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## **SERBS AT THE HUNGARIAN ROYAL COURT(S) IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE BATTLE OF MOHÁCS\*\***

**Abstract:** The paper analyzes the role of members of the Serbian elite in Hungary in the turbulent years after the Battle of Mohács (1526), when the country was divided between two kings and faced with increased Ottoman pressure. In that period, the Serbian nobility mainly supported John Szapolyai, including their new, self-appointed, charismatic leader, Jovan Nenad. In the first half of 1527, some of them - such as Despot Stefan Berislavić of Grabarje and Jovan Nenad - joined Ferdinand of Habsburg's side, but the latter was destroyed in several battles by Szapolyai's followers. This had a negative impact on the presence of Serbs at both royal courts, as their role became increasingly marginal. After Berislavić's death in 1535, this was particularly noticeable at the Habsburg court, where only one member of the Bakić family was admitted to the court in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. There were more Serbian nobles at King John's court. Many of the Serbian nobles converted to Catholicism and then Lutheranism, which prevented the Orthodox population from accepting them as their leaders. Despite this, King John's cousin, Petar Petrović (Péter Petrovics), remained the de facto lord of the Temes region (Temesköz) until his death in 1557. But by the 1560s, the Serbian nobility had disappeared from the Szapolyai court.

**Keywords:** Despot Stefan Berislavić, Jovan Nenad, Pavle Bakić, Petar Petrović (Péter Petrovics), King John Szapolyai, King Ferdinand of Habsburg, Kingdom of Hungary, the Serbs in Hungary, royal courts.

Studies of medieval Hungarian-Serbian relations often seem to discuss two separate issues under this heading. On the one hand, it seems as if the Serbs were present in Hungarian history only and exclusively as part of the border defence against

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the Ottomans, i.e. their role was limited to military history.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it is as if the Serbian despots were foreign bodies at the Hungarian royal court, and only temporarily stationed there as emigrant rulers. Both tendencies are the result of a nation-centred view of history that considers medieval states as national entities. Yet, in the countries of the Angevins, the Luxembourgs, the Habsburgs, the Brankovićs, the Jagiellons and the Hunyadis, ethnicity was a question of little importance in the context of elites and people without privileges, since this was not the basis on which the royal court, the society or the country itself was organised. With regard to the latter, it is sufficient to note that, on the one hand, the title *rex Servie*, i.e. *King of Serbia*, was added to the Hungarian royal titles in 1202 and remained there until 1918, regardless of the political situation.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Hungarian political elite seriously considered electing a king from the Serbian princely Branković family to the Hungarian throne.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, late medieval Hungarian-Serbian relations were not solely based on the “us and them” distinction. This approach became completely untenable after the final fall of Serbia in 1459, due to the absence of “them”. From the moment the Serbian despot and his entourage appeared at the court of King Sigismund, the Serbian nobility became as much a part of the history of the Kingdom of Hungary as the Italian Pippo Spano, or the Romanian Hunyadi, the Croatian Krbava, or the Cilli family of Krajina.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, due to their different language, script and religion, the Serbian aristocracy had some special internal relations within the Hungarian aristocracy, and some of these peculiarities can be observed even today. It is obvious that the Branković, Berislavić,<sup>5</sup> Belmužević and Jakšić families stayed away from the county offices because

<sup>1</sup> Ferenc Szakály, “Phases of Turco–Hungarian Warfare before the Battle of Mohács (1365–1526)”, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 33/1 (1979) 65–111.

<sup>2</sup> Judit Gál, “IV. Béla és I. Oroš szerb uralkodó kapcsolata”, *Századok* 147/2 (2013) 472–473; Jovanka Kalić, “Država i crkva u Srbiji XIII veka”, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta*, 46 (2009) 129–137.

<sup>3</sup> Tamás Pálosfalvi, “Egy Brankovics a magyar trónon? Egy királyválasztás kérdőjelei (1440)”, in: Árpád Hornyák (szerk.), *A keresztény Európa határán. Fejezetek az ezeréves magyar–szerb együttélés történetéből*, Újvidék 2020, 89–98.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandar Krstić, “‘Which Realm Will You Opt for?’ – the Serbian Nobility between the Ottomans and the Hungarians in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century”, in: *State and Society in the Balkans before and after the Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, Beograd 2017, 129–163; idem, “Szerb despoták és nemesek Magyarországon államszerkezetében 1404 és 1459 között”, in: Árpád Hornyák (szerk.), *A keresztény Európa határán: fejezetek az ezeréves magyar–szerb együttélés történetéből*, Újvidék 2020, 73–88; idem, “Familiars of the Serbian despots in and from the territory of Banat (1411–1458)”, in: Zoltan Jusztin (ed.), *Politics and Society in the Central and South-Eastern Europe (13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, Cluj-Napoca 2019, 93–111; Nada B. Zečević, “Familiars, egregii and homines despoti nonnulli: the retinue on the Hungarian estates of Despot George Branković and its social capacity (1427–1456)”, *Temas Medievales* 29/2 (2021) 1–19.

<sup>5</sup> Marija Karbić, “Hrvatsko plemstvo u borbi protiv Osmanlija. Primjer obitelji Berislavića Grabarskih iz Slavonije”, *Povijesni prilozi* 31 (2006) 71–85.

they felt that these positions were inferior. They also tried to marry among one another, maintained lively contacts with the Orthodox monasteries of Mount Athos and Srem, and corresponded in the Slavonic language.<sup>6</sup> This, in addition to their Hungarus consciousness stemming from their Hungarian landed status, gave them a special character within the aristocracy of the Kingdom of Hungary. The tradition of special court presence did not end with the extinction of the Branković family in 1502 or the Battle of Mohács in 1526. It continued in the courts of Ferdinand I of Habsburg (1526–1564) and the Szapolyais. As both Hungarian and Serbian historiography tended to focus on the history of the Bakić family,<sup>7</sup> it seemed for a long time that the majority of the Serbs found their place on the Habsburg side, but recent research has revealed a different picture. Namely, a number of Serbian nobles also served at the court of King John I of Szapolyai, and their positions suggest that medieval practices were more likely to have continued here.

After the Battle of Mohács, the Serbs in the Kingdom of Hungary had to decide on a survival strategy. They had three options: to side with Ferdinand (I) of Habsburg, to follow John (I) Szapolyai or to serve Sultan Suleyman (I). The situation was no different for the Hungarians, but their situation was easier as, except for those living in the Srem region, they did not have to recognise Ottoman supremacy, so they only had to choose between the two kings.

According to the sources, in the autumn of 1526, the Serbian nobility, like the Hungarians, lined up behind King John. In September, he was visited in Tokaj by his former groom,<sup>8</sup> Jovan Nenad with ten horsemen, and in return for his services, he was given the Bács county to settle with the Serbs who had fled from the Srem region.<sup>9</sup> With his charismatic personality, he became the leader of the Serbs who were in search of their place after the Battle of Mohács, which shows the desperation

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<sup>6</sup> Miroslav Timotijević, "Sremski despoti Brankovići i osnivanje manastira Krušedola", *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti* 27–28 (1991–1992) 127–150; idem, *Manastir Krušedol I–II*, Beograd 2008; Aleksander Krstić, "Posedi Jakšića u Slavoniji i Sremu", *Istorijski časopis* 70 (2021) 177–213; Adrian Magina, "Acta Jakšićiana: Documents Regarding the Jakšić of Nădlac Family in Romanian Archives", *Initial. A Review of Medieval Studies* 6 (2018) 159–188; Elek Szaszko & Aleksandar Krstić, *Jaksics Demeter (nagylaki), életrajzi szócikk*; idem, *Jaksics Márk (nagylaki), életrajzi szócikk*. Here I thank the authors for allowing me to use their manuscripts before publication.

<sup>7</sup> Including but not limited to Aleksa Ivić, *Istorija Srba u Ugarskoj od pada Smedereva do seobe pod Čarnojevićem: 1459–1690*, Zagreb 1914; Ferenc Szakály, "Szerbek Magyarországon – Szerbek a magyar történelemben (Vázlat)", in: István Zombori (szerk.), *A szerbek Magyarországon*, Szeged 1991, 11–50; Nenad Lemajić, *Bakići, porodica poslednjeg srpskog despota*, Novi Sad, Sremska Mitrovica 1995; idem, "The Bakićes as an example of the social rise of vlach families in the early Ottoman period", *Istraživanja. Journal of Historical Researches* 31 (2020) 93–111.

<sup>8</sup> Szaniszló Smolka, "'Fekete' Iván", *Századok* 17 (1883) 4.

<sup>9</sup> Szerémi György II. Lajos és János királyok házi káplánja Emlékirata Magyarország romlásáról, 1484–1543, Közli Gusztáv Wenzel, Pest 1857, 126 (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica* II. Scriptores 1).

having set in among them. The Ottoman campaign to Buda decimated them in the summer and probably again in the autumn and their nobles were unable to defend them. It was in this apocalyptic atmosphere that Jovan, taking advantage of his physical defect, appeared and proclaimed himself a descendant of the House of Mrnjavčević, the legendary King Marko.<sup>10</sup> After taking the oath of allegiance, Nenad returned to the area between the Danube and the Tisza, established his residence in Szabadka (today: Subotica, Serbia), and in November recaptured Cserög (today: Čerević, Serbia) on the right bank of the Danube. At the same time, the troops of the Serbian despot Stjepan Berislavić captured nearby Bánmonostor (today: Banoštor, Serbia).<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, his exact whereabouts are not known and he probably did not attend the coronation of King John. However, several documents from 1527 show that he was his supporter during those months. The lack of sources about him suggests that he had little influence and was not considered the supreme leader of the Serbs.

Pál Bakić, who survived the Battle of Mohács, also appeared in Tokaj, and it was he who captured Székesfehérvár in October, at the head of 200 horsemen. He took part in the funeral of King Louis II, and afterwards in the coronation.<sup>12</sup> Radić Božić, a veteran from Száva-szentdemeter<sup>13</sup> (today: Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia) and Mohács, captain of the Danubian boatmen, who had come to Székesfehérvár from the anti-Ottoman struggles, was also present at the event.<sup>14</sup>

In the history of medieval Hungarian coronations, King John's was undoubtedly the most prestigious for the Serbian nobles and their military escort. Of course, the loss of the Hungarian nobility in the Battle of Mohács and the absence of the Habsburg pretenders also played a role. During the coronation, the new monarch rode out of the city to brandish the sword of Saint Stephen at various locations, accompanied by Pál Bakić and the Serbian cavalry, who, according to György Szerémi, marched with dignity, unlike the Hungarians. The feeling of home was further enhanced among them by the fact that King John was able to communicate with them in their mother tongue as his mother was Polish. We also learn from Szerémi that

<sup>10</sup> S. Smolka, "‘Fekete’ Iván", 6; Đokica Jovanović, "From Myth to Ideology. The Case of Serbia (Some Manifestations), *Myśl Polityczna. Political Thought*, No. 5/16 (2022) 47–48.

<sup>11</sup> "Hodie accepimus litteras a despoto Rasciae, in quibus scribit eum civitatem quoque et sedem episcopatus mei, Banmonostrha vocata a Tureis liberasse et milites suos ibi imposuisse, scribit praeterea despotus eum a se petere bombardas, velle transire Savum, invadere terras hostiles." István Brodarics to Andrzej Krzycki and Jan Tamowski Pozsony, [before 11 November 1526]. Péter Kasza (szerk.), *Stephanus Brodericus – Epistulae*. Budapest 2012, 165 (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum, Series Nova XIV).

<sup>12</sup> Recently: Szabolcs Varga, "Három esztendő alatt három uralkodó birtokában: koronánk vándorlása Mohács után (1526–1529)", in: Pálffy Géza (szerk.), *A Szent Korona magyarországi kalandjai (1301–2001)*, Budapest 2023, 137.

<sup>13</sup> Ede Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium* 1, Budapest 1918, 44.

<sup>14</sup> In October, Božić sent a Turkish prisoner to John, i.e. he was not with him. Szerémi György *emlékirata*, 128. According to Szentkláray, the captain of the Danubian boatmen came to Buda from Bratislava, from the entourage of Queen Mary. Jenő Szentkláray, *A dunai hajóhadak története*, Budapest 1885, 102.

Božić spoke with the monarch in Serbian.<sup>15</sup> All in all, we can say that in 1526 the Serbian nobles, due to their military experience, had a privileged role at the Szapolyai court, so the Battle of Mohács cannot be considered a turning point in this respect. A new princely court was formed in Subotica,<sup>16</sup> and the Serbs hoped to regain Srem under the leadership of King John.

In 1527, however, it became clear that King John did not even have enough power to keep Ferdinand of Habsburg, who had been elected against him, out of the country. The new sovereign, with the help of Queen Mary, almost immediately reached out to King John's supporters. As early as 26 January, a memorandum stated that Mary summoned the Serbian despot Stjepan Berislavić to pay the wages of his soldiers.<sup>17</sup> On 3 February, nearly 80 letters were sent to key dignitaries asking for their loyalty, including one to the despot.<sup>18</sup> This marked the beginning of several months of negotiations, during which Berislavić also formulated his own terms in April. He asked for the maintenance of 1000 horsemen, the titular prelicity of his brother Miklós Brodi, the castles of Valkó and Boró (today: Borovo, Croatia), the confirmation of his despotic office, as well as the castles of Sremska Mitrovica and Rednek (today: Vrdnik, Serbia), if they were recaptured.<sup>19</sup> The monarch accepted most of them, and thus the despot sided with him.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, on 13 April, Ivan Habardanecz returned from Subotica with the news that Tsar Jovan had sworn an oath of allegiance to Ferdinand.<sup>21</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> of this month, Ferdinand sent Tamás Podvinyai to Božić to get him on his side, but the captain of the Danubian boatmen stood by King John.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, on his master's orders, he even tried to keep the "black man" loyal to Szapolyai, but was unsuccessful.<sup>23</sup> The whereabouts of Bakić are unknown, but he probably sided with the Habsburgs after the defeat at Tokaj. In March 1528, he served

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<sup>15</sup> S. Smolka, "Fekete' Iván", 138, 142.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv [=ÖStA], Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv [=HHStA], Länderabteilungen, Ungarische Akten [=UA], Allgemeine Akten [=AA] Fasc. 3. Konv. A. fol. 76.

<sup>18</sup> S. Smolka, "Fekete' Iván", 16. Aleksa Ivić, *Spomenici Srba u Ugarskoj, Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji tokom XVI i XVII stoleća. Prvi deo, od 1527 do 1600 godine*, Novi Sad 1910, 1.

<sup>19</sup> ÖStA HHSTA UA AA Fasc. 4. Konv. A. fol. 31. Kiadva: Emilij Laszowski, *Monumenta Habsburgica regni Croatiae Dalmatiae Slavoniae*, knj. I, 1526–1530, Zagreb 1914, 50–51 (Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum meridionalium [=MSHSM] 35). On 22 February, Ferdinand mentioned to István Pemflinger that he wanted to lure Bakić and Božić over. ÖStA HHSTA UA AA Fasc. 3. Konv. B. fol. 81.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to the above, he also promised to redeem the Fejérkő castle estate, if he succeeded in redeeming it from the pledge-holder Péter Keglevics. He offered this with a light heart, of course, as he had no intention of paying off the deposit. ÖStA HHSTA Reichskanzlei [=RHK] Reichregisterbücher Ferdinand I. Bd. 1. fol. 102. A. Ivić, *Istorija Srba*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> ÖStA HHSTA UA AA Fasc. 4. Konv. A. fol. 35. E. Laszowski, *Monumenta Habsburgica I*, 56–58. Jenő Szentkláray, "Levelek Csernoevics Nenád Iván czár a "fekete ember" történetéhez: I. közlemény", in: *Történelmi Tár* 3 sorozat, 8 kötet (1885) 506–508.

<sup>22</sup> ÖStA HHSTA UA AA Fasc. 4. Konv. A. fol. 59. A. Ivić, *Spomenici Srba*, 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> ÖStA HHSTA UA AA Fasc. 4. Konv. A. fol. 86. Idézi: A. Ivić, *Istorija Srba*, 56.

under Hans Katzianer at Kassa (today: Košice, Slovakia),<sup>24</sup> and in early October 1528, he was again a supporter of the Habsburgs.<sup>25</sup>

In the summer of 1527, a civil war and a Hungarian-Serbian conflict took place simultaneously in the area between the Danube and the Tisza rivers, during which, on 22 July, Tsar Jovan was killed in Tornyoş (today: Tornjoş, Serbia) near Subotica.<sup>26</sup> Although the news favoured King John, the situation was in fact tragic and could not be resolved by peaceful means. The Serbs who had been driven out of the Srem region were looking for land, and they saw the territory of the nobles of the Bács county, who were among the main supporters of King John, as a suitable place. However, these nobles were strong enough to defend their estates, so after the death of the Serbs' leader they had no other choice but to accept the situation, which the majority did, or move back to the Ottoman side. The great tragedy of the Serbs after the Battle of Mohács was that they were worn down and settled on both sides of the border, and there was no longer a political elite that could hold them together despite territorial losses - as there were many examples of in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is true that on 3 November 1527, the Serbian despot was able to hoist one of the national flags<sup>27</sup> - perhaps the Croatian one - and he also sat at the end of the table at the coronation banquet in the company of Bálint Török, Péter Erdődy (I) and Ivan Krbava.<sup>28</sup> In 1528, the prince did his utmost to repel the Ottoman attack, for which he was given the title of captain of the Srem region (partium Syrmienensis capitaneus).<sup>29</sup> But in early 1529, because of the lack of support, he surrendered the castles of Bács (today: Bač, Serbia) and Félegyháza to the Turks,<sup>30</sup> incurring the wrath of Ferdinand. His mother, "despotissa" Elena (Ilona) Jaksić, was taken hostage first by László Móré and then by Péter Perényi, and was captured on 25 July at Kajdacs.<sup>31</sup> On the emperor's orders,

<sup>24</sup> E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 699.

<sup>25</sup> ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 9. Konv. B. fol. 15. 1528. okt. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ferenc Szakály, "Honkeresők (Megjegyzések Cserni Jován hadáról)", *Történelmi szemle* 22 (1979) 236.

<sup>27</sup> S. Varga: *Három esztendő*, 146.

<sup>28</sup> Géza Pálffy, „Koronázási lakomák a 15–17. századi Magyarországon. Az önálló magyar királyi udvar asztali ceremóniarendjének kora újkori továbbéléséről és a politikai elit hatalmi reprezentációjáról“, *Századok* 138/5 (2004) 1005.

<sup>29</sup> ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 8. Konv. B. fol. 15.

<sup>30</sup> ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 10. Konv. A. fol. 21.

<sup>31</sup> "... idem dominus Petrus se movisset unacum uxore et liberis et captiva matre domini dezpot, ut Budam veniat cum curribus octo octo oneratis suis rebus argenteis." Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [=MNL OL] P 1314, No. 18147. Quoted in S. Varga, *Három esztendő*, 149. There is a document according to which Ferdinand wanted to keep the widowed despot in the castle of László Móré in Rahlca (today: Orahovica, CRO) "relictam despotissam", which Móré refused, and suggested Tata or Komárom instead. 16 June 1529. Palota. László Móré to Ferdinand. ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 11. Konv. C. fol. 54–56. Published: E. Laszowski, *Monumenta Habsburgica I*, 177–178. Although the author refers to the person here as Berislavić's wife, the wording makes it clear that it is Jelena Jakšić. It seems likely that she came from Móré to Perényi in Siklós, and that is how she fell into the hands of the supporters of King John.

Ivan Habardanecz captured the despot in March or April,<sup>32</sup> who was detained in Buda in May.<sup>33</sup> From there, on 22 August, he was sent to Esztergom to be handed over to the king's men,<sup>34</sup> but the despot escaped on the way and ended up in the sultan's camp.<sup>35</sup> He was later released – in March 1530 and stayed with King John,<sup>36</sup> in July, he had a meeting with Simon Erdődy in Csázma (today: Čazma, Croatia),<sup>37</sup> and in November it was rumoured that he led the Ottoman troops coming to destroy Slavonia across the Sava at Kobas (today: Kobaš, Bosnia and Herzegovina).<sup>38</sup> In July of the following year, he was at the confluence of the Sava and the Una with his fleet,<sup>39</sup> and in April 1532, János Tahy was of the opinion that the despot was happy to lay his hands on others' estates.<sup>40</sup> In the years that followed, he appeared to be both a supporter of King John and a subject of the Sultan. However, after refusing to hand over his castles in Požega to Hüsrev Bey, he was killed by Ottoman soldiers in 1535.<sup>41</sup> His death ended the history of the Serbian despots. Although on 18 June 1527, following Berislavić's disloyalty,<sup>42</sup> King John granted the title (*Rasciae despotatus*) to Božić, the captain of the royal fleet of boatmen (*capitaneus nasadistarum nostrorum*), as he died shortly afterwards, he had no opportunity to use the title of despot to organise the Serbs. The same applies to Pavle (Pál) Bakić, who was appointed to this post by Ferdinand on 20 September 1537.<sup>43</sup> This was the last time that the title of the

<sup>32</sup> A. Ivić, *Spomenici Srba*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ferdinand asked the Council of Lieutenancy in Buda to send the despot to him. ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 11. Konv. B. fol. 73.

<sup>34</sup> ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 12. Konv. B. fol. 43–44.

<sup>35</sup> E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 661.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, 708.

<sup>37</sup> Lajos Thallóczy, *Bosnyák és szerb élet- s nemzedékrajzi tanulmányok*, Budapest 1909, 75.

<sup>38</sup> E. Laszowski, *Monumenta Habsburgica* I, 454–455.

<sup>39</sup> Emilij Laszowski, *Monumenta Habsburgica regni Croatiae Dalmatiae Slavoniae*, knj. II, 1531–1540, Zagreb 1916, 56 (MSHSM 38).

<sup>40</sup> "Despotus ad plures partes tabernaculam figit et se in bonis aliorum fovet, terretque..." E. Laszowski, *Monumenta Habsburgica* II, 105–106.

<sup>41</sup> Marija Karbić, "Hrvatsko plemstvo", 83–84.

<sup>42</sup> MNL OL E 148 Fasc. 938. No. 13. Quoted by J. Szentkláray, *A dunai hajóhadak*, 107. Thanks to András Péter Szabó for drawing my attention to the source. M. Karbić, "Hrvatsko plemstvo", 81; E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 699.

<sup>43</sup> "Vnde repetentes nobiscum non modo apertissima syncerae fidei, summáe affectionis et perpetuae constantiae haud obscura testimonia magnifici fidelis nobis dilecti Pauli Bakyth, Hussaronum nostrorum capitanei, qua e ille omni rerum euentu erga sacram regni nostri Hungáriáe é coronam ac nos per plures annos in plerisque laudabilibus, fidelissimis offitiis et obsequiis prosecutus est et etiam in boras totis viribus magnaque animi cum integritate et Additate adhuc impendere non desistit et in posterum poterit. Sed etiam eiusdem et actam in bellicis experientiam, fortitudinem, strenuitatem, sagacitatemque nostrarum partium esse duximus illum ipsum Paulum de regno nostro praefato ac nobis tam benemeritum, digno quopiam honore offitioque exornare. Itaque animo deliberato, motu proprio et ex certa scientia nostra eundem Paulum Bakyth in veruna et legitimum despotum regni nostri Rasciae deputauimus, ordinamus et constituimus, prout tenore praesentium deputamus, ordinamus

Serbian prince was used by a Hungarian ruler to organise the Serbs living in the country.

The reason for Bakić's appointment was that the emperor wanted to encourage the Serbs to prepare for the great campaign along the Drava. Although Berislavić had long been unreliable in the eyes of the Habsburgs, he was allowed to remain in his post until his death. We do not know why he appointed him now, but the reasons were certainly complex. What is puzzling, however, is that Ferdinand also ignored the appointment of the Croatian-Slavonian ban and, after the death of Ivan Krbava in 1531, tried to fill the post only with governors, without the consent of the local nobles and estates. However, bans were needed, as the failure of the 1537 campaign had shown, so the Habsburg monarch reverted to late medieval practice by appointing Petar Keglević (Péter Keglevics) and Tamás Nádasdy at the end of the year.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the Serbs, it is possible that the fall of Požega in 1536, the ensuing panic and the failure of retaking the territory were the decisive moments that led Ferdinand to reuse the title of despot. Bakić was chosen for his loyalty, military experience and respect among the Serbs. However, the Serbian hussar captain was killed in the battle of Gorjani on 9 October, so this had no effect. Due to the short time available, the news of the appointment did not spread this time either, and in the years following the Battle of Mohács, Berislavić was the only one mentioned as despot, and afterwards there was no other aristocrat of note to replace him at the Habsburg court.

Remembrance, of course, created new cults – it is enough to think of Stefan Štiljanović, who was in the service of László Móré and later Péter Perényi in the 1530s. His main stations were Marót (today: Morović, Croatia), Orahovica, Valpovo and Šikloš, and his appointment as castellan was the highlight of his career. He died sometime in 1543, and in 1545, he was already mentioned in the Šišatovac monastery in Srem as a “Serbian despot” and a “true prince”.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the Serbian homeland

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et constituimus decernentes et praesenti edicto nostro regio statuentes, ex nunc in antea omnibus et singulis honoribus, praeeminentis, iuribus et libertatibus uti, frui et gaudere debeat, quibus Rascianorum despotus uti, frui, gaudere et potiri debet et potest quomodolibet consuetudine vel de iure. Quocirca universis et singulis Rascianis in praefato regno nostro et alias ubilibet existentibus harum serie strictissime mandamus, quatenus praefatum Paulum Bakyth pro eorum vero et legitimo despot, in tali officio et dignitate a nobis constitutam, debita reverentia ament et observent, eique in omnibus licitis et honestis obediunt praecipienteque ea, quae ex officio suo fuerint, fideliter obtemperent, illaque exequantur.” Jovan Radonić, *Prilozi za istoriju Srba u Ugarskoj u XVI, XVII i XVIII veku* 1, Novi Sad 1909, XXVIII–XXIX. Recent partial publication: N. Lemajić, *Bakići*, 315. Mentioned by E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 720.

<sup>44</sup> Szabolcs Varga, „Nádasdy Tamás horvát-szlavón bánása (1537–1539)”, *Századok* 144/4 (2010) 793–822.

<sup>45</sup> Zoltán Erdős, “Emlékezeti rétegek és hatalmi igények a Štiljanović-hagyományban”, in: *Örökség, történelem, társadalom: A Hajnal István Kör Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület 2018. évi, szentendrei konferenciájának kötete*. Budapest 2020, 26–27; Petar Seletković, “Stefan Štiljanović – od kaštelana do despota i sveca”: (drugi dio), *Scrinia Slavonica* 23 (2023) 9–44.

became finally included in the liturgy of the Orthodox monasteries, but the Serbian flag also appeared at the coronation ceremonies of the Hungarian kings in 1563, and the title “rex Serviae” was retained in the Hungarian royal titles.<sup>46</sup> To all this we can add that in the 1530s Pavle, Petar and Mihailo Bakić were among the court hussars of Ferdinand of Habsburg. The former was paid 100 horsemen in 1533, as was Petar at the end of 1537. It is possible that he took his place on the payroll after the death of his brother, Pavle. In April 1538 Petar and Mihailo were paid for a total of 150 horsemen. The latter’s son, Mihailo the younger, entered the court of Maximilian II of Habsburg, and in 1572 attended Rudolph’s coronation as master of the royal stewards.<sup>47</sup> This was, of course, a much more illustrious career than that of Radoslav Čelnik, known as the general of Tsar Jovan, who in the 1530s was paid 80, then 16 horsemen as a court hussar.<sup>48</sup> Of course, this was also court service, but in reality it could not be mentioned in the same breath as the influence of the Serbian despots in the Hungarian royal court in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. With the death of Stjepan Berislavić in 1535, the Serbian monarchs finally disappeared from the crowned families of Central Europe, a serious loss in the age of dynastic states. The stability of Europe rested on the kings’ kinship, and Serbia lost its royal bloodline along with its territory.

This concludes the account of Serbian participation in the Habsburg court. However, no mention has been made of whether a similar phenomenon could be observed in the court of John of Szapolyai after 1529. It was certainly the case in 1526–1527, but the later years are almost entirely unexplored. The subject has been neglected in Serbian and Hungarian historiography for different reasons. In Serbian historiography, the nobles who appeared at King John’s court became irrelevant because most of them became Catholics and then, in the late 1530s, followers of the Lutheran doctrines. If chancellor Tamás Szalaházy is to be believed, even Radić Božić was baptised before his death.<sup>49</sup> We cannot verify the truth of this, but it is certain that other Serbian noblemen, such as Ivan Jaksić and Petar Petrović, were among the first to convert to Protestantism, even though they were Catholics.<sup>50</sup> Of these, the first is perhaps the most surprising, as he was the grandson of Irina Branković and his

<sup>46</sup> Géza Pálffy, “A Magyar Korona országainak koronázási zászlói a 16–17. Században”, in: “*Ez világ, mint egy kert...*”. Tanulmányok Galavics Géza tiszteletére, Szerk. Orsolya Bubryák, Budapest 2010, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Géza Pálffy, „Aulicusból Hofdiener: Udvari struktúrák Magyarországon az 1526 utáni átmenet évtizedeiben”, in: Tibor Neumann (szerk.), “*Királyi házuk népe*” : *Királyi és Királynői udvartartás a középkor végén*, Budapest 2024, 397–433.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem and E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 708.

<sup>49</sup> “Radich paulo antequae moreretur ritu nostro baptisatus datur” ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 9. Konv. A. fol. 124.

<sup>50</sup> For example, in the 1540s János Jaksić divided the church on his estate in Nagylak into two parts. In one of them, the services were held by the Orthodox, and in the other one by the Lutherans. A. Ivić: *Istorija Srba*, 41–42. The religious affiliation of the landlords as patrons of the churches on their estates did not, in principle, influence the denomination of the people living there. Many Orthodox churches had Catholic and Lutheran landlords as their patrons. Péter Katalin, *A reformáció: kényszer vagy választás*, Budapest 2004, 33–34.

uncle, Marko was a generous patron of the monasteries of Mount Athos and Krušedol.<sup>51</sup> His mother, Katalin Csáky, may have played a role in Ivan's change of religion, but in any case, the young man who died prematurely was already referred to as a Pannonian in his late epitaph.<sup>52</sup>

The change of religion may therefore have had personal reasons, but these nobles no longer had such intimate relations with the Orthodox monasteries in Serbia as the Branković and the Berislavić families had with the Serbian Orthodox monasteries, or the Bakić family who patronised the Serbian bishops.<sup>53</sup> This was certainly a serious obstacle for the Orthodox Serbian masses, and, as a result, these people were later not included in the Serbian national canon.

Hungarian historiography has been insensitive to the subject in other ways too. The dualistic Hungarian historical view of Serbian-Hungarian relations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is vividly illustrated in the following short story, the main characters of which are István Werbőczy, the Serbian Božić and Péter Perényi. The story is set in the court of King John, after the murder of the Black Man, where the Hungarian nobles praise the Serbian boatman. "Special mention must also be made of our loyal partner who ... embraced the cause of the Serbian nation. Come here, my son Božić, you deserve to shake hands with us! ... – Gentlemen, I do not deserve praise, I have only done my duty. – Oh, no – the old man [i.e. Werbőczy] replies –, you have done more than your duty. You fought against your own blood, against your own kind, for the good of the country. ... You are part of our victory! – The traitor is not my blood, Radić Božić and his army of boatmen will always pursue the liar, the usurper, the rebel, and if the country and the King's welfare require it, he will take up the sword even against his brother or father."<sup>54</sup> There are several layers to this literary text, as it reveals both the Hungarian nobility's view of the Serbs and the policies of Szapolyai's followers that were blamed for the destruction of the Hungarian state.

It is no coincidence that Hungarian historian Gyula Szekfű expressed a scathing opinion of King John's government in the 1930s. In his view, Szapolyai's environment was extremely provincial compared to Matthias's court, with only second-rate artists and humanist intellectuals present. Behind the opinion was the unspoken view that the "Slav" king had organised his own court from within his own community. To prove this, it was enough to list the names of István Brodarić (Brodarics), Ferenc Frankopan (Frangepán), Antal Verančić (Verancsics), George Friar and Petar Petrović, who were

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<sup>51</sup> E. Szaszko & A. Krstić, *Jaksics Márk (életrajzi szócikk)*.

<sup>52</sup> Ágnes W. Salgó, "Jaksics János epitaphiuma. Egy 16. századi görög gyászvers művelődéstörténeti háttere", *Magyar Könyvszemle* 116/1 (2000) 70–77 (<https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00021/00024/0001-1b3.html>). A. Ivić, *Istorija Srba*, 41–42. However, this certainly cannot be linked to János, who died in 1539.

<sup>53</sup> E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 713.

<sup>54</sup> Ferenc Sziklay, "A Fekete Ember. Történeti regény", *A Prágai Magyar Hírlap eredeti regénye* 23, 1924. dec. 2, 47.

in fact from Slavonia, Croatia, Dalmatia and Požega.<sup>55</sup> From a Hungarian perspective, it was easy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to lump these people together and ignore the very important differences of origin and ethnicity. All this was enough to make both Hungarian and Serbian historiography neglect such aspects of the study of King John's court.<sup>56</sup>

There is no doubt today that John of Szapolyai's court was not second-rate. Nor is it true that the ruler's entourage consisted exclusively of Slavs, as there were also large numbers of Hungarians, Italians and Poles at his court. In other words, it was such a multi-ethnic community, as it was everywhere in Europe. The fact is, however, that King John spoke Polish as his mother tongue, and so understood the other Slavic languages well, as did his predecessors, Vladislav II and Louis II. Moreover, as the Szapolyais came from the county of Požega, the family may have had living Serbian connections there. So it is not surprising that most of the Serbs who fled to Hungarian territories accepted him as their lord after the death of Tsar Jovan. True, they could not have done much else, since the area between the Danube and the Tisza river, as well as the region around Temesvár (today: Timișoara, Romania) were under his rule until the Ottoman conquest.<sup>57</sup> A large number of Serbs fleeing from Srem settled especially in the area of Solymos (today: Șoimuș, Romania) and Lippa (today: Lipova, Romania), where the castles were in the hands of Božić until his death on 9 September 1528.<sup>58</sup>

The question is who represented the Serbian elite later at King John's court.<sup>59</sup> Much has been said about the Jakšić family, and among them Marko had considerable military experience, and was a member of King Louis' court. After the Battle of Mohács, he was present at the Diet of Tokaj and supported King John. However, he did not take part in military operations, probably because of his health. He and his Italian-born wife, Polyxena, had a son and six daughters, one of whom Pavle Bakić intended to betroth to his younger brother Mihailo, but the marriage failed due to King John's objections.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bálint Hóman & Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet* III. kötet, Budapest 1935, 27. Quoted by Szabolcs Varga, "A Szapolyaiak emlékezete", in: Pál Fodor & Szabolcs Varga (szerk.), *Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: A Szapolyaiak. (Mohács 1526–2026. Rekonstrukció és emlékezet)*, Budapest 2020, 363–364.

<sup>56</sup> Szabolcs Varga, "Hatalom és reprezentáció János király udvarában", in: Pál Fodor & Szabolcs Varga (szerk.), *Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: A Szapolyaiak. (Mohács 1526–2026. Rekonstrukció és emlékezet)*, Budapest 2020, 285–286.

<sup>57</sup> At the end of 1528, it was rumoured that the military successes with the conquest of Becse (today: Bečej, Serbia), Becskerek (today: Zrenjanin, Serbia) and Timișoara made the Serbs join him. E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 703.

<sup>58</sup> "Radich feria quarta ante festum exaltationis sanctae crucis e vivis excessit et publice sepultus est" ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 9. Konv. A. fol. 84. See also: A. Ivíč: *Istorija Srba*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> Among those in the service of the Szapolyai family, András Kubinyi could not find anyone of Serbian origin. András Kubinyi, "A Szapolyaiak és familiárisaik (szervitoraik). Tanulmányok Szapolyai Jánosról és a kora újkori Erdélyről", *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis, Sectio Philosophica* 13/3 (2008) 227–265.

<sup>60</sup> E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 713.

In the 1530s, Marko Jakšić was already trying to secure the inheritance of his estates, and did not participate in the government.<sup>61</sup>

A list of King John's familia regis from 1531 may bring us closer to the answer. Unfortunately, the list is not exhaustive, and it includes mainly the members of the royal banderium, who were lower-ranking members of the court. A total of 112 soldiers are known by name, who were paid for a total of 943 horsemen. Based on their names, about twenty of the 112 could have been Slavs. Unfortunately, at the moment we do not know who Sztoján and Pribék were, who were paid for 100 horsemen, among the court hussars. They were followed by Petar Petrović (?) (Petrowyth) with only 12 horsemen, and then by the unknown despot Sebestyén (Sebastianus Dezpöth) with the same number. Petar and Lázár Božić (Petrus Bosyth, Lazar Bosyth) were paid for six each, and Farkas Božić (Farkas Bozyth) for eight horses.<sup>62</sup> Petrović is the only one of them, if it is him at all, who later also appeared in the sources. It would be nice to know if the Božićs were family members of the late captain of the Danubian boatmen, but unfortunately the document does not say. On 1 September 1542, Petar Božić attended a meeting in Temeshódos (today: Hodoş, Romania), where Radolca Radics, Mikola (Miklós) Cserepovics, Petar (Péter) Bracsilics, István Szabó, Voivode Milota, Petar (Péter) Herlics, Iván Deák (!), Đuro (György) Vincsics and others sent him as an envoy to King Ferdinand to report on the situation of the Serbs in the area around Timișoara.<sup>63</sup> According to this, in the hectic period following the death of King John, the Serbian nobles of Temes were also groping their way towards the Habsburgs, but this was soon dropped from the agenda. Of the signatories, Cserepovics is undoubtedly the best known. In 1551, he attended the meeting in Timișoara convoked by István Losonci and was in charge of the supply of crops from the area, and in 1552, he was stationed in Lipova with his troops, and his main task there was also to supply the castle.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that the list of 1531 is not complete is confirmed by the absence of Petar Ovčarević (Ovcársóvics, Olcsársóvics, Olcharowith) and R[ad]ozaw Radić (Radics), who

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<sup>61</sup> E. Szaszko & A. Krstić, *Jaksics Márk*.

<sup>62</sup> Zsolt Simon, "Szapolyai János familiárisainak egy lajstroma 1531-ből. Tanulmányok Szapolyai Jánosról és a kora újkori Erdélyről", *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis, Sectio Philosophica* 13/3 (2008) 315–332. Especially 324–326. Twenty years later, none of them could be found in György Fráter's service. Teréz Oborni, "Fráter György szervitorainak és familiárisainak jegyzéke a Castaldo-kódexben, 1552", *Fons* 25/4 (2018) 435–451.

<sup>63</sup> "vestre serenissime maiestati fideles capitanei Racionorum Radyt Radoza, Nicolaus Chrepwith, Petrus Wrachlyth, Stephanus Szabo, Milota Wayda, Petrus Herlyg, Iwan Deyak, Gerogius Plynychth, ac universi Rasciani ad partes inferiors servitores perpetuales fideles" ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 48. fol. 2. Quoted by A. Ivić, *Istorija Srba*, 148. E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 717.

<sup>64</sup> *Bernardo de Aldana magyarországi hadjárata. [1548–1552]*, Közreadja Ferenc Szakály, ford. László Scholz, Budapest 1986, 203–204. Here he is referred to as Mihály in connection with the events at Lipova, but this is obviously a mistake. See also István Kenyeres, "A temesvári udvarbíró utasítása (1552) : Adalékok az 1551/52. évi temesvári és temesközi eseményekhez", *Fons* 4/2 (1997) 136.

were members of the *familia regis* (*aule nostre familiaribus*) in 1538.<sup>65</sup> About the latter there is a record from 1536 which mentions that he came from the Bodrog county.<sup>66</sup> This, of course, does not prove that he had also been in royal service in 1531, but it is assumed that he was. According to a fragmentary account of 1532 (or later), Ovčarević acted on behalf of King John in several cases. In November 1528, he received 200 gold forints from him in Makó where the king met Mehmed Bey. He negotiated with the Turks about the castle of Bečej “tempore ieiunii”, during the fasting period, presumably in 1529, and received 26 forints for this, and further 12 forints for his expenses.<sup>67</sup> We know that he was active later as well, maintaining good relations with Pavle Bakić, whom he visited in person on 31 January 1533.<sup>68</sup> The two had been in contact for decades. Petar had served as captain of the Danubian boatmen,<sup>69</sup> in Belgrade in 1521, and following the capture of the castle, he served as an Ottoman soldier there. In 1526, he was one of Bakić’s informants as a captain of the marauders of Bali Bey.<sup>70</sup> Sometime after the Battle of Mohács, he joined the service of King John, and in 1530, he was among the defenders of Buda, leading 800 Serbian soldiers. On 21 January 1531, accompanied by Hieronymus Lasky, he also took part in the Visegrád negotiations with other voivodes of the Danubian boatmen, among them Stjepan Ratkovics (ex Rascianis Petrus Olcsarovics, Stepko Ratkovics, alii potiores vojvodae nazadistae).<sup>71</sup> Antal Verancsics knew him personally, he mentioned him twice in his memoirs as a nobleman of Serbian origin who had been captured by the Turks as a young man, then returned to the Christians, where he excelled in military skills and was captain of the fleet in 1541.<sup>72</sup> According to László Szalay, the editor of the text, Ovčarević was none other than Péter Markos, one of King John II’s godfathers, who, in 1541, with some of his own men, plundered the house of Tamás Bornemisza - the judge of Buda, who was considered a traitor - and later accompanied Queen Isabella

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<sup>65</sup> Adrian Magina, *Acta et Documenta partes Regni Hungariae inferiores concernentia 1500–1552*, Cluj-Napoca 2020, 172.

<sup>66</sup> “egregii Radoza Radich de eadem Bodrogh” A. Magina, *Acta Jakšićiana*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> A. Magina, *Acta et Documenta*, 133.

<sup>68</sup> E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 713.

<sup>69</sup> Ferenc Szakály, “Nándorfehérvár 1521-es ostromához. Egy királyi adománylevél köztörténeti tanulságai”, *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 25/4 (1978) 484.

<sup>70</sup> Lajos Thallóczy & Antal Áldásy, *Magyarország és Szerbia közti összeköttetések oklevéltára 1198–1526*, Budapest 1907, 365 (Magyarország melléktartományainak oklevéltára. Codex diplomaticus partium regno Hungariae adnexarum 2).

<sup>71</sup> ÖStA HHStA UA AA Fasc. 17. Konv. A. fol. 45. Quoted by E. Margalits, *Szerb történelmi repertórium*, 709.

<sup>72</sup> “Petrus Owcziarevivic gente rasciana oriundus, qui in juvenili aetate a turcis captus, apud eosdem longa usus militia, postea christianis restitutus, apud nos etiam non ultimus inter fortes et militares viros habitus, tunc vero (1541.) temporis praefectus classis, omneque in consilium communitatis, rerumque gerendarum adhibitus.” And “Petrum Ouchiareum Rascianum, unum ex ducibus militum, insignem virum in re bellica praeteream” László Szalay, *Verancsics Antal m. kir. helytartó, esztergomi érsek összes, munkái 1, Történelmi dolgozatok deák nyelven, 1490–1551*, Pest 1857, XIV, 184 (Monumenta Hungariae Historica 2. Scriptorum 2).

to Lipova after the capture of Buda.<sup>73</sup> If this is correct, then his wife was Lőrinc Garay's daughter, Katalin, and Pál Istvánffy, Ferenc Zay and László of Macedonia became his brothers-in-law through his wife's sisters.<sup>74</sup> He was still alive in 1543, then he disappeared from sight, but the rest of the family was still active in the 1560s.<sup>75</sup>

The only person we have not looked at in detail is Petar Petrović, a close relative of King John. It is well known that in medieval states all rulers sought to rule the country with their most trusted supporters. Close family ties were one of the most important elements of loyalty, so it is not surprising that everyone tried to recruit supporters from among their relatives for the most important government positions. This can also be seen in the government system of King Matthias (I) of Hunyadi, in which the most prominent relatives and family members played an important role.<sup>76</sup> In King John's case, however, the practice is less clear, although the Szapolyais were not a populous family. John had three known siblings: his younger brother György died without an heir at the Battle of Mohács, and his two younger sisters (Borbála, the wife of King Sigismund Jagiellon of Poland, and Magdolna) died young. Borbála left two daughters who were too young to participate in their uncle's politics. Hedvig, born in 1513, was brought up in Poland and kept out of Hungarian politics all her life, while Anna died in 1520, aged just five. So there was no one in John's close family to support his side.<sup>77</sup>

However, in the lateral kinship of the Szapolyais, there were several family members who played an important role in the government of King John for a time. Among them were the Homonnai Drugeths, his second cousins, many of whom held various positions. Ferenc, István and Antal held the titles of ispán (Lat. comes) of Ung and Zemplén counties at various times, and Gábor served as Bishop of Győr for many years. Other important relatives were the Petrovićs (Petrovicse) of Szuraklin. The Lévai, Patócsi and Kendi families also became part of the Szapolyai family network through them, although they rose in importance only after King John's death in 1540. Of the king's close relatives, Petar Petrović, born of the marriage of his aunt of

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<sup>73</sup> L. Szalay, *Verancsics*, XIV. J. Szentkláray, *A dunai hajóhadak*, 150.

<sup>74</sup> József Holub, "A kisasszonyfalvi Istvánffy-család", *Turul* 27/3 (1909) 112–123.

<sup>75</sup> Károly Torma, "A berekszói régi templom Hunyadmegyében", *Archaeologiai Közlemények* 13 (1879) 13–51.

<sup>76</sup> Tamás Pálosfalvi, *Hunyadi-familiárisok Mátyás király udvarában* (manuscript) I thank the author for allowing me to use his study before its publication. And A. Kubinyi, "A Szapolyaiak és familiárisaik", *passim*.

<sup>77</sup> About the family in summary: Tibor Neumann, "Two Palatines and a Voivode, or the Szapolyai Family's Journey to the Royal Throne", in: Pál Fodor & Szabolcs Varga (eds.), *A Forgotten Hungarian Royal Dynasty: The Szapolyais. (Mohács 1526–2026. Rekonstrukció és emlékezet)*, Budapest 2020, 21–55. In Hungarian: Tibor Neumann, "Két nádor és egy vajda, avagy a Szapolyaiak útja a királyi trónig", in: Pál Fodor & Szabolcs Varga (szerk.), *Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: A Szapolyaiak. (Mohács 1526–2026. Rekonstrukció és emlékezet)*, Budapest 2020, 13–45.

unknown name to Mihály Petrović, rose undoubtedly to the highest offices and stood by King John and later his son and heir, John II, to the end.<sup>78</sup>

Petar Petrović was born around 1487 to a noble family in Orbász county. This relative from the Bosnian border was already serving with Szapolyai in 1514, but was not a member of John's immediate surroundings until the late 1520s. His career took off after 1529, and in the 1530s, he was given increasingly important posts and ever larger estates. By 1531, he already owned the castles of Lipova, Şoimoş and Bečej in the Temes region, and by 1533 at the latest, he was appointed by the king as the ispán of the Temes county (comes Temesiensis) and the Captain General of Lower Hungary (supremus capitaneus partium regni Hungariae inferiorum), and was made a baron.<sup>79</sup> The king's confidence is shown by the fact that Petrović's appointment put him in charge of a strategically important part of the country, the Temes region.

After his appointment, Petrović moved his headquarters to Timișoara, which already had a large Serbian population.<sup>80</sup> There is a consensus in scholarly literature that he was the leader of the local Serbs, and thus used his military power to gain his place among the most important members of John's court.<sup>81</sup> Petrović's presence and position in fact meant the continuation of the framework of the Hungarian world in a province that was rapidly losing its Hungarian ethnicity and nobility. Perhaps it is not entirely exaggerated to say that "the Serbs and the Temes region of King John's former kingdom were kept in loyalty by the very person and power of Petrović".<sup>82</sup>

However, this power was by no means unlimited, and the consolidation of the Temes region took many years, with the area around Lipova, for example, fluctuating between the two kings for a long time. The Serbian voivode Stjepan Balintić (István Balintics) conquered Bečej from István Werbőczy in 1531, then sided with King John, and after the death of Imre Bakić, he again approached the Habsburg monarch. For his fickleness, "King John took Stjepan Balintić, a leading person, in Lipova and brought

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<sup>78</sup> In details: Szabolcs Varga, "A hűség rokon: Petrovics Péter a Szapolyaiak szolgálatában", in: Pál Fodor & Szabolcs Varga (szerk.), *Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: A Szapolyaiak. (Mohács 1526–2026. Rekonstrukció és emlékezet)*, Budapest 2020, 147–148. Focusing on the second half of his life: Szabolcs Varga, "Péter Petrovics (1487–1557) in the Service of Queen Isabella", in: Ágnes Máté & Teréz Oborni (eds.), *Isabella Jagiellon, Queen of Hungary (1539–1559). (Mohács 1526–2026. Rekonstrukció és emlékezet)*, Budapest 2020, 327–347.

<sup>79</sup> Géza Pálffy, "Kerületi és végvidéki főkapitányok és főkapitány-helyettesek Magyarországon a 16–17. században (Minta egy készülő főkapitányi archontológiai és "életrajzi lexikonból")", *Történelmi Szemle* 39/2 (1997) 275.

<sup>80</sup> In 1481, following his campaign in the Balkans, Pál Kinizsi settled 25,000 Serbs in the area around Timișoara. István Berkeszi, *Temesvár szabad királyi város kis monographiája*, Temesvár 1900, 12; Recently: A. Magina, *Acta et Documenta partes Regni Hungariae*.

<sup>81</sup> "The powerful man of Zápolya, the Serbian Péter Petrovics, Count of Timișoara, secured a good part of the Serbs living there for his lord." Gyula Dudás, *A bácskai és bánágyi szerbek szereplésének története 1526–1711*, Zombor 1896, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Sándor Szilágyi (szerk.), *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, Budapest 1875, 97 (Monumenta Comititalia Regni Transylvaniae I).

him to Várad (today: Oradea, Romania). There he was killed in prison".<sup>83</sup> The above-mentioned Serbian meeting in Hodoş in 1542 shows that Petrović was by no means accepted by all the Serbs of Temes, but he undoubtedly had the largest military force, and in 1540, he led a thousand Serbian soldiers to Buda, and camped with Mehmed Bey at Kalocsa.<sup>84</sup>

Despite his Serbian origins, his long tenure of the offices of the Captain General and the ispán of Temes, and his royal kinship, Petrović did not develop a cult like the 15<sup>th</sup>-century despots or the Jakšić family. The main reason for this is the lack of evidence of any contacts between him and the Serbian Church, or of any generous donations to the monasteries of Srem or Athos. He had no links with the network of the Serbian Orthodox Church, there is no evidence of the survival of the Serbian princely court in his vicinity, and we can see no traces of any connections to the Bakić or Jakšić families moving to Hungary. True, as a bachelor, he did not have much in the way of family connections. Unfortunately, his court in Timișoara was not only far removed from the intellectual bustle of Vienna and Cracow, but also bore little resemblance to the princely centres of the Serbian despots. Petrović's centre was closer to Belgrade and Szendrő (today: Smederevo, Serbia) in physical and cultural terms. This, in turn, marked out the space for his political manoeuvres. We do not have any data showing that he ever contradicted King John's pro-Ottoman political actions, and it seems that throughout his life he adhered to the political principle that only the Ottoman Sultan could ensure the rule of the Szapolyais in Hungary. Perhaps this is what gave him his increasingly rising career, but it was too little to make him a universally accepted, charismatic leader of the Serbs. Perhaps his personality also made him unsuitable for the role.

Petar Petrović stood by King John's deathbed in Szászsebes (today: Sebeș, Romania) and became one of those appointed by the monarch to be his son's guardian. According to contemporary accounts, he had the advantages of his kinship, his loyalty, an army of Serbs and, having no family of his own, no fear of looking at the interests of his successors.<sup>85</sup> John chose well, Petrović was always Queen Isabella's most trusted confidant, and he remained with the Szapolyai family until his death. To advocate the interests of King John (II) of Szapolyai (1540–1571), the elected Hungarian king, Petrović turned against governor Friar George, who was gaining power in Transylvania. In 1549, he decided to organise a circle of nobles under the Queen,<sup>86</sup> and in 1551, he even went into exile out of loyalty to the family. In 1556, he arranged the return of Queen Isabella and John II, and left all his property to his queen in his will.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> 1504–1566. *Memoria rerum. A Magyarországon legutóbbi László király fiának legutóbbi Lajos királynak születése óta esett dolgok emlékezete*, Sajtó alá rendezte, az utószót és a jegyzeteket írta József Bessenyei, Budapest 1981, 47, 167.

<sup>84</sup> *Memoria rerum*, 51.

<sup>85</sup> S. Varga, *Péter Petrovics (1487–1557)*, 327–347.

<sup>86</sup> A. Magina, *Acta et Documenta*, 215–216.

<sup>87</sup> Wolfgangus de Bethlen, *Historia de rebus Transsylvanicis* I, Editio secunda, Cibinii 1782–1793, 610.

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The relationship between Petrović and King John was clearly defined by kinship and military service. The bachelor aristocrat remained loyal to the family all his life, and did not seek to acquire any larger estates. His Serbian origins gave him the support of the Serbian population in the Temes, who were used to military service, and this made him more valuable in the eyes of the king – and probably of the sultan. Perhaps it is also due to this that from 1541 onwards he was both a knight banneret of the Kingdom of Hungary and, by the grace of the sultan, the sanjacobey of Temes.<sup>88</sup> This could also symbolise the situation of the Serbs moving to the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, who also had to satisfy both sides. Their presence in the court almost completely disappeared in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the militant Serbs having lost their own nobility, saw this privileged class as an enemy more frequently, and found less and less contact with the Kingdom of Hungary, which had given them a home in both mental and cultural terms.

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<sup>88</sup> S. Varga, *Péter Petrovics (1487–1557)*, 332–336.

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## Varga Szabolcs

### SZERBEK A MAGYAR KIRÁLYI UDVAROKBAN A MOHÁCSI CSATA UTÁNI ÉVEKBEN

#### Rezümé

István szerb herceg a 15. század elején a budai magyar királyi udvar egyik legjelentősebb alakja lett. A szerb despoták hadserege hatalmas erőt képviselt, amely tovább erősítette helyzetét a magyar nemesség körében. Bár Szerbia bukása (1459) után befolyásuk csökkent, katonai erejük miatt továbbra is az udvar fontos tagjai maradtak.

A mai Belgrád (Nándorfehérvár) 1521-es bukása után a szerb elit az oszmán és a magyar fél közé szorult. Több nemest oszmán zsoldos szolgálatra kényszerítettek, míg másokat, például a Bakić családot a Magyar Királyságba telepítettek át. Az 1526-os hadjárat után a szerb nemesség többnyire Szapolyai Jánost támogatta. Cserni Jován (Fekete Iván) a szerbek új, önjelölt, karizmatikus vezetője hűséget esküdt Szapolyainak. Bár 1527 első felében néhányan - például a grabarjei Stefan Berislavić szerb despota és Cserni Jován is - elfogadták Habsburg Ferdinánd csábító ajánlatát és átálltak az oldalára, az később több csatában is vereséget szenvedett Szapolyai híveitől. Mindez negatív hatással volt a szerbek jelenlétére mindkét királyi udvarban, szerepük egyre marginálisabbá vált. Berislavić 1535-ös halála után ez különösen a Habsburg-udvarban volt feltűnő, hiszen a 16. század közepén a Bakić nemesi családnak csak egyetlen tagját vették fel az udvarba. A szerbek jelenléte az ünnepi alkalmakkor már-már csupán szimbolikus volt. János király udvarában több szerb nemes tartózkodott, de az uralkodó egyiküknek sem adományozott despota címet. A szerb nemesek közül sokan felvették a katolikus, majd az evangélikus vallást, ezért a pravoszláv harcos lakosság nem fogadta el őket vezetőnek. Ennek ellenére János király unokatestvére, Petrović Petar (Petrovics Péter) 1557-ben bekövetkezett haláláig a Temesköz *de facto* ura maradt, de az 1560-as évekre a szerb nemesség eltűnt Szapolyai udvarából.

**Саболч Варга**

**СРБИ НА УГАРСКИМ КРАЉЕВСКИМ ДВОРОВИМА  
У ГОДИНАМА ПОСЛЕ МОХАЧКЕ БИТКЕ**

**Резиме**

На почетку 15. века, српски кнез Стефан постао је једна од најважнијих фигура на угарском краљевском двору у Будиму. Војска српских деспота представљала је моћну силу, која је додатно ојачала своју улогу међу угарским племством. Иако је та улога ослабила након пада Србије (1459), они су остали важни чланови двора због своје војне моћи.

Након пада данашњег Београда (Nándorfehérvár) 1521. године, српска елита била је у процепу између османске и угарске стране. Неколико племића било је приморано да уђе у османску плаћеничку службу, док су други, као што је породица Бакић, пресељени у Краљевину Угарску. Након похода 1526. године, српско племство углавном је подржавало Јована Запољу, а њихов нови, самопрокламовани, харизматични вођа, Јован Ненад, заклео се на верност њему. Иако су у првој половини 1527. године неки од њих – као што су српски деспот Стефан Бериславић из Грабарја и Јован Ненад – прихватили примамљиву понуду Фердинанда Хабзбуршког и прешли на његову страну, он је касније поражен у неколико битака од стране присталица Запоље. То је негативно утицало на присуство Срба на оба краљевска двора, јер је њихова улога постајала све маргиналнија. Након смрти Бериславића 1535. године, то је било посебно приметно на Хабзбуршком двору, где је само један члан племићке породице Бакић примљен на двор средином 16. века, а српско присуство на одређеним свечаностима смањено је готово на симболичне функције. На двору краља Јована било је више српских племића, али он ниједном од њих није доделио титулу деспота. Многи од српских племића прешли су на католицизам, а затим и на лутеранство, због чега их православно ратничко становништво није прихватило за своје вође. Упркос томе, рођак краља Јована, Петар Петровић (Péter Petrovics), остао је дефакто господар Тамишке области (Temesköz) до своје смрти 1557. године, али је до 1560-их српско племство нестало са Запољиног двора.