

"The Good Horse and Arms":
Nobility of the Serbian Despotate

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Miloš Ivanović, a distinguished researcher of medieval Serbian and Balkan history, is a member of the younger generation of scholars. Being one of the leading medievalists, his activities and published works are very well known among international scholarship as well. Ivanović's new book, dedicated to the core of his expert interests, although as a doctoral dissertation it has been present among students for more than a decade [Foreword, p. 3-10], now has become accessible to the all types of audience in a supplemented and expanded form.

The structure of the book is complex and very transparent, so that a larger number of chapters allows easy access of results of multidisciplinary analyses. Thanks to the widely conceived introductory chapters, the author gradually introduces the reader to the issues to which the main part of the book is dedicated, from a thorough presentation of emergence of the feudal class of the medieval Serbian state [1. Nobles in the Serbian state before 1402; 1.1 Formation of the feudal class (pp. 11-21)], through the strengthening of the nobility during the reign of the late Nemanids [1.2 Feudal lords in the Nemanid kingdom and empire (pp. 22-86)], to the rise of the aristocrats in the age of the weakening and dissolution of the state [1.3 Feudal class in the era of regional lords (pp. 86-103)]. These chapters represent an introduction to analysis of dynamic changes in the position of nobility in relation to the supreme power [2. Relationship between ruler and nobles (1402-1459)], viewed in several stages [Suppression of power of high nobility in the reign of despot Stefan Lazarević (1402-1427) (pp. 105-129); Decline of the ruler's control over nobility in the reign of despot Đurađ Branković (1427-1456) (pp. 129-172); Disintegration of the state and nobility under the last despots (1456-1459) (pp. 172-183)], within the existing legal framework [3. Legal rights and obligations of nobility (p. 183-184)], and basic legal and property regulations [Legal rights and obligations of the hereditary nobles (p. 184-221)], as well as specific ones [Legal rights and obligations of *proniar*ii (p. 222) -236)].

The key segment of the book [4. Nobility in the state administration] deals with the activities of the feudal class in the administrative system of the Serbian Despotate through analysis of the original material about well-known individuals, from aristocrats close to the government top [4.1 Court nobility (p. 237-284)], and nobles connected to hierarchical entities [4.2 Nobility in local administration (pp. 284-354)], up to special cases of prominent individuals [4.3 Landlords without a title in the service of the ruler (pp. 355-358)] and others [5. Nobility outside system of the state administration (pp. 358-377)], evidenced by rare sources. Extensive material on the participation of Byzantines, Ottomans, Ragusans and citizens of other Dalmatian communes in the service of Serbian despots is dealt with in a separate subchapter [6. Foreigners as nobles (pp. 377-419)]. In accordance with Ivanović's previous research work, which is characterized by a wide range of topics and reliance on different types of sources, the central parts of his book convey the significant results of archival, archaeological and art-historical research, on the basis of which it is possible to reconstruct to a greater extent the daily life of a medieval nobleman and his entire environment [7. Possessions and income of nobility (pp. 420-434)], and better understand his private, family, as well as religious habitus [8. The material and spiritual life of nobility (pp. 434-478)].

Ivanović writes clearly, in an inspired manner, surely guiding ideas of the whole, with the aim of systematically studying extensive and diverse material and bringing it closer to the reader in an appropriate way. Just as the basic discussion is preceded by important chapters that provide a complete insight into the discussed issues, it is also concluded by chapters illuminating not only the role of nobility as a supporting class in the medieval society [9. Epilogue], but also its duration in significantly changed circumstances in diaspora [Nobles of the Serbian despots in Hungary after 1459 (pp. 479-490)], under their new masters [Serbian nobles within the Ottoman Empire (pp. 491-506)], and among those who were previously part of the same system [Nobles of the Crnojević (pp. 506-515)].

The book closes with a special chapter [Conclusion - nobility and statehood (pp. 515-517)], which summarizes Ivanović's multi-layered research of the aristocratic class of the Serbian Despotate, followed by bibliographical appendices: List of abbreviations (pp. 518-519), Unpublished sources (pp. 519-520), Internet (p. 520), Published sources (p. 520-533) and Literature (p. 533-564).

This extensive and comprehensive book sheds light on the crucial period of medieval Serbian history. Due to the meticulous approach of the author, his tendency to fully devote his attention to every problem, diverse but also scarcely preserved source material was impeccably made into attractive text that has already gained important place in modern medieval studies.