

Militarization of the Serbian State under Ottoman Pressure*

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After the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, Serbian territories were under strong Ottoman pressure. Turkish vassals soon became their rulers. Under these circumstances, they endeavored to fulfill their obligations to the Sultan and to strengthen the defense of their states. For these purposes, the ruling families, the Lazarevićs and Brankovićs, introduced new taxes during the last decade of the fourteenth century. Also, Despot Stefan Lazarević (1389–1427) established a different type of military service, placing emphasis on the defense of the country's borders. Based on archaeological material and written sources, one can conclude that Serbian rulers paid great attention to the construction and restoration of fortresses. In the first decade of the fifteenth century, Despot Stefan began to reform the local government system. The new administrative units were organized according to the model of former marches (*kerajišta*), which were headed by voivodes. Finally, the fresco painting of Serbian monasteries also offers evidence of the militarization of Serbian society during the period of the Ottoman threat.

Keywords: Militarization, Serbia, Ottomans, Hungary, taxes, warriors, fortresses, marches

The Battle of Kosovo in June 1389 was an important milestone for Serbian territories. Prince Lazar, the most powerful Serbian local ruler,¹ was killed in the Battle.² His successors were in a difficult position. In addition to the Ottoman pressure, their territory was threatened by the Hungarian King Sigismund in the north, who wanted to secure the border of his state from the Turks.³ These factors may well have prompted Lazar's successors to accept supreme Ottoman

* This article is based on work done within the framework of the research project "Medieval Serbian Lands (13–14th century): Political, Economic, Social and Legal processes" (no. 177029), funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

1 The territory of Prince Lazar encompassed the valleys of three Morava Rivers. See Mihaljčić, *Lazar Hrebeljanović*, 110.

2 See Mihaljčić, *The Battle of Kosovo*, 43–51; Ćirković, "The Field of Kosovo," 81–90.

3 *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár*, vol. 1. nos. 1190–1193, 1197, 1203–1204, 1265, 1275, and 1280; Trpković, "Tursko-ugarski sukobi," 96–102; Szakály, "Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare," 74; Rokai, "Kralj Žigmund," 145–46, 149; Engel, "A török–magyar háborúk első éve," 562–65.

authority before the middle of 1390.⁴ On the other hand, Vuk Branković,⁵ the son-in-law of Prince Lazar, resisted attacks of the Turks until the autumn of 1392, when he also submitted himself to Sultan Bayezid I (1389–1402).⁶ He tried to become the supreme ruler of the Serbs between 1389 and 1391.⁷

The Ottoman vassals had two main obligations. First, they had to send auxiliary troops for the Sultan's campaigns. Second, they had to pay the annual tribute, known as the *haraç*. Also, they had to treat the Sultan's allies and enemies as their allies and enemies.⁸ The failure to perform these duties was regarded as a form of defiance of the Ottoman ruler.⁹ The charters which have survived indicate that Lazarević family and Vuk Branković introduced a new tax to finance payment of the tribute. Vuk Branković noted in his charter to the monastery of Chilandar from November 1392 that he determined how much every estate would pay to cover the Turkish tax.¹⁰ The payment of this tax in the Lazarević state was mentioned only in their charter to the Great Lavra monastery of Saint Athanasius from 1394/1395. It was referred to as "service to the great master" (*rabota velikom gospodaru*).¹¹ Nevertheless, it is certain that this tax also existed later, when Stefan Lazarević was brought under the rule of the Ottoman Sultans. The obligation of tax payment was noted in two charters of the Branković family, one from 1410 and one from 1419.¹² The term *haraç* also appears in a later manuscript edition of *Dušan's Code*.¹³ However, Serbian sources do not contain information about the amount of this tax. Despot Đurađ Branković (1427–1456) paid 50,000 ducats in the name of *haraç*.¹⁴ At some point during his reign, the amount of this tribute rose to 60,000 ducats.¹⁵ His heir, Despot Lazar

4 Trpković, "Tursko-ugarski sukobi," 102; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 48.

5 Vuk Branković held territories from the region of Upper Lim to the Upper Vardar. See Dinić, "Oblast Brankovića," 148–59.

6 Vuk's decision was the result of the Turkish conquest of his town of Skopje. Bojanin, "Povelja Vuka Brankovića," 149–51, 153–54, 158; Šuica, *Vuk Branković*, 139–48.

7 Šuica, *Vuk Branković*, 119–35.

8 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 4, s.v. "Kharādj," 1053, 1055; *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, s.v. "Harač," 773; Inaldžik, *Osmansko carstvo*, 17, 164; Imber, *The Structure of Power*, 13, 93 180; Spremić, "Turski tributari," 275–76.

9 Inaldžik, *Osmansko carstvo*, 17–18; Imber, *The Structure of Power*, 93; Šuica, "Vuk Branković i sastanak u Seru," 259, 263, 265.

10 Bojanin, "Povelja Vuka Brankovića," 153–54.

11 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma*, 223.

12 Stojanović, "Stari srpski hrisovulji," 32–33.

13 Bubalo, *Dušanov zakonik*, 118, 223.

14 Broquière, *Voyage d'Outremere*, 206; Spremić, "Turski tributari," 290.

15 Makušev, *Istorijski spomenici*, 90–91; Spremić, "Turski tributari," 292.

Branković (1456–1458), had to pay 40,000 ducats, since he ruled the diminished territory.¹⁶

Furthermore, at this time, the Lazarević family established another new tax known as the “unče.” This fee was also mentioned for the first time in the Lazarević family’s charter to the Great Lavra monastery of Saint Athanasius in 1394/1395.¹⁷ The term “unče” originated from the name of the monetary unit, which was worth twenty dinars.¹⁸ The acts from the first decades of the fifteenth century point out that there were winter and summer “unče.”¹⁹ Consequently, historians have concluded that this fee amounted to 40 dinars, or almost one Venetian ducat, per year.²⁰ In the same documents, Serbian rulers used the terms “vojnica” and “danak gospodstva mi” for the summer and winter unče.²¹ One of these acts reveals the purpose of the new tax. Đurađ Branković (1427–1456), the heir to Despot Stefan, emphasized in the charter for the monastery of Saint Panteleimon (issued between 1427 and 1429) that the summer “unče” (“vojštatik”) was collected by his treasury for the purpose of equipping the army.²² The documents indicate that the monastery’s properties were not automatically exempted from this fee. Around 1415, Despot Stefan Lazarević (1389–1427) exempted new estates of the monastery of Mileševa from the winter “unče” for two years and the summer “unče” (“vojnica”) for five years.²³ A few months before his death, he freed new estates of the monastery of Great Lavra from all obligations, except the summer “unče.”²⁴ All of these obligations fell upon dependent peasants.²⁵

It should be noted that many Serbian noblemen were killed in the Battle of Kosovo. This particularly applies to the army of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović.²⁶ That is the main reason why his successors, widow Princess Milica and son Prince Stefan, tried quickly to restore the military power of their state. The

16 Makušev, *Istorijski spomenici*, 215; Spremić, “Turski tributari,” 292–93.

17 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma*, 223.

18 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 122; *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, s.v. “Unča” 762; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 166, 171–72.

19 Novaković, *Zakonski spomenici*, 528; Božić, *Dobodak carski*, 56; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 166–67, 223.

20 Božić, *Dobodak carski*, 58–59; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 171–72; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 122.

21 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma*, 193; Božić, *Dobodak carski*, 56.

22 Novaković, *Zakonski spomenici*, 528.

23 Veselinović, “Povelja despota,” 198.

24 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma*, 260.

25 Božić, *Dobodak carski*, 54–55; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 221.

26 Šuica, “Vlastela kneza Stefana,” 10.

fact that Prince Stefan and his troops played a significant role in the battles led by Sultan Bayezid I indicates that he achieved this goal to a certain extent. It is well known that Prince Stefan made a crucial contribution to the Ottoman victory in the Battle of Nicopolis.²⁷ Stefan's troops also played a significant role in the Battle of Angora.²⁸ Certainly, thanks to these efforts, he had a significant influence on the outcome of the conflict among Bayezid's sons after the Battle of Ankara in 1402.²⁹ Hungarian King Sigismund (1387–1437) also respected his military power. Despot Stefan became the vassal of the Hungarian ruler at the end of 1403 or the beginning of 1404.³⁰ In return, he received from the Hungarian king the town of Belgrade, part of the Banate of Mačva, situated to the south of the Sava River, and a major complex of lands in northwestern Serbia called *terra Dettosfelde*.³¹ Their ties strengthened in the following period, as indicated by the fact that Despot Stefan was the first among the baron members of the Order of the Dragon in its foundation charter from December 1408.³²

On the other hand, Vuk Branković remained the Sultan's vassal until 1394.³³ Ottoman forces captured his territories in 1396.³⁴ The major part of his estates belonged to Prince Stefan, who was a faithful vassal of the Turks.³⁵ However, the sons of Vuk Branković managed to redeem their father's state from the Sultan in 1402 before the Battle of Ankara.³⁶ They were in conflict with the Despot from 1402 to 1411 or 1412, when Đurađ Branković made an agreement with his uncle Stefan Lazarević.³⁷ From that time on, they worked together, and Đurađ became the despot's heir, since Stefan did not have children. This was formalized at the

27 Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis*, 82, 87, 93–94; Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 60–64; Šuica, "Bitka kod Nikopolja," 113–18; Hoensch, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 84.

28 Alexandrescu-Dersca, *La campagne de Timur*, 73–78; Nikolić, *Vizantijski pisci o Srbiji*, 38–46; Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*, 54; Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 43–44.

29 Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 57, 59, 61, 124–26, 137–38, 143–44, 150–53, 159–60, 168–70, 180–93.

30 Dinić, "Pismo ugarskog kralja," 93–97; Wenzel, *Okmánytár* 1, 22; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 70–71; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 232.

31 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 284; Purković, *Knez i despot Stefan*, 73–75; Kalić, *Beograd u srednjem veku*, 83–84; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 232–33; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 70–71.

32 *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae*, vol. 10/4, 682–94; Antonović, "Despot Stefan," 15–22; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 210, 213, 232, 234.

33 Šuica, "Vuk Branković," 155, 157–58.

34 Dinić, "Oblast Brankovića," 160–61; Šuica, "Vuk Branković," 162–65.

35 Orbin, *Kraljevstvo Slovena*, 102; Dinić, "Oblast Brankovića," 161; Šuica, "Vuk Branković," 166–67.

36 Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, 143–46; Orbin, *Kraljevstvo Slovena*, 103; Dinić, "Oblast Brankovića," 165–66; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 50.

37 Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 61; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 116–17; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 118; Nikolić, *Vizantijski pisci o Srbiji*, 72.

State council in 1425 or 1426.³⁸ It should be underlined that the tax system on the Branković family's territory was similar to that of Despot's state. Indeed, the region under the control of the Branković dynasty retained its specificity until the fall of Ottoman rule.³⁹

The charters which have survived indicate that the estates of monasteries were not completely exempted from some of the new obligations even after the end of the Ottoman civil war in 1413. In connection with this, it is worth noting that Despot Stefan and his nephew Đurađ Branković reestablished vassal relations with new Ottoman Sultan Mehmed I.⁴⁰ In 1419, Đurađ Branković and his wife Irene freed two villages of the Athonite monastery of Saint Paul from all obligations and taxes except for a tribute to the Turks.⁴¹ Since the Serbian Despotate entered the war with Ottomans in 1425,⁴² it is not surprising that in 1427 Stefan Lazarević did not exempt the new estate of the monastery of Great Lavra from the summer "unče."⁴³ In addition, it should be borne in mind that Despot Stefan provided military assistance to the Hungarian king. Despot's troops participated in Sigismund's campaigns against Hussites in 1421 and 1422.⁴⁴ Also, from 1421 to 1423, Stefan Lazarević led a war against Venice with the aim of reigning over the coastal towns of Zeta (today Montenegro).⁴⁵

The complex political circumstances also influenced the organization of military service in the Serbian lands. The charter of Despot Stefan to the monastery of Vatopedi from July 1417 gives information on various types of military obligations in the Lazarević state. The monastery's new possession, the village of Koprivnica (near the town of Novo Brdo), was exempted from the obligation of performing military service except for sending auxiliary troops to the Turks and participating in warfare on the *march* (*krajište*) of Novo Brdo.⁴⁶ Ten years later, Despot Stefan stipulated three exceptions for the villages which

38 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 316; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 70; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 237.

39 For more information, see: Dinić, "Oblast Brankovića," 168–69, 173–76; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 66.

40 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 90; Nikolić, *Vizantijski pisci o Srbiji*, 76–77; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 62–63.

41 Stojanović, "Stari srpski hrisovulji," 32–33.

42 The cause of this war may well have been Stefan's close relationship with Hungary: *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 212–14; Purković, *Knez i despot Stefan*, 130–31.

43 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma despota Stefana*, 260.

44 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 314; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 209.

45 *Istorija Crne Gore*, 135–46; Stanojević, *Borba o nasledstvo Baošino*, 16–63.

46 Lascaris, "Actes serbes de Vatopedi," 172; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 165–66, 192–93.

were bestowed to the monastery of Great Lavra on Mount Athos. First, these settlements had to send troops if the ruler personally led the army. Second, the villages had the obligation to participate in actions against brigands and in warfare on the *march* when the local voivode summoned the army.⁴⁷ There are no reliable data indicating how many soldiers were sent to the Ottomans by Serbian rulers. Byzantine writer Doukas noted that Prince Stefan had a detachment of 5,000 lancers in the Battle of Angora,⁴⁸ while Chalkokondyles stated that at least 10,000 Serbian warriors participated in the battle.⁴⁹ Allegedly, the Serbian detachment which participated in the siege of Constantinople in 1453 numbered 1,500 horsemen according to Konstantin Mihailović, who was a member of the unit.⁵⁰ It may be that the number was not fixed, but depended on circumstances. Considering that the estates of the monastery had to take part in equipping these armies, it is clear how difficult this duty was.

The military campaigns which were led by the ruler were probably considered the most important. Consequently, no one was excluded from these operations. One later charter from 1458 confirms that there were no exceptions to military service when the ruler organized a campaign.⁵¹ After the collapse of the Serbian state, the Ottomans took over a similar system of military organization. The Turkish legal provision for the *Sancağ* of Smederevo from 1536 determined that the *Vlachs* had to send one horseman for every five houses in the case of Sultan's campaign or service at the borders.⁵² Vlachs were a pastoral population with specific military obligations in medieval Serbia and the Ottoman Empire,⁵³ but it can be assumed that other people sometimes had similar duties. This kind of recruitment system was not unknown at the time. In October 1397, the Diet of Hungary in Timisoara ordered all landowners to equip one horse-archer for every 20 peasants for war.⁵⁴ This proportion changed several times over the course of the fifteenth century. According to the decision of the Diet in 1435,

47 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma despota Stefana*, 260; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 165, 193.

48 Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, 93.

49 Chalkokondyles, *Histories*, 242–43; Nikolić, *Vizantijski pisci o Srbiji*, 39.

50 Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, 90–91.

51 Rački, "Prilozi za sbirku," 158.

52 Bojanić, *Turski zakoni*, 47; Bojanić-Lukač, "Ko je učestvovao u zamičnoj vojsci," 242; Isailović, "Legislation Concerning the Vlachs," 38; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 168.

53 Bojanić, *Turski zakoni*, 47; Isailović, "Legislation Concerning the Vlachs," 30–31, 36–40.

54 Bak, Engel and Sweeney, *Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, vol. 2, 22; Borosy, "The Militia Portalis," 63; Held, "Military Reform," 131–32; Held, "Peasants in Arms," 81; Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service*, 149–51; Pálósfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 21–22.

every nobleman had to lead three mounted archers to the war for every peasant tenant. This kind of army is known in the secondary literature as a *militia portalis*.⁵⁵

Both charters point out the obligation of to participate in warfare in the border areas that were called *krajište* in medieval Serbia. It is worth noting that *Dušan's Code* emphasizes the responsibility of noblemen from border areas to defend the country. They had to make up for all the damages inflicted by the enemy army which entered and came passed through their border areas.⁵⁶ The importance of these regions increased as a result of the Ottoman threat. Turks used the *akinji*⁵⁷ detachments, which often disturbed border zones.⁵⁸ The aforementioned Ottoman regulation stipulated that every house of Vlachs give one cavalryman or infantryman in the case of urgent tasks in the border areas. This kind of recruitment was called *zamanica*, which was a Serbian term indicating the origin of this institution.⁵⁹ The aforementioned charter from 1458 points out that no one was exempted from the obligation of *zamanica*.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it is assumed that the army was gathered in a similar way in the regions *krajište* in the Serbian Despotate.⁶¹ It is certain that this kind of system of mobilization was applied in actions against brigands.⁶² The question is how effective the armies recruited in these ways were, because probably most of the peasants did not have adequate equipment or weapons for war. When it comes to Hungary, historians have concluded that the detachments were made up of peasants and had a secondary role, while the backbone of the army was still heavy cavalry. That is the reason why Hungarian kings spent a lot of money on hiring mercenaries in the fifteenth century.⁶³ The situation was to a certain extent different in the Serbian state due to the presence of the Vlach population. However, it seems that Vlachs and peasants could be effective against *akinji* or bandits, but it is hard to imagine that they made a significant contribution to the

55 Bak, Engel and Sweeney, *Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, vol. 2, 78; Borosy, "The Militia Portalis," 64; Held, "Military Reform," 133; Held, "Peasants in Arms," 82; Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service*, 150; Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 23.

56 Bubalo, *Dušanov zakonik*, 85, 166.

57 *Akinji* troops were irregular cavalry during the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire: *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 1, s.v. "Akindji," 340.

58 Imber, *The Structure of Power*, 190, 252, 254, 256, 260–65, 353.

59 Bojanić, *Turski zakoni*, 47; Bojanić-Lukač, "Ko je učestvovao u zamičkoj vojsci," 242; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 190–91.

60 Rački, "Prilozi za sbirku," 158; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 190.

61 Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 190–92.

62 Ibid, 165, 193.

63 Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service*, 151–56; Held, "Military Reform," 135–36.

conflicts against organized Ottoman armies. Various sources testify that Serbian Despots hired foreign mercenaries.⁶⁴ King Sigismund once pointed out that Despot Stefan paid them more than one golden florin per campaign. Namely, he stipulated a salary of one florin for mercenaries in 1432/1433.⁶⁵ He certainly used revenue from new taxes for this purpose.

The Ottoman threat was the reason for the expansion of the institution of *pronoia* in Serbian areas.⁶⁶ As was the case in Byzantium, Serbian rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty granted nobles this kind of estate in exchange for military service. Under this condition, *pronoia* differed from patrimony (*baština*), even when it could be passed on to an heir.⁶⁷ The *pronoia* retained these main characteristics during the time of the Lazarević and Branković dynasties.⁶⁸ This was the crucial reason why Serbian Despots gave *pronoiai* rather than patrimonies.⁶⁹ Thus, the prominent noble Logthete (chancellor) Stefan Ratković had more than 20 villages as *pronoia* before 1458. He did not have a patrimony.⁷⁰ For the sake of comparison, it should be noted that roughly 30 years earlier, the most powerful nobleman *Čelnik* (comes palatinus) Radič possessed a patrimony that consisted of around 60 villages.⁷¹ The system of *pronoia* also expanded in Byzantium after 1371.⁷²

It is impossible to estimate accurately the military potential of the Serbian state in the first half of the fifteenth century. The draft of the defense plan of King Sigismund from 1433 foresaw that the Serbian Despot would be obliged to equip 8,000 cavalymen. Primarily, this calculation concerned his estates in Hungary.⁷³ According to one estimate, Despot Đurađ participated in the “Long campaign” with 8,000 warriors.⁷⁴ Allegedly, the despot’s voivode Altoman led 12,000 soldiers during the campaign in Zeta in 1452. The members of this detachment also included Turks.⁷⁵

64 Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, 183; Konstantin Filozof, “Život Stefana Lazarevića,” 313, 319–20; Ćirković, “Cena najamnika,” 16, 18; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 184–85.

65 Döry, Bónis and Bácskai, *Decreta Regni Hungariae*, 411; Ćirković, “Cena najamnika,” 18.

66 Ostrogorski, *Pronija*, 149.

67 Ostrogorski, *Pronija*, 135–36; Bartusis, “Serbian pronoia,” 191, 210.

68 Ivanović, “Pronija u državi srpskih despota,” 326–32.

69 Ibid, 337.

70 Rački, “Prilozi za sbirku,” 156–58.

71 Stojanović, “Stari srpski hrisovulji,” 3–5; Ivanović, “Pronija u državi srpskih despota,” 337.

72 Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 551–58; Ostrogorski, *Pronija*, 109–11.

73 Held, “Military Reform,” 136; Ćirković, “Cena najamnika,” 18.

74 Iorga, *Notes et extraits* III, 109.

75 Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 380–81.

To improve the defense of the state, Despot Stefan introduced significant changes to the local government system in the first decade of the fifteenth century. It should be underlined that this reform was not carried out simultaneously on the whole territory of the Lazarević family.⁷⁶ The new administrative units were organized according to the model of the former marches (*kerajišta*) headed by voivodes.⁷⁷ The regions under their authority were called “vlasti.” The head offices of these administrative units were usually in fortified towns.⁷⁸ The voivode was mentioned for the first time in a town in 1411.⁷⁹ Indeed, there was an important difference between the former administrators of marches and voivodes. The first were the most powerful noblemen in their marches, while the voivodes were appointed directly by the ruler, who could change them at any time.⁸⁰ These nobles lost the title of voivode after they left or were removed from office.⁸¹ The military duties of new commanders were certainly primary. Unfortunately, the surviving sources do not provide much information about how they performed these obligations. The charter of Despot Stefan for the monastery of Great Lavra from 1427 confirms that the voivode led the army in his march.⁸² In major towns such as Belgrade and Novo Brdo, they had assistants in military affairs who carried the title *the voivode of the tower* (*keulski vojvoda*).⁸³ Quite certainly they had similar responsibilities to defend the country as commanders of marches. In addition to military duties, the voivodes also had a range of civilian competencies. On the basis of the *Novo Brdo Legal Code* from 1412, one can conclude that the voivode decided in cases of criminal offenses concerning murder, robbery, banditry, burning, and kidnapping.⁸⁴ Together with authorities from other towns, he judged in civil litigations.⁸⁵ The regulations of the same code enumerate different revenues of the voivode from customs and court fines. Thus, the voivode received the entire amount of the fines for criminal offenses.

76 Ivanović, “Jedan pogled,” 170–71.

77 Blagojević, “Krajišta srednjovekovne Srbije,” 40, 42.

78 Stojanović, “Stari srpski hrisovulji,” 3–6; Lascaris, “Actes serbes de Vatopedi,” 184; Rački, “Prilozi za sbirku,” 157–58; Dinić, “Vlasti za vreme Despotovine,” 237–39, 242; Blagojević, “Krajišta srednjovekovne Srbije,” 40; Blagojević, *Državna uprava*, 294; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 255.

79 Ćirković, Ćuk, and Veselinović, “Srbija u dubrovačkim testamentima,” 39; Dinić, *Iz dubrovačkog arhiva*, 28; Dinić, *Za istoriju rudarstva*, 72.

80 Blagojević, “Krajišta srednjovekovne Srbije,” 40–42.

81 Ivanović, “Jedan pogled,” 171; Božić, “Zetske vojvode,” 187–88.

82 Mladenović, *Povelje i pisma despota Stefana*, 260; Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota*, 165, 193.

83 Radojčić, *Zakon o rudnicima*, 51; Veselinović, “Vladarsko i komunalno” 134.

84 Radojčić, *Zakon o rudnicima*, 51; Ivanović, “Jedan pogled,” 172–73.

85 Radojčić, *Zakon o rudnicima*, 52.

He shared other revenues with comes (*kenes*) and the councils of burghers.⁸⁶ He also received many products made by craftsman free of charge.⁸⁷ It is most probable that other voivodes supported themselves in a similar way. Based on documents, one can conclude that the voivodes of Zeta (a coastal province of the Serbian Despotate) had special authorities which made them a kind of ruler's governors.⁸⁸ However, the new administrative organization was not introduced in the whole state. In the case of the Mačva area (the northwestern part of the Despotate), the reason may lie in the fact that Hungary claimed supreme authority over this area.⁸⁹ Furthermore, this region was less threatened by the Turks compared to other areas of the Serbian state. Also, the "vlasti" were not organized in the region of the Brankovići because of its special status with regards to the Ottomans.⁹⁰ The institution of *kephale* remained until this area fell under the Turkish rule in 1455.⁹¹ Some data indicate that this region also had a governor with similar authorities as the voivode of Zeta.⁹² The main goal of such local government organization was to strengthen the defense of the country.⁹³

The Serbian ruler paid great attention to the construction, restoration, and defense of the fortresses from the last decades of the fourteenth century. The dependent population in medieval Serbia had the obligation to build, renew, and defend fortifications.⁹⁴ Prince Lazar built Kruševac as his capital in the 1370s.⁹⁵ The construction of his foundation Ravanica together with the fortress was completed by the beginning of the following decade.⁹⁶ His nobleman Nenada constructed Koprijan south of Niš in 1371/1372.⁹⁷ The town of Stalać, northeast of Kruševac, was also built during his reign.⁹⁸ Furthermore, in 1387,

86 Ibid., 51–53, 55.

87 Radojčić, *Zakon o rudnicima*, 54; Veselinović, "Vladarsko i komunalno," 135.

88 Božić, "Zetske vojvode," 178–80; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 144.

89 Rački, "Prilozi za sbirku," 156–57; Mišić, "Posedi velikog logoteta," 12–13; Ivanović, "Jedan pogled," 176.

90 Dinić, "Vlasti za vreme Despotovine," 242–43.

91 Ibid., 243; Blagojević, *Državna uprava*, 274–77.

92 Ivanović, "Jedan pogled," 176–77; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 328, 354.

93 Dinić, "Vlasti za vreme Despotovine," 238; Blagojević, *Državna uprava*, 293; Ivanović, "Jedan pogled," 171, 177.

94 *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, s.v. "Gradozidanije," "Gradobljudenje," 125–26.

95 Spremić, "Kruševac u XIV i XV veku," 108–9; *Leksikon gradova i trgova*, "Kruševac," 152.

96 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 168.

97 Tomović, Gordana, *Morfologija ćirilskih natpisa*, 78–79; *Leksikon gradova i trgova*, "Koprijan," 140.

98 Minić, and Vukadin, *Srednjovekovni Stalać*, 7–11. 163.

Prince Lazar and Vuk Branković decreed that Ragusans, who had real estate in their towns, should have the obligation to build and defend fortresses.⁹⁹ The same regulations also applied at the time of their successors.¹⁰⁰ After the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, fortresses were even more important, because the Serbian army was not big enough against the Turks in the open field. Despot Stefan Lazarević made great efforts to building a Belgrade fort. His court was located in the Belgrade Upper Town.¹⁰¹ Constantine the Philosopher, his biographer, wrote that the despot's capital was surrounded by rivers on three sides and that the town had two ports.¹⁰² Belgrade was the last refuge of the despot when his brother Vuk attacked him, together with Turkish forces, in 1409.¹⁰³ The aforementioned charter of Stefan Lazarević for the monastery of Great Lavra from January 1427 indicates that the Despot was concerned about fortifying Belgrade until his death. This document envisaged that people from new estates of the monastery had to take part in the construction of his capital.¹⁰⁴ The villages that had this obligation were more than 150 kilometers away from Belgrade.¹⁰⁵ This example shows how this obligation could be difficult for the dependent population. One should not exclude the possibility that this obligation was transformed into a cash fee. From 1406/1407 to 1418, Despot Stefan built the monastery of Resava, his main foundation.¹⁰⁶ The monastery was inside the fort, which had eleven high and powerful towers.¹⁰⁷ We know less about the activities of the Branković family in this field during the same period. It is certain that they constructed the fortress of Vučitrn, where their court was located.¹⁰⁸

According to the Treaty of Tata, Đurađ Branković had to hand over Belgrade to Hungarian King Sigismund at the end of September or beginning of October 1427, after the death of Despot Stefan Lazarević.¹⁰⁹ That is why he decided to build the new capital city of Smederevo. The founder's inscription on

99 Mladenović, *Povelje kneza Lazara*, 193; Šuica, and Golubović, "Povelja Vuka Brankovića," 101.

100 Veselinović, "Povelja despota Stefana Lazarevića," 157; Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, 16.

101 Popović, *The Fortress of Belgrade*, 29–37; Popović, "Dvor vladara i vlastele," 44–45.

102 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 286–87.

103 Ibid, 291–92; Purković, Miodrag, *Knez i despot Stefan Lazarević*, 88–91.

104 Mladenović, *Povelje kneza Lazara*, 260.

105 About the geographical location of these villages, see Blagojević, "Manastirski posedi kruševačkog kraja," 45.

106 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 288–90; Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, 224; Stanojević, Mirković and Bošković, *Manastir Manasija*, 2.

107 Stanojević, Mirković, and Bošković, *Manastir Manasija*, 11–20.

108 *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, s.v. "Вучитрн," 79.

109 Krstić, "Kralj Žigmund u Borči," 115, 118–26.

one town tower suggests that the construction of the fortress was completed in 1429/1430.¹¹⁰ Historians assume that by that time the *Small Town* with six towers had been built.¹¹¹ The court of Đurađ Branković was there.¹¹² The *Great Town* with nineteen massive towers was erected by 1439.¹¹³ The fortress had a triangle shape and was surrounded by the two rivers. The walls toward the land were over four meters thick, while the others were around two meters thick. The towers were over twenty meters high and more than eleven meters wide.¹¹⁴ Smederevo was the largest Serbian medieval fortress according to the area it encompassed.¹¹⁵ The construction of the fort left a negative trace in the folk tradition, which blamed Đurađ's spouse Irene for the great effort of the population during the works.¹¹⁶ The strength of the fort was demonstrated during the Ottoman siege of 1439. The defenders handed over Smederevo to Turks after three months due to exhaustion and hunger.¹¹⁷

Finally, frescoes in Serbian monasteries also offer evidence of the militarization of Serbian society during the period of the Ottoman threat. Depictions of "holy warriors" were given a significant place on the walls of prominent monasteries. Sixteen holy warriors were painted in Ravanica, the foundation of Prince Lazar. Their number was particularly large compared to the total number of saint figures in the lower zone of the naos.¹¹⁸ The protective aid of the holy warriors was also emphasized on the walls of other monasteries at the time which were built by monks or by Lazar's noblemen. The main foundation of Despot Stefan, the monastery of Resava, contains a depiction of fourteen holy warriors. On the basis of the selection of the figures, one can conclude that the despot regarded his father's monastery as a model. The unknown painters followed the Byzantine iconographic canon. As a result, the Resava holy warriors resemble Roman centurions more than they do Serbian soldiers of Despot Stefan. Nevertheless, some of the weapons, such as the

110 Tomović, *Morfologija ćirilčkih natpisa*, 110; Popović, *Smederevo Fortress*, 24–26; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 130

111 Popović, *Smederevo Fortress*, 22–32; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 126, 130.

112 Popović, *Smederevo Fortress*, 6, 8, 27, 30–31, 45, 50, 53, 55–56, 60, 62–64.

113 Popović, *Smederevo Fortress*, 57, 64; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 126, 130.

114 Popović, *Smederevo Fortress*, 22–29, 34–42; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 125–26.

115 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 225.

116 Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, 1–2; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 131.

117 Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, 177; Orbin, *Kraljevstvo Slovena*, 111; Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, 232; Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 241–15; Nikolić, *Vižantijski pisci o Srbiji*, 105–6, 110–12.

118 Marković, "Sveti ratnici iz Resave," 192–93, 195.

triangular shield, the mace, the saber, and the bow quiver, can be tentatively used to reconstruct the military equipment of Serbian warriors from that time.¹¹⁹ Contemporary medieval armor is present in the images of the holy warriors from the Kalenić monastery.¹²⁰ Nun Jefimija in her literary work urged the Holy Prince to ask the holy warriors to help his sons Stefan and Vuk.¹²¹

Finally, the first half of the fifteenth century bore witness to a strengthening of chivalric culture in the Serbian state. Constantine the Philosopher, biographer of Stefan Lazarević, noted that one despot's knight won at a tournament at "the council of all princes."¹²² It is assumed that this tournament was held in 1412 at the Hungarian royal court in Buda.¹²³ He also pointed out that the despot had the right to pronounce royal knights. According to him, these Hungarian noblemen were proud because Stefan gave them the marks of chivalry.¹²⁴ Also, Serbian versions of chivalrous narratives, such as *The Romance of Alexander the Great* and *The Romance of Troy*, were very popular in this period.¹²⁵

The militarization measures failed to prevent the Serbian medieval state from falling under Ottoman rule in 1459.¹²⁶ However, the efforts of Serbian rulers had long-term consequences. As already mentioned, Turks took over some forms of Serbian military organization. The population of Vlachs had a significant military role in Ottoman border areas in the Balkans.¹²⁷ On the other hand, in 1463/1464, Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490) began to attract Serbian nobles to his territory and granted them estates.¹²⁸ In this way, the Hungarian ruler got warriors who knew the terrain under Turkish rule well.¹²⁹ Therefore it can be said that Serbs were a significant factor in the Ottoman-Hungarian wars.

119 Ibid, 197–216.

120 Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj*, 51, 61, 71, 89, 103–4, 116, 125, 128, 133, 143, 149.

121 Monahinja Jefimija, *Književni radovi*, 47–48.

122 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 312.

123 Filipović, "Viteške svečanosti u Budimu," 285–304; Bojanin, *Zabave i svetkovine*, 356–57; Purković, Miodrag, *Knez i despot Stefan Lazarević*, 101–2; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 87.

124 Konstantin Filozof, "Život Stefana Lazarevića," 312.

125 Pavlović, "Roman u staroj srpskoj," 12–13; Marinković, "Roman kao književni rod," 21–35; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 340–41.

126 Spremić, *Despot Đurađ Branković*, 544–45.

127 Miljković-Bojanić, *Smederevski sandžak*, 227–41; Miljković, and Krstić, *Braničevo*, 62–64; Isailović, "Legislation Concerning the Vlachs," 35–40.

128 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 376–78, 431; Krstić, "Which Realm Will You Opt For," 145–46, 149.

129 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 379.

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