, Garay, Cilli, they were influenced by the mystics of the Serbian holy dynasty and by the choice of the Heavenly Kingdom of *Vidovdan*. These kings canonization had as effect emotions of their occidental relatives and keeping positivist, orthodox spirit. They were ordinary nobles in the Occident and now they had access to holiness and royalty. Through the Serbians they rose above their level in Europe, of unholy nobles and even kings and thus they were attracted by the symbol which changed them from ordinary nobles into relatives of king saints, orthodox Nemanides. This was an important contribution to the evolution of the events in Europe until the first part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. When this current would be diluted and they would shift to Protestantism.

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